

Subject: NOVEL CORONAVIRUS IMPACTS ON VOLUNTEERING

March 25, 2020

As concern about novel coronavirus continues to grow, Michigan State University Extension remains focused on the health and wellbeing of its participants, volunteers and employees. In accordance with Governor Whitmer's executive order requiring all Michigan residents to shelter in place, MSU Extension is modifying, postponing or cancelling all face-to-face activities for staff and volunteers, including Extension Master Gardeners (EMGs), **until at least May 15.**

In Person Gatherings / Events:

In person EMG meetings and activities between now and May 15 must be moved to a virtual experience, postponed or cancelled. This includes association meetings, project meetings, bus trips, plant sales, spring work bees, etc. This date is subject to possible extension. We will communicate updates as they are determined.

- Meetings using phone and webinar technology such as Zoom or Skype are highly encouraged. (If you need assistance with this technology, please connect with your local MSU Extension staff members.)
- Volunteerism that can be done from home, such as newsletter creation, Ask an Expert, and similar may continue.

Volunteer Hours:

We realize that staying safe against novel coronavirus impacts your ability to accumulate volunteer hours toward your annual EMG certification requirements. This may be adding to your anxiety right now so we want to assure you that because of these unusual times:

- **We will modify the requirement of reporting a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer service this year.**
- **The situation will be assessed over the next few weeks with an update provided at that time.**

I know not being able to engage in volunteer projects that you're passionate about is disappointing for many of you. This will be hard, but it will be temporary. It's a necessary step for your protection during this unprecedented crisis.

Education Hours:

To help you maintain your continuing education, there are several online options that can provide science-based education and a welcomed distraction from novel coronavirus pandemic. Here are a few options:

- 2020 Free Online Webinar Series Exclusively for EMGs. (1 ½ education hours/webinar) This annual series covers numerous smart gardening topics as well as emerging issues. The first webinar will focus on the online IPM tool known as "Enviroweather" and will be in mid to late-April. Details will be forthcoming.
- "Volunteer Selection Process" webinar, March 20. (1 education hour) Don't worry if you missed this opportunity. We'll send the webinar link tomorrow.
- Recordings of past webinars on the VMS home page under "Free Online Educational Webinar List". (1 – 1 ½ education hours per webinar)

- Online “Smart Gardening with Vegetables”. (6 education hours) This is a self-paced introductory course on vegetable gardening. More details will follow shortly.
- [MSU Pollinator Champion](#). (6 education hours) This self-paced course is packed with videos, articles and fun activities to guide you through the world of pollinators.
- And, there are more to come! We will post opportunities on the VMS home page and the EMG Program website as well.

I also want to share that MSU Extension recently launched the [Remote Learning and Resources online space](#), a one-stop-shop for our digital offerings and educational materials related to the current circumstances. We hope this expanded offering on a variety of subjects will also be useful to you.

Finally, I want to make sure that when you have questions about novel coronavirus or want the latest recommendations, that you turn to the [CDC](#) or your local health department. MSU Extension is here to provide educational resources but we are not the expert on how to deal with the novel coronavirus. We can, however, provide resources like the previously mentioned webinars and the remote learning and resources, to help with your mental wellbeing as you “Stay Home, Stay Safe”.

We appreciate your support and understanding of efforts to protect ourselves and our communities. If you have any specific questions or concerns regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact Diane Brady (bradydi1@msu.edu) or Mary Wilson (wilsonm1@msu.edu).

Jeffrey W. Dwyer
Director, MSU Extension
Senior Associate Dean of Outreach and Engagement
MSU, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Mary A. Wilson
State Coordinator
Extension Master Gardener Program
Michigan State University