

# PARKS, GARDENS AND LANDSCAPE— MAINTENANCE

This technical note outlines good practices to be followed in maintaining important parks, gardens and landscapes and identifies maintenance activities that are approved under General Exemption Certificate—Queensland Heritage Places.

## Background

Parks, gardens and landscapes contain evidence of the layers of human activity, occupation and use over time. They reflect the time in which they were developed and about the way of life, tastes and interests of their original and subsequent owners and designers. Landscapes include scenic areas, cemeteries, stock routes, tramway routes, early coach routes, avenues of trees and individual trees. They might also be sites of significant events and are as much cultural artefacts as buildings. Original or early elements such as design, layout, plantings, fencing, paving, furniture, garden structures, culverts and abutments, should be retained and conserved.

## The Queensland Heritage Register

Some parks and some gardens are clearly identified as registered landscapes. However, many other places in the Queensland Heritage Register have landscapes that are part of the significance of the place. The Queensland Heritage Register boundary encompasses not only the building or group of buildings that may be the focus of the entry, but also includes the grounds, gardens and landscape structures and elements. Conservation of these landscapes is important for the conservation of the place as a whole and work to these areas requires approval by the department.

## Maintenance under General Exemption

Maintenance of parks, gardens and landscapes approved under General Exemption includes:

- pruning of trees to control size, shape, flowering or fruiting and removal of dangerous, diseased or dead vegetation
- replanting to maintain garden beds
- installation of garden sprinkler systems
- removal of Class 1 declared pest plant species
- removal of trees that have been assessed by a qualified arborist or horticulturist as dead, dangers or beyond curative repair.

## Pruning

Pruning of trees and shrubs is necessary to:

- control size
- improve shape, flowering or fruiting
- remove diseased, dead or dangerous material.

Pruning to 20 per cent of the crown of the tree within a period of two years can be undertaken under General Exemption. If the tree requires more than 20 per cent of its canopy removed for safety reasons or for the long-term health of the tree, a written assessment must be given and the work must be carried out by a qualified person (for example, an arborist, tree surgeon or horticulturalist). Trees should never be lopped back to a stump. Pruning must be carried out in accordance with Australian Standard AS4373 Pruning and Amenity of Trees.

## Maintaining the original character of the plantings

Registered gardens and landscapes should continue to use plants that reflect the original species used in the design. Otherwise the original character of the garden may be lost or obscured.

Replacement or additional plantings should be chosen from the range of species originally planted, or from plants that are similar in form and character and were available at the time of the original plantings. The pattern of planting in beds, rows or hedging should also match the original.

Many registered gardens and landscapes feature mature trees planted as avenues, border plantings or specimens. These trees may define the original design and character of the grounds or garden, and correct care of them is essential to maintain the significance of the landscape.

Earlier Queensland gardens often feature plantings of large native and exotic trees such as figs and pines, black beans, camphor laurels, bottle trees and bamboo groves; and the large flowering tropical trees and shrubs such as poinciana, jacarandas, albizias, cassia, rain trees, poinsettia and frangipanis.

Where there are gaps in formal planting, it may be possible to obtain mature specimens of certain species. However, mature replacement trees may have a limited life and a number of options may need to be considered. A replacement planting program would require approval by the department and is not covered by General Exemption.

## Sprinklers

Sprinkler or irrigation systems may be installed provided they do not damage important parts of the garden, for example, garden edging, paths, significant plantings and walls. When considering landscape design, gardens and sprinkler systems should not be placed adjacent to masonry walls as this can cause damp problems for the building. Position garden sprinklers so that water discharge is at least two metres away from all buildings and in-ground structures including monuments and memorials.

Consider installing a sub-surface tape system that minimises water loss to the atmosphere.

## Pest plant species

Removal of Class 1 pest plant species under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* is permitted under General Exemption. If the removed pest plant forms part of the park, garden or landscape design it should be replaced within two months of removal with a species that grows to a similar height, shape and visual appearance. The new plant should be located in the same or a similar position as the removed plant.

## Tree removal

Trees that have been assessed by a qualified arborist or horticulturist as dead, dangerous or beyond curative repair can be removed under General Exemption following the submission to the department of a written assessment of the health of the tree to be removed. If it is not possible to replace the removed tree with the exact same species, the report must nominate the species of replacement tree.

## Good practice

Caring for parks, gardens and landscapes should include:

- investigating the history and design, the elements and the condition
- maintaining an appropriate design that fits the character of the place and the needs of the owner
- maintaining the elements.

