

# The Gardening Page

Norwalk  
Public Library



## **MAKING A MEADOW!**



### **Our Interview with Chair, Audrey Cozzarin**

Oak Hills Nature Advisory Committee, Norwalk, CT



**Audrey holding milkweed seeds at Oak Hills Park**



**Sally from the Norwalk Public Library:** Audrey, this is such a great time for the **Oak Hills Nature Advisory Committee!** You were just recently voted in as chair of this committee, and look what—in just a few short months—you have accomplished!

### **THE BEGINNINGS OF A MEADOW ON THE GREAT LAWN!!**

Please, first tell us why meadows are so important to the environment.

**Audrey:** Sally, thank you for asking me to share this new project at Oak Hills Park.

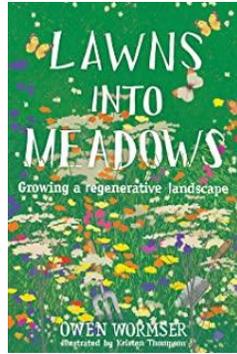
Historically, New England was covered by mature old-growth forests. Once our area became more populated (several centuries ago), settlers cut trees for building materials and clear-cut for agricultural farmland. Meadows are grassy open areas that appear in highlands and low valleys with rivers, and in woodland openings. Lately, there is a movement to restore former building sites back to a native condition. Meadows capture more carbon (CO<sup>2</sup>) than typical grass lawns. Plants are the natural “lungs” of nature, and keep our air quality clean. Meadows also supply food and shelter for pollinators (butterflies, bees, birds, insects) and wildlife. It is important to keep our environment natural and healthy, for the animals as well as us “earthlings”!

**Sally:** I love how you say that plants are the natural “lungs” of nature. So beautifully put. And yes, the pollinators! Without them, our food supply, too, would be severely diminished, wouldn't it. We do need to shelter, protect, and feed our pollinators.

Did you have the idea for a meadow on the Great Lawn for a long time?

**Audrey:** The Great Lawn meadow—along with the other two features of our nature center— was part of the 2016 master plan for Oak Hills Park. Establishing the meadow has been one of patience: we kept the area mowed for 4 years to prevent the invasive plants from seeding so that they would eventually die back. Now, at last, the time has come to start planting the native flowers and grasses! It's exciting to move forward, and spring, 2021, will be a very busy time!

**Sally:** I know that Owen Wormser—author of *Lawns Into Meadows*—provides you with inspiration and information in regards to creating a meadow. Please share that story!



**Audrey:** Yes, Owen has been a great resource! He was a featured presenter on your **Norwalk Public Library/Norwalk River Watershed Association Nature-friendly Gardening Webinar Series** in July.



I was so impressed with his command of this relatively new practice of creating meadows, so right away I bought and read his book. The subtitle for his book is *Growing a Regenerative Landscape*. That kind of says it all! I contacted Owen after the lecture, and he graciously weighed-in on my planting plan and timeline for this new meadow to be installed at Oak Hills. He said I was spot-on, so I guess I'm a good student!

**Sally:** What other sources of inspiration and information do you access during your meadow-making?

**Audrey:** Our resident **Pollinator Pathway** movement here in Norwalk and Fairfield County has been a tremendous resource.



I also took a course in the fall of 2018 at Norwalk Community College with **Master Gardener Jackie Algon**, and Liz Craig on flowers, shrubs, and trees that attract pollinators. Jackie Algon is a founding member of the **Northeast Pollinator Pathway!**

Many of the speakers in your **Nature-friendly Gardening Webinar Series** have mentioned the importance of meadows, passing along a wealth of information.

There is a lot of information on the Internet these days on meadows, too.

I also enjoy keeping up with the amazing progress being made at **Oyster Shell Park**, in restoring what was once a giant landfill.

And I keep tabs on the overall global situations created by climate change. I really like listening to climate scientist **Dr. Katherine Hay Hoe**.

**Sally:** I know Oak Hills Park has a large public golf course. I imagine you must feel such joy that there will now be a meadow on the grounds! Can you talk about the importance of having a meadow next to a golf course?

**Audrey:** It's quite unusual to have a nature center with protected woodlands at a golf course, so what we have here in Norwalk is a real gem. The turf grass and grounds on the course are maintained in a more sustainable way than most courses, and this does help remove carbon from the environment. The nature area and woodlands give the community another option to be in nature. In the spring, we plan on once again hosting trail walks and Yoga and Qigong classes in nature, poetry readings, as well as other events and opportunities, depending of course on the COVID-19 situation.

