

NURSERY SCHOOL

Lessons in Gardening

Saturday, February 21, 2026

8 AM - 3 PM

Vibrant Arena, Moline, IL



Illinois Extension's 27th Annual Gardening Symposium

Celebrate a day of learning, inspiration, and connection!

You are invited to University of Illinois Extension's signature event organized by our dedicated **Master Gardeners**. For 27 years now, hundreds of gardeners have gathered together for this popular winter symposium to learn from experts on a wide range of topics in horticulture - ornamentals, edible plants, environmental stewardship, and more! The event brings together experts and educators from a cross section of program areas to enlighten and inspire.

Please join us! Start your day with a thought-provoking keynote on **Growing Resilience in the Urban Forest**, exploring how climate change is reshaping our cities—and how we can respond with innovative strategies to protect and restore our community's green spaces.

Choose your own adventure by selecting two morning breakout sessions tailored to your gardening interests with six unique choices. Enjoy a buffet lunch, included in your registration, as you connect with fellow plant enthusiasts. Shop unique offerings from local garden and craft vendors.

Close your day with an inspiring keynote on Plants of Concern, a pioneering community science initiative working to protect Illinois' rarest plant species. Discover how everyday citizens are making a lasting impact—and how you can be part of it. The event ends at 2:30 with drawings for prize baskets donated by our vendors.

Don't miss out! Treat yourself to a unique day celebrating, exploring, connecting, and learning about topics that interest you! **Save \$10 when you register by Jan 31.** Sign up at go.illinois.edu/NurserySchool2026 We look forward to seeing you there!



Registration Details

Early Bird Rate: \$60 — through January 31, 2026

Standard Rate: \$70 — Feb 1 to Feb 15, 2026

go.illinois.edu/NurserySchool2026



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

University of Illinois Extension

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Nursery School Sessions

Morning Keynote: 8:30 AM (includes morning coffee and rolls)

Rebuilding Our Forests Amid Climate Challenges

Our urban forests are facing new pressures from a changing climate, pests, and other environmental stressors. This session will explore how these challenges are affecting trees in our cities and towns—and what we can do about it. Learn practical, forward-thinking strategies and tools to help protect, manage, and restore resilient urban forests for the future.



Justin Vozzo,
Illinois Extension Forestry Specialist, and ISA Certified Arborist

Justin holds degrees in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences from the University of Illinois and applies this expertise to statewide forest management, urban forestry, and ecological restoration projects. He brings a diverse background in education, consulting, and research, along with experience at the U.S. Forest Service and the National Ecological Observatory Network.



Breakout One: 10 - 11 AM

Select one from the following:

Ornamental Horticulture



Soak it Up: Rain Gardens in the Home Landscape

Emily Swihart, Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator

Discover how to manage stormwater beautifully and effectively in your own yard. This session highlights practical, homeowner-friendly techniques with a special focus on rain gardens—what they are, how they work, and how to design one that fits your landscape. Learn how to assess your site, choose the right plants, and create a garden that's both functional and visually appealing.

Edible Plants



Harvesting Happiness: Growing Fruit Trees at Home

Elizabeth Wahle, Illinois Extension Specialist, Agriculture and Agribusiness

There is no better feeling of self-achievement than successfully harvesting quality fruit from your own backyard trees. But to get to harvest, you need to manage and protect your trees season long. Join Elizabeth as she discusses the main challenges to bringing a crop to fruition, most especially integrated pest management and cultivar selection for apple, pear, and cherry.

Nature and Environment



Planting Herbs to Attract Pollinators

Jennifer Fishburn, Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator

Culinary herbs do more than flavor your meals—they can also invite pollinators into your garden. Learn how to select and grow herbs that attract bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects, while adding beauty and fragrance to your landscape.

Nursery School Sessions

Breakout Two: 11:15 am-12:15 pm

Select one from the following:

Reclaiming Runaway Landscape

Chris Enroth, Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator

Have a garden that's gone wild? Explore practical tips for taking back an overgrown, chaotic landscape. Learn design strategies, effective weeding tools, use of mulch, and other techniques. Finally, get guidance on how to decide which plants need to go and which ones can be tolerated.



Ornamental Horticulture

Explore the Foods, Flavors, and Health Benefits of the Mediterranean Diet

Kristin Bogdonas, Illinois Extension Food and Nutrition educator



Edible Plants

The Mediterranean style of eating is a one of the world's most researched and celebrated healthy eating patterns. Explore the origins and science behind it. Enjoy flavorful samples and take home practical tips to bring Mediterranean-inspired choices into your daily routine.

Support Biodiversity by Landscaping with Native Midwestern Shrubs

Rob Liva, Ecological Land Management Consultant



Nature and Environment

Native shrubs are a diverse group of plants ranging in size, shape, color, and habit, making them an excellent source of seasonal interest in your home landscape. These plants offer shelter and food for pollinators and birds that many garden-varieties do not. Learn characteristics and preferences of native shrubs and how they can connect your property to the magic of the broader wooded ravines of the Quad Cities.

Lunch 12:15-1:15 pm: Complimentary Buffet

Visit the vendors to win a Prize Basket!

Visit the vendors over lunch break.

Fill out your "library card" as you "check out" the vendors and earn entry to the vendors' giveaway held after the last session.



Closing Keynote 1:15 PM

Plants of Concern

Celebrate nearly 25 years of rare plant monitoring through the groundbreaking Plants of Concern program!



With almost 30% of U.S. plant species at risk of extinction, this initiative brings together volunteers, scientists, and landowners to protect Illinois' rarest plants. Learn how community science is driving conservation, climate research, and habitat restoration—and discover how you can help. This session also highlights the unique natural landscapes and rare flora of Northwestern Illinois.

Grant Fesseler, Northwestern Illinois Plants of Concern Coordinator



Grant Fesseler, a Quad Cities botanist, is putting his ecology degree to use as the Regional Coordinator for the Plants of Concern program. He oversees rare plant monitoring in Northwestern Illinois and is cataloging the vascular flora of Rock Island County.

Prize Drawing 2:30 PM

Don't miss this day of learning and inspiration!



Register Today!

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