

Illinois Master Gardener IMAGINE

INFORMATION ♦ NEWS ♦ EDUCATION



Volume 14 No. 2
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COORDINATORS' COMMENTS

It is the time once again when I must submit my reports of your volunteer work to the administration and to the feds. This was an easy task for me this year because you reported your hours via the online volunteer reporting system. We will continue to make improvements in this system- however if you are having problems logging in and reporting your hours- please contact your Coordinator as soon as possible so that he or she can work with the Extension Web Team to correct any problems.

HERE ARE THE STATISTICS FOR YOUR VOLUNTEER WORK IN 2012:

2012 Volunteer Hours= 198,354

2012 Continuing Education Hours= 42,033

Value of a volunteer hour= \$21.79 per hour as specified by the Points of Light and the Independent Sector

Total Value of 2012 Illinois MG Volunteer Hours- \$4.33 million to Illinois citizens

Volunteer Hours by Category of Work:

Gardens= 96,434 Hort Special Events= 26,919 Information Service= 36,170 Marketing Extension= 2197

Non-event Program support= 15,755 Other Extension Support= 5697 Speakers Bureau= 4303

Technical Hort Support= 4563 Therapeutic Hort= 6541 Website= 86

Contacts: adult face-to-face= 53, 152

adult non face-to-face= 3,592

youth= 24, 167

Total Contacts= 80, 911

New Master Gardener trainees in 2012= 470

These stats are impressive and so is the work you are performing in your counties! Thanks to each and every one of you for your volunteer service to the University of Illinois Extension.

100 YEARS OF UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION

University of Illinois Extension will be celebrating 100 years in 2014. As most of you are aware, the Morrill Act of 1862 established land-grant universities to educate citizens in agriculture, home economics, mechanical arts and other practical professions. The Cooperative Extension Service was established in 1914 with the Smith Lever Act. It established the partnership between the agricultural colleges and the U. S. Department of Agriculture to provide for cooperative agricultural extension work. At the heart of the extension work was the effort to develop practical applications of research knowledge and the giving of instruction and practical demonstrations of existing or improved practices in agriculture. Smith Lever mandated that the federal government (through USDA) provide each state with funds based on a population-related formula. Today NIFA distributes these so-called formula grants annually.

The University of Illinois wants to make the public aware that Extension is 100 years old (1914-2014) and celebrate our successes. Extension staff and stakeholders are being asked to share great ways to celebrate our 100 year anniversary. Here are a few suggestions they have received to date: find 100 ways to thank wonderful volunteers; provide recognition for 100 hours of service; send out press releases based on 100 ways Extension can help you; plant 100 or more rows of vegetables for food pantries; 100 dreams recognized because of Extension; plant 100 trees in each county or unit; collect and share 100 Extension 'tips' from the past that are still relevant today; 100 garden tips; 100 healthy snacks; plant 100 seeds; eat a minimum of one vegetable a day for 100 days. I am charging you as Master Gardener volunteers to suggest some other ways to celebrate. Pass your suggestions on to your local MG coordinator- or you may email them to me at modavid@illinois.edu

Monica David, Illinois Master Gardener Coordinator



MG CONFERENCE 2013

SEPTEMBER 19-21, MOLINE ILLINOIS

Join us in Moline at the iWireless Center for Master Gardener conference 2013. A block of sleeping rooms is being held at the nearby Radisson on John Deere Commons. The conference will feature two keynote speakers, lots of breakout sessions and workshops, exciting garden tours (all day and half-day), the annual Master Gardener awards banquet, the annual silent auction (with proceeds to fund MG mini-grants) and a Mississippi river boat cruise on the Celebration Belle.



Keynote speaker **Denise Wiles Adams** is an expert on garden history and has written two books- *Restoring American Gardens: An Encyclopedia of Heirloom Ornamentals* and her new book to be released in April 2013- *American Home Landscapes 1620--2000: A Design Guide to Creating Period Garden Styles*. Denise is a frequent writer for publications such as *Fine Gardening*, *Herbalist*, *Perennial Plants* and *Country Gardens*. Denise's informative lectures focus on perennials of the past for the present and restoring American Gardens. She will share her ideas on garden history as well as the knowledge she has gleaned from her collection of hundreds of antique nursery catalogs.

