



MONROE COUNTY 4-H CLOVERLINK

THE NEWSLETTER FOR 4-H FAMILIES & FRIENDS

Monroe County Extension Office, 206 South K St, Sparta, WI 54656
Phone: (608) 269-8722
Website: <https://monroe.extension.wisc.edu>

FEBRUARY 2026

CURIOSITY NEVER HIBERNATES

Greetings Once Again, 4-H Families,

As we are hunkered down and hibernating through the tail end of January's polar vortex, it helps to remember that each day is growing a little brighter. The sun is sticking around longer, and even if it doesn't feel like it yet, spring is just around the corner.

One of the latest internet crazes this winter has been the phenomenon of "exploding trees." Real science—or just an online hoax? If you've spent time in the woods during extreme cold, you may have already heard a sharp crack or pop that sounds like a .22 rifle being fired, without ever seeing the cause. If you're picturing trees actually blowing apart and sending wood flying in all directions, sorry to disappoint your imagination!

While the name is a bit dramatic, trees really can crack or split under the right conditions. A more accurate term is frost cracking—but that doesn't quite have the same ring to it. This happens when temperatures drop very quickly, often nearing -20 degrees, and the outer layers of a tree respond to the cold faster than the inner layers.

You might remember from science class (or from leaving a water bottle or soda can in the freezer!) that liquids expand when they freeze. Solids, on the other hand, shrink in cold temperatures. When the solid outer layer of a tree shrinks while the sap inside freezes and expands, pressure builds. If enough pressure develops, the tree can crack with a loud pop, leaving a long split in the trunk. The good news? Most trees heal over time, and the crack becomes little more than a scar on an otherwise healthy tree.

Frost cracking typically occurs in hardwood trees with thinner bark and cambium (the layer just under the bark), such as maple, birch, and poplar. Evergreen or softwood trees aren't affected in the same way—why do you think that is? Once things warm up, head outside and go on a scavenger hunt to see if you can spot any trees that cracked this winter. That question alone sounds like a great investigation and could turn into a Fair Entry in Natural Science (Dept. 16), Lot #9!

In the meantime, curiosity never hibernates, and winter is a wonderful opportunity to start—or finish—projects, and challenge yourself to learn something new. It's also a perfect time to reflect on your 4-H project goals for the year. There's still plenty of time to set new goals or adjust existing ones as you look ahead to the months to come.

We are excited to be planning a variety of county-wide activities and hope you can join us for the Festival of the Arts, Spring Project Day, Clover College, our family camping weekend at Pine View Campground, community service opportunities, and the regional Summer Camp at Upham Woods. There are also some fantastic state-level programs coming up, including ArtBEAT Camp and Summer Academy!

We look forward to seeing you in the weeks ahead and can't wait to share in the excitement of longer days, new opportunities, and the promise of warmer weather.

Jason & Vicki

Monroe County Extension Staff



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FRIENDLY REMINDERS

- Monthly 4-H Newsletter information is due on the 20th.
- Please keep your mailing and email addresses current in 4-H Online.
- If you plan to un-enroll from 4-H, please contact the office so we can remove you from the system.



If your club or group has events you would like on this calendar, please email information to Jason.hornickel@wisc.edu

Calendar of Events

FEBRUARY

Sun., Feb. 8, 2026

4-H ArtBEAT! Registration due in 4HOnline
WHERE: Upham Woods Outdoor Learning Ctr

Sat., Feb. 14, 2026

Happy Valentine's Day



Sat., Feb. 21, 2026

Beef Weigh-In, 9-11 am

WHERE: Equity in Sparta
 (snow date, Sun., Feb. 22, same time & place)

Every Monday, February 23rd-March 30th

Archery & Air Rifle Sessions, 6:00-8:00 pm.

*Required Safety Training, Feb. 23rd @ 5:00 pm.

WHERE: Gold Building, Tomah Fairgrounds

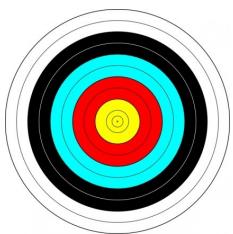
MARCH

Wed., March 4, 2026

Beef ID Forms Due by 12:00 a.m.

