

PLANTING & MAINTENANCE GUIDE

Washington Habitat Kits



Thank you for your interest and dedication to conserving pollinators. By planting this habitat kit, you're playing a vital role in supporting pollinator conservation efforts. This handout provides instructions for planting, as well as guidance on follow-up care to help ensure successful habitat establishment.

Background

In response to declines in a number of bumble bee species, the Xerces Society and partners developed a [statewide strategy](#) to conserve these essential pollinators in Washington. The strategy identifies priority management areas where targeted conservation actions can increase the amount of habitat available to at-risk bumble bees. As part of this effort, the Xerces Society worked with local native plant producers to create kits filled with pollinator-friendly native plants and distribute them to partners in priority bumble bee regions across Washington.

What's in This Kit?

These kits include native plants, featuring a variety of flowering species documented as important for at-risk bumble bees in Washington. The selected plants also support a wide range of other native pollinators and were chosen for their suitability to the specific ecoregions found within Washington's bumble bee priority management areas. Because pollinators need continuous floral resources throughout their active season, the kits provide plants that bloom from early spring through late fall. In addition to flowering plants, the kits contain native bunchgrasses, which provide nesting habitat for bumble bees and create important structure and shelter for many other pollinators. For details on the plant species in your kit—including growth form, bloom time, and mature size—visit the [Xerces Society](#) website.

Tips for Plant Establishment

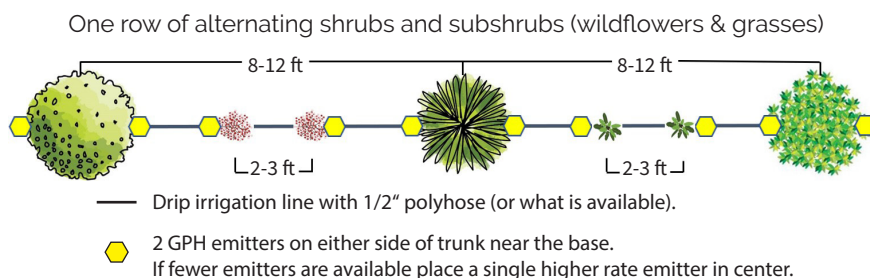
The plants in your kit are ideally suited for specific ecoregions near the eastern foothills of the Cascades of Washington, but they will need good care to get started.

- ⇒ **Weed management:** Before and after planting, manage weeds so they aren't outcompeting transplants. Providing a top layer of mulch (about 3-4") may help protect against weed encroachment while potentially reducing irrigation requirements.
- ⇒ **Timing:** For best establishment success, plant the entire habitat kit within a week or two of receiving your plants. Milkweed transplants are best planted before they go dormant, giving time for the roots to become established underground. Transplants will be fine kept in containers if they are watered regularly.

Plant Spacing and Configuration

All kits can be planted in linear rows (hedgerow: see diagram below) or any configuration that fits your planting site. Generally speaking, we recommend spacing herbaceous plants and grasses on 3' centers and woody plants (shrubs) on 6' centers. For kits that contain both woody and herbaceous plants, consider alternating woody and herbaceous plants. Large shrubs planted 8-12' on center with a group of forbs (recommended spacing for linear hedgerows, see example). Survival rates can be lower with forbs and grasses, which stay smaller, therefore, we recommend planting these plants 2-3' apart in groupings of 2-3 plants of the same species. If planting in areas with minimal irrigation or moisture, all plants will generally grow more slowly, therefore grouping them in clusters will fill in the planting area more easily.

Hedgerow Example



Planting

- ⇒ **Transplants:** Dibble sticks are ideal for plug planting, as they are easy to use and designed to make a correctly sized hole.
- ⇒ Use a spade or shovel for larger transplants (or for plugs if dibble sticks are not available).
- ⇒ The hole should be slightly deeper and wider than the plant container.
- ⇒ Gently remove the plant from the container using a small blade (a plastic knife works well for plugs), being careful to keep the root ball intact, and place it in the hole.
- ⇒ Gently pack soil around the base of the plant and pinch or compress soil gently over the plant's root crown to minimize loss of soil moisture.
- ⇒ It is important not to make the holes too deep; the base of the plant should be level to the surrounding soil.

