

Conservation@Home

extension.illinois.edu/fmpt/conservationhome

shaping private and community landscapes in a conservation-minded way

Summer Newsletter

As temperatures rise, so can our water use—but small changes in the landscape can make a big impact. Check out this month's newsletter for practical tips on managing water wisely and conserving this vital resource all season long.



Rain Barrels



Rain barrels are a simple way to save water and make the most of what nature gives us. Just place one under a downspout to catch rain from your roof, and you've got a free water source for your garden or flower pots. It's an easy win for both your plants and the planet.

When building a rain barrel, start with a water-tight vessel, such as a plastic drum or even a kitchen trash bin. A tight-fitting lid or screen is essential to keep out debris and mosquitoes. Add a spigot near the base for easy water access and an overflow



outlet to redirect excess water safely away from structure. Barrels can be elevated on cinder blocks or a wooden stand to improve water pressure and access.



Use mulch to retain moisture.

Applying a 2–3 inch layer of organic mulch around plants helps reduce evaporation, moderate soil temperature, and suppress weeds that compete for water. It also improves soil structure over time as it breaks down.

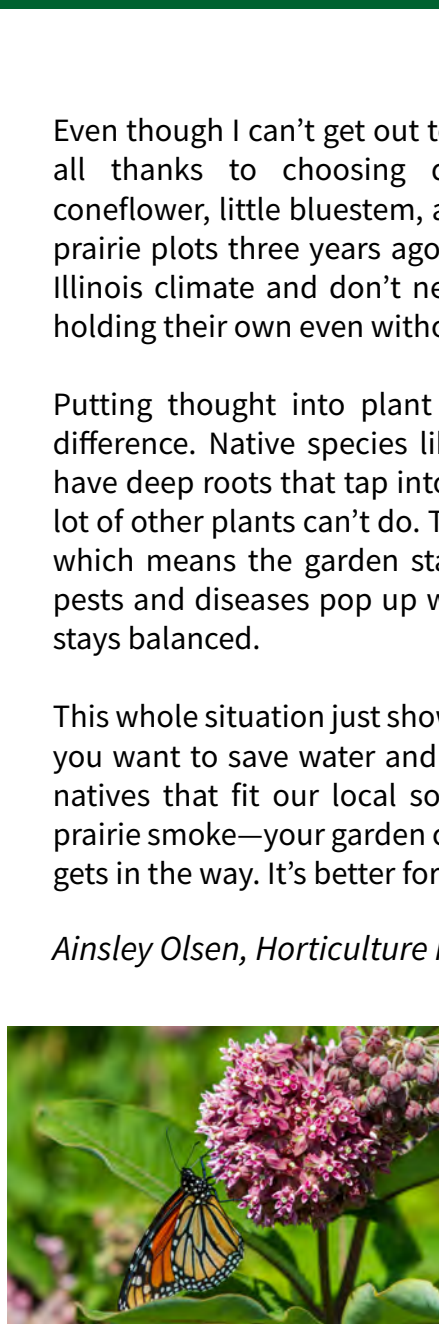


Water early or late.

Water your landscape in the early morning or evening to reduce evaporation and ensure more moisture reaches plant roots.

Plants prefer rainwater because it's naturally soft and free of chemicals like chlorine and fluoride found in tap water.

Native Choices for Water Management



Even though I can't get out to water my garden, it's still doing great. That's all thanks to choosing drought-tolerant native plants like purple coneflower, little bluestem, and black-eyed Susan when I was building the prairie plots three years ago. These plants are built to handle our Central Illinois climate and don't need any extra water to stay happy, so they're holding their own even without me watering every day.

Putting thought into plant choices from the beginning really makes a difference. Native species like prairie dropseed and pale indian plantain have deep roots that tap into moisture way down in the soil—something a lot of other plants can't do. They're made to withstand heat and dry spells, which means the garden stays healthy without a lot of fuss. Plus, fewer pests and diseases pop up when plants aren't stressed out, so everything stays balanced.

