

Weeding
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If you were expecting an article about your garden, then I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. Our Friends of the New Ulm Public Library annual used book sale is just one week away on November 2-4. We are grateful to all our Friends for the time and energy they put into the sale to make it successful in support of the library. We're also grateful to all of you who willingly donate your books and come to the sale! We hope you'll stop by the sale and have a lucky find or even join the Friends of the Library.

Some books in the sale, and the books on our regular book sale cart, have come from our collection. You see the library's barcode blacked out and may have wondered, as have many others, why would we get rid of books in our collection? Isn't this a library? Aren't we supposed to preserve knowledge and protect books? Well, yes. Have you ever seen the reality television program *Hoarders*? We may be a library, but an infinite space for the repository of all books we are not.

This brings me to my topic. As you may have guessed, weeding is the process we use to select items for removal from our collection. Many librarians (including myself) have a natural aversion to weeding because it means letting go of items our patrons might check out. We try to remind ourselves that we are not hoarding the books, we are a library for the community to use. Librarians put a lot of thought into the titles we select to add to our collection, and those reasons include community interest, new books by popular authors, new ideas and perspectives, or updated information. Likewise, we put a lot of thought into how we select titles for weeding. It is easy to select a book to be discarded if it is damaged beyond repair or if the physical copy walked away and never came back, but what else goes into the weeding process? Here are just a few principles we employ during the weeding process. It should give a glimpse at some of the behind the scenes work our staff put into making sure our collection is healthy and robust instead of cluttered and inaccurate.

One easy question to ask for non-fiction titles is "Is the information up to date?" Would you trust a medical book about cancer written thirty years ago? What about a book on Jupiter written twenty years ago? How about a book on Minnesota laws published just five years ago? If the information is outdated, then it becomes easier to weed. Not all non-fiction subjects are regularly updated though, so it won't always apply. However, if a book has an expanded, revised, updated, or new edition, then we consider that too.

Another great principle is one I've alluded to already – space. We only have so many shelves with just so much room on them. If a topic has many books in that section, we might feel the squeeze for shelf space. We shift and rearrange things when we can, but there comes a point where something has to go, which brings up my next point for how to select a title for weeding – statistics.

Between two books on the same subject or two books of the same genre, which do we weed? Circulation statistics help us make these decisions. If one book was checked out by patrons fifty times and the other was only checked out twice, then we have a better idea of what people are actually using. Do we have a book languishing on the shelf that hasn't been checked out in five years? It might be time to weed it from the collection, but first we ask ourselves some connected follow-up questions. Do we have the only copy in the state? Could a patron easily request it from another library?

If there is a book on our shelves that you think should stay in the collection because you have fond memories of it or consider it a classic, then check it out! Share about it with your friends and family. A well-read book is much more likely to stay in circulation for people to continue to enjoy. We hope you'll stop by the Friends of the Library used book sale starting on Thursday, November 2 at 5:30 p.m. for members of the Friends – you can join at the door! The regular sale opens up at 9:30 a.m. on Friday morning. The library is located at 17 N. Broadway and is open to the public Monday to Thursday 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m. and Friday and Saturday 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.