

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Local gardeners benefit from seed starting workshops

On one hand the concepts are simple, but on the other hand there are details and techniques that help gardeners increase their success at seed starting. In early 2025, University of Illinois Extension hosted a series of hands-on seed starting workshops across Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties, helping local gardeners start plants from seed successfully.

Winter Sowing

In January, 32 community members attended a winter sowing workshop where they learned how to create mini-greenhouses by upcycling containers to jumpstart their seeds outdoors in cold conditions. Attendees left with the confidence to apply this method in their gardens. One participant, Rayo Boursier, said, "I used winter sowing to grow many of the plants I added to my garden this spring."

Indoor Seed Starting Success

Two workshops in March, led by horticulture educator Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle, focused on indoor seed starting. These events provided attendees with practical advice on germination techniques, lighting, and troubleshooting common challenges. The Seed Starting workshop, held in Tazewell county, hosted 18 participants and was co-taught with Extension Master Gardener and Naturalist Janine Donahue.

Janine provided recipes and demonstrated the soil mix recipe she uses to start seeds in her soil-blocking method. Nicole led participants through a hands-on activity of making seed spirals that involved placing soil mix on a repurposed piece of plastic, adding seed, and rolling it up to look like a snail.

"I was happy to receive photos from Janet Mason (a workshop participant) showing her seed starting success," commented Nicole. "She used the seed-blocking method."

Herbs for Community and Home Gardens

The final workshop in March, held in Fulton County, emphasized herb seed starting. Participants experimented with soil blocks and seed spirals to start herbs for personal use while contributing to a new herb garden at the Fulton County Farm Bureau building. Workshop attendee Doris Simmons successfully started lemon balm and basil and donated them to the newly established herb garden.

By fostering hands-on learning and community participation, these workshops equipped attendees with the skills and confidence to start seeds successfully, enriching gardens and communities across the region.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle and Extension Master Gardener and Naturalist Janine Donahue teamed up to teach one of the seed starting workshops held this year. Four, in-person workshops were held and gave participants hands-on learning activities to experience a variety of ways to start seeds at home.

IL River Hort Blog

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