

Thank you for purchasing the Lawn to Nature kit! These instructions will help you convert your lawn space into a hub for wildlife.

Highlighted Headings are the methods used in our video instructional, which you can find [Here](#)

Preparing your land

- **Timing**

- Your Lawn to Nature seed mix includes annuals to give your garden a pop in its first season for spring-summer planting. However, the mix can be planted in a wide margin of time. For many native seeds, fall sowing is good as the seeds may need to sit through the winter in order to germinate properly. Anywhere between the last frost of the spring and the first frost of the fall is good for planting. This will give you plenty of time to remove your lawn first! We recommend fall or spring planting to beat the summer heat.

- **Choosing a spot for your Lawn to Nature garden**

- Pick an area that matches the conditions of your seed mix. The mix in the kit is for full sun to part-shade. Keep in mind very sloped or wet areas may be harder to tend.
- Show off! Don't be afraid to put your pollinator garden where you (or your neighbors) can admire it.
- Communities with HOAs may have rules limiting where you can put your Lawn to Nature garden.

- **Grass Removal**

Once you have chosen your location, you can prepare to clear the land for planting. There are multiple methods of doing this, so pick the one that is right for you. To keep your habitat safe, forgo the use of herbicides for this removal.

- **Manual removal**

Be sure to get help with intense manual work and stay safe! Hand pulling is of the more environmentally friendly methods but of course might be too physically demanding for some.

- **Manual sod splitting**

- Water the area a few days beforehand to make the land easier to work. Damp soil will stick together when pulled up, but wet soil will be too heavy to remove.
- Use a spade to cut into the land along the edges of the area you wish to remove, then cut 1ft by 1ft squares or 1ft by 2ft strips into the sod
- Finally, pry under each section with a spade or pitchfork to tear the taproots and roll them up for removal.

- **Shovel**

- This method is very physically intensive but will get the job done. The method of dampening the soil may also help here.

- **Machine removal**

Machines are available to rent at hardware stores. While easier than hand removal, they can still be heavy and unwieldy and should be used carefully.

- Sod cutter

- Sod cutters can be rented from hardware stores and are used to mechanically split sod for you. The strips can then be cut further or rolled for removal.
- Tiller
 - Rentable tillers can be used to simply till the grass and its roots. This however may need to be paired with solarization to prevalent regrowth or even manual removal of the pieces.
- Solarization

Solarization is the method of using the sun's energy to kill off your grass. While this method is better than chemical agents, it still does have the possibility of killing beneficial organisms and is weather dependent.
- Clear plastic

Clear plastic can be one of the fastest ways of killing off grass. It lets in UV and traps heat to create the greenhouse effect needed to kill grass and even some seeds.
- Dark plastic

Dark plastic works similarly to clear plastic as it relies on heat to kill off the grass beneath it. This plastic is readily available at most big hardware and garden stores.
- Smothering

Smothering is likely the most environmentally friendly option available. This will kill grass without killing insects and other temperature sensitive critters, but it is time consuming

 - Newspaper and cardboard work great to smother and will decompose. Lay a thick layer on the grass and leave it over an extended period of time. Check under the paper periodically to make sure it is thick enough to smother the grass.
 - Leaves work as well. Be sure to apply a thick layer to completely smother the plants under it. Check under the paper periodically to make sure it is thick enough to smother the grass. Leaves can also be used in conjunction with newspaper and cardboard.

Tip: Add your removed grass to compost. If removing sod in strips, lay them upside down to keep them from re-rooting.

Preparing the land

- Clear it

The space should already be mostly clear if you removed the lawn properly, but you may have a few surviving plants or rocks to remove.
- Till it

Till by hand or with a machine to a depth of 1 to 2 inches. Any deeper could pull up viable grass roots and weed seed. Tilling is important both to loosen soil and rip up any leftover growth or roots.

