

## Extension Connections Newsletter

**Rock Island County**  
321 W 2nd Ave, Milan, IL 61264  
309-756-9978

**Henry-Stark County**  
358 Front St., Galva, IL 61434  
309-932-3447

**Mercer County**  
910 13th St, Viola IL 61486  
309-513-3100

Website: [extension.illinois.edu/hmrs](http://extension.illinois.edu/hmrs) | Email: [uie-hmrs@illinois.edu](mailto:uie-hmrs@illinois.edu)

**May Office Closings:** All offices will be closed May 20 for staff training and May 25 for Memorial Day.

### Mediterranean Diet Month: Why It Matters + How to Get Started

Kristin Bogdonas, Illinois Extension food and nutrition educator

May is Mediterranean Diet Month, a time to highlight a flexible, flavorful way of eating that supports long-term health. This article explores why the Mediterranean diet stands out and offers simple meal makeover tips to help bring its benefits into everyday routines.

The Mediterranean diet offers a practical, flexible approach to eating that supports long-term health without strict rules or restrictions. Instead of eliminating food groups, it emphasizes balance, variety, and enjoyment. This eating pattern has been widely studied and is linked to improved heart health, better blood sugar control, reduced inflammation, and overall reduced risk of chronic disease. It can also be adapted to fit different cultures, preferences, and budgets, making it a realistic option for many.

Giving meals and snacks a Mediterranean makeover is a simple way to start. Begin by shifting the plate to include more plant-based foods like vegetables, fruits, beans, and whole grains. Swap refined grains for whole grain options such as brown rice, quinoa, or whole wheat bread to boost fiber and support lasting energy.

Next, rethink fats and protein choices. Use olive oil instead of butter or margarine for cooking and dressings and include fish like salmon or tuna a couple of times per week for heart-healthy fats. Replace some red or processed meats with beans, lentils, or other plant-based proteins.



Snacks can follow the same approach. Choose options like yogurt with fruit, a handful of nuts, or whole grain crackers with hummus to provide a balance of protein, fiber, and healthy fats that help keep you satisfied between meals.

Flavor is another key part of the Mediterranean style. Instead of relying on salt, use herbs, spices, garlic, and lemon to enhance taste. Meals are meant to be enjoyed and often shared with others, encouraging a more mindful and connected eating experience.

A Mediterranean meal makeover does not require a complete diet overhaul. Small, consistent changes like cooking with olive oil, adding an extra serving of vegetables, or choosing whole grains can add up over time. This month, focus on simple, realistic swaps that fit into daily routines and build from there.

**Horticulture Helpline | Wednesdays, 9 am - noon**  
**(309) 756-9978 | Illinois Extension, Milan, IL**

**Have a Plant Question? Ask the Master Gardeners!**

Our Horticulture Helpline is open every Wednesday from 9 AM to Noon. Call us at (309) 756-9978 or stop by the Extension office at 321 W 2nd Ave in Milan to speak with a Master Gardener in person.

Any other time, you can leave a message at **217-300-2040**, and they will return your call, or submit a question through an online form at [go.illinois.edu/AsktheMasterGardener](http://go.illinois.edu/AsktheMasterGardener)

***We're here to help with your gardening questions!***



## **Branching Out: A Botanical Workshop Series**

Join University of Illinois Extension Horticulture for **Branching Out**, a three-part workshop series led by horticulture educator Emily Swihart. Each session highlights a seasonal topic and includes an educational lesson followed by a hands-on, make-and-take activity.

**Location:** University of Illinois Extension, 321 2nd Ave W, Milan

**Time:** 1:00–3:00 p.m.

**Cost:** \$15 per session, or \$40 for all three

Register at [go.illinois.edu/BranchingOut](http://go.illinois.edu/BranchingOut) or call Illinois Extension at (309) 756-9978.



### **May 14 — Native Plant Alternatives for the Home Landscape**


Explore native plant species that can replace commonly used non-native plants while enhancing beauty and supporting biodiversity. Learn which species thrive in local conditions and how to incorporate them into sustainable landscape designs. The make-and-take activity features a pressed-flower photo frame to showcase a favorite memory.

### **June 10 — Landscape Design 101**

Build confidence in designing an outdoor space that is both functional and visually appealing. This session covers foundational design principles and common landscape styles to help participants begin personalizing their home landscapes. Participants will make a personalized concrete stepping stone for their garden.

### **July 16 — Drought-Tolerant Plants**

Discover how to create a water-efficient landscape without sacrificing color or interest. Learn what makes plants drought-tolerant, recommended species to consider, and practical strategies for reducing water use while maintaining a healthy yard. For the hands-on portion, create and decorate a pollinator-friendly “bee bath” using terracotta pots and marbles.



**2026  
Illinois Invasive  
Species Symposium**

**2026 Illinois Invasive Species Symposium  
May 28, 9:30-3:30 PM, Champaign**

Join University of Illinois Extension for the 11th Annual Illinois Invasive Species Symposium. Hear the latest research, explore management strategies, celebrate success stories, and network with colleagues.