The conference will also feature a second keynote speaker- Horticulturist, Garden Writer and Director of the Planting Fields Arboretum in New York- **Vincent Simeone**. Vincent studied with Dr. Michael Dirr and Dr. Allan Armitage. He has spoken to many groups nationwide and has appeared on several garden shows including Martha Stewart Living and HGTV. Since 2005 he has published 4 books: *Great Flowering Landscape Shrubs*, *Great Flowering Landscape Trees*, *Great Landscape Evergreens* and *The Wonders of the Winter Landscape*. His favorite subjects for talks are woody plants and historic landscape preservation.



TOURS

Day Trip # 1

Miss Effie's Country Gardens Donahue IA

Miss Effie's is the first U-Pick flower farm in Iowa. The farm, built in 1892, is a perfect example of a Queen Anne Classic-L Victorian farmhouse. Miss Effie's will remind you of your grandparent's farm. Rolling hills, clothes on the line and chickens and ducks roaming our gardens, will take you to a simpler era.

Cedar Ridge Vineyards with lunch at the winery; Cedar Rapids, IA

There will be a tour of the winery and distillery, where the production team makes and bottles all of their wines and spirits. A box lunch will be provided.

Day Trip #2

Intouch Garden Club

The Rock Island County Master Gardeners have been providing knowledge, guidance and assistance for Intouch participants who are interested in plants and gardening via the Intouch Garden Club for approximately fifteen (15) years. This year, the Intouch Master Gardeners have received one of the 2013 Master Gardener mini-grants to build an enabling garden. The project involves revising an existing garden so that it is user-friendly for individuals with special needs and/or disabilities. The goals are to expand access to gardening opportunities, multisensory experiences and the benefits of horticultural therapy.

John Deere & Co. Grounds

We are fortunate to have the John Deere headquarters located in Moline, IL. They will welcome us this morning and give us a guided tour of their grounds which includes a beautiful atrium in one of the buildings, a Koi pond, and 4 greenhouses. Lunch at the TPC Deere Run located in the clubhouse of the PGA Golf Course.

Butterworth Home & Gardens plus the Deere Wyman Home & Gardens

Both of these historic homes once belonged to John Deere's descendants. They now serve as year round sites for quality educational and cultural events and tours for local, national and international visitors.

Day Trip #3

Bickelhaupt Arboretum Clinton, IA

A fourteen acre outdoor museum of select, labeled trees, shrubs, groundcovers, perennials and annual flowers. A Country Garden is just one of nine gardens and collections at Bickelhaupt. Interest is extended through the winter season through the extensive conifer collection and the structural evergreens (including an evergreen "waterfall"), deciduous shrubs and ornamental grasses. After the tour at Bickelhaupt and lunch we will be able to visit 2 beautiful private gardens.

MG CONFERENCE 2013

TOURS CONT.

Morning Tour A1

Meyer's Nursery

Meyer's Landscape & Design was established in 1950. While visiting their nursery you will discover a variety of shrubs, perennials, evergreens and more. Their plants are locally grown and acclimated to our area's soil to insure the hardiest quality of plants.

Arrowhead Ranch

Arrowhead Ranch- Helping troubled youth learn to grow straight and tall. Tour includes a working greenhouse that the Master Gardeners maintain with the youth and a wide variety of vegetables grown not to only educate the youth on horticulture but to assist in building their healthy diet. Included on the grounds is an apple orchard and a variety of ornamental gardens including an arrow shaped pond.

Meyer's Tree Farm

Meyer's have a 192 acre Growing Division in Taylor Ridge, IL. This is where they tend to the nurturing of many of their plants used in landscaping design.

Morning Tour A2

Quad Cities Botanical Garden Rock Island

The Quad City Botanical Center is dedicated to bringing people and plants together in fun and meaningful ways. The Botanical Center is comprised of an indoor tropical atrium, a G-Scale train exhibit, thriving outdoor gardens, and an educational greenhouse.