Sowing the seed mix

- **Sprinkle seed**
 - Sand or loose, dry soil is good as a filler for your seed mix. Add mix and filler to a container and sprinkle both together to ensure an even distribution.
- **Cover**

Cover your seed to protect it from rain and wind erosion, birds, and other animals. It is recommended that you do at least one of these, but multiple may be helpful depending on your site's slope and animal activity.

 - **Dirt cover**, such as potting soil, can be used to lightly cover the seeds. Keep the cover thin as many seeds need to be close to or on the surface to receive sunlight.
 - **Straw** is best during the peak of summer. It can block out too much sun but may be necessary for retaining moisture during extreme heat and drought. It can also keep animals away.
 - Bird seed
 - **Compact** the seed into the soil by gently stomping or rolling over the area with a lawn/water roller (you can rent these at hardware stores). Many seeds just need good seed-to-soil contact so if you have no threats of disturbance this may work well for you.
 - Fencing and bird scares
 - If your area is highly trafficked by animals, fencing (even just string on sticks) will keep deer at bay and shiny scares like foil ribbon or pie tins can keep birds away.

Water

- Now that your seeds are set in place, water the area. It is best to water in the morning, so the moisture can penetrate the ground without the strong sun evaporating it away too quickly.

Keeping your sprouted seedlings happy

- **Water**
 - Most meadows planted in spring or fall should be well watered by natural weather patterns.
- **Protection**
 - Protect your growing meadows from deer and small mammals. If trampling or browsing becomes a problem, the fencing methods discussed above will help.

Meadow upkeep

- **Water**
 - Since native plants are adapted to our environment, your meadow will not require much watering from you past the initial growing season.
- **Trimming**

Meadows should remain untrimmed after the growing season. This allows the plants to serve their full purpose as winter food plants and safe cover from

predators. However, it is still important to trim your meadow periodically. This will tame any woody growth trying to take over, strengthen the roots, and redistribute nutrients and seed.

- Trimming new meadows
New meadows shouldn't be trimmed until they are fully established. Be sure to recognize that there are still some seeds under the first growth that will need proper care to grow.
- Trimming established meadows
Established meadows can be trimmed (as high as your mower will allow) every 2-3 years or you can trim one third or half of your meadow each year in a cycle. Trimming in sections will allow constant areas of safe cover and habitat as well as late winter seed forage.
Mowing should be done in very late winter to allow maximum seed availability and to not harm ground nesting birds in the spring.

FAQ

What seeds are in this mix?

The 2023 seed mix is a custom annual and perennial wildflower mix from Ernst Seeds. Included in the mix are annuals to give you a pop of color right away, and perennials that will establish over time. Annuals are denoted with an asterisk(*) and will slowly die out to be replaced by native hardy perennials over a few years. You can collect annual flowers' seed and directly reseed if desired. Most perennials will bloom only after spending a winter season outside as a seed.

Mix Composition ([view more in depth here](#))

17.9% *Cosmos bipinnatus* (Cosmos)*
14.7% *Echinacea purpurea* (Purple Coneflower)
13.3% *Calendula officinalis* (Calendula)*
8% *Coreopsis lanceolata* (Lance Leaf Coreopsis)
5.3% *Rudbeckia hirta* (Black Eyed Susan)*
4.4% *Trifolium incarnatum* (Crimson Clover)*
4% *Chamaecrista fasciculata* (Partridge Pea)*
4% *Eschscholzia californica* (California Poppy)*
4% *Linum grandiflorum* var. *Rubus* (Scarlet Flax)*
2.7% *Rudbeckia triloba* (Brown Eyed Susan)*
2% *Baptista australis* (Blue False Indigo)
1.7% *Clarkia elegans* (Clarkia)*
1.7% *Lobularia maritima* (Sweet Alyssum)*
1.5% *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium* (Narrow Leaved Mountainmint)

