



City of Sun Prairie

2024

**No Mow May
Impact Report**



2024 IMPACT METRICS



128

total registrants
(47 new, 81
returning)



44.8

acres of pollinator
foraging resources
conserved



1378.1

pounds of CO2
equivalents
avoided



17,861

people reached through
social media and the
Big 5 newsletter

WHAT IS NO MOW MAY (NMM)?

NMM is an initiative encouraging citizens to reduce or eliminate mowing in May. Foraging resources can be scarce in spring, which poses a challenge for pollinators in finding food. By allowing our lawns to grow, we can provide these resources for early-season pollinators, boosting their diversity and abundance. Decreased mowing can also reduce emissions and noise from gas-powered lawn equipment.

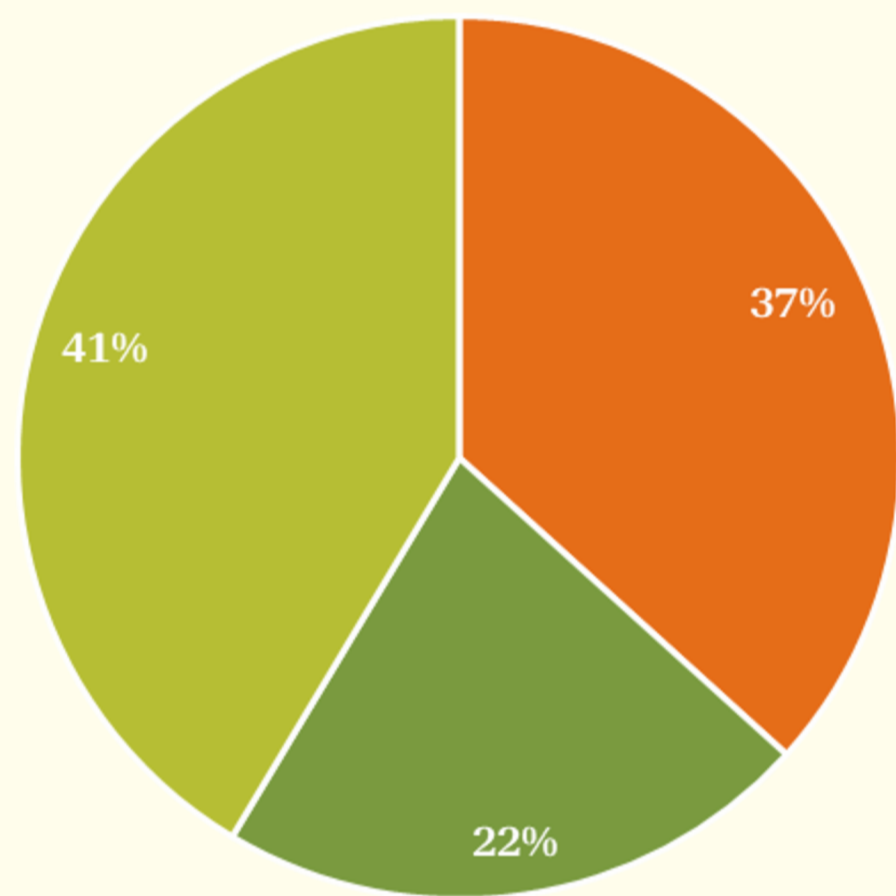
NMM IN SUN PRAIRIE

Sun Prairie piloted NMM for the 1st time in 2022. In 2023, the city piloted the initiative again and partnered with American Geophysical Union, UniverCity Alliance, and UW-Madison Gratton Lab to provide additional community science and data collection efforts for this program. In November of 2023, the Sun Prairie Common Council approved establishing NMM as an official annual program in Sun Prairie. Every year, the city suspends its noxious weed ordinance for the month, allowing citizens to grow a pollinator-friendly lawn.

