

# Madison-Monroe-St Clair Unit

## Below the Canopy

For Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists



January  
2023



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### Happy New Year!!

Thank you for reporting your 2022 volunteer hours! The groups had another busy year. Thank you for what you did to provide educational outreach and programming around the Unit!!

Here is a look at some of the numbers from the past year.

Master Gardeners — 8,800+ hours  
Master Naturalists — 5,400+ hours  
Horticulture Helpline — 170+ questions

### New Reporting System in 2023

There is a new online reporting system for Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists this year. Local staff have been uploading volunteer contact information and project information in preparation for opening the website. Sarah will provide a demonstration of the website. The demo will be less than an hour. Zoom meeting links will be emailed later this month. Call the office to register to attend in person.

January 27 at 11 a.m.—Waterloo or Zoom  
January 30 at 9 a.m.—Collinsville or Zoom  
February 1 at 1 p.m.—Collinsville or Zoom  
February 6 at 9 a.m.—Waterloo or Zoom  
February 7 at 9 a.m.—Collinsville or Zoom  
February 7 at 6 p.m.—Zoom only

### Annual Agreements

The office will mail the annual agreement forms in early February. Please return them in a timely manner so we can update your volunteer files.

In 2023, the Certified Master Gardener minimum volunteer hours is decreasing to 20 hours per year. Master Gardener Interns also have to complete 40 volunteer hours to complete that level. The office will be reviewing each intern's volunteer totals and we will notify you if you have completed your Master Gardener internship with these new guidelines by January 31. We know many of you will continue to far exceed that 20 hour minimum. Master Naturalist volunteer requirements are not changing in 2023.

### MG and MN Apparel

The website to order apparel is now open for volunteers!! There are shirts, jackets, and other items too. The MG and MN logo does not come on all of the options. There are still some marketing challenges with the logo. Check the website often for new merchandise. The vendor hinted that they were looking at adding kneeling pads in 2023. Shop at [go.illinois.edu/ExtensionMerch](https://go.illinois.edu/ExtensionMerch). Create an account and have the items shipped to your home.

### Naturalist Phenology for January 2023

Bill Klunk and Elizabeth Frisbie, Master Naturalists

During this month, be on the lookout for:

- ⇒ 1/18 early morning: Look low in the southeastern sky before sunrise for Antares, the bright red-orange supergiant star to reappear.
- ⇒ Great horned owls (*Bubo virginianus*) form breeding pairs now. Listen for extra hooting in the evenings as males seek to attract a mate and establish territory.
- ⇒ Increased presence of the American Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), especially along rivers.

# Continuing Education Programs

## WEBINARS

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### **Illinois Indiana Climate Series**

**Ensure long-term profitability and sustainability**

**January 26 from 1 to 2 p.m.**

Climate change has had significant impacts on agriculture in Illinois, including extreme weather impacts and challenges with integrated pest management. Impacts are projected to intensify with future warming, but solutions exist to both mitigate and adapt agriculture to climate change and its impacts. We'll discuss climate change, its impacts, and the important roles of soil and water conservation to improve long-term profit, sustainability, and resilience. Presented by Trent Ford, Illinois State Climatologist, University of Illinois  
Register [online](#).

### **Master Naturalist Continuing Education Series**

#### **Wetland Plants**

**January 18 from 6 to 7 p.m.**

This month's webinar will feature wetland ecologist, Susan McIntyre, from the History Survey, discussing wetland plants of Illinois. Register online at <https://go.illinois.edu/wetland>.

## IN PERSON or WEBINAR

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### **Four Season Webinar Series**

Register to participate online [here](#).

The program is also available at both offices. Call or email [ruth1@illinois.edu](mailto:ruth1@illinois.edu) to reserve a spot.

