



## Lawns to Legumes Fall 2024 Q+A Session

### Planting

- Can I add or expand onto an existing garden for my Lawns to Legumes project?
  - Yes. Remember to take a before and after photo so our team can see what you have changed.
- I have some non native plants close to where my project will be. Would I be required to remove those non-native plants?
  - No. While the program does not reimburse non-natives and cultivars, it is okay if you have existing non-natives or cultivars in or near your project area.
- Can funds be used for multiple plantings in different locations on one's property?
  - Yes. You will just need to submit before and after photos of each area.
- Is there a minimum or maximum size requirement for my project?
  - No. Your project size can be whatever best fits your space or capability. Even a small container planting makes a difference for pollinators!
- How exactly is "native" defined?
  - The Lawns to Legumes program reimburses plants that are native to the state of Minnesota. To search for Minnesota native plants to use in your project, use Blue Thumb's [Plant Finder](#), plant lists on their [Resources Page](#), or the websites of retailers on our [Native Plant Nurseries and Retailers list](#). To verify that a plant is native to Minnesota, you can use an online tool like [Minnesota Wildflowers](#) or the [USDA PLANTS database](#).
- With the garden viewing, are we required to allow others into our yard? My planting spot is out back in our private gated backyard.
  - No, you are not! It is okay to do your project in a private area like a backyard. The pollinators will still find it ;)
- I registered for a pocket planting but wound up having a larger area than originally planned. Can I still do a meadow even though I signed up for otherwise?
  - Yes, you do not need to stick with the project you indicated interest in when filling out the Confirmation Form. When you fill out the Reimbursement Request Form at the end, you'll have the opportunity to share what project type you ended up doing.

- Plant Selection
  - My backyard is full sun/part sun/full shade, what species would work for that?
    - Use the filters on Blue Thumb's Plant Finder or browse plant lists and design templates specific to sunny sites on Blue Thumb's Resources Page.
    - If you have a partly shaded area but it gets several hours of intense afternoon sun (ie 2-6pm), part sun to full sun preferring plants.
  - It would be great to have a list of Trees and Shrubs (other than some pictures) that are native.
    - Check out the pollinator-friendly tree and shrub lists on Blue Thumb's Resources Page, or use the tree/shrub filter on Blue Thumb's Plant Finder.
- I thought white clover was a non-native plant. For the pollinator lawn, how do we make sure to stay away from non-natives? Many of the seed mixes contain clovers, etc.
  - Several non-native flowering plants commonly included in bee lawn seed mixes are on our list of exceptions in the [Eligible Expenses Guide](#). These exceptions include white clover, self-heal, creeping thyme, and fescue grasses.
- I am thinking about planting a boulevard garden. Are there specific plants that do better with sand/salt from the winter?
  - Yes, some native plants are more salt tolerant than others. You can use the salt tolerance filter in Blue Thumb's [Plant Finder](#) to find a list. Many dry prairie grasses and flowers have high salt tolerance.
- Could you address if or when a controlled burn would be good for native plants? If we are considering using fire for management, where can we find info on local rules and local orgs or service providers that can assist us?
  - Most Lawns to Legumes plantings will not benefit from burning over routine clipping and other cleanup due to their smaller size. Larger prairie plantings do benefit from prescribed burning and city or county environmental staff can be contacted about local rules. In many cases mowing in late spring can be an alternative to burning.
  - MN native nurseries and contractors with a focus on restoration may have experience with fire management. You can find some of these businesses through the Blue Thumb [Partner Finder](#).
- Any tips for installing a bee lawn in the autumn?
  - Late summer to early fall is a great time to start a bee lawn. For more tips on timing and installation, attend our Pollinator Lawns Project Webinar on 7/29 or watch the recording!
- If we are seeding, how can we be sure we are not buying seeds that have been treated with chemicals or covered in a plastic coating?
  - Shop from businesses on our recommended Native Plant Nurseries and Retailers List! Alternatively, it should say on the seed label whether or not the seeds have been treated with a coating.

