

Extension Connections Newsletter

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Gardening Gains: Turn Yard Work into a Workout

Kristin Bogdonas, Illinois Extension nutrition and wellness educator

Did you know, only about 25% of adults meet the physical activity recommendations for muscle-strengthening and aerobic activity? A lack of physical activity will put you at risk for chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.



Physical activity is one of the cornerstones of a healthy lifestyle, as it plays a significant role in maintaining good physical and mental health. This April, we are highlighting Move More Month and National Garden Month and encourage everyone to make the most of their time working outside!

Gardening and yard work are more than just chores—they are excellent forms of physical activity that benefit both the body and mind. Many of the movements involved, such as digging, raking, lifting, and weeding, engage multiple muscle groups and provide a moderate-intensity workout similar to walking or biking.

One of the biggest benefits of gardening is its ability to improve strength and flexibility. Tasks like shoveling soil, carrying watering cans, and pulling weeds work the arms, legs, and core, building muscle endurance over time. Bending, stretching, and reaching help maintain joint mobility and flexibility, which are especially important for older adults and those with conditions like arthritis.

Gardening also contributes to cardiovascular health. Raking leaves, pushing a lawnmower, or carrying mulch can raise the heart rate, promoting better circulation and endurance. Even lighter activities, such as planting flowers or watering, encourage movement and help reduce sedentary time.

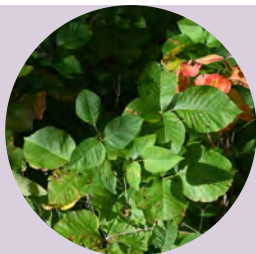
Beyond the physical benefits, gardening supports mental well-being. Being outdoors in the fresh air, soaking up vitamin D, and connecting with nature can lower stress, boost mood, and promote relaxation. The satisfaction of growing food or beautifying a space adds to the overall sense of accomplishment.

Since gardening can be adapted to different fitness levels, it's an accessible way to stay active at any age. Whether tending to a small flower bed or managing a large vegetable garden, these activities contribute to a healthier lifestyle while making outdoor spaces more enjoyable.

Cultivate Your Gardening Knowledge at Spring Series of Home Horticulture Mondays, April 14, 21, 28, 6 - 8 pm, Holiday Inn, Rock Island.

Join us at the Spring Series of Home Horticulture for engaging classes led by local experts. Expand your horticulture and environmental knowledge with two presentations each evening, plus Q&A. Whether you attend one night or all three, you'll leave inspired and equipped with new skills to enhance your garden or help the environment. The cost is \$15/night, \$40/series, includes appetizers. Register at: go.illinois.edu/SpringSeries25

Session Topics



Mon. April 14, 6-8 PM

Farming and Foraging of Gourmet Mushrooms

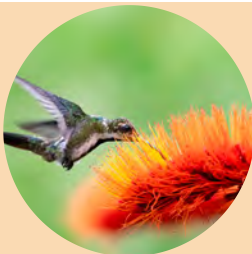
Joshua McAtee, Owner of Wild Growth Gourmet Mushrooms

Discover the fascinating world of gourmet mushrooms. Learn how they are grown commercially and explore the exotic species native to our region.

The Backyard Battle: Identifying and Managing Invasive Species

Emily Swihart, Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator

Gain insights into managing invasive species in your home landscape. Learn identification techniques and strategies to reclaim your garden from these uninvited guests.



Mon. April 21, 6-8 PM

Backyard Bird Cousins

Jimmy Wiebler, Naturalist and Research Coordinator at Nahant Marsh

Explore the diverse world of bird species related to common backyard birds like cardinals and chickadees. Discover the unique characteristics of these bird "cousins."

Forest Bathing: The Japanese Art and Science of Shinrin-Yoku

Leslie O'Ryan, Professor in Counselor Education Dept, Western Illinois University

Experience the benefits of nature through the practice of Forest Bathing. Learn how this Japanese art can help reduce stress and improve mental clarity.



Mon. April 28 6- 8 PM

Preserve Like a Pro

Kristin Bogdonas, Illinois Extension Nutrition and Wellness Educator

Learn the pros and cons of various food preservation methods. Get expert tips on canning, freezing, drying, and fermenting your garden's bounty.

Veggie Visions: Unveiling New Flavors in 2025

Bruce Black, Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator

Embark on a culinary adventure with the latest vegetable gardening trends. Discover new vegetables for the 2025 season and learn how to grow and use them in your kitchen.



Illinois Invasive Species Symposium | May 28, 9:30 am - 3:30 pm Champaign County Extension Office.

Invasive insects, plants, and animals pose a serious threat to Illinois waterways, natural areas, and farm fields. These non-native species spread quickly and are hard to remove once established. Take action now to learn the best ways to mitigate damage.

Join us at the 10th annual Invasive Species Symposium to get the latest research updates, learn management recommendations, celebrate removal success stories, network with colleagues, and ask questions. University of Illinois experts will present on emerging threats, Asian carp, tick responses, restoration projects, and more.

