

Illinois Country Living

DOWN TO THE KERNELS

Follow along the trail
of Illinois' favorite snack

 Association of Illinois
Electric Cooperatives

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FEATURE
Strolling along the
Makanda Boardwalk

SAFETY CHECK
Powering through
an outage

FINEST COOKING
Corn creations

 CO-OP
NEWS

Eye Doctor Helps Illinois Legally Blind To See

High Technology For Low Vision Patients Allows Many To Drive Again



For many patients with macular degeneration and other vision-related conditions, the loss of central visual detail also signals the end to one of the last bastions of independence: driving. A Mascoutah optometrist, Dr. Marianne McDaniel, is using miniaturized telescopes that are mounted in glasses to help people who have lost vision from macular degeneration and other eye conditions.

"Some of my patients consider me the last stop for people who have vision loss," said Dr. McDaniel, one of only a few doctors in the world who specialize in fitting bioptic telescopes to help those who have lost vision due to macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and other debilitating eye diseases.

Imagine a pair of glasses that can improve your vision enough to change your life. If you're a low vision patient, you've probably not only imagined them, but have been searching for

them. Bioptic telescopes may be the breakthrough in optical technology that will give you the independence you've been looking for. Patients with vision in the 20/200 range can many times be improved to 20/50 or better.

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness and vision loss in people over 50. Despite this, most adults are not familiar with the



A scene as it might be viewed by a person with age-related macular degeneration.

condition. As many as 25% of those over the age of 50 have some degree of macular degeneration. The macula is only one small part of the retina; however, it is the most sensitive and gives us sharp central vision. When it degenerates, macular degeneration leaves a blind spot right in the center of vision, making it difficult or impossible to recognize faces, read a book, or pass the driver's vision test.

Nine out of 10 people who have macular degeneration have the dry form. New research suggests vitamins can help. The British medical journal BMC Ophthalmology recently reported that 56% of patients treated with a high-dose combination of vitamins experienced improved vision after six months.

While age is the most significant risk factor for developing the disease, heredity, smoking, cardiovascular disease, and high blood pressure have also been identified as risk factors.

Macular degeneration accounts for 90% of new legal blindness in the U.S. While there is currently no cure, promising research is being done on many fronts. "My job is to figure out everything and anything possible to keep a person functioning, especially driving," says Dr. McDaniel.

"Bioptic telescopes can cost over \$2,000," said Dr. McDaniel, "especially if we build them with an automatic sunglass."

"The major benefit of the bioptic telescope is that the lens automatically focuses on whatever you're looking at," said Dr. McDaniel. "It's like a self-focusing camera, but much more precise."

To learn more about bioptic telescopes or to schedule a consultation, give Dr. McDaniel a call. You can also visit our websites.

www.mascoutaheycare.com

1-618-566-8899

Office located in Mascoutah, Illinois

Marianne McDaniel, O.D.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PERFECT POP

Illinois Country Living

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VOLUME 83, NO. 3

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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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Illinois Country Living (ISSN number 1086-8062) is published monthly by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. The cost is \$2.88 plus postage per year for members of subscribing cooperatives and \$12 per year for all others. Periodical postage paid at Springfield, Illinois, and additional mailing offices.

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Thank you for standing up for your co-op

But, legislative battles will continue

THIS SPRING, YOUR VOICE made a difference. Thanks to the strong response from electric cooperative members across Illinois, Senate Bill 40 did not advance during the spring legislative session in Springfield.



Craig Sondgeroth is the president/CEO of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives.

I want to personally thank each of you who reached out to your legislators through Voices for Cooperative Power to oppose this bill. Your advocacy protected your cooperative's ability to keep rates affordable and continue planning responsibly for our energy future. The unnecessary planning mandates would have undercut your board's ability to make decisions that reflect local needs.

This proposal would have required electric cooperatives like yours to conduct complex and costly integrated resource plans — plans that are more appropriate for large investor-owned utilities, not not-for-profit co-ops governed by the members they serve. These requirements would have meant more red tape, higher costs and less flexibility for local leaders like your board of directors to make the right decisions for your community.

Electric cooperatives already engage in thoughtful, long-term planning to ensure safe,

affordable and reliable power. We don't need a one-size-fits-all mandate from Springfield to tell us how to do what we've done successfully for decades. Their language threatened to take that control away from you — the consumer-members.

The substance of the legislation was introduced as SB 40 on May 28. At one point, the bill was 865 pages long, but most important to us were the 45 pages of the bill that were aimed just at electric cooperatives and municipalities.

While this large and very expensive bill did not pass by the end of the spring legislative session, this issue isn't over. It's likely we'll see this proposal again in the near future. But, because of your engagement, lawmakers now know that Illinois electric cooperative members are paying attention — and that we will speak up when legislation would increase electric rates.

Thank you for standing with us and making your voice heard. Your involvement and advocacy are what keep electric co-ops strong, local and focused on what matters most: serving you.

To stay up to date and to make your voice heard, join Voices for Cooperative Power, a network of Americans dedicated to transforming rural and suburban communities that educate policymakers on the localized, community-based approach that electric co-ops take to keep the lights on. Go to aiec.coop/iclvcv to sign up.



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JULY CHECKLIST

If you or your family plans to spend any time in the sun this summer, the American Cancer Society recommends that you seek shade and follow these tips to help prevent skin cancer.

Slip on a shirt.

While all clothing provides some UV protection, some clothes are made specifically to help block UV rays.



Slop on sunscreen.

Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 on exposed areas of skin year-round. Reapply sunscreen every 2 hours or after swimming or sweating.

Slap on a hat.

Opting for a hat on sunny days can help shade your face from the sun. A wide-brimmed hat can also protect your ears and neck.



Wrap on sunglasses.



Sunglasses that block UV rays can help protect the eyes and skin around them.



Demand growth looms over summer reliability

The North American Electric Reliability Corp. (NERC) is warning of potential energy supply shortfalls in parts of the U.S. this summer during periods of extreme weather amid climbing electricity demand and a changing resource mix.

The warnings were part of NERC's 2025 Summer Reliability Assessment released May 14, which evaluated generation resource and transmission system adequacy for June through September.

All areas studied by NERC are expected to have adequate resources for normal summer peak load conditions. But, several regions are at risk of electricity supply shortfalls during periods of more extreme summer weather, including New England, parts of the Midwest, the Southwest Power Pool and Texas.

According to the report, weather services anticipate above-average temperatures across much of North America this summer and below-average precipitation in the Northwest and Midwest.

Total peak electricity demand for the areas that NERC assesses has risen by over 10 gigawatts since last summer, more than double the previous year-to-year increase. At

the same time, more than 7.4 GW of generation capacity has retired or become inactive for the upcoming summer, most of it natural gas- and coal-fired generation.

"As demand expands, grid planners and operators are doing more than ever, but they're doing it under tighter reserve margins," said John Moura, NERC's director of reliability assessment and performance analysis, on a May 14 webinar discussing the report. "While we're adding a lot more resources — solar, batteries and other emerging technologies — the pace and performance of that build-out doesn't yet fully align with the reliability needs of a rapidly electrifying economy."

"Once again, NERC identifies continuing threats to the electric grid that leave a large area of the country vulnerable to power supply disruptions during periods of extreme summer conditions," said National Rural Electric Cooperative Association CEO Jim Matheson. "Demand is surging, supply isn't keeping up, and the resources being added to the grid aren't as flexible or reliable as the always-available generation they're replacing."

"Now more than ever, we need smart energy policies that prioritize reliability, affordability

Continued on page 8

Sudoku

by Myles Mellor and Susan Flanagan

To solve the puzzle, each row, column and box must contain each of the numbers 1 to 9. Level: Medium

Solution on page 33.

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

IL ENTERTAINMENT CORNER



'Tis the season for fairgoers in Illinois. According to the Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs, there are 105 county fairs and two state fairs in Illinois each year, most of them scheduled during the warm summer months.

The longstanding tradition began with the Macoupin County Fair in 1852 and to this day celebrates the history and importance of community and agriculture throughout the state. Varied attractions, events and fun foods are often found at Illinois fairs, and they continue to delight attendees of all ages.

This year's Illinois State Fair in Springfield will be held Aug. 7 to 17, while the DuQuoin State Fair is scheduled for Aug. 22 through Sept. 1. Go to illinoiscountyfairs.org/fairs for a complete 2025 schedule of county fairs across the state.

"Demand" continued from page 7

and put American consumers first. We look forward to continuing to work with policymakers to meet this challenge and keep the lights on across the nation."

NERC said its summer findings are consistent with risks and issues that it observed in its latest Long-Term Reliability Assessment, released in December 2024.

