

Extension Connections Newsletter

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Health Literacy Month: Knowledge is power

By Kristin Bogdonas,
Illinois Extension food and nutrition educator

October is Health Literacy Month, a time to recognize the importance of finding, understanding, and using health information to make informed decisions. Health literacy isn't about how smart someone is, it's about having the knowledge and confidence to navigate everyday health situations, from reading a nutrition label to understanding a medical diagnosis or asking questions during a doctor's appointment. When health information is confusing, it's easier to feel overwhelmed. But improving health literacy can lead to better communication with healthcare providers, safer medication use, and healthier choices for ourselves and our families. With internet access always at our fingertips, it's important to know how to spot trustworthy health information online

Here are some online examples and what to watch out for:

- Extension services: Any state land-grant university and extension service are good resources. Look for websites that end in .edu to make sure they are from a higher education system. Check out the Illinois Extension Health website where you can read, watch, and engage to improve your health at any age. Learn more at <https://extension.illinois.edu/food>
- Online health: Professional organizations and clinics, like the Academy of Pediatrics or Mayo Clinic,



can provide reliable health information online. Look for websites that end in .org to ensure it is from a reliable source.

- Artificial intelligence (AI): AI, like ChatGPT or Google Gemini, sources information. Some of it may be reliable and some is not. Check where AI got the information and go to the source directly. AI should not be used to ask personal medical questions.
- Social Media: Always check who posted the content and where their sources come from. If they use reliable sources, the information is more likely to be trustworthy. If they are posting about an individual experience, it may not apply to you.

If you are concerned about anything related to your health, reach out to your Primary Care Provider (PCP). While the internet can help us learn more, it cannot treat medical issues. This month, try learning more about your health using a reliable digital media source.

Food & Nutrition Programs



Native Plants Support Pollinators

Tuesday Oct. 20, 10 to 11 a.m.

Discover how native plants provide critical habitat and food sources for a wide range of pollinators, including butterflies, birds, moths, beetles, bats, and more. Learn ways to support pollinator populations while enhancing the beauty and ecological value of your landscape. This program will include a presentation by Master Gardner, Cindy Lenger.

Register online at

go.illinois.edu/NativePlantsSupportPollinators

Honey and Health | Tues. Oct 13, 5:30 - 6:30 p.m.

East Moline Public Library

Honey is a true superfood with unique characteristics and nutritional value. There are over 300 varieties of honey, each with unique flavor, color, and aroma profiles. The popularity of honey has continued to grow over the past decade due, in part, to its nutritional and therapeutic uses. Illinois Extension Food and Nutrition Educator Kristin Bogdonas will show you how to maximize honey in the kitchen and enjoy taste tests of common and rare varieties.

Sign up with Livvy Menage at the East Moline



**Get gardening answers from
a trusted source**

Horticulture Helpline

Illinois Extension Master Gardeners
are available in person

Wednesdays, 9 a.m. - Noon.

Call 309-756-9978 or stop by

Extension in Milan

321 2nd Avenue West, Milan, IL



Submit your questions **anytime** online at **go.illinois.edu/AskTheMasterGardener**
or call to leave a message at **217-300-0240**

Fall Walk at Brownlee Cemetery Prairie

Sat. Oct 3, 9 - 10 a.m.

Brownlee Cemetery

57 220th street, Alexis IL 61412

Join the Mercer County Soil and Water Conservation District and Illinois Extension Master Gardeners of Mercer County for a crisp, early-fall prairie walk.

Bring your favorite coffee mug and we will bring the coffee!

Learn about the native grasses and wildflowers that make this landscape unique while enjoying the changing colors of the season.

Sign up at: go.illinois.edu/Rainscaping2026



October 22, 10 a.m. - noon | Botanical Workshop: Tree Identification and Wood Cookie Wreath

University of Illinois Extension Office - Milan
Join Horticulture Educator Emily Swihart for this engaging make-and-take program! This introductory workshop will teach participants how to identify common tree species using key characteristics such as leaf arrangement, bark texture, buds, branching patterns, and other distinguishing features. You'll also learn seasonal identification techniques, including how to recognize trees during the winter months when leaves are absent.

Following the educational session, participants will create their own decorative wood cookie wreath. All materials are provided, and no prior crafting experience is needed.

The cost is \$15 and includes all supplies.

Register at : go.illinois.edu/TreelIdentification



October 20, 1:30 p.m. | Speak for the Trees: Community Advocacy for Urban Forests *Four Seasons Gardening Webinar Series*

Trees benefit communities. Giving them a voice strengthens their presence.

Community trees are an essential part of the urban ecosystem and add great value to the places we call home. Discover practical ways to become an advocate for the trees that strengthen communities. Through this program, residents will be provided with an assortment of strategies to get involved. Large and small actions make a difference. Attendees will gain tools, resources, and actionable strategies to champion a healthy, thriving forest so they can speak for the trees.

Presenter: Emily Swihart, horticulture educator, Illinois Extension

Register at go.illinois.edu/FourSeasons.

Upcoming Community Seminar Series

Active Moments, Healthier Days: Reducing the Risks of Too Much Sitting

Wednesday Oct. 7, 12 to 1 p.m.

This session explores how excessive sitting affects metabolism, energy levels, and long-term well-being. Learn practical, research-based strategies to incorporate more movement into your daily routine, reduce the effects of sedentary time, and support overall health through simple changes.

Register online at go.illinois.edu/CSSAutumn2026



Inside the Stress Response: Understanding the Amygdala's Role

Wednesday Oct. 14, 12 to 1 p.m.

Why do we react to stress the way we do? This session explores the role of the amygdala, a key brain region involved in processing emotions and triggering the body's fight-or-flight response. Learn how the amygdala helps us respond to challenges and what researchers are discovering about the connections among the brain, stress, and our reactions.

Register online at go.illinois.edu/CSSAutumn2026



Mapping Change: Exploring English Use and Gentrification in Puerto Rico

Wednesday Oct. 21, 12 to 1 p.m.

This session explores a community-led mapping project that examines the relationship between rising English use and concerns about gentrification and displacement. Learn how activists and researchers are collaborating to document these changes, increase spatial awareness, and better understand their impact on community identity and well-being.

Register online at go.illinois.edu/CSSAutumn2026



Mindfulness and Music in Early Childhood: Supporting Attention and Emotional Regulation

Wednesday Oct. 28, 12 to 1 p.m.

This session explores how mindfulness and music-related activities may support these emerging abilities. Learn about common approaches, including rhythmic movement, breathing exercises, mindful listening, and music-based attention activities. The session also reviews current research and highlights important considerations for parents, educators, and health professionals.

Register online at go.illinois.edu/CSSAutumn2026