Irrigation

Smaller transplants will need more frequent irrigation than larger transplants. A thick layer of mulch is recommended to help plants retain moisture.

- ⇒ **Transplant irrigation:** Transplants will need supplemental irrigation or moisture during the first several years to get established.
- ⇒ Irrigate transplants thoroughly immediately after planting. If the plants are not dormant or fall is unusually warm, consider additional occasional irrigation until dormancy or fall weather begins.
- ⇒ Resume irrigation in spring or whenever soil moisture starts depleting, and continue irrigating until fall moisture begins.
- ⇒ During the first growing season, irrigate transplants approximately once a week based on the soil moisture present and the needs of the plant. If there is a heat wave and the plants look wilted, consider an additional watering in the evening or early morning.
- ⇒ If possible, drip irrigation is ideal for transplants and minimizing weed growth.
- ⇒ If plants are near a well-watered lawn or sprinklers, reduce irrigation to the planting or move species that like it drier further away from the lawn border.

Long Term Maintenance

- ⇒ Once plants are well established (usually after the first year), irrigation can be gradually decreased. Generally, by the third year after planting, most native plants will need only monthly irrigation or no irrigation at all.
- ⇒ Mulch can be applied again after the first year if there are persistent weeds. However, not applying mulch will allow the plants to spread and fill in the space naturally

creating a “green mulch” which will suppress weeds.

- ⇒ Weed management is especially important the first couple of years; however, continuing to weed periodically in later years will keep them from taking over.
- ⇒ Resist the temptation to clean up your garden in the spring. Dead stems and leaf litter are used by bumble bees and other native bees as both overwintering habitat and as protection during cold spring evenings. If you must clean up your garden, wait until overnight temperatures are consistently in the 50s.

Additional Resources

Bumble Bees

Xerces Society: Habitat Management for Bumble Bees in the PNW
[xerces.org/publications/guidelines/pnw-bb-management](https://www.xerces.org/publications/guidelines/pnw-bb-management)

Xerces Society: The Pacific Northwest Bumble Bee Atlas: Summary and Species Accounts
[xerces.org/publications/guidelines/pnw-bumble-bees](https://www.xerces.org/publications/guidelines/pnw-bumble-bees)

Xerces Society: Conserving Bumble Bees. Guidelines for Creating and Managing Habitat for America's Declining Pollinators
www.xerces.org/publications/guidelines/conserving-bumble-bees

Xerces Society: Strategy To Protect State And Federally Recognized Bumble Bee Species Of Conservation Concern
www.xerces.org/publications/strategy-bumble-bee-species-conservation-concern

Pollinators

Xerces Society: Pacific Northwest-based resources, including plant lists and milkweed guides
[xerces.org/pollinator-resource-center/pnw](https://www.xerces.org/pollinator-resource-center/pnw)

Bee Better Certified

beebettercertified.org

Habitat Establishment and Management

Xerces Society: Guidance to Protect Habitat from Pesticide Contamination
[xerces.org/publications/fact-sheets/guidance-to-protect-habitat-from-pesticide-contamination](https://www.xerces.org/publications/fact-sheets/guidance-to-protect-habitat-from-pesticide-contamination)

Xerces Society: Pollinator habitat installation guides for hedgerows and wildflower meadows
[xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/habitat-installation-guides](https://www.xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/habitat-installation-guides)

Community Science

Bumble Bee Watch
bumblebeewatch.org

Pacific Northwest Bumble Bee Atlas
pnwbumblebeeatlas.org

Western Monarch Milkweed Mapper
monarchmilkweedmapper.org

Xerces is Here to Help!

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or need additional guidance (washingtonhabitatkits@xerces.org). You will find publications about bumble bees, pollinators, and habitat restoration work on our website ([xerces.org](https://www.xerces.org)) or by following the links provided.

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