

Extension Connections Newsletter

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Our offices will be closed for Juneteenth on Friday, June 19, 2026.

Dairy Done Differently: The Benefits of Fermented Foods

Kristin Bogdonas, Illinois Extension Food and Nutrition Educator

Did you know yogurt is one of the most widely consumed fermented foods in the world? Fermented dairy products like yogurt, kefir, and certain cheeses have been enjoyed for centuries and continue to gain attention for their potential health benefits.



Fermented dairy is made when beneficial bacteria break down the natural sugars in milk through a process called fermentation. This process can make dairy foods easier for some people to digest, particularly those who are sensitive to lactose. Fermented dairy products also contain probiotics, or beneficial bacteria, that may help support gut health and digestion.

In addition to probiotics, fermented dairy foods provide important nutrients including protein, calcium, potassium, and B vitamins. Research suggests fermented dairy may support bone health, immune function, and heart health when included as part of an overall balanced eating pattern. Some studies have also linked fermented dairy intake with lower inflammation and improved gut microbiome diversity.

June is National Dairy Month, making it a great time to recognize the nutritional value and versatility dairy foods can bring to meals and snacks. From milk and cheese to yogurt and kefir, dairy products provide key nutrients that support health across the lifespan.

In Mediterranean-style eating patterns, fermented dairy foods like yogurt are often enjoyed alongside fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and healthy fats. When choosing fermented dairy products, look for options that contain “live and active cultures” and try to limit added sugars when possible.

This month, consider incorporating fermented dairy into meals or snacks by adding yogurt to breakfast, blending kefir into smoothies, or using plain yogurt in homemade dips and dressings.

Statewide Listening Sessions on SNAP

Taylor Wheatley, Illinois Extension health and community wellness educator



University of Illinois Extension is partnering with organizations across Illinois to host a series of listening sessions focused on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These conversations aim to understand how recent SNAP changes are affecting individuals and communities statewide. Supported by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois Commission to End Hunger, the sessions bring together community members and organizations to:

- Share local experiences with recent SNAP changes
- Hear from professionals who work with SNAP, including nonprofits, grocers, farmers, food banks, and community organizations
- Identify ideas and solutions to address challenges and strengthen support for Illinois families

Join the Conversation!

Extension is leading the planning and facilitation of these sessions. Insights gathered will be compiled into a report shared with state partners to help guide future decisions and responses.

If you work with people who may be eligible for SNAP—or if you participate in SNAP yourself—your voice matters. Join one of our virtual listening sessions to share your experiences and ideas.

Community Members with Lived Experience

Register at go.illinois.edu/CommunitySNAPListeningSession

Choose your preferred session date/time:

- Tuesday, June 9 | 6:00 PM
- Tuesday, June 16 | 12:00 PM
- Wednesday, June 24 | 10:00 AM

Community Partners Working with SNAP

Register at go.illinois.edu/PartnerSNAPListeningSession

Choose your preferred session date/time:

- Tuesday, June 9 | 10:00 AM
- Thursday, June 18 | 3:30 PM
- Wednesday, June 24 | 6:30 PM

Canning with Confidence Workshop

Tuesday, June 23rd, 5:30 pm

East Moline Public Library



Learn the essentials of home canning and gain the confidence to preserve your favorite foods safely! In this program, Kristin Bogdonas, Illinois Extension food and nutrition educator, will teach you proper techniques for using a water bath canner, including electric models, as well as steam canners and pressure canners. You will receive step-by-step instructions, helpful resources, and video demonstrations of these canners in action.

Register at: go.illinois.edu/CanningEastMoline

Moth Gardening: Amazing Pollinators of the Night WEBINAR

Tuesday, June 9th, 1:30 pm - 2:30 pm



Learn more about the unsung pollinators visiting flowers and gardens at night.

Moths, the stunning, majestic insects of the evening, are important pollinators. Join in for a lively discussion of moth identification, life cycle, and strategies to use to attract moths to a landscape. Four Seasons Gardening series focuses on home gardening, environmental stewardship, and backyard food production.

