

UF/IFAS EXTENSION ST. JOHNS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS' EXPERIENCE INCREASED HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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Situation

The Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) Program is composed of UF/IFAS Extension certified volunteers who assist extension agents by providing research-based horticultural education and information to Florida residents.

Objectives

75% of Master Gardener Volunteers will report improved well-being as a result of participating in the MGV program.

75% of Master Gardener Volunteers will report improved well-being as a result of volunteering specifically in a garden setting.

Methods

After participating in an intensive 50-hour training in horticultural principles, participants volunteer a minimum of 35 hours annually to maintain MGV status.

Volunteers are provided continuing education and volunteer opportunities such as teaching and attending workshops; gardening in demonstration gardens and plant nursery; providing diagnostic services at plant clinics and help desk; and mentoring youth in garden settings. An annual survey has been distributed from 2019 to present to assess the benefits derived from participating in the program both as a volunteer and specifically as a volunteer in a garden setting.



Results

Annual surveys from 2019 to 2021, revealed that Master Gardener Volunteers experienced the following benefits as a result of participating in the MGV program:

91% (n = 109) feel physically healthier
81% (n=109) experience reduced levels of stress
90% (n=110) experience improved mental health
87% (n=110) increased social connectedness
92% (n=111) increased overall life satisfaction
90% (n=112) feel they make a difference in their community

When surveyed specifically about their experience volunteering in a garden setting:

90% (n=87) reported improved mental health
87% (n=87) increased social connectedness
83% (n=87) increased energy and vitality
92% (n=87) increased sense of well-being
85% (n=87) improved outlook on life
99% (n=88) increased physical activity
94% (n=86) improved physical health

Conclusion

MGV experience improved health and well-being from participating as a volunteer in the MGV program and from gardening opportunities the program provides.

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