

VOL 3 ISSUE 2-April 2026

ILLINOIS GREEN CONNECTIONS

Extension Master Volunteers' Newsletter
Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell Counties

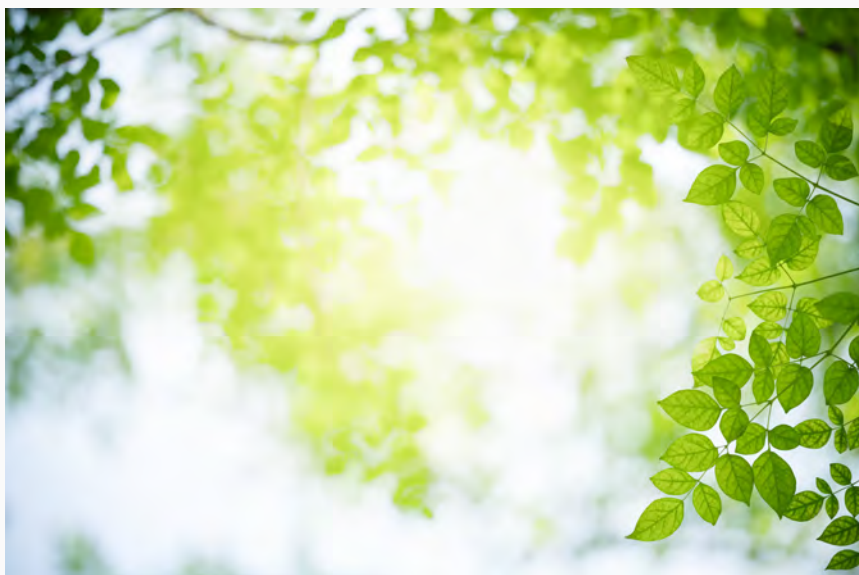


Spring

by Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle , Horticulture Educator

With the Spring Equinox behind us, the landscape is shifting toward longer days and the first signs of new growth. Early pollinators will soon be active, relying on spring bloomers and the shelter we leave in our gardens. Holding off on leaf cleanup until we've had several consistent 50-degree days protects both emerging plants and the beneficial insects overwintering beneath them.

It's a busy time of year. There is a wide variety of spring programs, workshops, and community events planned. Be sure to watch for opportunities to learn, connect, and get involved.



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Ten Ways You Can Help Migrating Birds This Spring

by Carla Rich Montez, MN, Outdoor Illinois

Nearly 3 billion birds have disappeared from North America since 1970 largely because the habitats they depend on for food, shelter, and nesting have been altered or lost.

Spring migration is an especially vulnerable time, as birds rely on familiar places to rest and refuel on their way to breeding grounds. The good news is that simple actions at home and in our communities can make a real difference. Here are ten ways to help migrating birds this spring.

[READ MORE](#)



Welcoming Spring Ephemerals to your Garden

by Bob Streitmatter, Luthy Botanical Garden

Spring is a wonderful time to be in a garden, as it comes to life... bright foliage and flowers seem to be everywhere. Walking through the garden almost becomes a celebration, as you spot Spring Beauty, Dutchman's Breeches, Bluebells or Trillium. Defined as spring ephemerals, they welcome the arrival of spring.

[READ MORE](#)

"Make a pledge to protect migrating birds this spring as they undertake one of nature's most astonishing journeys."

Carla Rich Montez





Top reasons it is important to plant natives

by Gayle Blodgett, MN, MG

Native plants are essential to healthy ecosystems because they support biodiversity, conserve resources, stabilize soils and waterways, sequester carbon, and provide resilience to changing climates, benefits that cultivated nonnative species often cannot match. Native plants are species that evolve naturally in a region and are adapted to climate, soils, insects, and other organisms. Because of those long-term relationships, native plants play important roles in ecosystems.

[READ MORE](#)



Mindfulness Hikes

Slow down, step outside, and reconnect with the present moment. Our guided Mindfulness Hikes offer gentle walks that help you unwind, tune into your senses, and enjoy the natural world with intention. Each month features a new scenic location and simple practices to support presence, calm, and curiosity.