That report said more than half of North America is at risk of energy shortfalls in the next 10 years amid surging electricity demand and thermal plant retirements. NERC projected that capacity additions to the bulk power system in the next decade will fall short of demand growth.

Molly Christian, NRECA



High schoolers from 44 states visit D.C.

More than 2,000 youth delegates, chaperones and staff members from 44 states visited Washington, D.C., for the annual Electric Cooperative Youth Tour, June 16-23. Forty-eight students represented Illinois' electric and telephone cooperatives.

"As we headed into our 61st year, we wanted delegates to connect with each other, American democracy and most importantly, connect with electric cooperatives and NRECA," said National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Youth Programs Manager Cale McCall.

During the tour's Youth Day program on June 19, delegates heard from several speakers, including NRECA CEO Jim Matheson, NRECA President Mike Partin, Youth Leadership Council spokesperson Maggie Martin and motivational speaker Mike Schlappi, a wheelchair basketball player who has appeared in four consecutive summer Paralympic Games.

"I am always excited for the trip," said Brooke Gross, member services

manager and facilitator of youth programs at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. "What I love most is watching the students' relationships evolve — many start the week as strangers and end it as lifelong friends."

Stay tuned for the August 2025 issue of Illinois Country Living magazine for more coverage of the event.

Victoria A. Rocha, NRECA

CMEC announces new president/CEO

Jim Wallace has been named president and CEO of Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative (CMEC). With more than 25 years of service at CMEC,



Jim Wallace

Wallace is poised to continue to lead the cooperative in meeting the needs of the co-op's consumer-members.

Wallace was hired at CMEC in 1998 as a marketing services specialist. In 2002, he became the cooperative's director of operations and engineering, holding that position until he was named interim president and CEO in December 2024.

"We are excited to welcome Jim to his new role," said CMEC Board Chair Kent Metzger. "The board is confident that he will bring the right blend of leadership, vision and experience to guide us forward while remaining deeply committed to serving our members."

"I am honored to be named the next president and CEO at CMEC," said Wallace. "I would like to thank the board of directors for this opportunity and their support. I believe very strongly in the cooperative model and look forward to contributing to the continued success of CMEC alongside [its] very committed and professional staff."

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Where is it?

The winners of the May hidden objects contest were Sandra Smith of Corn Belt Energy Corporation and Mary Edwards of Monroe Country Electric Cooperative. Congratulations! Your ICL campfire mugs have been sent.

The sun hidden in the June 2025 issue was on page 18 in the PoweredUp section. 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. In honor of Independence Day on July 4, be on the lookout for fireworks, pictured above. The symbol can vary in size and will not be hidden 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 received by the 25th. Only one entry is allowed per household every month. If multiple entries per household are submitted, only the first will be considered. Winners' names and the symbol's location will be published in each month's issue of Illinois Country Living. 💡

AT A GLANCE: THE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE NETWORK

From booming suburbs to remote rural communities, America's electric cooperatives are energy providers and engines of economic development. Electric cooperatives keep the lights on and play a vital role in transforming communities.

ELECTRIC CO-OPS
ARE PROUD TO
POWER

56% of the U.S. landscape.



ELECTRIC CO-OPS
ARE PROUD TO
SERVE

22 MILLION
homes, businesses, schools
& farms in **48 states**.



830

Distribution
co-ops are the
foundation of the
cooperative network.



64

G&T co-ops provide
wholesale power to
distribution co-ops.

ELECTRIC CO-OPS
**PROVIDE
POWER**



to 1 in 8 U.S. residents in rural
and exurban communities.

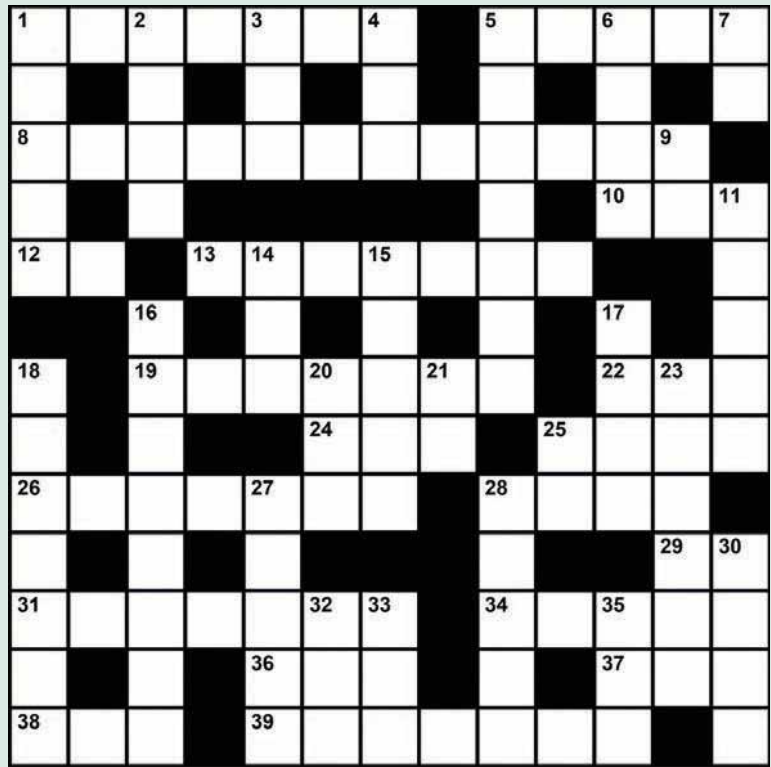
Across

- 1 Popular beef patties with fries
- 5 Grocery bags
- 8 Summer barbecue vegetable, 4 words
- 10 Frying equipment
- 12 Negative response
- 13 Bird that can be cooked on the grill
- 19 Frankfurters in buns, 2 words
- 22 Have a steak, say
- 24 Approves
- 25 Friend
- 26 Orange vegetables that can be grilled
- 28 Leafy green vegetable that can be grilled
- 29 Football position for the ball carrier, abbr.
- 31 Important proteins
- 34 Spritz the turkey
- 36 Expert
- 37 NYC clock setting, abbr.
- 38 Coast Guard rank, abbr.
- 39 Seafood fish that can be grilled

Down

- 1 Pork meat that can be grilled and has a smoky flavor
- 2 Pink, as steak

- 3 Green prefix for environmental concerns
 - 4 Take a chair
 - 5 Metal sticks for grilling kebabs, e.g.
 - 6 Lamb or pork section
 - 7 Street, abbr.
 - 9 Arts degree, abbr.
 - 11 Flavor like almonds or walnuts
 - 14 Pizza ____
 - 15 Prepares food
 - 16 Mexican sausages that can be grilled
 - 17 ____ peppers, vegetables that are often grilled
 - 18 Pacific salmon variety which can be cooked on the grill
 - 20 Small round mark
 - 21 Forces of gravity
 - 22 Sounds that can indicate cooking time is complete
 - 25 Airline, abbr.
 - 27 Energy
 - 28 Meat and vegetables on a stick
 - 30 Trial period
 - 32 Pitcher's stat, abbr.
 - 33 Sun in Spanish
 - 35 ____ the table (for a meal)
- Solution on page 33.*





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JULY/AUGUST Datebook

LET'S GO!

July 18

Farm to Table Dinner

PAXTON

Chef Ella crafts a refined, elegant menu at Cedar Oak Farms

July 19

Spelling Bee

GALENA

Children partake in an old-fashioned spelling bee in a one-room schoolhouse

Aug. 8

Stash Sale

NORMAL

Hands All Around Quilt Guild hosts its third annual event

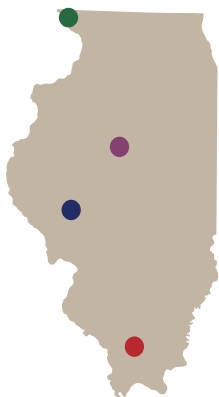
Aug. 7-17

Illinois State Fair

SPRINGFIELD

Rides, livestock shows, agricultural exhibits, racing, concerts, food and more

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



Art, Literature and Wine Festival

JULY

20

Local and regional artists specializing in oil and watercolor painting, wood, jewelry, metal work, ceramics and glass showcase their talents and sell their art at this free event. Local car clubs display their cars; wine tasting is featured all day in the tasting room; and music is provided by Greg Williams. Food vendors will also be on site. Rain or shine.

July 20, 2025: noon to 5 p.m.

- Mackinaw Valley Vineyard, 33633 State Route 9, Mackinaw
Admission: free
309-645-5054, mackinawvalleyvineyard.com

River Country Quilt Show

JULY

25-26

The event features the display of approximately 200 quilted items, the Textile Art Silent Auction, bed turnings, quilt appraisals, vendor booths, raffles, concessions and scissor sharpening.

