

Friends of Spy Pond Park Newsletter

Summer 2011

A Rain Garden at Spy Pond Park: Beauty and Purpose

by Charlotte Milan

This year, Arlington's annual EcoFest focused on many aspects of water, from recreational uses and water conservation to the infrastructure that brings safe and plentiful drinking water into our homes. As the planning committee reviewed the many ways residents are affected by water, flooding rose to the top as a major issue for those who live near the Alewife Brook in East Arlington.



PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE MILAN

Lead Designer Sally Naish, Brucie Moulton, Karen Grossman, Gail McCormick, Corinna Vanderspek, and Joey Glushko gather to plot out the rain garden.

Rain gardens are growing in popularity as a means to reduce the speed at which water from strong storms flows into streams, lakes, rivers, and our storm drain system. In a public place, a rain garden can be built to function as a storm water infiltration garden, collecting a certain amount of rainwater and holding it so that it can gradually seep back into the ground. The more storm water that can be held, the less there is to overwhelm our water bodies. Since Arlington is so densely developed, there is precious little open space available to help absorb rainwater, so building a garden designed to enhance infiltration of rain runoff can help put these small pieces of land to even greater use. Trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers can all be planted in a rain garden and help improve the beauty of a small open space that may previously have looked more like a large puddle after a storm. A garden with deep-rooted plantings that tolerate both occasional wet, but more frequently, dry conditions will also serve to naturally filter toxins and pollutants carried by rainwater as it crosses driveways and lawns. Thus,

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PHOTO BY LUCILLE CANNAVA

Doris Birmingham, Co-Chair Park Beautification (2nd from left) distributes tools, gloves and brown bags to volunteers.

Helping out at Spy Pond Park

by Tris Anzells-Hopson, BU Sargent College '97, '99

Thanks to the Friends of Spy Pond Park for allowing access to the scheduled Work Day at the park on Boston University's Global Day of Service. On April 16 my husband and I joined a team of other alumni and undergraduate students at this community-loved park in Arlington, MA. Although the weather was a bit raw, there was a willing group of participants buzzing around the park cleaning up winter's debris. Karen Grossman, a BU alumna herself, led us as we tended to growth along the shoreline, cleaned and raked the area around the pathways, and tidied up the playground. It was refreshing to see the mix of volunteers participating in the various tasks for the improvement of Spy Pond Park and celebration of the Global Day of Service. At day's end, the park was ready for spring and the influx of children, bikers, picnickers and fishermen that it brings.



PHOTO BY KAREN GROSSMAN

False Indigo: A Persistent Intruder

by Doris Birmingham



PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM

On any FSPP workday between June and September, someone will probably thrust a set of small pruners into your hand and instruct you to go after the false indigo. Once shown this plant, you may protest, "But it is so pretty!" Indeed, its grey-green, frond-like leaves are quite attractive - in fact, attractive enough to inspire many gardeners to plant it as an ornamental. However, its toughness, aggressiveness,

and virility are such that without our backbreaking labor it would soon obscure views of Spy Pond and literally smother the lovely native ferns, asters, Solomon's seal and other fragile species that park users so much enjoy.

Amorpha fruticosa is its scientific name, but it also goes by the following monikers: false indigo, indigo bush, desert indigo, bastard indigo, leadwort, and lead bush. In his *Field Guide to Wildflowers of the Northeast and North Central U.S.*, Roger Tory Peterson does not mention *Amorpha fruticosa*. However, he does list "blue false indigo" (*Baptisia australis*), which, like our indigo, is in the pea family, but whose appearance cannot easily be confused with *Amorpha fruticosa*. Blue false indigo, a native of the Midwest, which displays its own distinctive leaf arrangement and showy purple flowers, has spread to Massachusetts. So far it has not appeared in our planting beds, but if it did, we probably would welcome it since it is already listed as an endangered species in several states.

Not so with the ubiquitous *Amorpha fruticosa*. It is a perennial deciduous shrub, which in our area can very quickly grow into dense thickets with stalks as much as twelve feet tall and an inch or more in diameter. It is recognizable by its long compound leaves, consisting of 5-15 pairs of gray-green, hairy, oval leaflets. Given its tough and extensive root system, many of us have supposed that false indigo reproduces by means of runners. We have been mistaken. In early summer false indigo sends up 3-6 inch spikes (racemes) which bear tiny purple flowers that mature into numerous pods, each holding two seeds. Dropped on the ground and carried by wind or water, these seeds easily germinate in moist, bare soil. Not surprisingly, this plant loves fresh water shorelines, marshes, and the planting beds of Spy Pond Park! To

give false indigo its just due, we must admit that it offers some benefits: specifically, it can stabilize shorelines and provide habitat for small wildlife while its flowers attract butterflies.

