



Slow Mow Let it Grow



2025 Impact Report



2025 Impact Metrics



188

Total registrants
(86 new, 102
returning)



54

Acres of
pollinator
foraging
resources
conserved



1,170

pounds of CO2
equivalents
avoided



6,354

people reached
through social
media and the Big
5 newsletter

What Is Slow Mow Let it Grow?

Slow Mow Let it Grow (SM) is a Sun Prairie program that encourages community members to reduce mowing practices during the spring. The purpose of SM is to provide early-season foraging resources and habitat for pollinators. It can be challenging for pollinators to find food during the onset of spring. Allowing lawns to grow and flower increases the food supply for pollinators. Additionally, not mowing reduces emissions from lawn care machinery.



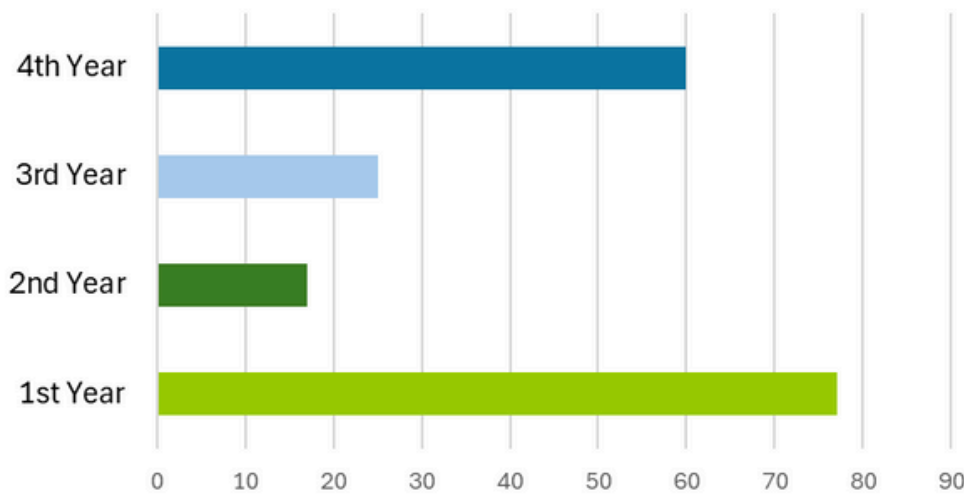
Slow Mow Let it Grow In Sun Prairie

The SM program was previously known as “No Mow May.” In 2025, Council rebranded the program to “Slow Mow Let it Grow” and extended the program dates from 4/21 - 5/31 to align with the earlier onset of spring observed in southern Wisconsin. Updating “Slow Mow” to “No Mow” encompasses a wider variety of sustainable lawn care practices. During the program, the city suspends its noxious weed ordinance to allow for these pollinator-friendly lawns.

Citizen Participation Data

In order to register for the SM program in Sun Prairie, participants are asked to fill out a form with questions related to: Years of Participation, Lawn Care Commitments, Lawn Mower Types, Mowing Frequency Outside of Program, Pollinator Conservation Practices, and Pesticide and Fertilizer Use. Below are the survey results and comparisons between this year's data and last year's.