July 25-26, 2025: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

- Jacksonville High School, 1211 North Diamond, Jacksonville
Admission: \$10
309-678-7716



John A. Logan College Harrison-Bruce Village 4th Annual Quilt Show

JULY

26

Display of 150-plus modern and vintage quilts, bed turning, demonstrations from local quilting, fiber, stitching and art guilds, quilts from the Illinois State Museum and local artist and business vendor booths.

July 26, 2025: all day

- John A. Logan College Conference Center, 700 Logan College Drive, Carterville
Admission: \$5
618-985-2828,
facebook.com/HarrisonBruceHistoricalVillageAtJohnALoganCollege

6th Annual Galena Brew Fest

JULY

26

Savor local and regional crafted brews, wine and spirits at a resort overlooking the Mississippi River. Take in the view while listening to music provided by Sam Wooden.

While there, enjoy the onsite restaurant, lodging and outdoor activities. Proceeds benefit Galena ARC.

July 26, 2025: 1-4 p.m.

- Chestnut Mountain Resort, 8700 W. Chestnut Mountain Road, Galena
Admission: Tickets available on website for \$35 (includes souvenir glass and 30 sampling tickets) and designated driver tickets for \$5. Tickets can be purchased the day of the event for \$40.
815-777-2248, galenaarc.org/galena-brew-fest



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Powering through an outage

Don't generate problems with your backup generator

THE WIND HOWLS OUTSIDE as a major storm system blows through the area. The lights flicker before you're plunged into darkness. The social media feed on your phone is packed with reports of damage and power outages.

variety of sizes, so homeowners can match the generator to their home's power needs. Portable generators can be moved to wherever they are needed; however, they generally provide less power than standby models. Most use gasoline or diesel fuel, and when operated correctly, both provide a safe source of backup power.

Some homeowners make the mistake of plugging their backup generators directly into a wall outlet or connecting them to their home's electrical panel. Beyond the significant risk of electrocution and fire that can create, these actions can send the voltage your generator creates into the power lines connecting your home to the electric grid.

That creates a dangerous condition called "backfeed," which can seriously injure the lineworkers who are working to restore your electricity, as well as anyone who accidentally comes in contact with power lines. Backfeed can also damage the generator.

That's why standby generators must be installed by a qualified electrician and are required to have a transfer switch. The transfer switch creates a barrier between your home's electrical system and the outside wires, so backfeed cannot occur. When the transfer switch senses that power has been restored, it switches the power from the generator back to the grid.

The biggest danger associated with backup generators is both invisible and deadly. Because backup

generators burn fossil fuels, they generate a variety of gases, most notably carbon monoxide (CO).

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, one portable generator can produce as much CO as hundreds of cars. The agency reports that nearly 100 Americans die each year because of CO poisoning from backup generators. That's why they should only be used in dry, well-ventilated areas away from your home and garage.

CO is not only invisible, it's also odorless. The National Institutes of Health warns that CO has the potential to kill in as little as five minutes. People exposed to CO typically become dizzy, feel nauseated and experience headaches. Often, they lose consciousness before noticing any symptoms. Anyone exposed to CO should be moved to fresh air immediately.

If you purchase a portable backup generator, protect your home and family by taking the time to read the manufacturer's instructions. When starting one, make sure nothing is plugged into it. After the generator starts, plug things in and turn them on one at a time to make sure you aren't overloading your generator's capacity. Unplug them from the generator before turning it off. Unless the manufacturer recommends otherwise, always turn the generator off and allow it to cool before adding fuel.

Regular maintenance is the key to ensuring your portable generator operates safely for years to come. When storing it, drain the fuel from the tank. In addition, check the oil and fuel levels, filters and other components once a season so you know it will be ready to run safely and efficiently the next time a big storm blows through. 💡



Standby generators are permanently wired into the home's electrical system.

Fortunately, you had the foresight to buy a backup generator big enough to handle your refrigerator, freezer and other key needs. Flashlight in hand, you attach extension cords. Within minutes, you hear the quiet humming that tells you they're working again.

Illinois' electric co-ops do their best to prevent power outages, but they can sometimes stretch into several hours or even days after a major storm. That's why many people consider buying backup generators to provide for their family's needs while waiting for service to resume.

Backup generators fall into two categories. Standby generators are permanently wired into the home's electrical system. They come in a



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.

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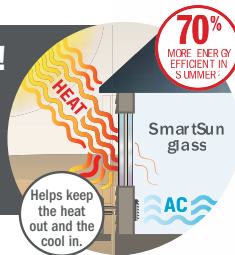
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*Using U.S. and imported parts.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION

The first step to improving an older home is air sealing and adding insulation to attic spaces.

Smart fixes for a more efficient older home

I LOVE OLD HOMES. The details and craftsmanship have always drawn me to them. The features of older homes can make them less efficient than modern construction, but it doesn't have to be that way. You can keep the charm and make your home more efficient.

Start by prioritizing the invisible upgrades that make your home more comfortable and efficient. When we were kids, I don't think any of us thought, "When I grow up, I want to spend my hard-earned money on insulation." It's not as exciting as new countertops or a remodeled bathroom, but air sealing and insulation can save you money every month. Then you can apply the savings to aesthetic improvements.

Many older homes are not properly insulated. Insulation has several benefits beyond sealing your home and keeping outdoor air from seeping in. It reduces outdoor noise, makes your home quieter and improves overall comfort.

Always properly air seal before you insulate. Older homes with pocket doors, coved ceilings, dumbwaiters, doors to attic spaces and laundry chutes allow indoor air to escape through the cavities, gaps and cracks around these classic features. Sealing off open cavities around those features often requires

plywood, rigid foam or drywall fastened into place and then caulked around the edges.

Keep an eye out for framing features that cause drafts. Balloon framing is a type of construction where wall studs run all the way from the foundation to the roof, allowing air to flow freely through those spaces. Second floors with knee-wall attics on both sides are notorious for air leakage. Open cavities allow air to flow horizontally between the attic spaces, making the home uncomfortable and inefficient. Seal off the open cavities in the floor framing and insulate attic spaces.

Dense-packed cellulose or closed cell foam insulation can be sprayed into exterior walls. Skilled contractors can remove pieces of siding and drill holes to fill the wall cavities from the outside of the home. For brick or stone homes, holes can be drilled from the inside and then patched and painted. Insulating walls from the inside of the home requires more time and effort in preparation and cleanup, but having well-insulated walls is worth it.

Knob and tube wiring — commonly used from the early 1880s to the 1930s with no grounding wire — should be replaced prior to insulating walls and attics for safety

purposes. Contact between insulation and knob and tube wiring can create a fire hazard.

People often think new windows are the best way to improve a home's efficiency. Considering the cost of replacing windows, I recommend investing in air sealing and insulation first. Then consider storm windows to keep the charm of the original windows, such as leaded glass and stained-glass windows in good condition. Choose from interior or exterior options that are operable and inoperable.

Once you've addressed the envelope of your home, consider appliance improvements. Replace your old electric water heater with a heat pump water heater. This upgrade can save a family of four an estimated \$550 per year and more than \$5,600 over the lifetime of the water heater, according to ENERGY STAR.

Invest in high-efficiency heating and cooling equipment. A mini-split heat pump, also known as a ductless heat pump, is a more efficient option than electric baseboard heating and provides the benefit of air conditioning.

Older homes don't have to be inefficient. Show your home some love and invest in energy-efficient upgrades. 💡



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



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 **1-888-358-9199** 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 **1-888-358-9199** to secure your supply of **Re-Nourish**. Use Promo Code **ICLRN725** when you call. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered!