- If we buy our plants now and some are alive, should we plant those earlier to get the roots established?
  - We would recommend waiting until the fall planting season (late August through early October) to plant. If you have plugs now, you can plant them and make sure that you're watering them regularly (1 inch a week) during the hotter weeks of summer.
- Will there be more information on how to increase pollinator habitat for selective nesters such as native ground bees? For example patches of bare dirt for bees or salt puddles for butterflies?
  - Beyond pollen and nectar, pollinators need water and shelter to thrive! While Lawns to Legumes focuses on adding flowering plants, engaging in these additional actions is also essential to supporting pollinators. The Xerces Society has a lot of great resources on overwintering habitat for pollinators, and Blue Thumb regularly shares this kind of pollinator support information in their social media and blog posts.

### Site Prep

- Can you address the fastest way to prep soil? Is amending soil necessary?
  - The fastest site prep method is to manually remove existing sod/vegetation with a sod kicker. Turning and raking the soil after removing the sod, and then applying a layer of mulch before planting, can help suppress weeds. In almost all cases, amending your soil is not necessary as native plants can be selected for a wide range of soils in Minnesota. Dry prairie plants are well adapted to sandy, nutrient poor soils. If you have extra compacted or nutrient-depleted soil, you can mix in some compost to the top layer of soil and also in the holes that you dig for each plug you plant.
- Is there still time to use sheet mulch for fall planting sites?
  - Sheet mulching is most effective if you do it for at least a couple of months. If you start now, you could plant in early October.
- Do we need to worry about reusing cardboard that has ink when sheet mulching?
  - When sheet mulching, you'll want to remove all the labels and tape from the cardboard, and make sure it's not coated cardboard. For detailed guidance see the [Xerces Society's Guide to Organic Site Preparation](#).
- How do you prepare the garden for a mix of plugs and dormant seeding? Do you still mulch?
  - Yes, it would be feasible to do a mixed plug and seed planting. Plant plugs first, then sow your seeds. Because seeds need soil contact it is advisable not to mulch.
- Do we have to use mulch? The prep is showing and talking about a lot of mulch. My planting area is at the bottom of a small hill and I'm concerned mulch would soak up too much water.

- Adding mulch will actually help with water retention in the soil. Mulching is a good idea on a slope because it can minimize soil erosion and help keep water on site instead of running off. If you are concerned about high moisture in the planting area, part of the solution could be more moisture tolerant plants which will also help take up the moisture.
- Is it recommended to apply a layer of organic landscape paper after clearing the site before covering dirt and mulch?
  - Organic landscaping fabric is not necessary for a successful planting. We would recommend looking into it if you are dealing with a sloped site that has erosion challenges, or as a site prep method to smother weeds before planting.
- I use grass clippings as mulch and weed barrier in my vegetable gardens. Would this be a sufficient source of mulch for preparing soil and maintaining weed control in these projects as well or would you recommend wood mulch instead?
  - Especially if your planting area already has some weed presence, we would recommend applying a shredded hardwood mulch to ensure the success of your new planting.

### **Maintenance**

- My yard is full of “weeds” But now I’m wondering aren’t “weeds” just plants that people find ugly or undesirable? How do I go about finding out what are native weeds vs non-native weeds?
  - Weeds are essentially plants that are out of place. A weed in one context may not be considered a weed in another. Weeds become problematic when they take over and prevent native plants from thriving. These weeds must be managed to protect the purpose of a planting, such as providing pollination services.
  - For help telling apart weeds from the native plants that you plant, you can label your native plant with something like popsicle sticks or another label you can write on. You can also use a free plant ID app like PlantNet or Seek by iNaturalist. Blue Thumb’s [All About Weeds Zine](#) is another resource.
  - For more tips, Blue Thumb recently made a blog post on this topic: <https://bluethumb.org/managing-weeds-in-pollinator-gardens/>
- How do you quantify 1" of water?
  - A rain gauge keeps track of how much water your planting has received. If you don’t have a rain gauge, you can use an aluminum can.

