

A Walk through Houston Meadow Reveals a Rare Plant

By Luke Rhodes, Project Coordinator, Fairmount Park Conservancy

On a warm, sunny day in July, a group of plant enthusiasts gathered outside of [Houston Playground](#). Field guides in hand, the group set out to explore the botanical treasures of Houston Meadow, one of a few naturally existing meadows in Philadelphia. Houston Meadow was the recent site of a PPR meadow reclamation project that expanded the meadow from a shrinking 15 acres back to a robust 30 acres.

Led by Janet Novak, president of the Philadelphia Botanical Club, and with individuals from Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, the Fairmount Park Conservancy, the Academy of Natural Sciences, Friends of the Wissahickon and others, the group made their way along the meadow trail, stopping to observe the various flowering plants in bloom. While many beautiful specimens were noted, one plant was of particular interest. It was an unfamiliar eupatorium, intriguing enough for Novak to make a return trip to identify as white thoroughwort (*Eupatorium album*). Once considered extirpated from Pennsylvania, this would represent the third known population of this plant's comeback in the state. With an abundance of small white flowers and growing only 2-3 feet tall, this eupatorium thrives in dry, poor soils with full sun, which makes Houston Meadow an ideal habitat. It takes careful inspection to distinguish this species from other eupatorium in the meadow but if the identification is correct, this is big botanical news.

Documentation has been sent to the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program for verification, and if accepted this will help *Eupatorium album* move from the classification of extirpated in Pennsylvania to endangered. Efforts are underway to gain the appropriate permission to collect seed and propagate this plant at PPR's Greenland Nursery. Once propagated, *Eupatorium album* would be planted in additional areas of Houston Meadow and introduced to other Philadelphia Parks & Recreation meadows to ensure a resilient population into the future.

Of the various habitats found in Pennsylvania, meadows are the most under-represented. PPR's division of Urban Forestry and Ecosystem Management has worked hard to preserve existing meadows and establish new ones, providing sanctuary for a diverse mix of Pennsylvania's flora and fauna. Perhaps most important among them, the rare and endangered species that struggle to keep their place in this urban ecosystem.



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Pictures of Houston Meadow