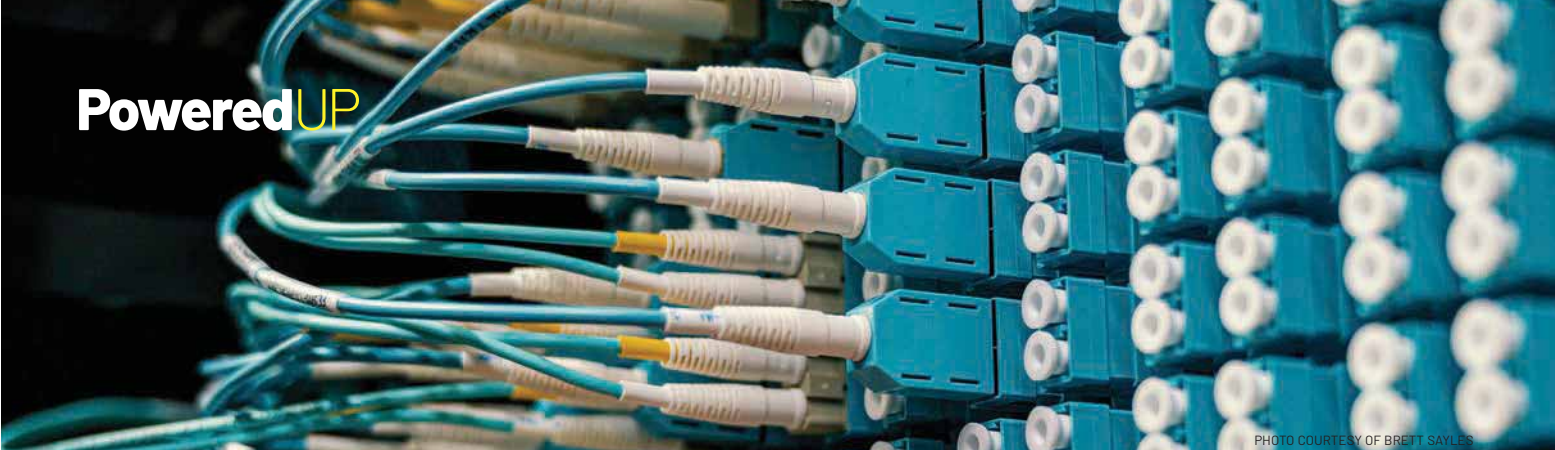


PHOTO COURTESY OF BRETT SAYLES

Data centers can be huge, sometimes requiring more electricity than all a co-op's members combined. This increased demand for electricity brings new opportunities and challenges.

Exploring the digital frontier

How data centers can impact rural electric co-ops

DATA CENTERS ARE THE backbone of the internet. They store and manage everything from social media to cloud computing, artificial intelligence and our favorite streaming services. As more people and businesses go digital, the number of data centers is quickly growing. While many of these centers were once built near large cities, more are now being sited in rural areas.

Electric cooperatives are receiving regular requests across the nation from companies that seek to build large data centers in their service territories. These requests bring both big opportunities and major challenges.

Why are data centers coming to rural areas?

There are several reasons why companies are choosing rural locations for their data centers:

- **More land.** Rural areas have plenty of space for large buildings.
- **Resource diversity.** Electric cooperatives own and operate reliable sources of energy.
- **Lower costs.** Land and labor are less expensive outside of cities.
- **Tax breaks.** Local and state governments may offer tax benefits to attract these businesses.

Data centers can be huge, sometimes requiring more electricity than all a co-op's members combined. This increased demand for electricity brings several new opportunities for co-ops.

- **New jobs and growth.** Data centers can bring jobs and revenue to small communities. In Virginia, the data center industry supported around 74,000 jobs and added billions to the state's economy, according to a 2024 report by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission.

- **Stable revenue.** These centers require a lot of power and usually sign long-term contracts. This provides the co-op with steady income, which can help pay for system upgrades and keep rates lower for other members.

- **Improved infrastructure.** To serve a large data center, the co-op might need to build new power lines or substations. While this is expensive, it can also improve service for all co-op members by making the electric system stronger and more reliable.

While data centers create significant opportunities for electric co-ops by driving demand and investment, they also present new challenges in meeting increased electricity needs while maintaining reliable and resilient power delivery.

- **High upfront costs.** Building the new infrastructure to power a data center can cost millions, which is why co-ops work diligently with data center customers to ensure costs are covered.

- **Risk of losing a big customer.** If the data center moves away or

shuts down, the co-op could be left with expensive equipment it no longer needs. This could negatively impact the co-op's finances.

- **Permitting and siting.** Acquiring permission to build new power lines and substations takes time. There may be zoning rules, environmental reviews and public meetings that slow things down.

Planning for the future

To manage both the risks and rewards that data centers bring, electric co-op leaders are taking a careful, informed approach. They are working closely with their generation and transmission (G&T) provider, economic development offices and financial experts to plan these projects.

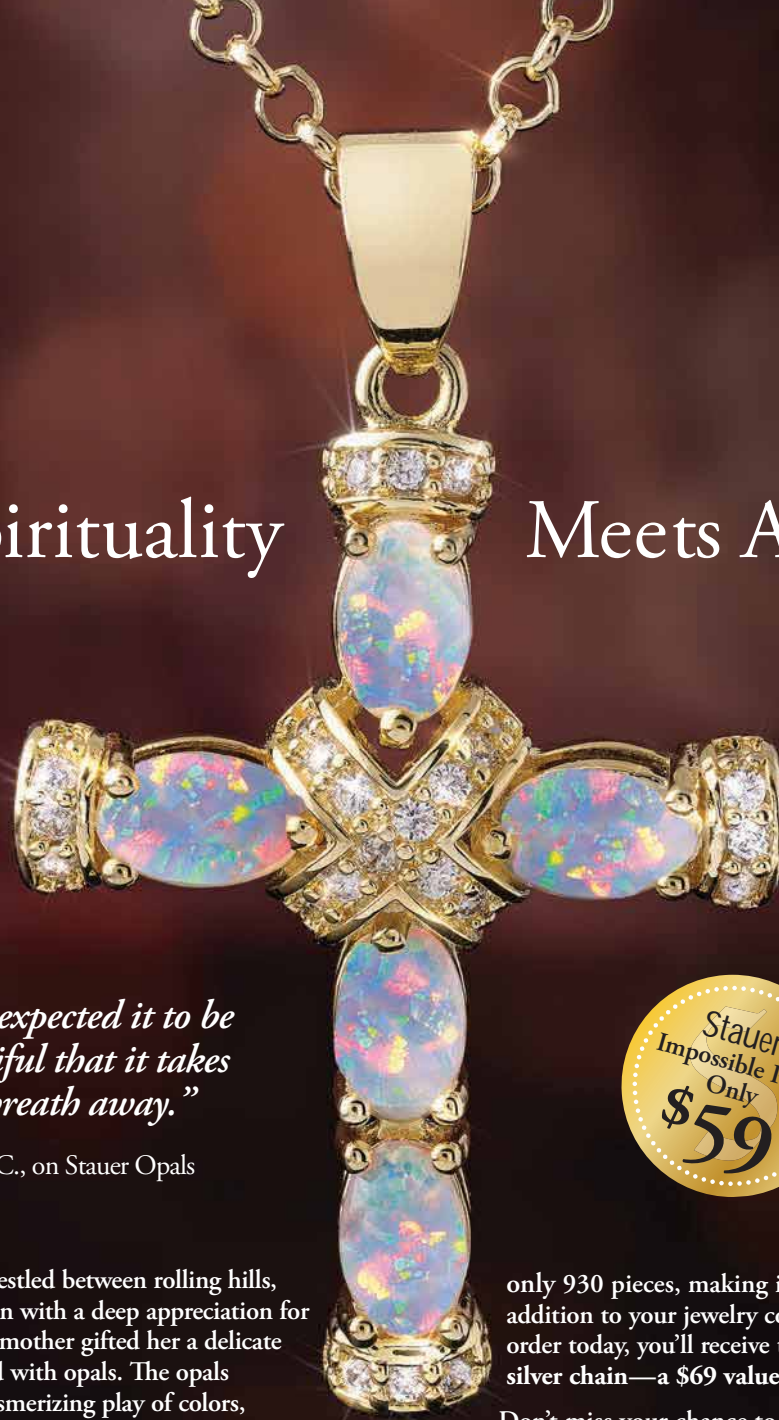
Co-ops are also ensuring contracts with data center operators include protections for the co-op. For example, if the data center leaves early, they may be liable for paying part of the infrastructure costs. Forecasting tools are also aiding co-ops in understanding how the new load will impact the local system.

Serving large data centers could be a gamechanger for many electric co-ops. These projects can bring jobs, revenue and new technology to co-op communities. But, they also come with financial risks and planning challenges. By asking the right questions and building smart partnerships, electric co-ops are poised to make decisions that serve their members well — now and in the future. 💡



Allison Hamilton writes on business and technology strategies for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

Spirituality Meets Artistry



"I never expected it to be so beautiful that it takes your breath away."

— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals



In a quaint village, nestled between rolling hills, lived a young woman with a deep appreciation for gemstones. Her grandmother gifted her a delicate cross pendant adorned with opals. The opals shimmered with a mesmerizing play of colors, reflecting hues of blues, greens, and fiery oranges. Her grandmother shared the legend of the opals, believed to bring hope, purity, and luck to those who wore them.

Using this story as inspiration, Stauer brings you the **Opal Spirit Cross Pendant**. With over 2 total carats of Kyocera lab-created opals set in .925 sterling silver encased in yellow gold, this pendant is a radiant celebration of beauty and craftsmanship. Each opal captivates with a kaleidoscopic dance of fiery oranges blending into oceanic blues, streaked with flashes of vibrant green that seem to come alive with every movement. The shimmering opals are skillfully arranged to create an enchanting, otherworldly glow, embodying the spirit of hope and harmony.

