

CREATING MONARCH AND POLLINATOR HABITAT

in Southeastern Canada



Private landowners are increasingly interested in restoring areas of their property to provide improved habitat for Monarchs and other pollinators. While there is abundant information on small-scale gardening with native plants, there is much less on planting at larger scales, such as on one acre or more of land. Here is a brief introduction for landowners in southeastern Canada interested in restoring an area of an acre or more in a cost-effective way. Establishing Pollinator Meadows from Seed*, a document developed by the Xerces Society, is also available online.

Choosing and Preparing a Site

Choose a site in full sun. Sites can range from moist to dry; wet sites are generally harder to prepare and maintain. If possible, choose a bare, weed-free site or recently cropped land where the competition from other plants (such as pasture grasses) is lowest. Sites that are former lawns or pastures can be the most difficult to prepare because they are dominated by aggressive non-native grasses. If you are working with this type of site, you could simply allow the site to regenerate naturally by reducing mowing (refer to CWF's Helping Monarchs and Pollinators: Rethinking Mowing factsheet*). The fastest way to prepare a pasture site for seeding is to treat the aggressive grasses with herbicide. However, it is also possible to use herbicide-free methods such as sod stripping, covering the site with UV-stable plastic, or multi-year cropping. For more detail, see Establishing Pollinator Meadows from Seed*. Before seeding, the soil surface should be smooth, weed-free and firmly packed. This will likely require follow-up weeding after initial treatments. A clean, weed-free site is critical: make sure you take the time to prepare your site properly.



Buying Native Plants

When restoring an area of an acre or more, it is most economical to plant seeds. For best results, you want to use seeds of native species that are found in your area and that provide nectar for native pollinators. For faster results, seeds can be supplemented with seedlings ("plugs") of wildflower species. Native plant plugs are more widely available but require more care.

In many areas of Canada, it is difficult to find suppliers of native seeds and plants. The Canadian Wildlife Federation maintains a searchable database of native plant suppliers. Be sure to ask a supplier where native seeds originated. Ideally, try to find seeds or plants that originated in your general area or at least in the same hardiness zone (e.g., Zone 5).

*For these resources and more, visit [HelpTheMonarchs.ca](https://www.helpthemonarchs.ca)

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Choosing and Ordering a Seed Mix

Native seed mixes provide a mixture of native grasses and wildflowers. The grasses help give structure and establish the site, while the wildflowers should provide nectar through the entire season. Ideally, choose a mix that only contains species native to your area and that has at least one locally occurring species of milkweed (*Asclepias sp.*). In eastern Canada, Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) is the most commonly occurring milkweed species, while Showy Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*) is more common in the western provinces.

Custom mixes can be ordered at a higher cost. To choose species appropriate for your area, check the Planting Guide* for your region, developed by Pollinator Partnership. You can use this list, combined with a local plant checklist, to make sure you select local species. Finally, order the seeds from the supplier as early as possible — six months ahead for large orders of 10 kilograms or more. Note that supplies of some species are limited.

For a well-prepared dry site, ideal seeding rates range from four to 10 kilograms per hectare. Native seed mix is fairly expensive: typical mixes cost \$100 to \$200 per kilogram.

Another economical option is to collect your own native seed from sites nearby. Although this takes a bit of time and expertise, it is very enjoyable. The Xerces Society has developed a guide with clear instructions – Collecting and Using Your Own Wildflower Seed*. Another option is to purchase a mix and supplement it with additional species collected locally or swapped with neighbours. It is best to start early to collect a diversity of seed through at least one season.

Planting Your Site

Sites can be seeded in spring or fall, although fall seeding is usually preferred because some species will germinate and develop sooner. Typical dates for a fall planting are from mid-October to late November. In southeastern Canada, spring plantings should ideally be completed in mid to late May. For best results, make sure your site is weed-free and firmly packed, with a smooth surface to ensure the best possible seed-to-soil contact. To help distribute costly native seed thinly and evenly, mix it with an inexpensive annual volume thinner, such as millet or oats, at a rate of 10 kilograms per hectare.



For residential sites, seeds can be broadcast or scattered onto the soil. Planted sites can then be packed with a lawn roller or a clean ATV or tractor to press the seed into the soil.

Managing Your Site

Watering and fertilizing your site should not be necessary. If you planted plugs, they may need watering in times of drought. Watch for germination of weed plants and remove them before flowering and setting seed. Over the long term, only mow your new meadow with clean equipment, every two years at most. Rotating the mown area will help promote recolonization. Burning is another way to regenerate a native meadow or prairie; check local regulations for more information.

This brochure was created with support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

This project was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada through the federal department of Environment and Climate Change Canada.

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