

CONSERVATION@HOME

shaping private and community landscapes in a conservation-minded way <u>extension.illinois.edu/fmpt/conservationhome</u>



WELCOME 2024

Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle, Horticulture Educator
Tara Heath, Horticulture Program Coordinator
Christine Belless, Ag & Natural Resources Coordinator
Karen Wiegelt, Special Projects Program Coordinator

Welcome 2024. Even in the cold of winter, we can find beauty in our landscapes. Native plants, shrubs, and trees not only provide ecological resources in the warm months their benefits go on throughout the year. By leaving your plants standing during the winter months, you are providing overwintering sites for beneficial insects, stems for native bee nests, seeds for migrating birds, and habitat for wildlife.

It isn't only ecologically beneficial, it also adds winter interest to your landscape. Airy grasses, the vibrant color of the red twigged dogwood and spiky coneflower seed heads take on a different beauty when covered in snow.

Winter is also a great time to start making plans for your landscape. Planning your gardens and landscapes can be a bright spot on some of winter's dark and dreary days. Now everything is resting, but before we know it spring will be on its way and our landscapes will be bursting with new life. Now begins our journey into 2024, let us see what it will bring.



JANUARY AND FEBRUARY ARE PRIME TIME FOR WINTER SOWING

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION ILRIVERHORT BLOG EXTENSION.ILLINOIS.EDU/BLOGS/ILRIVERHORT

Winter sowing is a cost-effective and low maintenance way of starting plants for the garden. The creator of the winter sowing method, Trudi Davidoff puts it in simple terms, "starting plants outdoors, in winter." Winter sowing works with nature to prepare seeds for growth by providing the proper...



NATIVE PLANT PROFILE LITTLE BLUESTEM

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION: ILLINOIS POLLINATORS

Schizachyrium scoparium

Providing a food source for caterpillars of skipper butterflies, Little Bluestem is a great four season interest grass to add to a difficult spot in your garden, as it tolerates poor soil.

Little Bluestem is a perennial grass that thrives in zone 3 to 9. This native grass can grow to be between 2 to 4 feet tall and due to its clumping habit it only spreads about 1 foot.

Like many other grasses native to the Illinois prairie it does well in full sun and medium soil moisture. This deep rooted grass can also tolerate dry soils during the growing season.

Observe the green to orange flowers from August to October. The foliage turns orange-red in the fall, providing great fall color. The grass remains throughout the winter. Little Bluestem is great for borders.

To care for Little Bluestem cut back the previous year's growth in early spring before new growth emerges. This plant grows well in poor soils.

For more information on Little Bluestem check out these articles from Illinois Extension:

- <u>Little Grasses on the Prairie</u> by Chris Enroth
- Native prairie grasses create distinct, breezy aesthetic in home landscape by Ryan Pankau
- <u>Little Bluestem</u> by Paul Markum from the Illinois Natural History Survey
- Garden worthy 'Plants of the Year' by Britnay Haag







Photo credit: Erin Garrett

CONSERVATION@HOME MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

ELLEN & JOHN DENLER

TAZEWELL COUNTY

"I became interested in the Conservation@Home program because it encourages just what I had discovered--it's not about having the prettiest or tidiest yard. It's about having a useful yard."

Meet Ellen and John Denler. Ellen's enthusiasm for Conservation@Home and her lovely yard is contagious. Not only has she created a yard using conservation practices, but she has a passion for sharing and teaching others. Read about Ellen's journey in her own words.



"My husband John and I live in the house in which I grew up. The original part of the house was built in 1878 and has had five generations of my family living here. Located on a corner lot (105' X 55') in Pekin, all sides of the garden are open to public view. Because of that when I first embraced a "prairie style," I was careful that the yard didn't look "messy."

I became interested in natives when I visited Master Gardener Pat Alexander's yard. I saw many plants I didn't recognize and had never even heard of! She briefly explained their benefits and encouraged my conservation journey by giving me several of her natives. I began ordering plants from Prairie Moon Nursery in Minnesota and locally from Pleasant Prairie Nursery in Williamsfield. I chose plants based on their descriptions and benefits.

My perceptions of a garden's purpose was radically transformed. I no longer used something just because it was popular and pretty. I didn't garden just to please myself. I developed my own "national park" as Doug Tallamy suggests. It is a pleasure to sit on our porch and watch pollinators and birds visit our Joe Pyes, bergamots, little blue stems, and that alien looking rattlesnake master.

I became interested in the Conservation at Home program because it encourages just what I had discovered--it's not about having the prettiest or tidiest yard. It's about having a useful yard."





WINTER BIRD FEEDERS



Birds need food all year round. While leaving seed head and berries on your native plants is a great source of food for birds in the Illinois winter, you might want to supplement the birds diets by adding bird feeders. The question is, "what is the best type of feeder for the birds in my yard?" Check out <u>Feeder Watch</u> from the <u>Cornell Ornithology Lab.</u>

Feeder Watch allows you search by region and find the best feeders for our local birds. Be sure to keep the feeders clean to prevent the spread of disease. Consider a variety of feeders to attract a large selection of birds throughout the winter.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MARK YOUR CALENDAR



- March 19, 2024, 1:00 pm at the Forman Center in Manito, IL: Duane Friend will talk to us about Climate Change and the new Climate Steward program. Social time at 1 pm, program begins at 1:30 pm
- April 13, 2024, 9 am to 4 pm: <u>Gardener's BIG Day</u>, Spoon River College, Canton IL. Keynote speaker, Chris Enroth: Gardening for Pollinators. For more details click on <u>go.illinois.edu/GBD24</u>
- May 21, 2024, 5:30 pm at ICC Horticulture Land Lab East Peoria IL: Corinne Brown will share information about "Native Trees and Shrubs" and tour the ICC arboretum. Social time begins at 5:30 pm, program begins at 6 pm.
- **July 16, 2024, 5:30 pm** at the Fulton County Farm Bureau Building: Dr. Mike Wiant will share information about "Native American Use of Plants." Social time begins at 5:30, program starts at 6 pm. Watch for information about location.
- September 17, 2024: Look for more details for this event in Peoria County.
- **December 10, 2024**: End of the Year Gathering. Watch for more details.



Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle Horticulture Educator nflower2@illinois.edu



Tara Heath
Horticulture Program
Coordinator
tsheath@illinois.edu



Christine Belless
Natural Resources
Program Coordinator
cbelless@illinois.edu



Karen Wiegelt Special Projects Program Coordinator kweigelt@illinois.edu

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