



Illinois Extension

DECEMBER 2021

Connections Newsletter

The College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Rock Island County
321 W 2nd Ave. Milan, IL
(309) 756-9978
Mon-Fri 8am - 4 pm
(closed 12 -12:30 pm)

Henry/Stark Counties
358 Front St. Galva, IL
(309) 932-3447
Mon, Wed, Fri 8 am - 4 pm
(closed 12 -12:30 pm)

Mercer County
910 13th St. Viola, IL
(309) 871-5032
Tues, Wed, Thur. 8 am - 4 pm
(closed 12 -12:30 pm)

Visit our website: extension.illinois.edu/hmrs



Wishing you the happiest of Holidays from all of us at University of Illinois Extension
Holiday Hours: Our offices will be closed from December 24, 2021 - January 4, 2022

Avoid overspending with smart holiday shopping strategies

Kathy Sweedler, Illinois Extension Consumer Economics Educator

It takes extra effort around the holidays to stay within a budget. We tend to spend more when we're tired and stressed, and holidays can add tasks and expectations to our already busy lives. In addition, everywhere we turn are spectacular sales, deals, and wish lists full of gifts and gadgets to buy! As the season for giving begins in earnest, think about ways to save a little money here and there for big savings overall.



Simple strategies to help you get started

- **Stay organized:** Keep receipts together in a marked envelope or other safe place so you can easily exchange or return any purchases that don't work out.
- **Make a shopping list:** Know what you're shopping for – and how much you are able to spend – before you go online or into a store.
- **Beware of loans:** Do holiday bills make money tight? A payday loan or vehicle title loan may tempt you with fast cash...but beware! While these loans are typically easy to get, they're hard to pay off. A typical \$1000 title loan in Illinois costs \$3000 in fees and interest charges to pay off!
- **Trade to save:** Tired of your holiday decorations? Trade with a friend instead of buying new! You'll get fresh holiday looks at no cost.
- **Give the gift of time:** Rather than buying holiday gifts for friends, meet up for a coffee and muffin as a break while holiday shopping.
- **Recycle:** Save on wrapping costs and use newspaper comics to wrap gifts for family and friends who enjoy reading comics.
- **Consider a group gift:** Buy a family or household gift instead of buying something for everyone in the house.
- **Plan for next year:** Keep track of all your holiday spending this year. Divide that number by 12, and plan to save that amount each month so that you will have the cash to spend next year.

For more financial advice and savings tips, visit extension.illinois.edu/blogs/plan-well-retire-well

Sign-Up for the EAT.MOVE.SAVE. Healthy Text Program!



Choose ONE of three ways to sign up to get 1-2 text messages per week! *Text message and data rates may apply.*
Text STOP to unsubscribe at any time.

Use a smartphone camera to scan and sign-up with an online form.



OR

If you live in Rock Island or Mercer County:
Text "rockisland7" to (833) 369-2916

If you live in Henry or Stark Counties
Text "henry7" to (833) 369-2916

Give a DIY Gift from Nature!



DIY bottle terrariums make great holiday gifts

Bruce Black, IL Extension Horticulture Educator

Winter is that time of year where gardeners rest and plan for spring. But with the holidays, why not make loved ones plant gifts?

Impossible bottles, or bottles with an object inside that doesn't seem like it can fit through the bottle's mouth, have been things of wonder throughout history with ships or decks of cards being built inside bottles. Bottle terrariums are similar feats of wonder using plants.

Terrariums are either tightly closed or open transparent containers with plants inside. Credited for inventing terrariums, Dr. Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward used hermetically sealed glass containers with soil inside to better observe the change of the chrysalis of sphinx moths.

"Bottle terrariums are a creative way to use plants," says Bruce J. Black, University of Illinois Extension horticulture educator. "Recycling old bottles and turning them into works of art is fun and easy."

When designing a bottle terrarium there are a few questions to think about first. Will it be an open or closed terrarium? What type of container is wanted? What is the theme? What plants – tall or small – will be used? Are there any additional decorations?