This breathtaking combination of color and craftsmanship is available as a limited availability of

only 930 pieces, making it a rare and treasured addition to your jewelry collection. Plus, when you order today, you'll receive the gold-finished sterling silver chain—a \$69 value—absolutely free!

Don't miss your chance to own this exclusive tribute to timeless elegance and meaningful symbolism.

Necklace Specifications:

- 2 ½ ctw. Kyocera lab opals and DiamondAura® accents
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A man wearing a red baseball cap, glasses, and a red and white plaid short-sleeved shirt stands in a lush green cornfield. He is wearing blue jeans and a watch on his left wrist. The background shows a clear blue sky and a line of trees in the distance.

Down to the kernels

Follow along the trail of Illinois' favorite snack

By Kayla Adkins

LONG BEFORE IT'S COATED in butter, cheddar cheese dust or caramel, and before it's scooped into a bag at a small-town shop or popped in a movie theater, popcorn begins in a field — often right here in Illinois.

Although Illinois may be best known for its field corn and soybeans, it's one of the top popcorn-producing states in the country, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and in 2003, popcorn became the official state snack food.

Based on average sales from 2016-2020, Popcorn.org estimates Americans consumed 14 billion quarts of popcorn. According to the Illinois State Museum, popcorn is grown on 333 Illinois farms.

Steve Turner, a farmer in Mason County, has grown popcorn since 1989.

Where the popcorn trail begins

Steve Turner, a farmer in Mason County and member of Menard Electric Cooperative, has grown popcorn since 1989, continuing a tradition his father-in-law began when he first started growing the crop in 1984.

“People may not realize that popcorn could be in their backyard,” Turner says. “If you go down the road in the fall, you may not be able to tell the difference between a popcorn field or cornfield, unless you look closely. If you look closely, you can tell the difference by the shape of it.”

For decades, Turner has cultivated popcorn on sandy, irrigated soil that’s uniquely suited to the plant’s needs. “Popcorn seems to like the sandy soils,” Turner says. “That’s why, in this area, in Mason and Tazewell counties, amazingly, you’ve got thousands of acres of popcorn.”

Turner’s operation typically grows between 250 and 400 acres of popcorn annually, depending on crop rotation. Popcorn is a non-GMO crop that thrives in the region’s sandy soils and benefits from irrigation — a crucial factor that helped the crop gain a foothold in central Illinois.

“When my father-in-law started, corn prices were low, and he was just trying to diversify and see what it would do,” Turner recalls. Popcorn ended up making sense and has been a staple of the farm ever since.

Turner explains that the growing and harvesting process mirrors that of a conventional cornfield, but with a few important differences. The popcorn ears are smaller, and the plants are less wind-resistant, which makes timing critical. Once it is ready, it is immediately harvested.

Most of Turner’s popcorn crop goes to Weaver Popcorn Company, which has a presence in Illinois and processes

millions of pounds annually for commercial use — everything from movie theaters to microwave bags.

Although the family considered branching into processing and selling their own brand at one time, they ultimately decided to stick with the farming side of popcorn.

And, while Turner is no fan of caramel or Chicago-style popcorn mix himself (“I’m a butter and salt guy,” he admits), he’s thrilled to see Illinois popcorn show up in a range of forms and flavors. As Turner puts it, “I’ve never met anyone who doesn’t like popcorn.”

Places to pop into

Popcorn hit peak popularity during The Great Depression because it was an affordable, healthy snack, according to Popcorn.org. While most popular in association with movies, early theaters refused to sell the snack. Entrepreneurs at the time began selling out of popcorn carts in front of theaters so that moviegoers could eat while they watched.

Those early days of popcorn entrepreneurship paved the way for popcorn stores to offer a more rounded menu to customers. As a result, these days popcorn eaters have many more flavors to choose from.

Across the state, a variety of popcorn shops celebrate this beloved crop in creative and flavorful ways. Some popcorn stores boast more than 50 flavors, as well as seasonal options. Whether you like sweet, spicy or salty, there is sure to be a popcorn flavor for you. Although this is not an exhaustive list, here are some spots where you can pop in (or order online) and experience the magic of Illinois popcorn.

ABE'S GOURMET POPCORN SHOP

101 E. Main St., Belleville
abesgourmetpopcorn.com

Abe’s prides itself on making “every batch the old-fashioned way: small batches, big flavor and a whole lot of love,” according to its website. The shop’s popcorn is sourced locally from Ella & Ollie Popcorn in Belleville. Abe’s offers more than 70 flavors, including its signature buttery caramel corn, which serves as the base of many of its most popular blends.

AMERICA'S POPCORN SHOP

126 S. Main St., Morton
americaspopcornshop.com

Morton’s hometown popcorn shop features more than 70 flavors of popcorn, including a flavor of the month. Not sure which flavor to try? Its website features a “Find Your Flavor” quiz. Answer five personality questions, and the website will provide a recommendation.





CHEF'S SHOPPE

2320 Troy Road, Edwardsville
chefsshoppe.com/popcorn

Chef's Shoppe started as a gourmet kitchen store in 1997 but has since added on a candy store and popcorn shop. The popcorn is popped fresh daily and can either be purchased at the store or shipped to your door.

COOL BLISS POPPED BLISS POPCORN SHOP

1506 S. Neil St., Champaign
cbppopcornshop.com

For over 15 years, CBPB Popcorn has been serving sweets and gourmet popcorn in the Champaign area.

GREAT AMERICAN POPCORN CO.

115 N. Main St., Galena
greatpopcorn.com

Great American Popcorn Co. is located in the heart of Galena. It offers wall-to-wall flavors of popcorn, as well as a sampling station. For those who like trying new things, the store offers a Flavor of the Month Club, delivered right to your doorstep.

CRANKY MIKE'S POPCORN

227 Gladiolus St., Momence
crankymikes.com

Don't go in asking to talk to Cranky Mike. Chris Doud is actually the owner, with her signature recipe being Cranky Mike's Kettle Corn. In addition to the kettle corn, other popular flavors are regularly available, as well as rotating specialties.

DOWNTOWN POPCORN COMPANY

314 W. Jefferson Ave. Suite B, Effingham
Downtown Popcorn Company on Facebook

Downtown Popcorn Company is a cozy, family-run popcorn shop located in the heart of Effingham. This charming store offers both bags and tins of freshly popped kernels — specialty popcorn balls are also a fan favorite. Its gourmet flavors range from sweet to savory, as well as unique seasonal popcorn varieties.

HOLLAND'S CARAMELCORN

127 Washington Square, Washington
hollandscaramelcorn.com

Holland's specializes in daily-made gourmet popcorn and can be found at a variety of stores in central Illinois. Check out its website for all the locations. Don't worry, there's a lot more than just caramel corn.



CREEKSTONE KETTLE WORKS

509 South O'Bannon, Raymond
creekstonekettleworks.com

Creekstone Kettle Works offers sweet, savory and premium flavors of popcorn and kettle corn. It also sells gift baskets and popcorn tins and can cater weddings. While customers are welcome to shop and smell fresh corn popping at the brick-and-mortar store, the popcorn is also available at several local businesses.



PHOTO COURTESY OF POPP'N ON MAINE

LUKA POPCORN CO.

Blue Mound
lukapopcorn.com

At Luka Popcorn Co., shop owner Morgan Luka shares her grandma's famous caramel corn. At her shop and area events, she offers gourmet popcorn featuring classic and quirky flavors. Luka Popcorn can also be ordered online.

MOM & POPS KETTLE KORN STOP

119 S. Market St., Paxton
momnpopskettlekornstop.com

Mom & Pops began as a wrestling fundraiser in Paxton. It was such a hit the owners created a business of it. In addition to the storefront and mailed orders, the popcorn can be found at most summer festivals in the area. Veterans, firefighters, police officers and EMS workers receive free "Kettle Korn" as a thanks for their service.

RIPOPPEDIT POPCORN

2004 S. Neil St., Champaign
ricreatedit.com

RiPoppedIt doesn't just have popcorn, it has "bougie" popcorn. You can find this popcorn at Hunny Bunny Bakes and at the Urbana Farmer's Market during the spring and summer months. Make sure to check out the flavor of the month.

THE ORIGINAL DEL'S POPCORN SHOP

142 N. Merchant St., Decatur
delspopcorn.com

In 1946, Del and Emily Barnett purchased "The Popcorn Shop" from John Baldwin, who opened the store in 1934. His shop was an immediate success, even amid the hardships posed by The Great Depression. The store has changed hands several times over the years but still offers its traditional flame-popped popcorn in small batches.

POPP'N ON MAINE

917 Maine St., Quincy
quincypopcorn.com

Popcorn has been Popp'n on Maine since 2019 and is a family affair for the McKinneys, who own and run the business. In addition to the various flavor options, the popcorn shop will also pop in to cater your next event.

