



May 30, 2020

Pollinator Zones 101 with Jim Hoffman

Questions & Answers

Q. I live in Cedar Rapids, 56' x 170' property. I have several flower gardens, a vegetable garden, apple trees, raspberries etc. It's hard for me to envision a larger prairie in my backyard amongst everything else. Can you show examples of smaller backyard prairies? Thank you.

A. Thanks for your question and what you have done so far is great! If your trees are actually natives that goes a long way to meeting the Tallamy challenge. If you are able to join our PZ201 webinar (June 6), you'll see examples of planting natives that you could use in your yard where you don't have a wide open area to work with. If you're not able to join, the recording will be available on our website after June 6.

Q. We are in the beginning of the 2nd year of a 1/4 acre pollinator site and live in the country. We burn our native grass prairies about every 3 years. When would burning (or mowing) the pollinator plot be recommended?

A. Burning prairies is a great and very beneficial maintenance practice. Fortunately, you live in the county and can do so. I would say every three or four years. Not every year. It is not necessary and can tend to stimulate a more mono-culture plot. By all means, burn. As to mowing, it is fine to mow in the 2nd year but you absolutely should go no shorter than 8". If your mower cannot be set that high, don't mow.

Q. I own 15 acres of what was a homestead of a large farm. Mostly buildings and pasture. We have been told most of 15 acres has never been plowed. I have about 2-3 acres of prairie remnant and 1.5 acres of predominantly native trees species. I have blue birds, orioles, bunting, quail, pheasant, meadowlarks etc. I have seen monarchs just this week. My issue is this, around the edges of my prairie remnant there are spots that have been invaded with non-native grasses. These spots have become a mono-culture of crabgrass. Should I knock these areas down with Round-up and replant them?

A. First of all, it sounds like a wonderful piece of property. If you really have a prairie remnant, you are very fortunate. Enjoy! Depending on the size of your mono-culture – sure. More is better and big areas of weeds or crabgrass can be much better put to use as prairie. If you're comfortable killing these areas and planting natives, by all means do so.

Q. Is it too late to start this year? Better to wait until next spring?

A. Absolutely it is not too late. This is the time of year where you can start seedbed preparation and begin treating the area with herbicide or covering in black plastic. You don't want to plant until very late in the year and you still have plenty of time to get your plot to bare dirt. Go for it!

Q. Are we supposed to register in order to participate in the program? How do we go about doing that?

A. Yes, go to the Pollinator Zones page of our website: <https://monarchresearch.org/pollinator-zones>. Click the "Contact Monarch Research About Beginning a Pollinator Zone" and complete the info form. If you complete your seedbed prep, and want to take advantage of our seed giveaway program, you will send a photo of your plot using our contact tab and we will make arrangements to get you the seed. Most likely via an envelope sent to your home.

Q. I planted two small areas in native plants and grasses 26 years ago, proudly the only landowner in my subdivision to do so as new houses were being built. I live in Linn County outside the city limits in a subdivision of 24 2-acre plus lots, most have woods with sun along the road. My plots are under woodland plant creep. I have never burned these areas due to the possibility of catching the woods on fire. I probably could rig up hoses to have water to put the fire out if needed. Other than woody plants like pignut hickory, Virginia Creeper and poison ivy, would burning these areas kill woodland plants and non-native grass like foxtail and nut grass? Right now I chop the woody plants each spring and spot spray and pull weeds and grasses. It's a lot of work and you need to do it when each of these plants is actively growing. Or is it best to use Roundup and start the whole process over using the mix or shade mixes you spoke of today?

One last question. How do you keep milkweed from taking over? I am okay with some for the monarchs but it seems to spread too easily once established.

A. This one is a tough question and I'm not sure I'm expert enough to answer the first part! I know that fire in woodland areas is an oft used practice for reducing non-native species but I would recommend that an expert perform that service for you or, as you say, you might have a real fire! The only person I've ever personally witnessed doing this in the area is David Novak, of Prairie Oaks Restoration. It might be a good idea to give him a call to discuss. I would say that nuking it and starting over is probably not a good idea unless the area gets at least partial sun. My guess is you will unleash a seedbed that would be pretty hard to get under control.

As to milkweed, my only comment is that you are right. It is hard to get milkweed going, but since it's a rhizome plant, it spreads fairly quickly once established. My editorial comment is that with 90% of the milkweed gone mostly from the farmfield, we all can live with a bunch of it on our properties to make up for the loss. That is why we're planting the roadsides, to help make up for that loss. Hope that helps!!

Q. Are there similar projects going on in other counties or nearby states that you are aware of?

A. The good news is that habitat restoration is becoming a much more common part of the conversation. We have seen examples all over the nation of pollinator habitat initiatives. Having said that, we know of no other county in Iowa who is even close to doing what we're doing.

Q. Can people in Rochester MN be part of this pollinator zone group and receive free seeds if they start preparing the ground in a 10/10 or 20/20 plot as you mentioned in this presentation?

A. Sorry, not at this point. We are opening up our program at this point to residents of Linn County and adjacent counties to participate. That does not mean you should not aggressively plant natives in your yard.