

What to Expect at Master Gardener College

Veteran attendees have put together some tips of what someone might expect at MG College. From events at College to lodging and dining to things to take for creature comfort, those who have been are always glad to share!

College starts for all attendees on Thursday, with the Advanced Master Gardener – Stewards beginning study on Wednesday. Dorm lodging are available beginning on Tuesday evening as would be any off-campus lodging. Thursday is filled with tours and workshops which may be the full day or half day, so your arrival will need to be timed appropriately.

Signage directs you to parking, with shuttles that take you and your belongings to the dorms or registration. If you like many arrive for afternoon tours on Thursday, you'll need to be mindful of the time to get lunch and get settled before your tour leave – they will leave on time!!! Thursday evening is the Awards Ceremony with those deserving service awards receiving pins. Search for Excellence and “brag board” displays are viewed after the ceremony.

Friday and Saturday follow the same schedule, with morning keynote speakers and afternoon concurrent sessions. Friday afternoon is the VMGA Bi-monthly Board Meeting and Friday evening is “free time” to attend Blacksburg events or relax with friends. Saturday evening offers wine and refreshments as the frenzy of VMGA’s Silent Auction comes to a close. The VMGA Annual Meeting takes place for about an hour at 7pm, after which the lucky bidders pick up their auction items.

Sunday morning keynotes complete the formal learning portion of College. Most attendees load up their vehicles and attend the picnic before heading home, tired, but with new knowledge and a renewed excitement for educating the public on all things horticultural and environmental.

FAQs

Q. How do I get there?

A. Any mapping app will help you with your route, but MGs sometimes detour from the Interstates for scenic routes or garden centers – the Tidewater folks opting for Rt. 460 and Northern VA MGs opting for Rt. 29. Carpooling is preferred for the fun and cost sharing!

Q. Where do I stay?

A. There are several different opportunities depending on your particular situation. Most like to stay in the dorms with an option for a single (more expensive) to have a roommate in rooms with private baths and lounge areas on each floor. The dorm will have an elevator. Hotels are near campus as well. Shuttles run from the dorms to the dining hall and classroom sites, but not to off-site lodging.

Q. Where do I eat?

A. Those staying in the dorms are provided with three meals a day beginning with dinner on the day of arrival at an on-campus dining facility. Both meal cards and cash are utilized (no credit cards) so those staying off campus can dine conveniently with fellow attendees. And the dining facilities on campus are very, very good – offering so many choices! There are options for

dining off campus, too. Breaks and some evening refreshments are provided – to date, no one reports going hungry. Quite the opposite!

Q. Where do I park my car?

A. On Wednesday (early arrival), Thursday, and Friday park only in the area designated by the “hang tag” which you will receive with your registration packet. If you do not park in the specific location specified by your hang tag, you WILL get ticketed anywhere from \$30-\$60. On Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday you can park almost anywhere on campus unless it has a specific designation such as handicap parking, service vehicle, loading dock, is a metered spot, or is listed as a 24/7 Faculty/Staff lot. Do not park in the Owens or D2 parking lots at any time, as these are 24/7 Faculty/Staff lots.

Q. What is the cost of registration? Will I need money for other things?

A. Last year registration was \$165, with additional fees for some workshops or tours and the picnic on Sunday. Discounts are possible if you are receiving a service award or if you are selected to receive one of VMGA’s MG College Scholarships. Some local units offer scholarships or other assistance. If you take advantage of the Silent Auction, MG Gear sales or book sales during College, you’ll want to have extra cash on hand.

Q. When can I register and how?

A. Watch for announcements from VMGA, your local agent or coordinator, or in the state newsletter, In Season. Register early to assure your seat in the tours and classes of your choice! Registration can be accomplished either on-line, by phone or by “snail mail.”

There are two separate registration processes, one for housing and meals and one for MG College. If you are staying off campus, you’ll need to make those reservations on your own, and would just register for College and pay for on-campus meals with cash as you go.

Q. Is there a lot of walking involved?

A. In a word, yes. The distance from the dorm to the main meeting site in Torgerson Hall is about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 mile depending on what route you take. It’s an easy walk, particularly after eating. For those who have difficulty with this much walking, there is a shuttle service available that runs for morning, noon and after classes. Make sure you take comfortable shoes!!

Q. How many volunteer hours can I get at MG College?

A. Actually, quite a lot. Your travel time will be added to roughly 17 to 17.5 education hours if all classes are attended from Thursday through Sunday. Many MGs contribute “administrative” hours by helping with College; check with your agent for approval if you have a role to play.

Q. What are some of the benefits of attending MG College?

A. First and foremost, you will have the opportunity to learn; new applications, latest information, great speakers, beautiful gardens... The hidden benefits are some of the greatest as you meet other MG’s from around the state and compare programs and share knowledge.

Q. Any tips to ensure “creature comforts”?

A. If you are staying in the dorms, the rooms can be very cool (cold). They provide towels, sheets, pillows, pillow cases and blankets; however, you may want to bring your favorite

bedding, including an extra blanket. Comfortable walking shoes are a must. The classrooms are usually cool so take a sweater or lightweight jacket in order that you are not chilled while in class. Everyone normally wears shorts, jeans or casual pants. Many of us found that what you wore in the morning was worn throughout the day. Take an umbrella or light rainwear. Disposable raingear is great – cheap at about \$2 and can fit in your pocket. Bring all of your toiletries and hair dryer as these things are not offered in the dorms.

Q. *Any other advice?*

A. Yes! Prepare to be thoroughly immersed in information and fun!