### **Eligible Expenses**

- Do plants have to be purchased from the recommended sellers or if they are native and bought elsewhere, is that acceptable?
  - Our Native Plant Nurseries and Retailers List is a list of suggested locations but you are welcome to shop from other retailers if you prefer. The one thing I would

caution when shopping for native plants from big box stores is that they tend to sell more cultivars of natives, which are not reimbursable (see the Grantee Guide for more guidance on this). You could also choose to buy your plants from a retailer that offers statewide delivery. (delivery expenses are reimbursable) There are some listed at the top of the Native Plant Nurseries and Retailers List.

- Eligible Trees: I see trees are available for reimbursement as well. Can you talk about the requirements for this? Do they need to be flowering trees, native, seedling/mature...?
  - All Minnesota native trees and shrubs are eligible for Lawns to Legumes reimbursement. The key is that they must be native to Minnesota and not cultivars. They can be seedlings or mature trees, and while they don't have to be flowering we recommend that they be to best support pollinators. You can see a list of some pollinator-friendly recommendations on our Resources page.
- What sort of contractor work is reimbursable?
  - Any type of site prep, design, or installation work that you pay another person to do for you (whether a contractor, neighbor, or friend) can be reimbursable. We just need some sort of documentation that shows how much was paid and what the payment was for.
- Is cocoa bean shell mulch acceptable?
  - Yes, any type of mulch can be reimbursed, though non-dyed mulch is preferred. We recommend double-shredded hardwood mulch because it stays in place well. Cypress mulch may be the only type that we strongly discourage (any type that is local is better).
- Are materials for a path reimbursable if used as a "cue for care"?
  - No, path materials would not be reimbursable, but any materials you use for edging or giving your planting a border can be reimbursed.
- Would a \$55 membership to the St. Paul Tool Library to rent a soil removal tool be a qualifying expense?
  - Yes, we can consider a Tool Library membership a type of equipment rental expense.
- When using chipdrop, there is an option to pay \$20 to cover the fee for the arborist. Would this be a reimbursable expense?
  - Yes, we would consider that a type of contractor fee.
- Can we purchase seeds for winter sowing in milk jugs if they will not be germinated or planted in the ground until Spring 2025?
  - No, the seeds must be in the ground to be considered a completed project, so seeds used for winter seed sowing in milk jugs are not reimbursable.
- I have a lot of deer in my neighborhood - is using DEER OUT or Liquid Fence or Repellex ok to use?
  - No, while the program does reimburse fencing material (chicken wire and stakes, mesh baskets), it does not reimburse repellants. But you are free to use these if

you need to. We would recommend selecting native plants that are more herbivore resistant using the Blue Thumb Plant Finder.

- What if a store doesn't have all the name specifics on a plant, only the general name? (i.e. doesn't give enough information to know if it's a cultivar or not).
  - If there are no additional names or no names in quotes or italics other than the plant's common and/or scientific name, it is likely native and not a cultivar. If you're not sure, email the L2L Helpline.
- I'm afraid that most nurseries are likely out of native plants and trees by now. What happens if there's nothing left to buy?
  - While fewer plants are available in the middle of summer, many native plant nurseries refresh their stock for the fall (August and September).

### **Support**

- Is there an opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation about what to do with my yard? Not a continuing conversation, just a one-time consultation so I don't take on more than I can handle or head off in the wrong direction?
  - Fill out our Coaching Survey! A volunteer coach can provide that type of support for you.
- Will BT or MB have staff at the state fair that can help us review our designs and plant choices?
  - Blue Thumb will have a native plant garden exhibit outside of the Eco Experience at the Minnesota State Fair this year (August 22 - September 2). We will have a number of different volunteers at the booth, including staff, Blue Thumb partners, and L2L coaches. We are busy talking to many people at the State Fair and likely won't have the capacity to review your full plan, but we'd be happy to chat!
- Is there a way to see the location of this year's participants? Hoping to meet some others in my area, maybe even in person!
  - For privacy reasons we cannot share the addresses of other participants, but you are welcome to post in The Hive and see if there are others in your area who'd like to connect!