1.3% *Helianthus annuus* (Common Sunflower)*
1.3% *Heliopsis helianthoides* (Ox-eye Sunflower)
1.3% *Liatris spicata* (Marsh Blazing Star/Spiked Gayfeather)
1.3% *Zizia aurea* (Golden Alexanders)
0.8% *Monarda fistulosa* (Wild Bergamot)
0.7% *Aquilegia canadensis* (Eastern Columbine)
0.7% *Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterfly Milkweed)
0.7% *Coreopsis tinctoria* (Plains Coreopsis)*
0.7% *Eryngium yuccifolium* (Rattlesnake Master)
0.7% *Lespedeza virginica* (Slender Lespedeza)
0.7% *Ratibida pinnata* (Gray Coneflower)
0.7% *Tradescantia ohiensis* (Ohio Spiderwort)
0.7% *Verbana stricta* (Hoary Vervain)*
0.5% *Aster laevis* (Smooth Blue Aster)
0.5% *Aster oblongifolius* (Aromatic Aster)
0.5% *Penstemon digitalis* (Tall White Beardtongue)
0.4% *Achillea millefolium* (Common Yarrow)
0.4% *Penstemon hirsutus* (Hairy Beardtongue)
0.3% *Aster novae-angliae* (New England Aster)
0.3% *Solidago odora* (Licorice Scented Goldenrod)
0.1% *Pycnanthemum incanum* (Hoary Mountainmint)
0.1% *Solidago bicolor* (White Goldenrod)
0.1% *Solidago nemoralis* (Gray Goldenrod)

Bought a 2022 kit? [The previous seed mix used can be viewed here.](#)

Is this mix good for full sun or part shade?

Both! We selected a mix that would be good in full sun to part shade locations.

Why are there non-native annuals in this mix?

Some of our native seeds need to spend some time in the bitter cold before they can germinate, so to give people that pop of color the first year if they plant in spring, the mix includes some annuals that should come up in the first growing season. This will help stabilize the soil right away without a cover crop and hopefully keep HOAs and neighbors happy about a change to your yard.

When should I plant my Lawn to Nature seed mix?

You can seed your area in the spring or fall. Make sure to tend to them appropriately for the season. Fall seeds may need extra protection from birds and spring seeds may need extra water as they start to grow. Summer planting should be done with caution as it will need more water to get started.

Troubleshooting

Keeping your seeds from being eaten

Birds and small mammals may be tempted to eat the seeds. Bird feeders with sought out foods like sunflower seeds and peanuts can help draw them away. Scares like plastic owls, rubber snakes, and shiny ribbon or tin foil may help scare critters away.

Protecting your bare land from erosion

Erosion can become a problem for bare land especially during severe weather events or in sloped areas. Erosion control will protect your seed mix from washing away and keep bare dirt from entering and polluting our waterways.

Stabilizing the seeds with compaction is your first line of defense. This is gone over in the “Cover” section of this document. The annuals included will help stabilize the land quickly, but while those grow, be sure to prevent the runoff of dirt and seed.

If your seed mix is threatened by runoff, you may have to protect it with a barrier uphill from your garden. Plastic fencing inserted partially into the ground at a diagonal or curve may help divert streaming water away from your garden. After the meadow is established, the rooting should be enough to keep light runoff from carrying your plants away.

Keeping your established garden from being eaten or damaged

Unfortunately, deer run rampant in our area and may try to chew their way through your garden. After all, they're built to prefer our native plants! Here are a few things to try to protect your plantings from deer and other animals while your gardens grow.

-Fencing, decorative or otherwise, can border your garden. If the fenced area is small enough, deer shouldn't be tempted to jump it.

-Natural deer and rabbit repellent made from capsaicin (the “heat” in spicy foods) can turn away critters that try to nibble the plants. This will wear off in the rain, though, so it will need re-applying.

-For young native trees and shrubs, a tree tube or fencing is necessary to protect from deer and rabbit year round. Fencing keeps deer from eating saplings in a few bits and rabbits from chewing through the small trunk in the winter. Tree tubing or other trunk protectors will protect the trunk of young established trees from being damaged from buck rub.

