

## Library Meadow Maintenance

Fairfax County handles the annual mowing of the library meadow. It is done once each year, usually in early March. The timing is contingent upon them being able to get a large mower in there when the ground is not saturated. We have been told that the meadow is on the Maintenance and Stormwater Division's annual schedule so it is not necessary for us to call each year. If the mowing hasn't been done by the time plants are getting big, however, a phone call would be in order. The main number is 703-877-2800.

As with all meadows, it is important not to mow in the Fall because doing so would kill all of the pollinators that have laid their eggs in the stems. It would also remove ground cover for over-wintering wildlife and eliminate seeds that could help feed birds when not much else is available. It is important to remember that the purpose of the meadow goes beyond aesthetics. It provides numerous environmental benefits, so even though it looks awful in February, that is part of the normal ebb and flow of a meadow.

As for garden club maintenance, the meadow requires only occasional attention. The natural evolution of a meadow will involve the gradual disappearance of some species and the gradual expansion of others. Some things will thrive, some will migrate to other parts of the meadow, and others will be eaten by deer or out-competed by stronger, taller plants. It is survival of the fittest. This process can be affected by the addition or subtraction of flowers and grasses, depending on the club's goals, budget and sense of aesthetics. For instance, over the past few years, we have been diligently adding grasses we know will spread aggressively so that we eventually get a larger percentage of grasses. This will enhance the overall appearance of the meadow and make it more attractive in the winter months. If it appears that invasive vines or "sticker bushes" are taking hold, a work day should be organized to remove them as much as possible.

The only other maintenance tasks are housekeeping issues that are not mandatory, but are certainly important from an aesthetic and environmental point of view. Trash such as plastic bottles and lacrosse balls occasionally wash into the culvert that empties into the meadow from the input drain. If we remove the trash while we are in there doing other meadow projects, it won't pile up by the exit drain and slow the water from leaving. In addition, paper and plastic trash blows from Georgetown Pike onto library property. While this isn't necessarily a garden club responsibility, it is wise to remove it so that the mowers don't cut it into thousands of pieces and scatter it across the lawn, which is unsightly, and so that it doesn't end up in the meadow. The front of the library has become an impressive addition to the landscaping of our town, and as a garden club project, it behooves us to keep it looking it's best.

Because the meadow was planted in a stormwater retention pond, we are prohibited from planting trees or shrubs there. We should also maintain a two-foot clearing around the metal cage that covers the exit drain. This keeps the county happy and ensures that they won't take matters into their own hands by clearing a much larger swath of desirable grass and flowers. After very large storms, the pond can fill with water and take several days to fully drain because this caged exit is designed to release the water slowly. This should be kept in mind when deciding where to locate new plants and grasses. Those that can't tolerate being occasionally water logged should be planted farther up the slope. Other than that, we have free rein to plant and remove flowers and grasses as we see fit.

Candy Burt has created a fabulous educational binder as a resource for the library staff and public. It describes each flower and grass we have planted, including botanical and common names, drawings and information about growing habits. In addition, the club and Friends of Great Falls Library paid to have designed and installed an informative sign near the meadow so that passers-by understand the purpose and value of the meadow.