



Pollinator and beneficial insect plantings can benefit a small-scale operation by improving flower pollination and yields while decreasing pest pressure. Native plants support our native insects year-round, providing places for these species to shelter, nest and feed. Providing food during times of the year that crops are not available is critical to maintaining these populations. An added benefit is the plantings can add interest and beauty to unused portions of your farm.

As with any conservation practice, there are challenges that come along with the benefits. To maximize success of your planting, here are some considerations when planning a native seeding.

Small Scale Pollinator Habitat SEEDINGS through Farm Bill Programs

BENEFITS

- Seeding is more cost-effective and less labor intensive for establishment than planting plugs or potted plants.
- A wider variety of native species are commercially available as seed than are as plants.
- There are more seed vendors to choose from than plant plug vendors.

CHALLENGES

- Seedings can take 3-4 years to fully establish. The area can look “weedy” during this period.
- Site preparation is critical. Prior to including a pollinator planting in your program application, develop a plan on how you will provide a firm, weed free seedbed. If you choose to use organic methods, consider building in additional time for adequate weed elimination. Depending on the site conditions, it can take up to two years to properly prepare a site for planting. Areas of sod, lawn or perennial grasses are especially difficult to control.
- It can be hard to distinguish weeds from native seedlings, making it a challenge to keep undesirable plants from establishing. These weeds may not be problematic for the pollinator planting but could create a seed source that impacts production areas.
- Small plantings require very small quantities of seed. Many vendors will not weigh out anything less than one-tenth (0.1) ounce per species for a custom mix. This can make it challenging for you or the conservation planner to make a custom mix for your specific site.

- Not all pollinator premade seed mixes available from vendors meet NRCS standards and specifications.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Prior to including a pollinator planting in your program application, research vendors with premade blends, or that may be willing to mix your own custom blend, that meet your habitat objectives. Look for vendors with experience with native plantings in Indiana or the Midwest. Be cautious of mixes with names such as “wildflower” or “showy mix,” as these may contain non-native species that will not be acceptable for the conservation practice.
- NRCS and its partners cannot recommend a specific vendor but can check any mix you are considering, ensuring it meets the conservation practice standard and program requirements. Always check that your mix will meet the practice scenario requirements BEFORE you purchase. See the Indiana USDA Fact Sheet- Before You Grow-Check Your Mix, for more information on the types of details needed.
- Have a plan for how you will manage the planting once it is established. Native plantings are generally low maintenance, but they are not “no-maintenance.” Vegetation management including strip disking, strip spraying, hand weeding, mowing, or even prescribed fire in some cases, will be needed, depending on site size and conditions.

NOTE: Prescribed fire should only be planned and implemented by a trained professional. Local restrictions may apply.





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As with any conservation practice, there are challenges that come along with the benefits. To maximize success for your planting, here are some considerations when planning a native plug planting.

Small Scale Pollinator Habitat PLUG PLANTING through Farm Bill Programs

BENEFITS

- There is no waiting for seeds to germinate. Plants are already well on their way. Shorter timeframe from plant to bloom.
- Plants can be placed or grouped in a way that is both visually appealing and beneficial to pollinators and the crop production areas.
- Plants can be marked and easily separated from undesirable weeds.
- There is less chance of weed seeds causing a problem if the planting is located next to crops.
- Mulch can be applied at a great depth with plug planting than seedings, providing the benefit of moisture retention and weed suppression.

CHALLENGES

- There are fewer plant vendors than seed vendors.
- Plants are more expensive than seed and are expensive to ship.
- Fewer species are sold as plants and are harder to obtain.
- Site preparation is critical. Prior to including a pollinator planting in your program application, develop a plan on how you will provide a firm, weed free seedbed. If you choose to use organic methods, consider building in additional time for adequate weed elimination. Depending on the site conditions, it can take up to two years to properly prepare a site for planting. Areas of sod, lawn, or perennial grasses are especially difficult to control.

- Mulch adds to the cost and labor of installation.
- Large areas are labor intensive to plant. At least one plug per square foot is required.
- Depending on the site and weather conditions, plug plantings may need to be watered during the first year of establishment.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Prior to including a pollinator plug planting in your program application, research vendors that have plants you will need. Obtain specifications from NRCS for your potential planting, so that you will know the number, types and mix of plants you will need to purchase.
- NRCS and its partners cannot recommend a specific vendor but can check any plantings list or kit you are considering purchasing to ensure it meets the conservation practice standard and program requirements. Always check that your planting list will meet the practice scenario requirements BEFORE you purchase.
- Have a plan for how you will manage the planting once it is established. Native plantings are generally low maintenance, but they are not "no-maintenance." Vegetation management including strip disking, strip spraying, hand weeding, mowing, or even prescribed fire* in some cases, will be needed, depending on site size and conditions

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