

# GROW GREEN

Enhancing  
Habitats at Home







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# Did you know?

- There are more than 20,000 known bee species, with 4,000 bee-ing native to the United States!
- Wisconsin is home to over 400 species of wild bees, including the endangered Rusty Patch Bumblebee.
- The Rusty Patch Bumblebee's known habitats not only include prairies and woodlands, but residential parks and gardens as well! (Williams et al. 2014)



[How many species of native bees are in the United States?](#)  
| [United States Geological Survey](#)

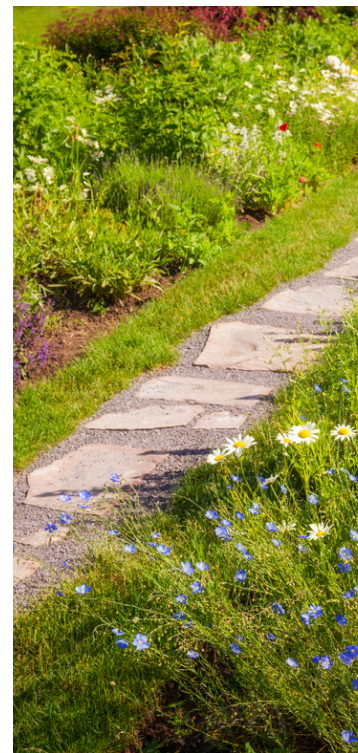
[Bully for Bees](#) | [Wisconsin DNR](#)

[Rusty Patched Bumblebee](#)  
| [US Fish & Wildlife Service](#)



# Introduction

**Welcome!** to this comprehensive guidance document on the concept of "Grow Green." Staff with the City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department have compiled a variety of resources to assist you in completing an impactful month of "Grow Green", while also providing guidance to continue your sustainability efforts beyond the month of May. In this document, we will explore the definition of Grow Green, a movement that encourages homeowners to support biodiversity and pollinators. We will also look forward to discovering the benefits of participating in Grow Green, practical tips for implementing it on your property, and the positive impact it can have on the environment. Get ready to learn how a small change in your lawn care routine can make a big difference for nature!





# Connections to the Climate Action Plan

The City of La Crosse is committed to environmental stewardship and sustainability. No Mow May proves to be an impactful initiative that engages the community and aligns with broader environmental sustainability and conservation goals within the community. Specific sections and strategies are detailed throughout the plan, along with actions to complete these strategies.

Section 8: Greenspace, Trees, and Ecosystems identifies a specific strategy in reference to pollinator support.

**GS 2: Increase pollinator supportiveness of lawns and grasslands in the community and achieve a 5% turf replacement with native grasses and wildflowers by 2030 (175 acres reduced by 2030).**

Replacing lawns with native grasses and wildflowers creates a more authentic, natural American landscape that combats climate change and provides shelter and food for songbirds and other small mammals. Compared to the typical lawn, native grasses improve water quality, reduce air pollution, provide habitat restoration and protection, and increase carbon sequestration. Nearly 3,800 acres of land in La Crosse (27% of all land) is covered in grasses. 90% of all grass land coverage is manicured, mowed lawns with the remaining 10% being native/prairie grasses.



**[Learn more about the City's Climate Action Plan here.](#)**



# CURRENTLY IN LA CROSSE

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**30%**  
Average Tree  
Canopy Coverage

**30%**  
Maintained Lawn  
Coverage

**11.9%**  
Impervious Surface  
Coverage

**1.8<sup>°F</sup>**  
Hotter than  
surrounding region  
due to urban heat  
island effect



# What is Grow Green?

Grow Green started as an initiative called “No Mow May”, encouraging homeowners to let their lawns grow naturally without mowing them during the month of May. This practice aimed to support biodiversity by providing habitat and food for pollinators like bees and butterflies. Since its inception, additional research has been provided and we’ve shifted to our “Grow Green” initiative. The residual impacts of participating in Grow Green can include a healthier lawn ecosystem, increased pollinator populations, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions from lawn mowers. This year, La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry is looking to go beyond No Mow May, and helping our community “Grow Green” by including sustainable lawncare practices, lawn alternatives, pollinator and rain gardens, and more! By allowing native vegetation to flourish, individuals can contribute to a more sustainable environment and promote the well-being of local wildlife.





