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Illinois Country Living

JULY 2024
VOLUME 82, NO. 3



PHOTO COURTESY OF AIKMAN WILDLIFE ADVENTURE

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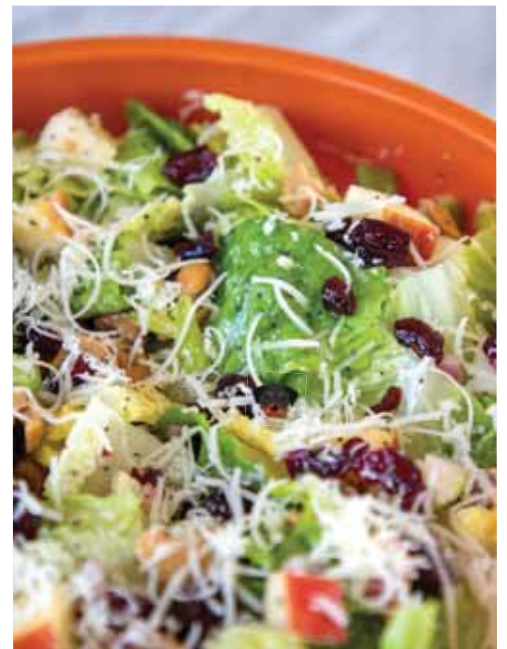
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PHOTO COURTESY OF AIKMAN WILDLIFE ADVENTURE



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN HUNEYCUTT, UNION POWER COOPERATIVE

To the rescue

What is mutual aid and why does it matter?

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES EMPLOY A variety of methods to reduce the likelihood of power outages — from regular tree trimming to equipment maintenance and repairs, to local grid updates. But, outages do occur, and when they do, co-ops are ready to respond.

Another way co-ops prepare for major outages and disasters is through mutual aid, which is a collaborative approach to emergency planning. The mutual aid model allows electric co-ops to help each other during times of need.

This approach permits co-ops to “borrow” restoration workers from other co-ops, thereby increasing the workforce response to areas impacted by a major outage event. It’s essentially about neighbors helping neighbors, even when those neighbors are fellow co-ops located hundreds of miles away.

Electric co-ops operate according to seven principles, and principles six and seven, “cooperation among cooperatives” and “concern for community,” are directly connected to the mutual aid model.

Electric co-ops were formed to provide reliable electric service to their members at the lowest reasonable cost, and mutual aid has been a fundamental part of our DNA since

co-ops were formed. The concept of mutual aid originated with rural electrification efforts in the 1930s. From the beginning, electric co-ops relied on each other to assist in times of need, and mutual aid provides an essential safety net in times of crisis.

Mutual aid ultimately benefits co-ops’ consumer-members. During major outage events,

co-ops can increase their workforce and respond more quickly, leading to shorter outage times for members.

Disaster response and mutual aid is managed by electric co-ops, as well as cooperative statewide organizations — in Illinois, that’s the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. Statewide organizations assist with coordination between states, helping to ensure the necessary personnel and equipment, which are the key ingredients of the mutual aid recipe. These efforts require effective logistics management and experts who fully understand resource allocation and have the know-how to respond appropriately under pressure.

During major outage events, a variety of equipment is necessary to complete repairs, including bucket trucks and other specialized vehicles, utility poles, transformers and wires. Skilled lineworkers, tree trimmers and other key personnel are also often shared among co-ops. These experts provide critical skills and manpower to speed up the restoration process.

Because the national network of transmission and distribution infrastructure owned by electric co-ops has been built to federal standards, line crews from any electric co-op in the U.S. can arrive on the scene ready to provide emergency support, secure in their knowledge of the system’s engineering.

Today, mutual aid continues to be a vital part of how electric co-ops operate and serve their local communities. The goal of mutual aid is to restore power as quickly and safely as possible after a major outage event. By sharing resources, co-ops can significantly enhance their response capabilities and ensure that consumer-members receive reliable electricity even in the face of major challenges. 💡



Jennah Denney writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

Illinois Country Living is a monthly publication serving the communications needs of the locally owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives of Illinois. With a circulation of more than 192,000, the magazine informs cooperative consumer-members about issues affecting their electric cooperative and the quality of life in rural Illinois.

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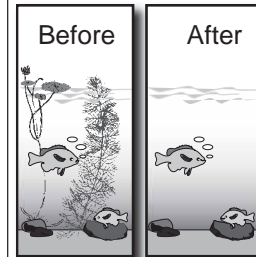
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UNITED WE STAND

As we celebrate the birth of our great nation, we are reminded of the values that make our community and country strong: independence, freedom and unity. Today, we honor the spirit of those who fought for our freedom and continue to work toward a brighter future for all.

Just as our forefathers came together to build a nation, we are committed to working together to power our community with reliable and affordable energy. Your trust and support empower us to innovate and improve, ensuring that our cooperative remains a pillar of strength and independence for years to come.

On this special day, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our consumer-members. Thank you for being part of our cooperative family. May your Fourth of July be filled with joy, pride and celebration.

Happy Independence Day!

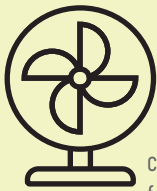


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JULY CHECKLIST

The dog days of summer are in full swing. Here are a few tips to help you keep cool and keep summer energy bills in check.

Use fans.



To stay a few degrees cooler, utilize portable or ceiling fans for a cooling

effect. Remember to bump up the thermostat to save.

Cover those windows.

Block heat gain by closing window coverings during the day.



Unplug electronics.



Some electronics give off extra heat. Shut them off to

save energy and keep your home a little cooler.

Shop smart.

When replacing appliances and electronics, purchase ENERGY STAR-rated models.



Power restored

Illinois electric co-ops show strength in numbers

On May 26, severe weather swept through the Midwest, knocking out power and causing widespread damage in its wake. However, electric cooperatives do not leave other co-ops in the dark. In the spirit of mutual aid, linework crews from 17 electric cooperatives in Illinois were dispatched to help with recovery efforts within the state and beyond.

Illinois' southernmost electric cooperative sustained the most damage from the storm systems within the state. Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative (SIEC) received mutual aid from Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association (EECA), Monroe County Electric Cooperative and Southwestern Electric Cooperative. With the help from the line crews of other Illinois co-ops, SIEC was able to complete power restoration to all members by May 28.

"We take pride in providing reliable electricity to our members, so we thank each of you for your patience, kind words of support and understanding as we worked to restore services across our territory," SIEC said in a statement on Facebook.

Clay Electric Co-operative was also able to complete its restoration efforts on May 28

with the help of neighboring co-op Norris Electric Cooperative.

From the same storm system, West Kentucky Rural Electric Cooperative (WKREC), headquartered in Mayfield, Ky., made a call for mutual aid to help restore its 20,000 outages. Crews from SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative (SEIEC), Tri-County Electric Cooperative, EECA, Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative and Clinton County Electric Cooperative were able to assist.

That Sunday evening, another storm system producing high winds came through much of the same area again, causing more widespread damage. Despite the number of outages, the line crews, along with eight other utilities and contractors, were able to help restore power to roughly 70% of the impacted areas by Monday morning. Power was fully restored on May 30.

"Over the past five days, our crews and the mutual aid crews, who showed up to provide aid and support, started their day with a mission to restore power to every WKREC member. We are proud to report that they have accomplished that

Continued on page 10

Sudoku

by Myles Mellor and Susan Flanagan

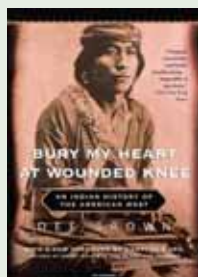
Each Sudoku puzzle consists of a 9X9 grid that has been subdivided into nine smaller grids of 3X3 squares. To solve the puzzle, each row, column and box must contain each of the numbers 1 to 9. Level: Medium

Solution on page 33.

