Lawns to Legumes reimbursement increases with $4M in new funds



Above: *Pollinators visit native flowers in a Lawns to Legumes garden project in Duluth.* **Below:** *A pollinator meadow was planted as part of a Lawns to Legumes project in Hadley.* **Contributed Photos**

A $4 million appropriation from the state's general fund will enable the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to increase the reimbursement amount for its Lawns to Legumes program, which offers grants to Minnesota residents for creating new pollinator habitat in their yards.

More than 22,000 applications for individual support grants have been submitted since the program's inception in August 2019. Lawns to Legumes has funded more than 3,500 projects across the state, resulting in more than 5 million square feet of new habitat. These reimbursement grants were capped at $350 during the program's first four years. Starting in spring 2024, grant recipients can be reimbursed up to $400.

Lawns to Legumes also funds 32 demonstration neighborhood grant programs. Those community projects are overseen by local governments and nonprofit organizations that seek to enhance pollinator habitat in key corridors, raise awareness about residential pollinator protection and showcase best practices.


Shaw

How to apply

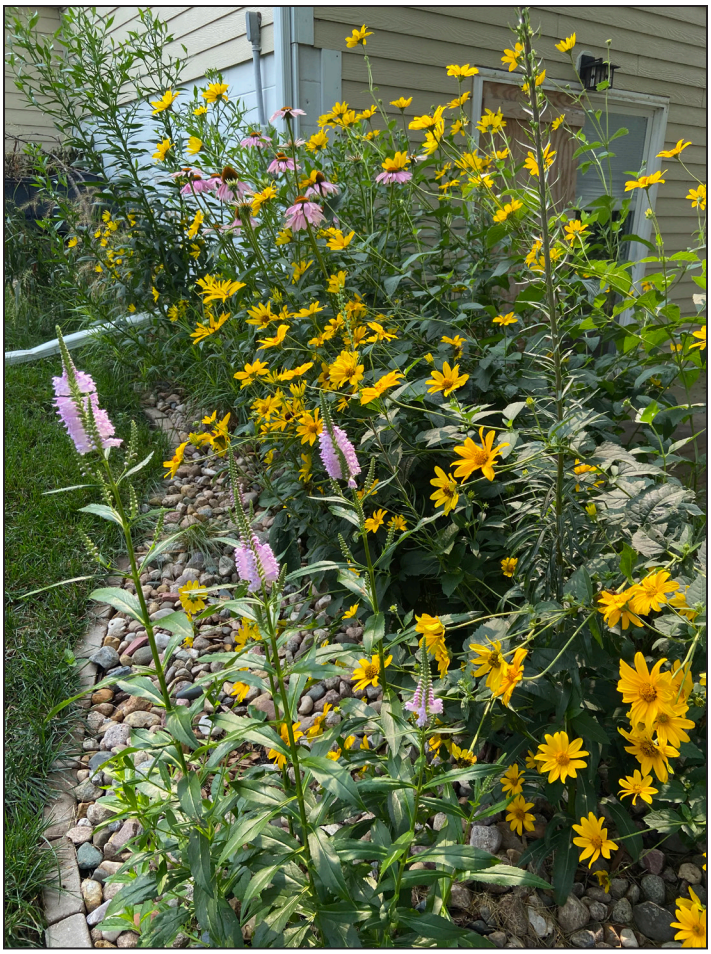
Minnesota residents can apply for Lawns to Legumes Individual Support Grants by visiting Blue Thumb's website. Applications are due Nov. 30.

"The thousands of pollinator plantings being installed through Lawns to Legumes offer an oasis for pollinators and provide a wide range of benefits, including increased resiliency for landscapes and local communities," said BWSR Senior Ecologist and Vegetation Specialist Dan Shaw, who leads the program.

Applications for spring 2024 projects are being accepted through Nov. 30. Anyone who lives in Minnesota and has a yard, patio or other outdoor space for planting is eligible to apply. The program is open to both homeowners and renters.

Lawns to Legumes uses a lottery system to select grant recipients. This system gives additional weight to applicants who live in priority habitat areas for the rusty-patched bumblebee and other at-risk pollinators, and considers geographic distribution to ensure all regions of the state are represented. Environmental justice and equity factors are included in the ranking system to ensure that low income, minority and tribal communities are represented and prioritized among grant recipients.

BWSR partners with Metro Blooms and Blue Thumb — Planting for Clean Water to administer the program. These partners manage the individual support grant application process and, to help promote project success, they oversee workshops and one-on-one coaching for grant recipients. More than 6,000 people have attended Lawns to Legumes workshops, webinars and presentations since the program launched.



A Lawns to Legumes individual support grant recipient created a pocket planting in Cottonwood County.

your yard CAN BEE the CHANGE
#Lawns2Legumes

BWSR Ecological Science Conservationist Erin Loeffler — who volunteers as a University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener in St. Louis County — has served as a program coach for more than a year.

"One of our priorities for our work (as Master Gardeners) is to promote pollinator health through working with community members, so I really felt that the Lawns to Legumes program was complementary to the work of the University of Minnesota Extension," she said.

Loeffler

Loeffler said the Lawns to Legumes gardeners she's coached bring a range of experience and knowledge to their habitat projects. Some request assistance with animal control methods to keep newly planted gardens safe from browsing, while others ask for reminders about program requirements. Some simply want to bounce ideas off of an experienced gardener.