Presentations cover emerging invasive threats, drone technology for plant management, silver carp movement, stiltgrass and fire, invasive ticks affecting cattle, and more. A closing panel will discuss the current state of invasive species in Illinois.

See agenda, presenters, and register (by May 20) at: [go.illinois.edu/InvasiveSymposium](http://go.illinois.edu/InvasiveSymposium). Lunch is included in the \$25 registration fee.



**FOUR SEASONS  
GARDENING**

**Veggie Visions: Unveiling New Flavors  
May 12, 1:30 PM**

Keep garden planning fresh by adding new vegetable varieties. Bruce Black, Illinois Extension horticulture educator, will share the new produce coming for the summer growing season. Learn about their unique characteristics, growing tips, and uses. Be among the first to discover the latest in vegetable gardening trends and get ready to transform kitchens with a harvest of vibrant and enticing produce.

**Register at [go.illinois.edu/FourSeasons](http://go.illinois.edu/FourSeasons)** or call the office at (309) 756-9978.

**Grow Food. Share the Harvest.  
Join GIFT Gardens!**



GIFT Gardens (Growing Illowa Food Together) invites gardeners of all levels to plant, harvest, and share fresh produce with local food pantries. Whether it's a single pot or a full garden bed, every contribution helps fight hunger in the Quad Cities.

This is a partnership of Tapestry Farms, Illinois Extension, Iowa State Extension, and River Bend Food Bank. Get more details at [www.tapestryfarms.org/gift-gardens](http://www.tapestryfarms.org/gift-gardens)



**Introduction to the  
MIND Diet: Eating  
for Brain Health**

**Introduction to the MIND Diet: Eating for Brain Health** Two locations and dates:  
**May 6 • 6 PM, Robert R. Jones Public Library, Coal Valley** - Register: 309-799-3047  
**May 13 • 2 PM, Kewanee Public Library**  
Register: 309-852-4505

Join Illinois Extension Food and Nutrition Educator Kristin Bogdonas for an introduction to the MIND diet, a research-supported approach that blends key elements of the Mediterranean and DASH diets to support cognitive function and reduce Alzheimer's risk.

Kristin will explain the science behind the MIND diet, highlight foods most strongly linked to brain health, and demonstrate how to build balanced meals using everyday ingredients. Participants will explore simple planning tools, practical examples, and recipes that make it easier to incorporate brain-supportive foods into daily routines and promote healthier aging.

## Free Pressure Canner Testing Available Through Illinois Extension

**Planning to can your summer harvest?** Make sure your dial-gauge pressure canner is accurate and safe. Illinois Extension offers **free pressure canner testing** to help home canners prepare for the season.

Locally, you can bring your canner to **Kristin Bogdonas, Food and Nutrition Educator**, at our **Milan office**. Testing takes about 15 minutes and ensures your dial gauge reads correctly. Inaccurate gauges can result in under-processed foods, which can pose serious health risks like botulism.



NOTE: You can also drop off your canner at our **Mercer County office in Viola** or the **Henry/Stark office in Galva**, but please allow extra time as testing is done in the Milan office and delivery by staff between offices is required.

To learn more about safe home food preservation, visit Extension's Food Preservation website [extension.illinois.edu/food-preservation](http://extension.illinois.edu/food-preservation) or check out recordings at [go.illinois.edu/ILExtensionCanningVideos](http://go.illinois.edu/ILExtensionCanningVideos)



### 4-H Hooks Us Together Statewide Fishing Tournament Competition runs May 1 - July 31

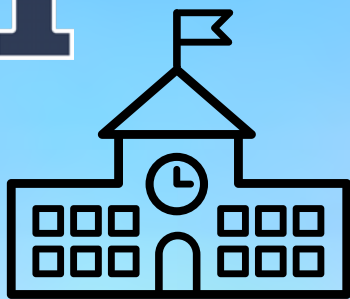
Calling all youth fishing enthusiasts. The popular 4-H statewide fishing spring fishing tournament is returning this summer. This year's tourney will again be a virtual event held between the dates of May 1 – July 31.

Catch-measure-picture-upload...repeat!

Get competition details at [go.illinois.edu/4-HFishing2026](http://go.illinois.edu/4-HFishing2026)

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## Illinois Extension



### RURAL ROOTS FAMILY FUN DAY

Thurs May 28, 10 am - 11:30 am

Wyoming Public Library

109 N. 7th St. Wyoming, IL



**Bring the family to the Wyoming Public Library May 28 and join Illinois Extension for Rural Roots - a fun morning of learning as you celebrate our agricultural heritage!**

- **Hands-On Stations:** Explore agriculture, gardening, nutrition, and 4-H activities.
- **Games & Prizes:** Kids - after you visit the stations, fill out a passport to win a prize.
- **Petting Zoo:** All ages will enjoy seeing the live farm animals at the free petting zoo!
- **Community Partners:** Stop by to visit booths by Birth to Five and Society of Growth.
- **Visit the Library!** Step inside for more fun!
- **Free Resources:** Pick up IL Extension information, grocery tote, and recipe cards, (while supplies last).