

ILLINOIS

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# GREEN CONNECTIONS

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



**Illinois Extension**  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Embracing summer

August and September bring some of the most vibrant and productive days of the year in Central Illinois. Gardens are overflowing with fresh produce, days remain hot, and the landscape slowly begins its transition from midsummer greens to the golds of late season blooms. Whether you're harvesting tomatoes, tending cool season crops, or simply enjoying an evening walk, this is a time to appreciate the abundance and beauty of the season.

These months also offer opportunities to gather with fellow volunteers through programs, workdays, hikes, and community events. As some garden tasks begin to slow, it can be a wonderful time to explore new conservation projects at home. Small actions, such as creating habitat with native plants, leaving natural areas a little wilder, or providing food, water, and shelter for wildlife, can make a meaningful difference.



If you're looking for ideas, be sure to check out this article: [go.illinois.edu/HelpWildlife](https://go.illinois.edu/HelpWildlife)

September also marks an important milestone in conservation history as we celebrate the anniversary of the Wilderness Act, signed into law on September 3, 1964. The act established the National Wilderness Preservation System and protected millions of acres of wild places for future generations. More than sixty years later, its legacy continues to inspire stewardship, curiosity, and a shared appreciation for the natural world, both in our nation's wilderness areas and here at home in Illinois.

*Brittany Chambers*  
Natural Resources Program Coordinator



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"The more you  
know about the  
natural world, the  
more you will  
appreciate and  
enjoy it."  
— Theodore  
Roosevelt



Join Laura Blackaby for "Nature in Words" on Saturday, October 10, from 10am – Noon at Spring Creek Preserve in East Peoria.

Register Here:  
[go.illinois.edu/journal4](https://go.illinois.edu/journal4)



## Start a simple nature journal this season

Nature journaling doesn't have to mean filling pages with beautiful sketches or long written entries. Sometimes, the simplest observations are the most meaningful. A notebook, calendar, phone app, or even a post with a picture on your social media can all become records of the changing seasons.

Try writing down what you notice and when you notice it. Maybe it's your tomato plants reaching their peak harvest, cool-season vegetables going into the garden, or seeds collected from a favorite flower. Perhaps it's monarchs gathering for migration, goldenrods coming into bloom, or the evening chorus of crickets and katydids. Even simple notes about birds visiting your yard, berries ripening, or seed heads forming can become meaningful. Over time, these small observations create a personal timeline of nature in your own backyard and can help you recognize patterns from year to year.

Make your journal fun and low effort! Use stickers, colored pencils, pressed leaves, or simple symbols to mark different observations. A butterfly sticker could represent monarch sightings, a flower sticker could mark first blooms, and a bird sticker could celebrate fledglings or migrating flocks. The goal isn't perfection, it's simply taking a moment to notice and appreciate the natural world around you.

### Things to Watch for in August and September

- Goldenrods blooming across prairies and roadsides
- Asters beginning to flower
- Elderberries ripening along woodland edges
- Monarchs gathering and migrating south
- Ruby-throated hummingbirds fueling up for migration
- Flocks of swallows gathering before heading south
- Cicadas, katydids, and crickets providing the soundtrack of late summer
- Tomatoes, peppers, and sweet corn reaching peak harvest
- Cool-season vegetables being planted for a fall garden
- Saving seeds from native plants and favorite garden varieties
- Prairie grasses producing seed heads
- Acorns and hickory nuts beginning to fall

## Garden Journal: A helpful gardening tool

ILRiverHort Blog by Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle

[go.illinois.edu/GardenJournal](https://go.illinois.edu/GardenJournal)



# Nipper Wildlife Sanctuary: A local nature classroom

By Roberta Clifton, Master Naturalist Volunteer

[go.illinois.edu/NipperWildlifeSanctuary](http://go.illinois.edu/NipperWildlifeSanctuary)



Off the beaten path, but only 30 minutes from our capital city of Springfield, in Loami, Illinois, is a wonderful place I found in 2015. Nipper Wildlife Sanctuary is a nature stop that offers everything from plants, prairies, wetlands, forest, wildlife, birds and our ever-robust world of insects. In my eagerness to do Master Naturalist training, I was given permission to go over to our neighboring unit covering Logan, Menard and Sangamon counties. That is how I found Nipper. A great deal of our training happened all in one spot. Nipper's Nature Center was our comfortable classroom with nature at our fingertips. The trails are easy to walk, and go for miles. Or just step out the door to view our nature topic of the day. The center provides a spacious porch where classes gather for watercolor classes, banding birds, tagging butterflies, or viewing the water snakes basking on the floating moss.