We often refer to false indigo as an "invasive," but this is a misnomer according to the U.S. government definition of that term, to wit: a plant "that is not native to the ecosystem under consideration and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health." Originating in the Midwest and Southwest, false indigo has spread to every state except Nevada and Montana. Only two states have so far banned it: Washington (where it can grow 20 feet tall!), which lists it as a Class B noxious weed that "displaces native riparian area species," and Connecticut, which deems it a "probable garden escapee" and thus "potentially invasive." Perhaps it is only a matter of time before Massachusetts reaches the same conclusion as its neighbor to the south. It would be interesting to do more research to see if the plant has become as much of a pest elsewhere in the Commonwealth as it has on Spy Pond.

Officially an invasive, or not, we clearly do not want it in our planting beds. Left to its own devices, it would eventually crowd out all the carefully chosen native species that the FSPP have so lovingly nurtured in the five years since the Park's renovation. So what can we do? According to Washington State's Department of Ecology, little information exists as to control methods, by which they presumably mean herbicides. The painful truth is that to merely keep this plant under control, manual labor is the only option. Throughout the summer months, we must try to pull out all of the young plants as they appear in the beds. Since they propagate by seeds, we need to destroy as much of the vegetation as possible before it flowers or bears seed pods. Near the water, the woody stalks and all new growth need to be cut to the base, but we should not contemplate removing the stumps or roots in this area because these may be helping to control erosion. Finally, as home gardeners let us not be tempted to cultivate this all-too-easy-to-grow plant, (usually sold as seed), and let us discourage our neighbors from doing so. Without vigilance, *amorpha fruticosa* could become the northern equivalent of southern kudzu near our waterways and wetlands!



PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM

President's Letter

Dear Friends,

There are many projects with which the Friends of Spy Pond Park are involved. First, and foremost, we have been grooming the park. We are grateful to all the volunteers who worked in Spy Pond Park each month this spring, including those from B.U.'s Global Day of Service and People Making a Difference (www.PMD.org). Successful Work Days will help us keep ahead of rapidly growing invasive plants in our planting beds. Please join us to help out, if you can. Or, if you know of a group that could assist on Work Days, contact Doris at dabirming@gmail.com or Gail at gtmmcormick@verizon.net.

We had requests for more shade within the playground. We were not able to arrange for the tree to be within the playground itself, because there it would not be a safe distance from the playground equipment. However, we asked for a young, black tupelo tree purchased by the Town to be planted on the grassy perimeter near the playground fence. Thanks to the efforts of some generous high school students who donated their time for this community service. We are grateful that Gail McCormick and Wally Williams have been watering this new resident of our park (a maple tree) until it is strongly established there.

So much will be happening around the park soon. On July 10 at 5 p.m. the Arlington Center for the Arts will sponsor Shakespeare's "Macbeth" acted by the Arlington Children's Theater teenagers at Spy Pond Field, across from the Boys and Girl's Club. As we have reported, there are already many visitors to our park who come from far and near. Now that the Arlington Land Trust and the Audubon Society have secured Elizabeth Island as conservation land, they will hold an outdoor celebration. We are having a Fun Day in the park for children on September 10 that we hope will coincide with their plans. Spy Pond Park is a busy place! Come on down. And don't forget to check us out on Facebook and "Like Us" there at: www.facebook.com/friendsofspypondpark.

Many concerns are on our "To Do List". Erosion from water flowing through the park continues to be an issue. We are getting closer to planting a rain garden to help that situation and have asked Heimlich Construction Company to give us an estimate for the cost of re-grading areas to ameliorate erosion problems. The StaLok® installation at Linwood Circle looks great. We hope to implement a similar remedy to repair the handicapped ramp so it can be safely used as intended. However, to do that we'll need to mount a fund raising campaign. If you can help spearhead that, please contact me. Lastly, many of you have paid your 2011 dues, but if you haven't, please send them to our P.O. box a.s.a.p. Thanks. Hope to see you in the park or at a meeting soon.