WHERE: Online [2026 Monroe County Fair](#)

[Animal ID Form](#) (also found on Monroe County Fair website)



Shooting Sports

The next archery and air rifle session will start with a mandatory training on Monday, Feb. 23rd at 5 p.m. The practice sessions will start on Monday, Feb. 23rd through March 30th from 6-8 p.m. The location is at the Gold Recreation Building on the Monroe County Fairgrounds in Tomah. Cost is \$10 for one discipline and \$15 for both Archery and Air Rifle.

A letter, safety and release forms have been sent to all members who signed up for these projects in 4HOnline. If you haven't received one, please give the office a call at 608-269-8722.

All participants MUST register online to be guaranteed a spot and to reserve a shooting time. Use the QR code below or go to: <https://forms.gle/Bc5Vz4n8QuroaysK8>. Maximum number of participants is 40. Those who show up that night without signing up online are not guaranteed participation.



SAVE THESE DATES!!

> **Clover Camp**, May 30, 2026, tentative camping weekend at Ft. McCoy

> **Upham Woods Summer Camp**, Wednesday, July 29, 2026 to Friday, July 31, 2026 in Wisconsin Dells.

Scholarship Opportunities

> **Western Wisconsin Beef Producers Scholarship**

Applications are due April 1, 2026. The \$300 scholarship is available to any graduating high school senior attending or planning to attend a College, Vocational School, Technical School, Agriculture Short Course, or any other institution of higher learning. For an application, go to: <https://monroe.extension.wisc.edu/files/2025/01/WWBP-Scholarship-Form.pdf>

> **Monroe County Farm Progress Days -**

Applications are due April 1, 2026. The \$250 scholarship is available to a high school senior living in Monroe County or have lived in Monroe County at the time of graduation from high school. Must be enrolled in a post high school agricultural short course or vocational-technical college program that will not result in a baccalaureate degree. Must be under 23 years of age as of January 1st of the application year. For an application, go to: <https://monroe.extension.wisc.edu/files/2025/01/Monroe-County-Farm-Progress-Days-Scholarship-Application.pdf>

> **WI Towns Association** - Applications are due May 22, 2026. The \$1,000 scholarship is available to students who are graduating from a Wisconsin public or private high school and will be attending a Wisconsin public or private college or university in the fall of that year. Proof of enrollment in college is required. Details and application are found at: <https://www.wisctowns.com/resources/scholarship/>

> **Monroe County Agricultural Society -**

Applications are due on or before March 15, 2026. To be eligible, applicants must have participated in 4-H, FFA or any approved youth group. Details and application can be found at: <https://www.monroecountyfairwi.com/information/scholarships/>

Project News & Information

Summer camp at Upham Woods is scheduled for Wednesday, July 29 to Friday, July 31st in Wisconsin Dells. Camp registration will open on March 16th and spots are limited. Any 4-H member in 9th Grade and up are eligible to be Camp Counselors at no cost and can earn great leadership experience. Please email jason.hornickel@wisc.edu for more information. Parents interested in possibly becoming chaperones at no cost, are also welcome to email Jason for more info. Participants who attended Summer Camp last year will be given the first opportunity to register early as returning campers are guaranteed spots if they register before March 15th. Watch for an email around February 15th from the office with the Pre-Registration Links. The estimated cost will be \$125 per camper, and **payments must be made in full by June 1st, 2026**. After June 1st, there will be no refunds for cancellations. Additional 25% scholarships are available through the Monroe County 4-H Leaders Association, and can be applied for at any time by filling out an application at this link: <https://forms.gle/HnxMykLa1uSY7yoSA> More details to come in next month's newsletter.



The beef weigh-in will be on Saturday, Feb. 21 from 9-11 am at Equity in Sparta. (*Snow date is the next day, Sun., Feb. 22 same time/place.*) This counts as your Pre-ID and you do not need to submit an online form if you attend the weigh-in with your animal. ID forms are submitted for you if you participate in the weigh-in. Beef not identified at the weigh-in will need to be identified by using the online form [2026 Meat Animal Pre-ID Form](#). Form can be found on the Monroe County Fair website under Exhibitors. Form must be entered by 4:00 p.m. on March 4, 2026.

Beef Weigh-In

Wisconsin Educational Experiences



Summer Academy



Get ready for a fun filled week, June 14-18, 2026 on the UW-Madison Campus. This program helps youth explore career and hobby pathways in a variety of track-based activities, seminars, campus tours, performances, and hands-on experiences. Members in Grades 8-11 are invited to participate.

