

Lake Barcroft Philosophy for Landscaping Common Areas

By Betsy Washington

- The Lake is the community's most valuable resource and the quality of its water must be protected
- The trees and understory shrubs surrounding the Lake are the most important factors in providing this protection and should themselves be protected and preserved
- Invasive plants shall be removed from all community property
- All future landscaping projects shall take into account the need to restore the riparian buffer zone giving preference to native and other plants in the Lake Barcroft Recommended Plants list
- All residents shall be encouraged to follow the example established in this policy.

The Lake is the community's most valuable "living resource" and the overarching goal of the community landscaping plan for our common areas shall be to protect the water quality of the lake by minimizing run-off, erosion, sedimentation, and pollutants in the lake and associated watershed. Large, mature trees and associated under-story plants are the most important factors in preventing run-off, erosion, thereby reducing volume of storm water and slowing the velocity and timing of water moving through the lake, and ultimately the watershed, preventing destruction of property in Lake Barcroft and in downstream communities.

Landscape plans shall not only consider the aesthetic value of new plantings, but shall seek to restore the riparian buffer zones and the urban forest and associated understory plantings along the lake shoreline. Mature trees and associated understory plantings shall be protected and preserved in all future landscape plans (with the exception of disturbed sites inhabited by invasive plants). In addition, we shall strive to protect the health and diversity of our aging forest, by including plants from as many different species and plant families as possible to protect our landscapes from devastating disease and insect pests.

Invasive plants are one of the greatest threats to our natural ecosystems and are extremely difficult and expensive to eradicate once established. An invasive plant is a non native plant that has shown the ability to seed and/or spread into undisturbed natural areas and replace native vegetation. Invasive plants reduce the amount of light, nutrients and water available to native plants and can alter the soil chemistry and erosion patterns and reduce wildlife diversity. Therefore, all plants listed as highly or moderately invasive by the state of Virginia shall be excluded from future landscape plans for LBA common property. All existing invasive plants shall be removed from community property as time and money permits.

Before undertaking community plantings, a thorough site assessment shall be undertaken to determine the site conditions and growing conditions of the area under consideration.

Factors such as the characteristics of the topography, drainage and infiltration rates of the soil shall be considered. An inventory of existing vegetation including the presence of invasive and noxious weeds, the presence of mature trees and understory plantings and their health shall also be noted. And finally, any underground or above ground constraints such as underground utilities, drainage fields, overhead utilities, or easements and right of ways shall be noted.

Notes: All landscape plans shall be made with the realization that gardens mature and change over time. Plans shall allow for the gradual evolution of newly planted gardens with small trees and shrubs and sun loving plants, to shaded woodlands with deep, humus rich soils and shade loving groundcovers and underplantings.

Lake Barcroft is an aging urban forest, and as such, many of our mature forest trees are showing signs of stress and disease, and early senescence. Factors that stress our urban trees include removal and thinning of trees, severe pruning of trees to provide view and site lines, soil disturbance and compaction from construction, re-grading, terracing, and filling. Additionally removal and replacement of understory plantings with lawns is detrimental to the health of our trees. Most of our trees are adapted to the native acidic, humus rich soils of undisturbed woodlands. Lawns require near neutral soils, and excessive fertilization and liming to raise the pH, all of which stress and shorten the life expectancy of our trees and make them much more susceptible to disease and insect pests. With this in mind, landscape plans shall seek to preserve existing trees and understory plantings and to plant new trees to renew and sustain our urban forest.

1 The Lake Barcroft Recommended Plants list is based on Fairfax County's Recommended Plants for Resource Protection Areas of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance and expanded to include native plants that more truly represent plants appropriate to our hilly Lake Barcroft neighborhood as well as other selected non-native ornamental plants that have been tested in the mid-Atlantic area and show superior ornamental characteristic in more than one season, and superior disease and insect resistance, and that will thrive in this area a minimum of maintenance, extra watering, or chemical interventions.