



Conservation Stewardship Program
Natural Resource Management

POLLINATOR HABITAT

MAINTENANCE

PROTOCOL

2026



THE CITY OF
COLUMBUS
ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR

RECREATION AND PARKS
DEPARTMENT

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Pollinator Habitat Maintenance	
Purpose:	To help maintain our pollinator habitats through the removal of invasives and weeds and planting of native plant species.
Requirements:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All volunteers must sign a yearly liability waiver • Must complete a background check (through VolunteerHub). • Complete a two-part training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Part One: Virtual training session led by Columbus Recreation and Parks Staff (to be offered annually). ○ Part Two: In person hands on training led by Columbus Recreation and Parks Staff.
Training Materials:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollinator Habitat Maintenance Protocol (this document) • Pollinator Habitat Maintenance Training Slides (Part One) • Education Materials – Tool use/ Equipment
Duties:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove woody invasive plant species from pollinator habitats. • Remove non-woody (herbaceous) invasive plant species from pollinator habitats. • Remove non-invasive woody plant species “volunteer trees” within pollinator habitats. • Litter clean-up within and surrounding pollinator habitats. • Seeding within the pollinator habitats. <p>Please only participate in activities that are within your own limits.</p>
Qualifications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possess an interest in nature and ecology. • Ability to follow direction of Columbus Recreation and Parks staff. • Demonstrate tact and diplomacy when working with the public. • Be able and willing to travel to your chosen pollinator habitat site. • Be physically able and willing to use tools and perform moderately strenuous activities to remove invasive plants. • Be personable and detail-oriented; have good communication and recordkeeping skills.
Equipment:	Loppers, soil knives, spades, hand pruners, pruning saws, hand tillers, tarps and gloves.
Season:	March through October.

Workday Planning and Procedures

Once you have completed a background check and two-part training, it is time to start volunteering!

Workday Preparation

1. Plan

- a. Find a Columbus Recreation and Parks pollinator habitat that you would like to help maintain. Click [here](#) or the link below for an interactive map of pollinator habitats throughout the City.

<https://columbusrecparcs.com/nature/pollinatorhabitats/>

2. Set the Date

- a. Once you have signed up for a location on VolunteerHub, you are ready to set a date and time for you to volunteer independently.
- b. You may complete volunteer work at more than one location. It is recommended to create a schedule for the season (or year) in advance.
- c. Independent Conservation Stewards or groups of Conservation Stewards less than 5 people do not need to notify the Conservation Steward on planned workdays.
- d. Groups with five (5) or more Conservation Stewards must notify the Conservation Stewardship Coordinators of planned workdays at least two (2) weeks in advance to ensure there are no conflicts with park events and/or programming.

3. Secure Tools and Supplies

- a. You are welcome to use your own tools and supplies if you choose. However, the Department has partnered with Keep Columbus Beautiful (KCB) to offer loans for tools and supplies if you need or prefer to borrow tools.
- b. The KCB Visitor and Supply Center offers tools and supplies on loan, free to the Columbus community. Litter grabbers, safety vests, gloves, trash bags, rakes, shovels, pruners and other helpful items are available. KCB also has first aid kits available to borrow. Please submit a Conservation Stewardship Program Supply Request Form linked [here](#) or scan the QR code. Please email PNSteck@columbus.gov with any questions.



Layout of Workday

1. Understand Workday Activities and Goals

- a. Take a walkthrough of the site to get familiar with your surroundings and identify any hazards that may be present.
- b. Be clear about which species you will be working with and only touch plant species that you are confident in identifying.

2. Start Working!

- a. We ask that volunteers only work during daylight hours and only work within their own limits.
- b. The following are maintenance opportunities that can be accomplished within a workday.
 - i. Removal of plant materials
 1. Invasive vines
 2. Invasive woody (trees and shrubs)
 3. Invasive forbs and grasses
 4. Volunteer native trees and shrubs
 - ii. Litter clean-up
 - iii. Seeding a pollinator habitat (Under direction of Columbus Recreation and Parks Staff to provide the seed mix and location)
- c. For a step by step of how to properly remove plants or seed, see the Appendix.

3. Clean-up

- a. It is expected that all conservation stewardship workdays have a waste removal plan. Any waste must be bagged and taken off site, unless directed otherwise by Columbus Recreation and Parks Staff. A specific waste removal plan will be provided for each respective location.

Workday Follow-Up

Documenting Your Work. It is very important for Conservation Stewards to document and report their workdays/ efforts to CRPD through our Survey form. This allows us to track the outcomes of the Conservation Stewardship Program and how Conservation Stewards are positively impacting our parklands! Only one form needs to be completed per workday. Please follow the directions below on how to complete your workday documentation.



1. Complete the Survey123 Form for documenting your work

- a. Scan QR Code or use this [link](#).

