

# Master Gardeners of Cuyahoga County



5320 Stanard Avenue ♦ Cleveland, Ohio 44103 ♦  
216-429-8200

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## Procedures When Staffing Horticulture Hotline

### Safety and Security

- \* Evacuate the building in the event of fire alarms (drills or real incidents) and obey instructions of authorities, security personnel or staff

### Preparation

- \* Come early and review Buckeye Yard and Garden Line, Ohio Garden Questions, Turf Tips, BugDoc, etc.

### How to answer the phone

- \* Pick up the receiver and speak. If your voice tends to carry too far then turn away from your partner so they can hear soft-voiced callers.

- \* Say "Hello this is "your first name", Master Gardener, how may I help you?" or "Master Gardener Hotline, how may I help you?"

- \* Listen to the question. You may rephrase the question. You may need to ask multiple questions to narrow the information needed. Use the TWENTY QUESTIONS found under Favorites to help you diagnose the problem. If you need to get additional resources (such as a book), let the caller know you will be looking for the answer and put down the phone to get your resource. Respond to the question.

- \* If the caller has multiple questions, it is okay to answer several if you do not get a signal that other callers are waiting. If there are many callers you may need to ask them to call back at another time with the additional questions, so that you can respond to other callers.

- \* If the caller has no more questions but delays ending the call with additional chatter, you may tell them that you need to answer other callers.

- \* If you cannot find the answer needed, it is fine to say that you cannot find the answer they need.

- \* If the question is a critical one, e.g. vegetables that are readily contaminated with lead

and you can't find the information quickly, you may get their phone number and call them back.

## **What calls are appropriate**

\*Handle homeowner/resident calls that pertain to **horticulture and general pest control**.

\* Answers for commercial growers or stores need to be referred to the Extension Horticulture Educator, Jacqueline Kowalski. This can be done by pressing "Trans/Conf" button and then following the directions on the screen. Jacqueline's Extension is 217. Press RLS.

\*Calls dealing with other topics are outside of our area of expertise. Try to advise the person whom to contact. Nutritionists in other counties can be used. See List.

\*Callers with pest/disease questions can be referred to:

\* MG Diagnostics committee at this email address: mgdiagnostics\_cuya@ag.osu.edu.  
Photos can also be sent to this email address.

\*Extension Ask an Expert widget on the county web site.

\* The ANR Educator.

## **Envelopes and Postage**

\*If the caller has access to a computer, give them instructions on how to get information on line, including fact sheets or other research based sources. Let the caller know that they can be assured of getting scientifically backed information by looking at those with edu or gov extension. You may also suggest that they look for books on the subject in their local library.

\*Information should only be mailed when the caller cannot access a computer.

\*Fact sheet number should be on the inside flap of the envelope. This is helpful at busy times when you can't fill the envelope immediately. It is also the procedure to be used at the Farmers markets or flower shows.

\*Write the address on a slip of paper and put it in the envelope.

\*Put the fact sheet in the envelope.

Material from other sources must go into the OSU, Cuyahoga County envelopes.

\*Give envelopes to Donna at the end of your shift.

\*Do not ask Donna to email information.

## **Appropriate responses**

\*Extension based answers. Information provided must be research based. (For information on how scientific information is determined see the introduction area of the Master Gardener Manual.)

\*Pesticide recommendations should come only from fact sheets. Not all fact sheets are current on pesticides. Caller should be advised to read the label on pesticides and the

inserts.

- \*Insects that need identification refer to MG diagnostics team, the ANR Educator or the Ask the Expert Widget
- \*Plant identification, same as above..
- \*If you don't know, say so. Ask the caller to call back around 12 or 12:30 p.m. so that you have time to research the question. There are times that a caller may need to make further observations based on your questions and then call back.
- \*If all else fails, take down the pertinent information and place in Jacqueline's mail box.

### **Inappropriate responses**

- \*Giving advice on non-horticulture topics
- \*Giving non-Extension advice, i.e. personal experience, things you have heard, etc.

### **Don'ts**

- \*Don't put on hold but you may lay the receiver down to get your resources.
- \*Don't be rude but don't take abuse.