Dealing with persistent invasives in your intended garden area

Invasive plants are very good at taking over disturbed soil. On top of that, their seeds can stay viable in the ground even after you've ripped them all out! Some plants, like stilt grass, will likely require persistent removal until it has used up its seed bank (up to 5 years!). Other plants, like barberry, may show up in established meadows. These may be kept at bay with regular trimming, but will need to be pulled up by the roots to be gotten rid of completely. The solarization gone over in the grass removal section may kill some invasive seeds when used over a long period of time.

Will my HOA be okay with this?

Maybe, maybe not! Some HOA's are more strict than others. Here's some things that may convince your HOA to accept natural areas.

Signage

The Lawn to Nature kit comes with a sign not only to raise awareness of the importance of wildlife habitat, but also to let others know you aren't just letting the weeds take over! Place your sign on a post leading into your garden or at the road edge to let your neighbors know what your garden is for.

Fencing

Meadow spaces can look like weeds to the untrained eye, especially in between growing seasons. Border your Lawn to Nature garden with appealing fencing to show that this space is intentional.

Pathing and Benches

Your new garden doesn't have to be a plain square in the middle of your yard. Use it as a long border strip along your fence or sidewalk, add a path with stepping stones through it, or situate it around a bench. You can turn your garden into a relaxing area to sit back and enjoy nature.

Additional Décor

Nothing says "this is for nature!" like a bird house or bee house. This is the perfect space for them too, as their food sources are in very close proximity. Check out our "More Ways to Help" guide for ideas on house building.

Hang windchimes, birdfeeders, or suncatchers nearby. This is especially nice if you are incorporating your garden into an area of your yard like a patio or gathering area as they tie everything together and give you and your guests sights and sounds.

Out of sight out of mind

Hide it! Putting it behind your house or behind a hill might keep neighbors from complaining, while still giving the wildlife some great habitat!

Trim annually

This isn't the best option for overwintering wildlife, but you can trim back your meadow every fall after the growing season to keep people from complaining about the dried plants.

Attend your local HOA and township meetings

The best way to encourage good habitat in neighborhoods is education. A big pile of leaves may look ugly, but it is a haven for many important insect species. Invasive species are loved by many homeowners. HOA rules and township ordinances can be changed to allow and even encourage healthier environments if people speak up for their importance. Rally for change in your HOA and even on the municipal level! Ordinances can change how every HOA in the area treats natural spaces.

Tending your successful garden

Well established gardens will need less tending than the lawn it is replacing.

Watering

Established gardens shouldn't need much watering as they are suited to this climate. If you notice a drought you can lightly water, but these plants are hardy and can bounce back.

Trimming

-Trimming new meadows

New meadows shouldn't be trimmed until they are fully established. Be sure to recognize that there are still some seeds under the first growth that will need proper care to grow.

-Trimming established meadows

Established meadows can be trimmed (as high as your mower will allow) every 2-3 years or you can trim one third or half of your meadow each year in a cycle. Trimming in sections will allow constant areas of safe cover and habitat as well as late winter seed forage.

Mowing should be done in very late winter and before spring to allow maximum seed availability and to not harm any ground nesting or fledgling birds in the spring.

Clearing woody growth from meadows

Woody plants, especially invasive plants like Japanese barberry or even aggressive native plants like sweet gum trees, can start to sprout in meadows. These can be held back with regular trimming, but some of these plants can become more aggressive when cut. If you notice this happening, it is best to pull or dig them out by the root. Invasive vines like bittersweet can be particularly aggressive when trimmed, so you should pull them as soon as you notice them!

Reseeding

If you feel your meadow needs a boost, gather seeds sustainably (30%) from your meadow and sprinkle them by hand through the plot. Otherwise, perennials should keep coming back up on their own and should be able to reseed naturally. The trimming process should also scatter seeds for you.

If you want to expand your garden or start a new one, just use this gathering method and go through the same process you used to start!