

220223



# MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Public Works & Environmental Concerns Committee

**FROM:** Carl Goldsmith, Director of Public Works

**SUBJECT:** “No Mow ‘til Mother’s Day” Program

**DATE:** June 2, 2022

The DuPage Monarch Project has asked the Village to participate in the No Mow May Program. As the name suggests, residents are encouraged to delay their first mowing until after May. The purpose is to better accommodate the springtime propagation of flowering plants (e.g., clover and dandelions) and also insects that serve as food for birds and pollinators for plants. Other “Bee City USA” communities participating include Westmont, Glenview, Port Barrington, Barrington Hills, and Hawthorn Woods. The program website is at <https://beecityusa.org/>. Note that Westmont has rebranded the program as “No Mow ‘til Mother’s Day”, and their fact sheet is attached for reference.

Article IV of the Village Code restricts the height of weeds and grasses to eight inches, and compliance following a letter is required within seven days. In 2021, there had been 6 violations in April, 85 in May, and 22 in June. In 2022, there have been 92 violations from April 1<sup>st</sup> through May 13<sup>th</sup>, and a further 108 violations from May 14<sup>th</sup> through May 31<sup>st</sup>. As such, Staff believes that not mowing for the entire month of May would be particularly problematic, and therefore suggests the end time of any potential program be set no later than Mother’s Day, consistent with Westmont’s program.

Under the program, the Village would purchase yard signs to provide upon request to residents. The annual cost for the signs is estimated at \$400, which may be absorbed by the Community Recycling Fund. There would be no cost to residents. The purposes of the signs are to (1) explain the reason for not mowing, (2) encourage others to participate, and (3) allow Code Enforcement to not cite violations related to weed and grasses over eight inches.

Recommendation:

Staff requests that the Committee provide a recommendation to the Board of Trustees regarding endorsing a “No Mow ‘til Mother’s Day” program starting in 2023.

CG/DG:dg H:\PW\Environmental\No Mow til Mothers Day\PWECC Memo R1.doc  
 attachment: Westmont’s Information & Fact Sheet  
 cc: Bill Heniff, Director of Community Development  
 Michelle Stefans, Code Enforcement Coordinator  
 Eric Hendrickson, Forestry & Urban Landscaping Supervisor

**Village of Westmont  
Environmental Improvement Committee  
2022 No Mow 'til Mother's Day Program  
Information & Fact Sheet - Published March 21, 2022**



**SIGN PLACEMENT**

**Where do I place the No Mow sign in my yard?**

If you have your sign from last year, please feel free to place it in your yard immediately. New signs will be delivered between March 21 and early April. We hope the signs will bring attention to this initiative and the topic of supporting the habitat of pollinators. Please place the sign on your property near the sidewalk where it will be visible to the public. All No Mow participants must have signs in their yard to avoid code violations. Make sure that the sign is not placed in the Village right of way, which includes the area between the sidewalk and curb.

**GRASS LENGTH**

**What if I feel my grass is getting too long?**

If you feel your lawn is too long, go ahead and cut it. This initiative is about habitat, but also about bringing attention to how we can do things better for pollinators and ourselves. Studies indicate that the optimal mowing cycle, specifically benefiting pollinators, is every two weeks.

**DANDELIONS**

**Dandelions went to seed in my yard and it looks terrible - what should I do?**

After a dandelion goes to seed, they are no longer a benefit to pollinators, so please feel free to cut them. But please be careful to cut the seeding dandelions high so that you do not cut the dandelions that are still flowering.

**YARD HEALTH TIPS FOR POLLINATORS**

- Avoid using pesticides
- Plant colorful native wildflowers
- Grow flowers in clusters
- Plant a wide variety of flowering plants that bloom during different times throughout the year
- Plant trees, herbs, flowering fruits and vegetables
- Leave some areas, even small areas, undisturbed
- Create a nesting shelter

**CODE ENFORCEMENT**

During the program, code enforcement staff will be enforcing lawn height property maintenance codes for all residents that do not have the No Mow sign displayed in their yard. Properties that are participating in the program are expected to be mowed after the Mother's Day weekend, and no later than the following Saturday.