Citizen Participation Data

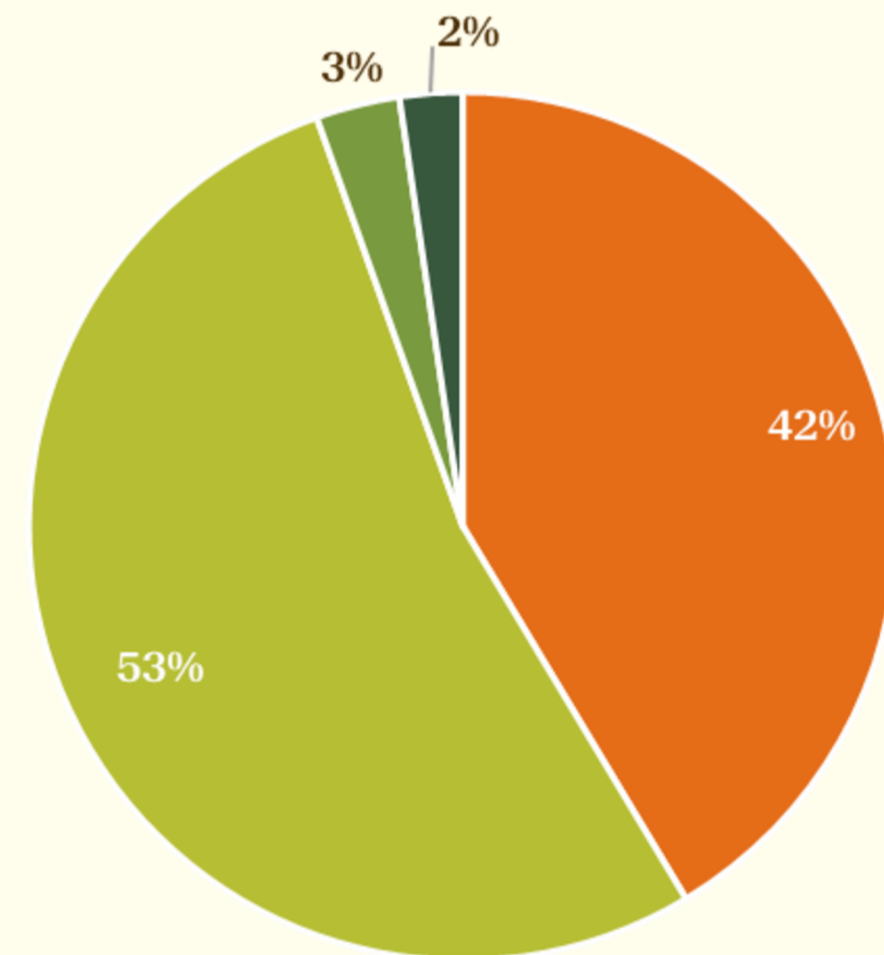
NMM participants were surveyed about their previous experience with NMM, their typical mowing practices, and the extent to which they would limit mowing during May.

Years of Participation



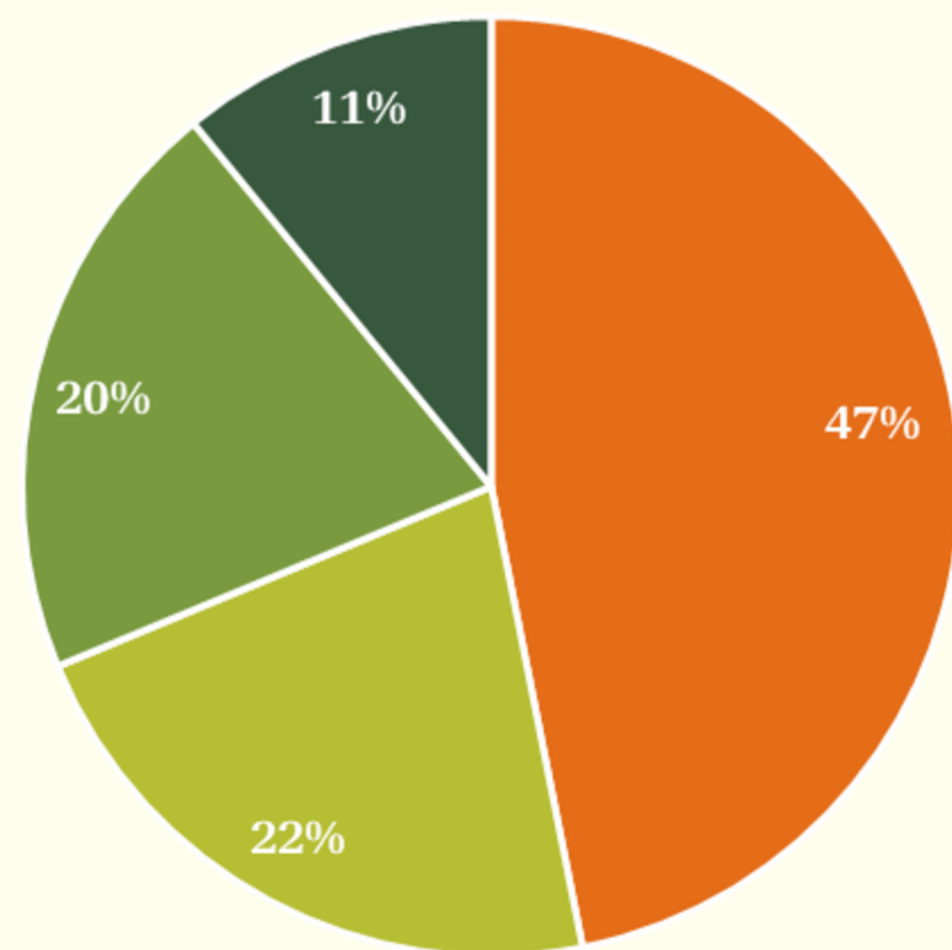
- First year participants
- Second year participants
- Third year participants

