

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

December 2023



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Gardeners flock to 2023 Illinois Master Gardener State Conference

Master Gardeners and gardening enthusiasts from across the state converged on East Peoria for the 2023 Illinois Master Gardener State Conference, held September 7-8. The conference was organized by Extension Master Gardeners and staff from Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties and offered a vibrant array of educational sessions, captivating tours, and networking opportunities.

[Kelly D. Norris](#), a renowned landscape designer and author, delivered the keynote presentation on "New Naturalism: Designing and Planting a Resilient, Ecologically Vibrant Home Garden." Norris emphasized the importance of incorporating native plants, embracing natural processes, and creating gardens that harmonize with the surrounding environment. His words resonated with participants, encouraging them to adopt sustainable gardening practices that contribute to the health of their gardens and the broader ecosystem.

Attendees delved into a diverse range of gardening topics during the breakout sessions, each designed to expand their knowledge and enhance their gardening skills. Whether they were mastering the art of rain garden design, exploring the benefits of native plants, or tackling weed management strategies, participants gained valuable insights to enrich their gardening endeavors.

The conference extended into the community with tours, offering participants the opportunity to explore a variety of gardens and learn from experienced horticulturists. A full-day tour embarked on a journey to the [Mason State Tree Nursery](#), [Dickson Mounds State Museum](#), [Black Sheep Flower Farm](#), and [St. Ann's Garden of Hope](#). Morning and afternoon half-day tours delved into the Illinois [Central College Gardens](#), [Wildlife Prairie Park](#) and [Luthy Botanical Garden](#). Each tour showcased the beauty and diversity of Illinois' flora, allowing participants to gain a deeper appreciation for the region's natural heritage.

Throughout the conference, participants engaged in lively discussions, exchanged gardening tips, and forged meaningful connections with fellow enthusiasts. The conference provided a platform for sharing experiences, fostering a sense of camaraderie among gardening enthusiasts from across the state.

"Participants are encouraged to carry forward the gardening inspiration and lessons learned in order to not only transform their own gardens but to enrich their communities as well," commented Tara Heath, horticulture program coordinator.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

Local Extension Master Gardeners and staff welcomed 300 guests to East Peoria for the Illinois Master Gardener State Conference. The two day event included tours, social event, educational sessions, and awards banquet. A team of volunteers and staff from the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit worked together to coordinate this special event.

Tara Heath

Horticulture
Program Coordinator
tsheath@illinois.edu