



Lawns to Legumes Spring 2026 Q+A Session

PLANNING & SITE PREPARATION

Planning Tools & Project Scope

1. Is there an interactive garden planning tool you recommend?
 1. There isn't one official tool, but several online tools can help you design and visualize your space, including nativegardenplanner.com and [Blazing Star Gardens' native garden design tool](#). Canva can also be useful for sketching a design.
2. Does the garden need to be visible to the public?
 1. No. Your project doesn't have to be highly visible — it just needs to include new native plantings that support pollinators.
3. Can we change the habitat type we originally planned?
 1. Yes. You can adjust your plan to something that suits your site better as long as it still fits within eligible project types (e.g., pocket planting, pollinator lawn, meadow, shrub/tree planting).
4. If I've already started creating pollinator areas, can I continue working in or next to those spaces?
 1. Yes. You can include multiple areas as part of your project. Just be sure that added native plants were installed after you received your grant and document the new areas clearly with photos.

Site Conditions & Invasive Species

5. Do I have to remove all non-native plants before planting natives for this grant?
 1. No — only the plants you want reimbursed need to be native. You can plant natives alongside or among non-natives, but only eligible, Minnesota native additions count for reimbursement.
6. What should I do if my site has invasive weeds like creeping bellflower or creeping charlie?
 1. Persistent invasive weeds like creeping bellflower often require complete root removal and repeated work. A sod cutter or smothering with cardboard and mulch can help reduce their presence before planting.

Site Preparation Methods

9. Do you recommend using landscape fabric under mulch?

1. Plastic landscape fabric isn't recommended. Organic weed barriers like cardboard or paper-based products break down over time and are reimbursable. They help suppress weeds without creating long-term plastic debris.
10. Is cardboard safe to use near a house foundation?
 1. From a gardening perspective, cardboard is a safe, biodegradable barrier. If you have pest concerns, check with a pest professional, but cardboard itself doesn't attract pests and breaks down naturally. It is a good idea to use cardboard without heavy amounts of ink and remove any tape on the cardboard before laying on the ground.
11. How long should I wait between laying cardboard and planting?
 1. Wait at least a few days to a week and water the cardboard well. It will start to break down and help suppress weeds when you plant on top. Some people wait longer for better smothering.
12. If my site already has rock along the foundation, can I keep it instead of switching to mulch?
 1. Yes. You can plant around and within existing rock if you like; it doesn't affect eligibility as long as the new plants are native.
13. Should I add soil before planting? When is that necessary?
 1. Soil amendments aren't usually necessary; most native plants are well-adapted to local soils. Amendments may help in compacted or poor soil, but they aren't reimbursable unless part of a container or raised bed project.
14. Should I use mulch if planting from seed?
 1. Mulch can help retain moisture and suppress weeds, but too much can impede seed-soil contact. Many gardeners use light or patchy mulch when seeding. You can also consider straw or a germination blanket.
15. Can I plant native seeds, or do I need to purchase live plants?
 1. You can use seed or live plants. Both are reimbursable if they are Minnesota native and meet program criteria. Starting from seed may take longer to establish blooms.

Seed & Sourcing Questions

17. Are seed mixes from local Soil and Water Conservation Districts always native? Is it recommended to purchase seed through them?
 1. Often, but not always. Ask SWCD staff and check species lists to ensure the seeds are Minnesota native and not treated with insecticides. The program encourages sourcing from within ~200 miles when possible.
18. For seeds that need cold stratification, when should I start?
 1. Follow the seed producer's instructions — stratification timing depends on the species and desired planting date. Many gardeners stratify seeds in late winter for spring planting.

Special Site Considerations

19. How can I stabilize bare soil on a slope to prevent erosion and beautify the space?

1. Use a mix of native grasses, sedges and flowers that establish deep roots. Combining seeded areas with plugs or plants improves soil stability and provides aesthetic appeal.

PLANTING & DESIGN

Location Questions

1. Can I plant in the strip between the sidewalk and the street?
 1. Yes, you can plant in boulevard areas as long as you follow local ordinances (permits/height restrictions), document it, and use eligible native plants.
 2. Check out the Blue Thumb Resources page for boulevard-specific design templates: <https://bluethumb.org/public-resources/>
 3. Some native plant nurseries offer plant kits specifically for boulevards, and you can ask nursery staff from our list or recommendations.
2. If I plant a pollinator lawn, will it spread into my neighbors' lawns?
 1. Pollinator lawn species like fescue and white clover aren't generally aggressive. White clover can spread a bit — you can avoid it if you're concerned. You can also invest in some edging around the area.