Type of Mower Used By Participants



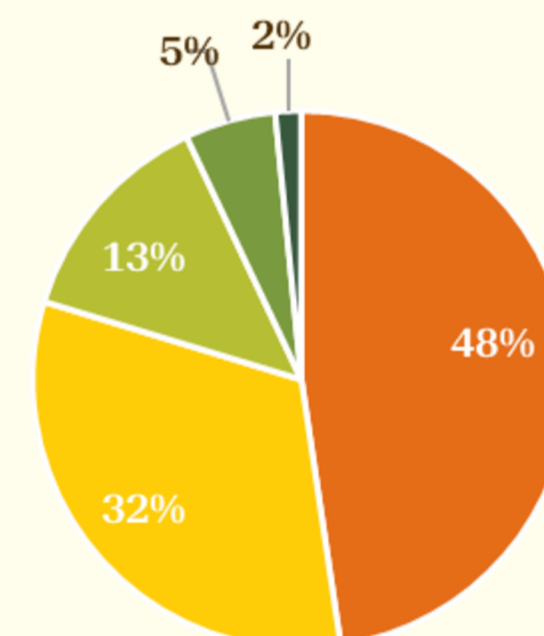
- Electric Mower
- Gasoline-powered mower
- Manual Mower
- Other

Mowing Frequency Outside of May



- Biweekly
- Weekly
- Once every three weeks
- As needed

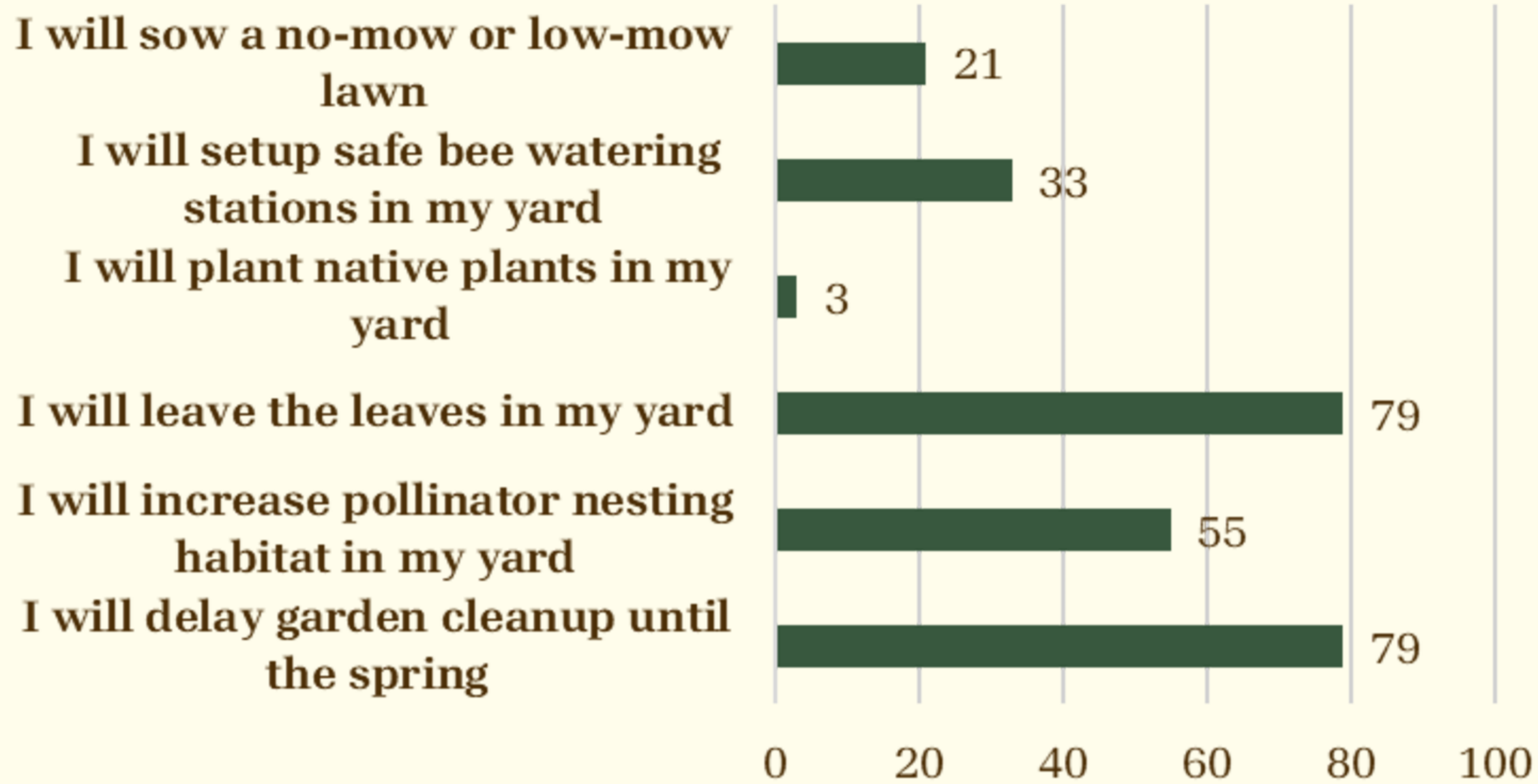
Citizen Lawn Care Commitments



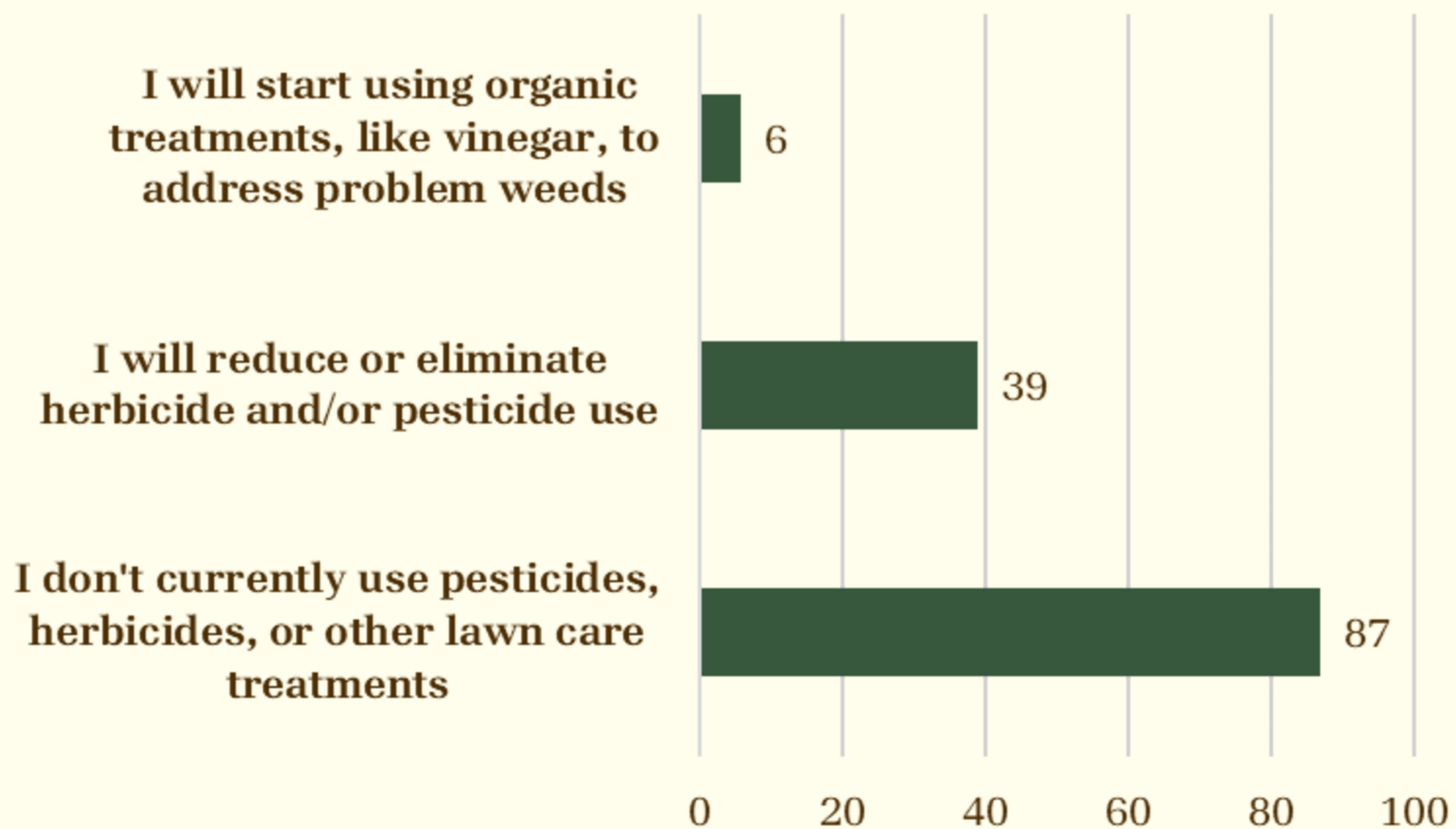
- I will commit to not mowing my lawn at all during the entire month of May
- I will wait to mow until I can't stand it any longer, hopefully a few weeks into May
- I will reduce mowing frequency to every other week
- I may mow the front yard, depending on how it looks, but will leave my backyard alone
- I will continue to mow regularly, but with a higher deck height setting to preserve cover

