

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Golden Garden Day—West Central Celebration, 50 Years of Extension Master Gardener Impact

In 2025, the Illinois Extension Master Gardeners are celebrating 50 years of impact. Five regional events invited people from all over Illinois to join in looking back at the Extension Master Gardener program and how it has grown since 1975. Extension staff and volunteers from the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit hosted the West Central regional event. The event centered around what all EMGs love, being out in the garden and connecting with other nature-lovers.

Over 90 participants met at [OSF St. Ann's Garden of Hope](#) in July to start the Golden Garden Day—West Central Celebration. Mike Brooks, the garden manager and EMG, shared the history and impact of the garden with the group. Guests enjoyed exploring the three sections of the garden.

In 2024, OSF St. Ann's Garden of Hope donated nearly 13,000 pounds of fresh produce to local food pantries and neighbors. Mike also works to coordinate the [Community Garden Network](#) to help support local giving gardens and connect them with food pantries to ensure the produce they grow can reach as many people as possible.

The celebration extended to [Wildlife Prairie Park](#), where Master Gardener lead projects were a highlight. County Director [Earl Allen](#) and Regional Director [Janice McCoy](#) spoke to the group, thanking them for the work Master Gardener volunteers do to positively impact communities in Illinois through education, giving gardens, pollinator support, and more.

The celebration ended with a chance to explore Wildlife Prairie Park and experience some of the Master Gardener led projects on site. The [4-H Learning Garden](#) is both a productive and beautiful space where 4-H SPIN club members learn about growing fresh vegetables to enhance the diets of the park animals and use their creativity to create fun and educational garden art.

The [Kim St John Butterfly Habitat](#) is the largest native butterfly habitat in Illinois. Master Gardeners and Naturalists help to ensure that resources are available to support native butterflies in every stage of their life cycle.

Guided tours through the park highlighted the importance of wildlife sanctuaries, their role in conservation, and information on native tree identification. While volunteer-managed, native plant beds added splashes of color to the space, attracting guests and pollinators.

The 50-year celebration will continue at the Illinois Extension Master Garden Annual Conference in September, as well as special events, and [social media](#) program highlights.



Local Extension Master Gardener Gloria Sun was among the guests at the regional Master Gardener 50th Anniversary celebration held in Peoria. The celebration included tours at OSF Garden of Hope and the numerous EMG projects at Wildlife Prairie Park.

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