

Weather It Better: Prepare Before Summer Storms Strike

Think Ahead & Keep Safety in Mind, Says the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute

Summer storm season is here, but having the right outdoor power equipment on hand can help you weather storms better, says the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI). “If you think ahead, you can mitigate damage from high winds, flooding, wildfires, and other storm surprises,” says Kris Kiser, President and CEO of OPEI, an international trade association representing manufacturers and suppliers of outdoor power equipment, small engines, battery power systems, portable generators, utility and personal transport vehicles, and golf cars. To get ready for inclement weather, homeowners should assess their property in advance, identify what equipment is needed, and focus on limiting potential storm damage. “Get out your equipment now and check it over,” adds

Kiser. “Make sure it’s serviced and working well so you’ll be ready when the storm hits. And remember to buy extension cords for generators and fuel in advance.” Depending on type and size of your landscape, there is equipment for every need including:

- Chainsaws and pole saws that can trim dead or dying limbs and cut shrubs away from windows and doors ahead of damaging storm winds.
- String trimmers and pruners that remove combustible material from around your home, making it less vulnerable to wildfires.
- A portable generator to power key appliances and charge cell phones or home medical equipment during power outages. Important note: Before an outage, plan where the generator will be set up. NEVER place a generator in a home, garage, carport, or near an open window or door. Use outdoor-rated extension cords long enough to carry power into your home from a safe distance and rated to handle the

power drawn.

- Water pumps to get water and muck out of basements and homes. Never pump substances that your equipment is not designed to cope with. Pay attention to avoid overheating and follow all safety precautions.
- A utility type vehicle to transport people and supplies quickly in an emergency. Remember to keep the vehicle stable, drive slowly, and do not turn mid-slope or while on a hill.

Kiser also adds to follow manufacturers’ guidance. “It sounds basic, but it’s important,” he says. “Never disable, modify or remove safety devices.” OPEI also advises equipment users to pay attention to energy levels and health. Storm preparation and cleanup can be taxing. Do not operate power equipment when tired or overly fatigued, and always use safety equipment like chaps, gloves, eye protection or hearing protection.

For more tips, go to *Weather-ItBetter.com*

Celebrate America’s Birthday During Alton’s 250 on the Mississippi Festival

Edited By MELISSA LYNN
Enquirer~Democrat Reporter

Alton is celebrating America’s 250th birthday with a three-day festival called “250 on the Mississippi.” The community-wide event begins Wednesday, July 1, culminating with a spectacular fireworks show Friday, July 3. Taking place across downtown Alton, the event will commemorate the nation’s semiquincentennial with three days of free entertainment, activities, history, and patriotic festivities along the Mississippi River. Events include a donut eating contest, presentation of an oversized birthday cake, stilt walkers, balloon artists, live music, kids activities, food trucks, and more. “250 on the Mississippi is a great way to celebrate our nation’s heritage, and the impact Alton had on U.S. history over the last 250 years,” said Cory Jobe, President and CEO of the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau. “We want to highlight the rich American spirit that infuses Alton and this three-day

event is the perfect way to do that. We have joined forces with local community and civic groups to create a fun, free, and celebratory event.” The party starts at 4 p.m. Wednesday, July 1 at Haskell Park in Alton’s Midletown neighborhood and near downtown. The event includes a proclamation of Duke Day in Alton from Mayor David Goins as well as the cutting of an oversized birthday cake created by Duke Bakery. The fun continues with a Kids Bike Parade, Tricorn Hat and Sticker Crafts, a kids Donut Hole Eating Contest, an Adult Donut Eating Contest, live music, balloon art, food, drinks, and more until 8 p.m. On Thursday, July 2, the fun moves to Rotary Park in Alton with activities from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Enjoy live music, food and drink vendors, stilt artists including Uncle Sam and Lady Liberty, balloon artists, and crafts for kids. The Alton Godfrey Rotary Club will distribute pocket booklets featuring the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

Anyone who has their booklet signed by the Thomas Jefferson re-enactor strolling down Broadway Street in downtown Alton can receive a \$2 bill if they bring the signed booklet to the Rotary club booth at the park. Meet Abraham Lincoln and Betsy Ross who will be accompanying President Jefferson on his Broadway appearance. Locally owned and operated businesses on Broadway will be open throughout the event. The celebration culminates with Alton’s annual Fireworks on the Mississippi Friday, July 3. This year’s fireworks display will be enhanced to honor America’s 250th. Enjoy live music from The LustreLights, lawn games, food, and drinks at the Alton Amphitheater from 5 p.m. until the fireworks begin around 9:30 p.m. The Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau has created a commemorative T-Shirt for the 250 on the Mississippi celebration. Shirts are available for \$20 at the Alton Visitors Center, 200 Piasa Street and can be purchased during events at Haskell Park and Rotary Park.