In addition to reducing their rate of lawn mowing, participants indicated their commitment to other practices that promote pollinator abundance.

Pollinator Conservation Practices



Chemical Reduction Commitments



Citizen Feedback

The majority of the comments regarding NMM were positive. Many people noted their excitement, curiosity, and thankfulness for the initiative. A few participants shared their ideas for improving the initiative in future years. Below are some of the most frequent comments, suggestions and concerns surrounding NMM.

Comments

- “Love this program! Thanks for keeping it going.”
- I’m looking forward to helping out the pollinators again this spring!”
- “I didn’t know bumblebees were such agile flyers, I watched them fly through the tall grass and find the flowers in my lawn!”
- “I grew lots of bunnies this year!”
- “ I really enjoy sitting at my patio and seeing a meadow instead of the traditional turf grass look.”

Suggestions

- More sustainability workshops and presentations
- More information on implementing no-mow lawns
- Greater access to native tree and shrub seedlings

Concerns

- Social stigma surrounding the aesthetics of pollinator friendly lawns
- Confusion about city rules and HOA guidelines surrounding lawn maintenance

City Park Participation

The following selected areas within Sun Prairie parks and green spaces were a part of the 2024 NMM program, saving over 14 acres of pollinator foraging resources:

- Wyndham Hills Park
- Sheehan Park
- Memorial Park
- Orfan Park
- Bike path between Hoepker Road & Highway 151
- Greenspace between the public library and community garden



Beautiful day at Wyndham Hills Park

Other Community Efforts

In addition to Sun Prairie's NMM initiative, several other projects were implemented, seeking to educate and boost pollinator abundance during May.

