

Lawns to Legumes: Pollinator protection by the yard



- Joe Pye Weed
- Ironweed
- Rattlesnake Master
- Bee Balm
- Little Bluestem
- Blazingstar
- Coneflowers
- Black-Eyed Susan

Left: Native plants beneficial to pollinators make up a planting in a Minneapolis yard. Urban plantings can help build important habitat corridors.

Photo Credit: Metro Blooms

Below: BWSR student worker conservation technician Ali Boese discusses Lawns to Legumes at a July 25 "Pollinator Party" hosted by the Minneapolis Parks Department and the University of Minnesota at Lyndale Park Gardens in Minneapolis. **Photo Credit:** BWSR



A new opportunity to protect pollinators and enhance habitat will soon be available to Minnesota residents through Lawns to Legumes, a program being developed by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).

Lawns to Legumes will offer cost-share, technical assistance, coaching and planting guides to eligible residents who install pollinator-friendly native plantings in their yards. The emphasis is on protecting the federally endangered state bee, the rusty patched bumblebee.

"Based on the high interest in this program we've received so far, we know Minnesotans are eager to do this work," said Dan Shaw, BWSR's senior ecologist. "Our goal is to equip them with the knowledge and tools they need to make a difference for pollinators right in their own neighborhoods."

Minnesota is home to more than 450 native bee species. Pollinators also include butterflies,



moths, beetles and native flies. All play a key role in pollinating many food crops and native plants, but populations have significantly declined worldwide in recent years. Shaw said population decline can be attributed to factors including pesticide use, pathogens, habitat loss and lack of nutrition for pollinators. The decline in beneficial



insect populations significantly concerned conservation professionals, legislators and the public — and served as a catalyst for creating Lawns to Legumes.

According to Shaw, even relatively small plantings can help create a matrix that is highly valuable to pollinators, and can help build important habitat corridors. Because they are frequently maintained, residential landscapes also may provide opportunities for greater plant diversity.

BWSR received a \$900,000 one-time appropriation during the 2019 legislative session from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) to launch the program as a three-year pilot. The program will involve collaborations with local governments and nonprofits including Blue Thumb Partners — which includes more than 50 private and public organizations focused on supporting landscapes that contribute to healthy ecosystems and clean water.

Lawns to Legumes will have three main components:

• **Demonstration neighborhoods:** A competitive request for proposals (RFP) from local partners will be issued to work with landowners to develop demonstration neighborhoods that showcase plantings beneficial to pollinators. Eligible applicants will include cities, counties, watershed districts and soil and water conservation districts. They will provide technical and financial assistance to approximately 300 landowners to establish pollinator pathways that provide high quality habitat for at-risk pollinators. These demonstration neighborhoods will be designed to raise program visibility and awareness.

• **Individual landowner support:** Blue Thumb Partners will coordinate the individual support offered to participating residents. The goal of that support — including cost-share, coaching and workshops — is to establish successful projects that will provide high value to at-risk pollinators while increasing neighborhood support for the establishment of



This BWSR photo illustration highlights common issues that make traditional yard landscaping less than ideal for pollinator habitat. Lawns to Legumes supports residents who want to create pollinator-friendly spaces within their own yards. Photo Credit: Metro Blooms

pollinator habitat. Participating yards will be marked with signs to raise awareness.

• **A public outreach campaign:** A broad partnership of conservation, local government and education partners plans to promote the importance of devoting lawn areas to pollinators, and to stress that all landowners can make a difference.

The program was informally launched at the Minnesota State Fair. Landowner workshops will be scheduled later this month. BWSR staff created and recently released “Planting for Pollinators: Guiding Principles and Design Concepts for Residential Pollinator Habitat,” for residents who want to start immediately, without cost-share.

The RFP for demonstration neighborhoods is expected to be released by late December. BWSR staff aims to begin enrolling participants at about the same time. Applicants who live in areas with a high presence of the rusty patched bumble bee and other at-risk pollinators will be given priority in accessing cost-share funds. Making cost-share and coaching available this winter will allow time for project planning, with planting and implementation slated to begin in

Top 10 Minnesota plants beneficial to native bumblebees

- Virginia bluebells
- Blazingstars
- Wild white indigo
- Milkweeds
- Goldenrods
- Beebalm
- Beardtongues
- Red Columbine
- Asters
- Blue giant hyssop

spring 2020.

The program is one of the first of its kind in the nation.

“There have been few pollinator programs across the country that promote residential pollinator habitat, so this program has received national attention from news organizations and conservation groups as a potential model for other states and conservation groups who want to make a difference for pollinators through residential landscapes,” Shaw said.