

# Pivoting the volunteer UVM Extension Master Gardener Helpline to an online platform during COVID-19

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The UVM Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Program answers numerous gardening questions from the public each year. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 20 trained EMG Helpline volunteers answered ~1,000 emails and phone calls providing science-based answers to pest and disease inquiries during the growing season.

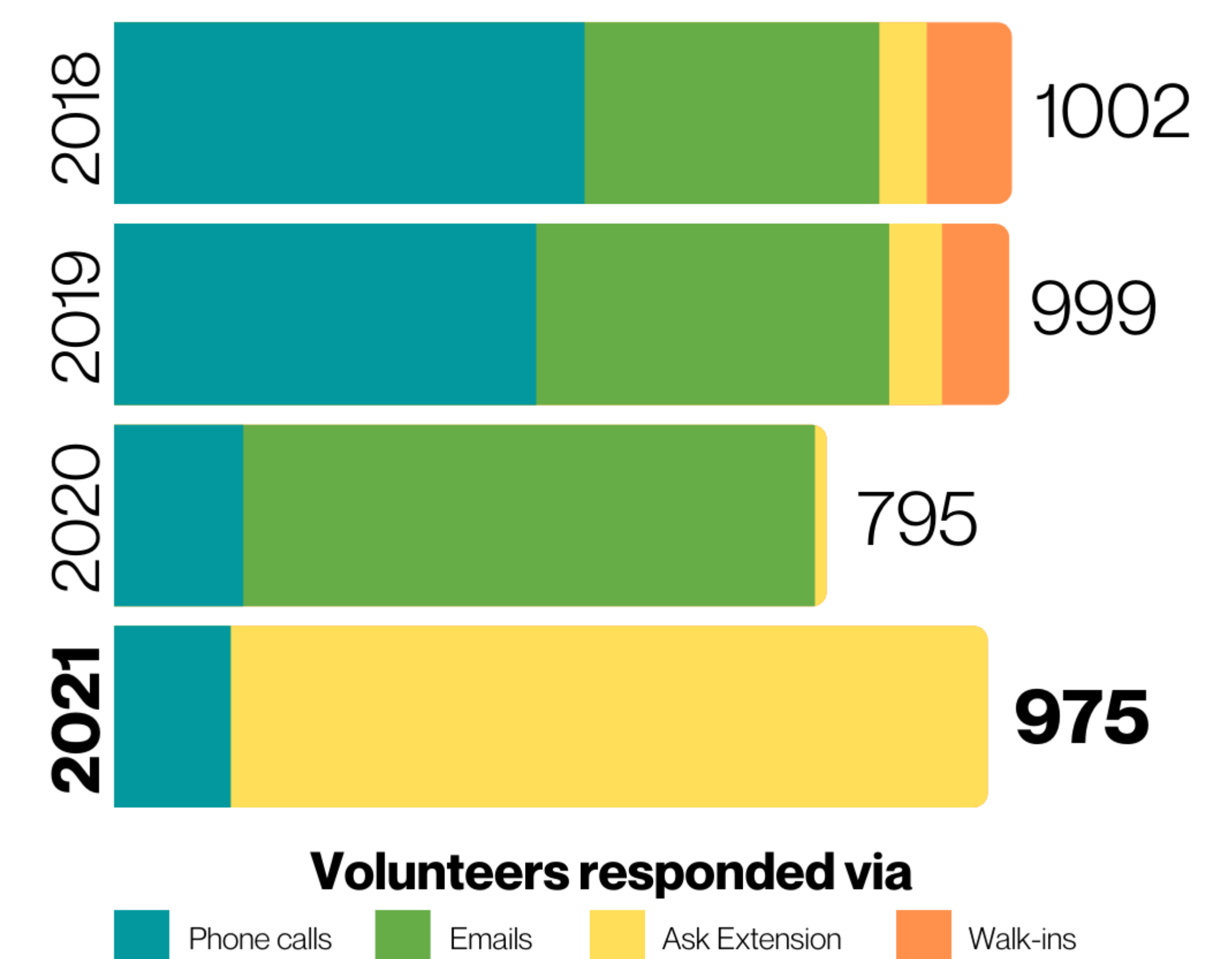
Due to COVID-19, EMG Helpline volunteers were not allowed on campus during the 2020-2021 growing seasons. However, more Vermonters started gardening during this period and the program saw a drastic increase in gardening inquiries as well as pest and disease questions. To address the volume of questions remotely, the EMG program pivoted to the “ASK EXTENSION” online platform.



ASK EXTENSION is a national initiative of the US Cooperative Extension System that provides one-on-one responses from Extension and University staff and volunteers. Vermont gardeners were able to post questions as well as photos and receive timely science-based answers from UVM EMG Helpline volunteers throughout the growing season.

**ASK EXTENSION was a success.** Gardeners were satisfied with the responses they received, and volunteers found the system user-friendly. **975 questions were answered during the 2021 growing season, bringing service numbers back to pre- COVID-19 totals!**

**Vermonters Served through UVM Extension Master Gardener Helpline / Ask Extension Services**



We will continue to use ASK EXTENSION in 2022 when volunteers return to the lab. This resource allows the UVM EMG Helpline volunteers to offer gardeners timely, science-based pest and disease IPM information.

