

ecology action center news



Volume 13, Issue 2

Summer 2015

Don't Miss the 13th Annual Yard Smart Garden Walk June 27—Sign up Now

By Adrienne Ohler, EAC Board Member

Join the Ecology Action Center for the thirteenth annual Yard Smart Garden Walk on Saturday, June 27, 2015. This free event features beautiful and functional gardens in our community that protect the environment, create a healthy and inviting space for animals and people alike, and use little to no synthetic chemicals in the process.

The morning walk takes place from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. with this year's walk focused on public spaces and community gardens. Bill Davison from the University of Illinois Extension will provide a Question & Answer style presentation on the newly planted Food Forest and beneficial plants at One Normal Plaza Park following the tour, from noon to one. Lunch is provided.



This year's event features a plant and garden tool exchange. Please bring plants or garden tools to give away (for free), and maybe you'll find something you need that someone else donates!

The Yard Smart Garden Walk is free and open to the public; however, a \$5 donation to offset the cost of lunch is appreciated. Register by June 25, to receive your details on the event. You can register online at ecologyactioncenter.org or call 309-454-3169.

Participants should bring their own reusable water bottles for the lunch and Q&A talk; the lunch is a zero waste event. Participants are encouraged to carpool during the tour to reduce pollution and conserve energy.

This garden walk promotes the Ecology Action Center's Yard Smart program which encourages local gardeners to reduce the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, to conserve natural resources such as water and fossil fuels, and to make room for wildlife in their yards. Yard Smart Certification recognizes the efforts of people in the community who use ecologically sustainable practices to maintain their yards, and who realize their lawn, garden, and landscaping decisions impact and affect the health of the entire community.

More information on the Yard Smart program as well as free resource fact sheets to help you become more Yard Smart are available at yardsmart.org.

Please join us on June 27th, to see some of the beautiful results of the time and love our neighbors and friends have put into creating healthy, safe, and functional yards and gardens, and find some inspiration for your own yard in the process!

Mark Your Calendar

June 23, 5:30 -7 pm
Rain Barrel Workshop
sign up online
ecologyactioncenter.org

June 27, 9 a.m - 12 pm
Yard Smart Garden Walk
sign up online
ecologyactioncenter.org

September 26
We Care Twin Cities Half Marathon
sign up online
wecaretwincitiesmarathon.org

Fall 2015 Date TBA
McLean County
Household Hazardous
Waste Collection
HHWmclean.org

Art in Nature

The McLean County Arts Center and the ParkLands Foundation announce an open call, all ages exhibition of art inspired by the nature of ParkLands. **Art in Nature** will be in the MCAC's Armstrong Gallery from August 14 - September 12, 2015 with an opening reception on Friday, August 14 from 5 to 7pm.

Youth and adults are encouraged to submit one artwork in any media under the size of 24" in any direction. For more information, visit www.mcac.org.



Genuine "Yard Smart" landscaping flourishes at EAC

By Carl Roberts, EAC Volunteer

The yard surrounding the Ecology Action Center's (EAC) Hewett House has been transformed into a living exhibit of the ecologically friendly landscaping techniques taught in the EAC's "Yard Smart" program. Walking along a path through the yard, EAC members and others can see and learn about several "Yard Smart" principles being successfully utilized.

Informative signs and diagrams along the path explain what is being exhibited in each portion of the yard. The natural exhibits range from an actual rain garden to an area landscaped with native, Central-Illinois-prairie vegetation. After seeing the exhibits in person, visitors can refer to the "[Yard Smart](#)"¹ section of the EAC's website for step-by-step instructions for implementing these techniques at home and becoming "Yard Smart" certified.

Expertise used to develop authentic landscaping.

The EAC redeveloped its landscaping in collaboration with Cathy Bilow, owner of [Accent Nature LLC](#)² in Roanoke. With 30 years experience designing landscaping, Cathy specializes in developing environmentally friendly lawns and gardens.