Mississippi River Visitor Center Arsenal Island Rock Island

The Mississippi River Visitor Center is located on the Rock Island Arsenal at Lock & Dam 15 overlooking the upper Mississippi River. In early spring the river opens to commercial navigation.

Riverside Gardens Moline

The University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners manage a Demonstration Vegetable Garden and Perennial Test Beds to provide local gardeners with a source to observe current and best growing practices in process.

Afternoon Tour B1

Isabelle Bloom Tour Davenport IA

See how Isabelle Bloom figurines are crafted from the locally available materials of concrete and river stone. Her figurines reflect inspiration from the artists' own backyards. Children playing, pets lounging, snowmen standing stout against the Midwest's winter cold.

Vander Veer Park Davenport, IA

Home to a beautiful 33 acre park, an extensive collection of gardens and trees, including many planted during the early 1890's, is inviting visitors to stroll from the Conservatory to the Stone Fountain.

Afternoon Tour B2

Wallace's Garden Center Davenport, IA

Wallace's Garden Center is a family focused business, serving the Quad City area since 1981. They are known for their quality, homegrown plants, and extensive display of giftware, pottery and garden décor. You can see the greenhouses where they do all their growing of seasonal plants and tour the areas where they maintain the plants for sale.

2013 MASTER GARDENER APPAREL ON SALE

It's time once again to order your Master Gardener apparel and merchandise. Along with this newsletter (it is also posted on our website) is a sell sheet. We will still offer the old favorites such as patches, T-shirts, polo shirts, and denim shirts. New items for 2013 include ladies full zip hoodies, men's pullovers and ladies button down polos, to name a few. All items contain an embroidered logo except for T shirts and ladies tank tops which have screen printed logos.

The final day to order apparel is April 12- no late orders will be accepted. All sales are final. Credit cards and checks will be accepted. Apparel will be shipped to your county office about 8 weeks after apparel sales close on April 12.

Go to the website for the online ordering link at-- <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/mg/news/default.cfm>



2012 MINI-GRANT PROJECT SUMMARIES

Following are the summaries of the projects awarded mini-grant funding in 2012.

Vermilion County- Douglas Discovery Garden

In our appreciation of the Master Gardener Mini Grant of 2012, the Vermilion County Unit used the grant to build six raised vegetable beds, as well as provided perennials plants and supplies for our vineyard for Douglas Discovery Garden, 500 Florida St., Danville, IL. We worked in conjunction with the Danville High School Trades Class. They cut the treated lumber, measured the size of each bed and assembled them for us. Compost was purchased to fill the beds. The Boy Scouts helped fill the planters with compost. Planting took place in May during the Great American Cleanup sponsored by Keep America Beautiful. The cleanup event included 50 volunteers of all ages working on various projects in the garden. Neighbors and community volunteers helped us plant the beds. This gave us a wonderful opportunity to instruct in the technique of planting and caring for the vegetables. Maintenance and watering was done by committee members and local neighbors. Produce was used by neighborhood families. We highlighted our efforts at the "Discovery Begins in the Garden" in June held in conjunction with the Master Gardener garden walk. The event showcased our efforts in the vegetable and perennial beds and there was also a dedication for the pergola that had been constructed earlier that spring. We wrapped up the season with the "Fall Family Fun" event in the garden. This was a great event to engage the children and families who had helped in the garden. It included a hayride, wiener roast, and stories about the history of the area. Our goal for 2013 is to continue with construction of 4 to 6 new vegetable beds and sponsor more events in the garden to help serve the community in a more productive manner.

Schuyler-Brown Counties- Rushville Community Garden

Grant money enabled Schuyler-Brown Master Gardeners to add blueberries, blackberries, rhubarb and asparagus to the Rushville Community Garden. New cages purchased enhanced the tomato section and new posts will be used to trellis the blackberries. Master Gardeners added whimsical signs and informative labels throughout the garden. Grant money was used to purchase two professional grade signs to identify the Master Gardener project. Master Gardeners use the garden to demonstrate simple and basic gardening. Their goal is to inspire community members to grow something healthy. Master Gardeners were on hand in the garden at two "Open Houses". One featured herbs and one featured salsa. Community members harvested fresh produce and produce was donated to a local "Chow for Children" program. Thank you for inspiring us!! The grant money was appreciated!