<https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/9296b36beea24fdaafc291d209eff62c>

- b. Questions below:

i. Pollinator Habitat – Volunteer Field Work

1. Date and Time
2. Name
3. Pollinator Habitat Name
4. Duration (hours worked)
5. Activity (can select multiple dropdowns)
 - a. Removing invasive trees and shrubs
 - b. Removing invasive vines
 - c. Removing invasive forbs and grasses
 - d. Removing volunteer woody plants
 - e. Litter clean-up
 - f. Seeding
6. Location where work was completed *Only needed for activities removing vegetation
7. Additional Maintenance Needs Observed?
8. Additional comments

*****IMPORTANT*****

Conservation Stewards are completing this work on behalf of COLUMBUS RECREATION AND PARKS DEPARTMENT. It is vital to the success of the Conservation Stewardship Program that the work is documented and that Conservation Stewards do not share the Survey123 link with anyone as it could compromise the integrity of the data we are collecting.

Appendix

How to Properly Remove Invasive Plants

Monitor the weather prior to an invasive removal event. If severe storms (i.e. heavy rain or strong winds) are coming, then reschedule or cancel the invasive removal event.

1. Check your surroundings before cutting, this is extremely important if tackling woody invasives that are overhead.
2. Ensure that the material is kept firmly in place. To avoid serious injury, it is crucial to hold the stock firmly in place. You can use your free hand to hold smaller objects, provided you wear thick gloves to protect your hand from the motion of the pruning saw. You can also ask an assistant to hold objects in place.
3. For woody shrubs and trees:
 - a. If you are working in groups, always be aware of others working around you, you may ask them to move or you may need to find another shrub/tree to cut. Some stewards may prefer to work on the buddy system to cut a large woody invasive plant, for this, one steward supports the weight of the invasive to prevent the tool from buckling or getting stuck while the other steward makes the cut. The steward providing support should stand so they do not impede the steward actively cutting.
 - b. Start slowly. To prevent buckling and rebound of the pruning saw, you must always start off slowly. Use long, even strokes to start cutting the material. If using loppers, remember the “rule of thumb: the loppers don’t cut anything thicker than your thumb.” While it may be possible to cut larger, it exerts extra energy from the user and is hard on the tool – it is possible to break the loppers from misuse. If you need to cut material thicker than your thumb, use a pruning saw.
 - c. Using either a pruning saw or loppers, cut as low and close to the ground as possible and keep the cuts level – you want the stump to be flat like a table, not angled into a wedge – this is to reduce risk of injury if someone falls and lands on the stump.

Correct



Incorrect



- d. Cut the plant into as many pieces as you need to safely transport the brush. Place the brush into a yard waste bag or trash bag.

4. For invasive forbs (flowering plants) and grasses:
 - a. The best course of action is to dig the plant up, be sure to get the roots. Use soil knives for small plants, and spades/shovels for larger plants.
 - b. For invasive plants with mature seed that is about to drop, please cut off the seed head and throw them into a trash bag before digging. Hold the seed head with your non-dominant hand and with pruners in your dominant hand cut the seed head. If you are not sure if the seed is mature, “when in doubt, throw it out.” Otherwise, you may skip this step.
 - c. Knock the excess soil off the roots, using either the tool or hitting the plant against the ground, and place the plant into a yard waste bag or trash bag.
5. For invasive vines:
 - a. When invasive vines are wrapped around a desirable native plant (especially one that has been intentionally planted or seeded in the pollinator habitat):
 - i. If approximately 50% or less of the native plant is covered in the vine, you must carefully unwrap the vine before removing the vine from the pollinator habitat. You may also snip the vine to help with unwrapping, but do not cut the native plant.
 - ii. If approximately 50% or more of the native plant is covered in the vine, you may use your best judgement on whether to sacrifice the native plant.
 - b. If the diameter of the vine is less than the diameter of your thumb, then dig the vine up, be sure to get the roots. Use soil knives for removing vines.
 - i. Knock the excess soil off the roots, using either the tool or hitting the vine against the ground.
 - c. If the diameter of the vine is thicker than your thumb, cut the vine as low to the ground as possible and keep the cuts level – you want the stump to be flat like a table, not angled into a wedge – this is to reduce risk of injury if someone falls and lands on the stump.
 - i. You may use loppers or pruning saws to cut thick vines.
 - d. Place the vine into a yard waste bag or trash bag.

How to Properly Remove Volunteer Native Trees and Shrubs

The plants that are installed in Columbus Recreation and Parks pollinator habitats are sun-loving species. Only select, large pollinator habitats are permitted to have trees *within* the pollinator habitat that were either mature, existing trees or have been planted by the Department. Any other native tree within the pollinator habitats, while occurring naturally, is considered a “**volunteer**” or a weed – a weed is any plant is not desired in that space – and should be removed so it does not eventually shade out the desired forbs, grasses, sedges, and small shrubs.

- Native woody volunteers (trees and shrubs) – **Pollinator habitats only**
 - ***Acer negundo*** boxelder
 - ***Celtis occidentalis*** hackberry
 - ***Juglans nigra*** black walnut
 - ***Populus deltoids*** cottonwood

Natural Resource Management Stewards are only permitted to remove native tree volunteer seedlings that are approximately the diameter of a pencil; larger diameter native tree volunteers will be removed only when CRPD staff are on-site.

1. If you are working in groups, always be aware of others working around you, you may ask them to move or you may need to find another shrub/tree to cut.
2. Start slowly. Decide whether to use a pruning saw or loppers to remove the tree or shrub. To prevent buckling and rebound of the pruning saw, you must always start off slowly. Use long, even strokes to start cutting the material. If using loppers, remember the “rule of thumb: the loppers don’t cut anything thicker than your thumb.” While it may be possible to cut larger, it exerts extra energy from the user and is hard on the tool – it is possible to break the loppers from misuse.
3. Using either a pruning saw or loppers, cut as low and close to the ground as possible and keep the cuts level – you want the stump to be flat like a table, not angled into a wedge – this is to reduce risk of injury if someone falls and lands on the stump.

Correct



Incorrect



4. Cut the plant into as many pieces as you need to safely transport the brush. Place the brush into a yard waste bag or trash bag.

Waste Removal

1. Count the number of trash bags used and yard waste bags used. If there is any chance of precipitation in the upcoming 72 hours, all yard waste **must** go into a trash bag as opposed to a yard waste bag.
2. Take all trash bags to the nearest dumpster or trash can.
3. Yard waste bags and brush should be taken to a designated space. If the pollinator habitat is near a community center or another park with a dumpster, you will drag everything to the dumpster, but **only** tied trash bags go in the dumpster, yard waste bags should be closed and left next to the dumpster.
4. If there is not a dumpster nearby and/ or is excessive yard waste:
 - a. **Option 1:** If you only have yard waste bags, please set them next to the nearest hard surface (trail is fine), but leave the **bags on the turf or in the wood line**, not directly on the trail because that will create a tripping hazard. However, if the bags are ripping, wet, or just too heavy follow option 2.
 - b. **Option 2:** If you have too much or too large of materials than what will fit in your yard waste bags, leave a pile (or piles as necessary) and yard waste bags in the prairie near the edge of the section of prairie you are working in, this time **please leave the yard waste in the pollinator habitat** (*note:* the turfed trails are considered trail at several pollinator habitats), and notify me of the general location so I can collect everything.
 - i. These are not meant to be habitat piles, please have all brush facing the same direction, stump end towards the trail. This allows for quicker cleanup by staff. Thank you in advance for your assistance!

Stewards may opt to dispose of brush and yard waste offsite themselves but are not required to do so.

How to Seed

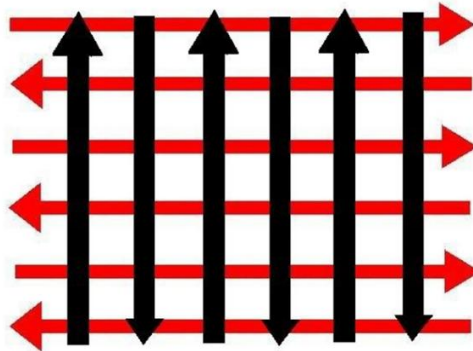
Seeding pollinator habitats are only permitted when the Conservation Stewardship Coordinator provides the seed and designates an area that needs to be seeded. Conservation Stewards are not permitted to plant or seed anything within parkland without prior written approval/ agreement.

Monitor the weather prior to seeding. If severe storms (i.e. heavy rain or strong winds) are coming, then reschedule or cancel.

While it is beneficial to seed just before a light or moderate rain, we do not want heavy rain washing away, or heavy winds blowing away our seed. Seeding is easiest to

perform during when there is light or no wind; if gusts of wind are occurring, wait them out before seeding, especially near the perimeter of the pollinator habitat.

1. Prep the space ahead of time by removing weeds and thinning thatch. Thatch can be raked with a garden rake, some or all the thatch can be repurposed by covering the seed at the end; excess thatch can be placed in a yard waste bag and disposed of properly (See Invasive Removal Cleanup). If the soil is compacted, then a hand tiller can be used to loosen the soil.
2. Divide the seed into buckets. The number of buckets is determined by the number of Stewards present for the event.
3. Distribute seed evenly within the pollinator habitat by walking in a crosshatch pattern as seen below. If multiple Conservation Stewards are present for the seeding event, space yourselves out so each Steward covers a smaller, but equal section of the Pollinator Habitat.



4. Stewards should walk at a leisurely pace, spreading seed in a “chicken feed” or a “sprinkler system” motion. If any wind is present, keep your seeding hand low to the ground to prevent drift – be extra cautious near the perimeter of the pollinator habitat as any seed that lands in the turf will be regularly mowed and some pollinator habitats are near a water source and washed away.
5. Once all seed is spread, cover the seed with excess thatch to protect the seed from burning in the sun.
6. At the end of the event:
 - a. If you were given a full/sealed bag of seed, then those bags may go into the nearest trash can.
 - b. If you were given seed in a paper bag or box, please return those to the Conservation Stewardship Coordinator at your earliest convenience.
 - c. You should not have any leftover seed; any remaining seed can be spread in the pollinator habitat. If the seeding event ended early because of weather or any other unforeseen circumstances, save the seed for the rescheduled time or contact the Conservation Stewardship Coordinator about other arrangements.