

Digging in: A Q&A with Lawns to Legumes gardeners



Metro Blooms co-director of design Jennifer Ehlert, right, talks with Kristel Porter and her son during a September 2020 gardening consultation at Porter's Minneapolis home. Porter is participating in the Resilient Yards for Pollinator Conservation in Northside Minneapolis demonstration neighborhood administered by Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission.

Photo Credit: James Wolfen, Metro Blooms



Spring shoots had yet to emerge when five gardeners from across the state took time to share their first-season experience with Lawns to Legumes Demonstration Neighborhood projects.

Demonstration Neighborhoods are one component of the Lawns to Legumes pilot program, which offers a combination of workshops, coaching, planting resources and cost-share grants to support the creation of new pollinator habitat in residential lawns. Demonstration Neighborhoods are community projects intended to enhance pollinator habitat in key corridors, raise awareness about residential pollinator protection and showcase best practices.

[Twelve organizations](#) are overseeing demonstration neighborhoods, working with local residents to install four types

of beneficial planting practices: native pocket plantings, pollinator beneficial trees and shrubs, pollinator lawns and pollinator meadows. Grant-related work must finish by Dec. 31, 2022.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), which administers Lawns to Legumes, caught up with participants via email this spring. Gardeners' responses are edited for clarity.

Margaret Horkey, Windom

Planting type: Pollinator pocket planting

Demonstration Neighborhood Grantee: Cottonwood SWCD

Grant title: Cottonwood, Jackson and Heron Lake Pollinator Partnership

Before starting your habitat project,

what kind of gardening experience did you have?

I raised a vegetable garden for many years while trying to maintain perennial flower beds in competition with the friendly deer in my neighborhood. The summer days of 2020 were going to be spent social distancing, so it looked like the perfect time to expand my landscaping. The grant made it financially possible to plant a large pollinator garden. I've gone through the gate in my backyard countless times to get to the vegetable garden — now it opens to my bee garden.

Kurtis Karr, Winona

Planting type: Pollinator pocket planting

Demonstration Neighborhood Grantee: Healthy Lake Winona

Grant title: Pleasant Valley Pollinator Corridor

What inspired you to create pollinator habitat?

My grandmother on my father's side loved butterflies. She passed in January of 2020. I wanted something to remind me of her. Wagon wheels were added to the butterfly garden to have it look like her yard.

We also saw the value of doing something to help keep pollinators around. It's been a great addition to our outdoor activities. It's a great place to relax. We hope the garden continues to thrive, and we hope to expand the garden in the future.

Heidi Ferris, Fridley

Planting type: Pollinator pocket planting

Demonstration

Neighborhood Grantee: Anoka Conservation District

Grant title: Mississippi and Rum River Pollinator Corridor Demonstration Neighborhood

Tell me about your experience planting for pollinators.

I've been using native plants in my garden for over a decade, and each year I learn more about new creatures and species of plants on which they depend. As an environmental educator and author who works with libraries, schools, churches and watershed districts, when I heard about Lawns to Legumes I was excited to participate. Adding biodiversity to your yard benefits the whole community — it's all connected. Gardening of all kinds brings me joy, peace and wonder.



Top: Kurtis Karr's pollinator pocket planting in Winona is supported by the Pleasant Valley Pollinator Corridor demonstration neighborhood administered by Healthy Lake Winona. **Photo Credit:** Kurtis Karr
Bottom: Margaret Horkey of Windom converted her vegetable garden into a pollinator garden through the Cottonwood, Jackson and Heron Lake Pollinator Partnership demonstration neighborhood administered by Cottonwood SWCD. **Photo Credit:** Margaret Horkey



Kristel Porter, Minneapolis

Planting type: Boulevard pocket planting

Demonstration Neighborhood Grantee: Bassett Creek Watershed

Management Commission

Grant title: Resilient Yards for Pollinator Conservation in Northside Minneapolis

How has Lawns to Legumes affected your community?

This project provided

beautification to our neighborhood, addressed the heat island effect, and lowered our carbon footprint. In North Minneapolis, we have a very low median income. Many of the property owners struggle financially and are unable to provide this update to their property. Through Lawns to Legumes, homeowners were able to attend a workshop that taught them the importance of boulevard gardens and knowing which plants should be incorporated into them. I am so grateful for this program and hope it continues for years to come.

Denise Nichols, Windom

Planting type: Shade plants incorporated into existing landscaping

Demonstration

Neighborhood Grantee: Cottonwood SWCD

Grant title: Cottonwood, Jackson and Heron Lake Pollinator Partnership

What would you say to someone who is considering planting pollinator habitat, but who isn't sure what to expect from the process?

Have a plan. Find out what plants can be used for the project and if they prefer sun or shade. Select plants or trees based on where you want the project in your yard, and make sure you have a water source nearby. When determining a location, remember the purpose is to attract bees. Most importantly, enjoy the process.