

Protecting pollinators: Lessons learned via Lawns to Legumes



L2L Details

GOAL: Increase habitat for at-risk pollinators in residential settings across Minnesota by providing reimbursement-based funding, workshops, coaching and gardening resources.



your yard
CAN BEE
the CHANGE
#Lawns2Legumes

GRANTS: Open to Minnesota homeowners and renters with a yard, deck, or other outdoor space for planting. Apply to be reimbursed up to \$400 in costs associated with establishing new pollinator habitat. Nov. 30 is the deadline to apply for spring 2025 grants. [Apply here.](#)

Five years after the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) launched the popular Lawns to Legumes program, BWSR Senior Ecologist and Vegetation Specialist Dan Shaw — who leads the program on behalf of the agency — reflected on program accomplishments and lessons learned along the way.

Residents are leading the way: Public motivation to help pollinators and support biodiversity across landscapes was a driving force behind creating the [Lawns to Legumes Program](#) in 2019. This motivation led Minnesota residents

to “bee the change” for pollinators even if they had never gardened before. Nearly one-third of program participants are new gardeners willing to dive into the world of soil, native plants, and garden maintenance out of respect for and appreciation of pollinators. Five years in, residents remain highly motivated and enthusiastic about creating pollinator habitat.

Everyone can play a role: People of all ages and from all parts of Minnesota are playing key roles in protecting pollinators. Even small gardens can

make a difference, and we encourage new gardeners to start small and add to their projects over time.

One of the program’s key goals is to ensure that all Minnesotans have an equal chance to participate and be successful with their projects. About 40% of projects funded by the Lawns to Legumes program are within environmental justice areas.

Supporting pollinators builds community: Supporting pollinators offers a common mission that can bring communities together. In addition to individual residents taking action, entire neighborhoods are applying for [Pollinator Pathways](#) grants to make a difference for pollinators.

We’ve learned about residents mentoring each other and sharing their seeds, time and expertise. This dedication from community members has helped complete nearly 6,000 projects statewide over the past five years.

Ecological gardening is good for people: Establishing pollinator gardens can be hard work, but it helps us to support our communities, connect with others, get outside, and build relationships with the land and the incredible creatures that live on Minnesota landscapes.

Left: *Neighbors planted native plant plugs along a boulevard outside Butter Cafe in Minneapolis’ Lyndale Neighborhood. A Lawns to Legumes Pollinator Pathways grant supported the project. Photo Credit: BWSR*

Center: *Pollinator meadows, such as this one in Duluth, are among the recommended practices that Lawns to Legumes funds can help to establish. Photo Credit: Lawns to Legumes gardener*

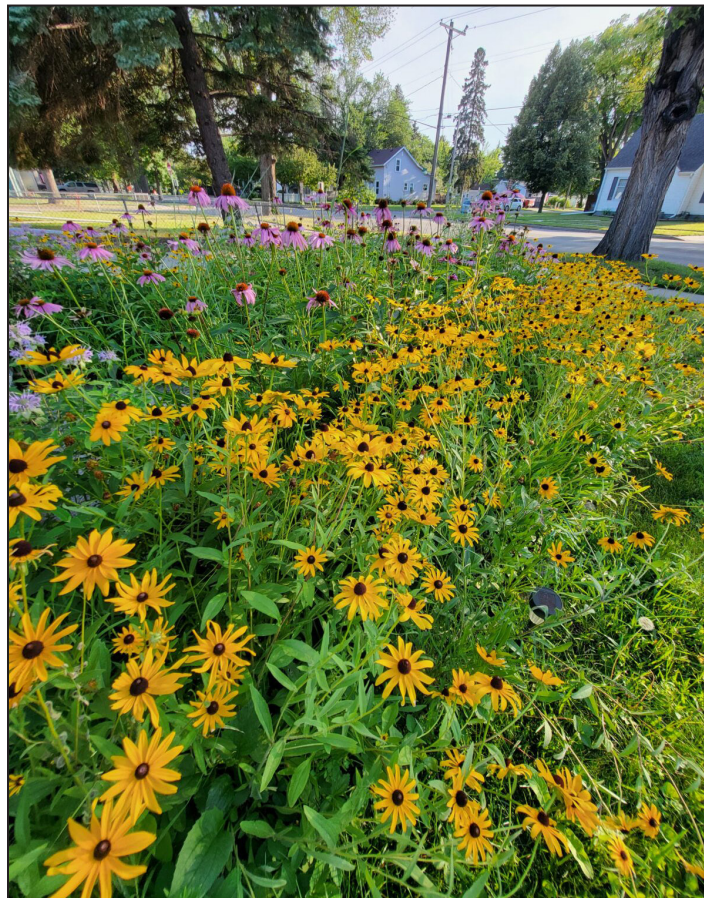
Right: *Native plant plugs grow in a residential yard in Minneapolis’ Kenwood Neighborhood, established as part of the neighborhood association’s Pollinator Pathways grant. Photo Credit: Kenwood Neighborhood Association*

Success takes many partners: More than 100 partner organizations have contributed funding, resources and expertise to support the Lawns to Legumes program. We have been fortunate to partner with [Blue Thumb — Planting for Clean Water](#) to run our reimbursement-based grant program. Other partners include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Xerces Society and Monarch Joint Venture.

Minnesota legislators have supported the program by securing funding to help Lawns to Legumes grow, and to ensure ecological gardening opportunities are available to more Minnesota residents. These partnerships play a valuable role in supporting residents in their efforts to create pollinator habitat projects.

Coaches play an important role: More than 270 volunteer coaches have assisted residents with their Lawns to Legumes pollinator plantings since 2019.

Coaches provide advice, support and expertise to new gardeners involved with the program. Many of these coaches are Master Gardeners, Master Water Stewards, or Master Naturalists, but we are seeing an increase in former Lawns to Legumes gardeners stepping into coaching roles after



Pocket plantings created by Lawns to Legumes gardeners, such as this one in Wayzata, offer food and nesting sources to Minnesota pollinators.
Photo Credit: Lawns to Legumes gardener

completing their projects.

Pollinator habitat projects help address climate

change: Gardens with native plants act as sponges, capturing excess rainfall, and native plants' deep roots also pull carbon into the ground.

We estimate that Lawns to Legumes plantings have sequestered more than 160 metric tons of carbon per year and are collecting more than 3 million cubic

feet of water per year.

Supporting pollinators supports our food:

We recognize that protecting pollinators protects our food production systems. Pollinator plantings near gardens and crop fields can lead to increased harvests of fruits and vegetables. The movement to support pollinators has also resulted in less pesticide use on residential landscapes.

We need to be innovative

and flexible: The Lawns to Legumes program continues to evolve as we learn about the needs of Minnesota pollinators, which include more than 508 native bee species. Program staff are refining approaches to plant selection and native seed mixes. They're also adjusting program components to further address equity needs, capture water, sequester carbon, and establish plantings in community spaces and schools.

We are making a

difference: Climate change, pesticide use, disease and loss of habitat all threaten pollinators. Fortunately, Minnesota residents continue to work together to protect pollinators for future generations. We are finding that as people plant habitat, pollinators show up in increasingly large numbers — and this outcome is multiplied when gardeners establish habitat across neighborhoods.

To broaden our impact, BWSR has developed a "[Living Landscapes Initiative](#)" to incorporate pollinator habitat into a wide range of landscapes including solar sites, utility corridors, wetlands, grasslands and forests. It is through this spirit of collaboration and innovation that we will continue to create a brighter future for Minnesota pollinators.