

# INTRODUCING

## The Toronto Master Gardeners Strategic Plan 2021-2023

### TMG Mission

Toronto Master Gardeners are volunteers who share current, science-based horticultural information with the gardening public: in person, in print, via media, and online.

### TMG Vision

When new or experienced Toronto-area gardeners need trusted gardening advice, they think first of the Toronto Master Gardeners. Our focus is to sustain the organization and our committed volunteers, support and inspire the community, and continually update the sound knowledge required to help them.

### TMG Values

*We believe:*

- in volunteering to serve the community
- in advocating to protect the environment
- in diversity and inclusion
- in active collaboration
- in lifelong learning



## Where we are now

With 125 members, we are Ontario's largest group of Master Gardeners and Master Gardeners in Training. Our strengths:

- A strong and growing volunteer membership, with a minimum of 30 and an average of 50+ hours per member per year
- As Ontario Master Gardeners, TMGs complete rigorous advanced-level education during training period, with ongoing monthly and annual education plus individual ed opportunities
- A variety of new and established delivery channels: well-designed website; online and in-person advice clinics (2958 hrs in 2019); radio call-in Q&As; in-person and online presentations, interactive workshops/webinars; and a nascent YouTube channel
- ASK online/phone Q&A service (in 2019, 750 online/220 phone questions answered), with significant library of researched answers vetted by our Best Practices group
- Growing numbers of followers on social media (Facebook/2100+, Twitter/337, and now Instagram/400)
- Long-term mutually beneficial relationships with the TBG and TPL
- Well-managed finances and proven organizational framework and operating practises, always seeking to improve
- an ambitious 2012 Strategic Plan, which the 2021 Plan builds on

**TMGs support the public, in person, online and via a range of social media.**



# What we've achieved

## Since setting objectives in our 2012 Strategic Plan

1. To ensure we are the first choice for reliable, credible and current horticultural information, we:

- Implemented Best Practices and ASK teams to ensure quality control and consistency when answering questions from the public
- Created a TMG Code of Conduct

2. To be fully aware of the knowledge, skills and experiences of current members and make this information available to the executive and the membership, we:

*Defined a clear organizational structure with roles and responsibilities, including:*

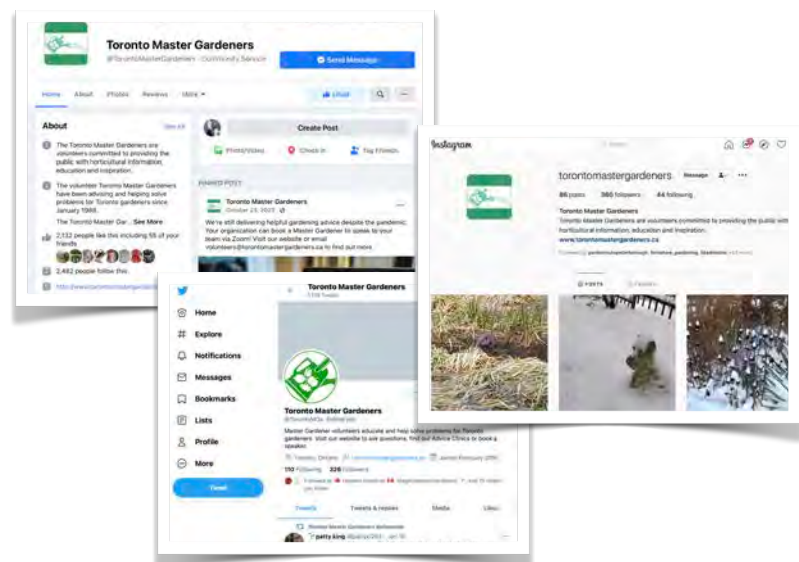
- TMG Administrative Guide detailing who does what
- Educating on Executive Positions at Monthly Meetings

*Implemented VMS to provide a simple online system, including:*

- Easy-to-use reporting tools for members to claim volunteer opportunities, log their volunteer hours and Continuing Education Units, and generate reports of their own volunteer activities / hours

3. To support our volunteers with ongoing education, social and development opportunities, we:

- Implemented a well-received Question Corner at monthly meetings to highlight interesting and difficult ASK questions
- Instituted an annual membership satisfaction survey



