Lawns to Legumes

Individual Support Grant Program
Printable Guide

Updated for Fall 2025

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Introduction

This is a printable guide that contains everything a participant needs to know about participating in the Lawns to Legumes program, from start to finish. It can be used as a primary guide or as a supplement to the Lawns to Legumes' Grantee Guide webpage. To contact program staff for questions, please email us at l2lhelp@bluethumb.org.

Getting Started

Congratulations! You've been selected to receive Individual Support reimbursement funding for a Fall 2025 Lawns to Legumes pollinator habitat project. You qualify for up to **$400 in reimbursement funds** for eligible project costs associated with creating new pollinator habitat in your yard.

Before getting started on your project, you'll want to take the following steps:

1. **Confirm your participation in Lawns to Legumes.** All recipients must accept reimbursement grants on Blue Thumb's **Confirmation Form by July 16, 2025**. If you do not accept by this date, your funding will be distributed to another applicant, and you will no longer be eligible for any reimbursement.

2. **Attend/Watch the Kick-Off Webinar.** The Lawns to Legumes Kick-Off and Q+A session webinars are optional and introduce program requirements and resources to help you complete a successful project. Attendance is suggested for anyone unsure of where to start.

   L2L Kick-Off Webinar: Tuesday, July 15, 6-7pm Central
   L2L Q+A Session: Monday, July 21, 6-7pm Central

   Zoom links will be sent via email in July. Both webinars will be recorded for those who cannot attend the live sessions.

3. **Request a Coach.** After the Kick-Off Webinar, we will email a form where you can request to be matched with a coach. Our coaches are volunteers from across the state with interest and experience in native plant gardening. We do our best to accommodate as many requests as possible, but we can't match every grantee with a coach. We prioritize matching coaches with grantees who can benefit the most, especially new gardeners.

Choosing Your Project Type

The next step is to choose your project type. Lawns to Legumes offers five project types to choose from. You can do a combination of multiple project types if you desire.

We recommend selecting a project type that meets your needs for your yard while supporting as many pollinator species as possible. The best way to protect native bumblebees and other pollinators is to plant **a diversity of native floral species**. But don't bite off more than you can chew! It's better to have a smaller, successful project than a bigger project that you're unable to finish or maintain.

For detailed guidance on each project type, visit our Plan a Project webpage.

1. **Pocket Planting:** Pocket Plantings are small native gardens that pack a punch in terms of pollinator impact without taking up much space. They are a great way to get started if you are new to gardening, or want to expand your existing garden. Choose species that bloom in all three growing seasons (spring, summer, and fall) for the biggest impact. Variations of a pocket planting include rain gardens and shoreline plantings.

2. **Container Planting:** If you don't have outdoor space for a garden, you can still help pollinators by planting native plants in pots on your balcony or porch. Native container plantings can thrive for years with proper care.

3. **Tree or Shrub Planting:** Flowering native trees or shrubs can provide as much pollinator forage as an entire garden. Early bloomers like willow provide high quality pollen for emerging bumble bees when few other resources are available.

4. **Pollinator Meadows:** Pollinator Meadows, expansive areas with a diversity of native plant species, are the most beneficial choice for supporting as many pollinators as possible. If you have the time and space to create a pollinator meadow, go for it! The easiest way to achieve this might be to plant pocket gardens side by side, eventually creating a meadow that takes up your full yard.

5. **Pollinator Lawns:** Pollinator Lawns with low-growing fescues and flowering species offer less support for pollinators compared to a small garden or tree planting. However, they offer a realistic option if you frequently use your yard for activities like recreation and are still a better choice for pollinators than a typical turfgrass lawn. If incorporating a pollinator lawn in your yard, we strongly encourage prioritizing native species over non-natives when possible.

Plan Your Project

1. Review the **Eligible Expenses Guide** to see what plants and materials are eligible for reimbursement.
2. Figure out what native plants you want to include in your project. Your pollinator habitat project **must include adding new native plants.**
    a. Use our online **Plant Finder Tool** to search for native plants well-suited to the conditions of your project site.
    b. Explore our **Resources Page** for plant lists, design templates, and more.
3. Decide where you want to buy your native plants from. We recommend shopping from suppliers on our **Native Plant Nurseries and Retailers List**.
    a. To the extent possible, try to source your plants from about 175 miles from your project location.
    b. If you don't have a native plant retailer near you, you can purchase your plants from a Minnesota retailer that offers delivery (there are several on our list). Delivery fees are reimbursable.
4. Start shopping! **Save receipts** for all the purchases you plan to request reimbursement for.
    a. Remember that only insecticide-free native Minnesota plants can be reimbursed, in addition to the few exceptions noted in the Eligible Expenses Guide.
    b. Non-native cultivars, "nativars," hybrids and annuals are not eligible for reimbursement. Here's some tips for telling the difference between a native plant and cultivar:

        - Native plants have a common name and scientific name. One or both of these names will be listed.
          Example: Blanketflower *Gaillardia aristata*

        - Cultivars usually have an extra whimsical-sounding name listed before or after the plant's common name or scientific name. This extra name often has quotes around it or will be italicized.
          Example: Gaillardia 'Spintop Orange Halo'
          Example: Spintop Orange Halo Blanketflower

        - Hybrids have an "X" in their name.
          Example: Gaillardia X grandiflora

If you aren't sure whether a plant or product is eligible for reimbursement, email the L2L Helpline at l2lhelp@bluethumb.org.

Prep Your Project Site

Option 1: Manual Sod Removal

Manually remove your existing turfgrass and vegetation using a sod kicker; then turn, loosen, and rake the soil. After applying a layer of mulch to help suppress weeds, plant your new plants.

Choose this option if:
- You want to prepare your site quickly
- You're working with a smaller space

Avoid this option if:
- You're working with a larger space
- You want to minimize manual labor

Option 2: Sheet Mulching

Suppress existing vegetation by "sheet mulching" with a layer of cardboard covered with mulch. This suffocates the grass beneath. Adding compost before laying down cardboard will further support your soil health as the layers break down. When you're ready to plant, brush aside the mulch and cut small holes into the cardboard to dig a hole for each plant.

Choose this option if:
- You have several months to prepare your site
- You want to minimize weeding time later on

Avoid this option if:
- You're planting on a steep slope
- Your site contains aggressive weeds

Option 3: Solarization

"Solarize" your planting area by covering it in a clear plastic sheet. The sun's heat becomes trapped underneath the plastic, smothering existing vegetation and weed seeds. Solarization is most effective when begun in early to late spring. Remove the plastic and any remaining weeds in fall, and immediately mulch and plant.

Choose this option if:
- You're planting in a sunny, relatively flat site
- You're dealing with high weed pressure

Avoid this option if:

- You're planting in a shady or wet site
- You only have one season to plant

For detailed guidance on each of these methods, see the Xerces Society's Organic Site Preparation Guide. *If you need more time to prepare your site than the length of your L2L grant, contact the L2L Helpline to see about getting an extension for your project: l2lhelp@bluethumb.org(opens in a new tab).*

Installing and Maintaining Your Project

Follow these steps for installing a general pocket planting. For detailed installation guidance on each of the four project types, including pollinator lawns and pollinator meadow seeding projects, refer to the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources' Planting for Pollinators Design Guide.

1. Once sod is removed from your project area, you will want to turn, loosen, and rake the compacted soil. This will make it easier to dig and plant, while also allowing roots to grow and expand.

2. Exposing bare soil will likely expose weed seeds that have been stored in the soil. As part of the preparation, you can choose to add mulch or a biodegradable weed suppression material. We recommend mulching your site with double-shredded hardwood mulch (available in bags or in bulk). This mulch doesn't float like wood chips and it locks together more quickly, protecting your site better. It is better to mulch before planting so you don't damage delicate plugs as you're spreading mulch. Avoid using chemicals to treat weeds.

3. If you will be planting plugs for your project (as opposed to seeds), lay out the plants before you put them in the ground so that you're happy with their spacing.

4. Once you're happy with the spacing, move the mulch back from where you want the plant to go. Dig a hole as deep and 2-3 sizes wider than the container. Gently remove the plant from its container, loosen roots and remove any roots that have grown in a circle around the base of the plant. Plant the plant so its soil level is just below the base of your plant, and then nestle the mulch back around the plant. Water immediately after planting.

Maintaining your native garden is important, especially during its first three years while plants are establishing. Here's some best practices for garden maintenance:

- **Watering:** Native plants are resilient and don't need much watering. During the first two years, water one inch of water a week if it hasn't rained. Watering larger amounts of water across longer intervals of time helps promote root growth. In year 3 and beyond, watering your native garden is only needed in times of drought.