**Sally:** Yes, Audrey, I think planting a meadow near a golf course creates an ideal situation. Maybe if every golf course (if they are maintained sustainably, that is) had an adjoining large meadow, a certain balance could exist: golfers could golf, and our pollinators could pollinate.

Please take us, step by step, on the process of building a meadow. It started a couple of weeks ago by planting a strip of pollinator-friendly flowers, I believe. Please outline your plan for us.

**Audrey:** The meadow was initially cleared of its tangle of invasive plants, shrubs, and trees in 2016. This is how it looked before we cleared it:



An oval gravel walking path was created, and native trees and lawn seed were planted for aesthetic purposes:



The lawn was mowed for four years, which helped to prevent invasive plants from going to seed.

Finally, the invasives died back.

**On September 25, 2020**, volunteers planted two areas with token small beds of donated milkweed, goldenrod, Rudbekia, and butterfly weed.



We put in a small row of hornbeam hedges, which attract bees. (I noticed the other day that critters have nibbled the hedges' leaves, but that's how it is in the natural world, and you have to accept this kind of occurrence.)



Volunteers Larry and John planting the bee-loving hornbeam hedges near the woodlands area



Volunteers Lisa and Andrea watering the plantings as we finished up for the day

Starting in the spring, we'll need a small army of volunteers to plant "plugs," which are small seedlings. We will need a drill-seeding machine to plant seeds directly into the existing lawn (hopefully, we will have one!). **If anyone wants to be contacted in early spring to volunteer, please email me at [audreyyogini@gmail.com](mailto:audreyyogini@gmail.com). I'd love to have you, and it's great fun!**

The mowing in the meadow area will be kept at six to eight inches high in order to keep weeds from growing, and to allow the small seedlings to keep growing. Eventually, all the weeds will be crowded out. We will have to pull out weeds by hand to some extent.

There is water in that area, so the seedlings won't suffer from drought. Once established, native plants are pretty much drought-resistant! They know how to acclimate to their natural surroundings.

Since the meadow might look a bit scraggly for the first year, Owen Wormser recommends planting annuals along the front, visible edge where folks will see colorful flowers.

**Sally:** That's a wonderful idea that Owen had, isn't it? I think it's nice, though, that a meadow looks scraggly at first, and then evolves into something beautiful. There is such metaphor in that!

Please give us a list of flowers that will be in your meadow, and the importance of native plants.

**Audrey:** Our meadow will have milkweed, butterfly weed, goldenrod, asters, sunflowers, pokeweed (for the berries), native grasses, and any donated or curated native plantings we are able to include. There are many very good wildflower seed blends, and many shrubs and trees. We'll be focusing more on flowers and grasses, though, because we have native trees already planted along the walking path.

The native plants provide local wildlife with food and shelter. We have lost many insects and birds worldwide due to human activity (chemical use, and habitat destruction). Over the years, buildings, paving, pollution, and lawns have replaced living space and clean air and water for animals and insects. If they thrive, we thrive. If they suffer and die off,

well, that is a warning sign for us humans. Native environments keep the planet healthy. Mother Nature knows best! At Oak Hills Park, we are doing our best to help her, and her “children”.

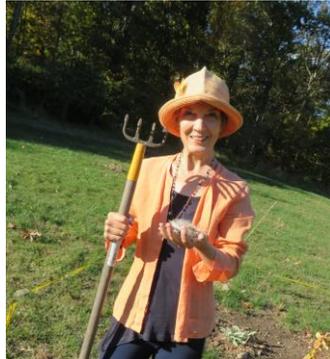
**Sally:** We look forward to the *final* ribbon cutting for the *full-grown meadow*!



OHPNAC ribbon-cutting before the first native plant bed was created on September 25, 2020

Thank you for making the world more beautiful, Audrey!

**Audrey:** Thank you, Sally, and the Norwalk Public Library, for bringing efforts like this to the attention and benefit of our community!



**If any of you would like to volunteer  
on the Oak Hills Park  
Meadow project,  
please contact  
Audrey at [audreyyogini@gmail.com](mailto:audreyyogini@gmail.com)**