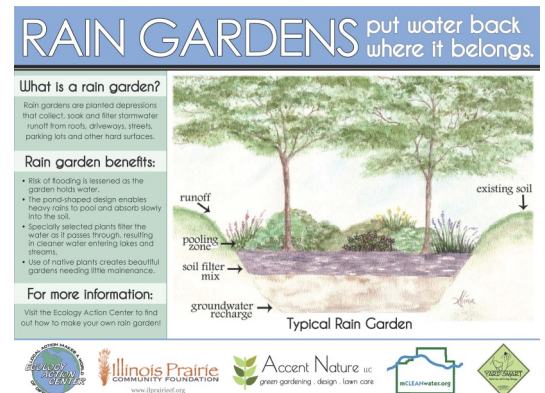
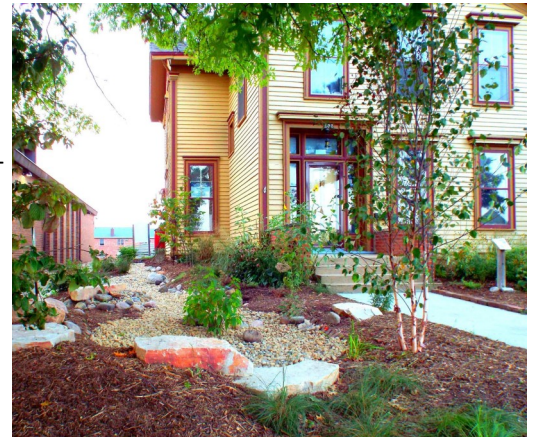
The landscape that Cathy designed incorporated several different techniques for saving water and implementing environmentally friendly gardening. These techniques are taught in the EAC's "Yard Smart" program, and Cathy has used them over the years to design landscaping for home gardens and lawns throughout central Illinois. Several of these homes have been featured in the EAC's annual "Yard Smart Garden Walk."

Cathy's model for the EAC landscaping was inspired by the exhibits at the world-renowned [Missouri Botanical Garden](#)⁴ in St. Louis. A grant from the [Illinois Prairie Community Foundation](#)⁵ in Bloomington helped fund the project. While the landscaping looks complete at this time, Cathy is still working on enhancing the project. Her next step will be the creation of a pear-tree fence on the wall between the Hewett House and the bank next door.

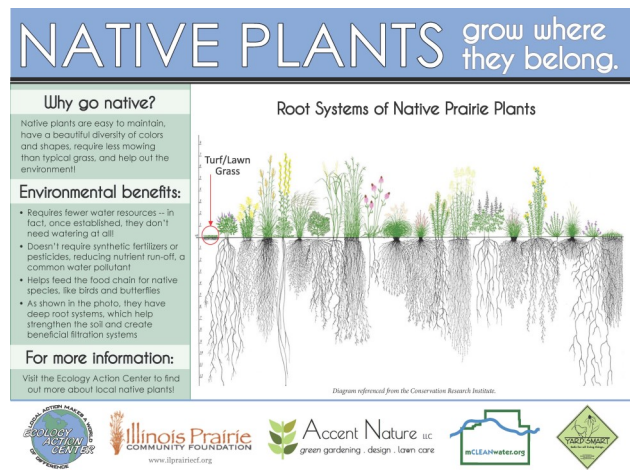
Highlights of the EAC Landscaping

The following are some of the "Yard Smart" exhibits included in the Hewett House's Landscaping:

1. **Rain Garden:** A pathway of pebbles slows down the flow of heavy rainwater to help prevent flooding. The water flows into a pool surrounded by large rocks, where the water settles until it can be absorbed slowly by the soil.



- Native Plants** are easy to maintain, require less water than other plants, grow without synthetic fertilizers and produce deep roots that strengthen the soil.
- Chemical-free alternatives** include compost, organic fertilizer, grass clippings and non-polluting herbicides.
- Rain barrels** are easy to use, inexpensive, reduce water usage and limit rainwater from washing pollutants into storm drains.
- Composting** provides an excellent soil enhancer, reduces the use of chemical fertilizers, cuts down on greenhouse gas emissions and prevents the accumulation of organic waste that would use limited landfill space.
- Geothermal heating and cooling** uses energy from the earth to help provide heating in the winter (when the ground is warmer than the air) and cooling in the summer (when the ground is cooler than the air).



You can grow a certified “Yard Smart” garden at your home

You can make a difference by becoming involved in the EAC’s “Yard Smart” program. “Yard Smart” is a voluntary effort to help reduce synthetic pesticide use, conserve natural resources and make room for wildlife. The program encourages yard-care practices that are safe for children, pets and the environment.

