



Lawns to Legumes Fall 2025 Q+A Session

Planting

- Can my project be a combination of project types, such as a pocket planting plus an adjacent native tree?
 - Yes, you can do multiple project types.
- Can I add or expand onto an existing garden for my Lawns to Legumes project?
 - Yes. No need to remove any existing plants, and it's okay if you decide to add native plants in an area that has some non-natives. Just remember to take a before and after photo so our team can see what you have changed.
- Is it recommended for fall to plant plants, or seeds?
 - That is your personal choice! Here's some things to consider when deciding between planting plugs or seeds:
 - Containerized plants, or plugs, are typically the best choice for beginners and small gardens. You'll have more control over layout and design, and plants have a higher survival rate. Plugs will also establish and bloom faster.
 - Seeds can be a cost-effective way to introduce diversity in larger pollinator plantings, but it can take much longer for the plants to grow. For new gardeners, it may be difficult to distinguish sprouting natives from weedy plants. Pro tip: buy locally produced native seeds to help protect nearby native plant communities. Avoid generic "wildflower seed" mixes from sites like Amazon, these usually contain seeds that are cultivars or not native to our area.
- Can a pocket planting be done around an existing tree or shrub?
 - Yes! You can do a pocket planting around or under an existing tree or shrub. There are a number of shade-loving natives, and we have a design template for shady dry sites, great for under trees.
 - We recently made a new "Dry Understory" design template for plantings under trees. You can find it on our resources page:
<https://bluethumb.org/public-resources/>
 - Local pollinator expert Heather Holm also has a resource called "Soft Landings" with more native plant suggestions for under trees:
<https://www.pollinatorsnativeplants.com/softlandings.html>

- What method would you recommend on an incline/sloped ground?
 - It is helpful to create a slight terrace and mulch to slow down and capture water.
 - To prevent water from running off when you try to water your plants, when you plant your plants you can cradle the soil/mulch around the base of the bottom half facing downhill. You could also place rocks in a crescent shape to protect this base. Water slowly and let it seep into the soil. .
 - Also, many of our native grasses are excellent for erosion control and establish quickly, so make sure to include plenty of them in your garden to help as well.
- Do you have to cover your planting area in mulch if you are sowing seeds?
 - No. After sowing seeds, you should not cover the area with mulch, as it can block light and prevent small seedlings from emerging. Instead, you can use a germination blanket or straw erosion control mat designed for seed establishment. These materials help retain moisture, protect the soil from erosion, and reduce seed displacement while still allowing light and water to reach the seeds. Once the seedlings are established, you can consider adding mulch in between plants to suppress weeds and retain moisture.
- Is there a recommendation about how far away from the home's foundation can I plant trees or shrubs?
 - It depends on the size of the shrub or tree at maturity. For shrubs, plant 2-5 feet away depending on the size. For trees, you will want to plant them at least 10-15 feet away for a small tree, more for larger trees.
- What suggestions do you have for areas that you're interested in planting, but have invasive species? Do you have suggestions for preparing soil in areas with invasive species?
 - Generally speaking, it will be difficult to establish a native pollinator planting without first removing the invasive species in the area. Focus on a small area at first. Small infestations may be controlled by repeatedly pulling plants in the spring. Large infestations may be mowed several times in a season to kill plants and prevent seeding. Be sure to mow plants in early- to mid-May before they bloom.
 - Mulching your pollinator planting will help with weed control! Some folks put cardboard over their garden bed and cut out holes for their desired plants. You can also try using edging around your garden bed. Something that you can insert a few inches into the ground can help keep weeds from invading your planting. More frequent weeding will also be beneficial.
 - If you are working with a larger area of land and need technical support managing invasives or preparing your site, we recommend reaching out to your local Soil and Water Conservation District (associated with your county). The Monarch Joint Venture also has a working lands help desk that provides free technical assistance for pollinator habitat projects:
<https://monarchjointventure.org/mjvprograms/habitat/technical-assistance-for-farmers-and-landowners>

- Where can I learn about the rules for planting in boulevards?
 - As mentioned in the Kick-Off Webinar, if you're planning to do a pocket planting in your boulevard (the strip of land between the sidewalk and street), it's important to check what your city or town's height restrictions are. Some cities like Minneapolis have different height restrictions if a planting is on a corner.
 - For Minneapolis, you can view the current boulevard planting guidelines at <https://www.minneapolismn.gov/resident-services/property-housing/housing/property-maintenance/boulevard-gardens/blvd-garden-rules/>

