

Extension Connections Newsletter

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Make Food Waste One Tradition You Leave Behind

Kristin Bogdonas, Illinois Extension nutrition and wellness educator

Thanksgiving is a time to celebrate abundance, gratitude, and togetherness. It's also a perfect moment to reflect on how we can make the most of our food—not just on the holiday, but all year long.

Did you know the average family loses \$1,500 annually to wasted food?

Nationwide, that adds up to 90 billion pounds of food tossed each year. The U.S. spends over \$162 billion growing, processing, and transporting food that never gets eaten. **That waste hits our wallets—and our environment.**



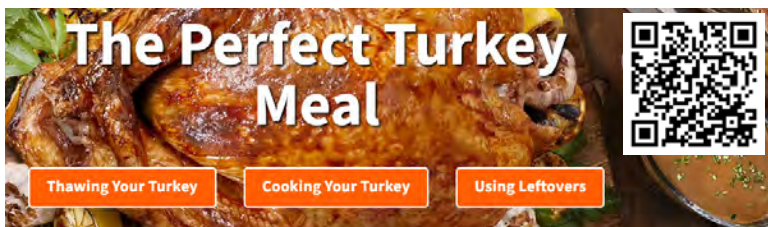
Let's turn the tide with a few simple habits:

- **Understand Date Labels** “Best if used by” and “sell by” dates refer to peak quality—not safety. Many foods are still safe to eat if stored properly. Learn more at extension.illinois.edu/food-safety/infosheets
- **Make a Plan** Buy only what you need. Weekly meal planning helps avoid impulse purchases and food waste. Cooking for one or two? Choose smaller portions and recycle packaging when possible.
- **Get Creative with Leftovers** Half an avocado and stray veggies? Turn them into a stir-fry, omelet, or sandwich spread. Try non-edible uses too—like a sugar-coffee scrub or citrus vinegar cleaner.
- Dining out? Order mindfully or share a meal to avoid leftovers going uneaten.



Watch this video to learn more about Reducing Food Waste at go.illinois.edu/FoodWasteVideo

Illinois Extension has a great website for Thanksgiving recipes, turkey facts and more!



Are you going fresh or frozen this year for Thanksgiving? A frozen turkey can be safely thawed in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave prior to cooking. Do not thaw the bird at room temperature on the kitchen counter. For more tips on cooking times, cooking methods and recipes for leftovers, visit extension.illinois.edu/turkey

If you or someone you know is in need of food assistance, visit Find Food Illinois



The Find Food IL map that shows you places in your community offering free food or meals, including school and summer meal sites. It also lists stores, retailers, and markets that accept SNAP/LINK or WIC coupons. Plus, it shows the DHS or WIC offices near you where you can sign up to receive benefits. Visit: go.illinois.edu/FindFoodIL



A Thanksgiving Table Reimagined

Across Illinois, the spirit of Thanksgiving is alive—not in the form of a golden turkey, but in the warmth of community and creativity. With rising food costs and reduced SNAP benefits, many families are turning to local food pantries for support. But this year, turkeys are scarce, and vouchers for meat alternatives are few.



Still, hope simmers in the kitchen.

Illinois Extension is here to help rethink your holiday plate with some filling and tasty alternatives. **Three Sisters Soup**—a hearty, plant-forward recipe rooted in Native American heritage, makes a delicious and affordable addition to your Thanksgiving menu. **Ground turkey**, when available, becomes the base for comforting dishes like turkey meatloaf (with a twist of grated carrots and herbs) or a cozy ground turkey chili. For those following plant-based diets, **stuffed acorn squash** is a savory and filling main dish.

Even cranberries get a makeover: chopped into meatloaf for a tangy surprise or floated in a fizzy cranberry seltzer made with cranberry juice and soda water—are cheerful, refreshing, and budget-friendly.

This Thanksgiving, the menu may look different, but the message is the same: nourishment, togetherness, and gratitude. Here are more tips to help make this Thanksgiving more affordable.