	3		4	1				
		6	7				5	2
2				8				
	4		1	9			7	
	6	1		7		2	4	
	5			4	8			9
				5				1
1	8				4	6		
				6	1		8	



IL ENTERTAINMENT CORNER



In the early 1970s, a newly published work of nonfiction turned history on its proverbial ear. That book, “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West,” challenged readers by presenting the closely held belief of

Manifest Destiny in a new, unflattering light – through the eyes of Native Americans who suffered as a result.

The book quickly became a bestseller, with millions of copies printed, and later inspired a 2007 film by the same name. According to a Time magazine book review: “Compiled from old but rarely exploited sources plus a fresh look at dusty government documents, ‘Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee’ tallies the broken promises and treaties, the provocations, massacres, discriminatory policies and condescending diplomacy.”

The author, Dorris Alexander “Dee” Brown, had helmed the agricultural library at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for many years by the time the book was written and published. He penned several other books about the West as well, both fiction and nonfiction. Brown died in 2002 at age 94; his remains are interred in Urbana. 📍

Postage rate hikes threaten member outreach

Publications like Illinois Country Living magazine are crucial to keeping electric cooperative consumer-members informed on local news, meetings and cooperative advocacy efforts. But rising postage costs are causing problems.

Additional rate increases “could be crippling to these important publications,” said Ryan Hall, communications director for the Montana Electric Cooperatives’ Association (MECA) and editor of Rural Montana magazine. “The magazine is the top way that we reach and connect with our members every single month. Readers rely on it for that connection to their co-op.”

Taking effect in July 2024, the U.S. Postal Service has approved rate increases of nearly 8% for first-class mail and marketing mail and an almost 10% jump for periodicals. This postage increase represents the sixth increase in three years.

Statewide publications give co-op members information on cooperative programs, director elections and making homes more energy efficient, said Scott Gates, senior editor of Carolina Country, the statewide magazine for North Carolina’s Electric Cooperatives.

“What’s more, many members prefer to receive monthly bills by mail,” Gates said. “And digital communications, though important, simply cannot connect with and educate members as well as a physical magazine like [these] statewide publications.”

Along with the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers, cooperatives and their allies are pushing back against the proposed rate hikes. Collectively, statewide associations mail over 12 million magazines every month. According to a survey by Cooperative Insights, magazines are still the top way that members get co-op communications.

In Illinois, more than 192,000 magazines get mailed to electric cooperative consumer-members from 20 electric cooperatives every month. Each of these magazines include national, statewide and local cooperative news, and several co-ops use the magazine to post official notices for annual meetings.

“We are urging the Postal Regulatory Commission to revisit and decrease these recent, burdensome rate increases,” Gates said. “These costs directly impact co-ops and their rural members, many of whom already face economic challenges.” 📍

Molly Christian, NRECA



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July 4th

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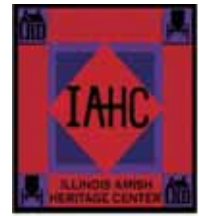
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Where is it?

The winners of the May hidden object contest were Karin Webster of Clay Electric Co-operative and Tina Helfrich of Monroe County Electric Cooperative. Congratulations! Your ICL campfire mugs have been sent.

June's yo-yo was hidden on the gameboard on page 25. Winners' names will be drawn, and they will be notified. Visit Illinois Country Living on Facebook after each month's deadline for a closeup of the object's location and winners' names.

It's time for a new hidden object search. Be on the lookout for a dog, which represents the dog days of summer. The symbol can vary in size and will never be on this page, a lettered page or in an ad.

Entries must include your name, address, name of your electric co-op (nonmembers are also eligible), and the page number and location of the symbol. Visit icl.coop/hiddenobject and fill out the entry form (also found under Contact Us on the website) or mail a postcard or letter to Illinois Country Living, Hidden Objects, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. We will NOT accept entries via phone call or email. All entries for that month must be postmarked or received digitally by the 15th. Winners' names and the symbol's location will be published in each month's issue of Illinois Country Living.



NERC assessment warns of summer power outages

Extreme heat could threaten the nation's energy supply this summer, driving up demand for electricity and potentially causing shortfalls and power outages throughout large swaths of the U.S., the North American Electric Reliability Corp. (NERC) warned in a new report.

The states and regions most at risk are Texas, California, the Southwest, New England and much of the Midwest, according to NERC's 2024 Summer Reliability Assessment. The warnings underscore the danger of the Environmental Protection Agency's recent power plant rule, which threatens reliability by forcing the premature closure of power plants at a time when demand for electricity is rising, said National Rural Electric Cooperative Association CEO Jim Matheson. On June 5, lawmakers in the House and Senate introduced a resolution to overturn the EPA rule.

"This latest report highlights the importance of always-available energy as our nation works to keep the lights on," Matheson said. "That's particularly true as we look toward a future that depends on electricity to power more of the economy. Importantly, this report does not consider the impact of EPA's power plant rule, which will significantly undermine reliable electricity across the nation."

The NERC report said that "weather services are expecting above-average summer temperatures across much of North America, potentially creating challenging summer grid conditions." With most areas forecasting higher peak demand for electricity than last summer, the report added, "Above-average seasonal temperatures

can contribute to high peak demand as well as an increase in forced outages for generation and some bulk power system equipment."

NERC found that the delayed retirements of fossil fuel-powered plants coupled with limited new supply "have improved the outlook for 2024" compared to some earlier reports. However, NERC also found that "a growing number of areas in North America face adequacy risks as early as 2025."

Erin Kelly, NRECA

"Power restored" continued from page 7

task," the co-op said in a statement on Facebook following full power restoration. "We appreciate our members' support and kind words as we worked hard to restore power."

Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation in Berryville, Ark., also requested additional aid, and line crews from Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative, Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative, Illinois Electric Cooperative, Menard Electric Cooperative, Spoon River Electric Cooperative and Shelby Electric Cooperative traveled to Arkansas to help with the recovery efforts.

On May 29, further assistance was requested by the Arkansas cooperative, and crews from Adams Electric Cooperative, Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative, Corn Belt Energy Corporation, EECA and SEIEC headed to the state to help. Recovery efforts there were completed on June 3.

Through mutual aid, electric cooperative line crews from any co-op can arrive on the scene, ready to lend a hand after disaster strikes.



All together for Youth Tour

An electric cooperative summer tradition returned with the annual Electric Cooperative Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. on June 14-21. This year's group included more than 2,000 youth delegates, chaperones and staff, along with nearly four dozen bus drivers who chauffeured them in and around Washington, D.C. Forty-four states were represented. From Illinois, 54 young leaders representing 26 electric and telephone cooperatives across the state attended this year's Youth Tour.

The 2024 event brought all delegates together over the course of one week, compared to being spread out over a two-week period during the past two years to accommodate pandemic concerns. "We're back to one week, and we're so happy that this year's delegates had a full-strength experience," said Beth Knudson, NRECA's youth programs and training manager.

