



Lawns to Legumes

COACHING HANDBOOK



Lawns to Legumes Individual Support Grants

Thank you for volunteering to help Minnesotans create pollinator habitat through the Lawns to Legumes program. Coaches will be connected with residents who were awarded Lawns to Legumes Individual Support grant funding.

The Lawns to Legumes Grant Program provides workshops, free planting guides, and opportunities to apply for reimbursement — enabling Minnesota residents to create pollinator habitat in their yards. Please visit the Blue Thumb Lawns to Legumes [Coaching Information Page](#) for more information, resources for coaches, and to sign up!



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I. How to Be a Coach

Coaches play a key role in this program and it requires a time commitment. Most of our coaches report spending 2-3 hours on each grantee over the course of their project. Know that we don't expect you to have all of the answers to every question and we have additional resources for questions you can't answer. Grantees are reminded that coaches volunteer their time and are not expected to be "on-call." For most of our grantees, you will be the much needed motivation to make the first few decisions about their project, and then get out there and do it!

Timeline for Coaches

Applications for coaching are accepted year-round at bluethumb.org/coach.

We host two cohorts every year in the Spring and Fall. Below is a general timeline indicating important events for coaches and grantees.

- Mid-January/July:
 - Grantees are notified of their award and given 2 weeks to confirm their acceptance.
 - Coach training webinars are hosted as a "kick-off" to our Lawns to Legumes season.
 - Before the start of each grant period, Blue Thumb staff will reach out via email and ask you to confirm your participation as a coach for the upcoming cohort.
- Early to mid February/August:
 - Lawns to Legumes kick-off webinars are hosted for grantees.
 - Coaches are matched with individual grantees and asked to reach out within two weeks of notification.
 - Grantees and coaches are invited to attend workshops on Planting for Pollinators, Resilient Yards, Alternative Turf, and Resilient Shorelines.
- April/October: Mid-season check in hosted for coaches.
- July 15/November 30: Project deadline, all reimbursement requests and supporting documents are due.

Types of Coaching

Individual Coaching

Coaches will be given contact information for one or more residents, depending on their capacity. We ask that coaches reach out to grantees first, either via email or telephone. Residents will not be provided with contact info for their coach until the coach reaches out. Coaches should send an introductory message as soon as they can to their assigned residents to provide the best way to be in touch. We ask that you reach out to your assigned grantees within 2 weeks of being notified. We recommend setting clear expectations for your grantees from the beginning: let them know what they

can expect from you as far as availability and how you anticipate communicating with them. If at any point you are no longer able to assist with your assigned grantees, unable to reach your assigned grantees, or need to report a concern, please reach out to the L2L coach email (l2lcoaching@bluethumb.org).

- **Coaching individual grantees**

- **Matching Process:** We always have more grantees request a coach than we have coaches available. For this reason, we prioritize matching grantees who self-identify as novices needing more help with their project. **Starting Spring 2024, we are asking grantees to request a coach after they have attended the program information webinar.** Grantees that wanted a coach but didn't get one will be encouraged to join The Hive or reach out to the email helpline with questions.
- **Phone calls and emails:** While some residents may want to meet virtually for a consultation, others will primarily need to ask questions over the phone or via email. It will be up to coaches to let residents know how much time they have available to provide assistance through a combination of email, phone calls, or texts.
- **Virtual Consultations:** Safety of coaches, residents, and their communities is our first priority. For this reason, we highly recommend meeting for consultations virtually. Zoom, and other virtual platforms, have some great tools for looking at and annotating property maps together. Below we have a link to a video showing how you can use the tools in Zoom to do a virtual site visit.

<https://metroblooms.egnyte.com/dl/q2mvJY5hSj>

We encourage grantees to prepare a site assessment before meeting with their coach for the first time. It can be good to remind them to come prepared with a basic site assessment or photographs of their yard to use in the consultation.

A coach and resident may choose to do an on-site consultation. This is at the coach's discretion and we tell our grantees to only expect interacting with their coach virtually.

Note about privacy: If you wish to keep your personal phone number private when connecting with residents, you can do so by typing the code *67, then typing the number you wish to call.