[Follow Link to Register](#)

April 10 - [Mindfulness Hike at Springdale Cemetery](#)

April 29 - [Mindfulness Hike at Carl Spindler Marina](#)

May 27 - [Mindfulness Hike at Detweiller Riverside Park](#)

June 17 - [Mindfulness Hike at Sand Ridge State Forest](#)

July 15 - [Mindfulness Hike at Emiquon Nature Preserve](#)

July 25 - [Mindfulness Hike at Farmdale Reservoir](#)

August 26 - [Mindfulness Hike at Spring Creek Preserve](#)

September 16 - [Mindfulness Hike at Tawny Oaks Singing Woods](#)

September 26 - [Mindfulness Hike at Dixon Mounds](#)

October 14 - [Mindfulness Hike at Big Creek Park](#)

Gardeners' BIG Day

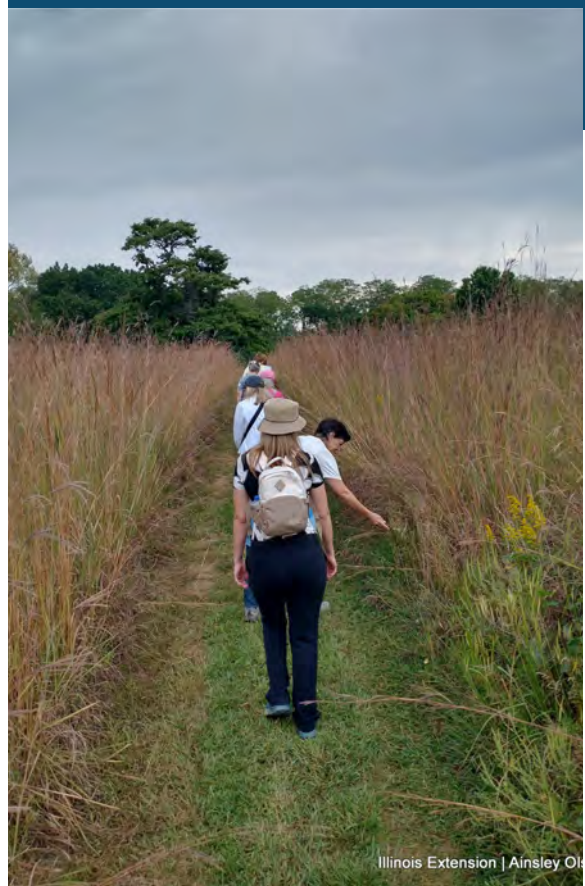
Thank you to everyone who joined us for Gardeners' BIG Day 2026.

It was a wonderful day of garden inspiration and community.

Special thanks to our volunteers for their hard work and to Cuba High School for providing such a great venue.

Check out the photo album

go.illinois.edu/GBD2026photoalbum



Illinois Extension | Ainsley O...



Nature Journaling

Discover the joy of noticing more in nature through a Nature Journaling Series. No artistic or naturalist experience is needed, just curiosity. Together, we'll explore simple techniques for observation, reflection, and connection, then put them into practice with guided prompts outdoors. Bring a journal, your favorite writing tools, and an open mind.

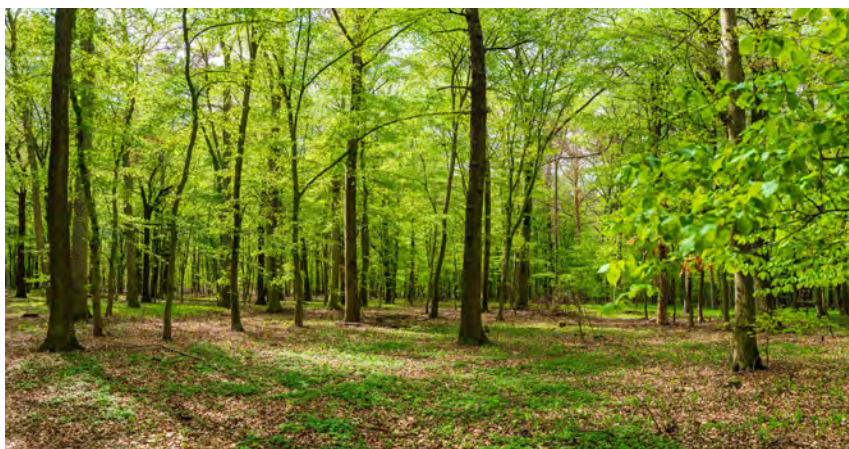
Follow Link to Register

April 11 - [Nature Journaling: Introduction to Nature Journaling](#)