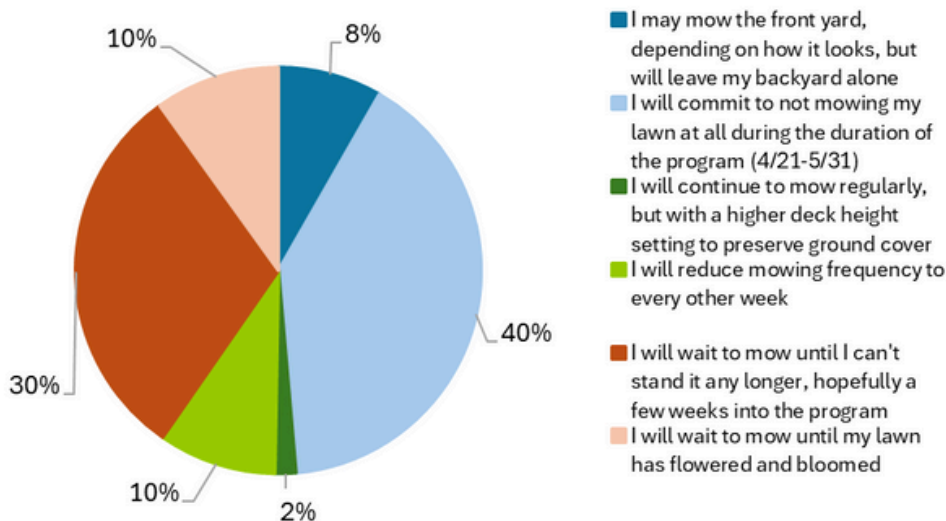
Years of Participation



There was an increase in first year participants in SM with 77 new participants. Additionally there were 60 participants returning for their 4th year!



Lawn Care Commitments

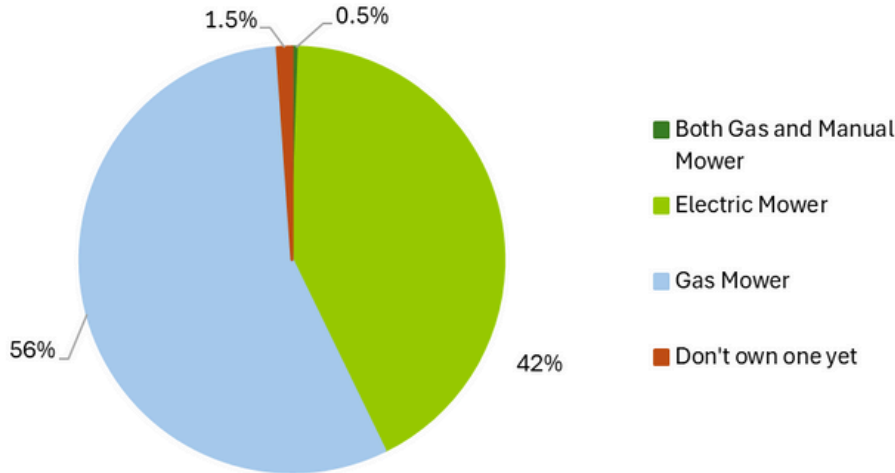


Although commitment to not mowing for the entire program duration dropped slightly, participants waiting until they "can't stand it" stayed the same. Additionally, we had a new category of waiting to mow until flowers bloomed, which captured about 10% of participants. Overall, participants are waiting longer to mow during the program.

Citizen Participation Data

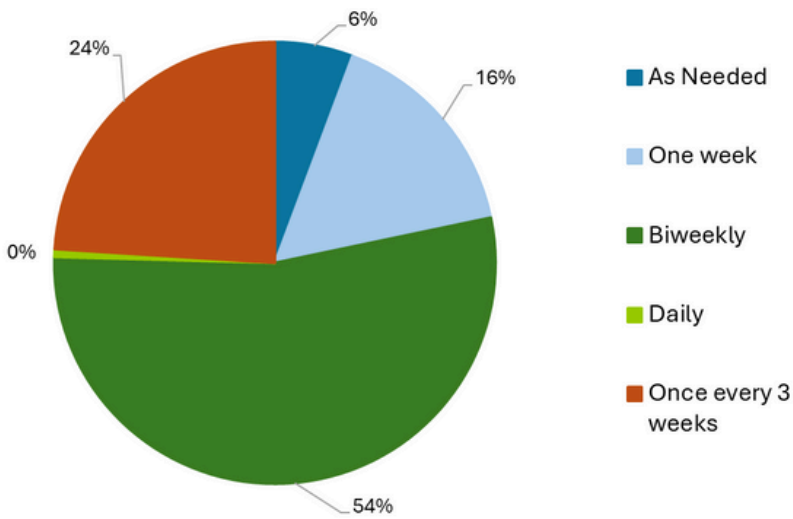


Lawn Mower Types



The percentage of electric mowers stayed the same, while the number of gas mowers increased slightly. There were a few participants who did not yet own a lawn mower.