Registration is through 4HOnline from March—April 2026. Capacity is limited for this experience. The cost is \$150.00. For more details go to <https://4h.extension.wisc.edu/opportunities/statewide-events-and-opportunities/summer-academy/>



County Scholarships

If you are interested in a state or national program, but costs are preventing you from applying, there are limited county scholarships available for youth. Application Link: <https://forms.gle/qQ1uwvhQsLgPMPxz9>

Monroe County 4-H Festival of Arts

Saturday, February 28th, 2026
Cashton High School



PURPOSE of the 4-H Festival of Arts is to provide the opportunity:

- For 4-H members and Cloverbuds to share their skills and talents with others.
- For 4-H members and Cloverbuds to further develop their skills in communicating through the arts with constructive feedback on their efforts.
- To share with the public the Arts and Communication Projects of the Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development program.
- To discover additional arts ideas from others in the area.
- To observe and support others as they perform or display their talents.

Area of entry include:

• COMMUNICATION ARTS

- Memorized Selection
- Story Telling
- Play Reading
- Original Speech
- Prose Reading
- Poetry Reading

• ARTS AND CRAFTS, PHOTOGRAPHY, MARKETING

- Registrations should be sent directly to Club Leader

• DEMONSTRATION, ILLUSTRATED TALK, ACTION CENTER

- Individual
- Team

• MUSIC

- Solo
- Duet
- Group

• DRAMA

- Group Drama
- Group Play Reading
- Mini-Drama (verbal or non-verbal)

**ONLY PERFORMING ARTS PARTICIPANTS
NEED TO REGISTER ONLINE AT:**

<https://forms.gle/ZCapppDH9p7kXH22A>

DEADLINE TO REGISTER: Feb. 16, 2026

Arts, Crafts, Marketing & Photography – let your Club Leader know how many items you plan on displaying

*Plan to join us to
showcase your
skills and talents!*

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ALL AREAS

1. Participants will introduce themselves to the judges before performing. Include your name, age or grade, name of 4-H club, title of performance. You may include an interesting fact, or something unique about your performance.
2. Throughout the program, participants and others will not leave or enter the auditorium while a group or individual is performing.
3. Please respect the time guidelines in each category.
4. Please respect the scheduled performance times. Groups are expected to perform at scheduled times.
5. All festival participants must be enrolled 4-H members.
6. All participants will be awarded a ribbon.
7. Merit winners will receive a merit ribbon. Merit awards will be based on quality of the performance/exhibit and age of participant. Only those who follow the guidelines will be eligible for merit awards.
8. When selecting material for presentations, please keep in mind that 4-H is a family organization. Presentations should be appropriate for audiences of all ages.
9. Performances will take place on the stage. Performers will use a microphone. The following will be available for use: piano, music stand, chair(s), sound system, demonstration table with mirror.



COMMUNICATION ARTS

Description - The following categories must have 1 or 2 readers.

Memorized Selection: Prose, poetry or any other piece; must be memorized. No notes allowed.

Prose-reading: include stories, narratives, anything not written as a poem; should be presented as a reading. No props.

Poetry-reading: may be original poem or a selection written by someone else, either in verse form or open-ended; should be presented as a reading. No props.

Original Speeches: A speech written by the speaker on any subject, preferably one pertaining to his/her 4-H project work. Notes permitted.

Storytelling: Original or from a book, told as if to younger children. No poetry allowed. Presented without using a book or notes; costumes or props are encouraged, and facial expression and gestures are allowed.

Play Reading: 1 or 2 readers are to make their selection "come alive" without the use of costumes and props. Hand movements and facial expressions acceptable; movement around stage unacceptable. A play reading should be presented as a reading.

Time Guidelines - Maximum time for above categories: 5 minutes.

DEMONSTRATIONS, ILLUSTRATED TALKS

Description - May be individual or in teams.

Demonstrations and Illustrated Talks: either teach someone how or show and tell how to do something.

- Consists of 4 parts - a) introduction, b) body, c) conclusion, and d) questions from audience.
- Visuals such as maps, charts, posters, graphs, pictures, slides or models can be used to explain what you're saying.

Action Center (informal): a show and tell with an emphasis on showing.