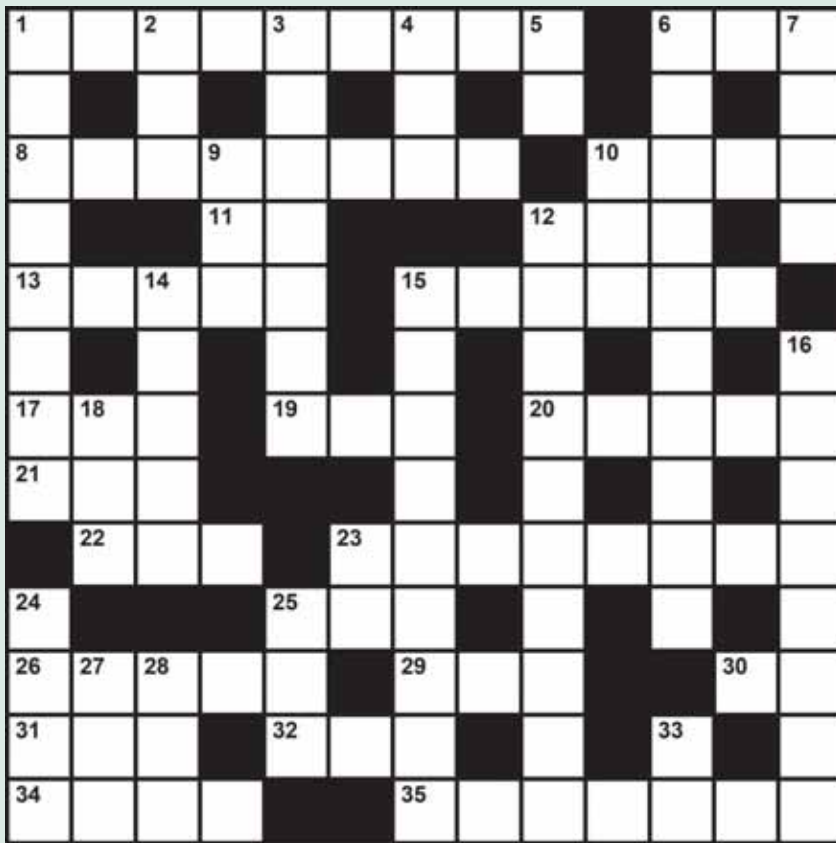
The formal Youth Day program took place June 19. It included a panel on the global impact of cooperatives. Motivational speaker Mike Schlappi, a wheelchair basketball player who has appeared in four consecutive summer Paralympic Games, also addressed the Youth Tour delegates.

"Youth Tour is a great opportunity that changes students' lives," said Brooke Gross, Youth Tour coordinator for Illinois. "After touring our nation's capital and seeing firsthand how our government works, they return home with valuable knowledge that helps prepare them for the future and friendships that will last a lifetime."

Since 1964, the nation's cooperative electric utilities have sponsored more than 60,000 high school students to visit Washington, D.C., meet their elected officials and learn about the cooperative program.

As of the publication of the July 2024 edition of Illinois Country Living magazine, Youth Tour was in progress. Be sure to check out the August 2024 issue for more coverage of the event. 📍

Victoria A. Rocha, NRECA



Across

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--|
| 1 UV protection | 25 Louisville Slugger, e.g. | 7 Rotate |
| 6 Moisten with water | 26 River craft | 9 Fish and chips fish |
| 8 Banana split ingredient,
2 words | 29 Over 90 degrees, say | 10 Cushion |
| 10 It's often used as a
fishing platform | 30 Prosecutor, for short | 12 Tot's beach
construction |
| 11 French for gold | 31 Employ | 14 Bahamas, e.g. |
| 12 Warmed the bench | 32 Bambi's mom, e.g. | 15 Enjoys lying on the
beach taking in rays |
| 13 Fun activity for kids at
the pool | 34 Spring from a board | 16 Painting of the sea and
the shore, e.g. |
| 15 In shadow | 35 Produce a mottled
effect | 18 Where chapstick is
applied |
| 17 "___ Follow the Sun"
(The Beatles) | | 23 Mum |
| 19 Go brown in the sun | | 24 Move quickly, as clouds |
| 20 Duck's mate | | 25 Ocean floor |
| 21 Secure | | 27 "___ mentioned ..." |
| 22 Tire pressure
measurement, abbr. | | 28 The Silver State, for
short |
| 23 Large aquatic mammals | | 33 Approve |

Down

- | |
|----------------------------------|
| 1 Beach attire |
| 2 Vane direction, abbr. |
| 3 Ocean motion |
| 4 Historical time period |
| 5 Raleigh's state, abbr. |
| 6 Kayaking challenge,
2 words |

Solution on page 33.

LET'S GO!

7 Gym Bob's Annual '50s and '60s Jamboree Show

BIBLE GROVE
Enjoy live opry-style music and a tribute to veterans

13 Cork & Pork Festival

SAINTE MARIE
Delight in wine tastings, delicious pork, a beer garden and live music at this annual event

14 Plainfield Church Car Show

ROSE HILL
The annual event features a car show, an outdoor church service, watermelon, ice cream and raffles

20 Spelling Bee and Old-Fashioned Games

GALENA
Bring the kids to Belden School to play games from the late 1800s and early 1900s

For more information, a complete listing of events or to submit an event, visit icl.coop/datebook.



Freedom Reins PRCA Rodeo

JULY

5-6

Since 1975, the Shenandoah Riding Center has provided a professional rodeo in conjunction with Independence Day celebrations. The Freedom Reins Pro Rodeo includes two nights of entertainment with cowboys and cowgirls competing in various events. Stick around after the show for fireworks and a barn dance.

June 5-6, 2024: Gates open at 4:30 p.m., and the rodeo begins at 7 p.m.

- Shenandoah Riding Center, 200 N. Brodrecht Road, Galena
Admission: varies
815-777-9550 or shenandoahriddingcenter.com

Salute the Troops

JULY

10

Don't miss an opportunity to engage with history, celebrate veterans and witness the legacy of World War II. The event promises an evening of education, appreciation and thrilling entertainment. This experience allows attendees to get up close with historical tanks, meet the crews, and watch a showcase of the tanks' firepower as they shoot blank rounds.

July 10, 2024: 6-8 p.m.

- Morgan County Fairgrounds, 110 N. Westgate Ave., Jacksonville
Admission: varies
217-370-2720 or themorgancountyfair.com



Pure Country Antique Show

JULY

13

More than 60 dealers offering true American antiques will be inside and around the air-conditioned Bloomfield Barn event venue. Food trucks, ice cream, live music and antiques – the perfect way to spend a summer Saturday in the middle of Illinois farm country. From 9 a.m. to noon, admission is \$10; admission is free after noon.

July 13, 2024: all day

- The Bloomfield Barn, 18444 N. 1600th St., Chrisman
Admission: varies
312-957-1065 or purecountryantiqueshow.com

Wild Child Flower Farm Vendor Market

JULY

27

Have fun in the sun at this annual outdoor summer market. Spend the day picking flowers, shopping for goods from small businesses and grabbing a bite to eat from local food trucks. The entry for the market is an item or monetary donation that will be given to the Lawrence County Humane Society.

July 27, 2024: all day

- Wild Child Flower Farm, 12186 Union Chapel Road, Sumner
Admission: donation
618-928-1510 or wild-child-flower-farm.square.site





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Safety first for first responders

Essential tips during an electrical accident

IMAGINE DRIVING DOWN THE road and coming upon a car accident. Utility poles are down, and power lines have fallen. Would you know what to do? Your impulse may be to render help as quickly as possible, but when electricity is involved, the wrong action could hurt or even kill you and others at the scene. Knowing how to respond in this kind of scenario could save your life — as well as someone else's.

Traffic accidents, high winds, severe weather and other events can bring down power lines within range of pedestrians and vehicles. Electricity can be an unforeseen hazard, particularly when overhead power lines have fallen and made contact with vehicles, the ground or anything that conducts electricity.

A fallen power line may not be sparking or showing signs that it is energized, but it could still be sending deadly voltage into whatever it is in contact with. Therefore, always assume that all power lines are energized, and never touch or approach them.

If responding to an accident scene involving a vehicle and downed lines, call 911, stay back and warn others to stay away. Make sure the occupants of the car stay inside the vehicle until the utility has arrived to deenergize the lines.

In rare circumstances, a vehicle may catch fire. The only way the occupants can safely exit is to jump free and clear without touching the vehicle and the ground at the same time. Advise them to jump and land with feet together, and then hop away to safety.

An accident involving a fallen power line is not the only situation where electricity can be involved. Electrical accidents can happen in your home or in your yard.

If someone has been in contact with electricity, there are not always obvious injuries. These are the symptoms to look for: changes in alertness; headache; problems with vision, swallowing or hearing; irregular heartbeat; muscle spasm and pain, numbness or tingling; and breathing problems.

If you come upon someone who may have suffered an electrical shock, do not touch the person. He or she may still be in contact with the source. If there is water involved, do not get in the water. Make sure to call 911 immediately.

If it can be done safely, turn off the electricity at the source — the circuit breaker or breaker box. Otherwise, wait for the help of emergency responders. Once the source of electricity is off, then it is okay to check vital signs. However, do not move a person with an electrical injury unless he or she is in immediate danger.

