



ECOLOGY NEWS

ACTION CENTER

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BNCOMMUNITY
COMPOSTING.ORG



RECYCLEBN.ORG



BNenergybright.org



TREE.CORPS.ORG



mCLEANwater.org



sugar creek
stewards

Join us for the 22nd annual Yard Smart Garden Walk

The Ecology Action Center is holding its 22nd annual Yard Smart Garden Walk on Saturday, July 19, 2025 from 9:00am-1:00pm. The FREE tour highlights beautiful and functional yards in our community that protect our environment, benefit wildlife, and use few or no synthetic chemicals. Registration is required at ecologyactioncenter.org/annual-yard-smart-garden-walk/

This year's tour features multiple home gardens of different sizes and styles which all protect our water and provide a safe place for people, pets, and wildlife. You will see a variety of native plants, yard smart methods, and you might see a garden fairy or two! The walk will conclude with lunch and a talk from the Illinois State Climatologist, Dr. Trent Ford who will be discussing gardening and yard maintenance in the face of climate change. An EAC rain barrel and compost bin will additionally be raffled off at the conclusion of the walk.

Photo by Alyssa Garvin

Participants should bring their own reusable water bottles, and dress for the weather. Participants are encouraged to carpool to conserve fossil fuels and reduce pollution, so check with your friends/family to see if they are going, and consider riding to the event with them. This event is free, but our staff works hard to make this event happen, so we do encourage donations to help offset the cost of the event and lunch and to help the Ecology Action Center continue its efforts to promote a healthy local environment! We will send event details to registered participants closer to the event date.

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The Yard Smart program promotes a more sustainable approach to lawn and garden maintenance. Working with nature to build a healthier ecosystem in both the soil below ground, the yard above ground, and reducing pollutants that runoff into our local water supplies will create a more beautiful, sustainable and safer environment for everyone—children and adults, pets and wildlife. The program encourages local homeowners 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 local homeowners who use ecologically sustainable practices in maintaining their yards and who realize that their lawn, garden and landscaping decisions affect the health of the whole community. More information on the Yard Smart program as well as a set of free resource fact sheets is available at **YardSmart.org**.

Grow Solar, Not Your Energy Bills

The EAC is excited to announce the return of Grow Solar Bloomington-Normal for 2025, after a 4 year hiatus. This is a group-buy solar program, which uses the power of buying in bulk to lower the cost of solar. The more people sign up, the cheaper the cost is for everyone. Residents of Bloomington-Normal, McLean County, and surrounding counties are all eligible to sign up for this program. There will be informational sessions called "Power Hours" that provide more information starting in July. With rising energy prices, and incentives still in place, now is a better time than ever to adopt solar for your home! Learn more at growsolar.org/BN



Pharmaceutical Drop-Off and Recycling

By EAC Intern: Hadley McKenzie

When disposing of unused medications and supplements, it is important to do so in a way that doesn't put other people, children, animals, or the environment at risk. Flushing medications down the toilet, sink, or other drain is harmful to the environment, as they will end up in our local water; medications in waterways harms wildlife, natural water chemistry, soil composition, and can be an additional risk if it ends up in a source of drinking water. When thrown in the trash, medications can be seen and taken by adults or children. Additionally, landfills are not equipped to handle medications which can lead to soil and ground water contamination.

To avoid these situations, it is best to properly dispose of medications and supplements at approved drop-off locations. The Bloomington-Normal area has several spots that accept medication disposal; names, addresses, and guidelines of drop-off locations can be found at **RecycleBN.org**. For confidentiality, black out personal information on the label, but make sure the name of the medication is still visible when you turn them in.

Doctor's Orders: "Get out and Volunteer in your Community!"

By EAC Development Coordinator Deborah Pitcher

I read a recent article written by a gerontologist who said that they wished older people would leave their doctor's visit with a prescription to go volunteer for a local non-profit organization. The author described a 12 year research project looking at what happens when older adults volunteer with non-profit organizations in their community. They found that those who volunteered were in better health than their peers who did not volunteer. In addition, their blood pressure was lower and they appeared to be aging more slowly than other people of the same age. Other researchers have found that volunteering is associated with a lower risk of having a heart attack. The mental health benefits were also just as striking; volunteering was tied to having fewer symptoms of depression and being more satisfied with one's life. It often brings an instant boost in mood, along with a deeper sense of meaning and purpose. Even engaging in what is known as "informal helping" such as lending a hand to friends, neighbors or community members in need-without getting paid or participating in an organized program-helped in similar ways.