Volunteers and the leadership of Vern LaGesse have played a huge part of restoring this farmland of soybeans and corn back to versions of prairie that match the terrain. It takes valued and appreciated crews of volunteers to do controlled burns, control of invasive species and plantings. Some of the area has been restored back to wetland wood lands with the native willows, oaks, and nut trees that once thrived in this region. There are examples of tall grass prairie, short grass prairie as well.

Nipper Wildlife Sanctuary was established in 1995 fulfilling the lifetime dream of Frank and Gladys Nipper to protect the land for future generations. Surrounding the 120-acre sanctuary are very good farming neighbors that have used the pollinator farm programs to create more wildlife refuge. All of this combined effort has totaled an area of prairie of over 500 acres.

As Master Naturalist, it was a blessing to find Nipper and learn the diversity and volunteer opportunities of seven counties from Springfield to Peoria. Nipper Wildlife Sanctuary will always be one of my favorites and truly is "A Sanctuary".



## Local OPAL

Exploring Illinois is one of the best ways to build a deeper appreciation for our state's natural and cultural heritage. If you're looking for a new trail, park, or natural area a little closer to home, Local OPAL website can help you discover local gems and learn more before you go.

[localopal.org](http://localopal.org)



Read more about the Local OPAL website in this blog article, written by Extension Master Naturalist and Local OPAL creator Julie Robinson.

[go.illinois.edu/LocalOPALarticle](http://go.illinois.edu/LocalOPALarticle)







## Conference Corner

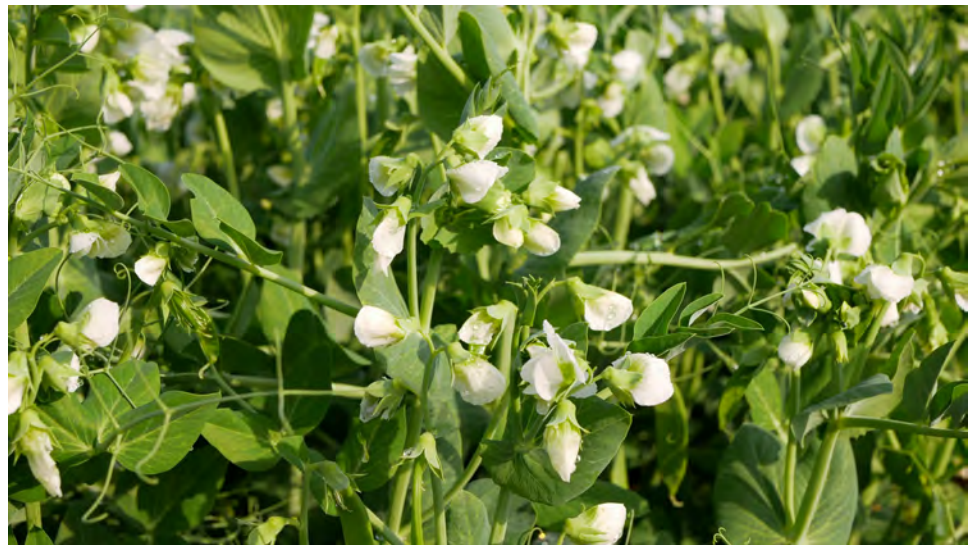
### Master Gardener Annual Conference

September 10 & 11 | Rockford, IL  
Join gardeners, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, Extension staff, and gardening enthusiasts for two days of tours, educational sessions, and networking. Registration closes September 4.