Sincerely,



Karen L. Grossman, President
Friends of Spy Pond Park

June Metamorphosis

by Eric Berger

The parade around Spy Pond celebrated a new name, for on June 17, 1867, as if to usher in the summer wafting gently on the deliciously warm horizon, West Cambridge morphed into Arlington. The gala festivities honoring our Town's new name are brought to life in the lovingly written book, *More Spy Pond Stories*, by Eva Balazs.

"The procession gathered in the Center, marched down Pleasant Street to Lake Street, around the shore and up again on Arlington Avenue (Massachusetts Avenue). Leading citizens, merchants, children, and members of the armed forces marched with flags and banners, while numerous bands marched along in accompaniment."

Eva recounts how a celebratory banquet lunch was served on the lawn of the Pleasant Street home of none other than J.R. Bayley, Esq. There, gathered beneath a giant tent decorated with flags and ribbons, many dignitaries sat at "long rows of tables". Speeches followed the sumptuous luncheon, and then the celebration shifted into high gear with a splendid regatta on Spy Pond. The day came to an elegant close with refreshments served at Addison Gage's ever so special house, topped off with more entertainment in his beautiful garden overlooking the pond.

"For many years it remained a custom to celebrate 'Arlington Day' with a parade around Spy Pond followed by a sailing regatta."

What a treat it is to read *More Spy Pond Stories* by Eva Balazs.

Community Compromises Create Better Results

by Betsy Leondar-Wright

Back when the park renovation was being planned, around 2001, there was a disagreement between two sides. The Conservation Commission and others concerned about the shoreline ecosystem wanted to put up a tall fence from one end of the park to the other, so that human and dog feet would stop trampling the wetland plants and causing erosion. Many Friends of Spy Pond Park members and boaters wanted to keep the same unfenced, open shoreline we had always enjoyed. It seemed like a conflict that someone was going to lose.

But at the community input sessions with Carol R. Johnson Landscape Architects, someone suggested a low fence with regular openings; someone else suggested stone steps down to the water; landscape architect Kate Thompson came up with the idea of a stone-lined wheelchair ramp; and a compromise was reached about fencing most of the park but leaving open the Linwood "beach" (which is naturally heavily eroded by wind and waves) so that windsurfers, kayaks and canoes can launch there.

The result was a park that was far more beautiful than FSPP's original request, and that did an even better job preventing erosion than the Conservation Commission's proposal. The process of community dialogue and compromise created a better result than anyone thought of in the first place.

Over these last two years, a similar process has happened with regulating motorboats on Spy Pond. The first proposal brought to the 2009 FSPP Annual Meeting by members who had witnessed a few incidents of reckless behavior by motorboat operators was to ask Town Meeting to ban gas-powered engines entirely. This was opposed by some motorboat owners and others who felt that the 10 horsepower and 10 mph limits were already enough regulation to prevent problems. The proposal passed by just barely over 50% -- not a mandate for action.

In 2010, FSPP officers asked two people with strong opinions on opposite sides – myself, in favor of the ban on gas-powered motors, and Herb Loeffler, against the ban – to research the laws at other lakes and to come back to the membership with a compromise proposal. They figured that if Herb and I liked the same idea, everyone would like it. Thanks to Herb's research, we came up with a proposal for a no-wake zone within 50 feet of the shoreline of the pond, including the shores of Elizabeth Island. Most water bodies that allow motorboats have some no-wake zone, so this didn't seem like it would be controversial.

This proposal got almost a unanimous vote at the 2010 FSPP Annual Meeting, and we signed a Warrant Article for Town Meeting, filed it in January, and spoke in favor of it at the Selectmen's hearing. Several neighbors of the park spoke passionately about dangerous situations with too-fast motorboats and children near the playground, the noise of boats speeding in

and out of the boat ramp, and the danger of pollution from a leak if a motor hit a rock at high speeds. To many of us it was hard to imagine that the no-wake zone would get any opposition.

However, what we didn't realize is that the channels on both sides of the island are barely 100 feet wide, so the coaching boats for the Arlington Belmont Crew Team (ABCT) would have to slow down to a crawl whenever they traveled between the two basins of the pond – not realistic, given how fast those rowers can row! The team spoke against the Warrant Article at the Selectmen's meeting, and the Selectmen voted no action – but asked FSPP and ABCT to come up with a compromise and bring it back to them.

Three crew team leaders, convened by Margaret Moore De Chicojay, Bob Noyes from the Spy Pond Committee of Vision 2020, and I from FSPP met and considered several possible compromises. Margaret had brought a map of the pond, and we drew all over it as we considered the crew team's needs and the park users' concerns.

