

Backyard bounty: Planting for pollinators



Left: A Lawns to Legumes gardener used a template provided by the program to plan and install a pocket planting. **Middle:** A bumblebee visits a blue giant hyssop plant in a pollinator garden planted by an individual support grant recipient. **Right:** Native plants can be attractive additions along driveways, sidewalks and fences. **Contributed Photos**

Anyone can access Lawns to Legumes' free planting guides and resources

Minnesota residents have until Feb. 15 to apply for \$300 reimbursement grants to create pollinator habitat in their yards through the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' (BWSR) Lawns to Legumes program.

Launched in 2019 with a \$900,000 appropriation from the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF), Lawns to Legumes offers a combination of cost-share funding, workshops, coaching and planting resources to help state residents create new pollinator habitat in outdoor residential spaces. BWSR partners with Metro Blooms and Blue Thumb – Planting for Clean Water to administer the program.

Since installations began in spring 2020, the Lawns to Legumes program

has helped residents plant more than 1.2 million square feet of pollinator habitat. By January 2022, the program had supported 279 pollinator pocket plantings, 70 bee lawn projects and 61 pollinator meadow projects. More installations are expected to be completed this spring. To date, Minnesotans have planted more than 1,100 trees and shrubs through the program.

“(Lawns to Legumes) helps promote people taking care of their yards and the landscapes around them,” said Dan Cariveau, an associate professor of entomology at the University of Minnesota Bee Lab, who primarily focuses on native bees. “It’s a way to see that we’re directly linked to the natural world.”

Anyone who lives in Minnesota can

apply to receive a reimbursement grant, also referred to as an individual support grant.

The program also includes demonstration neighborhoods, which are pollinator programs run by local and tribal governments and nonprofits with support from BWSR. Twelve organizations currently oversee demonstration neighborhoods. BWSR is accepting applications for a new round of grants through Feb. 3.

Lawns to Legumes received an additional \$2 million in ENRTF funding last year. Program staff plans to use this new funding to provide





additional grants, amplify outreach and education efforts, and expand planting opportunities to schools and community organizations.

“We’ve seen an incredible response to this program so far, with nearly 10,000 people applying for individual support grants to date,” said Dan Shaw, BWSR’s senior ecologist and vegetation specialist. “This new funding will help us extend more opportunities to Minnesotans who want to take action to protect pollinators.”

Lawns to Legumes seeks to develop habitat corridors



— pathways that offer food and nesting resources to pollinator species with limited flight ranges. While some species can fly for miles, Cariveau said some other small bee species can only fly a few hundred yards at a time.

“Some pollinators have pretty short flight distances, and also, flight is costly — it takes time and energy,” said Sarah Foltz Jordan, senior pollinator conservation specialist with the Xerces Society. “The more we can configure our plantings to have some degree of proximity to each other or to other nature areas, the better equipped insects will be to expand their populations and respond to threats like climate change.”

Cariveau said it’s important to remember that protecting pollinators

isn’t just about providing food sources — shelter is another important factor in supporting populations. Pollinator species that don’t live in colonies often nest in twigs, soil, dried leaves and plant stems.

“We mostly think of bees feeding on flowers, but bees need to live somewhere,” Cariveau said. “Many species visit their nests multiple times each day. Nesting habitat can include soil, so keeping parts of your yard bare is important. Keeping some stems in your garden can also be beneficial.”

Building pollinator corridors with plantings near one another can have a secondary benefit, Shaw said.

“When you have multiple people on a street or in a

How to apply

Visit [Blue Thumb — Planting for Clean Water’s](#) website to apply for \$300 individual support reimbursement grants. Applications are due Feb. 15.

neighborhood doing this kind of work at the same time, it can create its own sense of community,” Shaw said. “We try to encourage program participants to learn from each other, to share seeds or propagated plants and compare notes on what’s working in their immediate area.”

Free resources including gardening templates, planting guides and best management practices can be found [here](#).