June 6 - [Nature Journaling: Field Sketching & Close Observation](#)

July 29 - [Nature Journaling: Watercolor in Nature](#)

October 10 - [Nature Journaling: Nature in Words](#)



Forestry Skills 101: Using Forestry Tools at Rice Lake

Learn the basics of forestry tools and practice simple, field-ready techniques for identifying trees around Rice Lake. This two-hour, beginner-friendly workshop includes frequent stops and hands-on learning in the field. Wear sturdy shoes, bring water, and register to reserve your spot.

May 13 at 10 am

Rice Lake

19721 US 24 Canton, IL

[REGISTER](#)

Contact Local Extension Office

Phone

Fulton 309-547-3711

Mason 309-543-3308

Peoria 309-685-3140

Tazewell 309-347-6614





Wellness in Nature Yoga

Reconnect with your body and the outdoors through gentle, accessible yoga designed for those who love spending time in nature. As the flyer notes, this series invites you to “breathe deeply, stretch gently, and reconnect with your body” while moving at your own pace.

Follow Links to Register

Gentle Hatha Yoga

A slow, grounding practice focused on foundational poses, breathwork, and mindful movement to support balance and flexibility.

April 16 • 9–10 AM : [Canton Park District, Ranger Station Pavilion](#)

July 24 • 9–10 AM : [Havana Nature Center Pavilion](#)

Chair Yoga

A supportive option using a chair for seated and standing poses—ideal for older adults, gardeners, and anyone wanting a joint-friendly practice.

May 22 • 9–10 AM — [Illinois Central College, East Peoria Campus](#)

September 17 • 9–10 AM — [Jubilee College State Park, Butterfly Garden](#)



Charter Coach Trip: Chicago Botanical Garden

Thursday, June 25 | 6 AM - 6:30 PM
\$75

Join the Master Gardeners of Peoria County for a relaxing charter-coach trip to the beautiful Chicago Botanic Garden. Enjoy a carefree day of inspiration and exploration, complete with garden-themed fun on the ride, time to wander the grounds at your own pace, and a catered picnic lunch at the Picnic Glade. Open to the public. Bring your gardening friends and plant-loving family members. Seats are limited, so reserve yours soon.

[Register](#)

2026 Wellness in Nature

Programs that help you slow down, move with ease, and enjoy restorative time outdoors. Explore, notice, and reconnect with nature all season long.

Mindfulness Hikes
Outdoor Yoga
Nature Journaling





Floral Design Workshops

Join us for a hands-on series of Seasonal Floral Design Workshops led by Christine Wright, Hy-Vee Floral Manager. Each session highlights a new seasonal style, with all supplies provided and plenty of practical tips for creating beautiful arrangements at home. As the flyer notes, Christine “shares her tips and tricks for creating gorgeous floral designs for every season. Registration and prepayment are required to reserve your space.

Follow Links to Register

April 16 at 1 pm: [Wearable Art](#)

July 17 at 1 pm: [Flowers and Fruit](#)

September 25 at 1 pm: [Dried Flowers and Preserved Leaves](#)

December 4 at 1 pm: [Holiday Centerpiece Grandeur](#)



2026 Horticulture and Naturalist Core Trainings

Horticulture Core Education : June 8-12, 2026

Our summer Master Gardener offers 60 professional development hours and hands-on learning across Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties. Master Naturalist can take for an Advance Horticulture Certificate.

Naturalist Core Education: September 28–October 2, 2026

The five-day Master Naturalist Training features field experiences and instruction in Illinois ecology, natural history, and conservation. Master Gardeners can take for an Advanced Ecology Certificate.

