Answering County/Unit Horticulture Calls

1. Questions should be evaluated in regards to immediacy and subject matter. Questions dealing with storm injury, pesticide safety including possible pesticide drift, food safety, hazards (trees) and questions from commercial horticulture businesses and farms need to be referred to an appropriate educator/specialist following the guidelines below.

2. Units with horticulture educators may develop a system for answering inquiries.

3. For general home gardener questions, units with Master Gardeners should use their Master Gardeners first. Many units already utilize Master Gardeners to answer home garden questions. Some offices have a volunteer in the office to answer questions each work day while others may only have a volunteer ½ day a week. If Master Gardeners aren’t in the office, units need to hold the question/call until Master Gardeners are available.

4. Units should look to their Master Gardeners for providing support for ALL counties within their unit configuration as of July 1, 2011. For example, Master Gardeners in Adams County should be able to handle any home gardener call from other counties in their unit configuration.

5. Master Gardeners and units are encouraged to look through University of Illinois resources, such as Report on Plant Diseases/Vista website, IPM website, Home, Yard and Garden newsletters, etc. MGs are not required to provide an immediate answer; clientele may be told that answers will be forthcoming and provided a time frame for a response. We strive to provide answers within 24 hours but that isn’t always possible. When using UI websites (HYG, IPR, DDDI, Extension Horticulture) don’t forget to use the search functions for past topics.

6. The AskHort system is being developed for units to ask questions of the horticulture team, composed of educators and specialists, who can provide answers in a timely fashion.

7. If a physical sample is submitted for identification or diagnosis, the sample should be submitted through the DDDI system or sent to the Plant Clinic. Unless prior arrangement has been made with the educator/specialist, educators/specialists will NOT handle direct emails related to pest and plant
ID. Do not send pictures as attachments to a regular email as there is no guarantee these will be answered.

- DDDI and AskHort allow us to track problems, as well as provide a reference to MGs and unit personnel. With the investment Extension has in these two programs, we strongly feel the need to support them.
- Don’t forget the UI Plant Clinic as an option. Samples can be submitted year-round. (New for 2011)

8. If the request is for information that can’t be addressed by the Master Gardener through research, then the unit should use the educator list provided and forward the question to the appropriate person. The unit needs to contact the educator/specialist directly and work with them to secure an answer, providing detailed information- as answers are only as good as the information provided. This is a team effort. Please do NOT just e-mail a client’s name/address/phone/contact information to an educator or specialist. It only takes a moment to contact the educator/specialist to see if they are available and willing to provide assistance.

9. If responses are needed immediately, submit the question to AskHort where it will be distributed to the appropriate educator/specialist and responses can be more immediate.

10. Educators are free to work with neighboring/regional units to establish guidelines for handling calls. However, educators are NOT expected to field calls throughout the state, though many may be willing to respond to requests if time is available.

11. Specialists on campus will also be able to provide assistance, but units should contact specialists via email or phone to see if they are able to provide assistance.

12. While every effort will be made to provide assistance, there are some areas Extension educators/specialists do not have the expertise and responses may not be available.