This whole situation just shows how important it is to pick the right plants if you want to save water and keep your garden thriving. When you choose natives that fit our local soil and weather—like milkweed, coreopsis, or prairie smoke—your garden can take care of itself a bit more, even when life gets in the way. It's better for you, your plants, and the environment.

Ainsley Olsen, Horticulture Program Coordinator

[Read more at: extension.illinois.edu/blogs/ilriverhort/2016-09-23-low-water-use-landscapes](https://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/ilriverhort/2016-09-23-low-water-use-landscapes)

There's still time to plant native perennials this summer! Many are tough enough to establish in the heat, especially with a little watering early on. Planting now gives them time to root before winter and come back strong in spring. Just mulch well and keep them moist for the first few weeks—they'll be blooming and feeding pollinators in no time.

Local places to find Native Plants for this season:

These two local businesses currently have native plants for sale. For a complete list of garden stores/nurseries in our area contact Extension staff.



Pleasant Prairie Nursery
www.pleasantprairienursery.com/



Hoerr Nursery
www.hoerrnursery.com

Native Plant Spotlight: Rattlesnake Master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*)

Rattlesnake Master is a striking native perennial perfect for Central Illinois landscapes. Its architectural form features spiky, silvery-green leaves resembling yucca, topped with globe-shaped flower heads composed of tiny white blossoms surrounded by spiny bracts. Blooming from mid-summer into early fall, it adds dramatic texture and interest to mixed borders or prairie plantings.

This prairie stalwart is super drought-tolerant once established, thanks to its deep taproot—meaning minimal supplemental water is needed (a plus for water-wise gardening!). It thrives in full sun and adapts to various soil types, including dry, sandy, or clay soils. Plus, it's a pollinator powerhouse: bees, wasps, butterflies, and beetles flock to its nectar, and even goldfinches snack on its seeds later in the season.

Rattlesnake Master is not only ecologically valuable—it's also beautifully low-maintenance, deer-resistant, and long-lived. Its dried flower heads retain their shape and color, making them ideal for fall and winter bouquets or natural materials displays. Whether you're creating a native plant garden or enhancing a sunny border, this native prairie gem is a versatile and stunning choice.



Learn more at: illinoispollinators.org/plant/rattlesnake-master/

New Conservation@Home Members



New Conservation@Home Members cont.



Kimberly Helmkamp



Joyce Wassell



Rayo Boursier



Janet Jarvis



Gayle Carrillo

Conservation@Home Member Spotlight

Recognizing ongoing conservation efforts in a Member Spotlight review!



Laura Hertz

"I am proud to have the Conservation@Home sign displayed prominently!"

go.illinois.edu/SpotlightLauraHertz



Ellen Denler

"My perceptions of a garden's purpose was radically transformed."

go.illinois.edu/SpotlightEllenDenler



Mike & Pat McGraw

"It was a long journey and much work from nothing to Conservation@Home, but it was well worth it."

go.illinois.edu/SpotlightMikeMcGraw



Jennifer Bass

"I know it is a positive support system for me for the delight and well-being I feel as I work and the pleasure it brings to others."

go.illinois.edu/SpotlightJenniferBass

Open to sharing your conservation journey?

Let us know you are able to educate and inspire by emailing ainsleyo@illinois.edu and we'll get you on the path to being our next Member Spotlight!

Now that your yard is certified

An attractive and functional yard that conserves water and provides habitat for birds, butterflies and other beneficial wildlife deserves some recognition! Your certified yard is an environmentally-friendly landscape through the Conservation@Home program and you have a sign to post proudly. When your neighbors see your sign and get curious, they will want to know how they can get a sign like that. Before you know it, yard by yard, you've brought more nature to your neighborhood.

We would love to see the Conservation@Home sign in your yard. Place your sign in a visible place on a t-post or sturdy wooden stake then get a picture. If you need assistance with getting your sign posted, please let us know. Once you have your picture, we would love it if you would send it our way (email is usually the best and easiest way).