# Why Grow Green?

City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department has chosen "Grow Green" as a deliberate environmental initiative aimed at enhancing biodiversity and providing crucial support for pollinators such as bees, butterflies, and other insects. During this period, by refraining from mowing public and private green spaces, longer grasses and wildflowers are allowed to flourish, creating habitats rich in nectar and pollen. This not only benefits the pollinators, which are essential for the pollination of many crops and wild plants, but also promotes a more diverse and resilient local ecosystem. Additionally, "Grow Green" helps in reducing carbon emissions from lawn maintenance equipment, contributing to a greener, more sustainable urban environment. This initiative reflects a growing recognition of the importance of ecological conservation within urban planning, emphasizing the simple yet impactful ways cities can contribute to the global environmental effort.

**Aid  
Pollinators**

**Reduce  
Carbon  
Emissions**

**Increase  
Native  
Plantings**

**Diverse  
Ecosystems**

**Resilient  
Ecosystems**



# Getting Started with Grow Green

Getting started with Grow Green is as simple as it sounds! New to Grow Green and need a bit of assistance? We've created a step-by-step checklist to set you up for success!

**Step 1:** Register for Grow Green in person, by phone or by visiting <https://bit.ly/NMMregistrationLAX> beginning Monday, March 25th.

**Step 2:** Download the Grow Green poster to display on your property during the month of May.

**Step 3:** Select the area of your lawn or yard that you will allow to grow wild during the month of May.

**Step 4:** Participate in the "Spring for Sustainability" workshop on Wednesday, April 24th to learn more about sustainable landscaping practices and make your very own seed bomb with native seeds!

**Step 5:** Take note of any native plants or wildflowers that grow in the area during the month.

**Step 6:** Share your experience and photos on social media using #NoMowLaCrosse to raise awareness.

**Step 7:** Follow the steps on page 18 to guide you in returning your lawn to compliance. Remember, all lawns must be returned to compliance by June 7.

**Step 8:** Participate in the follow-up survey. Your feedback helps shape the future of our programs!

Register for Grow Green at [bit.ly/NMMregistrationLAX](https://bit.ly/NMMregistrationLAX)



# Grow Green FAQs

## Do I have to register?

We encourage all participants of Grow Green to register as a participant. This helps us track engagement and create accurate reports. Plus, you get free educational materials and a citizen participation sticker when you register!

**How can I register?** **Grow Green** registration is available to any City of La Crosse resident. Visit [bit.ly/NMMregistrationLAX](https://bit.ly/NMMregistrationLAX) to register your lawn, and make a spring sustainability pledge!

**I don't have a lawn. How can I help?** If you don't have a lawn, you can still help pollinators by planting a pollinator friendly pot or window box. Pollinators can also benefit from water and shelter. Consider providing bee nest boxes, and water such as a bird bath. Learn more on page 11.

## What City properties are participating in Grow Green?

You may notice longer grass and Grow Green signage at All Abilities Trane Park, Myrick Park, Leuth Park and Pettibone Parks in 2024.

## What else is the City doing to promote sustainability?

Check out the City of La Crosse's [Climate Action Plan](#), or visit our [Sustainability Page](#) to learn more about the Parks Department's sustainability initiatives.

## Do I have to go all month without mowing?

No! For some properties, a “**Low Mow May**” may be more suitable, other properties may benefit and have resources to increase habitat with a pollinator garden. What works for one lawn may not work for every lawn.



# Make it Manageable

While there are a number of ways to participate in Grow Green this year, if you choose to reduce mowing for the entire month, consider the information below as you prepare to for a manageable Grow Green Season.

