

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

New Illinois Green Connections educational events expand reach and build community

Continuing education programs have been a foundational part of the University of Illinois Extension [Master Gardener](#) and [Master Naturalist](#) volunteer programs. The local Extension horticulture and natural resources team serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties have expanded these programs to bring together Master Volunteers, invite new [Conservation@Home members](#), and be more intentional about promoting the events to the community.

Staff named the events Illinois Green Connection in honor of the shared interest of all three groups and to highlight the value of networking. These free events, held in March, May, July, September, and December, rotate through various locations in the four counties and are taught by expert instructors.

Since their inception in 2022, these unit-wide meetings have covered a diverse range of topics including native pollinators, native plants, soil health, sustainable landscaping, climate change, and native trees and shrubs. "Combining expert-led learning with networking opportunities has been a fantastic way to connect with our local communities," says Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle, Extension horticulture educator.

The Illinois Green Connections series kicked off 2024 with great success. In March, Illinois Master Naturalist Coordinator and Climate Specialist [Duane Friend](#) discussed climate change and introduced the new Climate Steward program. Corinne Brown, [Illinois Central College](#) Associate Dean, provided insights into native trees and shrubs during a guided tour of the ICC Arboretum.

The [July event](#) at the Fulton County Farm Bureau features Dr. Mike Wiant, who will present "Native American Use of Plants." Attendees will also have the opportunity to visit the native plant demonstration garden.

In September, [Wildlife Prairie Park](#) will host a session on "Invasive Species and Wild Spotter," presented by [Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle](#), who will discuss the impact of invasive species on ecosystems and introduce the [Wild Spotter](#) program.

To end the year, the December meeting is designed to enjoy each other's company and celebrate all of the accomplishments and experiences.

Additionally, this year marked the launch of the Illinois Green Connections digital newsletter "The digital newsletter is designed to provide timely information to keep readers up to date on information, upcoming events, and volunteer opportunities," commented Nicole.

Extension staff utilize the [ILRiverHort facebook](#) page, the local [Extension website](#), [marketing emails](#), and personal invites to share the IGC events with the public.



Corinne Brown, ICC Associate Dean, was the Illinois Green Connection (IGC) speaker for their May event. She shared information about Native Trees and Shrubs at the ICC Horticulture Land Lab Arboretum. The IGC events are designed to bring people together to learn and network.

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