Mark your Calendars for Extension Master Naturalist 2026 Continuing Education

April 15

June 15

August 15

September 15

October 15

November 15





Upcoming Events

Mark your calendar

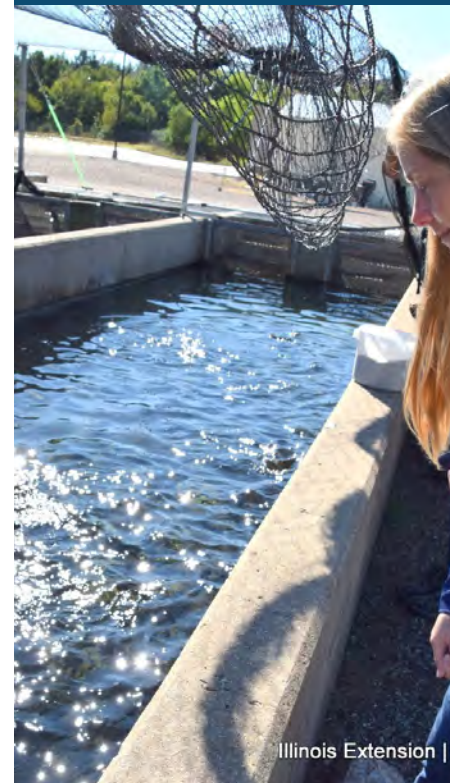
- **April 7 at 1:30 pm:** Growing a Butterfly Garden: Illinois Butterflies and Their Host Plants. Four Seasons Webinar. [Register](#)
- **April 10 at 9:30 am:** Mindfulness Hike at Springdale Cemetery, 3014 N Prospect Rd, Peoria. [Register](#)
- **April 11 at 9:30 am:** Introduction to Nature Journaling at Forest Park Nature Center., 5809 N Forest Park Dr, Peoria Heights. [Register](#)
- **April 14 at noon:** Fire ecology for managing prairies and woodlands, Master Naturalist Continuing Education Webinar. [Register](#)
- **April 15 at 10 am:** Watersheds and Stewardship Program/MN meeting at Therkildsen field Station, 11316 N Prairie Rd, Lewistown. [Register](#)
- **April 16 at 9 am:** Wellness in Nature: Outdoor Yoga - Gentle Hatha at Canton Park District-Ranger Station Pavilion 1200 Lakeland Park Dr, Canton. [Register](#)
- **April 16 at 1 pm:** Floral Design Workshop: Wearable Art, 15411 N IL 100 Hwy, Lewistown. [Register](#)
- **April 20, 9 am,** Clean Water Celebration, 201 SW Jefferson Ave, Peoria
- **April 22, 4 pm,** New Zealand's Flora And Fauna, 4810 N Sheridan, Peoria
- **April 24 from 2 to 6 pm:** Volunteer Appreciation Event at City Kids Camp 14253 E Epworth Spring Rd, Lewistown.
- **April 27 at 5:30 pm:** Crop Rotation, Illinois Extension Office, 1505 Valle Vista Blvd
- **April 29 at 9 am:** Mindfulness Hike Carl Spindler Marina, 3703 N Main St, East Peoria. [Register](#)
- **May 5 at 10 am,** Illinois Green Connections Jake Wolf Fish Hatchery Tour, 25410 Fish Hatchery Rd, Topeka. [Register by May 4](#)
- **May 9, 8 am to noon,** Plant Sale. Metro Center, 4700 N University St, Peoria
- **May 12 at 1:30 pm:** Veggie Visions: Unveiling New Flavors in 2026, Four Seasons Webinar. [Register](#)
- **May 13 at 10 am:** Forestry Skills 101 Workshop, Rice Lake, 19721 US 24, Canton [Register](#)
- **May 16 from 8 to 10 am:** Knoxville/150 garden workday.
- **May 18 at 5:30 pm:** Plant Bingo ID Game, Grace United Methodist Church, 601 N 4th St, Pekin
- **May 22 at 9 am:** Wellness in Nature: Yoga, ICC Horticulture Land Lab, College Dr, East Peoria, [Register](#)
- **May 27 at 9 am:** Mindfulness Hike at Detweiller Riverside Park, 8412 N Galena Rd, Peoria, [Register](#)
- **May 27 at 4 pm:** Make and Take Garden Craft: Decorated Pots. Illinois Extension Office, 4810 N Sheridan Rd, Peoria.
- **June 6 at 10 am:** Nature Journaling: Field Sketching & Close Observation, Tawny Oaks/Singing Woods, 715 W Singing Woods RD, Edelstein. [Register](#)
- **June 8-12 9 am to 4 pm:** Horticulture Core Education. [Register](#)
- **June 25 at 6 am:** Charter Coach Trip to Chicago Botanic Garden meet at University of Illinois Extension, Peoria Branch Office 4810 N Sheridan RD, Peoria. [Register](#)