## Tips for a manageable Grow Green:



Consider altering your mowing schedules from every week, to every other or every two weeks to mitigate the length of grass you'll be cutting at the end of the month.



Keep your lawn mower height deck at its highest setting, and always keep your mower blades sharp. Dull blades tear the grass rather than cutting it.



If your clippings are too thick to leave on your lawn, bag them and bring them to the [Isle La Plume Brush & Yard Waste Site](#) located at 2000 Marcou Drive.



Create paths or islands of unmown grass in your yard so you can walk around and observe the effects of Grow Green.

[!\[\]\(d3102649f02e825ddb76dc3de0190154\_img.jpg\) Click here to learn more about Lawn Care & Stormwater Pollution Prevention](#)



# No Lawn? No Problem!

For those living in apartments or homes without gardens, consider growing native plants on balconies, patios, or even windowsills to attract and nourish urban wildlife. Engaging in community gardens or supporting local green spaces that practice similar biodiversity-friendly initiatives can amplify the impact. Additionally, advocating for the adoption of Grow Green policies in public and shared spaces within communities can help spread awareness and benefits. Sharing knowledge and experiences on social media can also encourage wider participation, demonstrating that every little effort contributes to the broader goal of supporting local ecosystems.



Providing pollinators with shelter or habitat is crucial for sustaining ecosystems, as it supports their role in pollinating plants, which is vital for food production and biodiversity.



Consider growing native plants on balconies, patios, or even windowsills to attract and nourish urban wildlife.



Providing a reliable source of clean, unpolluted water can help pollinators like bees and wasps nest successfully, reduce the time they need to forage, and reduce their risk of exposure to pesticides.