"I think the appeal of Lawns to Legumes has a lot to do with the equity and inclusivity of this program, along with grantees' overall contribution to biological integrity in Minnesota," Loeffler said. "From container plantings to community gardens, residents are seeing their contribution to conservation daily as pollinators visit the habitat they created."

In addition to providing pollinator habitat, Shaw said that Lawns to Legumes projects play a role in making landscapes more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

"Pollinator plantings that use native species are effective at capturing and filtering rainwater through healthy soils, root systems and uptake from plants," Shaw said. "The program's focus on native species helps ensure that projects can adapt to local weather extremes."

Shaw said incorporating native plants into

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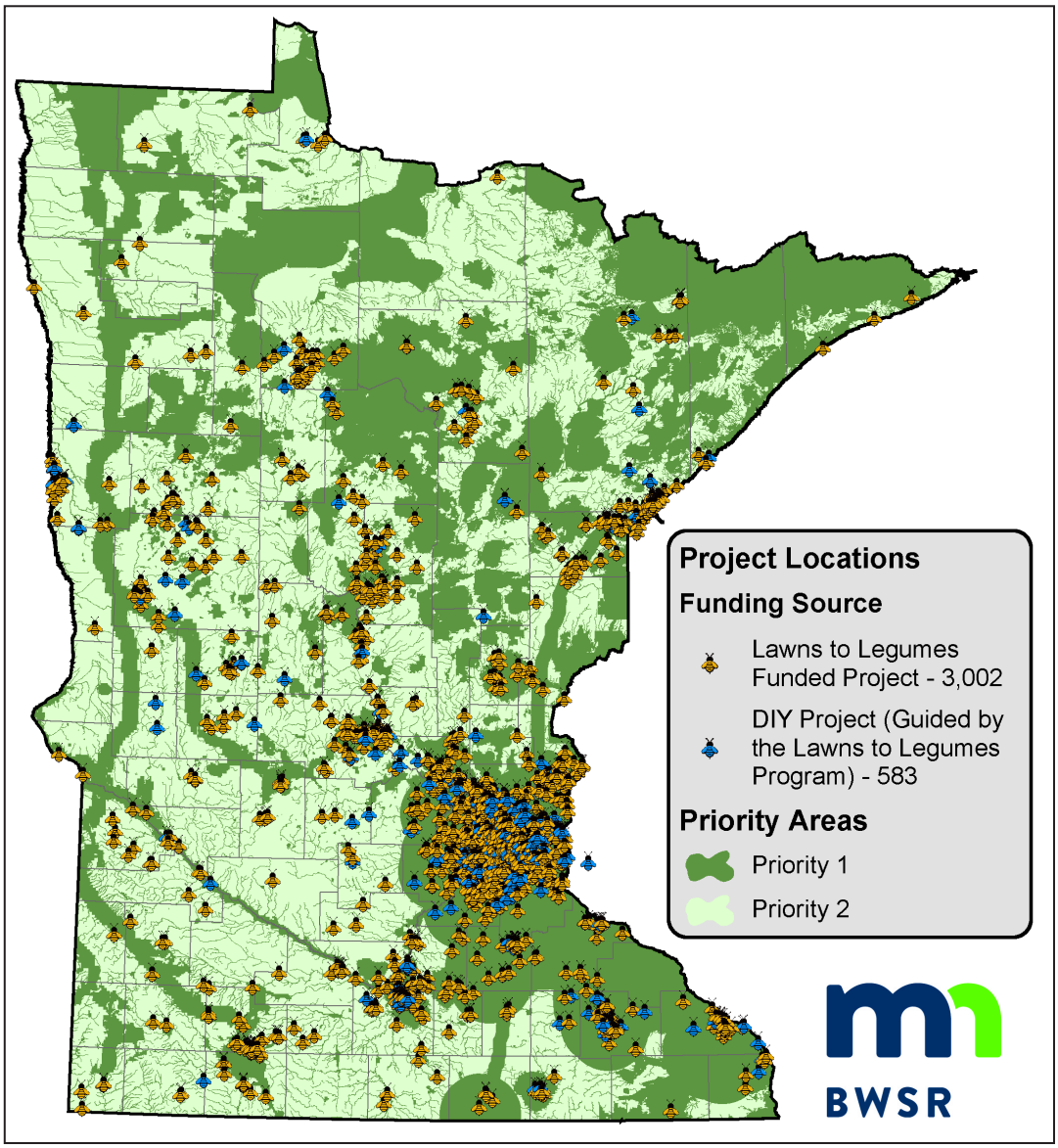
Funding for Lawns to Legumes is provided by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and the state's general fund.

residential landscaping can be especially beneficial during hot, dry summers such as the past few drought years in Minnesota.

“Minnesota prairie plants are particularly well adapted to drought,” Shaw said.

“Deep-rooted forbs, grasses, trees and shrubs add organic content to soils that help them hold moisture during a drought, increasing the resiliency of gardens and native plant communities. These roots are also effective at sequestering carbon and mitigating carbon emissions.”



More than 3,000 projects funded by Lawns to Legumes individual support grants were mapped as of September. The map also shows projects implemented by Minnesota residents using program resources other than cost-share funding, such as planting guides and garden templates. Projects are sorted into priority areas for rusty-patched bumblebee habitat. The rusty-patched bumblebee is Minnesota's state bee, and one of the at-risk species Lawns to Legumes focuses on protecting. **Map credit:** BWSR