Learn more and register here:  
[go.illinois.edu/MGconference26](http://go.illinois.edu/MGconference26)



- **August 14, 6pm** - Fantastic Fungi - Movie & Book Night 15411 IL-100, Lewistown  
Register at: [go.illinois.edu/FungiMovie26](http://go.illinois.edu/FungiMovie26)
- **September 24, 10:30am** - Mushrooms with Kelli Parke - Tawny Oaks Singing Woods Visitor Center. \$10/person. Register at: [go.illinois.edu/FungiMushroom26](http://go.illinois.edu/FungiMushroom26)
- **October 20, 5:30pm** - Edible Mushroom Workshop - Extension office, Pekin, \$60/person. Register at: [go.illinois.edu/DIYMushroom26](http://go.illinois.edu/DIYMushroom26)



### Green Connections Meeting Cover Crops for the Home Garden

Learn from Ethan Wieland of Saddle Butte Ag about Biotill and how cover crops improve soil health, with practical takeaways you can use in your own garden.

September 15 | 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.  
Parlin-Ingersoll Public Library  
205 W. Chestnut St., Canton, IL

Register: [go.illinois.edu/SeptGC26](http://go.illinois.edu/SeptGC26)



**GREEN CONNECTIONS**



# Upcoming Events

## August

- **August 14, 6pm** - Fantastic Fungi - Movie & Book Night 15411 IL-100, Lewistown  
Register at: [go.illinois.edu/FungiMovie26](http://go.illinois.edu/FungiMovie26)
- **August 15, 12pm** - Master Naturalist Meeting - Kickapoo Creek
- **August 16** - Hummingbird Pollinator Festival event and activity booth - Trefzgers in Peoria Heights
- **August 22 10am-2 pm:**, Conservation@Home Yard Tour  
Register at [go.illinois.edu/CHTour26](http://go.illinois.edu/CHTour26)
- **August 24, 5:30pm** - Leaf Castings - Ella Maxwell 1505 Valle Vista Blvd, Pekin
- **August 26, 9am** - Mindfulness Hike - Spring Creek Preserve Lot off of Spring Creek Road Register: [go.illinois.edu/MindfulnessSpringCreek26](http://go.illinois.edu/MindfulnessSpringCreek26)
- **August 26, 5pm** - Summer Garden Tour- Jubilee Butterfly Garden, Jubilee State Park, Near Historic Site

## September

- **September 10 & 11** Master Gardener Conference (open to everyone) - Embassy Suites Rockford Riverfront, 416 S Main St, Rockford. Register by Sept 4 at [go.illinois.edu/MGconference26](http://go.illinois.edu/MGconference26)
- **September 12** Landscape and Garden Days
- **September 12 & 13** Marigold Festival - Mineral Springs Park, Pekin
- **September 15 5:30pm-7:30pm** - Green Connections Meeting - Parlin-Ingersoll Public Library, Canton [go.illinois.edu/SeptGC26](http://go.illinois.edu/SeptGC26)
- **September 16, 9am** - Wellness Hike - Tawny Oaks Singing Woods Visitor Center [go.illinois.edu/MindfulnessTawnyOaks26](http://go.illinois.edu/MindfulnessTawnyOaks26)
- **September 17, 9am** - Chair Yoga - Jubilee College State Park, Butterfly Garden. Register: [go.illinois.edu/MGPeoriaYoga26](http://go.illinois.edu/MGPeoriaYoga26)
- **September 18 & 19** - Pumpkin Fest - Morton
- **September 24, 10:30am** - Mushrooms with Kelli Parke - Tawny Oaks Singing Woods Visitor Center. \$10/person. Register at: [go.illinois.edu/FungiMushroom26](http://go.illinois.edu/FungiMushroom26)
- **September 25 - 1pm** - Fall Floral Design- Dried Flowers and Preserved Leaves Register at: [go.illinois.edu/FallFloral26](http://go.illinois.edu/FallFloral26)
- **September 28 - October 2** - Master Naturalist Core Training. Register at: [go.illinois.edu/mn26](http://go.illinois.edu/mn26)

