

## Free Assistance With Native Plant Landscaping

Late summer is a good time to see pollinator insects such as butterflies visiting flowers and plants. But habitat loss is causing an alarming decline in some species, including the beloved monarch butterfly. Planting native wildflowers in home garden plantings or as wildlife cover on rural acreages is a great way to help the pollinators.

Now is a good time to start planning for establishing pollinator-friendly wildflowers in acreages or in home landscaping, said Lisa Potter, private lands programs supervisor for the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). For rural acreages, a fall herbicide application is often needed to remove competing vegetation before planting. When planted by seed, native flowers are often more successful when seeded in December through February. Now is the time to evaluate fields and gardens to determine how best to prepare the site for planting.

"People should plan now so they'll be ready when the weather and timing is right," Potter said.

MDC staff can help property managers plan where to plant native flowers and grasses, how to prepare sites for planting, and what type of equipment might be needed. For example, anyone wanting to plant natives in a field or along the margins or corners of a field will need to decide if they are going to broadcast seed onto the ground or use equipment such as a seed drill. Old pastures with cover such as non-native fescue grass may need herbicide treatments in autumn to reduce competition so the native plants can thrive in the following spring and summer. An MDC private lands conservationist can offer advice on choosing planting sites, where to obtain equipment and what steps are needed to produce desired results.

Besides helping pollinator insects such as butterflies, native wildflowers are also colorful. The plantings also provide excellent wildlife habitat. Native grasses and wildflowers are a good choice for anyone seeking to boost wildlife on their property.

"Pollinator-friendly plants provide excellent habitat for ground-nesting birds like bobwhite quail," Potter said.

Butterflies and birds can be helped by lawn and garden plantings in urban settings, too. Flowers such as purple coneflower provide colorful blooms and nectar for butterflies. Birds such as American goldfinch often alight on native prairie plants. Native plants also offer advantages in that they can survive Missouri's climate swings through drought, wet, hot or cold.

For an excellent primer on how to use native plants in acreages or landscape plantings, visit <http://on.mo.gov/1Csdj2b>. The Missouri Prairie Foundation offers information and links to helpful sites such as native seed sources at <http://grownative.org/>.

MDC provides free assistance for landowners interested in nature and conservation. Visit <http://mdc.mo.gov> and find your county in the Local Contacts box on the home page.