Changes with the Georgia MGEV Program

Sheri Dorn, State Coordinator, Georgia MGEV Program

I change my container plant combinations each year, sometimes twice in the same year, with the warm and cool seasons. I try to change the order and place of things planted in the vegetable garden, because we all know that crop rotation is an important step in IPM (integrated pest management). I try new varieties to see if a plant flowers more beautifully or stands taller or resists some critter that likes my garden plants as much or more than I do.

I don’t like to change computer software. I do not like to change the route I drive to work. I do not have the latest cell phone or gadget. And I certainly don’t want to change televisions because that would require learning how to use six more remotes.

So why is it that we are okay with certain changes, but others make us positively cranky? I know there are some psychologists among Georgia MGEVs. I would suspect you would tell me that people, as a rule, do not like change, but that the more comfortable we are with the subject, the more readily we respond to change in that area. That would DEFINITELY explain a willingness to change color schemes or plant combinations or, heck, even get a new container altogether, but why I do not want a new phone or TV remote or have to think through a new route home from the office.

So, the Georgia MGEV program has experienced some changes in the last 12 months. Some of those changes are welcomed, and some are resisted. Some of these changes I have instigated as a new State Coordinator, and some of these changes were beyond my control. We have a quarterly newsletter to MGEVs, The Volunteer Vine, which you are reading right now. We now have state initiatives that define and provide structure for the many MGEV projects in Georgia. We have moved to a process of background screening for all volunteers. A new recordkeeping system is being developed that will help grow our volunteer program by leaps and bounds. We have had new Advanced Training sessions and more are scheduled for the fall. We are even trying some distance education techniques to get training out to MGEVs who cannot travel to a training site.

The awareness and comfort with some of these changes varies widely across the state. Some of you have responded favorably, because you are familiar with or accustomed to the areas of concern. Some of you have responded constructively and cautiously, because you were not completely sure and good sense told you to ask questions. Some of you were not at all comfortable with changing “the way we do MGEVs.”
Changes continued...

and you did not hesitate to tell me about it! I bet some of you reading this are even wondering “What changes?”

I have been around the state and met with many of you in meetings, but I wanted to talk with you one more time about the additional updates and changes that evolved this year, as well as share the most exciting details of the latest opportunities with you. So, I am adding yet another new thing by offering a MGEV program update via the Internet. On September 11, 2013, from 9:30 – 10:30 am, I will spend an hour going over these changes and their implications for the Georgia MGEV program. I want to visit with you a bit about these changes and updates, make sure that your questions are answered, and share information about the wonderful new things coming for Georgia MGEVs. Be sure to tune in on September 11, 2013!

It is very easy to join me online for this webinar update. Grab a second cup of coffee and power up the computer. All you have to do is load this link:

https://sas.elluminate.com/site/external/launch/meeting.jnlp?sid=2013048&password=M.5A85061B6AF55FA66539AB3ED243E3

If you don’t want to type it, go to the NEWS AND EVENTS page at wwwgambarstergardener.org and scroll down to the information on the update. If you are using a MAC, you may encounter a few issues. If you want to participate via your smartphone, you can go to this page for the appropriate apps (http://www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Collaborate/Products/Blackboard-Collaborate/Mobile-Collaboration.aspx).

You’ll be able to hear what is being said via your computer speakers. If you have a question, you can type it into the chat box on the screen (sorry, smartphone users, I think this is not an option for you).

I promise. We won’t spend the entire time talking about policy and background screenings! We have new trainings, new awards, new service pins, new projects, and more to explore. And if we finish early, maybe we will talk about some of those color combinations I was telling you about!

MGEV Update with Sheri Dorn
Wednesday September 11, 2013
9:30-10:30 am
Session LINK http://tinyurl.com/oo7uh3v
First time Collaborate users: here is a video online orientation that you may find helpful.
http://www.brainshark.com/blackboardinc/vu?pi=zGLzYw5XBz3Sgz0
If this is your first Collaborate session, please check your login prior to the session(s). The login process follows this general format: Select the link to the Collaborate session(s) as listed above. After entering your first_lastname, you will receive a dialogue box to select Open or Run; this allows the installer to download and run on your computer. Be patient-this can take a few minutes. Next, a Blackboard Collaborate box should appear with gold dots indicating the login is in-process. Another box will appear requesting that you select your internet connection speed: LAN, Wireless, DSL, etc. If the meeting is open, you will then be logged into the Collaborate meeting. Once in Collaborate, select Tools, Audio, Audio Setup Wizard to check your speakers and/or microphone. If you need assistance, please call Blackboard Collaborate Technical Support at 1-877-382-2293

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Communication Guidelines for MGEVs
Sheri Dorn, Extension Horticulturist and State MGEV Program Coordinator

Do you write gardening articles as a MGEV? Have you put together handouts that summarize a topic that you are sharing about, maybe at a plant clinic or a presentation? Are your articles published in local papers or on websites? Do you prepare presentations about gardening topics to share with groups in the community? These are all great ways to get University of Georgia Cooperative Extension’s research-based gardening information out there to the gardening public. Here are a few tips to make sure we are all staying on the same page.

When you are preparing material for an article, publication, or presentation, it is acceptable to use information published by other states’ Extension programs. However, do not include pesticide recommendations from other states as those recommendations may not be legal in Georgia.

All material should be original work or should properly reference sources when appropriate and provide proper credit.  


New Recordkeeping System Coming for MGEVs!

