



Bee Lawns: Installing

CHOOSING YOUR SITE

Site location is important. It should be a place where bee lawn plants will thrive and bloom. Things to consider:

- Avoid deep shade as that will lead to sparse flowers and thin turf.
- Take your neighbors into consideration. Some of the flowers may spread to adjacent areas. Will that cause issues?
- What are the lawn maintenance rules in your municipality? Maybe your backyard may be more appropriate for a bee lawn depending on city codes.
- A low-traffic area will work better to avoid stepping on foraging bees!

Remember, it's okay to start small rather than converting your entire yard at all once.

WHEN TO ESTABLISH

Times to establish bee lawns in Minnesota are:

1. **Dormant seeding** in the late fall. This is the best time and will result in less work. In this technique, the seed is spread after the soil is too cold for germination. This is usually in late October to early November. The seed then germinates the following spring.
2. **Spring seeding** in May. This can work well, but there will be more challenges with weeds. Seed is spread after risk of frost in mid to late May. Unlike dormant seeding, the site will need to be watered regularly after planting.

Either of these times can work with **how you choose to establish** (next section).

HOW TO ESTABLISH

Choosing how to establish is one of the trickier aspects of a bee lawn. Options are:

1. **Overseeding.** Use this option if you have a healthy lawn with few weeds. The first step is to set back the existing turf by mowing the lawn very short to about one inch. The goal is to have some soil exposed. You can also aerate to help even more, especially with compacted soil.
2. **Renovation.** In this option, all the existing lawn is removed, either with a sod kicker or sod cutter, or by solarization. The soil should be lightly tilled and raked smooth before planting.

SEEDING

Once the site is ready, the seed can be spread. Here is an example of a recommended mixture, which would cover about 1000 ft².

- Fine fescue turfgrasses – 4 lbs.
- Dutch white clover – 1.1 oz.
- Self heal – 1.2 oz.
- Creeping thyme – 0.16 oz.

Bee lawn seed mix already pre-mixed can be found at some retailers (see *For More Information*).

AFTER SEEDING

For bare soil renovations, rake in seed lightly. Water regularly if establishing in the spring; watering is not needed if dormant seeding. You can use a starter fertilizer (this will be labeled as such at your garden or hardware store) for the spring planting, but it is not needed for dormant seeding.



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MOWING

Bee lawns can be maintained similarly to regular lawns. Mowing can help set back some weeds and can encourage further flower blooming. Mowing should be:

- Done at a higher height, so adjust your mower to 3 inches or more
- Performed less frequently to allow for flowers to bloom
- Postponed when the flowers are at the height of their bloom to allow pollinators time to forage from them

WATERING & FERTILIZING

Once established you probably will not need to water much at all. In long periods of drought, you may need to do a few deep waterings.

Bee lawns need little to no supplemental fertilizer once established. Too much fertilizer will favor the turfgrass over the flowers.

WEEDING

One thing to know about bee lawns is that you can't use most herbicides if you want to keep the flowers. You can:

- Hand pull weeds
- Learn to tolerate a few weeds
- Spot treat with an herbicide if necessary

Be careful with "weed and feed" products because they may contain herbicides that could kill your bee lawn flowers.



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Bee Lawns: Maintaining



WHAT TO EXPECT

- The flowers may take some time to establish, be patient.
- If by the 2nd year there are few flowers, consider trying again, maybe using a different way to establish.
- Your bee lawn may not be uniformly "flowery"; some flowers may do well in one part of your lawn, while less well in others.
- Bee lawns attract many species of pollinators, not just bees; you may see butterflies, moths, flies, beneficial wasps and more!



FOR MORE INFORMATION

This publication discusses the basics of establishing and maintaining a bee lawn. You can find much more information at the following sites:

- **UMN Bee Lab** beelab.umn.edu
- **UMN Extension** extension.umn.edu
- **UMN Turfgrass Science** turf.umn.edu
- **MN BWSR Lawns to Legumes Program** bwsr.state.mn.us/l2l
- **Metro Blooms** metroblooms.org

For a listing of where to purchase bee lawn seed: z.umn.edu/buyseed

One final note. Don't forget that bee lawns are just a small part of helping pollinators. Consider adding native trees, shrubs, and other flowering plants to your landscape.