

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

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Extension Master Gardeners team up with 4-H youth to grow a creative garden at Wildlife Prairie Park

Everywhere you turn in the 4-H Learning Garden at [Wildlife Prairie Park](#) there is something inspiring to see and new to learn. The 4-H Learning Garden is a colorful and productive garden that grows food for the park's animals while serving as a demonstration and learning tool. [University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners](#) (EMG) lead a 4-H special interest club at the park that focuses on gardening and art lessons.

"Our main goals are to provide healthy vegetables to enrich the diets of the park animals, to display gardening methods for park visitors, and to inspire young minds to grow as both gardeners and artists," explained EMG and club leader May Bach. "It was a fantastic year as we harvested a record-breaking 1,672 pounds of produce and added several new art projects, including a colorful "petal power" bicycle!"

The creative bicycle joins other art displays in the garden: caterpillar bench, ladybug bowling ball border, punny book brick border, hopscotch path, and tire snake to name a few. The garden also includes educational displays that teach about topics such as composting, pollinators, and "eating a rainbow."

During the gardening season, May and her fellow volunteers, EMGs Debbie Lane-Christian, Lynn Moon, Joan Houser, Randy Huber, and Extension Master Naturalist Cindy Intravartolo, work with the youth in the garden weekly. Throughout the year, they hold monthly educational meetings.

"May dedicates many hours to preparing lessons for her 4-Hers and ties these lessons into what is happening in the garden" explained Tara Heath, horticulture program coordinator. "This garden, with its colorful vegetables and creative and fun art projects, is inspiring."

In 2021 the garden was registered in the [University of Illinois I-Pollinate](#) program. I-Pollinate enlists citizen scientists to collect state-wide pollinator data in order to better understand how gardens contribute to pollinator conservation. In addition to planting and maintaining an array of ornamental and native flowers, the 4-H members recorded data on butterflies, bees, and caterpillars they observed in the garden.

"At one point we had more than 14 monarch caterpillars on our milkweed plants. Both the park visitors and our 4-Hers found them fascinating to observe as they feasted on the milkweed leaves before completing their transformation into adult butterflies," added May.

Located west of Peoria in Hanna City, Wildlife Prairie Park is a popular visitor destination and offers interactive nature-oriented educational and recreational activities throughout the park. Enjoy the 4-H Learning Garden on your next visit to the park.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

The 4-H Learning Garden at Wildlife Prairie Park combines traditional vegetable gardening with art projects through a collaboration with University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners and 4-H youth. Adult and youth volunteers team up growing produce for the park's animals and participating in monthly creative art sessions in the garden.

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