Register at: go.illinois.edu/FourSeasons

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 9:30 am to Noon**. You can 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.

You can also get answers anytime by filling out our online form at go.illinois.edu/askthemastergardener.

We're here to help with your gardening questions!



Flowers in the vegetable garden

Adapted from a Good Growing blog article on the topic by Emily Swihart, Illinois Extension horticulture educator

Each spring, many of us get very excited about the abundant harvest we are going to enjoy from our vegetable gardens. We plan, then plant. We weed and water. And if all goes well, we harvest an abundance of nutritious and delicious produce.

In a vegetable garden, planning to support beneficial insect populations can result in higher crop yields and create a more resilient garden ecosystem. Incorporating pollinator habitat into a landscape means creating spaces for shelter, reproduction, protection from predation, water, and a food source...think flowers!



Why Pollination Matters in a Vegetable Garden

Many popular garden crops require insect pollination to produce fruit. Food crops that produce perfect flowers, or those that contain both male and female reproductive structures benefit from or require the presence of pollinators in the garden. While visiting flowers, some native bees contribute to buzz pollination, a specialized technique in which bees vibrate their bodies, which shakes tightly held pollen free, promoting pollination. Popular garden species that benefit from buzz pollination include tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, and tomatillos.

Diversity is Key

When choosing flowers for the purpose of attracting pollinators, plant a variety of species. Consider the shape of the flower blooms, floral color, and bloom season to ensure beneficial insects have essential nectar and pollen resources throughout the growing season. Providing a diversity of bloom shapes helps ensure a variety of pollinators can utilize the flower resources.

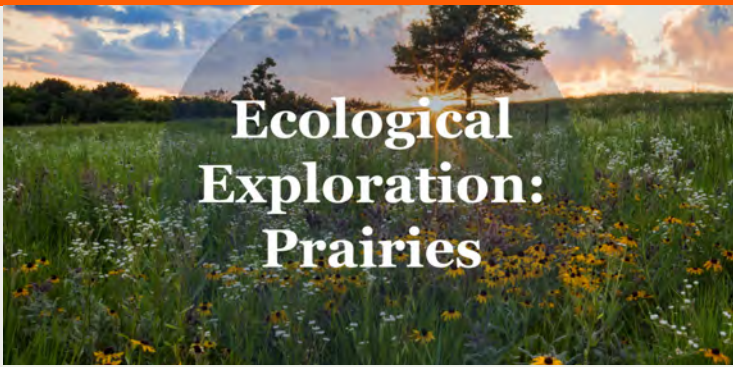
More Than Food

To fully support pollinators in the garden, provide resources that meet other life-sustaining needs, too. Include non-flowering plants that serve as larval food and/or protection from predators, shallow dish for water and integrate pest management practices that reduce or eliminate pesticides.

Designing a vegetable garden that supports pollinators has the potential to increase garden productivity and improve the ecology of the home landscape. Insects play an essential role in pollinating many popular garden crops. By incorporating a diverse range of flowering plants into a landscape and management practices that promote population growth of beneficial insects, yields can increase, and a more resilient garden is created.

Want to learn more ?

Read Emily's Good Growing Flowers in the vegetable garden @: go.illinois.edu/flowersinvegetablegarden



Ecological Exploration: Prairies

Ecological Exploration: Prairies Wednesday, June 17, 10 a.m.

Fairmont Cemetery Prairie, Davenport, IA

Don't miss this unique opportunity to learn from experts while observing prairie plants, wildlife, and management practices across the growing season. Join fellow prairie enthusiasts for the first event in this four-month series exploring local native prairies. Each tour includes a guided walk followed by free time to explore independently.

A \$20 registration fee provides access to all four tours in the series.

Register at: go.illinois.edu/EcoExplore

BiCAN BioBlitz

June 26th 2pm - June 27th 2pm

Wapsi River Environmental Education Center



Join BiCAN for our 2026 BioBlitz at the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center and Sherman Park! From June 26 at 2:00 PM through June 27 at 2:00 PM, we'll be teaming up with experts and community members to document as many plant and animal species as possible during this exciting 24-hour biodiversity event.

