

## **Certification: Total Nightmare or Dream Come True?**

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Certified Master Gardener

If you are anything like me, the first time someone told you they were a Certified Master Gardener you were totally impressed. Not only were they a 'master', but they were 'certified' too. Sounds very official, doesn't it? But what exactly does being a Certified Master Gardener mean? What is the benefit of getting certified? And how, praytell, does one become certified as a Master Gardener?

No matter what the industry, getting your certification means that you have studied, practiced and implemented the standards set by that organization. It is proof that you have the appropriate skills and know what you are doing. Being certified shows that you are committed to ongoing professional development and that you believe in lifelong learning. In short, it adds to your credibility, encouraging people to trust you and pay attention to what you say and do.

When I first decided to get my Certification I thought it would give me some bragging rights. I knew lots of other experienced gardeners, but none of them had the credentials I would have. Then I found out about the 25 hours of volunteer service I would have to do every year. Being quiet and somewhat reserved, I would rather swallow a fork full of dirt than stand up in front of a bunch of people and claim to be an expert so my dreams of being a Certified Master Gardener were squashed by stage fright.

As a master gardener, either in-training, or certified, we are required to motivate, inspire and educate other gardeners. It says so right on our website! I have always enjoyed talking to others about gardening (at least on a one-to-one basis) and I spent a lot of my time writing and creating social media posts about gardening and nature. I even did a webinar about finding your inner landscape designer, although I was so nervous that my voice shook the entire time.

It was several years before I looked at becoming a master gardener again . I was still hesitant, but it wasn't until I found out what 'volunteer' hours actually were that I discovered I was already doing the work I needed to do. All my social media work, article writing and putting myself out there were forms of volunteer work! I didn't have to stand up in front of a crowd and answer questions. There were lots of ways to get those volunteer hours doing things that I enjoyed! Yes, I do presentations now, but I started slowly, assisting others to make sure it was something I could do. Seeing the enthusiasm and pleasure people express at my talks makes them completely worthwhile.

If you are a Master Gardener-in-Training and want that validation and the confidence boost that comes along with it, don't let fear hold you back. Those hours are easy to get. Some of these suggestions count toward both volunteer and professional development/education hours:

- Write an article for a newsletter, community paper, or garden club
- Do a book review for our newsletter
- Prepare and do a presentation at our monthly zoom meetings
- Host a window box planting party at your home for your friends
- Do a quick lunchtime presentation for your co-workers
- Assist at plant sale or garden club event
- Help with your garden club's website
- Assist another Master Gardener at their presentation