



Many Wyoming residents would like to plant a pollinator plot, but many flowers can't hurdle the state's dry environment without supplemental water.

This is especially true with flowering plants that provide nectar and pollen throughout the season.

So, how can we be waterwise but still have a great pollinator plot? By taking advantage of leach fields, or septic drain fields, many Wyoming homes have. The moisture released from a leach field often makes them easy to spot late in the summer because it is usually the only green area around.

While highly discouraged to plant trees and shrubs in this area due to the roots possibly clogging a leach field, other, non-woody plants can be planted. Vegetable gardens also should not be planted here, but wildflowers and pollinator plants can be.

## **ESTABLISHING A POLLINATOR PLOT**

Building a new house is the perfect time to seed a leach field to a pollinator plot before weeds move in. The soil is

freshly disturbed, and there is no vegetation over the leach field.

Additional water may be needed the first summer as the soil above the leach field will take time to build up moisture. A sprinkler over the area every two weeks until at least mid-June should be enough to get these plants started.

Till or use a herbicide to remove existing plants. If using a herbicide, make sure to use one that will not have any residual effects on the new seeding. You may want to start with a small portion. For example, most leach fields are separated into several different zones and lines, so start with just one of these. Keep in mind removing existing vegetation will open up the area to weed invasion.

Starting with this smaller area will make pulling weeds easier until the pollinator plants get established. Then, move on to the next area the following year. This approach will take a few years to plant the entire leach field but increases the chances of success.

## RESEARCH YOUR SPECIES SELECTIONS

Species selection depends on the local area, taking into account the growing season length and soil type. Targeting pollinator species will also help determine the plant selection. Hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees prefer specific plants. Creating a mix with a variety of species such as those that flower in spring, summer, and late summer or fall will increase pollinator activity and all-around aesthetics.

Consider how the species will compete with each other. A leach field often has multiple drain zones, and planting different species on each zone to reduce competition between plants may be beneficial. If in an area close to grazing livestock, some pollinator plants can be poisonous to livestock, so research the plants and avoid these species. Lupine and larkspur are a couple of common poisonous ones.

The University of Wyoming Extension publication *Promoting Pollinators on Your Place, A Wyoming Guide* is a great resource with which to start. Go to the Barnyards and Backyards



SuperPrin, shutterstock.com

Here are some seed sources but is by no means a comprehensive list.

- Wind River Seed Co. out of Manderson, Wyoming
- Pawnee Buttes Seed Co. out of Colorado
- Applewood Seed Co. out of Colorado

website then scroll down to the pollinator guide resources.

For further assistance with species selection, contact your local UW Extension office ([uwyo.edu/uwe/county](http://uwyo.edu/uwe/county)), conservation district office ([bit.ly/wyo-serve-offices](http://bit.ly/wyo-serve-offices)), or Natural Resources Conservation Service office ([bit.ly/wyonrcs](http://bit.ly/wyonrcs)). They should be able to help or put you in contact with someone who can.

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