

# ILLINOIS MONARCH PROJECT: Mowing Guidelines for Pollinators

June 2019



## BACKGROUND

The Illinois Monarch Project was established to bring together representatives of natural lands, rights-of-way, urban, and agriculture sectors to address the stressors on monarch butterfly habitat, enhance existing habitat on the ground, and plan additional conservation actions for monarch butterfly.

The Science Committee is comprised of biological and conservation experts to support Illinois Monarch Project strategy development and implementation. The Science Committee addresses emerging issues and needs related

to monarch butterfly and pollinator health and habitat.

Milkweed is the sole food source for monarch butterfly caterpillars. Whenever possible, allow milkweed to flourish along with other nectar sources (wildflowers). This will benefit monarch butterflies and pollinators throughout the growing season. Monarchs lay more eggs on young milkweed and on new growth. This document has been developed to help you maintain areas for the benefit of monarchs and other pollinators using mowing as one management tool.

## HABITAT AREAS

### Establishment Phase (years 1 – 2)

**Only mow if necessary and only in the areas in need of treatment.**

If enrolled in a conservation program, follow all program requirements.

If an area contains native prairie or wetland plants that were not planted, exceptional pollinator habitat may be present and require a more sensitive mowing approach than described above.

**Year 1:** Mow stands to a stubble height of no less than 8", if needed.

- Mowing allows light to reach the ground so desirable native plants can get established.

**Year 2:** Mow stands to a stubble height of no less than 10", if needed.

- Minimum heights protect native plants.
- Do not mow more than 2-4 times as year. Doing so may unintentionally kill desirable native plants.

### Established Areas (3+ years old)

In many cases, prescribed fire is a better management tool than mowing. Consult an expert before considering fire.

**No mowing between April 15th and October 15th** because pollinators and other wildlife are present.

## INVASIVE AND WOODY SPECIES CONTROL

**Spot treatment** – limit mowing to the smallest area necessary to control identified invasive species.

- Agency partners must create and follow an approved Integrated Vegetation Management Plan.

## HOUSEHOLD AND BUSINESS CAMPUS LAWNS, MUNICIPAL LANDS

**Consider letting odd areas** grow wild, pursuant to local ordinances.

To the extent possible, **limit the area of mown lawn.** Saves time and money!

**In areas of your yard,** consider establishing native plants in your landscaping with a significant flower component and several milkweed species.

- In habitat plantings, include flower types that bloom in the spring, summer, and fall.

## ROAD RIGHTS OF WAY (ROW)

**Be mindful** of the management entity of roads and mow only with appropriate permission and safeguards.

**For rights of ways,** mow no more than necessary to maintain vision clearance and safety and management of invasive and woody species.

- Agency partners: Any additional mowing should be part of an approved Integrated Vegetation Management Plan.

**Mow no more than 1/3** of road ROW in a given year.

**Do not mow** May 1st – June 30th and August 15th – September 30th. Mowing mid-summer creates new, tender leaves that monarchs prefer.

**Do not blow grass clippings** into the road, as they pose a safety hazard.

**Note:** Interstates and state highway ROW are managed by IDOT and should not be managed by private citizens.



## Sources and additional resources:

Haan, Nathan L., Douglas A. Landis. "Grassland disturbance increases monarch butterfly oviposition and decreases arthropod predator abundance". *Biological Conservation*. 2019; 233: 185-192. DOI: 10.1016/j.biocon.2019.03.007.

Michigan State University Extension. "How to protect and increase pollinators in your landscape". 2016. [https://www.canr.msu.edu/publications/how\\_to\\_protect\\_and\\_increase\\_pollinators\\_in\\_your\\_landscape](https://www.canr.msu.edu/publications/how_to_protect_and_increase_pollinators_in_your_landscape)

Monarch Joint Venture. "Mowing and Management: Best Practices for Monarchs". <https://monarchjointventure.org/images/uploads/documents/MowingForMonarchs.pdf>

United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. "Important Plants and Plant Lists of the Monarch Butterfly – Midwest Region." [https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/PA\\_NRCSCconsumption/download?cid=nrcseprd1381428&ext=pdf](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/PA_NRCSCconsumption/download?cid=nrcseprd1381428&ext=pdf)

United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. "Insects and Pollinators". <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/il/plantsanimals/insects+and+pollinators>

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United States Fish & Wildlife Service. "Save the monarch butterfly: get involved as an agricultural producer". <https://www.fws.gov/savethemonarch/agriculture.html>

Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. "Agriculture: How to Farm for Pollinators". <https://xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/agriculture>

**Illinois Monarch Project website: [www.czs.org/IllinoisMonarchProject](http://www.czs.org/IllinoisMonarchProject)**

For more information, please contact the following organizations:

