

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

September 2023



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Gardeners' BIG Day continues long-standing tradition of high quality horticulture education

For the past 23 years, University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) have coordinated a day-long conference called Gardeners' BIG Day (GBD). This year, EMGs from throughout Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties worked together to plan a fun-filled day for 125 people, that included 11 speakers, vendors, silent auction, door prizes, and time to connect with other gardening enthusiasts.

"Rhonda Ferree (retired Extension horticulture educator) was involved with the very first Gardeners' BIG Day," commented Nicole Flowers-Kimmerlee, Extension horticulture educator. "It was great to have her back as a speaker this year."

Rhonda's breakout session "Finding Plants in Every Adventure" was a popular class that focused on plants Rhonda has photographed on her global adventures. Other sessions like John Curtis' "Key Tools For Your Home Vegetable Garden" gave attendees practical skills they could take home and put to use right away.

One attendee wrote in his/her event evaluation, "There was a great variety of sessions available. I enjoyed the wealth of information provided by the native plants and prairie topics."

The keynote address was given by Duane Friend, Illinois Extension climate specialist. He spoke about extreme weather and how it can affect our gardens.

"Our Master Gardeners are passionate about helping others improve their gardening skills or become inspired to try something new," stated Tara Heath, horticulture program coordinator. "The GBD planning committee is a great team of volunteers who put a lot of work into this event and it shows. It was wonderful to see so many of our volunteers work together to make it happen."

GBD is a partnership with Spoon River Garden Club in Canton. Spoon River College is also a supporter of the program as the host site. Additional local businesses, organizations, and colleges represented in the workshop presenter included Tippy Creek, Luthy Botanical Garden, Jubilee Prairie Dawgs, Kipling Lavender Farm, Illinois Central College, HyVee, and Giving Gardens. Extension Master Gardener and Master Naturalist Jennifer Bass and Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator Chris Enroth also presented sessions.

"I liked the entire format and especially enjoyed the long lunch hour to share with others, visit the auction and shop with vendors," noted another participant.

Traditionally, this event is held each April...just in time for spring gardening season. Gardeners' BIG Day is a great example of local EMGs working to further the mission of Extension and bring great educational opportunities to our communities.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

The hands-on flower arranging workshop at Gardeners' BIG Day is a popular session that the Master Gardener planning committee likes to offer each year. This event has been planned and led by EMGs since 2000.

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