Anyone who has come into contact with electricity should see a doctor to check for internal injuries, even if there are no obvious signs or symptoms.

When it comes to accidents, looking out for electrical hazards until an electric utility crew cuts off the power is vitally important for professional first responders, as well as bystanders who come upon the scene of an accident. For more information, visit SafeElectricity.org. 💡



As Executive Director at Safe Electricity, **Erin Hollinshead** has a profound passion for saving lives through education. She holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of Illinois and a grad certificate in management of nonprofit organizations.



Americans can finally grow thick, lustrous hair

“This will help your thinning hair and receding hairline in just 30 days” says top US Doctor

Clinical trials show a new hair loss breakthrough can help both men and women naturally regrow a thick, full head of hair – without drugs, surgery, or side effects

Thousands are rushing to get a new hair restoration method based on surprising new studies from the University of California.

It is the world's first and only hair loss solution that revives dead hair follicles. And studies confirm it helps men and women regrow a thick, full head of hair, even after years of balding.

Now, with news of this breakthrough spreading like wildfire — the manufacturers are struggling to keep up with overwhelming demand.

That's because, unlike other methods, it is prescription-free, drug-free, and has no side effects. And while hair transplants can cost \$4,000 or more, this new approach costs pennies on the dollar and doesn't involve going to the doctor's office.

Instead, it leverages cutting-edge technology to prevent hair loss, fills in embarrassing bald spots, and **Re-Nourishes** thinning hair — with results you can see and feel in 30 days or less.

As Jeanne F. from San Diego, CA reports: “When my husband began to use this product, all he had on top of his head was fuzz. His hair began to grow after 30 days and now it is about 2 to 3 inches long!”

Surprising Truth About Hair Loss

It is commonly believed that hair loss is hereditary.

Unfortunately, most people think there is nothing they can do to stop it. However, while many doctors will tell you that thinning hair, a receding hairline, and bald spots are due to your genetics, this is not the whole story.

“While genetics play a role, it's not the main reason you lose hair,” says Dr. Al Sears, the nation's top anti-aging doctor. “And surprisingly it's not just your age, thyroid, hormones, stress, or a vitamin deficiency, either.”

The latest scientific research reveals that hair loss is primarily

caused by the stem cells in your hair follicles dying.

“This discovery is a true breakthrough because by reviving these stem cells on your scalp, you can stop hair loss dead in its tracks and trigger new hair growth, even in areas that have been thinning for years,” explains Dr. Sears.

Now, at his world-famous clinic, the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Palm Beach, FL, Dr. Sears and his team have used this game-changing discovery to develop a brand-new hair restoration formula that is taking the country by storm.

Sold under the name **Re-Nourish**, it is flying off the shelves with men and women of all ages raving about the results it delivers.

Breakthrough research proves this discovery helps fill in bald spots, re-nourishes thinning hair, and leads to noticeable growth in as little as 30 days.

“I have seen a significant improvement in hair growth. Previously, you could see thinning areas at the back of my head and now hair has grown over it,” says Peter W. from Ontario, Canada.

And Susan D. from Fort Pierce, Florida reports, “My hair was thinning. So, I began to use **Re-Nourish** every day on the front part of my scalp. Now I have thicker hair.”

Regrows Hair In Just 30 Days

Scientists now know that stem cells are the lifeblood of your hair follicles.

Research from the University of California shows they're the reason you're able to grow hair. However, these stem cells aren't always active. In fact, studies reveal they're only active during certain phases of the hair growth

cycle.

“Your hair grows in three phases,” explains Dr. Sears. “First, you have the anagen phase, the hair growing phase. Then the catagen phase, when hair gets ready to shed. And finally, the telogen phase, where your hair is pushed from the follicle and falls out.”

As you get older it becomes harder for your hair follicles to complete this three-phase cycle. The results? Your hairs get stuck in the telogen phase. This is when they start falling out and stop regrowing, no matter what you try.

This process doesn't happen overnight, says Dr. Sears.

“At first, your hair dries out, becoming brittle, thin, and harder to style. Then, you start finding hairs on your pillow and down the drain. Finally, you're left with bald spots that age you prematurely.”

Fortunately, **Re-Nourish** puts a stop to this. It revives the dead stem cells in your hair follicles and reactivates your hair's three-phase cycle, triggering new growth in as little as 30 days — even in areas that've been balding for years.

Reawakens Dead Hair Follicles

For years, scientists couldn't figure out why hair follicle stem cells died.

However, a study from the University of California finally found the answer.

It has to do with T-cells — an important immune cell in your body. The researchers discovered these T-cells are the only way to command hair follicles to grow new hair.

More importantly, they showed that T-cells helped revive the stem cells in your hair follicles — spurring new growth, filling in bald spots and natural hairline.

Re-Nourish uses a unique blend of all-natural ingredients. By spraying it on your hair once per day, scientific studies show you

can revive dead stem cells and improve the appearance of thicker, fuller hair.

For example, the key nutrient of **Re-Nourish** was tested on a group of severely balding women.

After 6 months, nearly 70% of the women saw significant improvement in hair growth. Their hair was noticeably fuller, thicker, and healthier looking. Most exciting of all, they grew new hair on parts of their scalp that had been bald for years.

In another study, Italian researchers gathered a group of both men and women with thinning hair and applied the core ingredient of **Re-Nourish**. After 12 weeks, they reported a staggering 74% increase in hair growth.

“It's really mind-boggling that my hair started growing back,” says Zan R., another **Re-Nourish** customer.

With results like this, it's no surprise that demand for **Re-Nourish** is soaring. Thousands of men and women are scrambling to get their hands on the limited supply available.

Re-Nourish is not currently available in any store at any price. But we've secured a small batch for our readers.

Try Re-Nourish 100% Risk-Free

To secure the hot, new **Re-Nourish** formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at 1-800-585-0967 TODAY. “It's not available in retail stores yet,” says Dr. Sears. “The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer.” Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Re-Nourish**, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. “Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back.”

Call NOW at 1-800-585-0967 to secure your supply of **Re-Nourish**. Use Promo Code **ICLRN724** when you call. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered!

Stay cool and collected

How to spot HVAC issues early

YOUR HEATING, VENTILATION AND air conditioning (HVAC) system is one of the most important and most expensive systems in your home. Detecting issues early can help you plan for repairs or equipment replacement.

If your system is approaching or past the 20-year mark, start saving for a new system and get replacement estimates. There are a few warning signs to watch for that indicate your HVAC system needs to be repaired or replaced.

plastic or noxious odors — are a sign that your system is in trouble. If you smell any of those odors, turn your system off and contact a professional.

Strange noises

There is typically noise associated with the fans and motors in HVAC systems. Take note of any excessive or new noises. If your system is making any clunking, clanging or whistling noises, turn it off and check the filter. If that doesn't resolve it, reach out to a pro.

Running frequently

Your system needs to run more to keep up on extreme weather days, but there might be an issue if it runs too often. Short cycling is when a system cycles on and off before completing the heating or cooling process. Contact a professional to diagnose this issue.

Several factors come into play when deciding to fix existing equipment or invest in new equipment. Consider the severity of the issue, repair costs, the likelihood of additional repairs, equipment lifespan and your budget.

The efficiency of your HVAC system is also a consideration. Heating and cooling technology improvements have come a long way in the last 20 years. Lower operation costs can offset the cost of a new system over time.

Consider your options before you are in desperate need. I recommend getting estimates from at least three contractors. Ask the contractor, "If this was your home, what type of system would you install and why?" The best solution for your home might be a different type of equipment. 💡

Air conditioning is not as cool as usual

If the air from your air conditioner is warm or not as cool as usual, the equipment has an issue. It could be a problem with the compressor or a refrigerant leak. Contact a professional to get the issue checked.

Many refrigerants, especially the ones used in older systems, are harmful to the environment. Fix leaks before adding more refrigerant. Special certifications are required for handling refriger-

ants, so hire a professional to ensure the work is done properly.