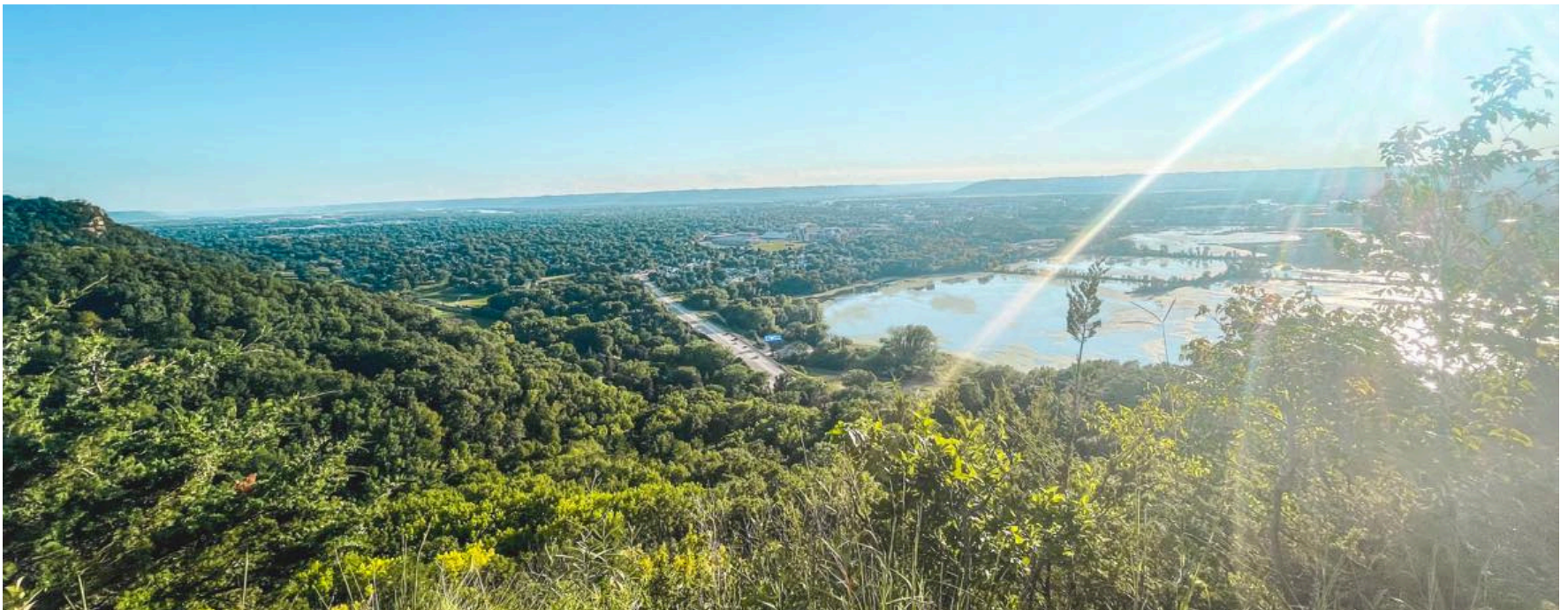


Advocate for Ecosystems! Supporting local and national conservation efforts and educating others about the importance of pollinators in our ecosystem can help ensure their survival and prosperity.



# Beyond Grow Green

The journey towards a truly sustainable coexistence with nature doesn't end as May transitions into June. Going beyond "Grow Green" is not just beneficial, but necessary for our environment. The extension of environmental stewardship beyond a single month invites us to consider more holistic and long-term practices that can significantly impact our community's (and planet's) health. From exploring alternative landscaping methods that support a diversity of flora and fauna to adopting eco-friendly lawn care techniques that reduce chemical and water usage, the ideas presented aim to inspire a year-round commitment to nurturing our planet. By embracing these practices, we can contribute to creating more resilient ecosystems, enhancing urban green spaces, and fostering a deeper connection between individuals and the natural world around them. The journey beyond "Grow Green" is an opportunity to transform our environmental consciousness into tangible action, ensuring that the seeds of change planted in May flourish throughout the year.



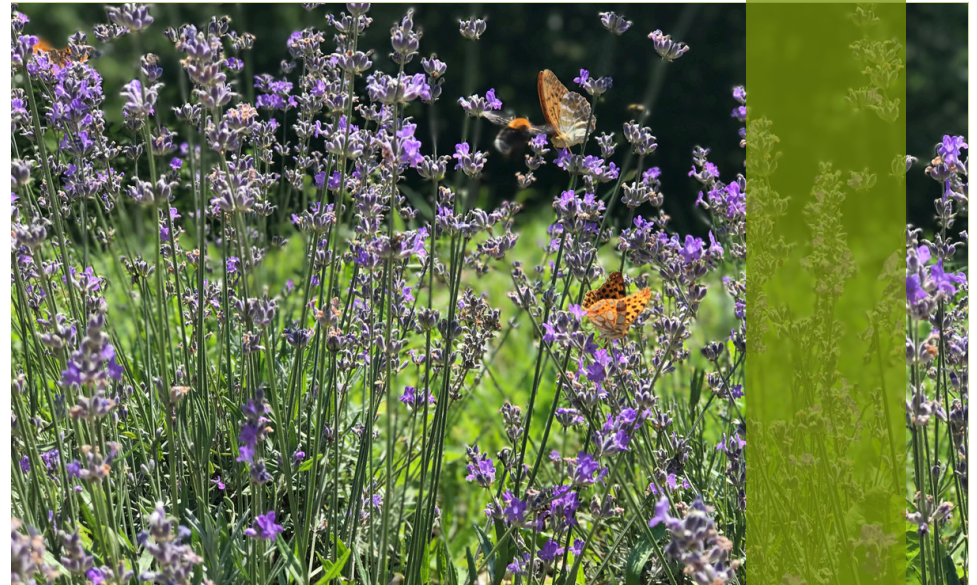


# Beyond No Mow May cont.

## Pollinator Gardens

Pollinator gardens provide a diverse habitat for a variety of insects, including bees, butterflies, and other vital pollinators. These gardens, especially when utilizing native species, can improve soil health, reduce water usage compared to traditional lawns, and decrease the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides, contributing to a healthier ecosystem. The rich biodiversity in these gardens not only supports pollinators but also enhances the beauty of the landscape and provides educational opportunities for communities to learn about the importance of biodiversity and conservation efforts.