Site Prep

- For sheet mulching, is it okay to use cardboard that has labels on it?
 - Do your best to remove tape and labels from the cardboard before applying it to your planting site. Try to avoid using cardboard with a large amount of dye on it.
- What do we do with the disposed sod if it's not good quality?
 - Check to see what yard waste disposal sites are in your area. Sod is generally not accepted as curbside compost. Most city websites have a list of yard waste disposal sites. Some municipalities have stopped accepting soil and sod at yard waste sites because of jumping worms. You may still be able to find a landscape supply center that offers industrial composting and might accept it since the worms and their eggs are thought to not be able to survive the high temperatures. Still, to be on the safe side, you could somewhere on your property to keep the sod and soil in hopes of limiting the spread. You may think of clever ways to use it, such as creating a small berm, filling in a low spot, or just finding an out of sight corner to spread it.
 - You can also flip your sod over and layer with newspaper and soil, or use some in the bottom of any raised beds you might have.
- Is it beneficial to add compost to the soil?
 - In most cases you shouldn't need to add any compost. Native plants are well adapted to Minnesota's soils and can do well even in poor soil conditions. Your native plants should do just fine in your original soil (provided you chose plants for your soil type). Just mulch on top of the open dirt, 2-4 inches.
 - That being said if you have heavily compacted soil, adding compost can help, especially when starting a new planting. Compost can help the soil retain moisture, adds nutrients to the soil and increases microbial activity, all good for plant health. You can put a handful of compost in each planting hole and also work 1-2 inches of compost into the top few inches of your soil before planting.
- Should a soil test be done for native plants? How can I do a soil test?
 - Soils don't often need to be amended for native plants because these plants are already adapted to our current soil conditions. However, if you're concerned about your soil (for example, plants have always seemed to struggle growing in it), you can do a soil test. The University of Minnesota Soil Testing Lab offers soil tests at a

low cost, though soil tests are not a reimbursable expense under the Lawns to Legumes grant. You can also bring in a sample of your soil to your local native plant nursery and ask them what plants would do best in your soil.

Maintenance

- Will we want to cut back what we plant this year when they die back, or let them die back and just cover the ground for the winter?
 - Keep fall yard cleanup minimal to help wildlife overwinter!
 - Leave dead stems. Some Minnesota native bees overwinter in the hollows of plant stems. You can cut stems back in spring once dandelions start blooming, cut a few inches above new growth to avoid harming it.
 - Keep some dead flower heads out if you have any. Seeds from native perennials like coneflowers, Joe Pye weed, and black-eyed Susans will help feed birds through the winter.
 - Let leaf piles be in your garden beds and under trees. Many butterfly and moth species overwinter in leaf litter.
- When can I expect my new plants to start blooming?
 - Native perennials take time to grow in, but the wait is worth it, providing resources for pollinators and enjoyment for you for years to come.
 - Year 1 (“sleep”): Leafy, green vegetation with few to no blooms. Water and pull weeds regularly to give these little guys a boost!
 - Year 2 (“creep”): Plants start to spread and fill in. More will start to bloom for the first time!
 - Year 3 (“leap”): Mature plants are dense and full of life and color. Their roots are now settled deep in the ground, and watering is only needed in periods of extended drought.

Eligible Expenses

- Where can I get a list of native plants that are allowed?
 - Because there are hundreds of plants native to Minnesota, we don’t have a single exhaustive list. But if you’re not sure where to start, you can browse the plant lists on the Blue Thumb Resources page or the Blue Thumb Plant Finder. You can also browse what is available from the native plant nurseries on our list.
 - <https://bluethumb.org/public-resources/>
 - <https://bluethumb.org/plantfinder/>
 - <https://bluethumb.org/lawns-to-legumes/native-plant-nurseries/>
- Do we need to buy native plants at one of the gardening locations on the list? Or can we purchase native plants from Gertens, etc?
 - No, while we recommend shopping from the retailers on our Minnesota Native Plant Nurseries list, it is not required. However, if you do ship from a retailer not on our list we recommend using extra caution to avoid cultivars or cultivated varieties

of native plants, which are not reimbursable. Refer to our guide on telling apart native plants and cultivars for tips:

https://bluethumb.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/L2L-Natives-vs-Cultivar-s-Handout_Updated-1-2025.pdf

- Can I find supplies on Facebook marketplace? Is it reimbursable to pay for native plants from a neighbor for example, some place without an official receipt?
 - Yes. For scenarios like these where there is not an official receipt, please download and fill out the Cash Receipt Template available on the Eligible Expenses Guide:
<https://bluethumb.org/lawns-to-legumes/eligible-expenses-guide/>
- I have a neighbor who received the grant in the past. She plans to give me a bunch of plants from her garden, and I will likely spend most of my grant on wood borders and mulch - is that okay if very little of the grant \$ is spent on actual plants?
 - Yes, it is fine if you acquire your Minnesota native plants through free or low-cost means. As long as your project involves the addition of blooming native plants in some way. If none of your receipts list native plants, please also prepare a typed out list of the native plants you acquired or a photo of their plant tags. The plants should also be visible in your after photos.
- Does the grant only cover products or also services (having someone to get rid of invasive plants for example)
 - Yes! Please see the [Eligible Expenses Guide](#). You can be reimbursed for hiring helpers or consultation, design, or installation services. That can include essential site prep work like removing invasive plants. Remember that your project focus must be the addition to new native plants and/or trees. All contracted work must be through the current grant period to be eligible for reimbursement. For hiring helpers (family, neighbors, etc.), you can use our cash receipt template (linked on the Eligible Expenses Guide to make a receipt.
- Can we trust the retailers to know if plants meet eligibility requirements?
 - It's important to verify that plants are native with your own research. It's easy to look up the native range of a plant using the USDA PLANTS database or Minnesota Wildflowers site linked on the Grantee Guide. Retailers on our Native Plant Nurseries list are going to be more informed about native plants and the Lawns to Legumes program. Let retailers know that you are not looking for cultivars of natives, as these are not reimbursable.
- Is a "native flower seeds" mix acceptable for reimbursement?
 - We can only reimburse seed mixes made with Minnesota native seeds, that are not cultivars. If the mix has a generic title "wildflower seeds" and does not specify the details of what species are in it, we cannot reimburse it. We recommend sourcing your seeds from one of the retailers on our MN Native Nurseries list.
- Are all MN plants going to be considered native for all MN regions for this project? I am from near the Canadian border, so I think my region has a slight difference from much of the Twin Cities.