- Presenter(s) carry on conversation with passersby (no seated audience)
- People watching take part by - a) watching and listening, b) talking with demonstrator, c) trying things with senses, d) judging things, e) asking questions
- Handouts may be used (instructions, directions, recipes)
- Posters or pictures can be used to show key steps or to show a close-up view.

Time Guidelines: 15 minute maximum for demonstrations; b) 15-30 minutes for action center.

MUSIC: SOLO, DUET and GROUP

Description - Define Group - three or more members.

- Categories include instrumental, vocal, dance or novelty (e.g. variety, lip sync).
- Lip sync will be judged separately from dance, vocal, etc.
- If media accompaniments are used, only instrumental accompaniment media are permitted. Vocal media will be allowed for lip sync or dance numbers only.
- No open flames, hay, straw, cornstalks, shavings or sawdust may be used.
- No directing is permitted from the audience or in front of the stage.



Time Guidelines - The maximum performance time limit is 12 minutes. Clock starts at beginning of performance. No minimum time limit.

GROUP DRAMA

Description - Groups must consist of three or more members.



- One Act Play, commercial or original drama.
- No open flames, hay, straw, cornstalks, shavings or sawdust may be used.
- No directing is permitted from the audience or in front of the stage.

Time Guidelines - The maximum performance time limit is 30 minutes: opening curtain to final curtain. No minimum time limits.

GROUP MINI-DRAMA

Description - Groups must consist of three or more members.

- Produced with minimal props (no special lighting, hay, straw, candles or open flames) and costumes. Examples include skits, puppetry, or creative dramatics, verbal or non-verbal.

Time Guidelines - A maximum time limit of 5 minutes, including set-up and take down.

GROUP PLAY READING



Description - Groups must consist of three or more members.

- Readers are to make their selection “come alive” without the use of costumes and props.
- Hand movements and facial expressions are acceptable. Movement around the performance area is not acceptable.
- Presented without a microphone or artificial devices.
- Scripts are to be used.

Time Guidelines - Maximum time limit of 12 minutes.

ARTS & CRAFTS



Description - Youth may bring a maximum of 4 items to display and discuss.

- Please call Club Leader to reserve space for exhibits. Club Leaders are responsible to reserve space for the entire club. You do not need to register online.
- Any article that has been made after April 1 of the previous year will be accepted.
- All articles will be judged by face-to-face judging. Items will be released after the awards program. Exhibitors are responsible for the removal of their exhibits.
- Evaluation - Articles will be evaluated on quality of exhibit, age of participant and answers to interview questions. Evaluation criteria include: 1) originality / creativity, 2) neatness, 3) artistic merit, and 4) appropriate finishing.

If a youth is unable to make it to the Festival of Arts they will be required to write a statement answering the 5 or 6 questions listed in the Face to Face Judging Guidelines and attach it to the exhibit. This can be found on the Monroe County Extension website: <https://monroe.extension.wisc.edu>.



MARKETING

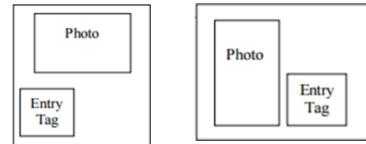
Description - All items submitted will be displayed together. Any item is acceptable that can be used for promotion of 4-H. All entries must have at least one green clover with the four H's. Examples would include posters, placemats, tabletop design, sweatshirts, etc. that promote 4-H visually.

- Please call Club Leader to reserve space for exhibits. Club Leaders are responsible to reserve space for the entire club. You do not need to register online.

If a youth is unable to make it to the Festival of Arts they will be required to write a statement answering the 5 or 6 questions listed in the Face to Face Judging Guidelines and attach it to the exhibit. This can be found on the Monroe County Extension website: <https://monroe.extension.wisc.edu>.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Description - All photos must be 4 x 6 or 5 x 7 only.



- Entry Labeling - All photographs must have a 3" x 5" index card listing: name, club, grade, category, and title of photo. Writing must be legible or deduction to placing may occur. Attach cards securely on the front of the exhibit in such a way that it is easily read and minimizes distracting from or covering the photo.
- Please call Club Leader to reserve space for exhibits. Club Leaders are responsible to reserve space for the entire club. You do not need to register online.
- All photos must be mounted on an 8 x 9 or a 9 x 8 tag board ONLY. Vertical photos will be mounted on the left side, leaving room for the entry tag, and horizontal photos will be mounted on the top. See diagram.
- Photos may be color or black & white, standard or digital, and any appropriate subject.
- Categories include: Animals, People, Still Life, Scenes, Flowers & Plants
- Quotas / Entry Requirements - Limit of two (2) photos per category per exhibitor, with a limit of eight (8) total entries.
- All photos will be judged face-to-face. Items will be released after the awards program. Exhibitors are responsible for the removal of their exhibits.