The “[Yard Smart](#)”⁶ Program recognizes local homeowners who use ecologically sustainable practices in their yard care. Homeowners voluntarily certify their yard as Yard Smart through a simple application available on the EAC’s website at [yardsmart.org](#).



Visit other natural gardens as part of the “Yard Smart” garden walk

The EAC will be hosting its Thirteenth Annual Yard Smart Garden Walk on **June 27, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon**. On this walk, you will see beautiful and functional yards that protect our environment, benefit wildlife and use few or no synthetic chemicals.

The Yard Smart Garden Walk is free and open to the public; however, a \$5 donation to offset the cost of lunch is appreciated. More information and registration are available on the [EAC website](#)⁷ or over the phone at (309) 454-3169.

The registration deadline is June 25, but registering now before all the places are taken is advisable.

For more information about the Ecology Action Center

More information is available on the EAC website⁸ or by calling (309) 454-3169. We encourage you to stop by the EAC’s Hewett House at 202 West College Ave. in Normal and see the “Yard Smart” landscaping for yourself. It might inspire you to implement some of these environmentally friendly techniques in your own yard.

Footnotes

- <http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org/yard-smart/>
- <http://www.accentnature.net/>
- <http://islwe.org/>
- <http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/>
- <http://www.ilprairiecf.org/>
- <http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org/yard-smart/>
- <https://www.ecologyactioncenter.org/event/yard-smart-garden-walk-save-the-date/>
- <https://www.ecologyactioncenter.org/>

Beyond the Basics — Progressing Towards Zero Waste

by Kris Hall, Assistant Director of Education

Have you heard? It is predicted that the McLean County Landfill will be full in June of 2017. Let's allow that to sink in for a minute. In two short years, we will not have a local resource for storing our garbage. (Because that's what's really happening – our garbage gets stored under the ground. Only a very small amount of it decomposes.) This means that the municipalities and private companies which haul and dump our garbage will have to make plans for a different destination. "Away" will get more expensive.

It almost seems too late to do anything about this, but it's never too late to make positive changes. The fourth graders I visit around McLean County have this one figured out: in order to solve the garbage problem we need to make LESS garbage.

The EAC has embraced a concept called "Zero Waste" as we have planned special events the past few years. Starting with our 40th anniversary celebration in 2011, we have been mindful of waste in the early steps of planning an event. An anniversary reception seems to call for a cake, right? Well, that would mean plates and forks would be required. What could we do instead? We chose to have the bakery make us a huge decorated brownie instead. Brownies can be cut, placed on a napkin, and eaten with fingers. No dishes, and the paper napkins were compostable (note—not in the trash, but in the compost pile).

Our next challenge was bigger events. The Illinois Sustainable Living and Wellness Expo draws several thousand people each spring to the Shirk Center. We encouraged our vendors to distribute items with minimal packaging, we used washable dishes at the café, and we started transitioning to electronic versions of the program guide, so that fewer had to be printed. We had recycle bins and compost bins, and at the end of the day, less than one bag of garbage was headed for the landfill!

An even bigger success has been the We Care Twin Cities races. Held each September, four races over a two day period attract well over a thousand runners, spectators and volunteers. And yet, we still managed to produce minimal landfillable waste. Reusable Hydrapouches are used instead of paper cups at water stops, all refreshment waste was recyclable or compostable, we sent the Tyvek race bib numbers back to the company for recycling, and we even re-purposed old trophies for awards!

Zero Waste isn't just an idea for businesses or events. While it's tough to actually get your garbage down to zero, everyone can make minor changes which can make a big difference. Here are a few ideas:

- ⇒ Buy thin, washable plastic plates for picnics. These usually come in packs of 4 for a dollar at discount stores; they are sturdy enough to last a long time. Take a plastic shopping bag along on the picnic, put the dirties in there, tie up the bag, and take them home to wash. You can also use metal silverware and washable plastic cups.
- ⇒ Throw a few old dishtowels in the picnic hamper so you won't have to use lots of paper towels.
- ⇒ Pay attention to packaging. Avoid the single serve packs for lunchboxes – place the right size serving into a washable container instead.
- ⇒ It's convenient to fill the cooler with drinks in cans and plastic bottles. Be sure to take the empties home to recycle if there is not a recycle bin at the park.