## October

- **October 10, 10am** - Nature Journaling, Spring Creek Preserve, East Peoria - [go.illinois.edu/journal4](http://go.illinois.edu/journal4)
- **October 14, 9am** - Wellness Hike, Big Creek Park, Canton - [go.illinois.edu/MindfulnessBigCreek26](http://go.illinois.edu/MindfulnessBigCreek26)
- **October 15 & 16** - Master Naturalist Conference. Save the date
- October 20,
- **October 29, 5:30pm** - Seed Swap - Peoria Public Library  
Register at: [go.illinois.edu/NativeSwap26](http://go.illinois.edu/NativeSwap26)

## Find Us

### Events Page

[extension.illinois.edu/fmpt/events](http://extension.illinois.edu/fmpt/events)

### Blog Page

[extension.illinois.edu/blogs/ilRiverHort](http://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/ilRiverHort)

### Social Media

[facebook.com/ILRiverHort](https://facebook.com/ILRiverHort)

[instagram.com/ilRiverHort](https://instagram.com/ilRiverHort)

[pinterest.com/ilRiverHort](https://pinterest.com/ilRiverHort)

## Contact Local Extension Office

**Fulton** 309-547-3711

**Mason** 309-543-3308

**Peoria** 309-685-3140

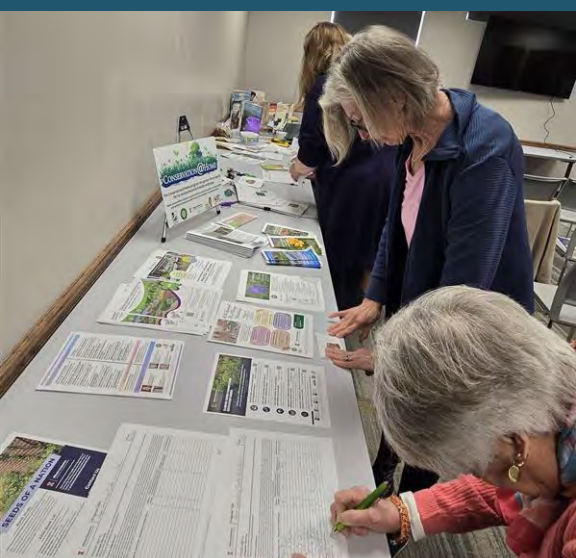
**Tazewell** 309-347-6614





## Book List

Join us as we explore the legacy of American Presidents and First Ladies through gardens, conservation, and environmental leadership. Choose one or more titles from the Seeds of a Nation book list and reflect on how historical landscapes inspire today's ecological choices.



- **Founding Gardeners** by Andrea Wulf
- **All the Presidents' Gardens** by Marta McDowell
- **The Naturalist** by Darrin Lunde
- **American Grown** by Michelle Obama
- **Silent Spring Revolution** by Douglas Brinkley
- **Lincoln and the Natural Environment** by James Tackach

Start sharing your insights or find further reading by joining our University of Illinois Extension Fulton, Mason, Peoria, Tazewell Book Study [go.illinois.edu/BookStudy/FacebookGroup](http://go.illinois.edu/BookStudy/FacebookGroup)

## Add cover crops for healthier gardens

Cover crops aren't a new gardening trend. For centuries, Indigenous peoples used thoughtful planting practices to protect and enrich the soil, while early American farmers like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson embraced cover crops and crop rotation to maintain healthy, productive farmland. Today, these same time tested techniques can help home gardeners suppress weeds, reduce erosion, build organic matter, improve soil structure, and naturally return nutrients to the soil. Whether you're preparing your garden for winter or looking to improve next year's harvest, cover crops are a simple way to invest in healthier soil.

Want to learn how to incorporate cover crops into your own garden? Read Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle's blog, "**Cover Crops to the Rescue**," then join us for our next Green Connections meeting!

Learn more:  
[go.illinois.edu/CoverCropsBlog](http://go.illinois.edu/CoverCropsBlog)



## From the Garden: A Fresh Summer Gazpacho

By Jen Bass, Master Gardener and Master Naturalist Volunteer

Looking for a refreshing way to enjoy your summer harvest? Jennifer Bass has shared her favorite gazpacho recipe, packed with fresh garden vegetables and perfect after a day spent outdoors.