Closed terrariums will act like a greenhouse and be a mini-ecosystem. Bottle terrariums with caps, corks, or tightly fitting lids will trap the moisture inside where it will cycle. Open containers are more of a display allowing for larger and taller plants.

Any transparent container can be used as a terrarium. Glass and plastic are the two most common mediums. Besides bottles, commonly used items are fish bowls, fish tanks, jugs, jars, or light bulbs.

"My favorite part is coming up with a theme," Black says. "Developing a theme based on an event, season, movie, or genre can help to tell a story and make your terrarium unique."

"Making terrariums is a great family or friends' activity," Black says. "I enjoy making them with youth and they make great gifts with the holidays coming up."

Terrarium Instructions

To build a terrarium, first, start off with a drainage material such as gravel or stones. This allows water to pool without soaking the soil. When using foraged rocks or shells, boil them for five minutes at a rolling boil to sterilize them and prevent disease or insect issues. Allow them to cool before using.

Add activated charcoal to help eliminate chemicals that could harm the plants. Activated charcoal can be found at garden centers. It absorbs any unwanted chemicals that would be taken up by the plant and harm it.

Next, add a pre-moistened potting mix suitable for the chosen plants. The gravel, activated charcoal, and potting mix should make up about a quarter of the container volume.

Many plant types such as Kalanchoe, Sempervivum, Crassula, Echeveria, Sedum can be used in terrariums. To add the plants, skewers, pipe cleaners, and long-handled tweezers may be needed depending on the size of the container's opening. When placing plants, don't let the foliage touch the sides of the container and wipe any debris off plants with a clean paintbrush.

Clean any figures, toys, glass, pebbles, or ceramic structures with an alcohol or 10% bleach solution and allow them to dry. Dried flowers or wood may also add to the story. Supplies can be purchased from dollar stores, craft shops, and local garden centers.

To care for the new terrarium, place it near a south or western facing window or near supplemental lighting, not in direct light. Most terrarium plants are in the medium-light requirement category.

Watering will vary. Closed, tightly sealed containers will only need to be watered every four to six months. Wilting plants and bottles with no condensation are a sign watering is needed.

Open containers need to be watered more often depending on humidity levels in the home.

For maintenance, don't overwater, remove any dying leaves, turn the container weekly to keep plants growing normally, and prune or pinch plants that get tall.

Check out these FREE online workshops



Planning for the Unforeseen | Dec 8, 12 pm

While many people think they are invincible, being prepared makes you a responsible adult. Property transfers, wills, and conversations about estate planning can be beneficial for you and your family's overall financial well-being. Presented by Nikki Giancola-Shanks, Illinois Division of Financial and Professional Regulation, and Andrea Pellegrini, University of Illinois Student Money Managing Center. Register at go.illinois.edu/GetSavvy2021

Plants with Wonderful Winter Interest | Dec 15, 3-4 pm



The winter season can be a dreary time for your landscape. Join University of Illinois Extension's Good Growing team to learn what plants to use to add color, texture, and plant architecture to your winter landscape. Some plants we will be discussing include red and yellow twig Dogwood, winterberry, witch hazel, serviceberry, false cypress, and more! Register online at go.illinois.edu/WinterPlants



Everyday Environment: Winter Precipitation | Dec 8, 12 pm

Winter brings snow, sleet, freezing rain, and the dreaded polar vortex. Extension educator Duane Friend will discuss the causes and differences between snow, sleet, and freezing rain, as well as other winter phenomenon, including Alberta Clippers, Pacific air, and the polar vortex. We'll review trends in winter weather for the last 50 years and what we expected for the future, including winter weather preparedness. Register online at go.illinois.edu/WinterWeather

How Long Do Holiday Leftovers Last?

Food can spoil faster than you'd think, creating the perfect home for bacteria and potential for food poisoning. Play it safe and freeze or use within the recommended number of days!

