

Help Desk Procedures

"I'll be happy to research the problem and call you back."

Tips for working the Help Desk

- **ONLY ANSWER QUESTIONS FROM HOMEOWNERS. DO NOT ANSWER QUESTIONS FROM COMMERCIAL GROWERS OR OTHER COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES!!!!**
 - At the beginning of every call, ask the caller if they are calling about a home garden or a commercial enterprise.
 - If you get a request from a commercial grower, refer to Sandra.

- **ALL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PEST CONTROL INCLUDING INSECTICIDES, FUNGICIDES AND HERBICIDES MUST COME FROM THE MOST CURRENT EDITION OF VA TECH PEST MANAGEMENT GUIDE: HOME GROUNDS AND ANIMALS!!!!**
 - Icon for PMG is on computer.
 - Any recommendation that is not from the PMG must be vetted by an agent or specialist at VA Tech.
 - Copy of PMG is in the office. If you can't find it on the bookshelf, ask Sandra. Only use the "Home Grounds and Animals" section.

- **Soil sample kits:**
 - Ask where sampling:
 - Home garden or lawn gets green form.
 - Pasture, horse pasture or commercial gets commercial form. (Sandra has these. They are no cost.)
 - Address an appropriately sized envelope and include a VCE transmittal form found with the envelopes on the desk. Put envelope in outgoing mail. (Sandra will attach postage.)

- **Check phone messages often:**
 - Red light lit means messages are waiting!

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- **Check Gmail account at beginning and towards end of shift:**
 - Email address for the Help Desk is "jccwmg1@gmail.com"
 - If you compose an email to send to a client, the signature fills in automatically, but please add your name to the end of the email **above** the signature.

 - The signature is as follows:
 - Your name
 - James City County/Williamsburg Master Gardener Help DEsk
(757) 564-2175

Please do not reply to this e-mail address as it is not monitored every day. If you have comments or questions please contact the Master Gardener Help Desk at 757-564-2175 or use our electronic help desk, as follows:

 - 1) Go to this website: <http://www.jccwmg.org/helpdesk/directions.htm>
 - 2) Read the instructions and then click on "Use Email to Ask Question"

- **Searching for answers to homeowner questions:**
 - Pest controls are found in the Pest Management Guide.
 - For identification of weeds, insects, other pests, it's easiest to search in this order:
 - JCCWMG Electronic Help Desk - icon is found on the right side of the computer screen. The URL is:
<http://jccwmg.org/helpdesk/index.htm>
 - Virginia Cooperative Extension - icon is found on the right side of the computer screen. The URL is: <http://www.ext.vt.edu>
 - Turf weed site at VA Tech. The URL is:
<http://turfweeds.contentsrvr.net>
 - Google - type your search phrase plus "site:vt.edu" or "site:.edu" in the search box.
 - Books in the library including the MG Manual.

- **Providing caller with resource material**
 - Attempt to send via email. Use the Help Desk Gmail account and include the links you find.
 - If no email or they specify they want paper copies, print on the Help Desk printer. Warning: many VT publications have lots of pages. Please make sure you address an appropriately sized envelope and include a VCE

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transmittal form found with the envelopes on the desk. Put envelope in outgoing mail. (Sandra will attach postage.)

- **Preparing diagnostic samples**

- Currently samples are mailed to VT on Wednesdays.
- Clients should be asked to bring in samples on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, and the samples should be collected within 24 hours of bringing them in. Degraded samples can't be sent to VT. The client may have to be asked to bring in a fresh sample if it has degraded too much.
- Adequate samples should be freshly collected, include a diseased and a non-diseased sample from the plant, and some dirt and roots.
- Disposable gloves, pruners, alcohol, plastic bags, etc. can be found in the closet. **Good sanitation practices are imperative when handling samples.**
- Help Desk staffers will prepare the diagnostic samples for mailing including completing the form and packaging up the sample. Put all prepared samples with the outgoing mail. (Sandra will put all the samples that need to go to VT together in one box and attach postage.)
- Sample forms can be found on the desk in the portable file to the left of the printer. **Please do not take the last form without making copies!**
- There is a lidded trash can in the Help Desk office specifically for disposal of excess plant sample materials. Good sanitation is imperative.

- **Entering calls in the MG Call Log**

- All calls and walk-ins must be entered into the MG Call Log. The Call Log is in Excel spreadsheet format.
- You will find the MG Call Log icon on the right side of the computer screen.
- **Do not use a paper call log.**
- The main use of the call log is to spot horticultural trends and not to get all the details of each call.
- Be brief in your diagnostic description.
- All fields are required. (Phone number and/or email are only needed if follow-up will be required.)
- Only enter calls in the log **after** they are completed.
- Please make every attempt to complete all calls that come in during your shift. Unanswered questions should **not** be left for the next Help Desk staffer.