



# Guidelines for Extension Agents

## Overview

The Mississippi 4-H Junior Master Gardener® program is a 4-H youth gardening project that offers horticultural and environmental science education as well as life-skills development through fun and creative activities.

It is modeled after the highly successful Master Gardener program and is designed to help young people become good gardeners and good citizens so they can make positive contributions to their communities, schools, and families.

As participants in the Junior Master Gardener program, some youths may be new to 4-H. Encourage these participants to take advantage of other, related 4-H programs. The motto of the 4-H program is "To Make the Best Better." Through the 4-H JMG program, horticulture is used as a tool to cultivate young people and communities.

Level 1 of the 4-H JMG program is for children in grades 3–5. Level 2 is for students in grades 6–8. Level 3 (grades 9–12) is in development.

Level 1 curriculum incorporates group and individual activities and is supported by a 4-H JMG Youth Handbook and a Teacher/Leader Guide. Level 2 curriculum combines the Teacher/Leader Guide and reproducible pages of the independent student handbook activities into a single book. Group activities can be conducted with school classes, after-school programs, home school groups, or other groups of interested young gardeners.

Individual activities allow youth gardeners to pursue self-directed learning at home. Flexibility is a key component of the 4-H JMG program. Most of the activities allow 4-H JMG leaders and young gardeners to customize the program to meet their needs and interests.

Although not required, young people can become certified 4-H Junior Master Gardeners by completing a specified number of activities from the curriculum.

Another way to participate in the program is to complete a Golden Ray Series, which requires a shorter time for completion. Program leaders also may choose to use the curriculum to supplement existing youth educational programs or classes. Through the 4-H JMG program and its guidelines, children share common experiences in gardening and community service.

## History

The 4-H JMG program began in Texas in 1995 as a dream of a few avid Master Gardeners, teachers, children, and Texas Agricultural Extension Service faculty. These people planted the seed that has now germinated into a premiere children's gardening program. A team of more than 600 children and adults contributed to the planning, writing, layout, art, and pilot phase of this curriculum.

Educators developed a Teacher/Leader Guide and Youth Handbook for children in grades 3–5 and desig-

nated it as Level 1. Level 2, targeting grades 6–8, is more in-depth. The first module, Operation Thistle: Seeds of Despair, focuses on plant growth and development. Level 3, for grades 9–12, is under development.

Level 1 made its debut in August 1999. Fifteen months later, the program had 137 registered groups representing 4,400 youths in 22 states and in New Zealand.

Extension introduced the Junior Master Gardener program into Mississippi in the fall of 2000. A pilot program in north Mississippi determined the program's impact, and it identified and evaluated Mississippi's specific Junior Master Gardener needs. The JMG program has become an integral part of the Mississippi 4-H program and is making a positive influence on Mississippi's youth.

## Purpose

Many young people are removed from the agrarian lifestyles of past generations and live in an increasingly urbanized, technological society. This Extension youth development and educational program exposes them to traditional agricultural opportunities.

The 4-H JMG program incorporates learn-by-doing activities involving plants and gardening, which increases the children's awareness and understanding of the importance of agriculture and the environment.

Studies show the following situations put young people at risk:

- Lack of relevant curriculum
- Lack of community support services or response
- Poor school attendance
- Low self-esteem/self-efficacy
- No parental involvement

Recent studies show that school gardening:

- increases self-esteem.
- helps students develop a sense of ownership and responsibility.
- helps foster relationships with family members.
- increases parental involvement.

Texas A&M University research indicates the following:

- Gardening as a group activity can be used as a socialization tool to learn leadership and volunteerism.
- Students who participated in this program developed responsibility in caring for living things.
- Students in this program increased compassion for people.

The Mississippi 4-H JMG program provides a tremendous opportunity for the state's youth to do the following:

- Enrich and expand their minds through agriculture-based learning activities.

- Broaden their horizons by building character and knowledge.
- Relate to their agrarian roots through “get your hands dirty” activities.

The program has enormous potential to make a positive impact in these areas:

- Environmental awareness
- Nutritional habits
- Horticultural knowledge
- Leadership skills
- Volunteerism
- Community involvement

Under the guidance and support of Extension agents, 4-H volunteer leaders use horticulture and gardening as a tool to teach young people how to:

- develop leadership, teamwork, and other life skills.
- identify community needs/volunteer opportunities.
- promote peer and cross-generational mentoring.
- foster personal pride and responsibility.
- increase knowledge in horticultural and environmental education.

## Administration

### National

Junior Master Gardener Program Headquarters  
225 Horticulture/Forestry Building  
Texas A&M University  
College Station, TX 77843-2134  
Phone: (979) 845-8565  
Fax: (979) 845-8906  
<http://jmgkids.us/>

### State

In Mississippi, the program is administered through MSU Extension and is a 4-H program.

### Contact

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### County

The county Extension agent with 4-H responsibility manages the program on the county level and serves as the county 4-H JMG coordinator, playing a key role in determining the success of the program. (See the next section for the county 4-H JMG coordinator’s responsibilities.)

### Club

A teacher, scout leader, Master Gardener, or other volunteer leader is directly responsible for managing and instructing the JMG group. (Specific responsibilities are listed in Information Sheet 1626 *Mississippi 4-H Junior Master Gardener Program Guidelines for Volunteer Leaders*.)

## County 4-H Junior Master Gardener Coordinator’s Responsibilities

These guidelines provide the flexibility to customize the 4-H JMG program at the county level. The county 4-H JMG coordinator is responsible for the following:

- Ensures that all volunteer leaders and youths are properly registered in the 4-H organization.
- Provides leadership and management of the county program.
- Serves as the first contact and as a resource person for the program’s volunteer leaders.
- Assists in training volunteer leaders.
- Distributes and manages the use of the county 4-H JMG manuals and materials.
- Is responsible for distributing and collecting evaluations/survey forms.
- Reports all requested information through the state 4-H system.
- Provides volunteer leaders with Information Sheet 1626 *Mississippi 4-H JMG Guidelines for Volunteer Leaders*.
- Provides volunteer leaders with Form 1041 *Leader/Teacher Registration Form*, Form 1042 *Member Group Enrollment Form*, and Form 1043 *Registration Agreement Form*.
- Encourages young people to participate in other, related 4-H activities.
- Helps volunteer leaders obtain local sponsorships for the program. Provides Information Sheet 1596 *Mississippi 4-H Junior Master Gardener Program Information for Prospective Volunteer Leaders and Sponsors* to volunteer leaders.
- Helps volunteer leaders recognize participants and provide publicity for the program.

[extension.msstate.edu](http://extension.msstate.edu)

[www.jmgkids.us](http://www.jmgkids.us)

The terms Junior Master Gardener, JMG, and Golden Ray Series, and associated logos, are service marks of the Texas Cooperative Extension.

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