There are also health benefits for those who start volunteering earlier in life. Children and teens who volunteer tend to have better health and lower levels of anxiety and fewer behavioral problems than those who don't volunteer. To learn more about Volunteer opportunities at the EAC, visit our volunteer page at ecologyactioncenter.org!



Pesticides and Neurological Challenges: Reasons to go Yard Smart

By EAC Intern Hadley McKenzie

More than 600 million pounds of pesticides are used each year in the U.S. in agricultural and urban settings. Yard Smart gardeners know that these chemicals have adverse effects on the environment and human health¹. Primary exposures to these chemicals are often through breathing in dust or vapor in the air, skin absorption from coming into contact with the chemicals, and eating/drinking contaminated food/water. When pesticides are applied to lawns, these chemicals get into the air, soil, gardens, and on other plants, which leaves humans, pets, and local wildlife vulnerable. Additional concerns arise during precipitation events when the residue is picked up by stormwater and run into local waterways via storm drains, putting more people, areas, and wildlife at risk.

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Many pesticides have been connected to neurotoxicity (a term used to describe damage to the nervous system that is caused by exposure to toxic substances²), and the effects on humans often display as neurodegenerative disorders like Parkinson's Diseases, Alzheimer's Disease, ALS, dementia, Epilepsy, seizures, and more³. After exposure, these chemicals may begin to target and damage/alter important neurotransmitters, ions, proteins, and neurons in the brain; this damage can lead to dysfunctions and decreased control of the nervous system, which is when symptoms begin to show. Though historically studied in large exposures, research shows that acute, long-term exposure can also be harmful to the human body and lead to neurotoxicity complications^{4,5}.

A great way to protect yourself and your community, is to go Yard Smart. Going Yard Smart means that you are committed to:

Reducing chemical usage by avoiding use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers and instead using integrated pest management systems and eco-friendly yard products

Conserving natural resources through Earth-friendly practices, like minimizing turf grass and promoting a healthy yard ecosystem

A yard that welcomes wildlife, which can be done by landscaping with native plants, and supplying adequate shelter, food, and water for wildlife



By using Yard Smart practices, yards are safe for all living things and risks of health or environmental issues are reduced. Find more information and get your yard certified as Yard Smart by visiting YardSmart.org. Interested, but not sure you want to make the commitment? Sign up for this year's Yard Smart Garden Walk, also on YardSmart.org!

Sources

¹https://water.usgs.gov/nawqa/pnsp/pubs/fs152-95/atmos_1.html

²<https://www.news-medical.net/health/What-is-Neurotoxicity.aspx>

³<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6170243/#:~:text=Epidemiological%20studies%20have%20suggested%20that,Alzheimer's%20disease%20and%20multiple%20sclerosis>

⁴<https://www.beyondpesticides.org/resources/pesticide-induced-diseases-database/brain-and-nervous-system-disorders>

⁵<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1247187/#:~:text=Most%20studies%20of%20moderate%20pesticide,reflecting%20cognitive%20and%20psychomotor%20dysfunction>

BN Green Events

VOLUNTEERING!

Learn more and sign up at ecologyactioncenter.org/volunteering. Currently we have many activities in the works including Storm Drain Stenciling, Summer Library Program Prep, McLean County Fair Green Team, and more!

YARD SMART WORKSHOPS!

Visit ecologyactioncenter.org/workshops to sign up! Currently there are dates available for rain barrel workshops (\$45 for members), backyard composting workshops (\$25 for members), and vermicomposting (\$35). Workshops come with all the necessary tools, information, and supplies to begin your water harvesting or composting journey!

BN GREEN EVENTS

Visit ecologyactioncenter.org/bngreenevents to sign up and get more information on upcoming local green events!

Summer Library Programs. The EAC is holding summer library programs for families at most McLean County Libraries. Check with your local library and attend a program!

Glorious Garden Festival. On July 11 and 12, learn more about how you can be Yard Smart and begin your journey into more environmentally friendly gardening.

Yard Smart Garden Walk. We are back for the 22 annual Yard Smart Garden Walk on July 19 from 9-1pm! Make sure to check out YardSmart.org to register!

Pack the Park. Join the EAC, Parks and Rec, and other community partners to Caden Park on July 12. Play some recycling games and sneak a peek at our vermicomposting worms.

Illinois Grand Prairie Master Naturalist Training. Trainings are held on Wednesday evenings from 6:00-7:30pm, August 24 to November 15. Make sure to apply before August 3.



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

The Ecology Action Center will make reasonable accommodations for participation in public programs and services. To request accommodation, please call 309-454-3169x11 or go to ecologyactioncenter.org/accommodation. Please provide two weeks advance notice if possible.

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