

# ILLINOIS



## *Master Naturalist*

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **What is the purpose of the Illinois Master Naturalist Program?**

The Illinois Master Naturalist (ILMN) Program provides science-based educational opportunities that connect people with nature and help them become engaged environmental stewards. By partnering with the ILMN Program, you'll provide opportunities for Illinois residents to experience nature, develop knowledge of and respect for the environment, and practice natural resource stewardship.

### **Why should my agency/organization consider partnering with the Illinois Master Naturalist Program?**

- Elevate the visibility and impact of your agency/organization;
- Generate new and/or share existing resources (e.g. funding, marketing, volunteers, projects, programs, information, research, equipment, staff training);
- Reach out to diverse constituencies, especially in urban communities where people may be more apt to feel disconnected from the natural world;
- Promote best natural resource management practices;
- Build effective, productive, and interdisciplinary partnerships with citizens, conservation agencies, organizations, and University of Illinois Extension;
- University of Illinois Extension is well-suited to foster a statewide, citizen-based system for environmental stewardship that is responsive to the needs of local communities; and
- The health and well-being of the residents of Illinois are inseparable from the health of the land upon which they live.

### **Who partners with the Illinois Master Naturalist Program, and what role do they play?**

Program partners come from a variety of organizations, agencies, and businesses that share or support a natural resource education and stewardship ethic. The state-level program is developed and administered primarily by University of Illinois Extension and includes formalized affiliations with statewide partners. At the local level, pilot sites are encouraged to associate with a minimum of two partners as part of an advisory committee. Partners may include agencies, organizations, and businesses, such as National Wildlife Refuges, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, U.S. Forestry Service, Soil and Water Conservation districts, city or state parks and recreation, colleges or community colleges, natural history museums, botanical gardens, zoos, and nature centers. Partners may provide resources, ideas, instructors, training sites, volunteer service opportunities, as well as assisting with funding and marketing the local program.

### **Who serves on the local advisory committee, and what does the committee do?**

A minimum of two partnering agencies/organizations/businesses should be represented on the local advisory committee. The committee advises local U of I Extension staff dedicated to the Illinois Master Naturalist Program on any issue U of I Extension requests; e.g. plans, marketing, curriculum, and evaluation. It is the primary responsibility of the local advisory committee to aid the local Extension office in recruiting, training, and providing expert instructors.

## **What type of volunteer services do Master Naturalists provide?**

Volunteer projects should: reinforce a sense of accomplishment and responsibility; cultivate a sense of ownership and community; address the needs of the community and environment; strengthen partnerships; add to the knowledge and understanding of how nature works; and build awareness of nature and local natural areas.

Examples of volunteer service projects include, but are not limited to:

- "Wildscape" maintenance and demonstration areas
- Streambank, wetland, forest, and prairie restorations on private and public lands
- Fish, wildlife, and plant inventories
- Environmental education programs for youth and adults
- Interpretive tours at a nature or visitor center

## **Are participants required to give back volunteer or community service after completing a local training session of the Illinois Master Naturalist Program?**

Individual participants gain certification as an Illinois Master Naturalist after participating in an approved local training program with a minimum of 40 hours of combined field and classroom instruction and completing a minimum of 30 hours of volunteer service within the first year. To maintain certification, Illinois Master Naturalists must fulfill a minimum of 30 volunteer hours and 10 continuing education hours annually. Graduates frequently put their new skills to work as volunteers in their communities. Participants who complete the local training will be designated Illinois Master Naturalist graduates indefinitely, or until they complete certification requirements within the first year. Certified Master Naturalists who do not complete recertification requirements will return to their former graduate status.

## **What does the local Illinois Master Naturalist training model look like?**

There is not a single, hard-and-fast model; diversity and adaptability are program hallmarks! The local Extension unit(s), in collaboration with local partners, make up the local advisory committee, which is responsible for the local training (i.e. schedule, hours, speakers, location, delivery method, field experiences). Participants should

receive a minimum of 40 hours of classroom and hands-on field training, which can be increased based on local needs. Training includes both classroom and field components, so participants experience and practice what they learn immediately. Though all participants will learn general naturalist concepts and skills, there is flexibility for each local pilot program to tailor its training to fit the local ecosystems and critical environmental needs. The curriculum covers topics such as: ecological concepts; weather and climate; ecosystems, such as forests, prairies, and wetlands; agriculture; soils and geology; landscape interpretation; human history and prehistory; and other traditional naturalist disciplines (e.g. ornithology, mammology, and herpetology).

## **Who can be an instructor in a local training program?**

Instructors must demonstrate expertise in subject matter content, local issues/information/history, and ability to disseminate the information in a non-biased, hands-on manner. Each topic will likely be taught by a different specialist, with instructors recruited from local universities and colleges, community colleges, state scientific surveys, fish and game agencies, conservation agencies, botanical gardens, zoos, nature preserves, forest preserves, native plant societies, national wildlife refuges, and so forth. Since training is administered by a variety of instructors at different sites throughout the state, the local Extension contact will be given an instructor training manual with a set of overall learning objectives to help select and guide instructors, and a list of potential instructors identified by partners.

## **What will it cost participants to receive Illinois Master Naturalist training?**

The local training has a standardized fee of \$250 per person. Because the fee may be a barrier to potential program participants, some pilot programs may develop "scholarship" funds (generally via donation) to aid those who cannot afford the full program fee. Pilot programs may also seek local sponsorship or grant funding to offset the cost of training and/or future community service projects. If a portion or all of the local training participant fees are paid by a donor or funder, then all promotional materials must note the original cost and give recognition to the generous contributor(s).

