



What is it?

Slow Mow Summer is a new lawn care approach that encourages homeowners to manage their lawns as “pollinator lawns.” Such lawns are mowed less frequently in Spring, Summer, and Fall to support pollinating insect populations that contribute to our overall ecosystem. It's an extension of the “No Mow May,” initiative from several years ago. Slow Mow Summer advocates for maintaining slightly taller grass (6”) and allow low-growing flowering plants to bloom during the growing season. Landowners adopting these beneficial practices can contribute to a healthier environment and a more sustainable lawn while saving money and time on lawn care. By doing less, we all get more.

What are the benefits?

- **Less mowing**
 - Less noise & pollution from gas-powered mowers & blowers
- **Less watering**
 - Taller grass has deeper roots so it is more drought-tolerant
- **Less fertilizer is needed**
- **No need for pesticides & herbicides**
 - These chemicals will harm pollinators and the plants they rely on.
- **Supports our local environment**
 - We will have more butterflies, native bees & other beneficial insects
 - NJ has over 350 species of native bees. These are not honeybees, they do not live in hives, and normally do not sting
 - More birds
 - Better water quality in local streams since fewer pesticides & fertilizers will be in stormwater runoff

Are there any negatives?

Not everyone appreciates flowers growing in their lawns, as some may see these as undesirable weeds. That is OK, since this is completely voluntary. No one is required to do this.

How does it work?

Studies show that limiting mowing to once every two weeks during May and throughout the growing season can help support pollinators and the natural food chain (<https://beecityusa.org/reduced-mowing-studies/#>). This schedule is best implemented by setting the mower blade height at 4" and mow only when grass is 6" tall. This allows for low-growing flowering plants to thrive amidst the grass while still maintaining a general "lawn" appearance. Avoiding the use of herbicides and pesticides is also necessary. This practice assumes that most lawns have some populations of low-growing flowering native plants. Lawns with 100% turf grasses that have been maintained to be “weed-free” would initially offer few benefits to pollinators regardless of mowing frequency. After a few years, low-growing flowering plants would naturally become more widespread. Existing lawns, or just smaller designated portions of a lawn, can be made more pollinator-friendly by overseeding with low growing flowering plants, such as Dutch White Clover, Self-heal, and Creeping Thyme. Clover provides natural fertilizer because it can “fix” nitrogen within its roots which grass and other plants can use. Encouraging homeowners to establish "pollinator lawns" with a mixture of fescue grasses and flowering plants is another option. However, since some regard "non-turf" plants in their lawn as undesirable weeds, a pollinator lawn is not for everyone.

Why do we need pollinator lawns?

We can make more productive use of our lawns. It is estimated that lawns in United States cover 40 million acres—an area as expansive as Colorado. This would make grass our largest crop. Many envision the ideal American lawn as a

lush, uniform green carpet that covers their outdoor space. But this comes at a cost, both financial and ecological. Turf grass lawns often rely on pesticides, fertilizers, gas-powered mowers and blowers, and considerable water consumption for their maintenance. Meanwhile, they provide little to no food or habitat for native wildlife.

What can Waldwick do to promote “pollinator lawns?”

- Provide information to residents about why this is a good thing and how they can participate
- Distribute small yard signs to participating residents that explain to their neighbors why they have changed their lawn care approach
- Identify locations in Waldwick parks where small “demonstration” pollinator lawns could be maintained without interfering with recreational uses
- The Waldwick School District might also consider altering its lawn care practices in certain areas, especially during the summer when schools are not in session.



What are pollinators and why are they important?

Birds, bats, bees, butterflies, and beetles that pollinate plants are responsible for bringing us a third of our food. They also sustain our ecosystems and produce our natural resources by helping plants reproduce. Flowers must be pollinated to produce seeds & fruits, which lead to the next generation of plants. Without the actions of pollinators, our agricultural economies, food supply, and surrounding landscapes would collapse. Between 75% and 95% of all flowering plants on the earth need pollinators. Pollinators provide pollination services to over 180,000 different plant species and more than 1200 crops. That means that 1 out of every three bites of food you eat is there because of pollinators. If we want to talk dollars and cents, pollinators add 217 billion dollars to the global economy, and honeybees alone are responsible for between 1.2 and 5.4 billion dollars in agricultural productivity in the United States. In addition to the food that we eat, pollinators support healthy ecosystems that clean the air, stabilize soils, protect from severe weather, and support other wildlife.

The Status of Pollinators & Birds

Both bird and insect populations are experiencing significant declines. Studies indicate that North American bird populations have declined by roughly 30% since 1970, with some bird species facing even steeper losses. Insect populations have also declined significantly, with estimates suggesting a decline of around 45% in the last 40 years globally. These declines are linked, as many birds rely on insects for food, and reduced insect populations can negatively impact bird survival and reproduction. The declines are attributed to a severe loss in feeding and nesting habitats. Pollution, the overuse of chemicals, plant disease, and changes in climatic patterns all contribute to shrinking and shifting pollinator populations.

Native New Jersey Bees

New Jersey is home to approximately 350 species of native pollinating bees. They generally are unnoticed by most people and are not known to sting. The well recognized European Honey Bee is not native to North America and was introduced and bred for agricultural pollination. Ranging from bumble bees to the smallest *Andrena* bees they occupy varied habitats in all corners of NJ. Many have very specific nectar and habitat requirements and may only spend a week or two as an adult that visits flowers while the entire rest of the year is spent as a larvae. Only the bumble bees are colonial and have a nest or hive while most of the other species are solitary or semi-colonial, sharing suitable space with others of the same species. Nesting needs can be highly specialized with many digging soil burrows while others depend on hollow grass and plant stems. Some species are called leaf-cutters and line their underground burrows with pieces of leaves. The carpenter bee, as its name implies, drills holes into dry wood to build its home. (<https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/wildlife/>)

Resources:

Jersey-Friendly Yards: <https://www.jerseyyards.org/>

University of Minnesota Bee Lab: <https://beelab.umn.edu/slow-mow-summer>

Bee City: <https://beecityusa.org/>