

USE OF WILDFLOWERS IN NATIVE GRASS SEEDINGS TO ENHANCE POLLINATOR HABITAT

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ABSTRACT

Native grasses and wildflowers provide habitat for very diverse wildlife populations of pollinators. Protecting and enhancing habitat for native pollinators as well as managed honey bee colonies, is important for not only these species but for the plants that depend on them for their survival, and is critical for food production and human livelihoods. The United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS), Xerces Society of Invertebrate Conservation and other federal and state collaborators, have teamed up to provide outreach on the problems facing pollinator decline such as loss of floral diversity and habitat, increased use of pesticides, climate change, disease, and parasites. Starting in 2009, the USDA NRCS Big Flats Plant Materials Center, established an early, late, and dormant seeding, replicated 3 times, of over 50 native wildflower species and mixes with native grasses. In 2011, multiple seedings were established at 5 different times during the growing season, at 3 different seeding rates, replicated 4 times, June 23, August 8, August 18, September 1, and September 14, respectively. In 2012, a mid-May seeding was established, with 30 species that showed the greatest potential for easy establishment and persistence. Results to date, show that regardless of time of seeding, tall white beardtongue, purple coneflower, wild and purple bergamot, butterfly milkweed, oxeye and ashy sunflower, lance-leaf coreopsis, blue false indigo, black eyed susan, giant sunflower, many aster and goldenrod species, all established easily and have persisted in the field over the past 3 years. Species that were slow to establish in the first 3 years such as cardinal flower, wild lupine, great blue lobelia, wild senna, golden alexanders, and zigzag spiderwort are now abundant. Based on the results to date, there is great potential to enhance pollinator habitat in underdeveloped and natural areas with a diverse array of native wildflowers and grasses. High species diversity of native plants will provide the resources necessary to help ensure a diverse, resilient population of pollinators.

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