Low airflow

If you aren't getting good airflow, it could be an easy fix, such as filter replacement or opening closed dampers. If you've made these fixes and the airflow is still not at normal levels, contact a professional. There could be a bigger problem with a motor, fan or something else.

Bad odors

Heating and cooling systems sometimes smell when you first start them up for the season. Those smells should be minor and dissipate quickly. Any serious smells — such as burning metal, melting



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK GILLILAND

The lifespan of a heating and cooling system ranges from 15 to 20 years. Proper maintenance and lower use can increase the life of the equipment.

Equipment functionality issues can affect your electricity use, which may result in higher energy bills. The age of your equipment can be a major factor in function. The lifespan of an HVAC system ranges from 15 to 20 years.

Proper maintenance and lower use can increase the life of the equipment. To find out the age of your system, look for the manufactured date printed on the unit's nameplate. If you can't find it, search online using the model number or call the manufacturer.

Being thrifty by nature, I typically subscribe to the notion, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." That said, I also believe in being prepared for the inevitable.



Miranda Boutelle is the director of operations and customer engagement at Efficiency Services Group in Oregon, a cooperatively owned energy efficiency company.

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The reality of AI

Electric co-ops see potential in artificial intelligence

UNLESS YOU'VE JUST AWAKENED from an especially long nap, you've probably heard about artificial intelligence (AI). Much of what you've heard is likely either exciting or terrifying. Movies and TV offer paradises in which technology frees us from daily drudgery — and frightening scenarios involving machine uprisings.

Venkat Banunarayanan smiles when asked if popular media's takes on AI are accurate. "We're at the stage of discovery with AI," he said. "There's a lot more buzz than reality at this point, and we have a long way to go."

As the vice president for integrated grid business and technology strategies for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, Banunarayanan spends some of his time exploring possible uses for AI and augmented/virtual reality (VR), while considering how they might improve the way electric co-ops serve their consumer-members.

"Can AI do things better? Can it handle some of the tasks we have to do today? Can it make decisions for us?" Banunarayanan rhetorically asked. "The answer to those and most other questions is the same: maybe."

Industry experts agree it's impossible to guess where AI will be in another decade or two, but it's currently not as powerful as Hollywood seems to think.

AI is being incorporated for specific tasks and activities, including automated solutions like chatbots capable of answering common questions. AI also has the potential to be paired with data analysis, such as retailers using data to predict customer needs.

Despite what you may have heard, AI is not capable of thinking on its own. The functionality greatly depends on programming, how the tool is trained to handle specific tasks, and the level of data being fed into the system. AI revolves around learning and adapting to decision-making.

Because these new technologies interface with internal and external systems, Banunarayanan stressed the importance of strong cybersecurity. "We need to make sure hackers can't influence systems," he warned. "When we consider advancements like AI, we need to ensure protection of personal, critical infrastructure, proprietary and confidential data, too."

Maintaining robust cyber-hygiene is important and necessary to deploy any technology in a reliable and safe manner — AI is no different in this regard.

As electric co-ops explore the possibilities of AI, they will focus on underlying needs rather than the technology itself. Examining

better ways to accomplish tasks and obtain desired results will guide co-ops as they consider AI tools for more efficient processes.

Despite the hype, today's AI is mostly being used to make incremental improvements to existing products and services. That's how electric co-ops are likely to experience the growth of AI in the foreseeable future. For example, the next generation of smart meters might incorporate AI tools to help homeowners better manage their energy use.

AI-based systems may also be used to improve management of the nation's power grid, spotting potential problems before human operators can. Electric co-ops could use chatbots to help answer members' questions and requests more quickly. Weather forecasts are likely to become more accurate, pinpointing the areas most likely to experience damage so crews can be stationed there.

Ultimately, the adoption of AI, VR and other promising technologies share one goal for electric co-ops. From solving outages more quickly to allowing greater control over energy use and lowering the cost of service, tomorrow's innovative technologies will continue to help co-ops enhance the services they provide to their local communities. 💡



Business writer **Scott Flood** has worked with electric co-ops for more than four decades to build knowledge of energy-related issues. He writes on a variety of energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

The need for bees

Graun Bee Company's sweet success

By Lisa Cherry

FOR SOMEONE WHO'S AFRAID of bugs, becoming a beekeeper may seem an odd pursuit. However, fear didn't stop David Graun of Graun Bee Company in Petersburg from doing just that. After watching a documentary about the implications of the loss of honeybees, the Menard Electric Cooperative member decided to help.

In 2018, he and his wife Cassie, then Springfield residents, found four acres available in Petersburg. "We reached out to the people selling the property and [asked], 'Do you mind if we move bees [there] before we buy it?'" Graun laughs. "So, our bees literally moved to the property before [us]."

He says the number of bees has approximately doubled each year, and these days, in addition to Petersburg, they also have hives in Greenview and Oakford. Surprisingly, it hasn't been an overwhelming time investment for the National Guardsman and Illinois Emergency Management Agency employee. Graun adds that, in fact, when he's been away from the hives for a season, whether due to work or for personal reasons, it's turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

"You have different types of beekeepers," he says. "I like to get into my beehive(s) twice a month, per hive, to do an inspection. I want them to be bees, and I don't want to disturb them." He explains that beekeepers also have different approaches to pest control.

"I decided that I want to manage problems [with] more of a natural approach," says Graun. "You could do a chemical, or you could do a brood break. That's when we take the Queen and either remove her by splitting her off and putting her into a different box [for a period] or eliminate her." He opts for the break, adding that over time, the results are just as effective.

While Graun didn't begin his beekeeping journey to sell honey, it is for sale online and at local businesses, including Whimsy Tea Company in Springfield. The two businesses also collaborated on new teas — the first, D.W.'s Bee Tea, named after Graun's son, and the latest, Mama Bee's Tea, in honor of his wife. The company's main product, Sweet Everly's Honey, shares its name with his daughter.



Graun says that most of the honey in their area comes from tree blossoms — and the flavor of their honey reflects what's nearby, including an apple orchard, a pumpkin patch, sunflowers and clover. The best honey, in his opinion, is the first "pull" of the year.

"It comes off as almost crystal clear," he says. "There are a couple things that change honey color: temperature variance — so, if I have honey that stays in a bucket, and the temperature goes up and down 10 degrees, every time it varies, it can get darker. Time can make it go darker, too. But that first [pull], sometimes I've got to pinch myself, [it's so] good."

Maybe most important to Graun, though, is the company's role in educating others about the importance of what they are doing. "We bring out an observation hive ... kids there will get a spoonful of honey straight out of the hive," he says. "I think that's the coolest thing ever, because I hadn't had that opportunity when I was a kid." 💡

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRAUN BEE COMPANY



A WALK ON THE **WILD** SIDE

Explore, learn and play at Aikman Wildlife Adventure

By Kayla Adkins

WITH THE SUN BLAZING brightly over the landscape and the wind rustling through the few trees spread throughout the grassy terrain, a vehicle slowly drives down the road. In a streak of black and white, a zebra runs by. A nearby wildebeest lazily grazes on grass. In the distance, the laughter of a hyena can be heard.

However, this isn't an African safari in the Serengeti — this is Aikman Wildlife Adventure in central Illinois.

Spread across 40 acres outside of Arcola on Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative lines, Aikman Wildlife Adventure is home to more than 230 animals representing 90 species from six continents, making it Illinois' only drive-thru animal park. Each year, the park welcomes more than 40,000 visitors to experience their own adventures in this unique sanctuary for exotic animals.

James Aikman's journey to creating this wildlife haven began with a dream — literally. In October 2013, he awoke with a vision of running a wildlife park with his wife Kelsey. At the time, he was working in banking, and, with a baby on the way, it seemed like an impossible dream. Yet, after having the same dream two nights in a row, James felt a divine calling.

"I told her, 'I don't know why, but I feel like this is something God's wanting us to do. Well, if God is behind it, he'll find a way to make it happen,'" he recalls.