THE PERFECT POP

134 St. Clair Square, Fairview Heights
thepfectpopgourmetpopcorn.com

Stephanie Williams opened The Perfect Pop five years ago with her husband Eddie. She specializes in caramel corn, but sweet and savory options are also listed on the website. All seeds are fresh from a local farmer.

THE POPCORN SHOPPE

4700 N. University St. #43, Peoria
peoriapopcornshoppe.online

What started as a hobby for owners Niki and Matt became an opportunity that allowed them to take over The Popcorn Shoppe in 2022. Now in a new location, the business has continued to expand. The backbone of the business is its staff of disabled adults, providing opportunities in a delicious, buttery environment.

TRIMBLE'S PRODUCE FARM

101 W. Main, Heyworth
facebook.com/TrimblesProduceFarm

Since 1974, Trimble's has been popping corn in the Heyworth area. As a produce farm, Trimble's offers much more than popcorn. Its popcorn and other products can be found at local events and markets.

WOODY'S POPCORN

1741 Industrial Dr. #24, Sterling
woodyspopcorn.com

Although Woody's does not have a storefront for customers, its popcorn can be purchased at stores throughout northern and central Illinois, as well as in parts of Iowa and Wisconsin. Bags and tins can also be purchased online with free shipping on all orders. Woody's offers four flavors: white cheddar, caramel, cheddar and caramel cheddar mix. 📍

LEARN MORE

For more information and a popcorn map, go to ICL.coop. If we forgot a popcorn shop, let us know. Email info@icl.coop and we will add it to the map.



Strolling along the Makanda Boardwalk



Nearby, a child pauses to pet Captain Jack Sparrow, a sleek black mixed-breed dog sporting a pair of mirrored, psychedelic sunglasses. In front of the PB&J store, a bubble machine releases a steady stream of floating orbs, while two young men toss beanbags in a friendly game of cornhole near the Makanda Trading Company. Even before stepping into the boardwalk's shops, the vibrant and laidback atmosphere outside is its own kind of attraction.

A walk along the boardwalk might begin with the Rainmaker Art Studio, owned by long-time resident Dave Dardis — both the artist and the studio are known by the name Rainmaker. Dardis and his original business partners chose the name after repeatedly encountering rain during festival events. At their first indoor event, a broken pipe created an ironic downpour indoors.

Dardis has been a fixture on the boardwalk for 52 years. He came to the region to attend Southern Illinois University (SIU) Carbondale, majoring in design, drawn by a lifelong love for making things.

Inside his studio, an old hand-cranked grinder releases small golden figurines — an homage to a decades-old cartoon. Handmade fountains send tiny streams of water onto delicate leaves, and an ornate chess piece stands on display with its own backstory.

Dardis had started work on a chess set decades ago, but each time he completed a piece, someone wanted to buy it. He never finished the set and finally held back a single piece for display.

Among his many creations, Dardis takes the most pride in his copper banyan trees, which rise to heights of around 12 feet. One stands just beyond his back door, its thick branches arching over a serene waterfall garden. Years ago, one such tree was commissioned by a customer who later felt it was too large. Rather than modify the piece, Dardis crafted a new one and used the original to enhance his garden.

A day in southern Illinois' most creative corner

By Mary Blye Kramer

THE DAY EDGES INTO the afternoon, when the Makanda Boardwalk truly comes to life. The Rainmaker Art Studio's door stands open, a speaker aimed outward and tuned to a local community radio station. On a bench next door, a couple enjoys ice cream from the Makanda Country Store while chatting with a backpacker from Ohio.



"I'm glad it happened that way," Dardis says. "Because of it, I got to decorate my gardens with the ones he didn't want." His lush backyard garden is open to the public, complete with winding ivy trails that lead through gazebos, over bridges and into secluded, shaded paths.

Next door, the Makanda Country Store offers a break for refreshments. The shop stocks nearly 30 varieties of coffee roasted in Illinois, as well as candies, nuts and Miller's Farm products, like pickles, sauces and spiced peaches.

Outside, Captain Jack Sparrow often rests beside his owner, Robert, a retired barge captain. The duo began collecting matching sunglasses after an SIU tailgate party, and Captain Jack now has a dozen pairs, all coordinated with colorful neckerchiefs.

Farther down the boardwalk, the Bell Building — constructed in the 1890s — opens its pair of colorful double doors marked by a peace sign. Inside is Visions Art Gallery, owned by Nina Kovar, who curates a collection of hand-crafted jewelry and art from 100 southern Illinois artisans.

Her selections reflect a whimsical yet sophisticated aesthetic. She likes a variety of styles that appeal to different people. An artist herself, Kovar particularly enjoys painting and creates art often influenced by optical illusions and surrealists like Salvador Dalí. Her current project depicts a melting candle transforming into human form.

Toward the rear of the boardwalk, Rachael Smith offers guidance on personal journeys through ancient runic symbols dating back to 150 C.E. Nearby, Healing Traditions — owned by Anne Discepolo — hosts yoga classes, massage therapy and other holistic wellness offerings.

Nestled between these spaces is The Funky Monkey, a shop owned by Kim Baker. During her years of working in design at an upscale furniture store in Marion, she often spoke of her dream of opening a shop in Makanda. Five years ago, her husband surprised her by purchasing the building that now houses her store.

Initially, she filled the space with decor from her own home. Later, she acquired an entire estate, which allowed her to expand her inventory. She now stocks a wide range of antiques and vintage glassware; her husband contributes by attending auctions to find pieces that fit the store's eclectic aesthetic.

Captain Jack Sparrow

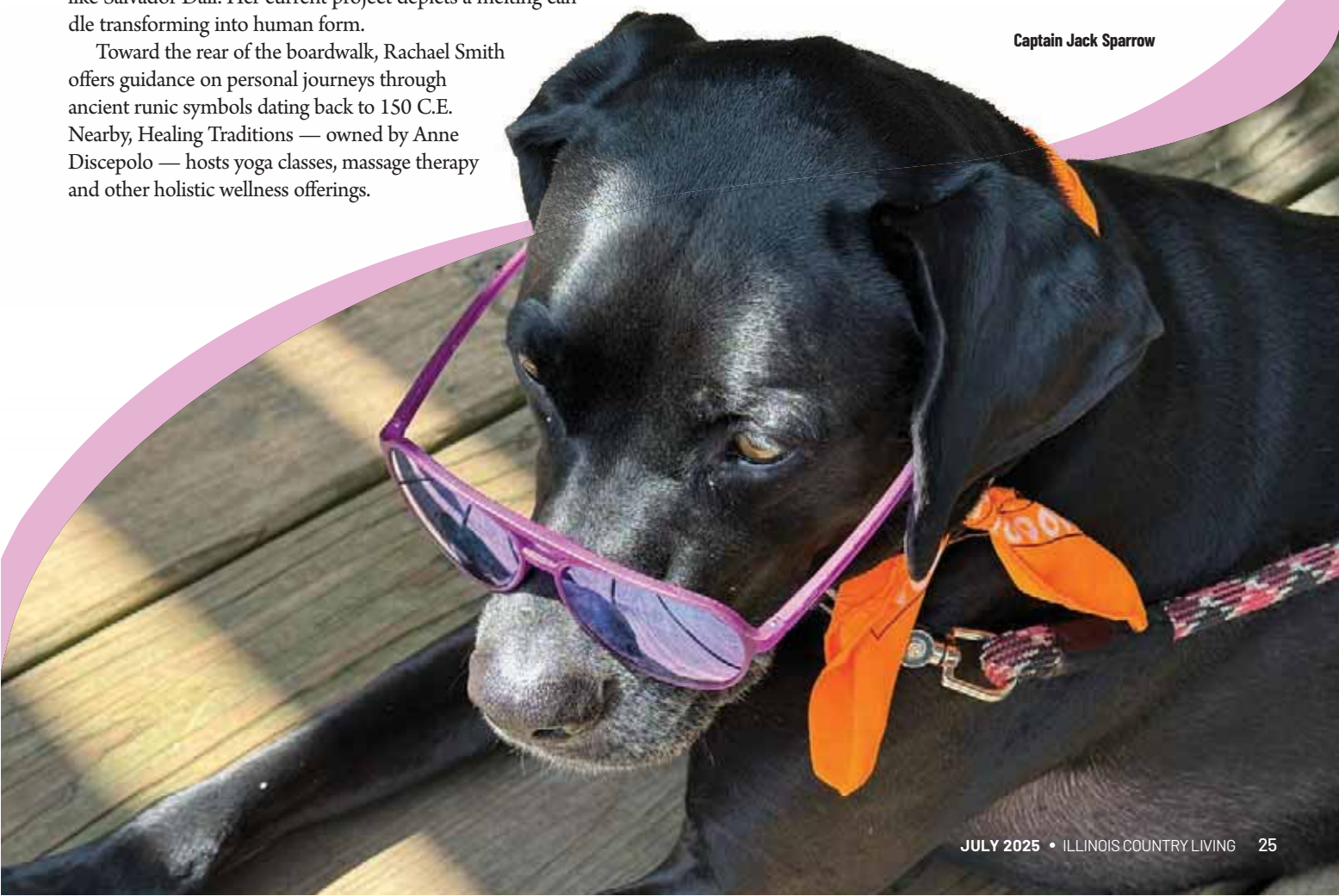




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Top: Unique stores line the Makanda Boardwalk in southern Illinois near Giant City State Park. **Bottom, left to right:** PB&J is a fun clothing and gift store that offers a mix of vintage and contemporary items; rocks and artifacts from around the world can be found at the Makanda Trading Company; The Funky Monkey sells home decor and antiques; and Visions Art Gallery sells jewelry and art by southern Illinois artisans.