Details

Check online for more information about upcoming events

[Illinois Extension FMPT Events](#)

[U of I Extension ILRiverHort Facebook Page](#)



Illinois Extension |

Volunteer Opportunities

- **Pekin Giving Garden:** [Julie Dantone](#)
- **Morton Giving Garden:** [Pam Scott](#), Monday & Thursday am.
- **Tazewell County Health Department Garden:** [Trudy Yazujian](#), Tuesday & Friday, 8 am - noon.
- **Canton Giving Garden:** [Gayle Blodgett](#)
- **4-H Learning Garden:** [May Bach](#), Tuesday & Thursday 9 - 11 am.
- **Holy Family Church's St. Fiacre Gardens:** [Bob Reading](#), Wednesday & Saturday, 9 am - noon.
- **Rt 150 Garden:** [Polly Wagner](#), Tuesday from 7 - 9 am.
- **Kim St John Butterfly Habitat:** [Randy Huber](#) and [Louise Bassett](#), Wednesday from 8:30 - 11:30 am.
- **ICC Demonstration Garden:** [Jennifer Bass](#), Tuesday 9 - 11:30 am.
- **Morton Public Library:** [Janine Donahue](#) and [Sarah Smith](#)
- **Jubilee Butterfly Garden:** [Patricia Melaik](#), Thursday 9 - noon.
- **St. Anne's Garden of Hope:** [Mike Brooks](#), Please sign up on our [website](#).
- **Peoria Academy's Vegetable Garden:** [Laura Hertz](#), Wednesday 9 - 11 am.
- **Peoria Zoo Pollinator Garden:** [May Bach](#), Tuesday &/or Wednesday am.
- **Friendship House:** [Kendra Belk](#)
- **Spring Creek Work Days:** [Mike McGraw](#), 2nd Wednesday of the month.
- **Elwood Work Days:** [Ed Coleman](#), 3rd Sunday & 3rd Wednesday of each month, 9 am - noon.
- **Donovan Park workday:** [David Pittman](#),
- **Rocky Glen Work Days:** [David Pittman](#)
- **Gardening Helpline:** [Anne Blindt](#) or [Debbie Lane](#)
- **Conservation@Home Evaluator:** [Ellen Denler](#) or [Karen Weigelt](#)
- **Speaker's Bureau:** [Ainsley Olsen](#) and [Fran Stroemer](#)
- **Newsletters:** [Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle](#) and [Jennifer Bass](#)

Volunteer Appreciation Month

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month, and we're grateful for the time, energy, and heart our volunteers give all year long. To celebrate, we invite you to join us on April 24 at City Kids Camp from 2-6 PM for a relaxed, open-house-style appreciation event. Stop by when you can for hot dogs and s'mores by the campfire, trivia, and activities. Please register so we can plan for food and supplies.

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
University of Illinois | U.S. Department of Agriculture | Local Extension Councils Cooperating University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment. If you need a reasonable accommodation to attend, call 309-347-6614. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the US Department of Agriculture by the Director, Cooperative Extension Service, and University of Illinois.

Work Days

Check with project lead about specific dates, work days can change due to conflicts and weather issues.



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