Over the next two years, doors began to open, leading to the purchase of the former Rockome Gardens property in September 2015. James's dream started to take shape when a Grant's zebra

became the park's first resident. "My wife named him Tobias. It means 'the goodness of God,'" James shares about his favorite animal at the park.

Aikman Wildlife Adventure officially opened in March 2016, with the walk-thru adventure debuting a few months later. Since then, the park has continued to grow, adding new attractions, animals and adventures for guests.

"All the animals were born and raised in the United States in captivity," James says. "So, none of them came from the wild, and most were born and raised in the Midwest."

For guests, there are six adventures to choose from. The walk-thru and drive-thru adventures can be done individually or together in the Aikman's Triple Crown. When choosing the drive-thru option, visitors can opt for a wagon ride instead of driving their own car and learn more about the animals from a guide while feeding and petting the animals. Each wagon holds 20 people.

The Off-Road Adventure takes guests off the beaten path to where the larger animals roam. For the ultimate experience, get up close and personal in the Behind-the-Scenes Adventure, in which a guide drives passengers in a utility terrain vehicle (UTV) right up to the animals.

"They [the animals] stick their heads right in," James says. "Like Randy, our camel, his head will come in one side, [and] his nose comes out the other side. So, there's a lot of squealing and giggling from both adults and kids on the UTV rides." This adventure ends with a meet-and-greet with the resident kangaroos and Rocket the muntjac.

According to him, the drive-thru remains the most popular option. With the animals living harmoniously in one large enclosure, guests drive their cars through the mile-long loop, getting right next to the animals, offering a closer encounter with the animals than zoos can provide. "People can't experience anything like it," James says.

The walk-thru adventure offers equally close encounters, with large habitats that prioritize the animals' quality of life. "We wanted to have big habitats. So, we chose quality of life versus quantity of animals," James explains. He says guests seem to appreciate the spacious enclosures and the opportunity to see animals like the spotted hyenas, Taz and Tasha, up close.

"They are two of the most popular animals at the park," James says. He explains this is partially due to many zoos replacing hyenas with more endangered animals. "Nobody gets to see hyenas anymore."

Having one of the strongest bites in the animal kingdom, the hyenas are too dangerous to pet. "They love attention. They'll come when they're called just like dogs, but even a play bite can still take your finger off," he adds.

The park also features a petting zoo, where kids can feed and interact with various animals, including sheep, Scottish Highlanders and zebu. Additional encounters allow visitors to meet and learn about specific animals, from kangaroos and muntjacs to reptiles and wolfdogs.

"We chose quality of life versus quantity of animals."

PHOTO COURTESY OF AIKMAN WILDLIFE ADVENTURE



Their Wildlife on Wheels program brings ambassador animals to off-site events for educational experiences. Some animal ambassadors include Benji the Norwegian dwarf rabbit, Ethel the sugar glider, Herman the tortoise, Leopard the ball python and Mirabell the hedgehog.

In addition to seeing the animals, guests can step back in time in the Museum of Prehistoric Life. More than bones can be viewed in this exhibit. Life-size statues stand in front of depictions of their natural landscape, and kids can touch the statues and dig for bones.

Aikman Wildlife Adventure also serves as a unique wedding venue, hosting ceremonies in a rustic barn next to the petting zoo and receptions in the Serengeti center. Couples can capture unforgettable moments with the animals as part of their special day. Guests can stay at Elk Ridge, the park's cabin B&B overlooking the pond in the drive-thru park.

Looking to the future, plans are underway to add more B&Bs, including one overlooking the wolfdog habitat and another near the kangaroo enclosure. James hopes these will be ready by next spring. Down the road, James also envisions adding big cats and giraffes to the park.

Driven by a mission to provide the highest quality of life for all wildlife in need and to create memorable experiences through interaction, education and conservation, Aikman Wildlife Adventure invites you to take a walk (or drive) on the wild side. This close-to-home animal adventure is more accessible than one might think, offering a memorable experience for all who visit.

"We are family-oriented," James says. "We want to make people feel welcome, have a good time and make memories."💡

For more information about Aikman Wildlife Adventure, go to aikmanwildlife.com or call 217-268-3500.

Find the park on social media, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.

Top: Rocket the muntjac. Top left: Marzipan the sulcata tortoise. Top right: Scout, one of four red kangaroos. Bottom left: Bowser the Patagonian cavy. Bottom right: Corey the Corsican sheep. Bottom: Owner James Aikman holds Lakota the umbrella cockatoo.



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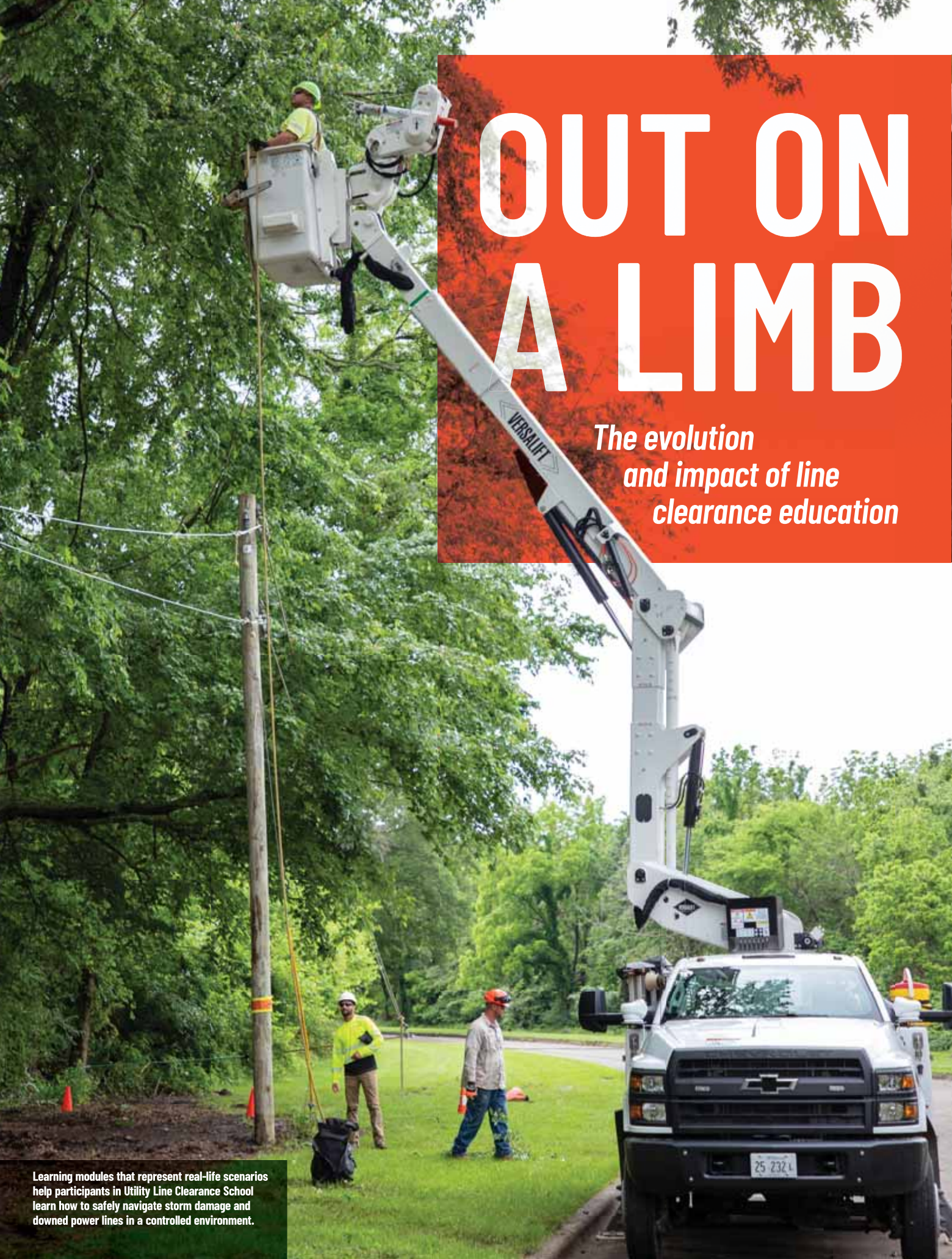
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OUT ON A LIMB

*The evolution
and impact of line
clearance education*



Learning modules that represent real-life scenarios help participants in Utility Line Clearance School learn how to safely navigate storm damage and downed power lines in a controlled environment.