Check out go.illinois.edu/Leftovers for recipes and to see how long common holiday leftover last.

Food Item	Shelf Life
Mashed Potatoes	3-5 DAYS
Cooked Veggies	3-5 DAYS
Gravy	1-2 DAYS
Stuffing	1-2 DAYS
Pumpkin Pie	2-3 DAYS
Roast Turkey	3-4 DAYS
Cranberry Sauce/Relish	5-7 DAYS

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Turkey Bone Broth

Don't let your turkey go to waste! Try making turkey bone broth for future recipes. It is packed with nutrients and proteins like calcium phosphate and collagen. After the holiday feast, save the turkey bones for making broth or soup. Leg bones, thigh bones, wing bones and the main breast and back bones are excellent for making a broth base for soup.

Break up turkey bones and place in a large pot. Add remaining ingredients and cover with 2 quarts water or canned chicken or combination of the two. Bring to a boil, then reduce to simmer and cook, skimming for 2 hours. Strain and boil down to one quart

Check out go.illinois.edu/TurkeyBoneBroth for instructions on how to make this.

TURKEY BONE BROTH

- 2 carrots
- 1 celery stalk
- 1 onion
- 1 clove garlic
- 1/4 cup parsley
- 1 tsp peppercorns
- 1 bay leaf
- Turkey carcass and bones
- Water

Nutrition Facts per serving: 4 servings per recipe; 1 cup serving size; 45 calories (10 calories from fat) 1g total fat; 0g saturated; 0mg cholesterol; 70mg sodium; 7g carbohydrate; 0g dietary fiber; 3g protein

For more holiday recipes and tips, visit

web.extension.illinois.edu/turkey



Keeping Nourished When Not Feeling Well



What do you eat when you are not feeling well? Two important recommendations for feeling better faster are rest and hydration. Rest is essential for becoming well, and drinking more liquids is the next best step.

Your appetite may be less than normal, so be purposeful in what you eat. Proper nutrition is important to provide the body with the energy to fight germs.

TIPS FOR INCREASING HYDRATION WHEN SICK

- Keep water within reach.
- Sliced citrus (oranges, lemons, or limes) will add a burst of flavor and vitamin C to water. Citrus may also help you to get better quicker.
- Tired of drinking water? Add a variety of liquids such as ginger ale and other clear fluids like tea, apple juice, or any type of broth.
- Jell-O, popsicles, and frozen fruit bars will help with hydration.

SEMI-HOMEMADE NUTRITIOUS MEAL TIPS

As your appetite returns, think shelf-stable convenience foods for a semi-homemade quick fix. Science shows warm fluids can help with congestion, and chicken soup is on the top of the list. Although homemade chicken broth tastes better, you may not feel like boiling a chicken and making the soup. Think semi-homemade, quick and easy!

- Use low sodium chicken broth in a carton, add egg noodles, a few spices, and herbs, add frozen or canned veggies and boil on the stovetop for a quick, nourishing meal to feel better faster.
- Tomato soup with whole-grain crackers and a small side salad is another healthy option.
- Try brown rice, chicken with some favorite frozen veggies or microwave a baked potato, then top it with cheese and broccoli.
- Build-in vegetables in all meals to help your body have the nutrition it needs to build your immunity.

NUTRIENTS TO KEEP THE IMMUNE SYSTEM STRONG

- Zinc: found in meat, poultry, breakfast cereal, almonds, yogurt, and cheddar cheese.
- Vitamin C: look to bell and chili peppers, strawberries, citrus fruit, potatoes, and dark green vegetables.



SNACK SUGGESTIONS

- Keep dried fruit and nuts on hand for a nutritious snack that takes little preparation.
- Mix chopped dried fruit with nut butter and dry cereal for a nutrient-packed snack or add them to oatmeal or other whole-grained cereal.
- Make a smoothie with yogurt, milk, bananas, and your favorite fruit for a deliciously balanced meal.

