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No Lawns: Fun Stuff

No Mow May

No Mow May is a movement that has gained a lot of attention in recent years. Unfortunately, that attention has often included bad info and misunderstandings. With this guide, we hope to clear up the pros and cons of no mow and answer common questions. What are the benefits?

The basic idea behind No Mow May is that there aren't many flowers popping up in the month of May, so allowing common lawn flowers to stay up (not mowing them over) is beneficial to pollinators. The actual impact this has varies greatly by location, so doing a little research about your local no mow may movement is a good idea. Bee City USA has a great article on the topic.

Some common-lawn dwelling flowers in North America are:

- Dutch White Clover (E)
- Wild Blue Violet (N)
- Dandelion (E)
- Creeping Charlie (E)

Note that many of these are (E) Exotic / non-native.

What are the limitations?

No Mow May is a really great starting point for having a conversation about lawns in general. But in most locations, no mow on its own is not a long term solution. Invasive and non-native species will overwhelm the area quickly, leading to a post here asking for help.

How to No Mow May like a pro

Define your spaces

One great way to utilize No Mow May is to help define spaces that you use for recreation and spaces you don't. You can think of your yard as an outdoor home, with different rooms for different purposes. For example, you might end up mowing:

- Around the perimeter of your house
- An open space for kids to play
- Near a fire pit
- Around a garden

But never feel the need to mow:

- A steep hill where you rarely walk
- In the ROW / hellstrip between the sidewalk and the road
- In a shady part of your yard where grass hardly grows anyways

These unmown spaces are now a great way to visualize where your lawn is actually being used. Remember that lawns are primarily meant to be used for recreation, so any space left unmown doesn't really need to be a lawn. By the end of May, you can start planning what you might do with that space instead of a lawn. Note that the Wild Ones garden designs take a very similar approach; most of these designs still have some lawn space throughout areas of the yard, with native landscaping filling in the rest of the space.

Identify Plants

As your unmown spaces grow, start identifying what grows in the lawn and unmown areas. You'll probably find a mix of native and invasive species. In my yard, I found:

Native Invasive / non-native Calico aster Asiatic Honeysuckles Prairie Ragwort Multiflora rose Nimblewill Oriental Smartweed Prairie Fleabane Japanese Meadowsweet Riverbank grapes English Ivy Black raspberry Asian Crabapple lots of native trees Zelkova (Japanese Elm)

There are several apps that can help you ID plants, like PictureThis, iNaturalist, Seek, and GoogleLens. There's also r/WhatsThisPlant, r/NativePlantGardening, and of course, r/NoLawns! Just make sure to flair your post when asking for a plant ID. Mow it down

Once you have established where you can eventually remove your lawn, be sure to mow down the longgrass before invasive species can take hold. You might choose to mow around native species pop up in your unmown space, but just letting a former turf grass lawn run wild is not a good way to help your local ecosystem.

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Last update: **2026/07/08 20:50**