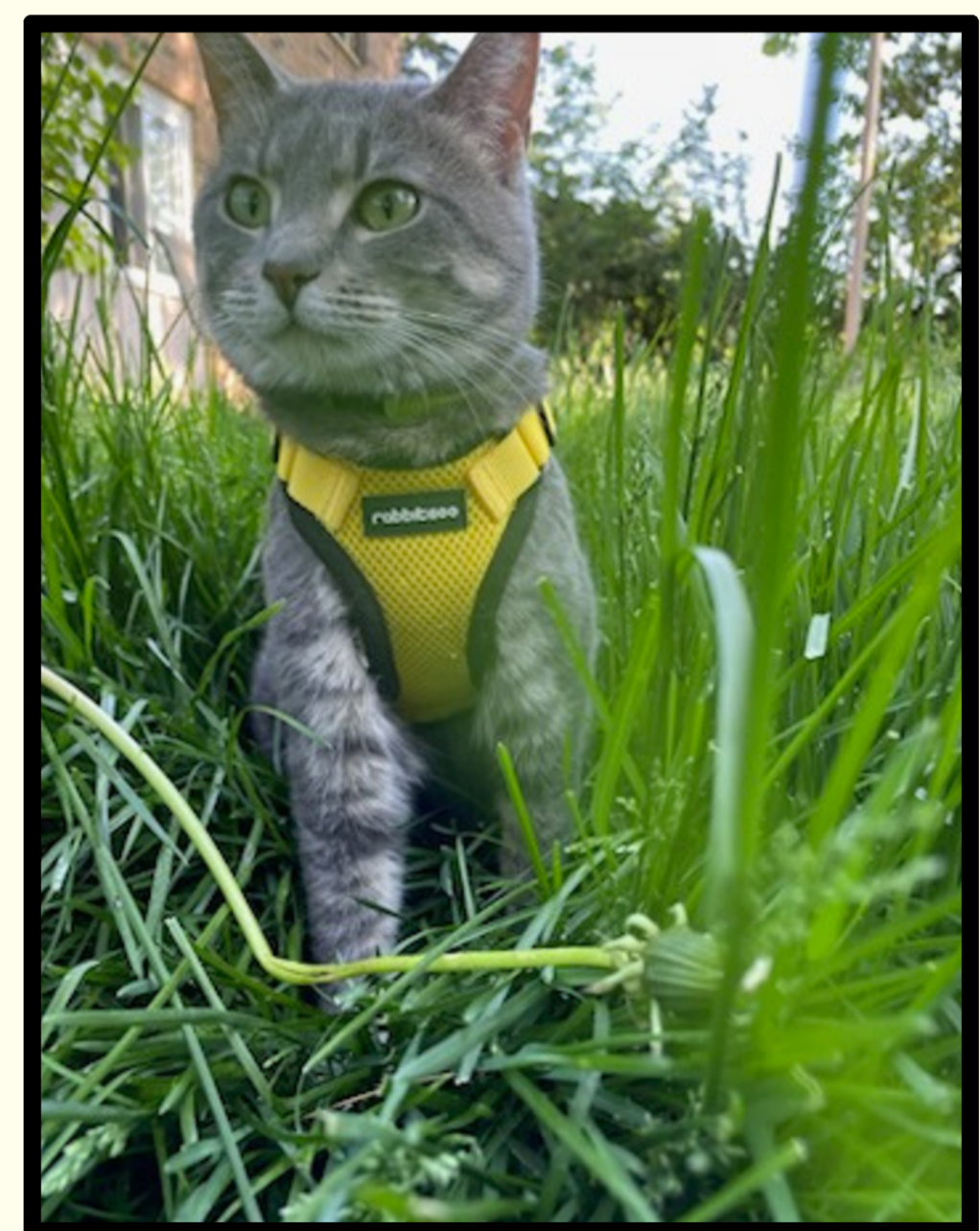
Community Science Initiative

This year, NMM participants had the opportunity to engage in a community science project by collecting pollinator activity data from their yards. This data was collected through the Wisconsin Wild Bee app, also known as WiBee, in which 40 NMM participants signed up.



Citizen Observation Directive

This month, the Sun Prairie Parks, Recreation & Forestry department began developing a lawn identification guide for local flowers often visited by spring pollinators. Forestry staff encouraged NMM participants to contribute photos of flowers found in their pollinator-friendly lawns, aiming to build a comprehensive archive of plants for the guide. This year, we received 70 photos from residents. Coming soon, this plant identification guide seeks to educate and foster appreciation for the many native plants that support pollinators and our environment.



Pollinator Gardens

Near the end of May, Sun Prairie Park Friends installed four pollinator gardens in Sunset Park, Liberty Park, Birkinbine Park, and Wetmore Park. These gardens are full of native plants and flowers that attract a variety of spring pollinators. Sun Prairie School District also planted a pollinator garden near Central Heights Middle School. These gardens can be seen on the participation map on page 8. Click [here](#) to learn more about our local pollinator gardens.