Pike County- Shastid Home Heirloom Garden

Pike County Master Gardeners in cooperation with the local historical society used grant money to enhance the yard of the Shastid House in Pittsfield. The home is one of 8 on a car-radio tour called "Abe Lincoln's Talking House Tour" and it is also a Lincoln Way-side exhibit. Raised bed gardens were established and planted with herbs and heirloom flowers. Heirloom perennial flowers were also planted around the house. A rain barrel was purchased for an authentic –(and needed) water source.

McDonough County- Gardening 101 'Roots and Shoots'

University of Illinois Extension, McDonough County Master Gardeners provided a special interest gardening club called 'Roots and Shoots' for children in grades 3rd-7th. The sessions took place on the grounds of the Extension office in 2 gardens measuring 50 feet by 30 feet each, 2 raised gardens measuring 10 feet in diameter, a fruit tree garden, an ornamental grass garden and a garden for vining vegetables. Twelve sessions were taught and each lasted 90 minutes. These began in early May and concluded in October. Twelve Master Gardeners worked with the children teaching them: the difference between vegetables and flowers, how to select plants, how to plant plants/seeds, the difference between perennials and annuals and the difference between weeds and plants. They also learned about how to design and make container gardens, soil properties, tree planting and gathering seeds. They learned sun/shade plant properties, fertilizing, mulching and the watering needs of all plants. Stones were painted with the names of perennials and placed in front of the plants.

An iPad was purchased and was used to film activities, conduct interviews, photograph plants, research gardening topics and to help in identification of plants and trees. Each child kept a journal of their experiences. The young gardeners planted herbs, deadheaded plants, made bouquets, grew strawberries, identified butterflies and trees, grew pumpkins and roasted their seeds. The final activity will be the planting of a daffodil garden which will bloom in 2013!

2012 MINI-GRANT PROJECT SUMMARIES CONTINUED

Peoria County- Western Avenue Greenway Project

Grant funding allowed us to add signposts for this project. The signposts were designed in lectern fashion for easy reading. They have a bolted Plexiglas top, with a drip edge, which helps protect the signs and makes them easy to change to keep the landscape mapping current. The signs have both the Western Greenway and University of Illinois Extension logos displayed. The signage has been very well received. Western Greenway has a lot of sidewalk traffic and the signs promote a reason to investigate the gardens. Organized garden walks through the Greenway are finding them a useful educational tool. As Master Gardeners we know how nice it is to be able to identify a plant we might want to duplicate in our own garden. We thank the state MG board for helping us do the same for the Western Greenway public.

Madison County- Veggies and Herbs Squared: Gardening in Small Spaces

The objective of our project was to educate and demonstrate to area residents the benefits of square-foot gardening. We began by staking out the area where the square-foot garden would be located in our garden. We also met with a representative of Impact, Inc. (the local Center for Independent Living) to determine the appropriate height for the raised beds with legs in order to accommodate persons with mobility issues. We built eight raised beds measuring 4' x 8' on the ground and four raised beds on saw horses measuring 4' x 4', which were 32" off the ground. Once the raised beds were built, the four accessible raised beds on sawhorses and two of the raised beds on the ground were lined with landscape cloth. These beds were then filled with Mel's Mix, ie. one-third vermiculite, one-third compost and one-third peat moss, no existing soil was utilized. The other six raised beds on the ground, we used existing soil and added peat moss, vermiculite and compost as amendments to the soil. The next step, we added the grids to the raised bed frames. Our first raised bed was planted on 4/18/12 with peas, radishes, broccoli, an artichoke plant, spinach, one roma tomato plant, two bell pepper plants and an heirloom tomato plant. The two raised beds on the ground with Mel's Mix were planted with pepper plants in one bed and big boy tomato plants in the other. The accessible raised beds had grape tomatoes, roma tomatoes, green beans, radishes and beets. The other six raised beds where we did not use Mel's Mix, we planted summer squash, cucumbers, big boy tomato plants, roma tomato plants, grape tomato plants, different herbs, more pepper plants & peas, spinach and beets. We also planted green beans and tomatoes in the traditional vegetable garden style.