- **January 31 at 1:30 p.m.—Pruning Shade Trees**
- **February 28 at 1:30 p.m.—Success with Indoor Plants**
- **March 7 at 1:30 p.m.—Basics of Home Composting**

## IN PERSON

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### **Backyard Maple Syrup Production Workshop**

**February 4 from 10 am-12:15 p.m., Dixon Springs Agriculture Center**

Attend the seventh annual Backyard Maple Syrup Production Workshop at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center, 354 State Highway 145 N, Simpson, IL 62985. Maple sap collection and syrup production is easy, relatively inexpensive to start, and is a great late winter project that can be fun for the entire family. This all-outdoor program will cover tree identification, equipment needs, tree tapping, sap collection, boiling, and finishing maple syrup. Participants will see firsthand the processes involved in making maple syrup. We will have a demonstration of a syrup evaporator and an optional tour of a sugarbush forest, managed for maple syrup production and utilizing a pipeline system of sap collection. The University of Illinois Extension will provide an indoor maple syrup program for kids.

Before the workshop, we are hosting a pancake breakfast as a 4-H fundraiser. Join at us 8:30 a.m. for pancakes and real maple syrup made at the Dixon Springs Ag Center (\$8 per person, pre-registration required)

Register by emailing [cwevans@illinois.edu](mailto:cwevans@illinois.edu) or online at <https://go.illinois.edu/MapleWorkshop> by February 3.

### **Gateway Green Conference**

**March 8 at Gateway Convention Center**

The program has been reformatted to include programs focused on building sustainable landscapes, conservation stewardship, and tree care. Discount available for MGs and MNs. Register [here](#).

*Check out the Unit Webpage for the most up to date info.*

<https://extension.illinois.edu/mms>



University of Illinois • U.S. Department of Agriculture • Local Extension Councils Cooperating  
University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in the program, please contact the Madison-Monroe-St. Clair Unit.  
Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time for meeting your access needs.

Wondering While Wandering  
Naturalist Ponderings for January 2023  
Elizabeth Frisbie, Master Naturalist



January 1<sup>st</sup> brought us all a new year and here in Illinois it also brought residents an official state snake. As of January 1, 2023, the Milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum*) joined the White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) as one of our official state animals. With our state's adoption, this brings the total number of states with official snakes up to 29. Notably the Milksnake was not suggested or chosen by Illinois's professional herpetologists. Instead, Gentry Heiple, a current 8<sup>th</sup> grade student at Carterville Junior High School, gets the credit for researching various native snakes, making a selection, and lobbying the legislature to declare the Milksnake the official snake of Illinois. State Representative, Dave Severin, and State Senator, Dale Fowler, both assisted Heiple in his quest.

As one might expect of an official state snake, the Milksnake, which is a non-venomous species of kingsnake, is found throughout Illinois. However, its appearance varies, depending upon your location and the subspecies found there. In our region, adult Milksnakes are bright red or orange with black and white checkerboard markings. This subspecies is known as Red milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum sypila*). Eastern milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum*) are found in the northern third of Illinois. In this subspecies, the red background is more of a muted reddish brown, gray or tan. In central Illinois, one can find both colorations and some inner breeding of the subspecies. The cross bred snakes can display combinations of elongated and collar blotch patterns with brown or orange blotches.



Both Red and Eastern milksnake are known for being docile and some keep them as pets. Children are often fascinated watching a Milksnake finish off its mouse meal since the rodent is swallowed whole with the tail “slurped” in last. Young children frequently compare this meal-finishing movement to when they slurp up a singular spaghetti noodle. Milksnake range in size from 24-43” (Eastern) and 21-28” (Red) as adults and weigh from ¾ to 3 pounds. They communicate predominately through pheromones and tail movement but also use hissing. Found throughout Illinois, Milksnake live in fields, river bottoms, woodlands and rocky hillsides. They are capable of surviving in both urban and rural areas. Milksnake are solitary and nocturnal. During the day, they will seek out dark spaces, often seeking refuge and rest beneath stones or logs or inside rotten logs. The female will lay approximately 10 eggs per clutch in those same rotten logs in June or July with young hatching in August and September. The hatchlings are self-sufficient immediately. Within their habitat, an adult Milksnake is a mid-level predator, feeding on rodents, small birds, and lizards. Notably, although fish were not an original part of their diet, Milksnake living near rivers have evolved to feed on fish. Additionally, Eastern Milksnake also sometimes eat other snakes, including those which are venomous. Both subspecies kill their prey through constriction. Although primarily terrestrial, Milksnake will occasionally climb trees to prey upon birds or in search of eggs.