- **Weeding:** Weed your garden as needed. Try to weed at least three times a year: late spring (around Memorial Day), mid-summer (around July 4), and late summer (around Labor Day). If you're not sure if it's a weed, let it grow a little first and use a plant ID app. Our **All About Weeds Zine** can help. Try to pull weeds before they set seed.

- **Fall Care:** In late summer and fall, let leaf litter and debris be. It will help enrich your soil, encourage beneficial fungi, and provide overwintering habitat for insects.

Request Reimbursement for Your Project

When your project is complete, submit your project via our Reimbursement Request Form. The link to the Reimbursement Request Form will be emailed to you in mid-August. The deadline to request reimbursement for Fall 2025 Lawns to Legumes participants is **November 30, 2025 at 11:59 pm Central**. Here's what you'll need:

- **Size of your project**: You'll need to estimate the size of your pollinator habitat in square feet or acres.

- **Before and After photos**: Don't worry if they're not pretty! We just want to see that you successfully installed your project. Try to take your photos from a similar angle. Take photos of the whole project area, not individual plants. If you planted in multiple areas, take a before and after photo of each area.

- **Receipts**: Receipts must be legible and show that purchased plants are native (with a few exceptions noted on the **Eligible Expenses Guide**). If your receipts are not itemized, you can also submit a list of plant names or a photo of your plant tags. If your receipt includes purchases that are not part of your L2L project, circle or highlight the purchases you are requesting reimbursement for. Receipts must be from purchases made on or after the date you were notified of your grant award.

- **Time spent on your project**: You'll need to share an estimate of the total number of hours you spent working on your project. This can include time spent planning and watching L2L webinars.

After you submit your reimbursement request, our team will review it. Once it has been approved, we will mail you your reimbursement check and a Lawns to Legumes yard sign. (Note that the sign does not come with a stake, but stakes are a reimbursable expense if you would like to purchase one beforehand!)

- Please be patient as we send out your check and sign. There may be delays, but we are doing our best to review and approve reimbursement requests as they come. Once you receive your check, please deposit it within 90 days or your check will be voided.

Eligible Expenses Guide

The Lawns to Legumes program has requirements on the types of purchases that can be eligible for reimbursement. Refer to the guide below when purchasing native plants and materials for your pollinator habitat project. If you have any questions about whether a purchase is reimbursable, please email the **L2L Helpline** (l2lhelp@bluethumb.org). Refer to the **Lawns to Legumes Participant Agreements** for additional grant commitments.

You can view a webpage version of the Eligible Expenses guide at bluethumb.org/lawns-to-legumes/eligible-expenses-guide/.

Native Plants and Seeds

To make the biggest impact for pollinators, Minnesota native plants and seeds should be the primary focus of your project. **To be reimbursed, your project must involve the addition of new native plants within the grant period**. Non-native plants, hybrids, and cultivars are not reimbursable.

Eligible Minnesota native plants and seeds include:

- flowers/forbs
- bare root plants
- grasses, sedges, and ferns
- trees and shrubs
- seeds

All-Season Blooms: Try to incorporate at least three plant species that bloom during spring, summer and fall, with higher diversity strongly encouraged.

Source Local: When possible, buy native plants and seeds from within 175 miles of project location.

Avoid purchasing plants treated with neonicotinoids/systemic pesticides. Before purchasing plants, check with your vendor to ensure that their plants are neonicotinoid-free.

Other Project Expenses

Depending on the needs of your project, the following eligible materials can help your planting be successful. Remember to keep native plants the focus of your project.*

- Mulch (non-dyed preferred)
- Compost
- Edging (non-plastic preferred)
- Fencing for herbivore protection material (Chicken wire and stakes, mesh baskets, etc. Repellants are not reimbursable.)
- Stake for your L2L yard sign
- Plant markers/labels for identification
- Equipment rental fees
- Delivery fees
- Blue Thumb/Metro Blooms workshops
- For raised bed and container gardens: soil**, containers, planters, and raised bed materials up to $100)

If Needed

If you are a beginning gardener or dealing with a special project site, these eligible purchases may be helpful to you only if needed.

- Gardening equipment purchases that total up to, but no more than $50 (trowels, gloves, etc.)
- Sheet mulching materials including cardboard or other wood fiber-based products
- Biodegradable weed suppression material including paper-based landscaping fabric and stakes (plastic-based products are not reimbursable)
- Hiring helpers or consultation, design, or installation help. All contracted work must be through the current grant period to be eligible for reimbursement.
    - Use the Blue Thumb Partner Finder to find services near you!
    - For hiring helpers (family, neighbors, etc.), you can use our cash receipt template to make a receipt.