Previously posted on August 6, 2013, to Trellis, http://blog.extension.uga.edu/mgevp

Have you heard about the recordkeeping system being built for the Georgia MGEV Program? A team of Agents and Program Assistants who work with MGEV programs contributed to the design of the system. It is tailored to meet many needs of the Georgia volunteer program. I am so excited about what it offers us! Here's an inside track:

For MGEVs: Everyone is listed in one place, according to the local program that you are a part of. You will have access to the system to update your contact information and report your volunteer service. No more paper log sheets!! You will be able to mark areas of interest for volunteering so that agents have a better idea of asking when there is a project need.

For Agents: Projects are listed in the system, offering searchable results for end-of-year reporting. Volunteers help share the responsibility of keeping information up-to-date. The system offers an efficient communication tool to all MGEVs. It is easy to monitor the progress of trainees or the active status of others. End-of-year reporting, as well as monthly data, are available at the click of a button. No more paper reports!!

For the SPO: There will be a direct means of communicating with MGEVs across the state. It will be much easier to promote training opportunities for current, active MGEVs. Annual reporting will have greater detail about the projects conducted locally. Statewide impacts will be better understood. WE will still have an annual paper report to make available!!!

I have worked before with online recordkeeping systems for MGEVs. Although there is an initial learning curve, my experience is that MGEVs catch on quickly and really enjoy the system. It is so much easier to keep track of volunteer time and project results.

I am often asked, “What about the people who do not have Internet access?” No problem. For those few, we still have the paper forms and we will help you report that information so that it is included in annual reports. The contributions of everyone are so important to telling our story, to explaining what we do and accomplish.

So, if all goes well, this new system will launch in January 2014. We will finish 2013 with the same way we have reported time and hours for years. Starting at the first of the year, we will transition to the new system. I am working with agents over the coming months to prepare for this transition. We will have multiple training sessions for Agents, staff, and MGEVs so that everyone is comfortable with the system and has a chance to get their questions answered.

Now, “MG Recordkeeping System” sounds a little boring, but we’re having a hard time figuring out what to name it! What would you call it? Send me some suggestions! ☁️
**World’s Best Help Desk**

When the MGEV program concept was developed 40 years ago in Washington, Agents were in dire need of volunteers to help answer plant and gardening questions that came to the Extension office. Plant clinics were also offered in area shopping malls. If you have worked the phones or office “help desk” or conducted a plant clinic at a farmer’s market or other venue, you know that this is still a huge area of need for Extension and that questions from the public can have a huge range. If there is one thing that MGEVs should do very well, it is to set up a great “help desk” or “plant clinic” station for answering those public questions. Here are some tips for doing so:

- **Discuss with your Agent.** Discuss the idea of a “help desk” or “plant clinic” station with your local agent. Is this a resource that is needed? Will it benefit the local office and community? Can the agent provide back-up for hard-to-answer questions or for topics on which MGEVs are not trained?

- **Create a schedule.** If you are in a county with a large population or call/visit volume, you may need to offer hours to the public five days a week. If you have a small amount of office traffic, consider choosing two time slots a week. Ask the Agent or the office staff when the peak number of questions come in and schedule volunteer services during those times. Set a schedule, find volunteers to staff the station during these hours, and promote the schedule to the public.

- **Decide on a location.** Is there space for a station in the office? Should these types of services be offered at a public venue, such as a shopping mall or a farmers’ market? Where will the public find your service? Where will you best meet the public?

- **Gather supplies.** You will need basic supplies, such as note paper, message pads, and pencils, when conducting a clinic or help desk. You will need reference materials to research answers. A Georgia Pest Management Handbook is essential for making any sort of pesticide recommendations for a correctly identified pest or disease. Stock your clinic box with soil test kits and extra copies of seasonal or timely Extension publications. Include a UGA MGEV program “Ask a Master Gardener” banner to identify your station. Activity reports will help capture the number of people you have helped during each clinic or session. Be sure to pass along to the Agent any questions for which you are not trained to answer or that you cannot answer. If you are creating a station at the Extension office, it is worthwhile to invest in reference texts. Watch for a list of recommended texts on Trellis (http://blog.extension.uga.edu/mgevp). Other supplies, such as a hand lens, magnifying glass, tweezers, probes, alcohol, or a microscope, can be added over time.

- **Market your services.** Make the public aware of this fantastic service! Promote your schedule in local newspapers, community blogs and Facebook pages, and any other place where people go for information. Schedule clinics in locations where you will encounter lots of people who may have gardening questions. Work with the local Agent to determine the most effective locations for these types of events. Inform the Agent and local office when and where MGEVs will be hosting a clinic or help desk.

- **Keep track of your results!** Using a logbook or other activity record, you can make sure that questions are answered in a timely manner. If questions cannot be answered in the current shift, they can be passed on to the next scheduled volunteers. Keep a record of the contacts that have received services from your help desk or clinic so that your Agent can report this each month through GA COUNTS. It will also help you to see patterns and trends in questions and volume.

- **Keep your skills sharp!** Working a help desk or clinic makes you quickly aware of what you don’t know. Be sure to ask your Agent for help, perhaps a special training session for MGEVs working the clinics or help desks or a heads-up on seasonal items about which you will experience a high volume of calls. Look for Advanced Training in diagnostic topics that will help you answer more questions.

Be sure share your Help Desk or Plant Clinic photos on the Master Gardener Facebook page at:

[www.facebook.com/UGAMasterGardener](http://www.facebook.com/UGAMasterGardener)