# Madison-Monroe-St Clair Unit Below the Canopy

For Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists

April 2022

Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN


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**Replacement Name Tags**
If you have a broken name tag or can't find it, let Sarah know by April 30, so we can order a replacement. It takes 4-6 weeks for the replacement tags to arrive. We will notify you when you can pick up at the office.

**State Master Naturalist Coordinator Update**
Duane Friend began his role of State Master Naturalist and Climate Change Specialist in March. Duane will be visiting units this spring and summer to learn more about ongoing local program and needs. We welcome his leadership!!

**Horticulture Helpdesk Workers**
The gardening and natural resource questions have started coming into the office. If you would like to answer questions from home, please let Sarah know. We can email you questions in categories that you are comfortable in answering. If you would like to answer questions at the office, the help desk is open at both offices. Please notify the office which days you would like to work. The helpline is traditionally open from 9 am to noon, but if you would prefer to work in the afternoon, please let us know.

**Fundraising Events**

**Eckerts's Dine and Shop-May 10**
Dine at the restaurant or shop the general store and garden center at Eckert's in Belleville all day on Tuesday, May 10. A percentage of your purchase will be donated to St. Clair County Extension and Education Foundation.

**Gardens in Bloom-June 3 & 4**
The committee will NOT be holding a plant sale this year. Instead, we are having a Gardeners Market. Donate houseplants, plants you started from seed, garden tools, gardening books, containers, and other garden themed items you are no longer using. Items can be brought to the Collinsville office by June 2 or bring to the Market on June 4. Market will be held at West End Dental, 9460 W Main St, Belleville. Look for a signup sheet in May to work as a garden host. The fundraiser is sponsored by St. Clair County Extension and Education Foundation.

**Madison County Garden Tour-June 10 & 11**
The container raffle returns this year. If you or a project would like to donate a container, please notify Sarah by May 15. Containers should be delivered to the Edwardsville Children's Museum on June 10 by 3:30 pm. Look for a signup sheet in May to work as a garden host. The fundraiser is sponsored by Madison County Extension Education Foundation.

**Naturalist Phenology for April**
Compiled by Bill Klunk and Elizabeth Frisbie, Master Naturalists

Be on the lookout for:

⇒ Many early forbs are now blooming. Check for Virginia Bluebell (*Mertensia virginica*), Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), Violet Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis violacea*), Yellow Violets (*Viola pubescens*), and Common Blue Violet (*Viola sororia*) in wooded areas.

⇒ Eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) are breeding during this time period. Compared to other IL ground squirrels, the Eastern chipmunk is the smallest, weighing 2-5 ounces.

⇒ Audubon predicts various Hummingbirds will return to our area by the 3rd week of April.

# Continuing Education Programs

**Four Season Webinar Series**
Register to participate online here.
The program is also available at both offices. Call or email ruth1@illinois.edu to reserve a spot.

- **April 26 at 1:30 pm—Jumping Worms**

**Everyday Environment Webinar Series**
Register to participate online here.

- **April 14 at 1 pm— Illinois Archaeology and our Natural Resources**
- **May 12 at 1 pm— Geothermal Energy**
- **June 9 at 1 pm— The Conundrum of Common Names**

**Forestry Spring Webinar Series**
**Wednesdays, March 30-May 25 from 2-3 pm.**
Illinois Extension Forestry team will lead a nine-session series for woodland owners. The series is free and open to the public and will explore how landowners can manage their trees for better return on investment, improve habitat for wildlife species, learn more about the native ecosystems and restoration potential, and mitigate forest threats such as forest pests, invasive plants, and storm damage. Sign up for one session or the whole series here.

**Trees Forever**
**April 12 from 6:30-8 pm at Old Bakery Beer Company, Alton**
Sponsored by Piasa Sierra Club. Learn about the benefits of urban trees in small municipalities from Emily Ehley, Southern Illinois Field Coordinator for the "Trees Forever" program, supported by the National Forest Service and Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Trees Forever has also launched a carbon credit program to incentivize communities to plant more trees. Attendees and friends are invited to have dinner and meet the speaker at the Old Bakery Beer Company, 400 Landmarks Blvd., Alton, IL 62002 at 5 PM. The program will begin at 6:30 PM, in the event room adjacent to the dining room. Folks are welcome to attend via ZOOM, starting at 6:30 if unable to join us in-person. To register to attend this event (in-person or via Zoom), RSVP via https://bit.ly/PPGApril. If you have questions, please contact Chris Krusa at 410-490-5024.