### Ingredients

2 lbs. fresh tomatoes, diced  
 1 small onion, chopped  
 1 cup tomato juice  
 2 cucumbers, chopped (peeled if preferred)  
 1 bell pepper, chopped  
 Celery, chopped to taste

### Dressing

2 Tbsp. red wine vinegar  
 1/3 cup olive oil  
 1 clove garlic, minced  
 Chopped fresh basil

Combine the vegetables in a large bowl. Whisk together the dressing ingredients, pour over the vegetables, and toss well. Chill before serving. Blend for a smooth soup, or leave chunky for a crisp, refreshing texture.

**"This is my favorite meal after working in the garden. It cools and refreshes me in no time!"**



# Homegrown conservation practices you can choose

## Think Beyond the Garden: The Impact of Invasive Landscape Plants

The plants we choose today can shape the landscapes of tomorrow. While many ornamental plants are beautiful, some escape cultivation and spread into nearby forests, prairies, and wetlands, where they crowd out native species and reduce habitat for wildlife. By choosing native or noninvasive alternatives, homeowners can help protect Illinois' natural areas while creating healthier, more resilient landscapes.

Want to learn more?

Read Christopher Enroth's blog, "**The Far Reaching Effects of Invasive Landscape Plants**," to discover how small choices at home can have a lasting impact on our environment.

[go.illinois.edu/EEinvasives](http://go.illinois.edu/EEinvasives)

Read Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle's blog "**7 terms to know about invasive species (and some to avoid)**" to clearly communicate and understand what invasive species are and why there is concern about them.

[go.illinois.edu/InvasiveTerms](http://go.illinois.edu/InvasiveTerms)



## Ecology at Home Webinar

Healthy ecosystems begin right outside your door. Join Illinois Extension's Ecology at Your Home webinar to explore practical ways to create landscapes that benefit pollinators, birds, and other wildlife while making your yard more resilient and enjoyable. Whether you garden on a few acres, a small city lot, or just wanting inspiration, you'll leave with ideas you can begin using right away.

### Ecology at Your Home

Free online webinar

August 13 from 1-2pm

Learn more and register: [go.illinois.edu/EcologyAtHome](http://go.illinois.edu/EcologyAtHome)

## Community Science: Your Observations Matter

Did you know you can help scientists monitor invasive species simply by recording what you see? Community science platforms allow volunteers to document plants and animals, helping researchers detect new invasive species, track their spread, and protect native ecosystems.

Whether you're hiking a trail, exploring your neighborhood, or working in your own garden, your observations can make a real difference.



### EDDMaps

Report invasive plants, insects, and diseases to help track and manage their spread.

[eddmaps.org](http://eddmaps.org)

### iNaturalist

Identify and record plants, animals, fungi, and insects while contributing to biodiversity research.

[inaturalist.org](http://inaturalist.org)

### eBird

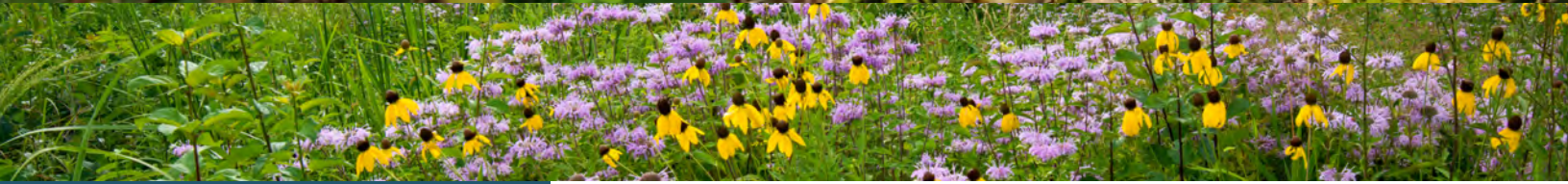
Record bird sightings and contribute to one of the world's largest bird monitoring databases.

[ebird.org](http://ebird.org)

### Illinois BeeSpotter

Photograph and submit bumble bee sightings to support pollinator research in Illinois.

[beespotter.org](http://beespotter.org)



## Join Our Community Outreach Team

### Community Event Booths

Represent Extension at local events by sharing programs, resources, and answering questions.

### Garden & Natural Resources Helpline

Help answer gardening and natural resource questions using Extension resources and training.

### Speakers Network

Share your knowledge by presenting to community groups, clubs, and organizations.

### Conservation@Home

Help homeowners create landscapes that support pollinators, wildlife, and healthy ecosystems.



Contact us if you have questions or are interested in helping! Every volunteer makes a difference.

## GREEN CONNECTIONS

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## Inspire Young Naturalists

We're looking for Master Naturalist volunteers to help lead or assist with **4-H Jr. Master Naturalist clubs!** Our greatest need is in Fulton County, where an established club is looking for new volunteer leaders as the current team transitions out. We'd also love to start clubs in our other counties if there's enough interest. Designed for youth ages 8–18, Jr. Master Naturalist introduces young people to nature through hands-on learning, outdoor exploration, and conservation activities. Each volunteer team has the flexibility to decide meeting dates, times, and the direction of their club.

You won't have to start from scratch. We can provide curriculum from both the Fulton County and Tazewell County Jr. Master Naturalist programs to help you get started. Whether you'd like to lead a club or simply lend a helping hand, we'd love to have you involved. If you have questions or are interested in volunteering, please contact **Brittany Chambers** at [blc21@illinois.edu](mailto:blc21@illinois.edu).



## Volunteer at the Repair Cafe

Join our Master Gardeners at the Peoria Area Repair Cafe on Saturday, August 22! Volunteers are needed to help share garden tool maintenance tips and represent Extension while attendees receive free tool sharpening.

Interested in volunteering or have questions? Visit the Contact page on the Repair Cafe website. [peoriarepaircafe.org/contact](http://peoriarepaircafe.org/contact)

Not able to volunteer? Check out their website to learn more about their mission, explore upcoming events, and find future Repair Cafe locations. [peoriarepaircafe.org](http://peoriarepaircafe.org)



# Volunteer Opportunities

- **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 and Natural Resources Helpline:** Anne Blindt or Debbie Lane
- **Conservation@Home Evaluator:** Ellen Denler or Karen Weigelt
- **Speaker's Network:** Ainsley Olsen and Fran Stroemer
- **Newsletters:** Brittany Chambers and Jennifer Bass
- **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.
- **4-H Learning Garden:** May Bach, Tuesday & Thursday 9 - 11 am.
- **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.
- **Native Plant Demonstration and Herb Gardens:** Ainsley Olsen and Brittany Chambers. Twice a month at 9 am.
- **Community Outreach:** Ainsley Olsen and Brittany Chambers.
- **Friendship House:** Kendra Belk
- **Canton Giving Garden:** Gayle Blodgett

## Native Plant Demonstration and Herb Garden

Master Volunteers are invited to help care for the native demonstration beds and herb garden at the Fulton County Farm Bureau this season. These gardens support education, workshops, trainings, and community engagement, and your time makes a meaningful difference.

Workdays take place twice monthly from 9–11 a.m. Volunteers will walk the gardens together to water, weed, monitor plant health, and complete seasonal tasks. Please be sure to also visit your resource library during your visit as well!



Have workdays or projects you want added?  
Please reach out!



**Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle**  
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**Ainsley Olsen**  
Horticulture Program  
Coordinator  
ainsleyo@illinois.edu





## Welcome Master Gardener Class of 2026

by Ainsley Olsen, Horticulture Program Coordinator

As we celebrate the completion of our June Master Gardener training, we'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the many Master Gardener volunteers, educators, and community partners who welcomed our trainees throughout the week. From ICC to Wildlife Prairie Park, Jubilee State Park's Butterfly Garden, Luthy Botanical Garden, and the many giving gardens, community gardens, and educational spaces across our four counties, each stop offered valuable lessons and inspiration. Most importantly, our trainees had the opportunity to learn from the people who generously shared their time, knowledge, and passion for gardening and volunteering. Thank you for helping create an engaging and memorable experience for our newest class of trainees!

As the Master Gardener Class of 2026 begins their journey, we encourage our experienced volunteers to reach out and help them get connected. A simple invitation to a project workday, MG meeting, or community event can make all the difference. Many lasting friendships and volunteer partnerships begin with a personal welcome. Together, we can continue growing a supportive, inclusive Master Gardener community while helping our newest volunteers discover where their interests and talents can make the greatest impact.

## Master Naturalist Meeting

Beginning this year, Master Naturalist meetings will be held every other month on the 15th of February, April, June, August, October, and November. Meetings will include continuing education, volunteer opportunities, and time to connect and share ideas.

Our August meeting will feature the Friends of Kickapoo Creek, followed by an optional cleanup float to remove litter and debris from the creek. Bring your own canoe or kayak, or reserve a seat in one of the Friends' canoes. Space is limited.

Interested in leading a future meeting or organizing a volunteer project? Contact Brittany to get involved!

Register for this month's meeting here: [go.illinois.edu/MNAug](https://go.illinois.edu/MNAug)



"Service is a limitless opportunity. It is the reason why we breathe."  
-Michelle Obama



Illinois  
Master  
Naturalist





## Pollinators Around the Clock

by Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle  
Horticulture and Natural Resource Educator

When we think of pollinators, bees and butterflies usually steal the spotlight. But after the sun goes down, moths, beetles, flies, and other nighttime insects take over, quietly pollinating many of the flowers in our gardens and natural areas. Illinois is home to nearly 1,700 species of moths, and many native plants have evolved pale blooms, sweet evening fragrances, and flowers that stay open after dark to welcome these important visitors. By planting native species, reducing unnecessary outdoor lighting, and leaving habitat like leaf litter and stems, we can help support pollinators around the clock.

Read the full article:  
[go.illinois.edu/NightBugsBlog](https://go.illinois.edu/NightBugsBlog)



## Garden Tour 2026

Saturday, August 22 ~ 10am to 2pm

Hosted by Conservation@Home Certified Yards in Fulton County

Join us for a day of viewing beautiful gardens already certified by the Conservation@Home program. You will be able to view other approaches to conservation to plan for your own ecologically-minded landscape!

This is a self-guided tour where you will be going to different C@H Certified yards at your own pace. All gardens on this tour are located in Fulton County. Locations will be sent out to registered attendees.

Please register for this free event for more details.

Register at: [go.illinois.edu/CHTour26](https://go.illinois.edu/CHTour26)



## Illinois Pollinator Website

Explore tools and plant guides that make supporting pollinators easy in any Illinois landscape.

Visit the Illinois Pollinator website to find plant lists, habitat tips, and resources.

[go.illinois.edu/IllinoisPollinators](https://go.illinois.edu/IllinoisPollinators)





## New homeowners should take time to learn their yard

By Deborah Lane, Extension Master Gardener, Serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell Counties

Read the full article on ILRiverHort Blog at [go.illinois.edu/NewYard](http://go.illinois.edu/NewYard)



As a Master Gardener volunteer, I have learned that many new homeowners arrive with the same concern: they have inherited a yard, but they are not sure what they have. Moving day may bring boxes, paint colors, and furniture decisions, but it also brings trees, shrubs, flowers, weeds, and landscape beds that may be unfamiliar, overgrown, neglected, or simply a mystery.

At the River Front Market and on the Master Gardener Help Line, I often hear questions from homeowners who are unsure where to begin. In many cases, the best advice is not to start digging right away. It is to slow down, observe, and learn what is already growing before making major changes.

- **Watch an entire growing season**
- **Take monthly photos**
- **Identify plants**
- **Inspect trees**
- **Test soil**
- **Right plant, right place**
- **Begin a yard notebook**

After answering many of these questions, my advice to new homeowners is simple: give the yard time to introduce itself. By observing first, identifying plants, protecting valuable trees, testing soil when needed, and choosing plants wisely, homeowners can build a healthier and more enjoyable landscape one season at a time.

## Illinois Green Connections Events

Green Connections brings together Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, and Conservation@Home members to learn, share ideas, and strengthen our stewardship of Illinois' natural spaces.



### Join us for our annual Green Connections Holiday Celebration Brunch

December 11

10 AM - Noon

Tazewell County Health Department  
21306 IL-9, Tremont IL

Register at:

[go.illinois.edu/GCyearend26](http://go.illinois.edu/GCyearend26)

