

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## 4-H and Canton Park District bring a piece of Illinois history back to Fulton County

Early settlers to the Midwest were in awe of the park-like landscapes of oak savannas, which once dotted the prairie. Today, these beautiful and unique ecosystems are among the most threatened in the world. But thanks to the [4-H Green Communities Tree Program](#), a new generation of young people is helping to bring them back to Fulton County.

With funding from [Illinois Forestry Development](#) this spring, the Fulton County 4-H Junior Master Naturalist Club helped plant 25 oak trees at [Wallace Park in Canton](#). This year is the first time Fulton County has participated in this statewide effort, which has successfully established 118 new oak savannas on public properties across 66 counties in just three years!

Club leaders and [Extension Master Naturalists](#) Amanda Atchley and Jenny Beal eagerly accepted the challenge of adding Fulton County to this impressive map. Amanda, also the Superintendent of Recreation at the Canton Park District, worked with Illinois Extension Environmental Education Specialist [Curt Sinclair](#) to select the perfect site. In February, the team learned they would receive an assortment of young oaks, including black oak, bur oak, white oak, and swamp white oak, all at least three feet tall to give them a strong start.

On April 23, the 4-H club members, park district staff, Extension Master Naturalists and [Master Gardeners](#) gathered at Wallace Park. Illinois Extension staff taught the youth about native Illinois trees and the best practices for planting them. The kids then worked side-by-side with the adults, carefully placing each tree to give it the best chance to thrive.

The event, strategically held during Earth Day and 4-H National Day of Service week, was not just about planting trees—it was about planting a legacy. One 4-H member shared her excitement with a volunteer, saying how "cool it was to plant a tree that one day she could bring her own kid to see when it was HUGE!"

The impact of this project is already inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards. The [Junior Master Naturalist Club](#) has already expressed interest in applying for the 4-H Green Communities Tree Program again next year to establish another oak savanna in the county. These young people are planting trees and growing a greener, more beautiful future for all of us to enjoy.



Photo by Krista Gray | Illinois Extension

*Extension Master Naturalist Ed Coleman was among the adult volunteers who worked with Fulton County Junior Master Naturalist 4-H club members to plant 25 Illinois native oak trees at Wallace Park in Canton. The 4-H members received a grant from 4-H Green Communities Tree Program.*

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