Community Coaching

We now host an online community space for grantees to share their progress updates and ask questions related to the program, called “The Hive”. The goal for this community space is to create a place for grantees to connect with each other and share their project progress and tips. Many grantees who do not get connected to an individual coach often have a single question sometime throughout the grant period that they would really like feedback on. This will also be a space to ask those questions and have them answered by coaches and Metro Blooms staff.

Additional Opportunities

MN State Fair

Coaches have the opportunity to represent the Lawns to Legumes program at our exhibit at the MN State Fair. They receive a free ticket to the fair! Generally, we will need coaches with a basic understanding of the L2L program who can also answer landowner questions about native plants. Native planting templates for sun and shade will be available as handouts for fairgoers. We will send out a request for fair volunteers in August.

II. Key Information for Guiding Residents

Planting Project Types

- **Pollinator Pocket Plantings:** A space as small as 10 sq. ft. 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. Pocket plantings can have different variations such as [rain gardens](#), [shoreline plantings](#) and boulevard plantings. The [Eligible Expenses Guide](#) has more details on reimbursable items.
- **Beneficial Trees and Shrubs:** Groupings of trees and shrubs can offer nesting areas, overwintering habitat and early-season food sources for pollinators. Beneficial native 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, creeping thyme, and self heal are seeded into fine fescue lawns to create a landscape that maintains the aesthetics and recreation associated with a traditional lawn, while providing high-quality forage for pollinators. Establishing [pollinator lawns](#) from seed takes time (sometimes more than one season) and requires diligent watering as seed establishes.
- **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.

Planning

- **Site consultations:** In the coach training webinar, we will cover the tools available for conducting virtual site visits. Additionally, [we have a video](#) showing how you can use the tools in Zoom to do a virtual site visit. Because we cannot guarantee all grantees are matched with a coach in their neighborhood, we set the expectation that all coach interactions will be virtual. Coaches can choose to offer meeting in-person with a grantee, at your own discretion. Keep in mind, all projects for the individual support grants should be completed on residential property.
- **Local Ordinances:** Residents are responsible for checking into local ordinances. For example, many cities restrict the types of projects done in the boulevard right-of-way.
- **Setting Project Expectations:** A key role for coaches is to set realistic expectations for residents about the complexity of the project they take on. Starting small is often a good idea, especially for less experienced gardeners. In future seasons, a small garden can be enlarged by adding new plants, dividing existing plants, or saving and starting seeds!
- **Lawn Reduction:** Encourage residents to think about how they use their lawns and which planting types are appropriate for their needs. Residents that frequently use their lawn area for recreation may want to consider a small or isolated planting, while residents that do not use their lawn as much might consider a larger project.
- **Siting a Planting:** When helping a resident determine a project site, consider factors like sunlight and the movement of water. Bees prefer to forage in sunny areas of a yard, while placing a planting where water flows through a yard can help reduce runoff and improve water quality.
- **Site Preparation:** Non-herbicidal methods of site preparation are preferred. Grantees must commit to non-herbicide methods of management once the project is completed. The [Planting for Pollinators](#) design guide lists some of the most common non-herbicidal methods for site preparation. Please note that some of these methods take longer than the grant period allows to be successful, and thus may not be the best option for this project.

Design

- **Plantings should benefit at-risk pollinator species, notably the rusty patched bumble bee and monarch butterfly (Minnesota's state bee and butterfly):** See preferred plant

lists for the rusty patched bumble bee and the monarch in the resources on the [Blue Thumb website](#).

- **Bloom Seasons:** It's important to plant a mix of at least three blooming species in early, mid, and late season to ensure the continuous availability of food. Some pollinators, including the rusty patched bumble bee, are active April through October. Other pollinators require specific host plants (like milkweed for monarch caterpillars) and also a wide variety of other plants to provide nectar or pollen.
- **Encourage use of templates and plant lists:** Templates for different types of gardens (sunny, shade, raingardens, boulevard) are available on the [Blue Thumb website](#). These templates include layouts and plant lists and can help take the guesswork out of plant selection. They have also been created to have full season blooms.

Another option for some gardeners may be a plant kit put together by one of our native nursery partners. Our native nursery list indicates which nurseries have these kits available, though it is not an exhaustive list.