**NO MOW SIGN PICKUP**

After Mother's Day on May 8, 2022, participants can keep their sign and use it again next year. However, on the Friday after Mother's Day, our Public Works staff will collect all No Mow signs that are still out so that they can be reused next year.

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

Overall, the Village has had a very positive response to this program. We understand that some people may not be in favor of this initiative, but the program is temporary and will end May 8. We ask for everyone's patience and support during this timeframe. If there are further questions, please contact us at [green@westmont.il.gov](mailto:green@westmont.il.gov)

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# More homeowners in Illinois are saying yes to No Mow May and letting lawns grow wild

By Nara Schoenberg

Chicago Tribune May 26, 2022



Barbara Dolan in the front yard of her Oak Park home on May 24, 2022. Dolan is participating in No Mow May, a movement in which home owners don't mow their lawns through May to encourage pollinators such as bees and butterflies to feed off plants that would have been removed due to mowing. (Chris Sweda / Chicago Tribune)

In a neighborhood of neatly groomed lawns, Barbara Dolan's stands out.

Emerald-green grasses compete for attention with knee-high dandelion puffs, while closer to the ground blue violets and yellow mock strawberry blossoms gleam like jewels. Bees buzz. Birds sing. Tiny seeds float through the air on fluffy white tails.

"Oh, look!" Dolan said, pointing at a flutter of elaborately patterned orange and black wings.

"That's a fritillary butterfly on that dandelion."

Dolan, 58, of Oak Park, is one of an estimated 5,000 Americans who are participating in No Mow May, a rapidly growing movement in which people let their lawns grow freely during the month of May, in the hope of feeding bees, butterflies and other beneficial pollinators.

The effect can be dramatic, with neat suburban lots growing shaggy and wild, and the jokes flowing freely along with the #lazylawn social media posts.

But the goal is serious. Scientists are increasingly concerned about studies showing key insect populations are falling due to factors such as loss of habitat, pesticide use and climate change. And the plight of these unsung heroes of the food chain [has proved difficult to publicize](#).

“The big issue is pollinator decline,” said Israel Del Toro, an assistant professor of biology at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, who organized the first American No Mow May in 2020.

“In the last 50 years we’ve really seen a global decline in insect biodiversity and pollinator biodiversity, and we need pollinators to survive. About a third of our crops in the U.S. are pollinator-dependent.”

A much-quoted [2017 study in the journal PLOS ONE](#) found a 75% decrease in flying insects (by weight) in German nature preserves over 27 years, and in 2021 the National Academies of Sciences produced a special issue on insect decline, [with the authors of one article](#) writing, “Time is not on our side, and urgent action is needed on behalf of nature.”

Among the insects that have suffered declines are [North American bumblebees](#) and [monarch butterflies](#).

Forty communities across the United States are offering officially sanctioned No Mow Mays this year, including Appleton, which has about 1,200 registered participants. Del Toro estimated that 5,000 people are participating nationwide.

The northern suburb of Northbrook suspended enforcement of its mowing ordinance and offered its first No Mow May this year, with free wildflower seed packs for participants. In Glenview, 292 residences signed up for a less ambitious No Mow 'Til Mother's Day program offered by the village. In Westmont, 236 residences registered for No Mow 'Til Mother's Day, up from 161 in 2021.

The Northbrook No Mow program was championed by the local group Go Green Northbrook and the Northbrook Garden Club, and the response has been good, with 70 residences signed up and many others joining in without registering, according to village Sustainability Coordinator Tessa Murray.

“We’ve seen a lot of people coming out of the woodwork, wanting to participate,” Murray said.

