

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER
& ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

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May Bach and Peggy Shane are two out of 20+ Extension Master Gardeners who answered hundreds of gardening questions from visitors to the Peoria Riverfront Farmers Market. Gardening and landscape topics are most popular with Extension programs and soil sample queries mixed in.

Extension Master Gardeners Provide Education to Hundreds of Farmers Market Visitors Each Year

Master Gardeners from University of Illinois Extension serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell Counties share a mission to “help others learn to grow.” Perhaps nowhere does this mission play out more directly than at the Peoria Riverfront Farmers Market (PRFM), where they answer hundreds of gardening questions posed by visitors from across Central Illinois and beyond.

During the summer of 2019, more than 20 Extension Master Gardeners each served one or more Saturday mornings at Extension’s information booth. Led by Extension Master Gardener May Bach, they collectively volunteered well over 260 hours providing education to the public on a huge array of gardening topics.

The questions visitors ask range far and wide and that is one reason the volunteers enjoy serving at the PRFM. In addition to the countless quick questions posed, there are many that require more detailed explanations. One of the most popular topics was pollinators (over 100 questions), and seven questions were about farming. This year 42 individuals who self-identified as new gardeners sought guidance, mostly about growing vegetables: tomatoes (9), cucumbers (6), pumpkins and squash (5), and okra (2) among many others.

Questions often center on gardening techniques: 12 visitors sought information on container gardening, four had questions about straw bale gardening, and seven needed information about pruning trees. There were many questions about fruit trees and nut trees (66). Watering and weeds were an issue for many visitors, with 14 questions each.

More than 30 visitors wanted to know about native plants and invasive plants (including poison ivy). Visitors needed information about safely and sustainably dealing with animals (12), insects (17), and plant diseases (15).

In addition to gardening questions, visitors often inquire about Extension programs. There were 12 questions about 4-H membership, almost 40 questions about the Master Gardener program, and seven about the Master Naturalist program. Visitors asked about Fulton County’s Gardeners’ BIG Day, our unit’s flagship annual public horticulture education event, and Lawn Days, an educational program at the East Peoria campus of Central Illinois College.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

Along with answering questions, Master Gardeners handed out hundreds of informational fliers on topics such as growing herbs, composting, and plants that are dangerous for pets. They also distributed hundreds of seed packets, 15 soil sampling kits, and refrigerator magnets with our unit’s Gardener’s Helpline contact information.