[!\[\]\(666e09182d4cd268646ea700ea60dcdf\_img.jpg\) Learn more about planting Pollinator Gardens in Wisconsin](#)



## Low-Mow Summer

Reducing mowing frequency can help promote biodiversity by allowing a variety of plants to flourish, which in turn supports a wider range of wildlife, including beneficial insects and pollinators. Longer grass blades can also improve soil moisture retention, reducing the need for frequent watering. Additionally, grass cut less often tends to develop deeper root systems, enhancing the lawn's resilience to drought and reducing soil erosion. According to a study by the University of Minnesota Extension, infrequent mowing can lead to healthier lawns that are more resistant to pests and diseases, providing a sustainable approach to lawn maintenance.

[!\[\]\(17413706fd4997a1a4bdf85c6864eee1\_img.jpg\) Learn more about healthy lawn care practices from the UMN Extension](#)



# Beyond Grow Green cont.



## Eliminate the Lawn

Replacing all or parts of a traditional turf lawn with environmentally friendly alternatives offers a multitude of benefits. Native plants are adapted to the local climate and soil conditions, making them more resilient and requiring less water than their non-native counterparts. This not only conserves precious water resources but also reduces the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Lawn alternatives, such as clover or moss, can provide a lush, green space with minimal maintenance, saving time and reducing the reliance on gas-powered lawn equipment. By making this shift, homeowners can enjoy a unique and vibrant landscape that supports the planet and its ecosystems.

[!\[\]\(c3d993ca47bfe2a953c700506ce31fa0\_img.jpg\) Learn more about Lawn Alternatives from Iowa State Extension.](#)

## Make it a Meadow

Visually, a native meadow introduces a dynamic and colorful landscape that changes throughout the seasons, offering a unique and beautiful alternative to traditional lawns. In addition to the aesthetic benefits, water consumption is significantly reduced as native plants are adapted to local rainfall patterns and require less supplemental watering. Additionally, a native meadow provides vital habitat and food sources for local wildlife, including pollinators like bees and butterflies, enhancing biodiversity.

[!\[\]\(003082e50e3009141f59bd5df831749f\_img.jpg\) Plan your meadow using American Meadows “Meadowverse Tool”](#)



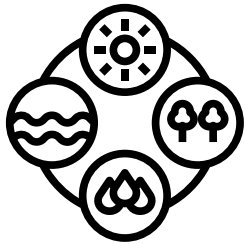




# Why We Need Native Plants

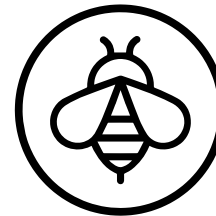
Native plants offer a deeper connection to the land and its ecological history. By introducing them to your garden or land, you are not only enhancing the beauty of your surroundings but also creating a habitat that supports local wildlife and biodiversity. These plants have evolved to thrive in our specific region, making them well-adapted to the local climate and soil conditions. Through the cultivation of native plants, you are contributing to the preservation of your ecosystem and promoting a sustainable approach to gardening. Embrace the wonders of native plants and witness the magic they bring to your outdoor space.

## Native Plants Support:



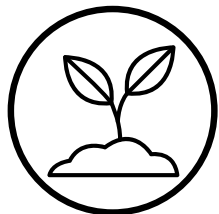
### Ecosystem Restoration

By planting native species, you are restoring ecosystems and preserving countless species that might otherwise be lost forever.



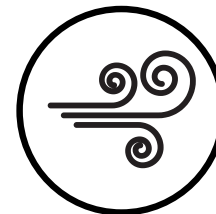
### Pollinator Conservation

90% of our native insects are specialists, meaning they require a native host plant in their life cycle.



### Healthy Soils

Native plants and beneficial insects help to keep soils balanced and healthy. Native plants prevent soil erosion, create topsoil and build fertility.



