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Caterpillar tunnel for ginger production

In April unit horticulture educator Ken Johnson, horticulture educator Chris Enroth (Macomb), and Local Food Systems and Small Farms Educator Katie Parker (Quincy) built a caterpillar tunnel at the Lukeman Garden and Education Center in Jacksonville as part of a project looking into ginger production in Illinois.

Caterpillar tunnels, and other season extension structures like low and high tunnels, allow growers to extend the growing season. As a tropical plant, ginger cannot tolerate temperature extremes common in Illinois. Because ginger is not tolerant of temperature extremes the caterpillar tunnel will allow the plants to be grown into the fall when it is normally too cold. Additionally, in the summer a shade cloth will be put on the tunnel to moderate hot temperatures.



While similar in appearance, there are a few differences between caterpillar and high tunnels. Caterpillar tunnels are held together by stakes (rebar) and ropes making them much more mobile and cheaper to construct. They use side-to-side crisscrossing nylon rope anchored to the base of each pole to secure its plastic covering.

High tunnels are more permanent structures. They are anchored by ground posts and utilize metal channels wire to secure plastic. They also have sidewalls that allow the sides of the tunnels to be rolled up and down to allow for ventilation.



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