Keep Pets Safe from Holiday Hazards

Dr. Yanshan Er, Veterinarian, U of IL Veterinary Teaching Hospital

No one knows better than a veterinarian who staffs the emergency room that the holidays can be fraught with hazards for pets. Luckily, most of the dangers can easily be prevented with some foresight and good advice.

Holiday Food Dangers

While you are enjoying your holiday feast, you may be tempted to slip your pet some table scraps. It is important to remember many of the things we enjoy are not appropriate for our furry friends.

Chocolate – Chocolate, especially the dark and baking varieties, contains toxins called methylxanthines, which may cause tremors, seizures, and fatal arrhythmias at high doses. Lower doses may cause vomiting and diarrhea.

Solution: Keep chocolate away from your pets!

- **Bones** – Leftover bones from that turkey or ham may seem like a treat for your pet, but Dr. Er says that's not true. "Bones pose several dangers: cracked teeth, a blockage in the esophagus, constipation, severe gastrointestinal inflammation or even perforation of the gastrointestinal organs," she says. "There are so many great ways to offer a treat, bones are definitely not worth the risk."
- **Alcohol and bread dough** – Make sure to keep your alcoholic drinks and baking supplies out of reach of your pets. If a pet eats raw yeast-containing dough, the dough will ferment in the stomach, producing ethanol, a form of alcohol. The expansion of dough in the stomach can cause a mechanical obstruction. The ethanol gets absorbed systemically and causes blood acidity and low blood sugar.
- **Grapes, raisins, and currants** – The exact causative toxin is currently unknown, but the fact that consuming grapes, raisins, and currants may result in acute kidney injury in dogs is well documented. Toxicity from these fruits may also lead to vomiting, diarrhea, and lethargy.

Seasonal Decorations

- **Christmas tree safety** – "Make sure to secure your tree so that it can take bumps or tolerate your pet's zoomies," says Dr. Er. Trees with shiny ornaments are a magnet for curious cats. If the tree is not securely anchored, it may fall over easily when kitty starts to climb. Inquisitive pets are also drawn to strings of lights and other electrical wires. Chewing on these wires may result in electrocution, painful burns in the mouth, and fluid in the lungs.
- **Tinsel and candles** – Shiny, reflective tinsel also attracts cats. If swallowed, tinsel, yarn or other stringy objects wreak havoc on a cat's digestive tract. This problem, called a "linear foreign body," must be treated with emergency surgery. Candles also fall into the "shiny danger" category. Pets aren't aware of the danger fire poses, so never allow pets to remain unsupervised in a room with lit candles.
- **Poinsettias, mistletoe, and lilies** – If you own a pet that eats anything and everything, it is important to know that poinsettias and mistletoe can result in an upset stomach for your pet. In very rare cases, mistletoe can also affect the heart. While not typically a winter holiday decoration, lilies are very toxic to cats, and result in acute kidney injury. "All parts of the lily plant are toxic, so remember to keep them out of reach of your kitties," says Dr. Er.



TAKE YOUR LOVE OF
GARDENING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Become an Illinois Master Gardener



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This winter, take your love of gardening to the next level by becoming an Illinois Extension Master Gardener.

Training is available through two online options – self-paced or hybrid with live sessions.

After completing your training, you can volunteer as a Master Gardener at University of Illinois Extension to serve Henry, Mercer, Rock Island and Stark counties.

Choose from a variety of volunteer opportunities that interest you such as presenting programs to garden clubs, civic groups, or schools; answering calls or emails for our horticulture helpline; establishing demonstration gardens that serve as educational tools; educating citizens on how to set up a community garden, designing an educational display garden or manning the information booth at the QCCA Lawn and Garden Show. **You'll also enjoy fellowship with other Master Gardeners, monthly meetings, continuing education classes and conferences, holiday parties, and more!**

The hybrid course meets online at your pace AND on Tuesday mornings, Feb 15 to April 26.