2025 Core Education Trainings: Horticulture

Sept. 29 - Oct. 3
go.illinois.edu/HortEd

Naturalist
October 13 - 17
go.illinois.edu/NaturalEd

University of Illinois Extension's Core Education trainings are designed for adults of any age that want to learn about and positively impact their local environment or learn more about horticulture. The goal of the program is not to teach you everything there is to know about the subjects being covered, but to give you an engaging exposure to the natural world--one that encourages you to seek lifelong learning opportunities to further your development as a naturalist or horticulturist. These trainings are the first steps to becoming a certified Master Gardener or Master Naturalist for those interested in those volunteer opportunities.

Everyday Environment: Extension Series Highlight



Actions to Reduce Water Pollution

What's in your water? Learn about common water pollutants, how your daily actions, indoor and outdoor, impact water quality, and how water is treated before returning to rivers and lakes. Simple tips to prevent pollution start with you.



Watch the full webinar here:
extension.illinois.edu/videos/actions-reduce-water-pollution

Other Water Management practices to consider:

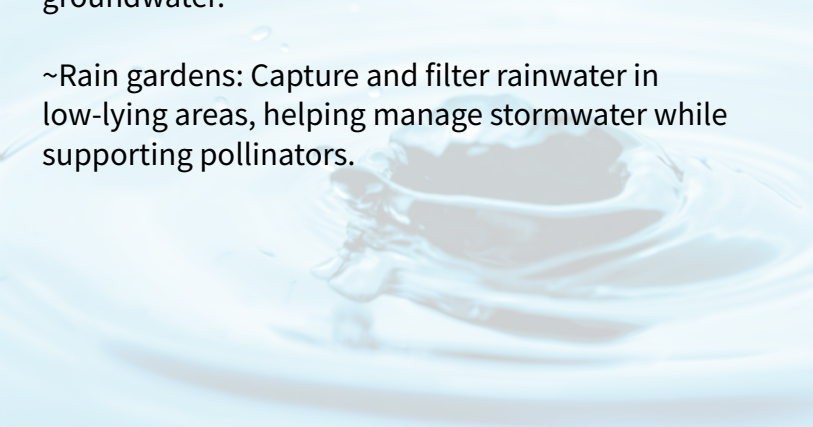
~Directing downspouts into garden beds (not the street): Helps water soak into the soil where plants can use it, rather than contributing to stormwater runoff.

~Permeable pathways: Allow rain to infiltrate the ground, reducing runoff and replenishing groundwater.

~Rain gardens: Capture and filter rainwater in low-lying areas, helping manage stormwater while supporting pollinators.

~Shoreline vegetation: Stabilizes soil, filters runoff, and protects water quality in nearby ponds, lakes, or streams.

~Minimal irrigation: Conserves water and encourages deeper root growth, making plants more resilient to drought.



Upcoming Events



2025 Garden Tour Tazewell County

Saturday, August 2 ~ 10am to 2pm

Join us for a day of viewing beautiful gardens already certified by the Conservation@Home program. You will be able to view other approaches to conservation to plan for your own ecologically-minded landscape!

Register: extension.illinois.edu/events/2025-08-02-conservationhome-garden-tour

This is a self-guided tour where you will be going to different C@H Certified yards at your own pace. All gardens on this tour are located in Tazewell County. Locations will be sent out to registered attendees.

July 17, 2025: 1:30 pm

Illinois Green Connections Event

Gayle Blodgett will share information about “Energy Efficient Landscapes” and we will learn about the energy- efficient high school building.

Cuba High School 20325 N State Rte 97, Cuba

September 16, 2025: Noon

Illinois Green Connections Event

Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle will share information about Creating a Bird-friendly Yard.

Grace United Methodist Church, 601 N. Fourth, Pekin

November 13, 2025: 11 am

2025 Habitat Garden Book Study Zoom meeting

Details at facebook.com/ILRiverHort events

December 9, 2025: 5:30 pm

Illinois Green Connections End of the Year Gathering

A time to enjoy each other’s company and celebrate all of the accomplishments and experiences of 2025.

Peoria Zoo, 2320 N Prospect Rd, Peoria



University of Illinois Extension Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit Staff

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