Open to professionals, students, landowners, farmers, foresters, volunteers, and environmental stewards. Fee: \$20. Find topics and presenters at go.illinois.edu/InvasiveSymposium.



Where to Start: Declutter Your Home and Finances | April 8, 2 pm

Do you have a filing cabinet spilling over with financial paperwork? During this program, we will explore reasons for clutter and how it makes you feel. You'll also understand what financial documents need to be kept and find out options to discard sensitive documents. Learn the benefits of decluttering and minimizing, and identify strategies to create a plan to clear your clutter.

Register at go.illinois.edu/lessonsforliving2025



Mind Body Techniques: Strategies for Better Sleep | April 16, Noon

Quality sleep is an essential component of physical and mental well-being. Mind-body practices can be utilized to promote and improve sleep quality. This presentation will provide an overview of sleep biology, the importance of sleep routines, and specific mind-body strategies to enhance sleep.

Register at go.illinois.edu/CSS-Spring25



Nature's Uninvited Guests: The Impact of Invasive Plants | Apr. 29, 1:30 pm

Sometimes, plants pop up in the yard that weren't planted. Many gardeners don't even notice at first or think the flower is cute, so they leave it. But in no time, it's everywhere. Learn what makes a plant invasive versus aggressive, some common-to-Illinois invasives, and what to do about them.

Register at go.illinois.edu/4SGInvasives



Actions to Reduce Water Pollution: Everyday Environment Webinar | May 8, 1 pm

Discover what the most common water pollutants are and how you can prevent water pollution by paying attention to what you put down the drain at home and how you manage your yard. Explore how the water treatment process cleans water before it returns to lakes, rivers, and streams.

Register at go.illinois.edu/waterpollution



Managing Common Squash and Pumpkin Pests | May 20, 1:30 pm

Pumpkins and squash are popular garden plants. However, many gardeners struggle with pests attacking their plants. Learn about common pests that affect squash, pumpkin, cucumber, and melon plants, as well as how to manage them. Register at go.illinois.edu/4SGPests



Honey and Health: Nature's Sweet Treat | May 15, 10 am

Discover the benefits of honey, nature's perfect gift from flower nectar. With 320 varieties differing in color, odor, and flavor, honey's popularity has grown due to its nutritional and therapeutic uses. We'll cover the basics and share delicious recipes to try at home.

Register at go.illinois.edu/lessonsforliving2025

Vegetable Gardening Series: Mondays, 11 am-12:30 pm Mon, April 7 and 21, Rock Island Library, Watts-Branch

Want to start gardening but not sure where to start? Join Emily Swihart, horticulture educator for this free series presented in partnership with the Rock Island Library. The final sessions in the two-month series are listed below.

Session Topics:

April 7: Warm Season Vegetables: Discover what crops grow as warm-season vegetables. Warm-season crops grow during the hottest part of the year.

This session will cover how to make vegetables such as peppers, tomatoes, squash, and more flourish.

April 21: Insects and Diseases: Discover pests and diseases expected to visit vegetable plants. New and experienced growers alike are challenged by pests, diseases, and disorders of vegetable plants. Learn about insects, diseases, and wildlife pests and how to prevent and manage them.

Registration is taken by the library at go.illinois.edu/VeggieGardenSeries or by phone 309-732-7341.



Growing Illinois Food Together (GIFT)

Help ensure fresh, nutritious food reaches those who need it most.

Plant an extra plant | Plant an extra row | Plant an extra garden!

Interested in joining? Signing up is not a commitment - just a way to stay informed. As the growing season approaches, we'll share details on donations sites, drop off options, etc. Visit:

go.illinois.edu/sproutandshare

Delicious way you can support Rock Island County 4-H!

Support Rock Island County 4-H and Extension through the annual pork chop dinner and pie auction event. Buy meal tickets, or become a sponsor and help support the 4-H programs that inspire hundreds of youth to grow in their citizenship, leadership, and life skills!

Event Details:

- **Thursday, April 24, 2025**
- **4 - 7 PM**
- **Blackhawk Fire Station**
- **Dine in or Drive-thru**
- **Meal Price:** \$10 pork chop | \$5 hot dog includes chips, apple sauce, baked beans, dessert.

Silent Pie Auction: Take home a delicious pie made by our 4-H members, volunteers and local bakeries. Bid on the pies inside the fire station. (We will have various auction ending times throughout the event.)

Tickets: Get your tickets at the door, or pre-order using the link below.

Visit go.illinois.edu/4-HPorkChopFundraiser or Text **4-HPC** to **707070** to donate

A delicious way to support
Rock Island County 4-H!



4-H Pork Chop Dinner Fundraiser

Thursday, April 24, 4 - 7 pm

New location!

Blackhawk Fire Station, Milan

102 3rd St W. (next door to Extension)