

## Re-Think Your Lawn: Wildflowers are “Bee-utiful”

16 May 2018

Almost everyone who maintains a lawn wants it to “look nice.” But, as the old saying goes, “Beauty is in the eye of the *bee*-holder.” Typically, most residential lawns are mostly maintained as uniform grassy areas. Any type of plant that is not a “desirable type of grass” is all too often considered a weed that needs to be removed. However, many so-called weeds should be considered wildflowers that are highly beneficial to bees, butterflies and other types of pollinators. As part of the “*Bee-Friendly*” Program Initiative, the Town of Durham Agricultural Commission encourages town residents to “Re-Think Your Lawn.”

**Re-Thinking your Lawn** is based on the premise that you can create or maintain your lawn for multiple purposes including: aesthetics, diversity, and concern for a healthy environment. The following sections provide some tips on how to manage your lawn for pollinators. In addition, photos of some native wildflowers are provided that can be allowed or encouraged to grow during spring, summer and fall.

Planting/re-seeding – Rather than using a uniform type of grass seed, there are various types of “conservation mixes” that contain both grass and wildflower seeds. These can be purchased from farm supply and gardening stores, and are also available from the USDA Cooperative Extension Service and US Soil Conservation Service.

Lawn mowing – There are three key factors to be considered when mowing your lawn.

1. Lawn mower cutting height - Unless you are trying to achieve a putting green for golf or area for croquet/lawn bowling, set your lawn mower to a four (4) inch height. In time, the result will be a lawn containing far more wildflowers, bees, butterflies and songbirds.
2. Where you mow and how often – Consider mowing just one-half or one-third of your lawn area at a time. Also, if you have some lawn areas that are drier or wetter, mow them less often. Rather than trying to achieve a uniform lawn, encourage diversity (a mix of grass and wildflowers).
3. Time of day when you mow – Mow during late afternoon or early evening when bees and butterflies are less active.

Beneficial wildflowers – There are many species of wildflowers that can grow along with the grass in your lawn that attract pollinators. Some are native to North America while many were introduced by colonial settlers when they originally came from Europe. When the right conditions occur, many wildflowers will seed themselves without being planted.

The following are some key species that occur in the New England region during the early spring season (April - June).

*[Note: This list will be periodically updated (June, July, August, and September 2018) to include other species of wildflowers that grow in lawns that are maintained for pollinators]*

Early spring wildflowers that benefit pollinators



Common Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)



Common (Wild) Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*)



Common Blue Violet (*Viola papilionacea*)



Bluets (*Houstonia caerulea*)



Purple Nettle (*Lamium purpureum*)



Yellow Rocket or Winter Cress (*Barbarea vulgaris*)