Mowing Frequency Outside of Program



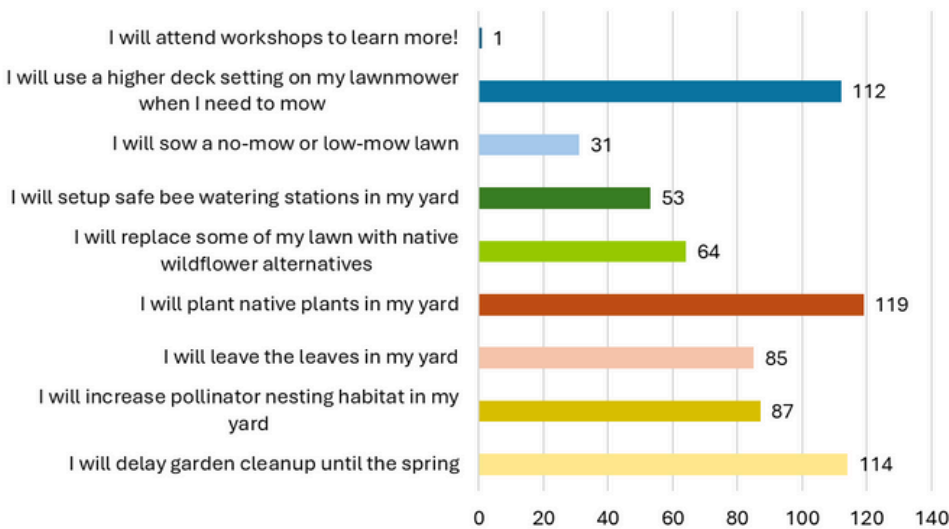
Outside of the program, around 54% of participants mow their lawn biweekly, which is consistent with the previous year. There was an increase in participants who mow their lawn every 3 weeks and a decrease in participants who mow weekly.



Citizen Participation Data



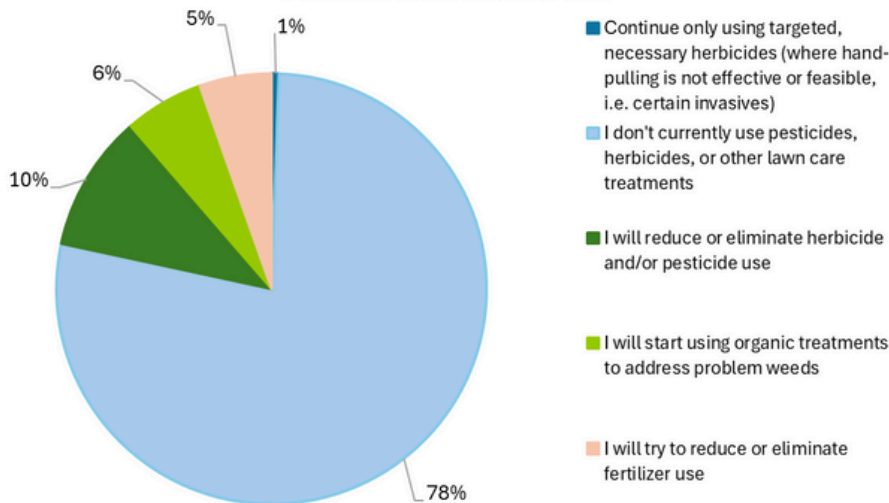
Pollinator Conservation Practices



There was an increase in people participating in every category, but most notably, planting native plants increased from 3 to 119 this year! Additionally, 112 people committed to the new category of a higher deck setting when mowing.



Pesticide and Fertilizer Use



There were 12% more participants this year that don't use any pesticides or herbicides on their lawn, as well as an increase in participants who use organic treatments. There were also 2 new sections added for fertilizer use and targeted herbicide use. There was some confusion with the way the questions were presented, so this may not be a completely accurate representation.

Citizen Feedback

The majority of the comments regarding SM were positive. Many people noted their excitement, curiosity, and thankfulness for the initiative. A few participants shared their ideas for improving the initiative in future years. Below are some of the most frequent comments, suggestions, and concerns surrounding SM.



Comments

- Glad Sun Prairie continues to work on sustainable initiatives.
- I'm so glad Sun Prairie continues to do this program, including the thoughtful rebranding.
- Hi there! Really excited to see the new rebranding follow the research on climate and habitat! Great job!
- Love it—thanks for doing this.
- So glad you are doing this again!
- We just moved to Sun Prairie, thanks for having this program!
- Please keep up the great work!
- I appreciate that I live in a city dedicated to doing its best for the environment, and that it changes its approach based on new findings. We have a great community!

