

“Managing a Small Forest”

Patrick Agonis is the Grounds Supervisor for the Lowell Cemetery. He started to work here in 2016 at the suggestion of his mother-in-law, Julie Danforth, the Lowell Cemetery's Master Gardener from 2004 to 2022. On a cold March day, I interrupted Patrick's busy schedule to ask him what it's like to prep the Cemetery's 50 gardens for spring. At the time of this writing, the snowdrops are out near the office, but the fabulous tulips and daffodils had yet to appear.

-Rosemary Noon, Trustee

I'm guessing at this time of year you have to handle multiple projects at the same time.

I get to work at 6:45 a.m. and drive around the property checking on what needs attention that day. It's like managing a small forest. I check with Seth Durno (Lowell Cemetery Superintendent) and plan the day's work. Maybe it's not such a small forest after all—it's 54 acres.

Since Julie (Danforth) left, I'm responsible for gardening supervision, staying on top of watering, weeding, seeding, edging, pruning of roses, watering, laying out wood chips, and keeping up with the design of each of the gardens.



Patrick Agonis, Grounds Supervisor

Are you responsible for the tree collection?

We plant four to five shade trees every year. The Silver Maples and October Maples are a priority. Their leaves that turn from yellow to orange to red. They complement the yellow to orange colors of the many Sugar Maple leaves in the fall.

We call Burbank Tree Surgeons when certain trees are struggling. This happened recently with some beech trees. Organic material was pumped in to help the trees combat disease and assist with longevity. We recently lost two big oak trees near the cannons at the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic, Civil War grave area) lot. Trees can become weak over time or fall due to wind and weather.



June 2022

What are the particular areas to watch for plantings in April, May and June?

At the bus stop (name for the covered bench at the Knapp Ave. entrance), we planted 450 vibrant red, white, and yellow “Judy Beauty” tulips. In front of the Bonney monument, look for 325 Stop the Car apricot-orange and satiny plum-purple tulips arranged in a triangle design. At the intersection of Alpine Path and Washington Ave., there will be 325 reddish-pink and creamy-yellow “Miss Confection” tulips.

Red Canna flower bulbs and Elephant Ear plants are being cared for in the greenhouses at Sykes Florist, but they will be planted soon. I'll work with Darren (Sykes) to plant red, yellow and pink “Cut-and-Come-Again” zinnias at the Lawrence St. Gate. Impatiens will appear in a half-moon garden at the intersection of Howard and Oberlin avenues. The large pots at the GAR lot, the Ayer Lion, and Companion Gardens will be filled with flowers before Memorial Day.

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The Cemetery's forsythia will be out by mid- to late April. The Crab Apple and Cherry trees will start to flower shortly with the Magnolia trees. Lisa and Brian Anderson of Tewksbury recently donated a white flowering pear tree. It's in the middle of Mistletoe Path, off Washington Ave. and will peak in April.

What's your favorite area in the Lowell Cemetery?

That would be Rose Garden and the Evergreen Garden on Fenelon Ave., by the Talbot Chapel. The roses have recovered from a cold snap we had in 2022. We cut three feet from the plants. This area is fertilized four times a year (April, June, August, October) with “Rose-tone,” an all-organic product.

Visitors, daily walkers, and family members attending a service typically comment of how beautiful the Lowell Cemetery looks. Can you look at this property and think of its beauty, or do you only see projects needing attention?



May 2022



May 2023



May 2024

I'm proud of my work, but I'm dependent on a skilled crew. As the foreman, Bill Martino is responsible for maintaining the Cemetery's grounds. He and Kevin McCarthy work as a team to install new trees, lay foundations for headstones, assist at all burial services, and ensure the Cemetery's general upkeep. Maria Hernandez does the pruning and watering. Juan Ovalles and Cheo (Lorenzo) Paredes will be on the mowers. Everything comes together because of them. The day-to-day responsibilities are significant, but I know the Lowell Cemetery is a beautiful and special place.