** BlueThumb/MN BWSR has the right to refuse reimbursement if it is clear that project funds were not used for the primary purpose of creating native pollinator habitat.*

*** Soil is not an eligible expense for projects that don't involve containers, 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.*

Cultivars and Non-Native Plants

Non-native cultivars, "nativars," hybrids and annuals are not eligible for reimbursement, except for the exceptions listed below. For more guidance, this handout provides tips for identifying whether a plant is native or a cultivar.

Cultivar and Non-Native Exceptions

Lawns to Legumes provides reimbursement for several non-native and cultivar plants due to their functionality in pollinator lawns, adaptability to Minnesota's climate, or benefit to pollinators. If you are not sure whether a plant is eligible for reimbursement, please email the **L2L Helpline** (l2lhelp@bluethumb.org).

Common Name	Scientific Name	Reason for Exception
Fescue grasses	All *Festuca* species	Pollinator lawn species
Self-heal	*Prunella vulgaris*	Pollinator lawn species
Yaak yarrow	*Achillea millefolium var. 'yaak'*	Pollinator lawn species
White clover (Dutch White Clover, microclover)	*Trifolium repens*	Pollinator lawn species
Serviceberry tree	All *Amelanchier* species	Beneficial for pollinators
Hawthorn tree	All *Crataegus* species	Beneficial for pollinators
Black chokeberry	*Aronia melanocarpa*	Beneficial for pollinators
Prairie Crabapple	*Malus ioensis*	Beneficial for pollinators

**Non-native creeping thyme seeds may be reimbursed if they are part of a pollinator lawn seed mix or as an element of a pollinator lawn for areas with sandy soil. If you do not have primarily sandy soil, we recommend the alternatives above. Please email the L2L Helpline if you have questions about using creeping thyme for your pollinator lawn project.*

Time Requirement

Grantees are expected to spend at least 2 hours of time on their projects. This includes time spent watching the L2L Kick-Off Webinar and planning. You will need to share the

total number of hours you spent on your project when filling out the **Reimbursement Request Form**.

Reporting Additional Spending

Track the total expenses spent on your project, including any expenses beyond the amount you request reimbursement for. (This will help us demonstrate the many outcomes of the Lawns to Legumes program!) You will need to share this information when filling out the **Reimbursement Request Form**.

Where can I purchase native plants?

The first place to look is our **Native Plant Nurseries & Retailers list**. A number of retailers on this list offer delivery if there is not a retailer located near you. While we recommend these retailers, your purchases do not have to be limited to this list.

The **Minnesota DNR** has a list of native plant vendors (it is important to check with any vendor to ensure that their plants are neonicotinoid free). **The Wild Ones Chapters of Minnesota** also have a list of native plant vendors.

When can I start making purchases?

You can start making purchases for your Lawns to Legumes project anytime after filling out the **Grant Confirmation Form**. Lawns to Legumes can only reimburse eligible purchases made after the date of grant confirmation and before the project deadline.

Requesting Reimbursement

- Once you complete your project, **submit a reimbursement request** by the project deadline. See Blue Thumb's **Grantee Guide** for your deadline and steps to get started on your project.
- Prepare your materials: To submit a reimbursement request, you'll need before and after photos of your project area, itemized receipts, project size information, and documentation of the time and money spent on your project. Review what you'll need on the **Grantee Guide**.
    - *For vendors/services that don't have receipts, you can use our cash receipt template!
- Please be patient as we go through reimbursement requests. Our team individually reviews each request.

Project Checklist

Lawns to Legumes
Project Checklist Fall 2025

June and July
- Confirm your grant award by July 16, 2025
- Review grant information and watch the Kick-Off and Q+A Session
- Request a coach if needed (watch your email for the request form)

August
- Plan your project (choose location, pre-order plants, etc.)
- If you have a coach, start discussing ideas
- Reimbursement Request form opens in mid-August (fill out after completing your project)

September
- Purchase plants and materials, keep receipts
- Take “before” photos
- Plant between late August and early October (at least 6-8 weeks before the first frost)

October
- Complete your project
- Take “after” photos
- Care for your installed project by watering regularly until the ground freezes in fall (1 inch a week when no rain)

November
- **Fill out Reimbursement Request form as soon as your project is complete (deadline is November 30)**