In our experiment, we harvested the crops in the boxes with Mel's Mix three weeks sooner than the crops in the ground and two weeks sooner than the crops in the raised beds that had been amended with compost, vermiculite and peat moss. The raised beds with Mel's Mix also produced approximately one-third more harvest than the plants in the ground and one-fourth more harvest than the plants in the other raised beds. Demonstrations were given to garden clubs, garden enthusiasts as well as local organizations throughout the gardening season. We were also able to donate 567.7 lbs. of produce to the local food pantry.

DeKalb County- Sycamore History Museum at the Engh Farm

The DeKalb County Master Gardeners, according to Master Gardener Ron Johnson, had a chance to fulfill our mission statement "Helping Others Learn to Grow" through the mini-grant funds used at Sycamore History Museum in 2012. The Master Gardeners reached out to people of different ages, abilities, and interests over the growing season and saw many grow their gardening vision. Throughout the season free educational seminars were offered to several audiences. Garden Story Time had families looking for appropriate activities for children ages three to six. Master Gardeners offered stories, finger plays, crafts, and songs on the following topics: flower gardens, birds, insects, vegetable gardens, colors of fall, and a pumpkin circle. Grow and Garden to Eat! gave children ages seven to eleven the opportunity to learn gardening basics, garden maintenance, and garden eating. This was in conjunction with Girl Scout volunteers, who with Master Gardeners donated over 300 pounds of fresh produce to a local food pantry from the Sycamore History Museum vegetable garden. Back on the Farm Gardening seminars reached adults looking to expand their knowledge of tomatoes, edible flowers, water-wise gardening, and lawn care. These seminars also acted as a remote horticulture help desk as participants brought samples and questions to discuss with Master Gardeners. Sycamore History Museum's partnership with the Master Gardeners made many significant contributions to the community and we plan to further the relationship in the coming year. The most time-consuming project was preparing the grounds for the Garden Walk. It was the perfect site for refreshments and wash room breaks while giving participants the opportunity to view the many gardens and plantings at the museum. Master Gardeners also participated in the Fall Festival and the museum House Walk. They also worked along NIU students for the "Day of Caring" and with Kiwanis in a service day. In all, the DeKalb County Master Gardeners gave over 300 hours of service to these many projects in 2012. The mini-grant provided funds to enable the Master Gardeners freedom to buy plant materials and solicit donations to make the Museum a place to help the public learn to grow. Planning for the future, the Master Gardeners see the tremendous possibilities to develop the food bank donations into an educational component with clients, begin a horticulture camp for kids, finish landscaping the museum, expand the vegetable garden and orchard and complete their mission statement.

2012 MINI-GRANT PROJECT SUMMARIES CONTINUED

Lake County- Sustainable Education Edible Display Garden

The Lake County Master Gardener Demonstration Garden Committee created a plan to install a Sustainable, Edible Educational Display Garden (S.E.E.D. Garden) to dispel the myth that a person needs a vegetable garden to grow vegetables. Their plan was to incorporate some vegetable plants amongst annuals and perennials to emulate a foundation planting or a garden border with the hope that gardeners would find the use of vegetables in the flower bed less intimidating than a large square usually relegated to the back yard. The plan was developed and priced and written up by the Lake County Master Gardeners as submissions for several grant opportunities. Securing grant funds for the project, the Lake County Master Gardeners fine-tuned their plan and proceeded with the installation of 9 garden beds. Each bed contained perennials, annuals and vegetables. A garden soil mix was brought in to freshen the beds to assure good organic content. Cultural practices consistent with the teachings of Extension were used. Perennials annuals and vegetables were selected from the recommended plant lists from University of Illinois Extension resources. A variety of trellises and plant supports were installed to demonstrate their use. Straw was used as organic mulch for the gardens. The visual impact to the Extension site was remarkable. Extension patrons commented on how beautiful the garden beds were (at all stages of growth) and asked for information. As this was one of the goals, literature was created for the S.E.E.D. Garden and made available in a box next to the garden.