Plant Selection & Garden Design

3. Can I divide and use plants from my existing garden?
 1. You may use divisions of native plants you already own for your project but this does not count as adding new plants. As shared in the Eligible Expenses Guide, your project must involve the addition of new native plants within the grant period.
4. If I add native plants to an established perennial garden, does that count as a pocket planting?
 1. Yes — adding new native plants to existing beds can count as part of your project.
5. Is there a required ratio of flowers to grasses for a pocket prairie?
 1. There's no required ratio. Habitat designers often start with more flowers and fewer grasses; over time, grasses tend to become more prominent. Remember to try and add flowering species that bloom in spring, summer, and fall so pollinators have resources through the growing season.
6. When should bare-root spring ephemerals (such as Virginia bluebells) be planted?
 1. Bare-root spring ephemerals can be planted spring through fall. Prairie Moon Nursery has a guide with additional considerations for each season: https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.prairiemoon.com/PDF/Prairie.Moon.Bare.Root.Installation.Brochure.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1771271657078042&usg=AOvVaw31_bJWOn3phk_qTv54Oo_v
 2. For the spring grant timeline, you can plant them as soon as the ground is workable and before new growth begins.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES & REIMBURSEMENT

Purchasing & Timing

1. When can we begin making purchases for reimbursement?
 1. You may begin purchasing eligible items any time *after* you've confirmed your grant award. (This is, now!) Receipts dated before your award are not eligible.
2. Is there a specific reimbursement form we must use?
 1. Yes — use the Lawns to Legumes Reimbursement Request Form and include required documentation like receipts and photos. The form will open on May 1 on your Submittable account and the link will be emailed to you.
3. When should we take “before” photos — now, or after snow melt?
 1. Take them anytime prior to installation; many grantees take them once snow melts and before planting begins.

Eligible Materials

4. Is compost reimbursable?
 1. Compost is no longer an eligible expense as of this cohort — apologies for sharing outdated information in the webinar!
 2. Native plants thrive in a variety of soil types, even more compacted clay soil. You can use the [Blue Thumb Plant Finder](#) or nursery sites like Prairie Moon Nursery to find plants that do well in your specific soil conditions.
5. Can grant funds be used to purchase tools, such as a shovel?
 1. No, equipment/tool purchases are not eligible for reimbursement. (Only equipment rental.)
6. Is edging material such as corten steel eligible?
 1. Yes—any type of edging material is reimbursable, non-plastic edging is preferred.
7. Can funds be used for maintenance of existing pollinator gardens?
 1. Maintenance costs are not typically reimbursable unless they are part of project installation or establishment. You can email the L2L Helpline (l2lhelp@bluethumb.org) if you want clarity on your specific situation.
8. If I began preparing the site last fall, should I track those expenses even if they won't be reimbursed?
 1. Only time and expenses since you were awarded the grant need to be tracked.

Plant Eligibility

10. Can we purchase native plants from retailers not on your recommended list (for example, larger garden centers)?
 1. Yes — your purchases don't need to come from the recommended list, but they must be Minnesota native. When shopping from larger retailers, watch out for cultivar varieties of native plants, which are not reimbursable.
11. Do neighborhood or Friends plant sales qualify?

1. Yes — if the plants are native and meet eligibility criteria. If your plant sale receipts are not itemized, be sure to take a photo of your plant tags or write out a list of the species names purchased.
12. Are fruit trees (such as apple trees) reimbursable?
 1. Cultivated apples aren't typically eligible (Prairie crabapple is the exception), but native fruiting trees like serviceberry, chokeberry, highbush cranberry and elderberry are reimbursable.

MAINTENANCE & LONG-TERM CARE

Mulch & Protection

1. Do I need to replace mulch every year?
 1. Not necessarily. Mulch can be refreshed as needed to suppress weeds and retain moisture.
2. Is there an affordable plant protection option for larger spaces that won't leach harmful chemicals?
 1. Use physical barriers (mesh baskets, chicken wire). There are some organic repellants on the market but repellants are not reimbursable. Avoid chemical repellents that could leach into soil or water.

Seasonal Care

3. Should I cut plants back in fall, or leave them standing through winter?
 1. Keep fall yard cleanup minimal to help wildlife overwinter!
 2. Leave dead stems standing. 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.
 3. Keep some dead flower heads out if you have any, birds will feed on the seeds.
 4. Let leaf piles be in your garden beds and under trees. Many butterfly and moth species overwinter in leaf litter.
4. When can I expect new native plants to begin blooming?
 1. 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.
 2. Year 1 ("sleep"): Leafy, green vegetation with few to no blooms. Water and pull weeds regularly to give these little guys a boost!
 3. Year 2 ("creep"): Plants start to spread and fill in. More will start to bloom for the first time!
 4. 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.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Are there other pollinator planting grants available in Minnesota?

1. Yes — local soil and water conservation districts, watershed districts, and other programs offer similar funding. Check [Blue Thumb's list](#) or your SWCD's grants page for opportunities.
2. Is there a map of previous Lawns to Legumes project locations that can be viewed or visited?
 1. The [Blue Thumb Garden Gallery](#) lets you filter and view past projects by region, project type, and plant palette.
 2. The MN Board of Water and Soil Resources has a [searchable statewide map](#) of all completed Lawns to Legumes projects!

*For more information about your Lawns to Legumes grant, visit the Grantee Guide:
<https://bluethumb.org/lawns-to-legumes/grantee-guide/>*