Pollinator habitat program takes flight

your yard CAN BEE the CHANGE
#Lawns2Legumes

Left: *A rain garden encompasses a front lawn in Minneapolis. Lawns to Legumes offers Minnesota residents the opportunity to apply for reimbursement to create residential pollinator habitat. Free workshops and planting guides are also available.*
Photo Credit: Metro Blooms

Lawns to Legumes open to Minnesota gardeners of all skill levels

Minnesota residents can now apply for assistance to create pollinator habitat in their yards through a new Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) program.

Lawns to Legumes, the Minnesota program designed to help at-risk pollinators, supports habitat projects that can encompass an entire yard. But beginning gardeners and those with limited space can make a difference with as little as 10 square feet.

Feb. 28 is the deadline to apply for up to $350 in reimbursement. But that's just part of the program to establish native vegetation, which has garnered national attention since its development last summer. By early January, approximately 400 people had participated in free workshops and 175 participated in online webinars. More online and in-person workshops are being planned for spring. Free online planting guides are available to anyone.

An emphasis is on protecting the federally endangered rusty patched bumblebee, Minnesota's state bee. BWSR partnered with Metro Blooms and Blue Thumb: Planting for Clean Water, a collaboration of nonprofits supporting pollinators, to launch the program open to Minnesota residents.

Lawns to Legumes aims to protect the federally endangered state bee, the rusty patched bumbleebee.
Photo Credit: Heather Holm

"This program is resonating with beginning and experienced gardeners alike," said Metro Blooms Executive Director Becky Rice. "Lawns to Legumes gives people the opportunity to make a tangible difference for pollinators by bringing them into their everyday lives."

Anyone who lives in Minnesota can apply to be reimbursed for up to $350 in costs associated with establishing pollinator habitats in their yards.

To increase projects' success rate, recipients are expected to attend a workshop or webinar. Funding decisions and all notifications will be emailed in March for spring 2020 planting.

Minnesota supports more than 450 native bee species. Pollinators — including butterflies, moths, beetles and flies — play a key role in food-crop production and in supporting native plants. But pollinators' populations have significantly declined worldwide in recent years. Among the contributing factors are habitat loss, lack of food, plus pesticide use and pathogens.

"Even small plantings of native flowers can help create habitat that's highly valuable to pollinators," said Dan Shaw, BWSR senior ecologist. "The high interest we've seen in this program shows that Minnesotans are eager to make a difference for these species we

Lawns to Legumes Recommended Practices

Pollinator pocket plantings

Beneficial trees and shrubs

Pollinator lawns

Pollinator meadows

Lawns to Legumes recommends four project types for residents interested in creating pollinator habitat in their yards. ***Pollinator pocket plantings*** *can be installed with as little as 10 square feet. They are small clusters of native plants that provide food and shelter to pollinators, and are recommended for new gardeners.* ***Beneficial trees and shrubs*** *offer overwintering habitat and food sources and are recommended for beginner and intermediate gardeners.* ***Pollinator lawns*** *involve inter-seeding pollinator-friendly species into existing turf or low-growing native plants; they are recommended for experienced gardeners.* ***Pollinator meadows*** *are larger groupings of native plants that provide habitat and water quality benefits; they are recommended for experienced gardeners.* **Photo Credits:** Metro Blooms

all rely on."

Shaw said pollinator-friendly plantings are important because many of the insects that support our food and ecological systems are at serious risk. Lawns to Legumes promotes four pollinator-friendly conservation practices:

• **Pollinator pocket plantings:** A space as small as 10 square feet can serve as pollinator habitat. Native pocket plantings are small clusters of native flowers and grasses that can provide places for pollinators to rest and feed from spring through fall. This practice is recommended for new gardeners.

• **Beneficial trees and shrubs:** Groupings of trees and shrubs can offer nesting areas, overwintering habitat and food sources for pollinators. Beneficial species include willows, American basswood trees, raspberry bushes and black chokeberry. This practice is recommended for new and intermediate gardeners.

• **Pollinator lawns:** Species such as Dutch white clover, fine fescues and creeping thyme are seeded into lawns or low-growing native plants to provide habitat for ground-nesting bees. Because these projects require a significant commitment in terms of installation and maintenance, they are recommended for experienced gardeners.

• **Pollinator meadows:** Large plantings of diverse native plants provide habitat and water-quality benefits. Pollinator meadows require additional planning and maintenance; they're recommended for experienced gardeners.

In addition to supporting residents' efforts, Lawns to Legumes aims to highlight best practices by establishing high-profile, community-wide projects in important pollinator pathways. Organizations that oversee a demonstration neighborhood will work with local residents to install the program's four types of beneficial planting practices. Thirteen grants for demonstration neighborhoods were awarded by BWSR's board in January following a request for proposals process.

A large pollinator garden in the Minneapolis Fulton neighborhood was named "Best Pollinator Garden of 2016" by Metro Blooms. A diversity of native plants offers food and shelter to a wide range of Minnesota pollinators. **Photo Credit:** Metro Blooms