

HELPING MONARCHS AND POLLINATORS: Rethinking Mowing



The decline of Monarch Butterflies and other pollinators is receiving increasing attention, leading many landowners to wonder how they can help. Rethinking mowing is one way you can make a difference.

Some properties, especially in rural areas, include large areas of lawn. People are accustomed to seeing tidy, evenly mown expanses of green from the roadside. But for Monarchs and other pollinators, these areas are not usable habitat. With a different management approach, these areas can offer a sanctuary for Monarchs that provides breeding and nectaring habitat and improves the chance of recovery for this iconic species.

Pollinators, including Monarchs, require a diversity of flowering plants, including both milkweed and nectar-producing wildflowers. Consider the following ways to increase and improve habitat on your property.

Reduce Mown Areas

Reducing the area of mown lawn can make a difference for insects, including Monarchs. Determine the area that is needed for regular use, such as for children playing or socializing. The remainder of the lawn could simply be allowed to grow or actively planted with wildflower seeds to benefit Monarchs and other pollinators. Allowing a lawn to regenerate to a meadow can, over time, help milkweed and native wildflowers to establish naturally among the grasses. It also helps the area to tolerate drought, resist erosion, reduce runoff and require no fertilizers — and of course, it saves you time to enjoy the summer.



Reduce Frequency of Mowing

Regular mowing promotes grasses; when mowing is reduced, native wildflowers such as milkweed are more able to compete with the grasses. If an area is infrequently used (e.g. for occasional parking or an annual event), it can be less frequently mown. Limit mowing in these areas to once a year or even less, if possible. Some people create pathways by mowing strips through the lawn and leaving other areas to grow taller and produce wildflowers.



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

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Reconsider Timing of Mowing

Mowing vegetation such as milkweed during summer and early fall can lead to high mortality of Monarch caterpillars and loss of habitat for other pollinators. Mower blades can kill eggs, caterpillars, chrysalises and even adult butterflies. The ideal time to mow varies by region. In southern Canada, avoid direct mortality to Monarchs by not mowing between early June and late August. If possible, avoid mowing between May 15 and October 1; this longer window will not only ensure the full lifecycle of Monarchs can be completed, but will also allow any nectar-bearing blooms (such as asters and goldenrods) to provide migrating adult butterflies with native wildflower nectar for their journey south. Mowing later in the season can also promote the spread of flowering plants by allowing them time to flower and produce seed.

It's best to mow in the daytime rather than in the morning or evening when temperatures are cool. During the day, insect pollinators are more likely to be flying or active or able to escape.

Reduce Impacts by Changing Techniques

For areas that are infrequently mown, evidence shows that using certain mowing techniques will benefit Monarchs, pollinators and other wildlife.

- » **High mowing:** Cutting grass to a height of eight to 12 inches appears to minimize impacts to native plants and many insects, and may allow native plants to flower again in the same season.
- » **Patch mowing:** Rotating mown areas during the season or between years leaves refuge areas for insects and other wildlife. These areas can provide source populations to recolonize the mown patch.
- » **Using a flushing bar:** Attaching a flushing bar to a mower can warn wildlife of oncoming danger.
- » **Slowing down:** Reducing mower speed can give wildlife a chance to escape.

By rethinking mowing on a large scale, thousands of acres of privately owned habitat across much of southern Canada can be improved and made available to Monarchs and other native pollinating insects through the season.

Visit HelpTheMonarchs.ca for additional resources on restoring an area for Monarchs and pollinators, including:

- » **Creating Monarch and Pollinator Habitat in Southeastern Canada*** — a CWF factsheet.
- » **Mowing: Best Practices for Monarchs*** — a document developed by Monarch Joint Venture that gives additional background information and tips.
- » **Journey North*** — a website with information on arrival dates of Monarchs in your area, including maps and, with the help of citizen scientists, tracking information for Monarch migrations in spring and fall.

The Canadian Wildlife Federation encourages landowners to use the iNaturalist app to help keep track of Monarch Butterflies and other wildlife. Visit iNaturalist.ca.

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