“We’re getting a lot of feedback that, ‘I’m seeing more rabbits, I’m seeing more bees than I’ve ever seen in my yard before’ — these exciting types of new discoveries made at the residential level. And of course, a lot of kids really love dandelions, so that’s a cool outcome.”

Not everyone is happy with No Mow May in general and those extra dandelions in particular. Northbrook received a public comment from a participant who said their neighbor mowed their lawn in the middle of the night. On Facebook, No Mowers said they were concerned about upsetting their neighbors and spreading dandelions. One woman said she had taken to deadheading dandelions to avoid seed spread, a time-consuming task.

Murray said a few people had expressed concerns about allergies, ticks, “dandelions in general” and whether the additional weeds would lead to an increase in pesticides in 2023.

There’s also pushback on Facebook, with some gardeners questioning the value of the nonnative dandelion in feeding pollinators. Del Toro said dandelions aren’t the perfect source of nutrition but they bloom at a critical time, producing pollen and nectar that allow pollinators to get off to a good start.

Then, when other, better flowers come into bloom, pollinators move on, he said.

“Why have a cheeseburger when you can have a filet mignon?” Del Toro said. “Dandelions are cheap corner-store hamburgers that are just to get them started.”

Among those who are trying the No Mow approach in the Chicago area is Migdalia Jimenez of Humboldt Park. A librarian who enjoys popular science books, Jimenez, 41, said she had become concerned about the decline of insect pollinators through her reading.

“I thought to myself, let’s see what I can do,” she said.

Last year, she planted milkweed and experimented with unmown grass. This year, she is doing No Mow May and plans to continue to let her grass grow throughout the summer.

Katy Schafer, 38, of Chicago’s Kilbourn Park neighborhood, said she was drawn to No Mow May for multiple reasons.

“It’s supposed to be helpful for the environment and for local pollinators, and I’m a pretty big gardener, so anything I can do to attract more insects to my garden is always a good thing,” she said.

Among the benefits: She said she recently counted 29 black swallowtail caterpillar eggs on dill that self-seeded in her unmown yard.

In a small study co-authored by Del Toro and [published in the journal PeerJ](#), researchers found there were five times more bees on 20 No Mow May yards than there were in adjacent frequently mowed green spaces.

“There are (insects) out there that live their entire life spans in an area the size of a football field,” said Del Toro. “So when you think, is my little pasture of a lawn making a difference? Well, yeah. Of course it is.”

No Mow leaders hope the event will lead to larger efforts to increase pollinator habitat and reduce threats such as pesticides and climate change. For those who want to expand their DIY pollinator conservation efforts, Murray suggests growing native flowers, leaving leaves in your garden so insects such as dragonflies can overwinter there, and letting native plants stand after they bloom so animals can eat the seeds and insects can nest in the stems.

Dolan said she heard about No Mow May on Facebook, but she was already planting natives such as milkweed, Joe-Pye weed and golden Alexanders; feeding birds with her serviceberry shrub; and growing dill for swallowtail butterflies. When plants sprouted around a tree on the parkway in front of her house a few years ago, she let them grow, and when the village requested that she cut them down, she negotiated a truce.

“I’m sort of the Joan of Arc for ‘don’t call it a weed,’” Dolan said. “A weed is just a word, and we can live in harmony with what we consider to be weeds, once we pay attention to what the weed’s purpose is.”

During a sunny hour in her unmown backyard, bees fed on pale purple creeping Charlie blossoms, and black and orange butterflies fluttered above tall grasses. Two big white cabbage moths locked together in midair and then flew as one. Sparrows gathered at the bird feeder and a banana-yellow goldfinch perched on the apple tree.

It’s nice to just observe what grows naturally in spring, Dolan reflected. Still, she said, there are downsides to No Mow May, even for her. Her little dog, Ripley, gets soaking wet when he goes outside after a rain. The grass has grown so high she fears it may look yellow and raw when she cuts it.

Her backyard gardening plans are on hold, too, held hostage by bees and butterflies.

“I will be psyched for June 1,” she said with a chuckle.

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