What we realized was that virtually all the complaints and worries about fast motorboats were coming from the park, the condos, and nearby areas on the northern shore. On the south side of the pond, Route 2 noise drowns out motorboat noise, most homes are high up off the water, and the boat ramp where motorboats enter and leave seems very far away. It appears that no one who lives in Kelwyn Manor or along Pleasant Street has any concerns about motorboats. And from the ABCT point of view, the coaching boats already go at slow speeds near the park, both for safety reasons and because the rowers haven't yet built up any speed there. In fact, a no-wake zone near the park would help protect the fragile crew boats from other motorboats entering and leaving the pond.

So, clearly the best idea was a no-wake zone only by the park! The crew team liked it, FSPP's officers liked it, park abutters liked it, members of the Spy Pond Committee liked it, the Selectmen liked it – and when Town Meeting member Ethan Zimmer introduced it, a majority of Town Meeting members voted for it – another example of successful community compromise coming up with the best results for everyone!

Shakespeare in the Park brings "Macbeth" to Spy Pond Field

Join us Sunday, July 10 at 5:00 pm for "Macbeth" performed by Arlington Children's Theatre. ACT's talented teen actors will enthrall the crowd with Shakespeare's tale of one couple's murderous lust for power. The play tells the tragedy of Macbeth, a Scottish general whose encounter with three witches leads him to believe he will one day be king. He and his wife decide to murder the current king to make way for Macbeth himself. Guilt, confusion and more violence follow until Macbeth is ultimately destroyed and peace is restored to Scotland.

This is the first year for the FSPP to co-sponsor Shakespeare in the Park, one of Arlington's favorite summertime traditions! The public is invited to come early, bring a picnic, and enjoy free, outdoor theater in some of Arlington's most beautiful park settings. For the past 10 years, performances have been held in Menotomy Rocks Park and Robbins Farm Park, and this year, FSPP will play host to the event in Spy Pond Field, adjacent to Spy Pond Park.

For FSPP, this is a great opportunity to draw the public to our neighborhood. FSPP will have a table to promote activities and upcoming events. Please join us for this special event!

Organized by the Arlington Center for the Arts, Shakespeare in the Park is co-sponsored by the Friends of Spy Pond Park, the Friends of Menotomy Rocks Park and the Friends of Robbins Farm Park. This year's two productions are funded in part by a grant from the Arlington Cultural Council.

A second Shakespeare in the Park event will be held Sunday, August 7 at 5:00 pm, when the New England Shakespeare Festival will present "Measure for Measure" at Robbins Farm Park.

"Friends Of Winchester" Visit Spy Pond Park

by Devi Narayanan

We are a small group of 15 families, each having one, two or three kids, all going to pre-school or elementary. We like to get together with our families for the kids to have fun with each other and the adults to relax as well.

This Spring I had to choose a park that would be ideal for our group to have a little Spring Potluck Picnic. After a little bit of a research, I found Spy Pond Park in Arlington would be the most ideal place for our group. There is water/pond and the green grass that gives peace of mind. There are ducks that entertain/amaze people of all ages, a play ground for the little ones to play, nice picnic tables for our potluck food display, the warm and welcoming residents of Arlington, and most of all the park is so clean and tidy. What more would we need to have a happy family picnic! After obtaining a permit from the Parks and Recreation Department, on May 14th we had our Spring Potluck Picnic at Arlington's Spy Pond Park. We all had a very splendid experience. Our children had a wonderful time at the park.

Though we are the Residents of Winchester, we love to explore our neighboring cities' resources and this time it turned out to be a winner! Thanks to the Friends of Spy Pond Park.



PHOTO BY KAREN GROSSMAN

Spy Pond Park Rain Garden

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less contamination reaches our valuable water bodies, like Spy Pond, Alewife Brook, Mystic River and Mystic Lakes.

The Spy Pond Park rain garden project has an additional important purpose: to demonstrate one of the ways that Arlington residents can handle excess water from heavy downpours in their own back yards. "With the right location and the right plants, a rain garden can be not just functional, but beautiful too." says Sally Naish of Light and Shade Garden Design, Inc.; Sally is also a member of the Arlington Garden Club and Chair of the Arlington Tree Committee. According to experts like Sally, the best rain garden plants are those with extensive root systems, like grasses, but more importantly are adapted to the prevailing conditions. The rain garden in Spy Pond Park is intended to represent an area of a yard that is slow to drain after a rainstorm, but would otherwise be dry. "Ornamental shrubs and perennial flowers and grasses that are drought-tolerant, but don't mind occasional wet feet are perfect for such a location." says Naish. The Park garden will showcase for Arlingtonians some beautiful examples of what they can purchase locally and plant in their own yards to help hold water, prevent erosion, and provide an easy-to-care-for garden alternative to damp areas of lawn that can be difficult to maintain.

