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Prepare Your Holiday Tree for Reuse

<https://www.fitchburgwi.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2369>

Still have a holiday tree decorated in your home? Next week, January 20-24, City of Fitchburg crews will pick up undecorated natural trees, grinding them into wood chips and mulch for the next phase of their life cycle, restoring nutrients back to the soil and providing benefits to other plants.

If your tree is still up and you'd like to take advantage of this collection, please remove all decorations from the tree, and place it out by your curb (not overhanging or in the street), perpendicular to the street with the cut trunk end facing the street, by 6:30am Monday the 20th. Spent holiday trees also make great habitats and shelter for birds and other small animals, if you have woods near your home where you can place them.

Celebrate National Bird-Feeding Month in February

<https://greenbay.wbu.com/national-bird-feeding-month>

February is National Bird-Feeding Month, a time to recognize and support our feathered friends during one of the coldest months of the year. Established in 1994 by the National Bird-Feeding Society, this observance encourages people to provide food, water, and shelter for wild birds in their backyards, helping them survive the winter and thrive as they prepare for the coming spring. By participating, you can contribute to bird conservation efforts, learn



more about local species, and enjoy the beauty and joy of watching birds up close.

How You Can Participate:

1. **Provide high-energy food** - Fill feeders with sunflower seeds, suet, peanuts, or nyjer seed to give birds the energy they need during the winter months.
2. **Install a heated bird bath** - Offer birds (as well as your other backyard critters, including squirrels, chipmunks, even raccoons and possums) a source of fresh, unfrozen water to help them stay hydrated in cold temperatures.
3. **Create a bird-friendly habitat** - Add native plants or evergreens to your yard to provide shelter and food sources.
4. **Set up different feeders** - Use a variety of feeders, such as tube feeders, platform feeders, and suet cages, to accommodate different bird species.
5. **Keep feeders clean** - Regularly clean your bird feeders to prevent the spread of disease.
6. **Do some backyard bird watching!** - Keep up on your backyard birds, and see if you can learn to identify the various species (free apps like iNaturalist, eBird, Merlin Bird ID, and the Audubon Bird Guide, are all great resources), along with just spending some time appreciating your urban/suburban ecosystem.
7. **Participate in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count** - February 14-17, 2025 is when this year's [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) will take place, giving backyard birders a chance to contribute to one of the year's largest international efforts to track bird species.

Free Native Plants for Schools and Community Groups

<https://lwr.danecounty.gov/grants-and-costshare/free-plants>

Native plants have tremendous water quality benefits and increase habitat and food sources for pollinators. Because of this, the Dane County Land and Water Resources Department has started a native plant growing program to provide a source of free native plants to help schools and community groups in Dane County. These plants will be available in spring and summer each year. Spring plants are



donated from community members through the Plant Dane! plant sale and fall plants are grown by local volunteers.

Since the program began in 2016, more than 36,000 plants have been distributed to 178 different groups, including schools, neighborhood associations and community centers. Scroll to the bottom of the page for an interactive map of projects that have received plants from this program.

Please note that applications for free native plant packs are due January 31, 2025. If you'd like to help support this program by growing native plant packs to distribute in the Spring, please register as a volunteer at the "MyImpact Volunteer Portal" link on the program page above.

Winter Bike to Work Day – 2/14

<https://winterbiketoworkday.org/>

It may be cold outside, but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy some fresh air and exercise! While our local bike week is still several months away, international Winter Bike to Work Day is almost here, this year taking place on Valentine's Day, Friday February 14th.

Winter riding can be rather different from riding in other seasons, with different clothing of course being required but also a change in tires if the roads aren't clear, and greater awareness given that drivers don't usually expect to see bikes out on the road in winter. But if you prepare yourself well (check out these [winter riding tips](#) from Madison), you can have a great cold-weather commute for exercise and fresh air year-round!

World Wetlands Day

<https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/>

World Wetlands Day is celebrated every year on February 2, as groups around the world take the opportunity to provide education on the importance of wetlands, both as vital ecosystems and as natural buffers to floods and hurricanes and other extreme weather events.



The United States and the state of Wisconsin have various laws regarding the protection and restoration of wetland habitat, reflecting the essential role of wetlands to both natural and human systems. You can visit the [World Wetlands Day website](#) to learn more about these habitats and pledge action to help protect them, or check out the [Wisconsin DNR's many](#)

[resources](#) on wetlands around the state, to get more information about the wetlands in our own backyard and how they're being managed and restored.

If you're interested in finding ways to contribute to wetland preservation efforts, you can [adopt a storm drain](#) as part of a Dane County initiative, or participate in Fitchburg's annual Earth Month [Waterway Cleanup](#) (check back in late February for this year's date).

Woody Invasives – An Ongoing Challenge

Submitted by Sue Fieber, of Fitchburg's [Tree Advisory Committee](#)

Surely by now you have heard about the woody invasive species that are infesting large tracts of land in southcentral Wisconsin. But you may not know how such an infested tract actually looks.