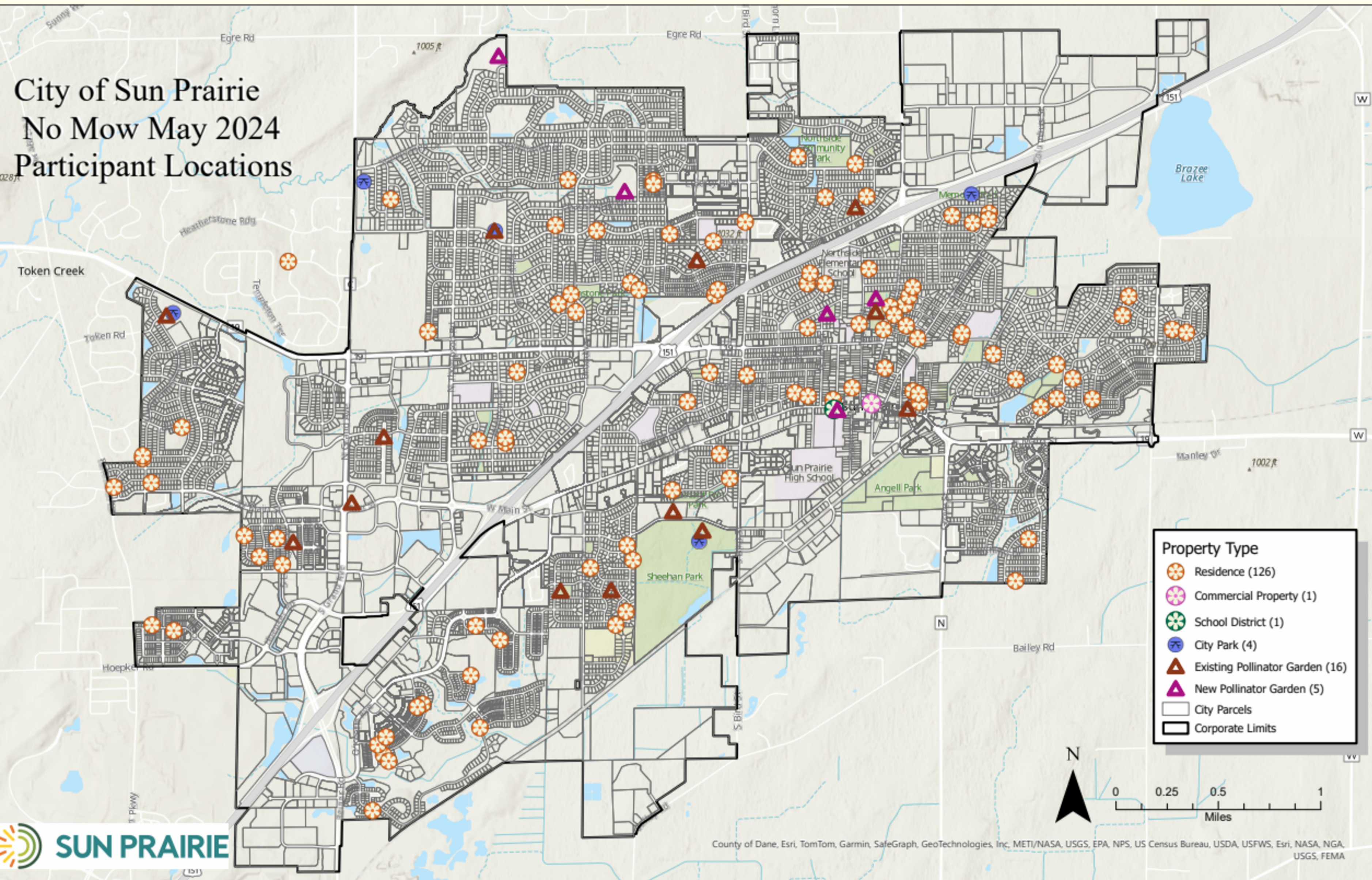
Pollinator Presentation

In Late April, the Sun Prairie Public Library hosted an interactive presentation about promoting pollinator abundance. Dr. Hannah Gaines Day (University of Wisconsin-Madison Gratton Lab), Cindy Burtley (City of Sun Prairie Parks & Forestry Director), and Dr. Rose Daily (City of Sun Prairie Sustainability Coordinator) shared the specific steps that community members could take to help pollinators thrive. The city hosted 27 citizens attended this event. Attendees received a complimentary American Hazelnut or White Oak seedling.



Participation Map

Below is a map of the 2024 participants and pollinator gardens.
Click on map to view in full resolution.



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is No Mow May Effective?

A: Both scientific and local data demonstrate the effectiveness of NMM in pollinator conservation. Several peer-reviewed scientific papers provide evidence of NMM as a beneficial initiative for pollinator abundance. These papers are linked below. Sun Prairie has also collected local pollinator activity data through the Wisconsin Wild Bee app, or Wiee. Based on [Sun Prairie's 2023 data](#), pollinator diversity is significantly higher in unmowed lawns. Additionally, our data showed that visits to flowers by wild bees are almost twice as high in unmowed lawns. NMM is also beneficial for limiting greenhouse gas emissions, as lawn care equipment produces 5% of the nation's air pollution (EPA). In 2024, Sun Prairie's NMM initiative reduced local greenhouse gas emissions by 1,378.1 lbs of CO2 equivalents.

Q: How can I cut my lawn after May in a sustainable way?

A: After May, mowing long lawns can pose challenges for both pollinators and our lawnmowers. Furthermore, cutting back the entire grass blade length at once will stimulate a hormonal response in the plant to regrow the photosynthetic tissues, leading to a faster-growing lawn and the need for more frequent mowings. Fortunately, there's a strategy that simplifies mowing, promotes lawn health, and minimizes environmental impact. According to Dr. Paul Koch, an associate professor in the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the "1/3 rule" is the least ecologically disruptive mowing tactic. To follow this strategy, never cut more than 1/3 of the total grass length in one mowing. This reduces stress on the plant. After cutting 1/3 of the turf leaf blades, try to wait 3 to 5 days before mowing again.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Do I have to go all month without mowing?

