



HOW TO START A Pollinator Habitat FROM SEED

SEEDBED PREPARATION

Preparing a seedbed for pollinator habitat establishment is the first and most important step toward success.

Seedbed preparation is the act of clearing existing vegetation for more successful seeding of a new pollinator habitat.

The three main methods for seedbed preparation:

1. Chemically driven herbicide
2. Tillage or mechanical means (hoe)
3. Prescribed burn

*Note: *Burning requires having an open burn permit from the IEPA and following any local ordinances.**



PLANTING TIMES

Pollinator seeds can be planted at any point between spring and fall (March 1- soil freeze)

Keep in mind, pollinator seeds need to be exposed to cold, damp conditions before germinating. So, fall is the ideal time to plant, especially after the first frost. This allows planted seeds to establish themselves without the competition of persistent unwanted plants.

SEED SELECTION

For seed selection, consider the following logistics:

Soil type and land history

A soil's composition of sand, silt, and clay particles and its history of previous usage (ex. farmland, garden, roadside, etc.) often determines how the soil in that specific area was managed (fertilization levels, tillage, etc.). This may affect your seed selection and seeding rates. Select seeds that work best for your soil.

Desired pollinators

Different plants may attract different pollinators. For example, include milkweed to attract monarch butterflies.

Plant types

Seed mixes should have a combination of flowers and grasses (recommended no more than 25% grasses). Varieties that are native to Illinois will attract native pollinators.

The amount of seed needed varies greatly depending upon the seed mix you use and how heavy you plant. Seeding rates can also vary depending on how well the seedbed was prepared. Consult your seed mix provider for an estimate of seed needed for your habitat area.

PLANTING METHODS

You have many options for seeding pollinator habitat. Choose a method based on the size of your habitat and the tools you have available.

Drilling

A mechanical method of planting using a seed drill (for areas greater than 5 acres).

Broadcasting

Spreading the seed with a mechanical broadcaster/spreader (for areas less than 5 acres).

Hand tossing

Spreading the seeds uniformly across the landscape by hand.

OTHER PLANTING CONSIDERATIONS

Carriers

Mix in carriers with seed mix for all sowing methods (ex. cracked corn, wheat, oats, sunflower seed, pelletized lime, sand, etc.) to facilitate even distribution.

Fertilizer

Applying fertilizer to native pollinator plants is unnecessary.

Roller

Using a roller after broadcasting or tossing seeds is an excellent way to get better seed-to-soil contact.

MANAGEMENT

Managing pollinator plots is especially important in years 1-5. This allows pollinator plants to establish themselves as the dominant species. At most, only manage 1/3 of the habitat at any given time so that pollinators can re-establish their colonies.

*(*Note- some native pollinator species may take 1-2 years to establish after seeding and will not flower right away.)*

Inter-Seeding

After pollinator plants are well established, consider inter-seeding new plant species into the area to ensure constant flower blooms from Apr.- Oct

Prescribed Burns

You can also use prescribed burns or tillage to help manage litter build-up and clear large sections of unwanted plants.

Insecticide Usage

If using insecticides near a pollinator habitat, exercise care and opt for formulas that target specific species and minimize harmful ingredients.

Mowing

For the first mow in the first year, do not mow until the grasses are at least 18-20 inches tall and do not mow plants shorter than eight inches. In years one and two, only mow once or twice, especially if there is a lot of rain. After the first mow, mow again when plants are 10-12" tall. No mowing is necessary after year two.

*Note: *If you're enrolled in a conservation program, you may have to adhere to specific seed selection, planting, and management criteria to maintain eligibility.*

For more detailed information, see our "Pollinator Habitat Guide for Agricultural Landscapes" at www.ilfb.org/Pollinators