- **Aesthetic Considerations:** Using features such as edging, walls, fencing, hardscapes, etc., as well as grouping plants in masses and by height help give gardens a sense of order. The program's [Planting for Pollinators](#) habitat guide has many tips regarding design, as well as sample images.
- **Ongoing care:** Grantees signed an agreement to care for their projects for at least three years. We generally recommend that they do maintenance around Memorial Day, the 4th of July, and Labor Day at a minimum, especially in the establishment years, and to use manual methods of pulling, digging, and cutting back weeds. Planting in groups can be a really useful design tool that will also make it easier to distinguish intentional plants in the garden from weeds.

Requirements for Reimbursements

- **Match Requirements:** Grantees are expected to spend at least 2 hours on their projects. We also ask in the reimbursement form for the total amount of time spent on the project (often above and beyond 2 hours).
- **Eligible Expenses:** The primary focus for program funding is native plants. Residents are free to add other horticultural species to their gardens, but they will not be eligible for reimbursement. Certain project-related supplies and materials are also eligible for reimbursement. The [Eligible Expenses Guide](#) outlines these in detail and includes a graphic to help grantees distinguish natives from cultivars at local nurseries.
- **Requesting Reimbursement:** Residents are asked to submit photos of all of their receipts, along with before and after photos of their projects by the deadline specified to receive reimbursement. **It is helpful to remind residents to take "before" pictures!** Once

projects are completed, grant recipients should map their project and submit a request for reimbursement via the [Grantee Guide](#) on the Blue Thumb website.

Receipts should be itemized and show the species of plant purchased. If receipts are not itemized, grantees should take a picture of the plant tags and submit that along with the receipt.

Additional Resources

- We have lots of resources available for coaches and grantees to review and share on the [Blue Thumb website](#).
- List of [Frequently Asked Questions](#) regarding the L2L program.
- We also have a [Hive community](#) just for coaches. Please feel free to connect with each other and use each other as a resource! Our coaches come from a diverse array of backgrounds and if you don't have the answer, it is likely one of your fellow coaches does!
- If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to l2lcoaching@bluethumb.org. This email is monitored by Blue Thumb staff and we are here to support you and help answer any questions you may have.
- Our [Resilient Yards online learning series](#) is now available at any time for free. This is an in-depth series with sections on assessing a site, designing with native plants, planting for pollinators, redirecting runoff, incorporating turf alternatives, and more.
- At the beginning of each grant period, we host a variety of workshops just for Lawns to Legumes grantees and coaches. Dates for these workshops will be shared with you and cover the different eligible project types (pocket plantings, pollinator meadows, beneficial trees and shrubs, bee lawns).

Lawns to Legumes Coaching Guide

Key websites

- [L2L Coaching Information](#)
- [L2L Coaching Handbook](#)

Items and timing are flexible based on individual needs and interest

Status	Item	Notes
Getting started		
	Attend coach training webinar	
	Review website resources	
	Receive grantee contact information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option—check project context by entering address in Google maps 	
	Make introductory contact (within 2 wks of notification) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email or phone; if no reply, repeat in different format • Welcome • Briefly, your background/interest in pollinator plantings • Offer to meet online or by phone, suggesting days/times 	
Coaching conversations (one or more sessions as needed)		
	Identify grantee goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gardening experience • Project type (pocket, meadow, lawn, trees/shrubs; stand alone or mixed with existing plantings) • Vision for project • “How can I best help you with this project?” 	
	Gather information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site map & conditions: light, soil, water, hardscape, usage • Plant ideas • Resources consulted so far 	
	Discuss specifics as apply to needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating the L2L website resources • Matching plan feasibility to grantees available time/resources • Design and planning, considering site and project vision • Plant selection for full season flowering and site conditions • Information on individual plant needs, mature size • Resources available to help in addressing questions • Plant sources • Installation (clearing site, planting process, weed suppression, water) • Garden maintenance including weed and pest control 	
Follow-up		
	Try again after 1-2 weeks if no reply to initial introduction; if still no contact, email l2lcoaching@bluethumb.org	
	Check back 3-4 weeks to ask how project is going, any issues to address	
	Ask for coaching feedback, what else might be helpful for future grantees	