Instructor Alex Bildeaux teaches Utility Line Clearance School participants about chainsaw safety.

By Colten Bradford

WITH A SHOUT AND final buzz of a chainsaw, a tree crashes to the forest floor. Men in hardhats look to the instructor to learn more about tree felling techniques. These men are participating in a weeklong series of courses, held this year April 13-17 at Rend Lake in southern Illinois, to enhance their knowledge of line clearance.

The development of the line clearance training program in Illinois represents a significant advancement in worker safety and public service. Enhancing safety, improving power reliability and fostering professional growth, this program represents the importance of specialized training and the positive impact of electric cooperative efforts within the industry.

Putting down roots

In the late 1990s, Illinois' electric cooperatives recognized a critical gap in employee training programs. While line-workers had access to extensive apprenticeship and training opportunities, those working in line clearance did not. This discrepancy posed safety and reliability issues for both workers and the public. This led to what is now known as Utility Line Clearance School (ULCS).

"Safety. That's the key element to everything that we're trying to provide," says Jim Miles, vice president of training, safety and loss control at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC).

"When you're up in a tree near power lines, you're in a hazard zone, and you have to be very careful and work to the safest measure you can to keep yourself protected," Miles continues. "When the school was developed, it was the first time

within our state cooperative program that anything of its kind was offered."

The primary goal of this series of courses is to enhance the safety of line clearance workers. Given that these individuals often work in hazardous conditions near power lines, comprehensive training is essential. The program also aims to improve the reliability of power systems by ensuring proper tree maintenance and clearance, which prevents power outages caused by fallen trees or branches.

Miles credits the development of improved line clearance education to Cal Williams, who worked for 40 years at Corn Belt Energy Corporation as the manager of forestry and safety. Williams' passion for the safety and professional growth of line clearance workers sparked the creation of a specialized educational program.

"He really had a sincere passion for those out there doing the work on the line clearance side of the business and wanted to pursue ways to help those workers grow in their careers," Miles says.

Initially, the program's curriculum focused on fundamental arboricultural skills, such as tree biology, proper pruning methods and climbing techniques. It also touched on electrical hazard awareness, essential for anyone working near power lines.

One of the earliest students of the program was Miles himself, who at the time worked in line clearance at Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative. "In 2002, I had the opportunity to participate as a student, marking my first exposure to formal training in line clearance," Miles says.

Coming from a contractor background with predominantly on-the-job training, this program was lifechanging for Miles. On one hand, it offered structured, safety-focused education, unlike the informal training he previously experienced, that potentially saved his life. On the other hand, it led him down the road to help educate his peers when he was invited to become a ULCS instructor in 2004. Then, in 2008, Miles joined the AIEC's safety department and inherited the school.

This allowed him to advocate for additional crucial training components and to further develop the program. The enhanced curriculum

went on to include detailed instruction on electrical hazards, herbicide techniques, and advanced techniques for felling trees and removing limbs near power lines.

"We've created learning modules that represent real-life scenarios," Miles explains, regarding the hands-on format of ULCS. "We try to make them as real as possible, even to the point that we build mock power lines. They just don't have an energy source."

These scenarios include ways to handle storm damage, emphasizing the safe removal of trees and branches from downed power lines. This allows students to gain hands-on experience in a controlled environment.

Branching out

ULCS has grown significantly since its inception. Initially, about 15-20 students participated; today, the school has grown to well over 100 students annually. When educators and industry sponsors are added, the total number of participants reaches more than 200. This growth can be attributed to the program's expanded scope and the inclusion of lineworkers in the training.

Recognizing that lineworkers can encounter tree-related hazards during outage calls, Miles says a shorter, intensive course specifically for them was introduced. He hopes that this integration will foster a mutual understanding and respect between lineworkers and line clearance workers, enhancing teamwork and safety.

The program's success has extended beyond Illinois, with participants traveling from other states, including Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and Arkansas. Some states have even adopted similar programs inspired by the ULCS curriculum.

According to Miles, one of the keys to the success of ULCS is its strategic location at Rend Lake in southern Illinois. The location allows for easy access to the interstate, especially for those traveling from neighboring states.

In addition, the AIEC collaborates closely with the Rend Lake Conservancy District. Areas of clearance are identified, and any trees trimmed or removed are either unhealthy, invasive or hazardous, which helps to improve public safety.

"Since we've moved to Rend Lake, I can't ask for anything more," Miles says. "The last thing we want to do is to go in and cut down healthy trees. At the end of the day, we've got a major respect for the aesthetics and the health of the trees, and there's no point in going and taking down a bunch of trees, especially when they don't need it."

Public safety

Addressing public concerns about tree trimming and removal can be a delicate part of the job, Miles explains. Many homeowners become upset when their trees are pruned or removed for safety reasons. However, these actions are necessary to prevent accidents and ensure a reliable power supply.

"We've got to maintain a level of safety," Miles says. "In a worst-case scenario, what if a child were to climb a tree and be able to reach a power line? Imagine how awful the outcome would be."

Miles suggests that planting trees at a safe distance from power lines can help mitigate these issues in the future. Research before planting and determine how tall the tree will become and how wide the treetop will reach. If there's a chance it could reach power lines at full growth, choose another location to plant the tree.

"Line clearance work is a job that has its hazards, but it is necessary to help ensure the safety of the public and to make sure that power is reliable," Miles says. 💡



McDonough Power Cooperative Journeyman Lineman Gabe Williams receives tree felling tips from instructor Phillip Kelley, who is a private contractor and training specialist.

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SAVOR THE FLAVORS OF SANDRA'S AUTHENTIC MEXICAN FOOD

By Colten Bradford

SANDRA ESPINOZA LOVES TO cook, and she's good at it, according to her daughter Amay. For nearly a decade, Sandra, along with her husband Jorge and their children, has been serving up tacos, burritos and other Mexican fare in rural west-central Illinois out of a yellow food truck.

"I've always loved her food," Amay says. "[Growing up], I would always try to get my friends to come over and try her food, because it was just so good." Today, Amay still loves sharing her mom's Mexican dishes with others and helping with the food truck in any way that she can.

The food truck, named Sandra's Authentic Mexican Food, initially started in a tent in 2015, serving food at area fairs, festivals and community events. In 2016, the Espinozas purchased a food truck, and Sandra decided to pursue the endeavor full time in 2019.

"My mom has always wanted to open a restaurant," Amay says. "Having a food truck was a big step for us."

The Espinoza family moved to Carthage 18 years ago, where they are consumer-members of Western Illinois Electrical Coop. They decided to put down their roots in the area.

A sampling of street tacos include asada (steak), al pastor (marinated pork) and pollo (chicken).

“Family means a lot,” Amay says. “We’ve always been very close. A lot of our family lives pretty far away, so it’s mainly been us. Obviously, it can be hard to work with family sometimes . . . but we’ve learned how to work together as a team, and we’re still learning.”

Currently, patrons can find the food truck parked in Carthage and Macomb. Locations and hours are updated weekly on Sandra’s Authentic Mexican Food’s Facebook page. Because of the limited space on the food truck, the menu varies based on the day and location.

While there are other Mexican restaurants in the area, the food truck sets itself apart. “[The other restaurants] are more like Tex-Mex, which is really good, but we have something a little different — authentic homestyle Mexican food.”

For the most part, the menu has remained the same over the years, with the occasional new dish. “I don’t know why I always get so nervous when we introduce new foods,” Amay says. “I don’t know if people will know what it is or like it.” But, they have always proved to be crowd pleasers.

