

Plant a Bee Lawn



Turf Alternatives Series

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Creeping Thyme



Ground Plum



Self Heal

What is a Bee Lawn?

Bee lawns are made of a mix of grasses and low-growing perennials that can be used and treated much like a regular lawn but also offer high-quality nutrition to pollinators.

Why should I plant a Bee Lawn?

Pollinator populations have been declining in part due to habitat loss, pesticide use, and parasitic mites. Pollinators play essential roles in our ecosystems and help pollinate 1/3 of the food on our plates! Introducing flowers into a lawn not only helps bees and other pollinators, but can also increase the resilience of your yard by promoting deeper roots, increasing soil health, and reducing the need to fertilize.

Where do you plant a Bee Lawn?

Turf areas that are not heavily used for recreational purposes or that are primarily aesthetic make great pollinator habitats. Examples include home lawns, boulevards, slopes that are steep or challenging to mow, and right of ways or easements.

What plants make up a Bee Lawn?

Shorter flowers: These are flower types that cater to different bees with different pollen and nectar needs and access abilities. They are low growing and can tolerate being mowed to 3”.

- White clover (*Trifolium repens*)
- Creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*)
- Self heal (*Prunella vulgaris ssp. Lanceolata*)
- Ground plum (*Astragalus crassicaarpus*) in sandy soils

Grasses

- Fine fescues (*Festuca sp.*) have thin blades that give flowers the best chance to establish, and are longer-rooted and slower-growing than Kentucky bluegrass, needing less maintenance throughout the year.

Taller flowers: These bloom above typical mowing heights, but make can nice additions to gardens or border areas.

- Prairie Groundsel (*Packera plattensis*)
- Lanceleaf Coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*)
- Calico Aster (*Symphyotrichum lateriflorum*)

How do I make a Bee Lawn?

Overseed a traditional lawn with pollinator friendly seeds

STEP 1: Mow your lawn very short—1 inch or less to improve seed to soil contact. Rake or remove grass clippings to expose as much soil as possible.

STEP 2: Optional. Aerating the lawn is recommended. It can be done with a hand aerator or machine and helps create good conditions for seed germination and healthy growth.

STEP 3: Spread seed at appropriate seeding rates:

- White Clover at 3.2 ounces (7 tablespoons) / 1000 ft²
- Creeping thyme at 1 ounce (2 tablespoons) / 1000 ft²
- Self heal at 3.6 ounces (7.5 tablespoons) / 1000 ft²
- (Optional) Fine fescue at 4 lbs / 1000 ft²



White Clover

You can mix the small amounts of seed into compost and apply. Compost can be applied up to 40 lbs / 50 ft² of lawn. It improves seed to soil contact and germination rates.

Build from the bottom up

STEP 1: To start from a blank slate you must remove existing grass. Please plan accordingly; a large area of bare soil is easily eroded by runoff, and provides fertile ground for weeds to easily grow. Herbicides are not recommended because of impacts to water quality. All methods have their pros and cons. Below are alternatives to chemical removal.

- Sheet mulching uses cardboard or newspaper to smother grass. A quick google search can tell you all you need to know.
- Sod cutter use is hard work, but non-chemical. You can lose a lot of organic matter though.
- Solarization is a method that covers the area with plastic and uses the sun and lack of water to kill grass. This uses a lot of plastic, takes time, plastic degrades and should be performed in sections rather than on a large scale to reduce the risk of runoff.
- 20% acetic acid or Phydura is an ecologically responsible alternative to glyphosate. It kills all vegetation but leaves roots for stabilization and reseeds easily.

STEP 2: Follow the directions above to aerate and seed with mix of fine fescue and flowers.

Maintaining a Bee Lawn

If you mow, keep it at least 3" tall. Taller lawns shade the ground, preventing too much moisture from evaporating while also discouraging weed seeds from sprouting. You can choose to refrain from mowing while flowers are blooming to increase the amount of forage available for pollinators.

White clover fixes atmospheric nitrogen into the ground, so you will not need much fertilizer, if any. Herbicides won't be able to differentiate between the flowers you want to keep and those you want to remove, so hand tools will be the most effective at weeding.

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