

Retention Efforts for Extension Master Gardener Volunteers: A Team Approach

Rachel Painter, Extension Agent- University of Tennessee Extension

rpainter@utk.edu

The Team



A group of volunteers called "The Growth Team" is charged with engaging and encouraging new and experienced members of the Extension Master Gardener program.

- Volunteers with exceptional leadership and engagement abilities
- Mentoring new members
- Actively recruiting new members
- Encouraging and engaging new and current members
- Facilitating social events

Recruitment



Growth Team members contribute to recruitment efforts and encourage other members to share their experiences with their communities.

- Social Media
- Websites
- Newspaper Articles
- Farmers' Market Booths
- Educational Workshops
- Demonstration Garden Tours

Connection & Engagement



By intentionally engaging, encouraging, entrusting, and empowering their fellow volunteers, the Growth Team has been tremendously successful in improving both the engagement and retention of volunteers.

- Social Events
- Recognition of new and current volunteers
- Encouraging volunteers to take on leadership positions
- Connecting volunteers with projects

Growth & Retention



This team approach to retaining both new and experienced members helps members feel empowered and recognized by their peers. Furthermore, these members are then better prepared to fulfill their mission for being involved in the organization and serving the citizens of their county.

- Two Interns join the Growth Team each year.
- The Growth Team continually supports and engages all volunteers.
- Engagement and Retention have improved since implementation in 2017.

Results

Since utilizing the Growth Team for recruitment and engagement efforts in mid-2017 the retention of new volunteers has increased dramatically as noted in Figure 1.

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019
Interns Trained	19	20	24	22
Interns Certified	6	10	20	16
Retention Rate	32%	50%	83%	73%

**The Growth Team began its efforts in mid-2017.*

Figure 1. Master Gardener Volunteer Retention in Rutherford County

Additionally, these efforts have contributed to increased diversity within the local Extension Master Gardener Program membership. By intentionally engaging all volunteers and empowering them to share their experiences within their communities, these efforts have created an organizational culture that is welcoming, approachable, and inclusive.

The Growth Team prepares for new interns



Demonstration Garden activity engaging new and experienced volunteers