

# Peck Homestead Native Garden, Summer 2025

## Current Conditions, Recommendations and Planting Proposal to Reduce Maintenance Requirements

Prepared by Lisa Mertz, Co-Chair of LGC Peck Garden Committee

**Open Spaces:** There are currently two significant bare areas in the native garden. These are the result of two primary factors: weed removal and more shade.

### 1) Wandering/Creeping/Roving Bellflower (*Campanula rapunculoides*)

The two photos below show where we've been working to remove a lingering infestation of Wandering Bellflower (WB). We've been digging out the roots of this stubborn weed for several years. This delicate looking plant (above ground) does have pretty flowers, but it aggressively outcompetes other plants. Its abundant seeds and intense roots contribute to the formation of dense colonies. I have not (yet) seen it move into natural areas, but in gardens it is a Menace! It's extremely difficult to remove. Full and lasting removal requires extensive digging. This often requires temporary removal of other plants nearby as well. Desired plants should not be returned to the area until it is known that no WB root fragments were left behind. In the photos below, the small, harmless looking plants in the center of the circle are more WB! They are resprouts from the bits of root that managed to escape our thorough excavation efforts.







The photo above shows the location of our most recent WB clearing campaign. Heather Parris and I dug out roots from here last year and again this spring. We had to remove the surrounding plants. This summer we've been cutting off the flower stalks that developed in order to reduce spreading by seed.

Right: WB can develop large, carrot-like taproots, but these are often difficult to find. The "carrots" develop at the bottom ends of long thin roots that extend deep below the surface and become entangled in the roots of other plants.

### **My Recommendation for This Bare Area:**

Hold off on installing any new plants until after the WB is more thoroughly removed. We can dig out the remaining roots this fall. The exposed, disturbed soil should then be covered with a layer of finely ground mulch. This will discourage new weed seeds from germinating here. (Note: *Mulch should be placed no more than 2 in. deep, and only on the soil, not on or against any foliage.* I've seen far too many landscapes damaged or even destroyed by over-mulching.) We can plant desirable plants in this area next year.





## 2) Less Sun and More Shade in Front Corner Triangle - Garden in Transition

This is a natural ecological shift that happens as nearby trees become larger and new trees are planted. It's a common occurrence in suburban landscapes.



Above: Notice the shadow patterns on the Grace Street sidewalk. This shows where tree shade has reached across the garden by mid-afternoon (in mid-May).

When the LGC Peck Garden Committee first designed this garden about 8 years ago, this front corner was sunny for much of the day. So we planted several prairie species. True prairies have **no** shade at any time during the day. As some of the full-sun plants subsided over time, plants that are more shade-tolerant began moving in to fill the open spaces. Some of these were native species, but they were too tall and seeded themselves too abundantly for this garden. These included Joe Pye Weed, Tall Coreopsis, Cup Plant, Drummond's Aster, New England Aster, and Brown-Eyed Susan. These are beneficial native plants in some settings, but they are not suitable for this part of our demonstration garden. We've been working to remove these and want to replace them with native species that meet the following 3 criteria: a) thrive in part-shade, b) appropriate size, and c) do not outcompete other plants in a designed landscape. I can prepare a list of recommended plants that meet these criteria.





The picture above shows where a large bare area exists, but the emptiness at ground level is not visible from this view. We've been removing most of the tall plants that had moved in on their own. We're temporarily leaving the **Common Milkweed** (in case Monarchs are using them now for their eggs and caterpillars) and some of the **Brown-Eyed Susan** (because they're very showy right now). However, the seeds heads of these should be removed before they mature. It's the seedlings of these and similar species that were over-filling the space and would all become very large plants next year. Plants that tend to spread so quickly are nature's way of restoring disturbed landscapes, but they are too much for a small designed garden such as this. - Notice how shade is beginning to cross the path by 1:00 in mid-summer.

### **My Recommendations for This Bare Area** (front corner triangle):

Disturbed, exposed soil is prime real estate for seeds looking for homes. Unwanted growth on open ground can be reduced with repeat mulching, herbiciding, and manual weeding, but these control methods are expensive and quite labor-intensive, esp. for a small group of volunteers.

**I propose we invest in planting a protective groundcover of native sedges.** This landscape design strategy is becoming quite popular and is referred to as "matrix planting" or "live green mulch". Spaces between flowering plants are covered and protected by a carpet of short, grass-like foliage. A variety of native sedges is available for this purpose. I recommend we begin with installing plugs of **Pennsylvania (Common Oak) Sedge** (*Carex pensylvanica*). Descriptions and pictures of this important native species are on the next page. Flowering plants can be placed within the matrix as our time and budget allows. I can prepare a list of flowering plants that would be suitable for this location and thrive.

### 3) Recommending for a Matrix Groundcover to Reduce Maintenance

#### **Pennsylvania (Common Oak) Sedge** (*Carex pensylvanica*)

<https://www.pizzonursery.com/native-plant/carex-pensylvanica/>

**This popular sedge has found its niche in shaded landscaped for its ability to bring some green in the early spring and function as a dense and attractive groundcover.** Pennsylvania Sedge is low growing sedge with thin, graceful leaves and a showy inflorescence due to the large anthers of the staminate florets on the spikelets during the blooming period, which is early spring. It is worth plugging this delicate looking sedge as it does not come up well from seed.

<https://plantfinder.nativeplanttrust.org/plant/Carex-pensylvanica>

**Pennsylvania sedge supports dozens of butterfly and moth species**, a prime lawn alternative for dry shade and moist sun. This short sedge spreads gradually to form a dense mat. Needing neither irrigation nor mowing, it grows quite nicely where traditional turf struggles.

<https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?kempercode=f237>

**Groundcover for dry shade. Underplanting for shade perennials.** Lawn substitute for dry soils in shady areas (forms a turf that never needs mowing or mow 2-3 times per year to 2" tall). May be best to use purchased plants for covering large areas because this species often does not grow well from seed.

<https://www.midwestgroundcovers.com/carex-pensylvanica>

Short grass-like Sedge. **Delicate and semi-evergreen with slender leaves and interesting flowers.** Grows in shade or part sun. Prefers dry to well-drained soil. It can do well in more sunny locations with adequate moisture.

<https://www.prairiemoon.com/carex-pensylvanica-pennsylvania-sedge>

*Carex pensylvanica* is a fine-textured Sedge that reproduces by rhizomes and rarely reaches heights of more than 8" when blooming. **It is sought-after for its look of a traditional lawn and for its dry-soil tolerance and ability to grow in full sun or full shade.** To get a solid stand of this hardy sedge that so many desire, divide plants over the years. It will spread between 3-8" each year depending on the soil moisture of the site. To start a larger area from seed is not realistic; seed is difficult and slow to germinate. Pennsylvania Sedge actively grows during the spring and fall when soil temperatures are cool.





## Karen Brittain's Shady Front Yard in Elmhurst

**Pennsylvania Sedge** planted in October 2020

Full coverage in July 2021 and June 2025

Becomes green in early spring before lawn grass.



Photos by [Lisa@LivingLocalLands.com](mailto:Lisa@LivingLocalLands.com)

Karen prefers to leave her sedge area natural without mowing or intentional inter-planting. A few of her desired flowering plants appeared there over time and she keeps those.