Bring your curiosity, your sense of adventure, and help us discover the incredible biodiversity of the Wapsipinicon River area.

To learn more visit: go.illinois.edu/BioBlitz26

MIND Diet: Eating for Brain Health Sat., June 13 10:30 - 11:30 am Edwards River Public Library, Aledo, IL

Discover how the MIND diet—a blend of the Mediterranean and DASH diets—supports cognitive health and reduces the risk of Alzheimer's disease. In this program, Kristin Bogdonas, Illinois Extension food and nutrition educator, will teach you which foods support brain health, how to structure balanced meals, and strategies for incorporating brain-healthy foods into everyday life. Whether you're looking to support long-term brain health or make immediate, healthier choices, this class provides practical guidance, recipes, and meal-planning tips tailored to the MIND diet principles.

To register: Call the Edwards River Public Library (309)582-2032



To learn more visit:
go.illinois.edu/MINDDietAledo

Branching Out: Landscape Design 101 A Botanical Workshop Series

Wednesday June 10 | 1 - 3 PM

Illinois Extension, 321 W 2nd Ave, Milan IL

Cost: \$15 per session or \$40 for the series



Join Illinois Extension horticulture educator Emily Swihart for a Landscape Design 101 Workshop. Learn the basics of creating a beautiful and functional outdoor space and be introduced to foundational design principles. You'll explore common design styles, and leave with the confidence to begin personalizing your own landscape. Following the educational portion, you will then create your own concrete stepping stone to add to your garden.

Register at: go.illinois.edu/BranchingOut and learn about the others in the series.



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



4-H at the Henry County Fair Cambridge, IL | June 14-20

Check out the 4-H Shows during the 2026 Henry County Fair in Cambridge, IL.

The 4-H Food Stand will also be open. It's a great way to support the program while you enjoy a fresh squeezed lemon shakeup and other delicious items!

FOOD STAND HOURS:

Tues June 16 - Sat June 21,
7 am - 2 pm

2026 Henry County 4-H Show Schedule

Saturday, June 13

*General Projects Judging, 9-11 a.m.
Dog Obedience & Showmanship 2 p.m.

Wednesday, June 17

Bucket Calf Show, Noon
Master Showmanship, 6:30 p.m.

Thursday, June 18

Swine Show, 8 a.m.
Beef Show (steers and heifers) 9 a.m.
Sheep Show (after swine show)
Goat Show (after sheep show)
Junior Livestock Auction 6:00/6:30 p.m.

Friday, June 19

Horse Show, 9 a.m.

Saturday, June 20

Rabbit Show, 8:30 a.m.
Poultry Show, 9 a.m.

**General Projects will be on view in the Art Hall building starting Tues June 17 at noon to Sat June 21 til close.*

Visit the Henry County Fair website for more
www.henrycountyfairillinois.com

Celebrate Agriculture with the Whole Family!



Farm in the Park

Friday, June 12 • 3:30 – 6:00 PM

Central Park, Aledo, IL



Join us for a fun-filled afternoon of hands-on learning and games!

- **Petting Zoo** — Meet friendly farm animals and snap some cute photos.
- **Passport to Fun & Prizes** — Visit hands-on ag-education stations, learn something new, then stop by the Farm Bureau table to claim a prize.
- **Horticulture Help** — Get gardening tips and resources from Illinois Extension Master Gardeners.
- **Farm Equipment Showcase** — Check out real farm machinery brought by Mercer County Farm Bureau members.
- **Bounce House** — Kids will enjoy the YMCA-provided bounce house.
- **Ice Cream for 4-H** — Cool off with ice cream, and support the Mercer County 4-H Teen Federation through a free-will donation.

This event is brought to you by:



Illinois Extension
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For more information contact
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extension.illinois.edu/hmrs