Main Dish Alternatives

- **Roast Chicken or Turkey Breast** – Smaller cuts cost much less than a full turkey but still give you that traditional flavor. Season simply with herbs, butter, and garlic, or try it fried: go.illinois.edu/FriedChicken
- **Stuffed Acorn or Butternut Squash** – Try a beautiful, hearty main dish made with squash, ground turkey, and red bell pepper: go.illinois.edu/StuffedSquash
- **Turkey Meatloaf** – Uses ground turkey, stretches farther, and cooks faster. Add additional diced veggies for color and seasonings to suit your taste: go.illinois.edu/turkeymeatloaf
- **Three Sisters Soup** - Uses beans, corn, and squash: go.illinois.edu/3SistersSoup

Budget-Friendly Sides:

- **Mashed Potatoes or Sweet Potatoes** – Inexpensive, filling, and classic. Add roasted garlic or a little butter for richness.
- **Roasted Vegetables** – Carrots, onions, and seasonal root veggies are affordable and delicious, especially when roasted with olive oil and herbs.
- **Cranberry Relish** – Blend fresh or frozen cranberries with orange juice, and sugar—simple and fresh.

Simple, Inexpensive Desserts

- **Pumpkin Pie** – Try this easy, no bake recipe: go.illinois.edu/NoBakePie
- **Apple Crisp** – Uses basic pantry ingredients and easy to scale up for a group: go.illinois.edu/AppleCrisp

Money-Saving Tips

- **Buy seasonal produce** — sweet potatoes, carrots, onions, and cabbage are on sale this time of year.
- **Use store brands for staples** like broth, butter, and flour.
- **Plan a potluck** — invite guests to bring one dish each to share the cost.
- **Skip extras** — you don't need 10 sides; 3–4 solid dishes make a satisfying meal.

Volunteer Reception Center Training Nov 14, 9 am - 4 pm, Moline



The training will provide participants with the necessary tools and skills to set up a Volunteer Reception Center to manage volunteers who step up to lend a hand during a disaster affecting their community. Whether it's a flood, tornado, storm or others. Attendees will have the opportunity to work together as a team in establishing, managing, and mobilizing a Volunteer Reception Center through a simulated exercise.

Want to help your community during a disaster?

Disaster Ready Quad Cities is hosting a Volunteer Reception Center Training for individuals in the Quad Cities and surrounding region on Friday, November 14, from 9 am to 4 pm at the American Red Cross, 1100 River Drive, Moline IL.

Jamie Lane, Disaster Services Officer with Volunteer Iowa, will serve as instructor/trainer.

Please RSVP by November 10th to Russell Medley at rmedley@illinois.edu or (309) 756-9978

Building a Balanced Charcuterie Board | November 12, 2-3:30 p.m. | Kewanee Library

Charcuterie boards are fun to eat and make the perfect appetizer for entertaining. Treat your family and friends to a healthy charcuterie board this season by making simple modifications. Learn what a charcuterie board is, what elements go into making a traditional board (or box), and how to adapt your board for different seasons and holidays. Participants will get hands-on practice by designing a charcuterie box to take home.

Space is limited so sign up early! Cost: \$10

Registration required. To register, contact Susan Carlson at the Kewanee Public Library by calling 309-852-4505



Mental Health First Aid for the Agriculture Community

Support your community, coworkers, and yourself. This training helps agricultural professionals recognize and respond to mental health and substance use challenges in adults.

Designed for those who live and work in agriculture, this course empowers you to:

- Spot signs of mental health struggles
- Offer meaningful support in times of crisis
- Break the silence around mental health
- Build a culture of care and connection
- Access local and national support networks

Available Dates: Tuesday, December 2, 9:00AM-4:00PM

Register by Nov. 11 for this session.

Please note that the course requires 2 hours of self-paced pre-course work to be completed online before attending the training.



Register here:

**go.illinois.edu/AgMentalHealthFA
or call Extension at (309) 756-9978.**

Join us for these Free Webinars

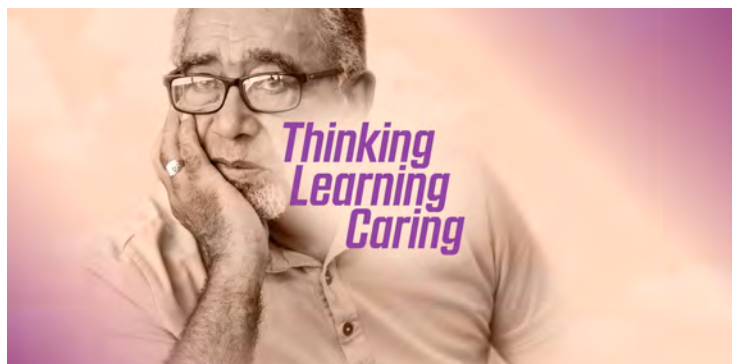
Healthy Mouth, Healthy Body: The Key to Total Wellness: November 5 at Noon