- Yes, you can be reimbursed for plants that are native to Minnesota. However, your planting is likely going to be more successful if you choose plants native to your region of the state, especially if you live in Northern Minnesota. You can use the Minnesota Wildflowers site (linked in the Grantee Guide) to see the state-specific ranges of plants.
- If I replace a dirt patch with only the approved low-growing fescues, not adding in any clover or other bee lawn plants, is that reimbursable?
 - No. The Lawns to Legumes program is specifically for creating pollinator habitat, so we do require some flowering species to be installed as part of your project.
- How much do you need to spend to get reimbursed?
 - There is no monetary match requirement for the Lawns to Legumes program. The match aspect of our program is that you must spend at least 2 hours of time on your project.
- Can the Bee Lawn be a "work in progress", such as starting to seed in bare spots and expanding the seeding later?
 - Yes. Your Lawns to Legumes project can be one stage of a longer term project if you like, as long as your project during the grant period (now through November 30) involves getting native plants in the ground. We cannot reimburse you for seeds that you do not sow before the November 30 deadline, unless you ask for an extension.
- Can cypress mulch be used?
 - Any type of mulch is reimbursable. However, we do not recommend using cypress mulch because it is unsustainably harvested from vulnerable cypress swamp habitats in the southern US and other places. Additionally, non-dyed mulch is preferred. As mentioned in the kick-off webinar, we recommend shredded hardwood mulch because it stays in place well.
- Are rocks an eligible expense instead of mulch?
 - No. We do not recommend using rocks as mulch. Weeds can come through the rocks and it becomes more difficult to maintain. Rocks also do a poor job of holding moisture in the soil, which is another key benefit of using mulch.
- Would we be allowed to put down some topsoil to help raise our garden area a bit?
 - Topsoil is not reimbursable. Compost is reimbursable and is a good option if you are interested in amending your soil or raising it a bit. The only case in which soil is reimbursable is if you are using it for a container planting project, up to \$100.
- Are there any approved native trees with edible fruits (for humans, haha) that I could add to my project?
 - Yes, there are a number of Minnesota native trees and shrubs that provide fruit edible and yummy for humans! A few you might consider are serviceberries, black chokeberry, native cherries, prairie crabapple, and American Plum.
- Some of my receipts are not detailed. Will we need to keep or document each species we purchase?

- Yes, create a list of the plants associated with that receipt & save the plant tags.
- We developed a Project Tracker spreadsheet for you to easily track expenses! It's at the top of the "Plan and Install Your Project" section of the Grantee Guide and we'll share the direct link:

<https://bluethumb.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/L2L-Project-Tracker.xls>
x

Misc.

- Where do bees overwinter?
 - It depends on the bee! Some native bees are ground-nesting, and they will dig a hole in the ground to overwinter. This includes the Rusty-Patched Bumble Bee. Other bees are stem-nesting. They will make chambers and overwinter in the hollows of stems. That's why it is important to leave your stems standing over winter and keep leaf litter on your garden beds, so bees and other insects have overwintering habitat. You can also leave some bare, undisturbed soil or rotting wood for ground nesting bees. The University of Minnesota Bee Lab website has lots of great educational resources on MN native bees if you are curious to explore more.
- What type of plants are good for leaf cutter bees to cut?
 - Native leaf cutter bees cut small circular pieces from leaves and petals to line their nests. They like smooth, non-hairy, pliable leaves. There are many native plants that fit this description, some options you can consider are bee balm (monarda), asters, and Golden Alexanders. They also visit a wide range of native flowering plants for pollen and nectar.
- Can we get more than one L2L sign?
 - We only have enough funding to provide one Lawns to Legumes yard sign per grantee. There are lots of pollinator sign options available online and from organizations like the Xerces Society and Monarch Joint Venture, but these will not be reimbursable under the L2L grant. Only a stake for your L2L yard sign can be reimbursable.
- I never got a link to join the Hive?
 - The link to the Hive is in the email that was sent to you after you filled out the Confirmation Form. Here is the direct link to join:
<https://bluethumb.thinkific.com/products/communities/The-Hive-Fall2025>

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

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