Suggestions

- More pollinator gardens
- Consider banning synthetic fertilizers, insecticides, rodenticides, herbicides, fungicides etc.
- More clarity on when workshops are/more notice



Concerns

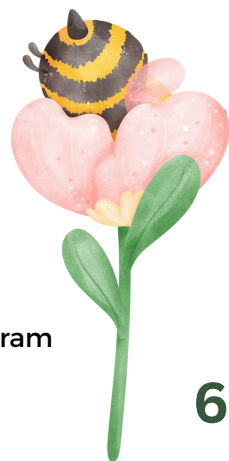
- Complaints from neighbors about the lawns and confusion about city and HOA guidelines
- Concerns about allergens, aesthetic look of lawns, and wildlife hiding in laws

City Park Participation

The following selected areas within Sun Prairie parks and green spaces were a part of the 2025 Slow Mow Let it Grow program.

- Sheehan Park (Central)
- Sheehan Park (East)
- Wyndham Hills Park
- Shonas Highlands Park (some mow-biweekly)
- City property north of community gardens
- City property north of Renstone Park
- City property along bike path (some mow-biweekly)

Over 6.6 acres of
pollinator
foraging
resources
conserved in
parks!



Fawn pictured in the unmowed area of Sheehan park during the 2022 No Mow May program

Other Community Efforts

In addition to Sun Prairie's Slow Mow Let It Grow initiative, several other projects were implemented, seeking to educate and boost pollinator abundance throughout the spring

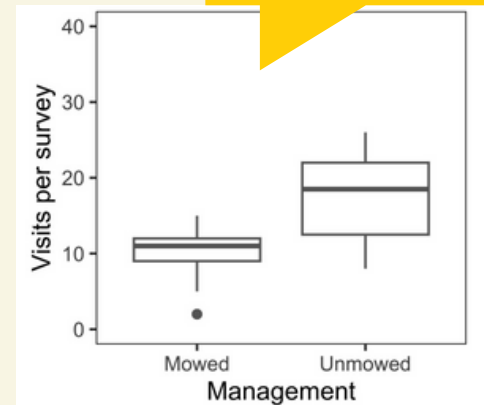
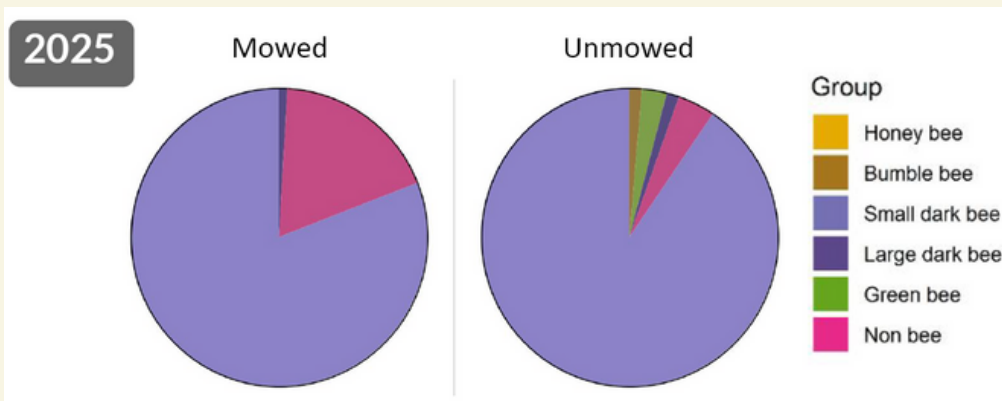
Community Science Initiative

Like in previous years, SM participants had the opportunity to engage in a community science initiative by collecting pollinator activity data in their yards. This data was collected through the Wisconsin Wild Bee app (WiBee). A total of 17 surveys were completed. The pie charts on the right demonstrate greater pollinator diversity in unmowed versus mowed lawns.