Just remember: nearly everything you throw in the garbage will end up in a landfill for decades if not centuries to come. If we all make better choices about what we use and how we discard it, we can save precious resources on our planet.



EAC Welcomes New Staff Member Marcus Ricci

by Marcus Ricci, Assistant Director of Energy and Water



Greetings! I am very excited to join the Ecology Action Center as the new Assistant Director of Energy and Water. I bring to the position a diverse background in multiple environmental disciplines.

I am a resource manager with the eye of an urban planner and the heart of a conservationist. I am interested and experienced in a wide range of resource management disciplines, from stormwater management, erosion control and land conservation, to renewable energy generation and energy conservation and efficiency. I started off my education in the

Environmental Science program at Bowling Green State University focusing on land management, and followed that up with a Masters of Biology during which I developed a computer model to locate remnant and restorable oak savannas in the Great Black Swamp region of northwestern Ohio. I recently completed my Masters of Urban Planning at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; my final project was drafting a Zero Waste Plan for the Urbana-Champaign campus which they are currently incorporating into the 2015 update of their Climate Action Plan.

Prior to coming to the EAC, I was a Building Energy Specialist at the Smart Energy Design Assistance Center, where I performed building energy audits throughout Illinois at libraries, schools, hospitals, and special sites including the State Fairgrounds and the Marseilles Training Center. I also served as their Sustainability Coordinator, expanding their recycling program and starting composting and reusable linen programs, so I am really excited about the EAC's great resources on recycling, reusing and repurposing.

I have served as a county planner focusing on agricultural preservation and community development, as a land trust director preserving working farmlands and natural areas, and as a urban conservationist educating and enforcing local, state and federal regulations on sediment and erosion control.

I am happy to be able to bring all of my past education and experience together into these great programs at the EAC that are designed to conserve two of the world's vital resources: energy and water. Our energy program staff have already completed almost fifty home energy assessments for our BN Energy Bright residential program with ten more waiting to be scheduled – we hope your home will be next! We also are in the process of launching the small business component of BN Energy Bright— if you own or manage a small business in Bloomington-Normal we can help you save energy and improve your bottom line.

I hope to meet many of you at a presentation, workshop, or event in the near future. If you are interested in learning more about our BN Energy Bright Program, scheduling a low-cost energy assessment, or have some questions about energy or water protection, please email me at mricci@ecologyactioncenter.org, or call me at (309)454-3169, extension 15. My friends will tell you that I like to share information, so be prepared for questions, and answers!

McLean County HHW Fund



The EAC is planning a fall 2015 locally funded Household Hazardous Waste Collection for McLean County residents in partnership with the City of Bloomington, Town of Normal, and McLean County, among others. The event will be held in Bloomington-Normal at a location to be announced.

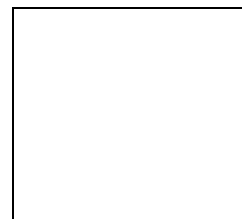
This one-day event will cost at least \$160,000. While the City of Bloomington, Town of Normal and McLean County have agreed to provide a significant portion of the funding for HHW collection in the fall of 2015, private contributions are necessary for the remaining portion. With your support we can bring back another HHW Collection to McLean County.

Please contribute to the McLean County HHW Fund. Donations may be made online or by mail. Please make checks out to "Ecology Action Center" and mail to: Ecology Action Center, Att: HHW Fund, 202 W College Ave, Normal, IL 61711. All contributions are tax deductible.

HHWmclean.org



Ecology Action Center
202 W. College Ave.
Normal, IL 61761
ecologyactioncenter.org
309-454-3169



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EAC Staff

Michael Brown
Executive Director

Kris Hall
Assistant Director of
Education

Marcus Ricci
Assistant Director of
Energy/Water

Ruth Ann Lipic
Radon Program
Coordinator

Gary Kamplain
Program Assistant

Larissa Armstrong
Program Assistant

Glen Wetterow
Program Assistant

Sally Stoneking
Administrative Assistant

Carlo Robustelli
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