A well thought-out maintenance program will keep parks, gardens and landscapes in good condition at a reasonable cost. Major rehabilitation following years of neglect can be expensive.

Maintenance should be based on good horticultural practice rather than current fashion. The intent of the original design and significant subsequent changes should also be respected. The maintenance program should be designed to ensure that the park, garden or landscape is viable into the future. As with all maintenance, guidelines are no substitute for specialist advice from people experienced in horticulture and heritage landscape conservation.

The following discussion outlines how to gain an understanding of your registered park, garden or landscape and provides some information about undertaking maintenance.

## Understanding registered parks, gardens and landscapes

Landscapes provide evidence of the past and of social and cultural change. They provide an opportunity to understand plants and their use and to recognise historic procedures of plant cultivation.

Landscapes may be important both in their own right and/or as settings for registered buildings. Landscape elements alter not only with the seasons but also over periods of many years, so understanding the place can be difficult. This continual change means that the maintenance of a landscape must always proceed cautiously, in conjunction with ongoing assessment. It is important to keep records of the place as it develops and as new evidence is found. It is equally important not to remove evidence that helps in understanding or interpreting the site.

## The Queensland garden

There are distinctive Queensland traditions in design and planting that can be found across all types of gardens. Very little is known about the history of Queensland landscapes and further research is needed.

Avoid generalisations about Queensland landscapes and be wary of copying examples from southern states where more work has been done on the history of landscapes in these areas. Do not design or decorate the garden or landscape to a style or with details or furniture unsuited to the design of the building or landscape.

A useful reference to assist in identifying the characters of gardens and landscapes in Queensland since the 1840s is *The Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens* (see Further Reading for full reference).

## Maintaining the design

The setting and significant components of landscape must be preserved. These elements will include major landscape features, clear open spaces, shrubberies, decorative flowerbeds, garden structures, features and ornaments, edges and paths.

Regular maintenance should conserve these components and the integrity of the overall design.

## Structures and furniture

Original garden structures, walls and edges, furniture, fittings and services should be conserved in their original locations. This includes some garden and landscape structures that may now be rare including Hills hoists, domestic outhouses, farm sheds, windmills and early fences.

## Views and vistas

Important views or vistas in a garden or landscape can often become obscured by natural growth of trees and shrubs or by inappropriately placed new ones. Views and vistas may change as the landscape matures and these become important as evidence of the intent of the evolving design. To maintain significant views, prune plantings as necessary but not beyond 20 per cent of the crown.

## Landscape features and contours

The form, materials and detailing of the original landscape design should be conserved as well as retaining or replacing original plantings. For example, if the contents of an old garden bed have changed, the form of the bed should be retained.

The contours and shaping of the landscape are important. Many gardens and landscapes have terraced areas, plantings often follow the contours, and shaped mounds provide interest and contrast. These features should be conserved as an integral part of the design of the landscape.

Do not replace original straight paths or drives with curvilinear paths or drives (or vice versa), or a gravel surface with modern brick paving. Retain and repair old bitumen paths, rather than replacing them with brick or other materials.

Do not alter lawn or garden profiles adjacent to paths. Retain and repair garden edgings such as tiles—do not re-edge with modern materials such as concrete strips, or inappropriate recycled materials such as old railway sleepers.

## Care of lawns

A healthy, vigorous sward of grass is the best defence against pests, disease and weeds. Grass requires intensive and continual maintenance throughout the year, including mowing, watering, aerating, fertilising, top dressing, oversowing, weeding and control of pests and diseases.

Try to retain original grass species and varieties as they contribute to the cultural heritage significance of the place.

Although different grass species require different mowing heights, in general older sites are best left with longer grass length, especially in areas further from the buildings. When mowing, take care not to damage brick gutters, edgings, plants or garden ornaments.

Avoid mowing grass paths with mowers that are wider than the paths. Take care with brush cutters and whipper snippers near garden ornaments, edgings or significant plantings as their use can result in damage to these elements and ringbarking or plant injury.

## Care of hard landscaping elements

Fences and gates, walls, paths, paving and edging, roads and tracks, fountains, statues, furniture, culverts, etc should be regularly cleaned and maintained using methods that do not damage the fabric of the elements.

## New work

New work, such as the addition of new features, is not maintenance and cannot be undertaken under General Exemption. This will require approval by the department.

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## Further reading

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