

Why are pollinators important?

Pollinating insects are a vital part of the natural ecosystem. They are responsible for the successful pollination of a wide range of plants that provide essential food sources for birds, animals and people, including many fruit, vegetable and oilseed food crops.

While there has been great media coverage regarding pollinator gardens and wildflower mixtures, most aren't suited to Ottawa Valley's climate. Unfortunately some species that are not easy to establish from seed and some even contain invasive weeds which can be very harmful to our local ecosystems.

A good pollinator mix is one that is acclimated to the area, offers a wide nectar flow timeline, especially during periods of dearth (low nectar flow) & has a variety of flower shapes to accommodate the needs of the whole spectrum of wild bees as well as managed honey bees. The creation of even small areas of dedicated habitat can significantly increase the numbers of pollinating insects.

This '**Ottawa Valley Beekeepers Meadow Mix**' is a perennial seed mix designed specifically for field & yard edges, buffer strips or any other areas that would benefit from adding to the seed bank.

Other positive side effects of mixes like this include improved biodiversity & soil health. Perennial mixes provide an environment for microorganisms to grow. The root development can help sequester carbon and add organic matter back to the soil. Planted in ecologically sensitive areas like pond, ditch and other riparian edges, these plants can help protect the land from erosion, contributing to better water quality as well

Thank you!

With every purchase of Ottawa Valley Pollinator Mix a portion of the proceeds are donated to the Ontario Beekeepers' Associations' Tech Transfer Program (TTP), based in Guelph, ON. The mandate of the TTP is to conduct research for Ontario's beekeeping industry, to facilitate a honey bee breeding program in Ontario and to transfer information, skills and methodologies to the beekeepers. As a 'one-stop-shop' for information and recommendations on best practices, resources and courses, they focus on developing improved Integrated Pest Management approaches to beekeeping. The results of the work by the OBA TTP is presented at beekeeper association meetings in Ontario, Canada and the Us and to school and community groups with an interest in honey bees.

Best Practices for Establishing Pollinator Meadows

Site Preparation

- Seeds are like any babies: they need adequate food, shelter and nurturing for success.
- If starting in an area with heavy weed pressure, mow the existing area & till the soil or use other forms of weed control to reduce competition for sunlight, water or nutrients for the young seedlings as they grow.
- If 'over seeding' an existing area, mow the plants that are present and loosen up the seedbed with a rake or a lawn aerator.
- Some weeds will continue to return throughout the growing season so additional weeding may be required being sure to not to overly disturb the seedlings until they can compete on their own.
- In areas of heavy pressure or poor soil structure/drainage the site may require one full season of weed control and site prep prior to seeding.
- The seedbed should be firm enough so that the impression left by a footprint is 1 - 1 ¼ inch deep

Timing

- Spring: Sow seed in the very early spring (before the end of May) while precipitation occurs regularly.
- Early fall: Sowing the mix in late August or early September for establishment once daily temperatures are more moderate and precipitation is more frequent.
- Frost Seeding: sowing in the late fall before snowfall or in early spring after snowmelt during a period of freeze-thaw cycles.
- Note: This mix can be planted in other parts of the growing season so long as adequate water is supplied on regular basis to prevent seedling desiccation.

Installation:

- Seed should be planted at ¼ to ½ inch on clay or loamy soils and ½ to ¾ inch on sandy or gravelly soils.
- Broadcast seeding: spread the seed out uniformly using your hands or a grassed spreader. Aim for only 5 – 7 seeds per piece of letter-sized paper (use this brochure to help benchmark!)
- If possible, harrow (spread the soil back over the seed) and pack firmly to allow for good seed to soil contact. Seed must contact soil to establish. Areas of exposed seed will likely dry out before root establishment can occur.

Maintenance:

- This mix has a diversity of seeds. Some seeds will establish quickly while others in the mixture may take up to 3 years to establish. Remember to plan for some form of weed control to reduce competition to the growing young plants.
- During establishment, meadows often look weedy and may not have many blooms as the pollinator plants grow to maturity. Also soil disturbances will allow many native weeds already present in the seed bank to germinate. This is normal and expected.
- If possible, stands can be improved by mowing new seedlings to a 6" height 2 – 4 times per year in the first 3 years. Regular maintenance will help to reduce annual weed pressure but is not necessary depending on your end goal for your Pollinator Meadow area.
- If desired, mow meadows to 6" every year or two to help redistribute seed and keep undesired species at bay.

Sources:

- Ontario Beekeepers' Association website: <https://www.ontariobee.com/outreach/tp>
- Operation Pollinator, Soil & Crop Improvement Association
- The Pollinator Garden: <http://www.foxleas.com/wild-bees-and-gardens.asp>



'Ottawa Valley Pollinator Mix' has been created with care and passion by Jennifer Doelman, a proud mother, beekeeper, farmer, Certified Crop Advisor (CCA-Ont) and environmental enthusiast. It has been supported by the wonderful members of the Upper Ottawa Valley Beekeepers Association and by pollinator supporters like yourself! Thank you! If you have feedback on this mix or future mixes you would like to see please feel free to contact me at bdsfarmag@gmail.com.