

NO MOW MAY
Take the Challenge to Do Nothing!

By Donna Merrill, Pollinator Pathway Steering Committee
and Jackie Algon, Wilton Conservation Commission Chair

2020 was a difficult year and you may not be ready to take on anything more, but the Wilton Conservation Commission and the Pollinator Pathway have laid down the gauntlet: let your lawn grow for the whole month of May. That's right—Do Nothing! Leave your mower in the garage until June. Let your green lawn turn into a riot of color with buttercups, clover, dandelions and daisies that will offer much needed food for our beleaguered bees and butterflies who are starving after a long winter. Every flower counts when it comes to providing a meal for our pollinators, so it makes sense that cutting your lawn in early spring is not the best thing to do.

Understandably, if this is your first time it may be hard to get comfortable with a bit of messiness. Here's a suggestion: don't go "all the way". Start small if changing in one fell swoop is too much. Give your lawn a partial haircut instead of a full buzz cut by leaving islands or streams of lawn untouched by the mower where the wildflowers can bloom. Try mowing wide paths so you can walk around, watch the activity and enjoy the changing shapes and colors. Have these paths lead to a bench, a bird bath, a statue or a big pot of flowers. If you're worried about what the neighbors will say, mow a buffer along the edges and along your driveway and walkways. Then ask your neighbors to stop working so hard and join the fun; after all, No Mow May saves time, saves money, provides for quiet relaxation, and eliminates noise and air pollution (the EPA attributes 5% of U.S. air pollution to mowers). Natural landscapes attract more bird species providing a chance for birdwatching, and they offer opportunities for photography, painting or simply observing our native wildflowers. May will come again in 11 months, so take your time, see what happens, and by all means, have fun.

Once June arrives you may feel ready to take it a step further by only mowing once every two weeks all summer long. This benefits our native bees by allowing more bloom time. The taller grass shades out the weeds and keeps the ground cooler, retaining moisture so less sprinkler time is needed. Cutting your grass at least three inches high, shearing only the top third of the blade and leaving the cut portion on the ground will provide all the nutrients the lawn and soil require to stay healthy. Lawns grown and shorn as monocultures provide zero resources for wildlife, especially with the 80 million pounds of pesticide active ingredients used yearly on American lawns and the 9 billion gallons of water used to keep our non-native European turf-grass green. Even Kentucky bluegrass is not native to the U.S.!

Then, take a good look at your property from your hammock and decide how much of your lawn you really need and want. Enough for your family and pets to play and enjoy, enough to create a tick-free buffer. If you shrink your lawn you'll save time and energy, you'll provide the birds and pollinators with habitat and nourishment, and you and your neighbors will derive pleasure from a four-season natural garden. It's a bold concept and one that might need to be taken in baby steps. So why not start with No Mow May this year and explore what comes next!

