



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension

## Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Network

### Our Mission

We prepare volunteers to be peer educators who build relationships with community audiences to integrate local experience and research based knowledge in planning for and initiating steps to manage gardens, lawns, and landscapes with an emphasis on food security and environmental stewardship.

### Our Vision

Adults, youth, and families who engage in our garden-based educational programs expand their learning networks and ecological gardening skills towards greater resilience and connections. As a result, they experience enhanced health and wellness, food security, ecological literacy, environmental stewardship, and they embrace sustainable community practices.

### Our Values

- We uphold the nation's Land-Grant University System mission, as well as the mission, vision and values of Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- We support people as they initiate and grow successful gardens, connect in community, and live with meaning and purpose.
- We may be involved in creating and maintaining gardens to support learning. However, we do not provide labor for garden projects, nor do we support gardens that are outside the scope of our mission.
- We offer inclusive educational programming that reflects and respects the diversity of New York State communities and the local needs of those communities.
- We foster diversity by preparing educators and volunteers to build relationships beyond familiar networks.
- We provide garden-based education that incorporates principles of experiential learning, peer learning networks, reflection, and systems thinking.
- We embrace positive adult, youth and community development through sustainable gardening practices.
- We believe in the power of reflection to help us 'do less, better.' In an era of 'too busy-ness,' we strive to pause and consider wise action in all our program efforts.
- We promote trust and safe spaces as we engage in learning and collaboration with our network of educators and volunteer, community partners, and program participants.

*Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities*

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities



## Ground Rules for Engagement

**Be present as fully as possible.** Be here with your doubts and your convictions, listen and speak up. Be present to all involved. Focus on the task at hand (use technology in ways that encourage full engagement without outside distractions).

**Respect individual differences.** Our views of reality may differ, but all are welcome to the table. Listen for understanding before responding. When offering an opinion, use “I” statements and create space for diverse voices and perspectives to be heard.

- **Acknowledge challenges respectfully and avoid defensive behavior.** Avoid denying problems or changing topics, allow others to talk without interruption. Lean in to conflict. Hard stuff...but important.
- **Seek first to understand.** Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions instead of corrections as new ideas are presented. Practice restating what others have said in seeking clarity and understanding.
- **When the going gets rough, reflect.** Suspend judgement to create opportunities for discovering what you don't know that you don't know. Assume the best of intentions.
- **Appreciate tension and complexity.** There may be times we differ in our perspectives. Move away from “either/or” thinking. Know that “us **and** them” doesn't need to mean “us vs. them.”

**Develop a sense of trust and team.** Certain practices help build “team”:

- Demonstrate a **willingness to compromise** or seek consensus.
- Accept and **publicly demonstrate support** for group decisions.
- Support a **strong sense of community** and relationship.
- **Expect and accept that our work is ongoing.** Have patience in the process.
- **Intentionally model collaborative behavior** practices within and outside of the team.

**Know and respect where the buck stops.** At the end of the day, some decisions are made at a higher level for all of us. Know that those in administrative roles wrestle with and set important priorities accordingly. Be respectful of this relationship.

Adapted from Circle of Trust Touchstones. *Touchstones are part of the Circle of Trust® approach developed by the Center for Courage & Renewal and based on the work of author/educator Parker J. Palmer.*  
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