- Created a TMG Resource List, available on VMS
- Adapted to pandemic restrictions by delivering internal educational content via Zoom at monthly meetings

*Increased social engagement between TMGs by introducing:*

- Members' plant sales, nursery visits

**4. We created standards and procedures that make us better at targeting and recruiting volunteers with the skills we need to improve our organization and how we interact with and serve our community:**

*New Master Gardener in Training (MGiT) protocols, including:*

- Open house information night prior to the testing phase
- Defined procedures
- Potluck initiation night brings MGITs, executive members, and mentors together to celebrate and educate on TMG
- MGIT-specific training sessions
- Criteria for mentor selection

**5. We increased our variety of platforms to meet the demands of our community:**

*Content delivery options for our customers, the people of Toronto:*

- Implemented a new format for workshops for the Toronto Public Library in 2018

*Adapted to pandemic restrictions by delivering education via other mediums including:*

- Presentations via Zoom
- Advice clinics via Zoom and on radio
- Increased social media presence (Instagram, YouTube)

**The Toronto Master Gardeners celebrate their 35th Anniversary in 2022**



**We are proud of what we have accomplished since our 2012 Strategic Plan.**

Now, Toronto Master Gardeners must not only carry goals forward but adapt to new situations and needs.

*This is behind our Strategic Plan for 2021 to 2023.*

# The 2021–2023 Strategic Plan:

## What we need to do

In addition to what we've achieved, we need to address both new and ongoing challenges:

- Build greater awareness of the TMG brand
- Develop greater flexibility to address sudden changes (such as COVID19-fuelled interest in gardening and a shift to delivery methods such as online presentations), as well as larger trends (such as interest in houseplants and growing vegetables among younger/new gardeners)
- Capitalize more fully on existing resources (such as the ASK library) and update our presentations, not only to reflect the latest science, but current needs and delivery channels
- Attract and sustain a more diverse membership to better reflect the population and demographics of the citizens we seek to serve
- Reduce or remove financial barriers to entry for MGITs, especially those from negatively impacted groups and communities

## How we plan to do it

The 2021 Strategic Plan contains detailed action plans for moving forward over the next three years, organized under three Strategic Imperatives:

*External focus:*

Reaching out to the world

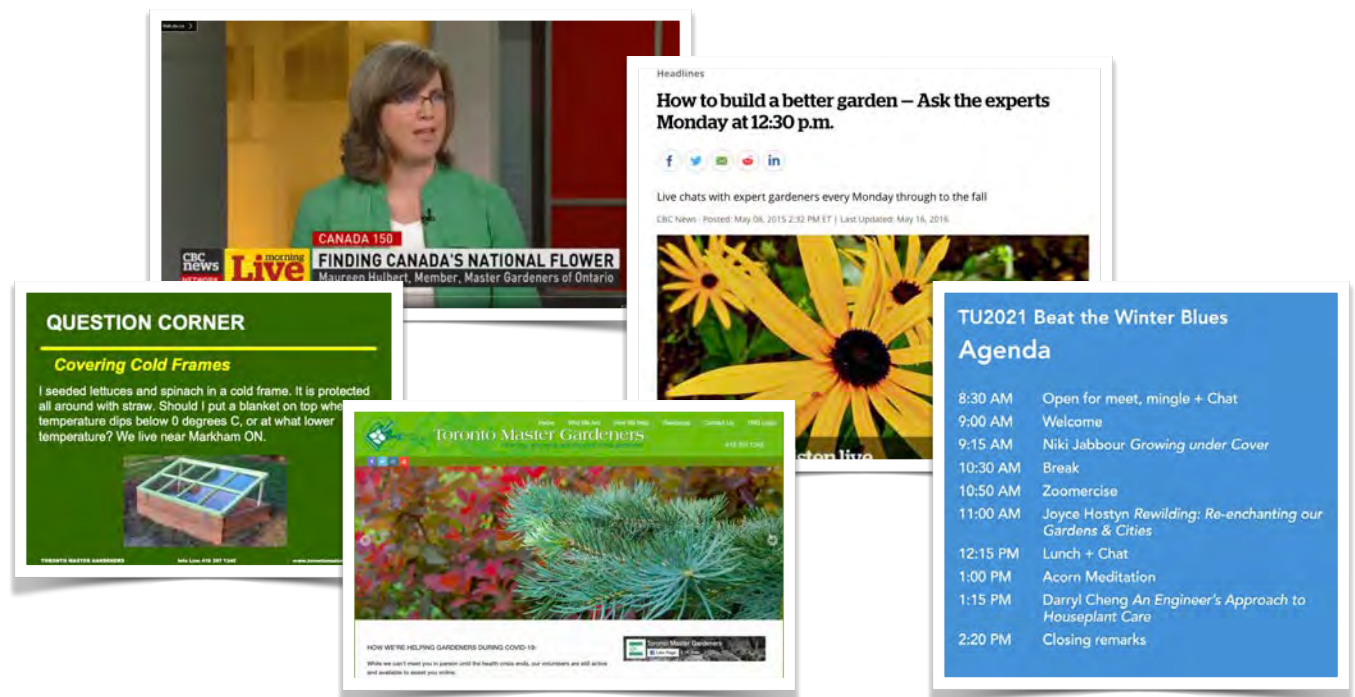
*Internal focus:*

Supporting our members

*Organizational focus:*

Strengthening our operating practices

These are briefly summarized on the next page. More information on specific actions, both short term and over the next three years, as well as our background research, is available on request.



# Our Strategic Imperatives:

## Toronto Master Gardeners Strategic Plan 2021-2023

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### 1. Reach out to the world

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#### *By improving external communications:*

- Through focussed efforts to improve understanding, awareness, reach, and recall of the TMG brand
- Through research to understand our audiences (public, clients, like-minded organizations, etc.)
- Through clearer definitions of those audiences, better understand what they need, and/or how we can build mutually beneficial bonds, and reflect this in the services we provide or the relationships we seek
- Through easy-to-understand key messages for each, delivered in the way best determined to reach them

### 2. Support our members

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#### *By strengthening our MGiT program:*

- Through a further standardized and refined MGiT recruitment and mentor/education support system
- With responsibility for MGiT support spread over additional roles, to ensure greater accountability and more clearly defined milestones
- And with a new, regular MGiT feedback loop system, for continuous improvement

#### *By enhancing the membership experience:*

- Through additional internal contact, knowledge, and sharing about each other at social events, networking forums, and regular activities such as “meet a TMG” at meetings
- Through more team volunteer opportunities, so we get to know each other better by working together
- Through fun ways to grow our knowledge, similar to Kahoot or member-to-member workshops

### 3. Strengthen our operating practices

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#### *By introducing proven, new ideas:*

- Through best practices gleaned from winners of the International Master Gardener Awards, and identifying, piloting, and implementing ideas that are a good fit for the TMGs

#### *By continuously improving our content:*

- Looping back to the first imperative, ensuring that TMG content (such as presentations, gardening guides, and the ASK archive) continues to evolve and be updated for quality control from a branding perspective as well as to meet the defined needs of our audiences

# Appendix

## Guiding Documents

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Available upon request to Teams/Volunteers/Members:

1. **2012 Success Stories.** List of achievements that came out of the 2012 Strategic Plan
2. **2020 Quick Actions.** Initiatives that were quickly put into action in 2020 stemming from members' feedback, annual survey, and leftover actions from 2012 Strategic Plan
3. **June 2020 Member's Survey.** Annual survey of TMG members, results & comments
4. **Diversity Workshop.** Given by TMG Emma Rooney, October 2019
5. **Action Plans for Strategic Imperatives.** Guideline templates for action.
6. **Ideals to Strive For, Dafina-Lazarus Stewart.** A message included by Strategic Planning Chair to help guide the Action Teams in reflecting on our vision and values to serve the community.

## 2021 Strategic Planning Committee

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### 2021 Strategic Planning Committee

- Tina Cesaroni, Strategic Planning Chair
- Dianne Azzarello
- Gail Bebee
- Jackie Campbell
- Sue Hills
- Maureen Hulbert
- Linda Lynott
- Sylvia Sarkus
- Jane Smale

### Document Editor

- Helen Battersby

## A big thank you to the committee and editor

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Over 10 months they volunteered countless hours and adapted to COVID-safe Zoom meetings to get this plan to the membership. We now invite you to sign up and help bring this into reality.

*Tina Cesaroni, Executive Coordinator, January 2021*

**To receive the 14-page action plans and supporting documents, or to tell us you'd like to get involved as we roll things out, please contact:**

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