



ECOLOGY NEWS

ACTION CENTER

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recycle coach



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sugar creek
stewards



Law Protects the Right to Grow Native Plants in Illinois

Illinois residents now have stronger protections when it comes to supporting biodiversity in their own backyards. The Protecting Illinois Native Landscapes Act (Public Act 103-0704)—also known as the Homeowners' Native Landscaping Act—was signed into law in 2024. By protecting homeowners' right to plant natives, Illinois is making it easier for communities to reduce stormwater runoff, create sanctuaries for native pollinators, and strengthen climate resilience—right in their own yards.

This new law prevents homeowners' associations (HOAs) from prohibiting residents from planting or maintaining Illinois native species on their lawns. Under this act, associations cannot stop property owners from creating native landscapes as long as those landscapes are predominantly free of weeds, invasive species, and trash; and the native species do not extend into neighboring property, public property or interfere with traffic or utilities. These areas have to be intentionally planted and properly maintained. HOAs are not allowed to impose height restrictions but can adopt reasonable rules regarding native landscaping.

The law defines Illinois native species as trees, shrubs, vines, ferns, flowers, grasses, sedges, and other plants that grew in Illinois before European settlement or as otherwise defined by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The definition excludes exotic and noxious weeds regulated under state law. To see a list of recommended native plants for McLean County yards, visit [YardSmart.org](https://www.yardsmart.org).



Photo by Jordan Aaron

Fall into solar savings... while there's still time!



The Grow Solar Bloomington-Normal 2025 Program, a group-buy solar program run by the Ecology Action Center, Midwest Renewable Energy Association, and StraightUpSolar, has been a massive success so far, and there's still time to make it even more successful! The program runs to the end of the

month, with the deadline to sign up September 30. Unfortunately, the time to qualify for the federal tax-credit has passed, with this initiative set to expire by the end of this year. However, state and utility incentives are still available to discount the price of roof-top solar, along with the group-buy discount for being a part of the program. Solar is also an excellent long-term investment, especially to get ahead of rising energy rates.

For more information on solar, and about the GrowSolar Bloomington-Normal Program, go to GrowSolar.org/BN.

Help us identify public sites in need of trash clean up!



Have you noticed any places around town that could use a little sprucing up? Our mCLEAN up Crew is always

on the look out for "trashy" spots to beautify! Submit sites you find with as much detail as possible. We will do a site assessment and determine if we are able to add it to our list for an upcoming workday! All sites must be within McLean County, Illinois. Submit your sites at ecologyactioncenter.org/mcleanup.



Fall Air Quality Workshop coming this October!



Spooky season is almost here, but there's nothing ghoulish about this event. Join the Ecology Action Center for our second BNCARE Air Quality Workshop on Monday, October 6th at 5:30pm. We'll be discussing the importance of air quality, local air quality issues, and how to use the program's portable air monitors. We ask any interested residents to please

register for this event, as space is limited. Sign-up is available at ecologyactioncenter.org/bngreenevents. We can't wait to see you there!



Don't Miss it! Household Hazardous Waste Collection 2025!



This year's Household Hazardous Waste Collection event will be here before you know it! Participation is open to all Illinois residents at no cost. **REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED** In order to help regulate traffic and prevent long wait times, please sign up for the collection event.

Only residentially generated HHW items are accepted. Carpooling is encouraged—consider offering to take HHW materials for family members or neighbors.

Register by September 26, 2025—get your spot before they run out! Sign up at **HHWMCLEAN.org**

Accepted materials include: Oil-based paints, Used motor oil, Herbicides, Pesticides, Insecticides, Old gasoline, Pool chemicals, Cleaning products, Mercury, Acids, Alkaline, Ni-Cad, and lithium household batteries, Paint thinners, Lawn chemicals, Solvents, Antifreeze, Hobby chemicals, Aerosol paints and pesticides, Fluorescent lamp bulbs, Drain cleaners, Wetted and double bagged asbestos, Vapes, and Corrosives.

Unaccepted items include: Latex paint, Agricultural wastes, Business/commercial sector wastes, Explosives, Fireworks, Controlled substances and unwanted or expired medications, Car or truck Batteries (lead-acid), Propane tanks, Smoke detectors, Farm machinery oil, Fire extinguishers, Biohazard waste, Institutional or business waste, Electronics/e-waste, or Appliances.

Questions? Give us a call at 309-454-3169

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Volunteers are critically needed to help this event run smoothly! We are short on the number of volunteers we need so please sign up for a shift at HHWmclean.org. Volunteers do NOT handle any hazardous waste but rather help with traffic, handouts, and event takedown.

The McLean County Household Hazardous Waste Collection is funded by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency with additional local support from McLean County, the City of Bloomington, the Town of Normal, and Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District. Additional services are provide through an in-kind donation from Republic Services.

Thanks Trees, you're a life saver!

The list of benefits that trees provide to us and our ecosystems is a long one - from reducing runoff, to keeping our neighborhoods cool, to recycling carbon dioxide into oxygen. Yet some of the benefits of trees are still not fully understood and hard to define, especially in the area of trees impacting human health. We know that trees are good for us, but in the last decade more and more evidence has come out about a surprising outcome - trees are expanding our lifespans and reducing deaths!

Public health authorities have been making significant connections between our expected health outcomes and where we live. Neighborhood and built environment is one of the major social determinants of health because it determines your access to things like safe drinking water, air quality, fresh food, and recreation activities.¹ Studies are showing that individuals that live in greener neighborhoods with more tree canopy experience better respiratory, cardiovascular, and mental health.

