MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Arboretum Yard and Garden Phone Line

GUIDELINES FOR RETRIEVING AND ANSWERING PHONE MESSAGES

Extension Master Gardener volunteers are encouraged to sign up to answer calls from the Arboretum Yard and Garden Phone Line. Anoka, Dakota, Carver-Scott, Hennepin, Ramsey, and Washington counties have shifts reserved for their volunteers. Master Gardeners from all counties are encouraged to sign up for the remaining shifts.

SIGNING UP TO VOLUNTEER FOR THE YARD AND GARDEN PHONE LINE

- Sign up on the Extension Master Gardener website at http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/master-gardener/
- Click on “For volunteers” in the upper right hand corner and log in.
- Under “Volunteer opportunities,” click on “Yard & Garden Phone Line – Arboretum”.

HOW TO ACCESS THE YARD AND GARDEN PHONE LINE FROM AN OUTSIDE PHONE

- Dial 612-626-0001
- Enter the mailbox id and password:
  - Mailbox id: 17590 and the # sign
  - Password: 427336 (GARDEN) and the # sign
- Press 1 to hear new messages. Press 2 to repeat the message.
- Write down the details needed in order to research the question. Sometimes people provide a lot of detail. Sometimes they provide very little. It may be necessary to contact the caller for more details before researching the question. (Note: There should not be any saved messages. If there are, assume they have not been resolved and need to be followed up.)
- Once all information is recorded accurately for your records, press 7 to delete the message.

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• If you do not know the answer to a question, please contact a seasoned Extension Master Gardener in your county, your mentor, or your local coordinator if you have one. If not, you may email a question to mgweb@umn.edu. (Do not contact Extension Educators directly.)

HOW TO BLOCK YOUR PRIVATE NUMBER FROM APPEARING ON CLIENTS’ CALLER IDS

Your privacy is important. Since most Master Gardeners answer calls on the Yard and Garden Line from their home phone, it is important to block your phone number from appearing on a caller’s “Caller ID.” Blocking your number protects your privacy and deters callers from contacting Master Gardeners personally each time they have a question.

“Selective Line Blocking” is a universal feature that lets any caller block the number display on a call-by-call basis. Access to the per-call blocking feature is achieved by dialing *67 prior to dialing the number. Selective Line Blocking, when activated, delivers a message similar to “Anonymous” or “Private” to the person being called.

When you dial *67, you will get another dial tone, then you can dial as usual. You will need to dial *67 before every call.

HOW TO SEND AND RECEIVE EMAILS

The address for the email account for the Arboretum Yard and Garden Line is: ygdesk@umn.edu. Please use this email address to send and receive information. This is a great tool, and all volunteers working on the line are encouraged to use it.

• Go to: www.mail.umn.edu. You will be brought to the University “Sign In” page.
• Enter the Internet ID: ygdesk
• Enter the Password: ExtArb10
• Click “Sign In”
• To write an email, click on the “Compose” button in the top left corner of the screen. Type your message. To include the address (URL) of any websites or online publications you would like to send in the body of your email, go to the webpage, highlight the URL, and use the keys Ctrl-C to copy it. Paste it into your email using the keys Ctrl-V. Or you can use the cut and paste features using the menus.
• Sign your email with your first name and the title: University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener.
RECORDING YARD AND GARDEN LINE DATA

Please use the Data Reporting Form available on the Master Gardener website as a tool to record the calls you retrieve and answer. Some volunteers may prefer to keep a record in a notebook. This form is for your use only. Volunteers do not need to send in their reports.

REPORT YOUR VOLUNTEER HOURS PROMPTLY

Be sure to report your volunteer hours online promptly. It is acceptable to summarize multiple shifts in a month in one posting. Please round your hours up to the nearest half hour.

YARD AND GARDEN LINE FAQ

I would like to sign up, but I work during the day. Can I still volunteer?

Even if you work during the day you can volunteer on the Line. Before you leave for work, or during your lunch hour, you can listen to, record, and then delete the calls you are willing to answer. Then, you can research and return those calls in the evening. Please just try to answer all of them within 24 to 48 hours. Also be respectful and do not call people after 8:30 p.m.

When I checked the line, there were over 20 calls. Am I expected to answer all of these during my shift?

Some Master Gardeners who have a lot of experience and know how to find answers quickly may be able to get through 15 to 20 calls per shift, while others may only be able to get through 10. You are encouraged to start with 10, and then if you have time, go back and get more. Remember, just try to answer all of the calls you took within 24 to 48 hours.

What should I do if there are saved messages on the phone?

If there are saved messages on the phone, you must assume that they have not been answered or responded to. Please treat them like new calls. Sometimes, people forget to erase them, and that is often the case, but since you don't know for sure it is best to follow through with them.

Why were there so many old calls on the Line during my shift? Am I supposed to answer those too, or just the calls that come during my shift?

It is not uncommon to have old calls, especially if you take a Monday shift and calls come in over the weekend. Sometimes, if the shift prior to yours does not get filled, those old calls will be there as well. Please respond to the oldest calls first. Most of the time you will be answering old calls. The calls that come in during your shift will be answered by the next volunteer.

If a person has their line blocked and I can’t get through, or if a call is long distance, what should I do with those calls?

Please send messages that you are unable to answer to your local coordinator, if you have one. If you can, please give the coordinator the question and your researched reply to the caller, so all they have to do is make the call. If you do not have a local coordinator, email your question with reply to mgweb@umn.edu.
What should I do if I don't know how to find an answer to a question?

The first place to start is with your mentor or a seasoned Master Gardener. The second step is to ask your local coordinator, if you have one. Lastly, send an email to mgweb@umn.edu. Do not call Extension Educators directly unless you have exercised these other options first.

Oftentimes people want to send, or bring in, samples. How should I respond to those requests?

Depending on the type of sample, you can have them send photos via the ygdesk@umn.edu email. If you ask them to do so, it is then your responsibility to follow up on the email. You can then forward the photo to your mentor, or a seasoned Master Gardener or coordinator, for identification if you don't know what it is. Clients can also bring samples to their local Master Gardener program where they live. They should contact their county office to determine the best way to do that. Many counties have Diagnostic Clinics. Disease samples can also be sent by clients to the University of Minnesota Plant Disease Clinic for a fee. The last resort is to forward photos to mgweb@umn.edu. Make sure you use the find answers page first to make sure you can't determine the answer on your own.

I often work on the Line 4 times per month. Do I have to report each shift separately?

It is acceptable to lump multiple shifts into one posting when you report your hours online. If you serve frequently on the line, please try to post your hours monthly. If you only serve on the line a few times in a season, you can post those as one entry. Under the description area, you can just note the dates served. For example: Dates served in May: 3, 7, 12, 15, and 21. Or, Dates served: 4/12, 5/25, 7/11.

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