The Milksnake's color and blotch pattern are evolutionary adaptations that support their survival through defensive mimicry. Because of their bright blotches and color patterns, our state snake is often confused with venomous Eastern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*) and Eastern Coral (*Micrurus fulvius*) snakes. This mimicry scares away predators but unfortunately also results in frightened Humans killing Milksnake, fearing they have come upon a Coral or Copperhead when they encounter a Red or Eastern milksnake respectively. In addition to the mistaken belief that Milksnake are poisonous, human error impacted this snake in another way by generating its common name. In regional folklore, it is noted that in the past, people believed Milksnake sneaked into barns at night and suckled milk from the teats of the dairy cows. Obviously, this is completely false. Instead, the Milksnake was and continues to be frequently found in dairy barns because of the prolific mice and rats, which they do eat. Today's farmers are often pleased to find a docile Milksnake has taken up residence in their barn, as long as they properly identify it.

References: IDNR: Wild About Illinois Snakes; IL Natural History Survey; Reptile Guide: Illinois Snakes Identification Guide; Wildlife Illinois

Photo Credits: Eastern milksnake (northern area): Dr. Todd Pierson & Red milksnake (southern IL): Kory G. Roberts. Species distribution map from The Prairie Research Institute's Illinois Natural History Survey.

## Welcome to My Jungle

### Dr. Elizabeth Wahle, Extension Educator

Nothing in a nursery catalog catches my attention more than the word “new.” This term is usually applied to a plant that is new to the U.S. market, either as a new release from breeders, a wild plant recently brought into cultivation, or a plant already established on the overseas markets. And, more often than not, a much higher price is almost always a given for new introductions.

Some plants like *Hosta*, *Iris* and daylilies come gradually down in price after their initial introduction, so if you can stand to wait just a few years as inventory builds, you can get the same plant for less. Other plants like terrestrial orchids and intersectional peonies never come down in price; they just continue to command a higher price because of limited availability or just sheer demand.

I subscribe to a few European gardening magazines, and I am always seeing plant offerings that are available there but not here. I like to think my covetousness, though, somehow aligns with certain U.S. growers because sometimes something I want comes onto the U.S. market. One such group of plants are the yellow selections of snowdrops (*Galanthus* spp.). Most snowdrops available in the U.S. have green markings on the shorter and/or longer perianth segments as well as the ovary. Just replace the green with yellow and you have one of the yellow selections. Prices on snowdrops can be all over the board, from very affordable to downright expensive (\$0.75 - \$75+ per bulb), but the yellow selections almost always command a price well into the range of intersectional peonies. I recently planted the yellow selection “Primrose Warburg’ and I am anxiously awaiting its appearance, especially since it is touted to be a good grower/increaser. It’s a bit easier to justify a higher price if you know your investment will increase.

In the Perennial Plant Association ‘2022 New to the Market Forum,’ *Hosta* ‘First Blush’ was one of the plants presented. To me, this plant is not new but only because I was in the right place at the right time to acquire a plant shortly after its 2016 release. It sports beautiful red petioles and in the early spring before temperatures soar, the interveinal regions of the leaves blush red as well. Once our notorious heat hits, the blush on the leaves dissipates, but the red petioles remain. If I were a commercial grower, I would choose this *Hosta* as one to grow as well.



*Galanthus nivalis* 'Viridapice' is a Snowdrop green selection



*Hosta* 'First Blush' sports leaves that flush red in the spring before temperatures soar, then back to green.



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