The purchase of the building included three upstairs apartments. One remains a long-term rental, but the other two have been transformed into Airbnb units. Kim is currently preparing the units for summer visitors who come to hike nearby Giant City State Park or explore the Shawnee Wine Trail.

At the far end of the boardwalk, the PB&J store is a popular destination. Owned by Pam Baker, her husband Bob and their daughter, Jackie, the name reflects the family trio. The business began with festival vending, which Pam describes as both enjoyable and profitable. Seventeen years ago, they seized the opportunity to open a permanent shop, and in 2019, relocated to a larger space with an upstairs apartment, which they now call home.

The shop features jewelry, suncatchers and decoupage — most of it handcrafted by Pam. Despite the volume of merchandise, each display is thoughtfully arranged, thanks to Jackie’s eye for design. Pam’s father taught her the art of decoupage, which she now applies to furniture, trinket boxes and custom-themed artwork. The family collaborated on a mosaic out front and built an ornate aqua bench beside it, contributing to the shop’s creative charm.

The final stop on the boardwalk is the Makanda Trading Company, also known as the “Rock Store.” Owner Brian

Beverly, who holds a degree in anthropology, has curated a collection of rocks and artifacts from 55 countries, including amethyst from Uruguay and quartz from Indonesia. Shelves hold delicate soaps, colorful rugs and tiny carved masks. Among the most striking displays are vintage Italian candelabras topped with golden fluorite spheres.

As the day winds down, the atmosphere remains calm and welcoming. Shop owners linger rather than rush to close. Dardis chats with friends. Pam relaxes at a picnic table with a regular visitor. Kim heads upstairs to add finishing touches to her second Airbnb, themed with a retro vibe.

Visitors, too, are in no hurry to leave. Many finish their ice cream on a shaded bench or engage in leisurely conversations with shopkeepers. Eventually, the crowd thins, and the shops begin to close.

But, for those who live and work there, the day doesn’t end — it simply shifts. Quiet gardens beckon, home-cooked meals await, and the tools of their artistry are never far from reach. Whether it’s a paintbrush, a copper cutter or a jeweler’s saw, inspiration always finds its way back into their hands.

The Makanda Boardwalk can be found in downtown Makanda, near Giant City State Park. The shopping mall is open year-round. 📍

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Frankly, it's iconic

Galesburg's Coney Island stands the test of time

By Les O'Dell

NOT ONLY IS GALESBURG'S Coney Island the oldest restaurant in town, it also is a staple of the community. It's the kind of place that current residents take visitors and one that former residents seek out during return visits. They come for a variety of reasons.

For many, it's a delicious serving of nostalgia, bringing a flood of memories. For others, it's a step back in time, where the smells, ambiance and decor are familiar. Stepping into Coney Island, guests see a restaurant unchanged by decades.

The flattop grill is still in the window, and the original 40-foot bar runs the shop's length. Vintage decorations, from advertisements for bygone soda brands to old sports images, dot the walls. There's even an antique children's pedal car on display. It, of course, is a Wienermobile.

For all patrons, however, the coney dogs bring them back time and time again. Much of the iconic taste comes from the coney sauce, the recipe for which is a closely held secret. It's the same recipe that's been used since brothers Paul and George Nickopolous started the restaurant in 1921. In fact, when owner Jesus Valdez purchased Coney Island in 2004, he got more than the keys to a building and restaurant equipment.

"When I bought the place, I got a really fragile piece of paper with the recipe on it," Valdez says. "Every previous owner has signed it, and it's been passed on from one owner to the next."



Above: Coney Island owner Jesus Valdez

Top: The original 40-foot bar, lined with vintage decorations, runs the shop's length

Top right: The original coney dog on a steamed bun

Bottom right: Hot dogs on the grill



Valdez says it is a unique recipe that defies decoding. “Over the years, I’ve spent nights on the computer searching coney sauce recipes, and I’ve read hundreds and thousands of different ones, but none of them match ours. Plus, I have people who come in saying they’ve figured it out, but they haven’t.”

While the amateur dog detectives may not have the formula, they will have the coney dogs: a pork hot dog in a steamed bun, topped with brown mustard, the elusive beef sauce and freshly chopped onions.

Valdez realizes that coney dogs might not be for everyone, so there are more than a dozen other choices, too. There are regular hot dogs, taco dogs, polish sausage and barbecue dogs, just to name a few. There are also several side dishes.

All told, Coney Island sells thousands of hot dogs every day — to tourists, students

from nearby Knox College and generations of regulars.

“We have people who are in their 80s and 90s and still come in here and get a coney dog, down to [teenagers] who come in here after school,” Valdez explains. “We also have doctors, lawyers, tradespeople, all sorts of customers who come in every day.”

Many feel a sense of ownership of Coney Island, so much so that they enter the restaurant’s back entrance. Valdez says this sense of belonging has been a key factor in Coney Island’s longevity.

“It’s that hometown feeling,” he says. “It’s the community. People come in through our back door and walk through the kitchen. They say it’s like walking through their grandma’s kitchen. It’s home, and it’s comfortable. They bring their kids, and then they bring their kids. It passes from generation to generation.”

LET'S EAT!

Coney Island

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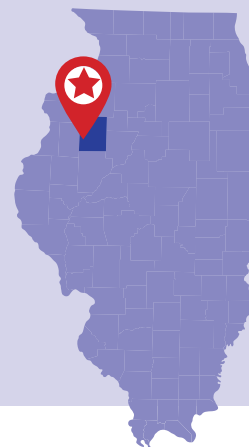
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Corn creations

THERE ARE SO MANY ways to eat corn. It can be part of the main dish, a side or a snack for later. Readers submitted so many corn recipes that we have to split them into two parts. So, stay tuned for the August issue for more corn dishes. For now, enjoy a variety of ways to eat one of Illinois' top crops. 🌽

WE NEED RECIPES!

Stone fruit
Pastries
Snacks
New favorites

Please email recipe submissions or questions to finestcooking@icl.coop or mail them to Finest Cooking c/o Illinois Country Living, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. Please include your name, address, phone number (for questions), and the name of your electric cooperative. Additional recipes can be found on our website at finestcooking.com.



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



Cowboy Caviar

Submitted by Janice Aldridge, SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative
Servings: 12

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 15-ounce can black beans, drained and rinsed | 1 bell pepper, chopped |
| 1 15-ounce can black-eyed peas, drained and rinsed | 1 large tomato, chopped |
| 1 can white corn, drained | 1 onion, chopped |
| | 8 ounces zesty Italian salad dressing |

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours before serving. Enjoy with tortilla chips.

No-Blanch Freezer Corn

Submitted by Judi Davis, Western Illinois Electrical Coop.
Yields: 4 quarts

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 15 cups corn | 3/4 cup sugar |
| 5 cups ice water | 2 tablespoons salt |

Mix all ingredients together and set aside for a few minutes before dividing the mixture into freezer-safe containers. Be sure to allow some space for expansion. Place in freezer until ready for use. When ready to cook, allow the corn to thaw, bring to a boil in a pot, cover and simmer for 15-20 minutes. It will taste like it's fresh from the garden.

Crispy Caramel Corn

Submitted by Patricia Mahoney, Menard Electric Cooperative

Servings: 20-30

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 7 quarts popped corn (popped without oil) | 1/2 cup white corn syrup |
| 1 cup honey-roasted peanuts | 1 teaspoon salt |
| 2 cups brown sugar | 1 teaspoon vanilla |
| 1 cup butter or margarine | 1 teaspoon baking soda |

Preheat oven to 250 F. Pop the corn and add it to a very large bowl with the peanuts. Prepare two large rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper or spray with cooking spray. (These steps must be done before starting the caramel syrup). In a saucepan, add the brown sugar, butter, syrup and salt. Over medium heat, bring the mixture to a boil while stirring. Once it reaches a boil, stop stirring and continue boiling for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla and baking soda. Pour over popcorn and peanuts. Mix well and divide evenly between the two baking sheets. Bake for 1 hour, stirring occasionally. Allow the popcorn to cool before storing in airtight containers.

