

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Herb garden becomes teaching tool and culinary resource

In 2025, a new herb garden, planted through a partnership between University of Illinois Extension and the Fulton County Farm Bureau, became the foundation for interactive learning experiences. More than 95 participants explored how herbs can enhance everyday life, from cooking to creative beverages. A full-season of using herbs for culinary use followed throughout the year. Herb-focused programming is planned for 2026.

The year began with participants starting herb seeds indoors, many of which later found their way into the newly established herb garden at the Fulton County Farm Bureau and local Extension office. Extension Master Volunteers nurtured the space through workdays, turning the garden into both a teaching tool and a culinary resource.

As Master Gardener Ellen Denler shared after one session, *“Learning to make herb salts was fun. Great program.”* Her enthusiasm reflected the spirit that carried the series through each month.

As the garden grew, so did the programming. Throughout late summer and fall, community members joined workshops that highlighted ways to incorporate herbs into everyday life. Participants blended seasoning salts, practiced drying techniques, crafted herbal syrups and sodas, and learned how herbs can elevate simple butters and oils. The year closed with a festive herbal tea (tisane) session, complete with a tea party setting and a selection of herbs and dried fruits for personalized blends.

One participant, Gloria Sun, reflected, *“The tea party was very nice. The setting was lovely! I have been making and enjoying herbal teas all my life, but I was still impressed with the Extension staff’s work for displaying more varieties, more than I knew or tried.”*

Extension staff along with Master Gardener Karen Corrigan, brought the herbal tea program to ACES Family Academy in July, where 25 youth and adults blended their own teas and planted miniature take-home tea gardens. Karen also taught an herbal tea session at Gardeners’ BIG Day.

Building on community interest, the herb series continues in 2026 with expanded garden plans and new programming across the unit. The season opened with Garden Grown Glow: Intro to Herbal Bath & Body Products, offered by Janine Donahue, with other programs to follow throughout the year.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

*An Herbal Tea Party was a great way to celebrate the successful, year-long program series about herbs. The 2025 herbal series focused on culinary use.*

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