For a good illustration, take a ride. Bike or drive down Marketplace Dr to where it crosses the Badger State Trail at a DNR signboard. Head either way just a short distance on this trail and observe the trees and shrubs you pass. You will quickly see a striking contrast with the photo below. While the photo shows an area of S. Johnson Park that was cleared of woody invasives in 2018, this section of woods abutting the Badger State Trail has not been, and invasive species are prominent, most notably a few European and Asian species of [buckthorn](#) and [honeysuckle](#). Use the free iNaturalist or PlantNet app for help identifying the plants you see!



What are these woody invasives, and how have they become such a problem in our landscape? The primary offenders are two species of buckthorn and several species of honeysuckle. They are native to other parts of the world, but they were brought to North America in the mid-18th and 19th centuries because of their showy flowers and fruit. Garden centers sold them as ornamentals; they were also used for wildlife food and cover, and for erosion control.

Property owners had no idea what a Pandora's box they were opening. In a native environment, species grow well together and usually keep each other in check. When an exotic (non-native) species is introduced, the natural balance of species is disrupted; there is nothing to keep the exotics under control. Without competition, they can quickly form dense colonies in a native woodland. They can change the chemistry of the soil, so nothing else will grow near them. They also have a longer growing season than the natives, which gives them an advantage. And they can grow taller than native understory shrubs, which are quickly shaded out.

In addition, exotic species produce large quantities of seeds, which are readily spread by the birds who eat their berries. Unfortunately, their berries do not provide the same nutrient-rich fruit migrating birds need. And exotics even compete with native plants for pollinators, reducing the natives' seed production, thus reducing the number of natives in the woodland.

As woody and other invasive species continued to spread, Wisconsin legislators directed the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish a statewide program to control invasive species. In 2009, the DNR promulgated Wisconsin's Invasive Species Identification, Classification and Control Rule, [Chapter NR 40, Wis. Adm. Code](#). Among other things, the rule forbids the sale, purchase or introduction of [regulated invasive plants](#), and helps citizens learn to identify and minimize the spread of invasives.

Although the DNR rule is helpful, the rule alone cannot undo the damage invasives have already done to Wisconsin's ecosystems. That is why municipalities and nonprofit organizations have undertaken measures to remove invasives where they are already established.

Non-chemical control methods include hand pulling, mowing, prescribed burning and manipulation of the environment. (The latter means planting vigorous, shade-tolerant native shrubs in the understory to compete with buckthorn and honeysuckles.) Use of these methods can reduce invasive populations by 50% in the season following treatment.

Various chemical control measures (herbicides) are also being used. These can be applied directly to the soil, to the leaves of existing plants, or to cut stumps of larger shrubs. Many of these herbicides have a higher percentage of success, often reducing invasive populations by 70 to 90% in the season following treatment.

As you can see, efforts to remove invasives must be ongoing. (That cleared area in S. Johnson Park won't stay clear for long if left alone.) You can help! There are many ways—some big, some small—for you to become involved in eradication efforts:

- Remove any woody invasives you may have on your property and replace them with native species. This will take time and patience because natives grow more slowly, but the results will be rewarding. (If you need help identifying a possible invasive, take a photo and send to the Wisconsin First Detector Network, <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/wifdn/learn/managing-invasive-species>).
- If you notice woody invasives in neighbors' yards, talk to them about this issue and encourage them to remove the exotic shrubs.
- Report garden centers that continue to sell woody invasives to the DNR.
- If you are physically able, volunteer in community efforts to eradicate invasives. Here again, the results will be rewarding.

For more information on identification and control of woody and other invasives, visit the DNR website (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Invasives>). The UW Extension Learning Store also has many publications you may download from its website (<https://learningstore.extension.wisc.edu>).

AI's Energy Future (Forward in Energy Forum) – 1/28

Text from <https://energy.wisc.edu/events/ais-energy-future-balancing-growth-grid-and-environment-forward-energy-forum>



As use of artificial intelligence grows, so does the demand for electricity and water to power and cool hyper-scale data centers. Many utilities have proposed building additional fossil fuel power plants or keeping older ones running to meet this new demand. Meanwhile, most major computing companies have made commitments to power their operations with clean energy. In this Forum, we'll explore the potential demands that the growth of AI and data centers may place on the grid and what can be done to mitigate its environmental impact (e.g. improving energy efficiency of computing, or locating and operating data centers in ways that maximize use of renewable energy). How much will electricity demand from data centers truly grow? How might that growth affect both the environment and other electricity customers? And what can we do to ensure that we address that growth in the most sustainable way?

Join us on Tuesday, January 28 at 4:30 p.m. CT either in-person at the Wisconsin Energy Institute or online via Zoom Webinar. Registration is recommended for all and required for online attendance.



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Please contact Phil Grupe, Sustainability Specialist, at phil.grupe@fitchburgwi.gov or (608) 270-4259, if you have any questions, comments, and/or suggestions for future Green E-News topics.