[More on WiBee App!](#)

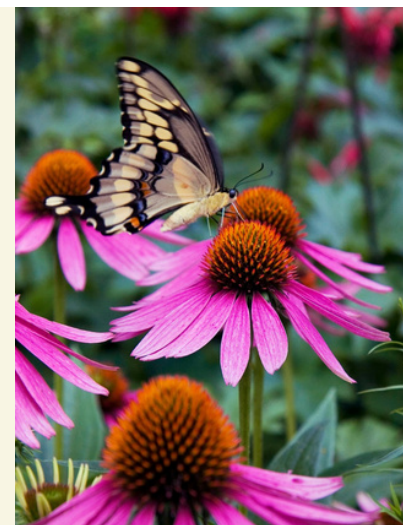


Visits per survey by wild bees were nearly twice as high in unmowed lawns as in mowed lawns. This data is consistent with previous years, showing that SM is effective.



Free Native Plants

This year, Sun Prairie gave out a free native plant to all participants who registered for Slow Mow Let it Grow and those who attended the natural lawn workshop. Participants were able to pick up these plants on May 21st at the Orfan Park Beer Garden. White Pelican Farm donated 150 native plants of the following species: Columbine, Ohio Spiderwort, Blue Flag Iris, False Solomon's Seal, Little Bluestem, Pale Purple Coneflower, Nodding Onion, Yellow Coneflower, Obedient Plant, and Yellow Giant Hyssop.



Pollinator Gardens

Near the end of May, Sun Prairie Park Friends installed four pollinator gardens in Sunset Park, Liberty Park, Birkinbine Park, and Wetmore Park. These gardens are full of native plants and flowers that attract a variety of spring pollinators. These gardens can be seen on the participation map on page 9. [Click here to learn more about our local pollinator gardens.](#)

Park Friends planting a pollinator garden at Sunset Community Park(2024)

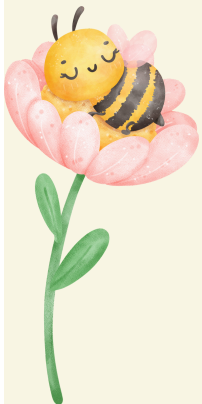


Park Friends replanting part of the controlled burn area in Wyndham Hills Park(2025)














Citizen Observation & Plant Identification Guide

Due to all sorts of native flowers and plants popping up during SM, in 2024, the city encouraged people to submit photos of plants they didn't recognize in their lawn. In 2025, the City identified the plants and added them to a plant identification guide in an effort to support the identification of plants commonly found in Wisconsin lawns.



COMMON PLANTS IN SUN PRAIRIE LAWNS

If you participate in Slow Mow- Let it Grow you may see these plants flowering in your lawns. Once you can identify them, you can determine if you want to maintain or control them in your own yard!