**Nature Adventures Day**
**April 30 from 10 am-1 pm at Baebler Farm, Waterloo**
Enjoy a day exploring nature. Educational stations include herpetology presentation at 11 am, wooded hikes at 10:30 am and noon. Kite flying, fishing, and other activities planned. Pack a picnic lunch and enjoy a relaxing nature adventure. All ages are welcome. The event will be held unless there is a severe weather threat.

**Eckert's Tour**
**May 10 from 9-11 am, Belleville**
Join Extension and Eckert's staff for a behind the scenes tour of commercial production. Learn more about how Eckert's manage disease and pests and increase production on their fruit and vegetable crops. Space is limited. Contact Sarah at ruth1@illinois.edu or 618.344.4230 to reserve a spot by May 1.

***Check out the Unit Webpage for the most up to date info.***
***https://extension.illinois.edu/mms***

# Welcome to My Jungle

Dr. Elizabeth Wahle, Extension Educator

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*A terminal bud scar encircling a branch of a red buckeye (Aesculus pavia) marking the beginning of newer growth.*

Watching how plants grow is just fascinating. Like when a terminal bud begins growing in the spring after being dormant, it leaves behind a bud scale scar that encircles the entire twig or branch and is visible to the naked eye. Since each twig makes only one terminal bud per year, you can use these scars to determine the age of a twig or limb by counting the scars back from the tip. The first one you encounter marks the growth from the previous year, the next one the year before, and so on.

This is useful information beyond just knowing how old a branch is. In fruit trees, nitrogen fertilizer recommendations for homeowners are often adjusted up or down depending on last year's growth rate. Measuring from the terminal bud to the first terminal bud scar is how we know how much the tree grew last year. If growth was not sufficient, the upper end of the recommendation would be used. If growth is in the recommended range, the lower end of the recommended nitrogen rate would be applied. If growth last year was excessive, then the nitrogen fertilizer rate would be reduced to balance the vegetative growth.

Another use of the terminal bud scars is during dormant pruning, specifically when making heading cuts in an apple or pear tree. To avoid excessive unproductive growth, the recommendation is to only cut into wood that is more than one year old or older. This means not to make a heading cut between the terminal bud and the first terminal bud scar. After you have mastered terminal bud scars on a "regular," branch in your yard, check out a fruiting spur on an apple or pear when you get the chance. Spurs are compressed shoots that have such slow growth, the terminal bud scars are stacked one on top of another, making it difficult to determine the age of the spur.

Of course there is another type of bud scar that you may notice when looking for terminal bud scars, and that is a leaf scar. This is the scar left behind when a leaf abscisses or drops. They differ from a terminal bud scar in that there are as many scars as there are leaves that drop and they do not encircle the twig or branch, but rather mark the place where the petiole attached to the stem previously. The shape and other characteristics of leaf scars is commonly used to identify woody perennials during the dormant season.

*Spur-type growth on a Shipova (xSorbopyrus irregularis); note the stacked terminal bud scars that result from a spur's slow growth rate*

*A leaf scar on a red buckeye (Aesculus pavia) marking where a leaf used to be*

Wondering While Wandering
April 2022
Elizabeth Frisbie, Master Naturalist

Although our recent weather has been chilly, the season of spring is upon us as evidenced by the arrival of our region's early-blooming wildflowers. Among them is Illinois's state flower, the Common Blue Violet (*Viola sororia*). This small perennial plant is usually about 4" high and 5-6" wide. Notably, if you have them growing in your lawn, these violet plants may eventually grow shorter. This is due to an adaptation strategy which Common Blue Violets share with Dandelions (*Taraxacum officinale*). When mowed, both plants adapt by growing shorter stems. Thus, rather than 4-6" stems mowed plants will begin growing shorter, 2" stems. By keeping its flowers close to the ground, the rapidly adapting Common Blue Violet ensures survival. The plant is characterized by green heart-shaped leaves with crenate (rounded) edges and flowers which are small, measuring ¾" in height and rise above the leaves on a slender stalk. Usually, the flowers are deep purple or violet but coloration in *Viola sororia* can range to grayish, white or periwinkle. Their broad color variations also include: Confederate (white with blue center) and Freckles (light and dark) white petals with violet spots and darker blue with violet spots. The flowers always have five petals with a white center that often has purple or violet veins. The leaves and flowers of Common Blue Violet emerge directly from the rhizomes which typically penetrate the soil about 4-5". This plant is native to the eastern United States, including Illinois and belongs to the genus Viola, the largest genus in the violet family *Violaceae*, containing between 525 and 600 species. The Latin word "Soriria" in its scientific name means "sisterly, resembling other species" and was chosen because many Violets look similar. Within the United States, the Common Blue is the most common of all Violet species.