Six formal garden presentations were conducted at the site to promote the use of the mixed beds. Refreshments were made from the garden produce. Thirty-six members of the public, teachers, 4H club members and leaders, and an environmental group enjoyed the presentations. From these presentations, we shared a variety of information including how-to plans for the gardens, lists of plant material, and resources on how to plan their own garden, to name a few. A survey was conducted after each session to determine if the attendees learned anything from our efforts. 100% of respondents named at least one piece of information that was learned from their session. Two 4H SPIN Clubs for gardening are being formed in 2013 and are using the format of the S.E.E.D. Garden while educational components will be presented to them by the Lake County Master Gardeners. By the end of the season, some of the vegetables were so exuberant that some of the annuals and perennials were engulfed. With the small foot print of our gardens, we were able to share 24 pounds of produce with the INEP staff to use in their healthy cooking demonstrations. The remaining produce was donated to our local food bank with our total contribution being 246 pounds. A power point presentation has been prepared to share our information to future groups any time of the year. Lessons were also learned by the Master Gardeners and some changes will be made next year. The extreme heat and lack of rain in 2012 required that the Master Gardeners spend much time monitoring the watering. A different irrigation method will be considered. Also the plant selection will be reviewed as the food bank shared information on what vegetables are appropriate for their use. The overall success of the project assures that next year the SEED garden will return with improvements that we plan to share with even more gardeners.

Coles County- Pilot Project Enabling Garden

On April 21st, the Coles County Master Gardener built a raised garden bed at the Brookstone Estates assisted living facility. This was followed by a Gardening for ALL Abilities presentation at Brookstone. The Master Gardeners provided information to community members and Brookstone residents on how to build their own raised beds as well as building instructions for a table garden. They shared photos of the raised bed they had made at Brookside as well as other types of enabling garden structures and plant selection for small space and raised beds. Residents from Brookstone made decisions on the types of vegetables to be grown in their raised bed this year. At the second educational session, the residents planted their garden. Care of the garden- watering, harvesting, deadheading herbs were taught. Staff at the facility were shown how to oversee continued care of the garden. Overall the garden was a huge success. Staff reported that during the growing season almost every resident at Brookstone was involved in the garden in some way. Many vegetables were harvested and enjoyed by the residents. Due to the heat and age of participants they volunteers had a hard time completing the educational series. Master Gardeners plan to continue with classes for residents in 2013 as well as offering separate classes for the public. With help from the grant the Master Gardeners were able to attend a class on Enabling Gardens at the Chicago Botanic Garden. With their new-found knowledge they were also able to give classes at a local nursing home.

IMPORTANT DATES

March 9: Russell Allen Garden Day, Meyers-Evans Student Center Lincoln College, Lincoln. 9 am to 1pm. The keynote speaker will be Dianne Noland, producer of *Midwest Gardener* on WILL-TV who will talk on "Great Perennial Combinations". Breakout sessions include Container Gardening; Herb Gardening; Horticulture Happenings at the IL. Executive Mansion; Native Plants; Cooking with Herbs and Hummingbirds. Registration fee is \$10 before March 2 and \$12 at the door. Sponsored by the Logan Co. MGs. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/lms> 217-732-8289.

March 9: Ready..Set..Grow, Sauk Valley College, Dixon. 8:30 am to 3 pm. Sessions on Sustainable Landscaping; Vertical Gardening; Rain Barrels; Beekeeping; Seed Starting and much more. The keynote address will be "Ornamental Edible Gardens" by Mark Dwyer, Director of the Janesville WI Rotary Gardens. Registration is \$40 & includes breakfast, lunch and door prizes. Sponsored by the Ogle, Lee and Whiteside Co. MGs. 815-732-2191 or 815-835-2070. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/bdo>

March 11, April 29, May 6, 13, 20: Homegrown Challenge: Vegetable Gardening Classes, Extension Office, Milan. 5:30-6:30 pm. Free classes for the beginner gardener. Vegetable classes taught by MGs from Rock Island Co. <https://webs.extension.uiuc.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=7521> or call 309-756-9978

March 14: Growing ProHort Workshop, Illinois Central College, East Peoria. Day long workshop includes speakers and lunch. Presented in partnership with the IL. Green Industry and Extension. Watch for details at <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/fmpt> or 309-543-3308.

