Greetings Master Gardener Volunteers,

We are writing to update you on the latest University of Maryland Extension (UME) Master Gardener Program volunteer activity decisions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and recent announcements by the Governor.

The Governor referenced the [Maryland Strong Roadmap to Recovery](#) outlining the responsible reopening of businesses, organizations, and schools that will extend at least through the fall. This guidance was informed by CDC guidelines and has been developed by experts and stakeholders in an effort to safely re-open our state.

After careful review of the guidance developed by government and health officials, along with key discussions with University of Maryland and UME Administration, the UME Master Gardener Program has decided that all in-person summer programs and activities will be suspended through July 31st. This includes working in any demonstration or community gardens as a Master Gardener volunteer. This is in alignment with decisions made for other UME volunteer programs, including 4-H, and with the University’s decision to move all courses online for the summer sessions.

We remind everyone that we must be prepared for the possibility that the suspension of activity may continue past July 31st. The situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic is always changing, but our priority remains the health and safety of our volunteers and constituents. We will continue to monitor the announcements and guidelines from the State, the University, and UME Administration and will keep you informed accordingly. We will post the most recent announcements on the [Master Gardener website](#).

Please rest assured that we understand the impact of this decision. We have heard your suggestions and concerns, and take them very seriously. We know that it is hard to miss out on the opportunity to grow produce for your local foodbanks or to know that your carefully planned demonstration gardens are getting overgrown. We are missing seeing everyone in the garden as well. This decision was not made lightly, and we appreciate your understanding. In the meantime, we have been having great success with online continuing education events, such as our Ask a Master Gardener Plant Clinic Training last week that saw 395 participants! We are so proud of our Master Gardener Coordinators and Volunteers for the initiative and creativity that they have shown during this difficult time.

As the State, the University, and UME work to develop a plan for reopening, we are doing the same to develop a roadmap to restoring Master Gardener activities. This will include
protocols in accordance with public health directives including participant size capacity, physical distancing, indoor vs. outdoor programming, facility and equipment sanitization, risk exposure and mitigation, personal protective gear, and more. We will reassess our program decisions as our state government implements the three stages of recovery (low risk, medium risk, high risk) and our program becomes better equipped to manage the above-mentioned public health directives.

We very much value our Master Gardener program and understand the impact these decisions have on families and communities. However, we cannot move too swiftly and run the risk of advancing the spread of the virus—even among our communities with lower reported cases. We are grateful for your patience as we work to develop guidance and protocols that will enable us to responsibly resume our in-person programs. We look forward to the day we can all gather safely together again!

Regards,

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UME Program Leader, Environment and Natural Resources

Stephanie Mathias
State Master Gardener Coordinator