Common Blue Violets thrive best in moist soil in partial to light shade. They are found in lawns, along stream edges, in meadows, and woodlands. The plant spreads rapidly and may provide good groundcover. Blooming in the spring, these plants seed in the autumn when their fruit, or capsule, cracks open, catapulting the nutlike seeds away from the mother plant dispersing via wind. The fleshy endosperm of the seeds is oily and attracts Ants (*Formicidae spp*.) who carry the seed away, thus further dispersing them. Ecologically the plants' rapid spread and rhizome structure help reduce erosion in places where the soil is too moist for other groundcovers like grass. Although not a big source of nectar, the Common Blue Violet does support early spring pollinators including Skippers (*Hesperiidae spp*.) and Mason Bees (*Osmia spp.*). The lower central petal has a beard of small hairs which support pollinators by helping them to hang on and preventing rain and dew from sliding down into the center and diluting the nectar. Additionally, the small veins in the petals known as nectar guides assist pollinators in locating the nectar. The leaves also support pollinators as the caterpillars of several Fritillary Butterflies (*Speyeria spp.*, *Boloria spp.*, & *Eupoieta claudia*) feed on them. Wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*), eat the foliage, seeds and roots while Northern Bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus*) and Mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*) prefer only the seeds. When other food sources are stressed, White-tail deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), Eastern Cottontail rabbits (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) and White-footed mice (*Peromyscus leucopus*) will also eat the plant. Throughout history humans have also enjoyed eating the Common Blue Violet as both the leaves and flowers are edible. In fact, the Ancient Greeks and Romans cultivated the plant as far back as 400-600 BC for eating (leaves and flowers: as salads or cooked greens) and drinking (the flowers were utilized as flavoring and to make a wine known as "Vinum Violatum"). Additionally, Violets were also used medicinally to prevent dizziness and headache. The Greeks, Romans and early American settlers were onto something as it is now known that Violets contain salicylic acid, one of the ingredients in aspirin. The petals and stems of the Common Blue Violet are actually fairly nutritious, containing high amounts of vitamin C. In fact, the Violet flower has more vitamin C than most other vegetables and three times the Vitamin C of oranges! Today, many naturalist cake decorators make candied Violet flowers in the spring by dipping both sides of the flowers in frothy egg whites, coating in sifted powered sugar, refrigerating and then air drying. The flowers may also be made into jam and jelly. (Please note that the rhizomes are highly toxic!)

Along with their value as a food source, Violets have been favored by humans across time because of their beauty. The Ancient Greeks consider the plants a symbol of fertility and love and often used them in love potions. The early Romans viewed them as symbolizing modesty and innocence and this tradition continued in the Catholic faith in which Blue Violets are associated with the Virgin Mary. These meanings resulted in bunches of Violets being given to newlyweds at the beginning of their sexual relationship in the Victorian era. Today, traditionalists still request Blue Violets to express initial interest to a new love. Violets are also

traditional gifts later in a relationship, being the official flower of the 50th wedding anniversary due to their association with deep spiritual connection, trust, abiding affection, loyalty and love. The unique sweet scent of the Violet also contributes to the flower being a favorite of many. However, the scent is fleeting, not due to lack of fragrance output, but because the flowers contain ionine, a chemical which temporarily desensitizes the receptors of the nose and our sense of smell. Thus, after one sniff, the Violets' smell seems to disappear until our nasal nerves recover.

Although a common flower, Blue Violets are strong favorites in both past and present. Violets were the official flower of Athens in ancient Greece. Further, in Greek mythology, Persephone was said to gather Violets to take with her into the Underworld each autumn as a reminder of happier spring days spent above. French leader Napoleon Bonaparte so loved the plant he was referred to as "Corporal Violet" by friends and his followers would determine loyalty by asking those unknown to them if they liked the flowers. Pro-Bonaparte supporters would reply "Eh, bien" to indicate their allegiance. When his beloved Empress Josephine died in 1814, legend has it that Napoleon covered her grave with Blue Violets. Common Blue Violets are the official flower for the month of February and are also the state flower of Wisconsin, Rhode Island, New Jersey and Illinois. Our state was the first to claim the flower, adopting it as state flower in 1908 after school children voted in 1907.

References: American Violet Society; Bioweb: University of WI-La Crosse; www.exoticflowers.com: The Symbolic Meaning of the Blue Violet; www.gardenexperiments.com; www.illinoiswildflowers.com; Nature Guys podcast: Blue Violets are Sometimes Blue (May 5, 2020); Telaflora; University of Illinois Extension Wildflower Directory: web.extension.illinois.edu/wildflowers/directory.cfm

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