

Neighborhood connections aid gardeners



Metro Blooms Landscape Designer Jennifer Moeller talks with residents of the Brook Gardens apartments in Brooklyn Park during a community celebration for their Lawns to Legumes Demonstration Neighborhood in October 2020.
Photo Credit: Metro Blooms

BWSR's senior ecologist and vegetation specialist offers ways for neighbors to collaborate when creating pollinator habitat

Minnesota pollinators face a daunting array of challenges. Habitat loss, pesticides, pathogens, pollutants and the effects of climate change are all factors that affect declining native pollinator populations. At times, addressing these challenges can seem overwhelming. The pandemic has also drawn time and attention away from these topics, requiring us to regain momentum to protect these species.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

(BWSR) strives to address major conservation challenges in Minnesota — and in recent years, we've found innovative ways to make progress by partnering with gardeners, pollinator and wildlife enthusiasts, and environmental nonprofits.

BWSR's Lawns to Legumes program is building a movement to protect at-risk pollinators and the integrity of our landscapes. Residents across the state are working to establish habitat in their yards and communities. In

doing so, they're recognizing that their efforts can make a difference for at-risk species. While gardening may initially seem like an individual pursuit, it presents opportunities to connect with neighbors and build community.

Lawns to Legumes' success can be attributed to the hard work of individual residents. However, we've observed that residents who are new to gardening or who may not have the financial resources available



Lawns to Legumes is funded by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). ENRTF dollars are generated by the Minnesota State Lottery for the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation and enhancement of the state's air, water, land, fish, wildlife and other natural resources.

to invest significantly in landscaping are often hesitant to get started, even if they have been awarded cost-share funding. This is where neighbors can play an important role in supporting each other.

“Our gardening practices influence our neighbors,” said Rebecca Rice, director of Blue Thumb — Planting for Clean Water, a Lawns to Legumes partner. “We have a direct impact on the environment they live in, so if we’re planting for pollinators and clean water, our neighbors might begin to notice and enjoy the butterflies around our blooming natives. They might enjoy it so much that they want some in their yard, too — and gardeners are always happy to share.”

Here are five ways that neighbors can assist neighbors to increase benefits for pollinators and other at-risk wildlife species:

Share tools, materials and information: Sharing knowledge, tools, extra plants, seeds or other materials can be a big help to neighbors who are getting started with native plantings. If you do share plants, tools, or materials with friends and neighbors, be sure to take precautions to [prevent the spread](#) of invasive jumping worms (*Amyntas spp.*). Sharing information such as resources found on BWSR’s [Lawns to Legumes webpage](#) can also help neighbors get started.

Erect yard signs, host project tours: Having pollinator yard signs is one way to communicate your project’s intent and can lead to discussions with neighbors about how to get started. Garden parties and project tours also can build community support

for pollinators while allowing people to enjoy the beauty of established pollinator gardens.

Map your project: [Map and provide information about your projects](#) on Blue Thumb’s website. We want to know about your efforts and those of your neighbors — having this data helps state government agencies and others understand where pollinator corridors are developing, and where additional habitat is needed. A robust map of projects also can help support future funding requests for the Lawns to Legumes program.

Get involved with local organizations: Many local organizations work to educate and collaborate on the establishment of habitat for wildlife. [Wild Ones](#) is a great example of an organization that promotes native landscaping and has several chapters in Minnesota. Many of these local chapters are hosting tours this spring and summer. Contact your local soil and water conservation district for information about [native plant nurseries](#) and other ecological gardening resources near you.

Share projects and updates on social media: Social media is a powerful tool that can help stress the importance of protecting declining pollinator populations. It’s a great way to show pictures of established projects. Follow BWSR’s social media accounts for gardening resources, project photos and program updates on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). BWSR also recommends following its Lawns to Legumes partner organization, Blue Thumb — Planting for Clean Water, on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).



Top: Minneapolis residents participating in the Lawns to Legumes’ Longfellow Demonstration Neighborhood met up for a plant pickup event in July 2020. **Photo Credit:** Longfellow Community Council

Bottom: A Lawns to Legumes sign is staked in a pollinator planting at the Brook Gardens apartments in Brooklyn Park. **Photo Credit:** Metro Blooms



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dan Shaw is BWSR’s senior ecologist and vegetation specialist. Shaw started working in the field of ecology about 25 years ago. Before joining BWSR, he gained experience with restoration companies, native plant nurseries, consulting firms and nonprofit organizations. Over the past 15 years at BWSR, he’s coordinated conservation programs focusing on native vegetation establishment, invasive species management, pollinator habitat, habitat-friendly solar, water management and resiliency to climate change. Shaw has taught ecology courses at the University of Minnesota for the past 20 years. He also has written and illustrated several ecology-focused publications.



Shaw