Creamed Corn Casserole

Submitted by Julie Douglas, Shelby Electric Cooperative

Servings: 12-25

- | | |
|--|---|
| 2 15-ounce cans whole kernel corn, drained | 1 stick butter, divided |
| 2 15-ounce cans creamed corn | 1 cup sharp cheddar cheese, shredded |
| 1/2 sweet onion, minced | 1-1/2 teaspoons Cavender's (or other all-purpose Greek seasoning) |
| 1 4-ounce can green chilis | 1 green onion, chopped fine (greens only) |
| 1 4-ounce jar diced pimentos, drained | 1 egg, beaten |
| 1 sleeve Ritz crackers (or other butter crackers), divided | |

Preheat oven to 350 F. In a large bowl, mix together the corn, creamed corn, onion, pimentos and green chilis. Set aside. In a separate bowl, crush half of the crackers and mix them with the cheese, green onions and seasoning mix. Fold the cracker mixture into the corn mixture. Melt 6 tablespoons of butter and stir it into the mixture along with the egg. Spray a 9-by-13-inch casserole dish with cooking spray and pour in the corn mixture. Bake uncovered for 30 minutes. Crush the remaining crackers, melt 2 tablespoons of butter and mix them together. Crumble the crackers over the top of the casserole and bake another 15 minutes.

Corn Chowder

Submitted by Dorothy Carole Yaw, EnerStar Electric Cooperative

Servings: 12

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 pound bacon, diced | 3 15-ounce cans creamed corn |
| 1 medium onion, diced | 3 12-ounce cans evaporated milk |
| 1 8-ounce container fresh mushrooms, sliced | 3 10-ounce cans cream of mushroom soup |

Brown bacon, onion and fresh mushrooms in a large pot over medium heat, about 8 minutes. Add the creamed corn, evaporated milk and cream of mushroom soup. Simmer until thoroughly combined. Salt and pepper to taste.



True blue

Rare gems for the flower garden

BLUE MAY BE A favorite color for many, yet only about 10% of flowering plants naturally produce blue blooms. This soothing hue brings

selection of plants, shades of blue can flourish throughout the seasons, bringing beauty from early spring through fall.

foliage and heat and drought tolerance (once established) make this a favorite for containers or annual plantings.

Blue lobelia creates bright blue flowers throughout the growing season. The trailing habit makes it perfect for containers or the front of the landscape.

Blue Daze blooms with bright blue flowers among a mat of small, fuzzy leaves that trail when planted in baskets or containers. The flowers are sun lovers that close on cloudy days and at night.

Blue-blooming shrubs

These can add form and structure to your landscape all year, in addition to the rare blue color.

Bigleaf hydrangea is a shade-loving shrub with large clusters of smaller flowers. Blue flowers are produced in acidic soil. Aluminum sulfate can be added to the soil to lower the pH.

Bluebeard bursts with dark blue blooms covering the branches in late summer. The 3- to 4-foot shrub is a great nectar source for pollinators.

Perennials

Some gorgeous blue blooms can be planted in any sun or shade garden and will come back year after year.

Blue false indigo has pea-like, indigo blue flowers that appear above blue-green foliage in late spring to early summer. Minimal maintenance and easy adaptation to a variety of conditions make it garden-worthy.

Bluestar is a mid-spring bloomer with powder blue, star-shaped blooms among upright, clumping foliage.

Great blue lobelia is an Illinois native perfect for areas with wet soil. The showy blue flowers attract a variety of pollinators from July to October. 💡



Virginia bluebells are some of the few rare flowers with natural blue blooms.

a sense of peace and tranquility to any space. While red, yellow, pink and white flowers are common sights in gardens, blue blossoms stand out like rare gems, adding a touch of unexpected beauty among vibrant beds of color.

While naturally occurring blue flowers are rare, breeders continue to develop new varieties, expanding options for gardeners. These stunning blooms can enhance landscapes by adding a refreshing pop of color or creating balance in gardens dominated by warm-toned flowers. Many pollinators are attracted to blue flowers, which typically have high amounts of nectar.

Although blue flowers are less common in garden centers, each variety offers its own unique charm, differing in shape, size and sunlight requirements, making it possible to find the perfect blue bloom for any garden space. With a diverse

Spring-flowering bulbs

These are the first to provide color to the landscape after a dull, colorless winter.

Virginia bluebells are a gorgeous spring ephemeral with drooping blue, bell-shaped flowers atop 2-foot-tall clumping foliage. They can form large groupings over time — a stunning sight to see.

Grape hyacinth produces clusters of small, bell-shaped blooms, with grass-like foliage. Only reaching 5 to 8 inches tall, they are great naturalizers and pollinator favorites.

Annual plants

Providing continuous colorful blooms throughout the summer, these are great additions to your landscape or a patriotic patio pot.

'Black and Blue' salvia has show-stopping cobalt blue blooms with black whorls that appear on spikes 2 to 4 feet tall. Pleasantly fragrant



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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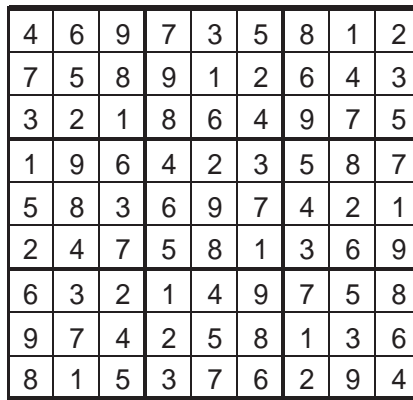
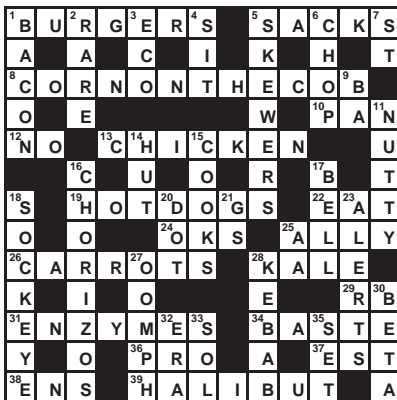
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Shawnee National Forest in Alexander County along the Grapevine Trail
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UPCOMING THEMES

- September – Art
- October – Spooky
- November – Fall colors
- December – No theme



SUBMIT A PHOTO

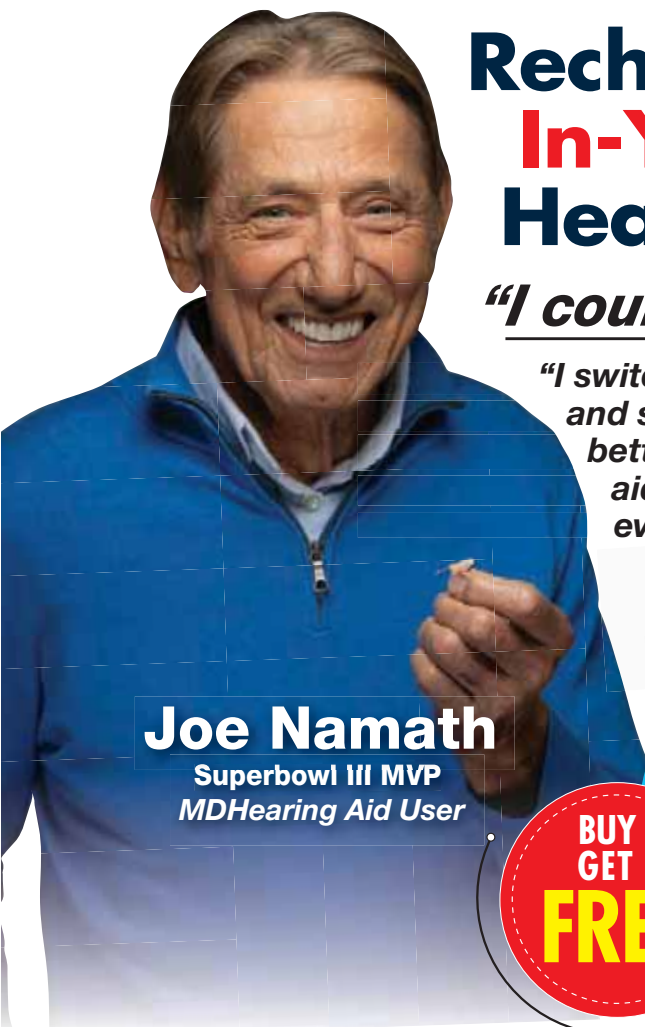
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