If a youth is unable to make it to the Festival of Arts they will be required to write a statement answering the 5 or 6 questions listed in the Face to Face Judging Guidelines and attach it to the exhibit. This can be found on the Monroe County Extension website: <https://monroe.extension.wisc.edu>.

CLUB DISPLAY

Description - Each club display table will be judged as a unit by the judges. 1st through 3rd place will be awarded. Members should let their Club Leader know how many items they plan to bring. No need to register online. Club Leaders should contact the office to give the number of tables needed.

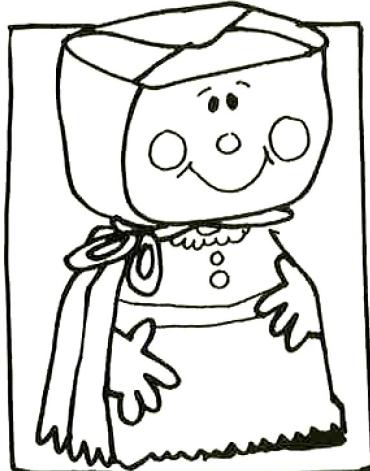
- Appearance: pleasing to the eye; neat; well-placed items; items are seen easily and with the name cards uniform and with the proper information. A properly fitting table cloth that adds to the appearance. An easel or peg board is very useful to display drawings and other crafts that need to be hung up for viewing. Distracting packaging or items should be out of sight.
- Arrangements: a good variety of art and craft items. Originality or other characteristics that make the items worthy of recognition. It is not always the number of items but how they are arranged for the people viewing to give a nice appearance.
- Theme: 4-H colors and the club's name is evident.



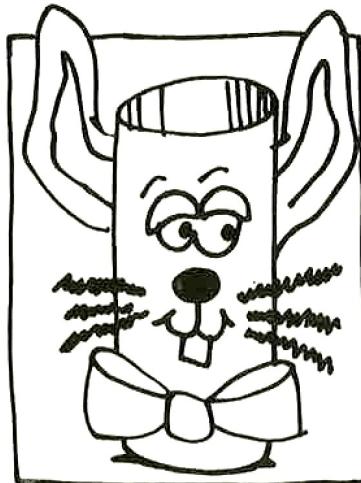
Cloverbud
cornerUniversity of MN Extension Service
Cloverbuds Publication 4H-MI-5560-S

Puppets With "Pizzazz!"

You can make puppets from all kinds of things.
Look carefully at the puppets below. Discover
what they're made from - then gather the materials
and make your favorite kind.



Made from _____



Made from _____

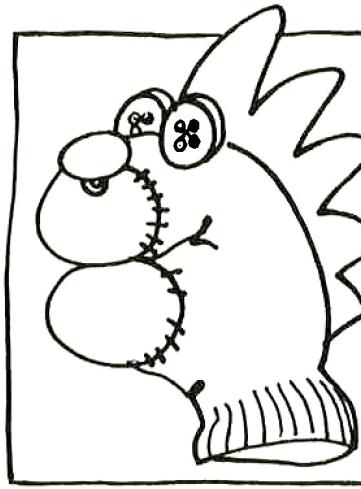


Made from _____

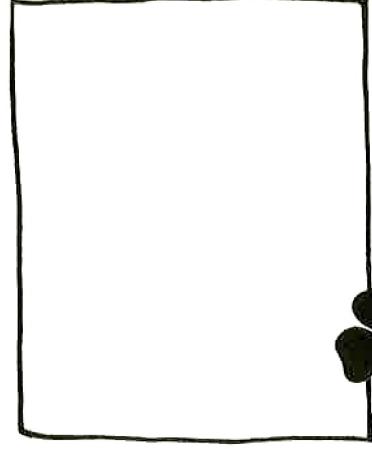


Just
imagine!

Made from _____



Made from _____



Draw
your
own
here!



Made from _____