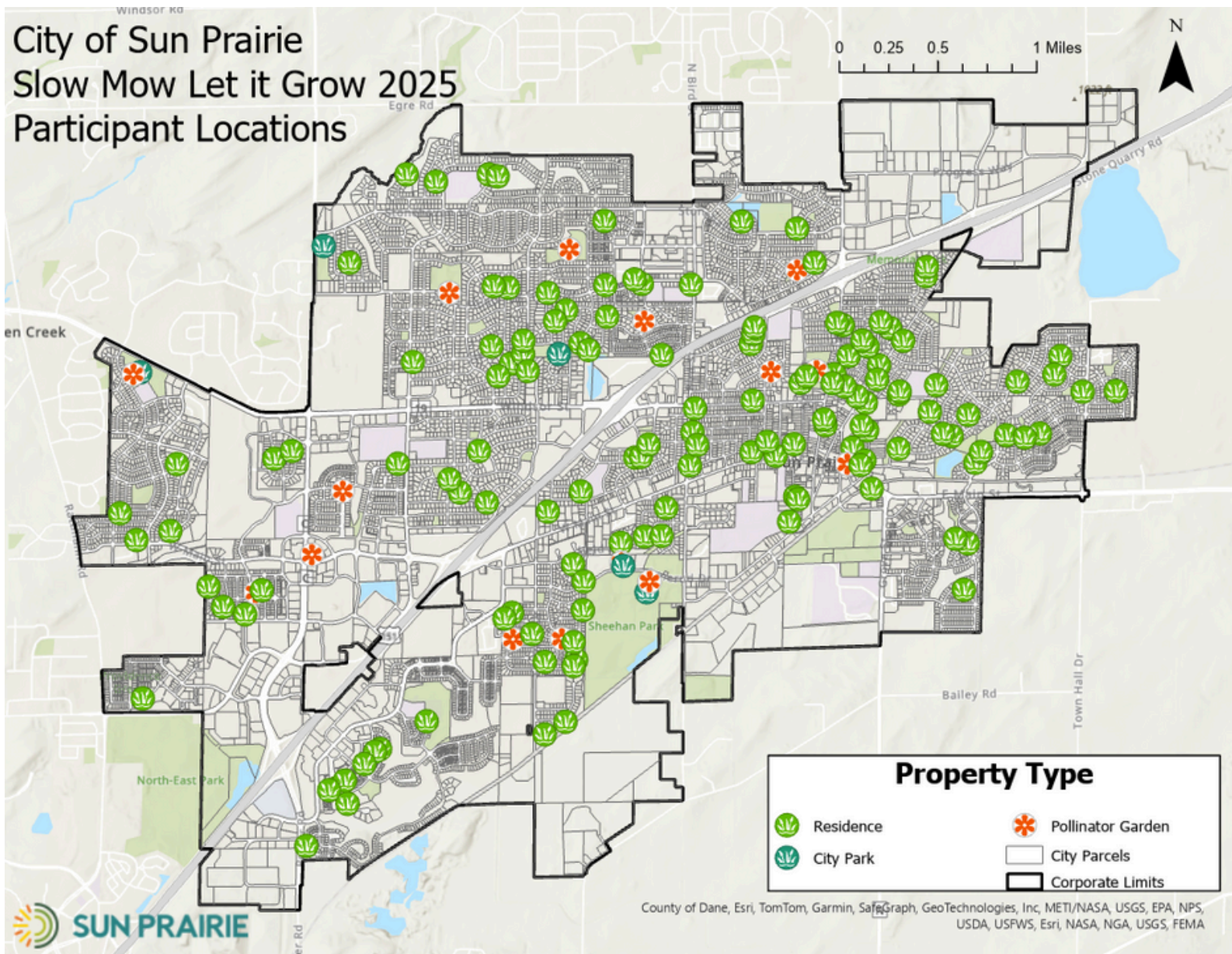
 <i>White Asters</i>	 <i>Wood Sorrel</i>
 <i>Northern Ragwort</i>	 <i>Wood Violet (white form), WI State Flower</i>
 <i>Wood Violet, WI State Flower</i>	 <i>Creeping Charlie</i>
 <i>Red Clover</i>	 <i>Garlic Mustard</i>
 <i>Dandelion</i>	 <i>Dame's Rocket</i>
 <i>White Clover</i>	

■ Plants with a Red Border- Invasive plants or low benefits to pollinators
■ Plants with a Green Border- Native plants, provide benefits for pollinators and Wisconsin biodiversity and environment
■ Plants with a Blue Border- These plants may be labeled as "common lawn weeds" by some, but also provide benefits to the environment and pollinators

Thank you to all citizen scientist participants that submitted photos of their No Mow May lawns in 2024 that provided the photos for this handout! Each species name is hyperlinked with further useful information on identification, benefits, and management/control.

Participation Map

Below is a map of the 2025 SM participants and pollinator gardens. Click on map to view in full resolution.



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is Slow Mow Let it Grow Effective?

A: Both scientific and local data demonstrate the effectiveness of SM in pollinator conservation. Several peer-reviewed scientific papers provide evidence of SM 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. Sun Prairie's 2023, 2024, and 2025 data consistently demonstrates that pollinator diversity is significantly higher in unmowed lawns compared to mowed lawns, and visits to flowers by wild bees are almost twice as high in unmowed lawns. SM 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 SM initiative reduced local greenhouse gas emissions by 1,378.1 lbs of CO2 equivalents.

Q: What should I do if there are baby animals nesting in my yard?

A: The City is aware that wildlife may nest in unmowed areas. Participants are asked to carefully inspect their lawns before mowing. If a nest is found, they should avoid disturbing it and mow around the area until the animals have left.

Q: What are Bee-friendly Watering Stations?

