

**GREENCOVER**

# SOIL HEALTH RESOURCE GUIDE

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*12th Edition*

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# Maximizing Diversity with Flower to the People

The *Take Back the Turf* strategy by Flower to the People (F2P) reimagines conventional, non-functional monoculture lawns as vibrant, living landscapes that support both ecological and community health. We are applying key regenerative principles to urban and suburban landscapes, transforming lawns that require significant inputs of fertilizer, pesticides, and water, generate large amounts of green waste, and offer little to no habitat value into highly biodiverse, resource conserving, soil and carbon sequestering, fun play spaces. Converting these landscapes through conventional methods requires significant time, money, and specialized skills to replace lawn with woody plants or meadows. Our strategy focuses on rebuilding the degraded soils of these monoculture lawns by converting them into polycultures using cover cropping and “animal” integration. We are working with the natural succession of the place and are transforming these lawns quickly, at a fraction of the usual cost, with traditional equipment and crew.

Working with Green Cover, F2P has developed a highly diverse *F2PLawn Seed Mix* of more than 100 species from 22 families. The blend combines popular cover crop mixes (think mung beans, crimson clover, and buckwheat) to jump-start soil microbial activity with a prairie “golden ratio” mix of 50% grasses, 40% forbs, and 10% legumes from native seeds across the U.S. to support a perennial ecosystem. While both annuals and perennials are in the blend, the goal is to stimulate the soil microbial community favoring the perennial native seed bank. The grass on the site remains in place and is prepared by scalping, dethatching, and aeration (three annual tasks associated with any good lawn maintenance plan) and overseeded with the broadcast *F2PLawn Seed Mix*. All organic matter remains on site, so the thatch is re-used as cover after seeding. All fertilizer, pesticide, and herbicide applications are eliminated by this process.

The result is a lawn that is neither meadow nor restored prairie, but something in between – a little wild, a lot of fun—and very much a lawn. Where summer rain is insufficient, prescriptive irrigation helps facilities managers meet water conservation goals. Monthly random mowing patterns stimulate growth, allow flowering, and provide opportunity for the lawn to rest. These mowing patterns follow principles of adaptive grazing, guiding our human animal impact “Nike buffalo” through various play spaces. F2P launched a two-year Pilot Program with a target of 100 polyculture lawn acres by 2027. During the pilot, facilities schedule “Stomp ‘n Romp” and “Big Lawn Dance Party” events, inviting the community onto the lawn to stomp out unwanted plants, gently disturb bare areas, and contribute their microbi-



ome to boost biodiversity. Our goal is to get people away from screens and devices and back playing on lawns and landscapes.

Our pilot program partner, Dwelling on Carbon, conducts soil health testing to complement the data we are gathering on water use, plant, animal, insect, and bird biodiversity, and community acceptance of the “rewilded lawn” look. In our first year of monitoring, we have found infiltration rates generally triple and compaction abates, all while reducing water applications by 70% or more. Further testing on soil water holding capacity, carbon and nutrient cycling, and microbial activity are ongoing.

Most importantly, people relate differently to the wilder landscapes. The local community engages more frequently with these landscapes. Neighbors identify plants and birds. Children pick flowers. On the weekends it becomes an impromptu dog park. These new human interactions are proof that biodiversity not only benefits the landscapes, it benefits the people.

We are continually seeking 1-5 acre commercial, industrial, institutional lawn sites across the U.S. to further our research; we see stormwater capture areas, HOA common areas, and commercial green areas as strong candidates for the pilot program.

Restoring our communities and maximizing this planet’s diversity goes beyond a soil strategy. Life thrives through complexity, not uniformity. Our strategy creates more resilient landscapes and increases human interaction. At Flower to the People, we’re not replacing one kind of lawn with another; we are cultivating a new relationship with landscapes, starting with the soil and extending to the soul.

## By Pamela Berstler



Pamela Berstler is the CEO of G3 (Green Gardens Group) and Flower to the People, Inc., entrepreneurial organizations devoted to designing regenerative landscapes and training property owners and landscape professionals in soil health and environmental stewardship to affect profound change in urban watersheds. Certified Professionals from both organizations implement projects embracing workforce development, water conservation, low-impact design, education, and community activism.

For twenty-five years, Pamela has been a sought-after speaker on environmental topics, working with executive groups and businesses on ways individuals can change the planet’s future using urban and suburban landscapes as essential tools. She’s now adding regenerative agricultural practices and rural entrepreneurship to the mix. Together with partners at Dwelling on Carbon, a non-profit focused on carbon sequestration in urban landscapes, and Green Cover, Pamela’s team developed *Take Back the Turf*, a low-cost cover cropping strategy for building urban soil health and transforming commercial lawns into climate-appropriate, abundant, pollinator and people-friendly landscapes.



Photos courtesy of Flower to the People