### **Reimbursement Request**

- For before and after pictures, should we wait until plants grow in more or is it okay to take those photos now?
  - You can take your before photo anytime before you plant, and you can take your after photo immediately after planting. You do not need to wait for your new plants to grow in.
- Once receipts have been submitted, are we still able to make more purchases and submit more receipts (before the official deadline)? Or are we only allowed to submit receipts all at one time?
  - We ask that you submit one reimbursement request with all of your receipts.

- What is the turnaround for reimbursement?
  - Once your reimbursement request has been reviewed and approved by our team, we process and mail your reimbursement check to you at the beginning of the following month. It will then take 2-4 weeks to arrive at your mailing address. Your check will arrive in a standard letter-sized envelope from Bill.com with a California return address. Please cash your check within 90 days of receiving it to avoid the check expiring.

### Special Challenges

- My main issue in my yard is the white grubs that eat grass roots.
  - Planting deep-rooted native plants helps control grubs. Grubs most often prefer eating the shallow roots of turf and not native plants. Adding longer-rooted turf alternatives like fescues can help as well. If the grub damage is severe you might consider planting in an alternate area or reaching out to a business that specializes in organic lawn care—you can find some on the Blue Thumb [Partner Finder](#).
- I am trying to garden in an area where a birch was removed 3 years ago. Where can I find info about what those roots leave in the soil?
  - The roots likely won't have impacted your soil quality to an extent that would affect plant growth. Birch root systems can be dense however, so they might make planting more difficult. One way to mitigate this would be to purchase smaller size plants that require less digging and fit in-between roots.
- Jumping Worms: Do you have recommendations for places to get mulch that are working to prevent the spread of jumping worms? I recently discovered jumping worms in my boulevard. I am hoping to plant a garden on my lawn space and want to know if there is anything I should do or know before planning my garden?
  - Jumping worms are an invasive species of worm that strip topsoil of nutrients and inhibit plant growth. They spread via dirt or sod, or in mulch/compost piles that are stored in an area where they have spread. To avoid bringing jumping worms into your garden, purchase mulch that has been heat treated to 150 degrees. If a yard or garden is known to have jumping worms it's safest to not accept plants or garden materials from that location.
  - If you already have jumping worms in your garden, the UMN Extension has lots of tips for coping with them: <https://extension.umn.edu/identify-invasive-species/jumping-worms>
- We have a large population of rabbits in our neighborhood. Is there a way to search for native plants that are rabbit resistant?
  - Some native plants don't tend to get nibbled as much, including native plants in the mint family and onion family (this includes wild bergamot, giant hyssop, and prairie onion). Plants that are rough, prickly, or hairy (such as black-eyed susan) also get gnawed on less. You can use the Herbivore Sensitivity filter in the Blue Thumb [Plant Finder](#) for a more extensive list.

- Is it possible to have a pollinator yard with a large dog and young child?
  - Yes! Here's some ideas:
    - Locate your planting in an area away from foot and paw traffic, like along the edges or your yard. Or, do a container or raised bed planting.
    - Choose taller perennials that will encourage your dog/kids to walk around rather than through.
    - Fence your planting while plantings are still small and establishing.
- If my city does street truck mosquito spraying, do I need to locate my project farther away?
  - Spray applications are tricky because of residual drift. If you can locate your planting further away from the street, such as in a backyard, that would be ideal for both the plants and pollinator visitors.
- How far do I need to dig when removing the mound from a boulevard so that it can capture stormwater?
  - Lower your boulevard to about 3" below the grade of the curb and the sidewalk so that stormwater will flow from the sidewalk into the boulevard.
- Are there resources to help determine where to place a rain garden?
  - Look for a spot that is a minimum of 10 feet from any basement foundation.
  - Avoid trees. Stay out of the dripline—roots generally extend at least as far as the leaves above them.
  - Avoid utility lines and septic tanks. Call 811 to locate underground utility-owned lines and equipment.
  - Direct downspouts, sump pump outlets, and/or driveway water runoff into the rain garden.
  - See Blue Thumb's Rain Gardens page for more rain garden installation guidance: <https://bluethumb.org/raingardens/>

***For more information about your Lawns to Legumes grant, visit the Grantee Guide:***

***<https://bluethumb.org/lawns-to-legumes/grantee-guide/>***