A: . Although pollinators can get water from many natural sources, such as lakes, rivers, etc., they are unable to swim and prefer to have a spot to sit, so having a safe nearby supply of water is best. Some [ideas for bee-friendly watering stations](#) are to fill a hummingbird feeder with water, fill a shallow dish or bowl with water and add rocks or marbles, add rocks to a bird bath, or add rocks to a pet's outdoor water dish. Additionally, make sure the water you put in the dish is pure (no additives, excessive chlorination, etc.) More resources [here](#) and [here](#)



Frequently asked questions

Q: How can I sustainably cut my lawn after the program?

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. 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.



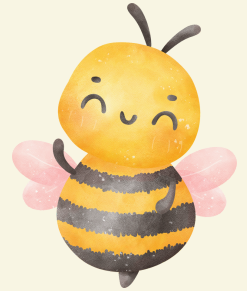
Sun Prairie family's before and after pictures of their lawn during 2025 Slow Mow Let it Grow program

Why not Slow Mow all season?

What Are Low Mow Lawns/ Natural Lawns?

In spring of 2025, Sun Prairie revamped its Natural Lawn program, making it easier for residents to register with the city's program. Here is the link to [Sun Prairie's Natural Lawn Registration Page](#) with additional resources below.

- [Registration Form](#)
- [4/8/25 Natural Lawn Workshop Slides](#)
- [What is Native Landscaping?](#)
- [Pollinators - Wisconsin Horticulture](#)
- [Natural Lawn Permit Ordinance](#)
- [Noxious Weed Ordinance & Species List](#)
- [DNR List of Invasive Species](#)
- [The Nature Conservancy tutorial on transitioning to a natural lawn](#)



Purpose of Low Mow and Natural Lawns: Provide food and habitat to wildlife, help with water conservation, reduce emissions, reduce fertilizer and pesticide use, and increase the diversity of plants in the area.

Low Mow lawns: A longer grass mix that is mowed less frequently and uses less water. It's meant to be planted in low-traffic and shaded areas. If it is above 8 inches tall, make sure to check the city ordinance and apply for a natural lawn (links above). Clover lawns are another great option as they stay under 8 inches (no need for a permit) and help pollinators!



Natural Lawns: Mix of wild grass and native flowers that may look like a prairie or meadow. Some factors to look into are plant and grass height, sun, and soil type. These lawns increase biodiversity. Consider planting just part of your yard as a natural lawn or even a few native plants.

Additional Resources and Readings

1. Peer-reviewed scientific papers to provide evidence of the SM pollinator benefits:
 - [Lerman et al. 2023 \(Bioscience\)](#)
 - [Wastian et al. 2016 \(Journal of Hymenoptera Research\)](#)
 - [Lerman et al. 2018 \(Biological Conservation\)](#)
2. [The American Obsession with Lawns | Scientific American](#)
3. [The Great American Lawn: How the Dream Was Manufactured - The New York Times](#)
4. [Saving Wisconsin's Native Pollinators | Wisconsin DNR](#)
5. [5 Steps to Planting a Pollinator Garden in Wisconsin \(wisconservation.org\)](#)
6. [Let's Grow Stuff: Replace your lawn with something better, a beginner's guide - PBS Wisconsin](#)
7. [Bee Lawns: Using Your Lawn to Provide Food for Pollinators](#)
8. [National Pollinator Week: The Climate Threat to Bees | Department of Energy](#)
9. [Climate Change Is Ratcheting Up the Pressure on Bees | UC Davis](#)
10. [What you need to know about No-Mow May, the bee-boosting trend sweeping Wisconsin - WPR 12](#)
11. [Chapter 8.28 - NATURAL LAWN PERMITS | Code of Ordinances | Sun Prairie, WI | Municode Library](#)
12. [Chapter 8.36 - NOXIOUS WEEDS | Code of Ordinances | Sun Prairie, WI | Municode Library](#)
13. [How to Plant a Clover Lawn—and Why You Should \(thespruce.com\)](#)
14. [Modeling the status, trends, and impacts of wild bee abundance in the United States | PNAS](#)
15. [Watering Stations 101: An Easy Way To Enhance Pollinator Habitats - The Outdoor Apothecary](#)
16. [Sustainable Sun Prairie Podcast: What it Takes to Create a Pollinator Paradise](#)
17. [Sustainable Sun Prairie Podcast: No Mow May and Community Gardens](#)
18. [Sun Prairie Fall Recreation Guide](#)