

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

September 2024



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Invasive plants are no match for local Extension Master Naturalists

When certain plants get established in an ecosystem they can choke out the more beneficial native plants. Left unchecked, those invasive species can destroy the native ecosystem and natural beauty. Local volunteers have a passion for eradicating invasive plants and thanks to their expertise, time, and hard work local natural areas are being restored.

[University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalists](#) serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties have reported over 2,400 hours of volunteer restoration work since the winter of 2023. Master Naturalists have removed non-native invasive plants such as, autumn olive, Japanese bush honey suckle, multiflora rose, garlic mustard, oriental bittersweet and many others. Master Naturalists work with partners to accomplish the clearing of non-native plants in their natural areas to help support healthy ecosystems and promote the growth of native plants.

Master Naturalists have assisted [Prairie Land Conservancy](#) and the [Peoria Wild Ones](#) in conducting controlled burns in the spring. Many volunteers take part in Earth Day events planting tree and native pollinator plants. In the fall of the year volunteers start collecting native seeds, processing them over the winter to spread in late winter and early spring.

Kirsten Boesen, Stewardship Coordinator with Prairie Land Conservancy shared, "Bimonthly volunteer stewardship days at Elwood Wildlife Preserve continue to be led and participated by a majority of local Master Naturalists. There is amazing restoration progress occurring in the reconstructed prairie at Elwood and there are plans for the volunteers to start working on some oak grove timber stand improvement there, this fall. In addition, [Elwood Wildlife Preserve](#), Peoria County, has become our pilot Volunteer Land Steward Program location due to the success of consistent volunteer workdays led by Master Naturalists. We hope to grow this model to other PLC sites."

EMN Mike McGraw shared, "I have been doing invasive removal work at [Spring Creek Preserve](#), in Tazewell County, for two years. While I often work by myself or with just a few other volunteers, this year I started leading once-monthly invasive-removal work days, the second Wednesday of each month. My goal, each time I work there, is simply to clear one small patch of forest of all invasives, so that the native flora, like this Broad Beech, will have a chance to thrive. I would like to think that one day Spring Creek Preserve - all 262 acres - could be invasive free."

Extension Program Coordinator [Christine Belless](#) stated, "Volunteers involved in restoration work have shared encouraging impact stories of seeing fewer invasive plants the following season." MN intern Lisa Arnett has made it her endeavor to irradiate autumn olive at [Camp Big Sky](#).

"I do believe it becomes a mission for the volunteers who enjoy the restoration work," Belless stated. "They have been working season after season removing invasives and supporting native plant life and the natural beauty of the area."



Extension Master Naturalists John Meyers and Ed Coleman are among a group of volunteers with a passion for restoring local natural areas to their thriving native ecosystem by removing invasive plants. They regularly join the crew for the 3rd Sunday workday at Elwood Wildlife Preserve in Peoria County.



The beautiful, native Broad Beech fern is EMN Mike McGraw's favorite native plant to see at Spring Creek Preserve, East Peoria. Removing other invasive plants so that this plant can thrive is among the restoration work happening throughout Central Illinois.

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