- It includes both online classes you can take anytime and live sessions on Tuesday mornings.
- Get links to view recorded classes taught by IL Extension horticulture educators.
- Have weekly live Q and A session with your teachers on Tuesdays from 9 - 10:30 am via Zoom.
- Meet with others in the training to do case study questions and activities (Tuesdays 10:30 am - Noon).

The cost for the hybrid training is \$225. (One scholarship is available to cover tuition - see details at registration link). Register by Feb 1 to participate.

The self-paced online course starts January 31, 2022.

You get links to view recorded classes taught by University of Illinois Extension horticulture educators, a manual, reading materials, and quizzes to take at your own pace. There is a \$300 course fee. Register by Jan 24 to participate.

Learn more and register @ go.illinois.edu/MasterGardenerTrainingWinter2022

For more information, or if you need a reasonable accommodation to participate, contact Illinois Extension horticulture program coordinator Tracy Jo Mulliken at (309) 756-9978 or email her at tmully@illinois.edu

Join Illinois Extension in a new 4-H program to help nourish our neighbors!



4-H is looking for motivated, creative youth age 12-18 to serve as hunger ambassadors.

Are you interested in...

- Helping your community?
- Health, Nutrition, or Physical Activity?
- Working with your peers?

Join the team. Change the world.

To learn more visit:

go.illinois.edu/HungerAmbassadorInterest

or scan the QR code:



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Did you know?

Food Insecurity is:
A lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life

Feeding America, 2019

5,090

The amount of children who are food insecure in Rock Island County

15,750

The total amount of people who are food insecure in Rock Island County

10.9%

The food insecurity rate in Rock Island County

Map the Meal Gap: Feeding America, 2019

PICKING THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS TREE STARTS AT HOME

Ron Wolford, Horticulture Educator, Illinois Extension

From pre-lit artificial trees to potted living evergreens, the holidays have more tree options than ever, but for some only a visit to the tree lot or farm will do. "Visiting a Christmas tree farm, garden center, or pop-up lot and choosing a real tree is a family tradition for many," says Ron Wolford, a University of Illinois Extension horticulture educator.

"Keeping that tree fresh throughout the holiday season is a lot easier with some pre-visit planning." The first step is to find the perfect spot. Pick a location away from heat sources, such as spaces heaters, fireplaces, TVs, radiators, and air vents to avoid drying out the tree and creating a safety hazard.

Next, measure the height and width of the space in the room where the tree will be placed. "There is nothing worse than bringing a tree indoors only to find it's too tall," Wolford says. "Take a tape measure with you to the farm or the tree lot." If the tree will be displayed in front of a large window, choose one that looks as good as possible from all angles. If the tree is against a wall, a tree with three good sides is a great option, while a tree with two good sides would work well in a corner.

When choosing a tree, look for a healthy green specimen with few browning needles. The needles should be flexible and not fall off easily. Raise the tree a few inches off the ground and drop it on the trunk end. It is normal for a few inner brown needles to fall, but very few green needles should drop off the tree.

Make sure the trunk or base of the tree is straight and long enough so that it will fit easily into the stand after making additional trunk cuts. When buying a tree from a retail lot, Wolford recommends going during the day to get a better view. "If you're not putting it up right away, store the tree in an unheated garage or some other area out of the wind," Wolford says. "Make a fresh 1-inch cut on the end and place the tree in a bucket of warm water." Before moving the tree indoors, check for any bird nests or insect egg masses. Cut another 1-inch slice off the stump and place the tree in a sturdy stand with water. Commercially prepared mixes, sugar, aspirin, or other water additives are not necessary. "Research has shown that plain water will keep a tree fresh," Wolford says.

The stand's water reservoir should provide one quart of water for every inch of trunk diameter. Keep the water level several inches above the cut. If the base dries out, resin will cover the cut preventing the tree from absorbing water. After the holidays, consider rehoming the tree. Many communities offer a recycling program, with trees going on to provide habitat for wildlife, enrichment for zoo animals, or to create erosion barriers.

For more information about trees selection and care, visit go.illinois.edu/ChristmasTreeCare.