This summer, the Rain Garden volunteers will be out in the Spy Pond neighborhoods reaching out to residents to invite them to be involved in the fall planting of the garden, and provide opportunities for learning how to choose and maintain plants best suited for rain garden installation. We are looking for more avid gardeners and climate change-interested people to join us in engaging the community in thinking about how we can best adapt to meet the changing times. Please contact Charlotte Milan at cmilan@sustainablearlington.org if you'd like to help.

All neighbors, with or without previous gardening experience, are invited to help with the building, planting and maintenance of the garden this late summer and fall. You can think of it as free gardening lessons, or an opportunity to expand your knowledge of native plant species. Please contact Joey Glushko in the Planning Department to be included in any of the gardening activities, or just to learn more about the project: phone 781-316-3093, or email jglushko@town.arlington.ma.us.

The New England Grassroots Environmental Fund provided a grant for the building of the rain garden. Spy Pond Park has been selected as the location at the edge of the playground toward Pond Lane with installation expected in Aug./Sept. 2011. The volunteers who are helping see the project through include members of the Arlington Garden Club, Vision 2020's Sustainable Arlington, the Friends of Spy Pond Park, and Town staff representing the DPW and the Planning Department. Sally Naish is the lead designer on the project; she can be reached at sally@lightandshadegardens.com. On Thursday, July 14 at 8:00 P.M. there will be a public hearing with the Conservation Commission before final approval of this project in the third floor conference room of the Town Hall Annex.

Friends of Spy Pond Park next meeting at Karen Grossman's Sunday, August 7, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. 32 Hamilton Road #402

RSVP (optional) to 781-646-5990
email fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org

Park on Linwood Street off Mass. Ave. or on Lakehill off
Lake St. at the far end of the complex.

To join Friends of Spy Pond Park...

Send your annual dues (\$15 individual, \$25 household, \$5 low-income) to:
FSPP, P.O. Box 1051

Arlington, MA 02474-0021

For more information, call a Friends officer.

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For newsletter contributions, contact berkshire2@juno.com
General comments can be sent to fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org

Friends of Spy Pond Park • <http://www.friendsofspypondpark.org> • P.O. Box 1051 • Arlington, MA 02474-0021

Fun Day Coming Up on September 10

by Betsy Leondar-Wright

I have some questions for any kids reading this:

- If you make a boat out of bark, can you get it to float? How about if you put a little clay person on it? Will it still float?
- What kinds of bugs can you find in Spy Pond Park? And after you find them, what do you think they might do in a house, race track or circus ring you make from cardboard before releasing them?
- What is the biggest leaf you could find in Spy Pond Park?



PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE (WWW.PMD.ORG)

What's the smallest? Are there any colors of leaves besides green? If you made art out of leaves, which leaves would you use to make your art the most beautiful?

- Do you know what was going on with Spy Pond 300 years ago? 10,000 years ago? Do you think you could find hidden clues in the park to find out the answers?

- Usually adults tell you not to tear plants out of the earth. If you were asked to please tear up as many alien invasive species as you possibly could, how many could you uproot?
- If you got real binoculars as a prize for solving a mystery, doing a puzzle, or tearing out alien invasive species, what do you think you could see up in the trees and out in the water?

Do these questions get you in the mood to come to the Spy Pond Fun Day on September 10 from 1 to 4?

The theme of this year's Fun Day is the living beings in the ecosystem of Spy Pond and the crafts that can be made from natural materials found in the park. A Work Day will be going on simultaneously with the Fun Day. Live music will entertain us as we clean up the park and enjoy the nature activities.

Work Days 2011

- Sat., July 16, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. (rain date Sun., July 17, 1-4 p.m.)
- Sat., Aug. 20, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. (rain date Sun., Aug. 21, 1-4 p.m.)
- Sat. Sept. 10, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., Sept. 11, 1-4 p.m.)*
- Sat., Oct. 15, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., Oct. 16, 1-4 p.m.)

*There will be children's activities in the park during work hours on this date