



Plant Observation Challenge

Learn about seasonal plant changes from your own backyard or neighborhood park in the Illinois 4-H Plant Observation Challenge!

In this challenge, youth will:

1. Get familiar with plant phenology (the study of seasonal plant changes) and be introduced to the Chicago Botanic Garden's BudBurst project
2. Learn how to make scientific observations and record them
3. Learn what factors impact when plants leaf out and flower

Challenge resources:

[Yard Tour Video](#) on YouTube (DKK 4-H)

[Plant Phenology Video](#) (Chicago Botanic Garden - BudBurst)

[Plant Observation Log](#) (DKK 4-H)

Challenge details:

Visit <https://4h.extension.illinois.edu/programs/home-activities> to get access to the challenge materials and watch the two videos above to get started!

Go for a virtual tour of 4-H Educator Donna Nuger's yard, see her plants and learn about how they look in early spring. You also can learn more about the science of plant phenology with a video from Chicago Botanic Garden's BudBurst project.

Then, select an area of your yard or a park to study over the next week. It can be as big as your whole yard, or just a 3-foot-by-3-foot section. Use that area to complete the following tasks:

- Draw a map of your plot including major plants and manmade objects.
- Count the number of different plant species living in your plot. Do your best to identify as many plants as possible in your plot. These tools may help you with identification:
 - ["What tree is that?" interactive identification guide](#) (Arbor Day Foundation)
 - [Illinois Extension perennials directory](#) (University of Illinois Extension)
 - [Tree and plant directory](#) (Morton Arboretum)
 - If you need further help, please send any ID questions for this challenge to dnuger@illinois.edu or feel free to ask our Master Gardener e-Help desk in your county (find contact info [here](#)).
- Go to go.illinois.edu/stem4Hdkk and download our plot observation log to journal your observations. Describe what stage each plant is at with words like: seedling, sprout, budding (leaves or flowers), fruiting, etc. You can include drawings or photographs in your records.
- Next, observe your plot every day for a week.
 - Be sure to look at it during different times of day.
 - Check on it in different weather conditions.
 - Observe your plot from different points of view (north, south, east and west).
 - Get another perspective by standing, sitting, lying on your stomach at ground level or even lying on your back looking up.
 - Listen to hear what is happening around you. Are there animals, insects, weather such as wind or thunder, people, or street noise?

Illinois 4-H At-Home STEM Challenge

Collect your observation log, map, and any drawings or photos of your plot. You also may be inspired to create original poetry or stories from this experience. At the end of a week, we encourage you to share your plant observations and creations with your family. If you also choose to share your work on social media, with parental permission, consider using our hashtag #thats4H or tagging "Illinois 4-H."

Questions?

Email dnuger@illinois.edu or visit <https://4h.extension.illinois.edu/programs/home-activities>

Want to learn more about 4-H near you?

Find your local 4-H office at go.illinois.edu/FindYour4HOffice or learn more about Illinois 4-H at 4h.extension.illinois.edu

Did you have fun with this challenge?

Check out the Chicago Botanic Garden's BudBurst project, at <https://budburst.org/forfamilies>, to find additional resources and activities.



Resource originally produced by Donna Nuger for DuPage, Kane & Kendall County 4-H.

If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this program, please contact your local University of Illinois Extension office.

Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time for meeting your access needs.

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