Slow Mow-Let it Grow FAQ

Q: Is Slow Mow-Let it Grow Effective?

A: Both scientific and local data demonstrate the effectiveness of Slow Mow-Let it Grow in pollinator conservation. Several peer-reviewed scientific papers provide evidence of this practice as a beneficial initiative for pollinator abundance. These papers are linked below. Sun Prairie has also collected local pollinator activity data through the Wisconsin Wild Bee app, or Wibee. Based on Sun Prairie's 2023 data, pollinator diversity is significantly higher in unmowed lawns. Additionally, our data showed that visits to flowers by wild bees are almost twice as high in unmowed lawns. NMM is also beneficial for limiting greenhouse gas emissions, as lawn care equipment produces 5% of the nation's air pollution (EPA). In 2024, Sun Prairie's NMM initiative conserved 1378.1 pounds of CO_2 equivalents.

Q: Do I have to go all month without mowing?

A: No! While avoiding mowing altogether will create the most resources for pollinators, this may not be feasible for every resident, which is okay! Committing to "Low Mow" by reducing your lawn care activities in spring will create a positive impact. Any increase in foraging habitat for pollinators should be considered a successful implementation of beneficial and sustainable lawn care practices.

Q: How can I cut my lawn after May in a sustainable way?

A: After May, mowing long lawns can pose challenges for both pollinators and our lawnmowers. Furthermore, cutting back the entire grass blade length at once will stimulate a hormonal response in the plant to regrow the photosynthetic tissues, leading to a faster-growing lawn and the need for more frequent mowings. Fortunately, there's a strategy that simplifies mowing, promotes lawn health, and minimizes environmental impact.

(cont.) According to Dr. Paul Koch, an associate professor in the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the “1/3 rule” is the least ecologically disruptive mowing tactic. To follow this strategy, never cut more than 1/3 of the total grass length in one mowing. This reduces stress on the plant. After cutting 1/3 of the turf leaf blades, try to wait 3 to 5 days before mowing again.

Q: What options are available for replacing pesticides, herbicides, or other chemical appliances?

A: When applied improperly, lawn chemicals can run off into streams, harming fish and contaminating water. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the use of lawn chemicals accounts for the majority of wildlife poisonings. Additionally, lawn chemicals can deter and harm local pollinators. There are many alternatives to typical pesticides that are safer for humans, pollinators, and the environment. See the Additional Resources and Readings page for more information.

Q: If I don’t have flowering species in my lawn, will my participation in Slow Mow-Let it Grow make a difference?

A: There are many ways to support the abundance of pollinators in the spring. Reducing herbicide and pesticide use in your yard is an excellent way to give pollinators a greater chance of survival. Additionally, planting native plants and providing bee watering stations can make your yard a safe and reliable environment for pollinators. For those looking to transform their yard into a pollinator haven, consider seeding a no-mow or low-mow lawn, either across your entire lawn, or in small sections. See the Additional Resources section below for further guidance on incorporating these resources into your yard.

Q: How is the changing climate affecting the NMM initiative?

A: A primary goal of NMM is to boost food resources for early-season pollinators so they can thrive for the rest of the summer and into fall. Beginning this initiative in May is not mandatory, however. As our climate shifts and average temperatures rise, reducing mowing earlier in the season can be even more beneficial. Most native bee species will emerge from hibernation when nighttime temperatures are consistently above fifty degrees. As pollinators start coming out earlier on average, it will be crucial to reduce mowing during these earlier months.

Sources

- spring (epa.gov)
- https://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/lawn-and-garden#pratices
- https://www.des.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt341/files/documents/2020-01/ard-22.pdf
- https://www.mymonona.com/1573/No-Mow-May-Healthy-Lawns
- https://www.ucdavis.edu/climate/blog/bees-face-many-challenges-and-climate-change-ratcheting-pressure

Additional Resources and Reading

The American Obsession with Lawns | Scientific American
The Great American Lawn: How the Dream Was Manufactured - The New York Times
Saving Wisconsin's Native Pollinators | | Wisconsin DNR
5 Steps to Planting a Pollinator Garden in Wisconsin (wisconservation.org)
Let's Grow Stuff: Replace your lawn with something better, a beginner's guide - PBS Wisconsin
Bee Lawns: Using Your Lawn to Provide Food for Pollinators
National Pollinator Week: The Climate Threat to Bees | Department of Energy
Climate Change Is Ratcheting Up the Pressure on Bees | UC Davis
What you need to know about No-Mow May, the bee-boosting trend sweeping Wisconsin - WPR
Chapter 8.28 - NATURAL LAWN PERMITS | Code of Ordinances | Sun Prairie, WI | Municode Library
Chapter 8.36 - NOXIOUS WEEDS | Code of Ordinances | Sun Prairie, WI | Municode Library
How to Plant a Clover Lawn—and Why You Should (thespruce.com)
Modeling the status, trends, and impacts of wild bee abundance in the United States | PNAS
Watering Stations 101: An Easy Way To Enhance Pollinator Habitats - The Outdoor Apothecary