Learn how to improve your overall well-being by taking care of your mouth. Healthy teeth, healthy body. This session dives into the critical connections between oral care and overall health, showing why what happens in your mouth matters for your entire body, and how simple steps can make a big difference.

Register at go.illinois.edu/HealthyMouth or call Extension at (309) 756-9978.

Bullying Among Older Adults: Thinking, Learning, Caring Webinar: November 6 at 2 pm



Recognize the signs of senior bullying and learn how to respond with empathy and action. Most people think of bullying as something done to children by other children. As the attention and focus on the social problem of bullying has become more prevalent in recent years, it is evident that bullying can be perpetrated and experienced by people of any age. Learn to recognize and respond to bullying situations.

Register at go.illinois.edu/Bullying or call Extension at (309) 756-9978.

How Your Environment Shapes Your Health: November 12 at Noon



More than personal choices influence your health — your environment plays a key role. Food availability, safe sidewalks, and green spaces impact healthy habits. This interactive virtual session explores how environments shape eating and activity patterns, offering practical strategies to improve your health and support others. Learn actionable steps to thrive and foster healthier environments for all.

Register at go.illinois.edu/EnviroHealth or call Extension at (309) 756-9978.

Wellness in Nature: Lessons for Living November 13 at 2 pm



Discover the health benefits of nature and simple ways to enjoy it. Spending time in nature can benefit mental and physical well-being. From creating a sensory experience while growing vegetables and fruits in a garden to hiking and exploring a forest preserve, even a short amount of time spent in nature can improve overall health. Explore the health benefits of being present in nature and discover simple activities to foster experiences in the natural world.

Register at go.illinois.edu/WellNature or call Extension at (309) 756-9978.



4-H Holidays Around the World: Make-and-Take Celebration

Join 4-H for a festive journey across the globe! Explore holiday traditions from around the world. Youth ages 5 to 18 are invited to attend a session at one of our three locations. They will rotate through interactive stations, each featuring a hands-on craft and a traditional treat from a different country.

What to Expect:

- Learn about unique holiday customs from six regions
- Create festive crafts inspired by global traditions
- Sample delicious holiday foods from around the world
- Celebrate community, culture, and creativity



Featured Stations:

- **Germany:** Make traditional ornaments and taste Plätzchen (spiced gingerbread cookies)
- **Mexico:** Create poinsettia handprint art and sip Mexican hot chocolate
- **Africa:** Craft Kwanzaa bracelets and enjoy Mbatata (sweet potato cookies)
- **Asia:** Make Chinese lanterns and blend an Indian spice mix
- **Australia:** Build a holiday snow globe and try Tim Tam Balls
- **USA:** Decorate Santa ornaments and enjoy classic sugar cookies



Cost: \$5 per person | Fee waiver available upon request

Event Locations: Choose the location that works best for you!

- **Toulon Library** – Tuesday, December 2 | 5–7 p.m.
- **Aledo Fire Station** – Friday, December 5 | 5–7 p.m.
- **Milan Extension Office** – Saturday, December 6 | 9 a.m.–Noon



Space is limited—register early to reserve your spot!

Sign up at go.illinois.edu/4-HWorldHolidays or call IL Extension at (309) 756-9978.

Attention all Lego Enthusiasts ages 8 to 18:

Compete in the 4-H virtual building brick challenge to show off your original builds with plastic building bricks like LEGO and MEGABLOKS.

November Challenge

- Theme: Hometown Pride
- Build something that represents your town or county!
- Size: Build should fit on a standard 32x32 stud LEGO (or similar) baseplate (i.e. no larger than 10" wide and long). There is no height maximum.
- Entries due by 11 pm on November 30, 2025.

Get all the details and link to upload your entry at go.illinois.edu/4-HNovLego

BUILDING 
BRICK
CHALLENGE SERIES