National Dairy Month Celebrates Nutrition and Dairy Farmers

By MELISSA LYNN
Enquirer~Democrat Reporter

June is National Dairy Month, a time to celebrate the dairy foods families enjoy every day and the farmers who help bring them to the table. From yogurt at breakfast to melted cheese in your favorite dish, dairy products remain a family staple, providing essential nutrients such as protein, calcium, and B vitamins that support bone health, energy, and muscle repair. “Whether you are heading to practice, the classroom, or work, dairy delivers the nutrients your body needs,” said Mea-

gan Modrusic, nutrition educator with the St. Louis District Dairy Council. According to the St. Louis District Dairy Council, all dairy milk contains 13 essential nutrients. Those nutrients include calcium, potassium, zinc, and vitamins A, D, and B12, which contribute to overall health and wellness. While National Dairy Month highlights the nutritional benefits of dairy products, it also serves as a reminder of the dairy farmers who work year-round to provide fresh milk, cheese, yogurt, and other dairy foods for families and communities across the county.

Watermelon Whip Recipe

As June marks the start of summer, celebrate the warmer days with this refreshing recipe. Milk, yogurt, frozen watermelon, and frozen berries blend to create this healthy, frosty concoction in minutes. This watermelon whip offers high-quality protein, calcium, vitamin D, fiber, and vitamin C. Serve it for breakfast, as a snack, or after a meal.

Prep time: 2 hours
Servings: 2

Ingredients

- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 tsp. lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp. honey
- 2 cups watermelon, diced into ½-inch cubes
- 1 cup mixed berries, frozen

Instructions

1. Line a sheet pan with parchment paper, place wa-

IDOA Announces Specialty Crop Block Grant Funding Available

Illinois to prioritize projects that benefit beginning farmers, nutrition and health outcomes, sustainability and conservation

The Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) will distribute more than \$796,000 over the next three years to expand access to fresh, locally grown produce and boost the competitiveness of the state’s specialty crop industry. This funding is made possible through the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. An application for grant funding will be available this week on the Illinois Department of Agriculture website and must be returned to the Department by noon on June 5, 2026. The program will run from September 30, 2026 through September 29, 2029. Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, local and government entities, trade and commodity associations, public and private colleges/universities. Illinois funding priorities include projects that benefit beginning farmers and first-time specialty crop producers (a beginning farmer is an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participates in the operation), projects with educational programming to enhance knowledge and consumption of

specialty crops, projects connecting specialty crops with nutrition and health outcomes, including food safety, projects that prioritize sustainability and conservation. “These grant funds help ensure that Illinois producers—especially small, beginning, and historically underserved farmers—have the opportunity to grow and succeed,” said Jerry Costello II, Director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture. “Our goal is to strengthen local food systems, expand access to fresh, healthy products, and drive innovation in Illinois’ specialty crop industry.” To encourage further expansion of this industry, and to take full advantage of the allocated federal funds, the Department invites the development of projects pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry:

- Enhancing food safety.
- Improving the capacity of all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain to comply with the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act, for example, by developing “Good Agricultural Practices,” “Good Handling Practices,” “Good Manufacturing Practices,” and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems for small farmers, packers and processors.
- Investing in specialty crop research, including research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes.
- Supporting the growth of

organic specialty crops.

- Developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops.
- Improving pest and disease control.
- Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops.
- Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems.

Projects that benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual are ineligible. Farmers’ markets, roadside stands and community sponsored agriculture programs should consider submitting proposals to the USDA’s Farmers’ Market and Local Food Promotion Program. USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service defines specialty crops as “fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture).” There are more than 3,200 producers devoting more than 83,000 acres of Illinois farmland to specialty crops production, creating nearly \$500 million in annual sales for Illinois farmers. Nationally, Illinois ranks first for its pumpkin and horseradish production and ranks in the top ten for the production of asparagus, cauliflower, fresh-cut herbs, peas, mustard greens and lima beans. Additional information about the program can be found online at the Department’s website and/or by contacting AGR. ISCBG@illinois.gov.

TurfMutt’s Tips to Embrace Your Community Park this Summer

The TurfMutt Foundation encourages families, pet owners and community members to embrace the power of their parks this summer. More than just scenery, community parks are vital outdoor spaces that boost mental health and physical wellness, provide critical cooling for urban environments and provide free venues for making summer memories.

“Parks connect us to nature, our neighbors and our own well-being,” says Kris Kiser, President & CEO of the TurfMutt Foundation. “This summer, we’re encouraging everyone to expand their ‘backyarding’ mindset beyond their home’s fence line and into our shared community spaces.”

To help you harness the power of parks, TurfMutt offers the following tips:

- **Community Connection.** If your personal outdoor space is limited, the park is your shared backyard. Use it for sprawling family reunions, intimate sunset picnics or walking clubs.
- **Take the Office Outdoors.** Swap your cubicle for a shaded picnic table. Natural

light and fresh air provide a much-needed cure for digital fatigue.

- **Nature’s Gym.** Trade the air-conditioned gym for a patch of park grass to make your workout that much more effective and enjoyable.
- **Prioritize Howling Good Times.** Dog parks are essential for canine socialization and manners. Just remember to follow dog park etiquette and rules to keep everyone safe and happy.
- **Utilize the Living Classroom.** Mitigate the “summer slide” and lure your kids away from screens by visiting the park to identify local flora, fauna and wildlife. Use TurfMutt’s online resources to turn a nature walk into a fun, hands-on lesson.
- **Practice a “Mindful Minute.”** Sometimes the best park activity is doing nothing at all. Unplug and recharge by focusing on a park’s birdsongs or the breeze in the trees. Check out TurfMutt’s Park Personality Types on TurfMutt.com for even more inspiration about how to harness the power of parks this summer.

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