A: No! While avoiding mowing altogether will create the most resources for pollinators, this may not be feasible for every resident, which is okay! Committing to “Low Mow May” by reducing your lawn care activities in spring will create a positive impact. Any increase in foraging habitat for pollinators should be considered a successful implementation of beneficial and sustainable lawn care practices.

Q: If I don't have flowering species in my lawn, will my participation in NMM make a difference?

A: All grass species are a part of the flowering plant group called Angiosperms. For example even Kentucky Bluegrass, which is one of the most common turfgrasses in Wisconsin, produces small flowers in May, though it may be hard to notice if you frequently mow or use pesticides. Nonetheless, participating in NMM offers benefits beyond promoting pollinator health. Letting your lawn grow a little taller fosters stronger roots. These roots can hold much more water than shorter ones, which can reduce stormwater runoff, keeping our local watershed clean.

Q: What else can I do to help pollinators during the spring?

A: There are many ways to support the abundance of pollinators in the spring. Reducing herbicide and pesticide use in your yard is an excellent way to give pollinators a greater chance of survival. Additionally, planting native plants and providing bee watering stations can make your yard a safe and reliable environment for pollinators. For those looking to transform their yard into a pollinator haven, consider seeding a no-mow or low-mow lawn, either across your entire lawn, or in small sections. See the Additional Resources section below for further guidance on incorporating these resources into your yard.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What options are available for replacing pesticides, herbicides, or other chemical applications?

A: When applied improperly, lawn chemicals can run off into streams, harming fish and contaminating water. According to the Environmental Protection Agency ([EPA](#)), the use of lawn chemicals accounts for the majority of wildlife poisonings. Additionally, lawn chemicals can deter and harm local pollinators. There are many alternatives to typical pesticides that are safer for humans, pollinators, and the environment. Learn more about these alternatives [here](#).

Q: How is the our existing and changing climate affecting the NMM initiative?

A: A primary goal of NMM is to boost food resources for early-season pollinators so they can thrive for the rest of the summer and into fall. Beginning this initiative in May is not mandatory, however. As our climate shifts and average temperatures rise, reducing mowing earlier in the season can be even more beneficial. Most native bee species will emerge from hibernation when nighttime temperatures start to reach fifty degrees. As pollinators start coming out earlier on average, it will be crucial to reduce mowing during these earlier months.

DID YOU KNOW?

Garden
Equipment
engines produce
5% of the
nation's air
pollution ([EPA](#)).

FAQ Sources

- [spring \(epa.gov\)](#)
- [Lawn and Garden | US EPA](#)
- <https://www.pollinator.org/pesticide-education>
- <https://www.mymonona.com/1573/No-Mow-May-Healthy-Lawns>

Additional Resources and Readings

1. Peer-reviewed scientific papers to provide evidence of the NMM pollinator benefits:
 - [Lerman et al. 2023 \(Bioscience\)](#)
 - [Wastian et al. 2016 \(Journal of Hymenoptera Research\)](#)
 - [Lerman et al. 2018 \(Biological Conservation\)](#)
2. [The American Obsession with Lawns | Scientific American](#)
3. [The Great American Lawn: How the Dream Was Manufactured - The New York Times](#)
4. [Saving Wisconsin's Native Pollinators | Wisconsin DNR](#)
5. [5 Steps to Planting a Pollinator Garden in Wisconsin \(wisconservation.org\)](#)
6. [Let's Grow Stuff: Replace your lawn with something better, a beginner's guide - PBS Wisconsin](#)
7. [Bee Lawns: Using Your Lawn to Provide Food for Pollinators](#)
8. [National Pollinator Week: The Climate Threat to Bees | Department of Energy](#)
9. [Climate Change Is Ratcheting Up the Pressure on Bees | UC Davis](#)
10. [What you need to know about No-Mow May, the bee-boosting trend sweeping Wisconsin - WPR](#)

Additional Resources and Readings

11. [Chapter 8.28 - NATURAL LAWN PERMITS | Code of Ordinances | Sun Prairie, WI | Municode Library](#)
12. [Chapter 8.36 - NOXIOUS WEEDS | Code of Ordinances | Sun Prairie, WI | Municode Library](#)
13. [How to Plant a Clover Lawn—and Why You Should \(thespruce.com\)](#)
14. [Modeling the status, trends, and impacts of wild bee abundance in the United States | PNAS](#)
15. [Watering Stations 101: An Easy Way To Enhance Pollinator Habitats - The Outdoor Apothecary](#)
16. [Sustainable Sun Prairie Podcast: What it Takes to Create a Pollinator Paradise](#)
17. [Sustainable Sun Prairie Podcast: No Mow May and Community Gardens](#)
18. [Sun Prairie Fall Recreation Guide](#)