While the asada tacos (street style tacos with marinated steak, onion, cilantro and lime on a corn tortilla) have always been a bestseller, the tostadas and fried gorditas exceeded expectations when first introduced on the menu.

A tostada is a traditional handheld Mexican dish that consists of a flat, crunchy corn shell topped with a spread of beans, choice of meat, lettuce, avocado, cotija cheese and sour cream. The fried gorditas are made with corn masa dough that’s tinted red with Sandra’s secret spice mix — even Amay doesn’t know the recipe. The dough is formed into a thick, round shape and fried until crispy. It is then sliced open and filled with a ground beef and potato mixture, lettuce, cheese and sour cream.

Tamales are another favorite, and often sell out quickly. Made with masa dough and filled with a variety of ingredients, they are wrapped in a corn husk and cooked. While they sell chicken and pork tamales throughout the year, Sandra offers Christmas tamales during the holidays. They can be preordered and are available for pick-up a few days before the holiday. “People love them,” Amay says. “We offer a larger variety of fillings and flavors during Christmastime, so that gets people excited.”

Earlier this year, Sandra’s Authentic Mexican Food won third place in a small business pitch competition in Macomb. The money earned will help the Espinozas fulfill their dream to open a restaurant that’s not on wheels.

“We decided to go for it, because we’ve always wanted a brick and mortar,” Amay explains. “[It] puts the pressure on us to get it done and get moving. . . . We’re excited.” While a location hasn’t been selected yet, it will be within Macomb’s city limits.

The Espinozas look forward to the future. “I just want to say, ‘thank you,’ to everyone who continues to come and enjoy our food,” Amay says. And to those who haven’t yet had a chance to stop by the food truck, she adds, “I can’t wait for you to try it.”



Amay and Sandra Espinoza in front of their food truck



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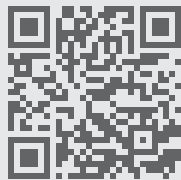
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Recipes are prepared, tasted and photographed by **Colten Bradford**, Illinois Country Living editor.

Sue's Pasta Salad

Submitted by *Dee Hinrichsen*,
Corn Belt Energy Corporation
Servings: 12

- 1 pound rotini, cooked, drained and cooled
- 1 cucumber, chopped
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 cup cauliflower, diced
- 1 cup broccoli, diced
- 1 tomato, diced

Dressing:

- 1 cup oil
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon celery seed
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon Mrs. Dash seasoning

In a large bowl, stir together cooked rotini, cucumber and onion. Cover and let sit overnight in refrigerator. Stir in cauliflower and broccoli, and add the tomatoes just before serving. In a bowl, mix dressing ingredients together and pour over the salad. Toss to coat.



Festive Tossed Salad

Submitted by *Becky Barlow*, Adams Electric Cooperative
Servings: 6-10

Dressing:

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup apple cider or red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons red onion, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2/3 cup oil
- 2 teaspoons poppy seeds

Salad:

- 10 cups romaine lettuce, torn (about 4 bunches)
- 1 cup Swiss cheese, shredded
- 1 medium apple, cubed
- 1 pear, cubed
- 1/4 cup dried cranberries
- 3/4 cup cashews, chopped

In a small bowl, whisk together dressing ingredients and set aside. In a large bowl, toss together the salad ingredients. Drizzle dressing on salad and toss before serving.

Caribbean Salad

Submitted by *Jane Miller*, SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative
Servings: 4-8

- 1 20-ounce can pineapple chunks, drained
- 1 medium ripe avocado, peeled
- 1 medium red onion, sliced
- 1/3 cup bottled oil-vinegar dressing
- 1/8 teaspoon cumin, optional
- Lettuce

Drain pineapple juice into a medium-sized bowl. Cut avocado in half and remove pit. Cut avocado into chunks and add to the pineapple juice. Toss gently to coat. The juice helps prevent the avocado from darkening. Just before serving, drain and discard juice. Add pineapple and onion to avocado and toss with salad greens. Mix dressing with cumin and pour over salad ingredients. Toss to coat. **Editor's note:** Miller suggests enjoying this salad with pork.





Orange Jell-O Salad

Patricia Mahoney, Menard Electric Cooperative

Servings: 10-12

- 1 6-ounce box orange Jell-O**
- 1-3/4 cups hot water**
- 1 pint orange sherbet**
- 1 15-ounce can Mandarin oranges, drained**
- 8 ounces whipped topping**

In a large bowl, dissolve orange Jell-O in hot water and stir in sherbet while hot. When the sherbet is dissolved, fold in Mandarin oranges and the whipped topping until combined. Chill for several hours until ready to serve.

Apple Salad

*Submitted by Denise Smith,
Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative*

Servings: 4-8

- 2 apples, chopped**
- 1 handful seedless grapes**
- 1/2 cup celery, chopped**
- 4 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled**
- 3/4 cup pecans, chopped**
- Marzetti slaw dressing**

Cut apples into small pieces. Grapes can be left whole or cut in half lengthwise. Mix apples, celery, grapes, crumbled bacon and nuts. Starting small, add just enough slaw dressing to coat apples. Cover and refrigerate until serving.



Embracing drought-tolerant plants

Create a stunning garden with less water

HOT SUMMER TEMPERATURES coupled with minimal rainfall can be a challenge for plants. To create a vibrant landscape while conserving water, opt for drought-tolerant plants. These species, well-suited for hot, arid summers, thrive without the need for daily watering or extensive maintenance. Despite their resilience, these plants offer both aesthetic beauty and practical functionality in the garden.

A lack of water is a major stressor for plants. Although plants experience water stress due to a lack of rainfall or routine watering, they also lose water naturally through the pores in their leaves. During this process, known as transpiration, the pores open to let carbon dioxide into the leaves for photosynthesis, but the open pores also allow water vapor to escape (evaporate). Signs a plant is stressed due to lack of water include curling leaves, chlorosis (yellowing), stunted growth and leaf scorch or drop.

Drought-tolerant plants are adapted to dry conditions based on their ability to increase water absorption and conservation. With deep, developed root systems, these plants resource water deeper

in the soil, which is beneficial during dry conditions.

Many drought-tolerant plants also have smaller leaves, which reduces the leaf surface area; less surface area means less exposure to evaporation (water loss). Leaves are also protected from evaporation by either a wax coating or tiny hairs on leaves — both trap water and reduce the amount of water lost.

Drought-tolerant plants have extensive root systems that allow them to access water from deeper in the soil, which is especially advantageous during dry periods.

Regardless of growing conditions, selecting the right plant for the right place is the key to success in any garden. Always consider sunlight, soil and site conditions before choosing plants for your landscape. Drought-tolerant plants thrive in hot, dry conditions.

Some dependable perennial plants that tolerate drought conditions include baptisia, Joe-pye weed, Russian sage, sedum, thread leaf

coreopsis, showy goldenrod, liatris, little bluestem, purple coneflower and monarda.

Although tough and dependable, these plants require some care and maintenance. Just like any newly placed plant, water well the first year. Watering deeply but less frequently is better than shallow, more frequent watering; deep watering encourages the roots to grow deeper. Most plants grow best with at least 1 inch of water per week. After drought-tolerant plants are established, watering will only be necessary to keep plants healthy if there is a prolonged period of dry weather.

Most drought-tolerant plants prefer well-drained soil — this soil type encourages roots to spread as water drains away. Despite a preference for well-drained soil, some soil moisture is still needed. Maintain soil moisture and cooler soil temperatures with shredded hardwood mulch.

To reduce competition for soil water and nutrients, maintain a weed-free environment. Given these conditions, drought-tolerant plants need minimal fertilizer to thrive. Give your watering can a rest and incorporate drought-tolerant plants into your landscape. 💡



Brittnay Haag is a Horticulture Educator for the University of Illinois Extension serving Livingston, McLean and Woodford counties. Her work focuses on youth horticulture education through school gardens and Jr. Master Gardener programs.

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UPCOMING THEMES

- September - Outdoor adventures
- October - Fall foliage
- November - Shapes
- December - N/A
- January - Smiles



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