One challenge to studying trees' effects on health is finding the right tools to measure it. Previous studies had been using tools like Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI), which measures greenspace with satellite data that filters for infrared light to find vegetation density. This can be helpful in studying drought conditions, but it doesn't tell us what types of vegetation are present. In order to understand if trees are the true culprit of improved health outcomes, a better tool is the Leaf Area Index (LAI). LAI measures the tree canopy by quantifying the ratio of leaf coverage on a unit of ground.²



TREE CORPS
TREE-CORPS.ORG

Using these tools, a study cohort called Green Heart Project measured the associations between Leaf Area Index (LAI) and blood pressure.³ They found that the leaf surface area of trees around the participants' homes was strongly associated with lower blood pressure.³ Notably, that association was not true of simple grass cover.³ Another study found that a 30 year residential tree planting effort in Portland, Oregon resulted in reduced cardiovascular and non-accidental mortality for those

neighborhoods' residents over time, correlating closely to the survival and size of the new trees in their neighborhoods.⁴ Still not convinced? In 2011 researchers wanted to know if the inverse could be shown - negative health outcomes based on the loss of trees. From 2002 to 2012, approximately 100 million trees were lost to an invasive forest pest - the emerald ash borer.⁵ They looked at the effects of this major change to the natural environment - the massive loss of trees across 15 states. Researchers looked at county-level mortality from 1990 to 2007 and compared it to the spread of tree deaths as the emerald ash borer moved through the states and found that as more trees died, human cardiovascular and respiratory deaths increased.⁵ Specifically, "the borer was associated with an additional 6113 deaths related to illness of the lower respiratory system, and 15,080 cardiovascular-related deaths."⁵ The overlaying maps show a clear picture: the loss of trees contributed to a loss of people.

Scientific advancement is giving us a clearer picture all the time of exactly how trees are improving our lives. However I'd say a lot of us already had a feeling that was true. You're taking a walk on a well shaded street or trail and gradually your shoulders relax, and your mood lightens. Maybe the air smells cleaner, maybe the cool shade is allowing you to stop squinting and see what's around you. It turns out that good feeling isn't all in our heads! Thanks science!

Sources for Thanks Trees, You're a life saver!

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2. Dr. Gaylon Campbell. "The Researcher's complete guide to Leaf Area Index (LAI)". Metergroup. <https://metergroup.com/education-guides/the-researchers-complete-guide-to-leaf-area-index-lai/>
3. Ray Yeager, Rachel Keith, Daniel W Riggs, Daniel Fleischer, Matther H.E.M. Browning, Alessandro Ossola, Kandi L Walker, Joy L Hart, Sanjay Srivastava, Shesh N Rai, Ted Smith, Aruni Bhatnager. "Intra-neighborhood associations between residential greenness and blood pressure" ScienceDirect October 10, 2024. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969724039354>
4. Andrea Watts, Geoffrey Donovan, Demetrios Gatzolis. "Plant a tree and save a life? The value of planting more trees in urban areas" USDA 2024. <https://research.fs.usda.gov/treesearch/67583>
5. Geoffrey Donovan, David Butry, Yvonne Michael, Jeffrey Prestemon, Andrew Liebhold, Demetrios Gatzolis, Megan Mao. "The Relationship Between Trees and Human Health: Evidence from the Spread of the Emerald Ash Borer" ScienceDirect February 2013. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379712008045>

Vape Disposal

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the use of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes or vapes) continues to rise.¹ These devices—powered by lithium-ion batteries—heat nicotine, cannabis, or other liquids to create an inhalable aerosol. They come in many shapes and sizes, with some designed for single use and others built to be recharged.²

Unfortunately, many vapes are improperly discarded—either tossed in regular trash or littered on the ground. Both practices pose significant risks; lithium-ion batteries can ignite during transport or inside landfills when punctured or damaged and the chemicals inside vapes can leach into soil and water, threatening fish and other aquatic organisms.³

The correct way to dispose of vapes is to bring them to a Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection event. The Ecology Action Center will be

hosting a HHW collection event on October 4 from 8:00-3:00pm. Appointments are required before September 26. Sign up for an appointment and view other accepted materials at **[HHWmclean.org](https://www.hhwmclean.org)**.

Sources for Vape Disposal

1. Vahratian, Anjel et al. "Electronic Cigarette Use Among Adults in the United States" , no. 524 (2025) <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc/174583>
2. "About E-Cigarettes (Vapes)." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed September 9, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/about.html>.
3. "How to Dispose of E-Cigarettes ." EPA. Accessed September 9, 2025. <https://www.epa.gov/hw/how-safely-dispose-e-cigarettes-information-individuals>.

How to Safely Dispose of E-Cigarettes: Information for Individuals

The goal of this fact sheet is to explain to consumers the importance of safe disposal of e-cigarettes, including vape pens.



Do NOT put e-cigarettes in your household trash or recycling

- The lithium batteries can become damaged and cause fires.
- Nicotine is toxic and poses a risk to both workers and the environment.



DO take e-cigarettes to your household hazardous waste (HHW) collection site

- Many towns and counties have collection programs for HHW, which can be identified by searching online for HHW collections near you or contacting your local solid waste agency.
- Typically, HHW collections are free for residents.
- The e-cigarettes will be managed safely and prevent fires and releases of harmful chemicals to the environment.



A customer carefully disposing of multiple e-cigarettes at an HHW collection site. Photo courtesy of Mesa County, Colorado HHW



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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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