

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Horticulture team adds program coordinator to support growing program

Ainsley Olsen is the newest member of the University of Illinois Extension horticulture team serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties. With the growing Master Gardener program, demand for horticulture education, and the addition of the Conservation@Home program it became critical to expand the horticulture team in order to maintain the excellent quality of programs.

Ainsley was a member of the Master Gardener Class of 2021. She very quickly completed her internship hours and received her official EMG badge in 2022. With a deep passion for community and conservation, she quickly became involved in projects focused on food security and pollinator protection. As a Master Gardener she led the educational booth at the Peoria RiverFront Market, where the team of volunteers shared gardening information, answered questions, and connected people to the program.

"I love native plants and sustainability," Ainsley explained. "I am dedicated to making gardening more accessible and impactful for people and the planet through my new job and my personal life."

Originally from the sun-baked deserts of West Texas, Ainsley's professional background spans accounting, business operations, and creative education. Before joining Extension, she worked in oilfield and telecommunications industries, managing everything from financial systems to field operations. She is also a lifelong dancer and spent over a decade teaching and directing youth dance programs—an experience that shaped her love for building community through creative, hands-on learning.

"Ainsley brings a perfect blend of technical skills, subject matter expertise, and people skills to our team," offered Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle, horticulture educator. "With our growing team of staff and volunteers it was critical that we hired someone who was passionate about the program and ready to work hard. I'm so glad to have Ainsley on the team."

Ainsley lives in central Illinois with her husband of 10 years, Conoley, and their red heeler mix, Rosie Belle, who enthusiastically assists at the RiverFront Market by greeting visitors and making new gardener friends.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

*Ainsley Olsen joined the Illinois Extension horticulture team as a program coordinator. She joins Rachel Driver, program coordinator, and Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle, educator, on the team that supports 150 Master Gardeners, coordinates a wide range of horticulture programs, and provides horticulture education.*

### Anita Wilkinson

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