

This lawn is becoming a home for wildlife.

Mowed grass is being converted to native meadow and young woodland. Here are honest answers to the most common questions about the practice.



THE BIG IDEA Nature finds its own balance



YEAR 1

Plant-eaters arrive

New plants draw caterpillars, beetles, and aphids.



YEARS 2-3

Predators follow the food

Lady beetles, spiders, dragonflies, and birds move in to hunt.



YEAR 3 AND BEYOND

Balance takes hold

Hunters and hunted keep each other in check. No one kind takes over.

Why turn a lawn into habitat?

Lawn grass gives wildlife almost nothing to eat. Native wildflowers, grasses, trees, and shrubs feed bees, butterflies, and birds. Their deep roots soak up rain and help keep soil out of our creeks. Less mowing also means less fuel, noise, and air pollution.

What about mosquitoes?

Mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water, like buckets, clogged gutters, and old tires, not in plants. Deep-rooted meadow plants help rain soak in instead of pooling. Dragonflies, swallows, and bats eat mosquitoes. Adults may rest in shady plants, so use repellent if they bother you.

Won't a meadow bring more bugs?

You will see more *kinds* of insects, and that's a good sign. Most are helpful or harmless. Lady beetles, lacewings, and spiders hunt the insects that chew on plants. Insects feed birds, too: a pair of chickadees needs 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars to raise one nest of chicks.

Will it look messy?

A new meadow can look patchy for a year or two while plants grow deep roots. As gardeners say, the first year they sleep, the second year they creep, and the third year they leap! Mowed paths and edges, signs, and tree shelters show this site is cared for on purpose.

Ticks, snakes, and exploring safely

Will there be more ticks?

Ticks live in grassy, brushy, and wooded places, so be tick-aware anywhere outdoors. Ticks can't jump or fly. They wait on plant tips and grab on as you brush past. That's why this site has mowed paths: stay on them and you stay out of ticks' reach. Take extra care from May through July, when young ticks are most active.

Found a tick? Grab it close to the skin with fine-tipped tweezers and pull up with steady pressure.

Tick-smart in 5 steps

- 1 Stay in the middle of mowed paths.
- 2 Use repellent with DEET, picaridin, or IR3535.
- 3 Treat clothes with permethrin. Tuck pants into socks.
- 4 At home, check skin, hair, kids, and pets.
- 5 Shower within 2 hours. Dry clothes on high heat for 10 minutes.

Will snakes move in?

You may spot one now and then. That's a sign of a healthy habitat. Pennsylvania has 21 kinds of native snakes. The one you'll most likely see is the harmless eastern gartersnake. Only three are venomous, and snakes would much rather avoid you. They help us by eating mice, voles, slugs, and insects.

If you see a snake

- Stop and give it plenty of room.
- Let it move along. Never try to pick it up.
- Keep dogs leashed and on the path.

COME EXPLORE

Walk the mowed paths and look closely

The mowed paths are your front-row seat. Walk slowly, stop often, and bring a phone or notebook. Each season, notice who has moved in. Over time, you'll watch the hunters arrive to match the hunted.

SPRING

Bird song, the first wildflowers, and bees waking up.

SUMMER

Butterflies, dragonflies on patrol, and fireflies at dusk.

FALL

Goldenrod, asters, and monarchs heading south.

WINTER

Animal tracks, seed-eating birds, and stems that shelter bees.