March 15-17: Illinis Indigenous Plants Symposium, John Logan College, Cartersville. Free guided excursions in Giant City Park and Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge. Keynote speaker Dr. Gregory Mueller, Chicago Botanic Garden will speak on Mushrooms. Breakout sessions on Biodiversity, Urban Forests, Landscaping with Natives, Native Insects and Native Irises, Lilies and Orchids. Cost is \$20 and includes a box lunch. Vendors will be present. Register at <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/fjprw> or call 618-687-1727.

March 13-April 22: Spring Series of Horticulture, Extension Office, Milan. Monday evenings 7-9 pm. Classes on a variety of topics including winemaking, conifers, mixed beds, plants for pollinators and cooking with honey. Six workshops for \$25 or \$5 each. Sponsored by the Rock Island Co. MGs. <https://webs.extension.uiuc.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=8011> or call 309-756-9978

March 16: Gardener's Day, Western IL University Student Union, Macomb. 9 am to 3 pm. Experts from across the region will speak on New Plant Releases; Designing for Extreme Weather; Creating Certified Wildlife Backyard Habitats; Local Foods; a tour of the WIU living library with over 2,000 plants and much more. Registration fee of \$40 includes break out sessions, lunch and vendors. Sponsored by the McDonough County MGs. 309-837-3939.

March 23: Gardener's Day, Morgan County Extension Office, Jacksonville. 9 am to Noon. Topics include Pollinator Plants; Rain Gardens and EAB. In addition there will be a rain barrel workshop in the afternoon for an additional charge. \$10 per person. Sponsored by the Morgan and Greene Co. MGs. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/ccgms/> or 217-243-7424.

March 23: Weekend Gardener, Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, Belleville. 8:30 am to 2:45 pm. Choose from 16 exciting workshops including Wildflowers, Designing Containers, Attracting Butterflies; Tomatoes; Entryway Designs, Turfgrass and more. Fee is \$40 and includes lunch. 618-939-3434.

April 6: Gardeners Big Day, Dickson Mounds Museum, Lewiston. 8 am to 4 pm. \$25 includes lunch, your choice of gardening seminars, workshops, vendors, displays and much more. Sponsored by the Fulton County MG. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/fmpt/> or 309-547-3308.

April 6: Gardening Insights, Richland Community College, Decatur. Keynote speaker, Felder Rushing, will present "Slow Gardening-Savoring what you do with all your senses, through all seasons." Eleven different breakout sessions will be offered, including Hummingbirds, Heirloom Seeds, Floral Arranging, and more. Registration fee is \$25, which includes keynote address, 4 sessions and lunch. Sponsored by the Macon Co. MGs. Register at <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/dmp>

IMPORTANT DATES CONT.

April 6: Gardenfest 2013, McHenry County College, Crystal Lake. Keynote speaker is Bruce Spangenberg, Horticulture Department Chair at the college. The day long event offers seminars and workshops in all areas of horticulture. Sponsored by MCC and the McHenry Co. MGs. Contact Amy Carzoli at acarzoli@mchenry.edu or 815-455-8764.

April 11: April in Paris, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Paris. Four educational sessions include: 'Tips for Vegetable Gardeners' by Chuck Voigt; 'New Varieties and Old Favorites' by Marilyn Miller; 'Natives in Modern Landscaping' by Dyke Barkley and 'Growing and Using Culinary Herbs' by Deborah Lee. Program fee is \$25 and includes lunch. Vendors present. Presented by the Edgar Co. MGs. 217-465-8585. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/cce/>

April 13: Gardeners' Day, Allerton Park Visitor Center, Monticello. 9 am to noon. Educational sessions include Evergreen Problems & Solutions; Poisonous Plants; and Herb Gardening. Registration fee is \$10, which includes sessions and snacks. Bring a picnic lunch to have on the property and enjoy a guided tour of the gardens after. Sponsored by the Piatt Co. MGs. Register at <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/dmp>

April 25: EAB Management, Blackhawk Community Education Center, Kewanee. 10 am to 2 pm. No fee but reservations are required by 4-23 for lunch. <https://webs.extension.uiuc.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=7417> to register or call 309-756-9978.

