

Connecting our local residents to nature

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Nature Programming for Families

With the return to in-person programming, the NREE team is emphasizing reaching new audiences in all communities of the unit. A needs assessment showed that many residents of the counties enjoy spending time outside with their family, so new multi-generational programming is being developed.

All About Caterpillars

New in 2022, we partnered with local libraries in the 5 counties to deliver educational programs for youth. Youth learned about caterpillars while parents and grandparents received resources on pollinators, native plants, and trees. Local libraries were very enthusiastic about the partnership.

77 youth
51 adults
9 libraries



Magnificent Moths

Magnificent Moths encouraged families to learn about moths during National Moth Week. Fifty-five participants visited 12 stations to learn what a moth is, how to attract them at night, what their caterpillars look like, and more. Master Naturalist volunteers and Extension staff engaged with youth while dressed up as moths.



Field Trainings

Educator Erin Garrett specializes in plant identification of grasses and prairie wildflowers. She is invited often to share her knowledge during field days and webinars.



She developed and delivered a popular webinar series, Which Grass is Which? Her five-part video series had 1,300 live participants. Recordings of the webinars have received an additional 15,000 views.

Her recently created blog, Grasses at a Glance, is providing an asynchronous learning opportunity.



Erin identifying a grass at a prairie plant and grass identification training for NRCS professionals.



Erin talks about grass identification resources at a grass identification field day held as a regional Master Naturalist learning opportunity.

Master Gardeners

The Illinois Master Gardener program is a volunteer training program whose mission is "helping others learn to grow". Master Gardeners provide service to their community by sharing their special interests in horticulture and the skills they acquire during training.

Unit 27 has 8 active Master Gardener volunteers this year, who are involved in several volunteer projects.



Master Gardeners assisted with pollinator garden maintenance at a partner site's educational garden.



Master Gardeners prepared over 150 herbarium specimens for the Plants of Concern program.



Master Gardeners care for the unit's two food donation gardens.

Master Naturalists

The Illinois Master Naturalist program is a volunteer training program that provides science-based educational opportunities to connect people to nature and help them become environmental stewards.

Unit 27 has 15 active Master Naturalist volunteers this year, who are involved in numerous volunteer projects.



Master Naturalists removed over 2,800 pounds of trash from the Shawnee National Forest and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service property in 2022.



Master Naturalists pulled 160 pounds of garlic mustard and 3,250 Japanese honeysuckle saplings. These two invasive species cause major problems in our forests if not removed.