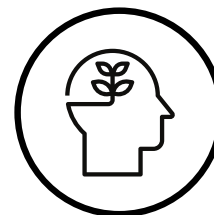
### Clean Air

Planting green spaces like forests, prairies, and meadows can absorb pollutants and carbon, improving air quality and helping combat climate change.



### Clean Water

Native plants' root systems function as a sponge and filter, aiding in rainfall and stormwater absorption into the soil and removing excess nutrients and pollutants, enhancing water quality.



























### LEARN MORE

Learn more about Native Plants from our friends at [Prairie Moon Nursery](#) or from [American Meadows](#)



# Native Plant Garden Planner

Keep track of the native plants you plan to incorporate into your garden using this planner. Strive for a variety of bloom periods and benefits for local wildlife. Get a step by step planting guide at: <https://widnr.widen.net/s/kwppnwt6mg>

COMMON NAME / SCIENTIFIC NAME	MATURE SIZE	SUN REQUIREMENTS	BLOOM PERIOD	WILDLIFE BENEFITS	NOTES
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		<input type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Sp Su F W	  	
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# Returning to Compliance

**Reminder:** All lawns must be in compliance with [La Crosse Municipal Code § 30-4](#) by June 7th, 2024.

As the deadline for ensuring compliance with the La Crosse Municipal Code §30-4 approaches, it is essential to take proactive steps to maintain your lawn. Use the tips below to prepare for a return to compliance, while practicing sustainable lawn care!

## Tips for Returning to Compliance



### Stay Sharp

Keep your mower blades sharp! Dull blades leave jagged edges and plants are more susceptible to diseases. Clean cut grass blades are able to conserve water, reducing need for irrigation.



### Think Increments

Remove no more than 1/3 of the leaf tissue when you mow. Mowing too short can allow weed seeds to get more sun and increase the chance of germination, puts stress on the grass, and makes it more susceptible to diseases, pests, and drought



### Keep Your Clippings

Leaving your clippings on the lawn can improve soil quality and minimize runoff, improve carbon sequestration, and can act as the equivalent to one fertilizer application to your lawn each year.



### Stand Tall

Increase mowing height by an inch during mid-summer to improve lawn's ability to tolerate stress caused by heat and drying winds.

[Visit UMN-Extension to learn more about Mowing practices for healthy lawns.](#)



# Resources

Each of the resources below is linked directly to the website where you can find additional information on the topic you've selected.

## Pollinators

1. [City of La Crosse Climate Action Plan](#)
2. [Saving Wisconsin's Native Pollinators - Wisconsin DNR](#)
3. [Planting & Maintaining a Bee Lawn - University of Minnesota Extension](#)

## Native Plants

1. [Plant Native Plants to Help Nature - Wisconsin DNR](#)
2. [Pollinator Friendly Native Plant Lists - Xerces Society](#)
3. [Lawn Alternatives - Iowa State University Extension](#)
4. [Planting & Maintaining a Bee Lawn - University of Minnesota Extension](#)

## Lawn Care

1. [Reduced Mowing Studies - Bee City, USA](#)
2. [Sustainable Lawn Care Guide - Habitat For Humanity, La Crosse](#)
3. [Sustainable Lawn Care - University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum](#)
4. [Lawn Maintenance - University of Wisconsin Extension, Horticulture](#)
5. [Mowing for a Healthy Lawn - University of Minnesota Extension](#)
6. [Lawn Alternatives to Turf Grass - Iowa State University Extension](#)
7. [Planting & Maintaining a Bee Lawn - University of Minnesota Extension](#)

## References

1. [Now Mow May: A Gateway to Better Landscape Management - Xerces Society](#)
2. [Reduced Mowing Studies - Bee City, USA](#)
3. [City of La Crosse Climate Action Plan](#)

“

Do your little bit of good where you are; it is those little bits of good put all together that overwhelm the world.

-Desmond Tutu