June 13-15: American Hosta Society National Convention, Sheraton Milwaukee Brookfield Hotel, Milwaukee WI. Educational sessions and tours of gardens. \$139 per person. <http://www.2013ahsconvention.com>

July 13: Gardenwalk and Plant Sale, DeKalb. Eight unique gardens and a "point of interest" have been chosen for this year's event. The BIG plant sale includes a Garden Boutique and a Master Gardener Help desk. Tickets for the Gardenwalk will be \$10 in advance or \$12 on the day of the event. The plant sale will be held at the DeKalb County Center for Agriculture, Sycamore, IL. For the latest information go to -- <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/bdo/> or call the Extension office at 815-758-8194.

2013 MINI GRANT WINNERS

Thanks to all the counties who submitted applications for the 2013 Master Gardener mini-grants. We received 24 applications with a total request for over \$16,000. Unfortunately- the state advisory committee could only fund 13 of those projects as our budget was around \$6,000. This figure is based on the amount generated from the annual silent auction held at state conference. The Master Gardener state advisory committee selected the winners based on the completeness of the application; the project's consistency with Master Gardener goals; practicality, usefulness and relevance of the project; potential number of people impacted and the educational value of the project. ***Congratulations to the winners!***

County	Project	Amount
Cook	McKinley Park Community Garden	\$300
DuPage	Community Garden	\$500
Ford/Iroquois	Onarga Academy	\$900
Jefferson	Gardening for the Homeless	\$300
Lee	Three Sisters Children's Garden	\$200
Macoupin	Royal Lakes- Roots in Our Community	\$750
McDonough	Gardening 101- Roots and Shoots	\$300
Monroe	JMG Camp	\$500
Ogle	Sensory/Butterfly Garden	\$500
Rock Island	Intouch Enabling Garden	\$1000
Schuyler-Brown	Rushville Community Garden	\$175
Warren	Garden Grubbies	\$500
Woodford	Yellowjacket Vegetable Gardening	\$600

IOWA AND MINNESOTA MASTER GARDENERS HELP WITH BIOCHAR RESEARCH

As part of the CenUSA Bioenergy research project, Extension Master Gardeners in Iowa and Minnesota are doing research to explore to see if biochar makes a good soil amendment for growing flowers and vegetables in the home garden.

What is biochar? In a nutshell it is a new term for an old product ... charcoal. The soil scientists working on the CenUSA Bioenergy project are really good about explaining the differences between biochar based on the type of biomass it's processed from or the way it is actually processed. Because not all biochar is created equal, when people get excited about wanting to add biochar to their gardens (or garden soils, technically), I try to encourage them to wait until there is more research and some credible labeling and standardization of biochar products before diving in. There is a lot of hype and misinformation that's out there. I can't imagine what would happen if people started adding biochar to their soil every year much like fertilizer... if too much is added, it could prove to be pretty negative on the soil (with long term consequences). Different materials and processing lead to variable biochar outcomes.

Since biochar is a form of carbon, it can last in the soil for decades (depending on how it's processed). Biochar is a complicated product. It can be processed from many materials. There are many ways of processing it which also produces differing results. When those variables are combined with a variety of soils, it results in many different outcomes. I have learned that in current research projects, there are some plants that have shown beneficial results from using biochar such as flowers or leafy kale and in other cases there were negative results such as tomatoes and in some trials, adding biochar as a soil amendment made no substantial difference in plant growth.

With that said, there is still a lot of research that needs to take place before using biochar to grow flowers and vegetables in the home garden. Some careful research has shown that in some soils, especially sandy or nutrient-depleted soils, biochar has shown improved plant yields on select crops. This may be due to better soil structure and improved moisture and nutrient retention from the use of biochar. On the flip side, there are some biochars that have been tested and had some negative results – showing that it may actually rob the nutrients from already healthy soils, and some biochars may actually possess potentially toxic chemicals. Researchers on our project and elsewhere are also trying to measure if there is a net benefit of reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide when it's weighed against the amount of carbon needed to produce it.

To learn more about this research on biochar visit the national Extension Master Gardener blog at <http://blogs.extension.org/mastergardener/>

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