

## HERITAGE GARDENS

### INTRODUCTION

Gardens require maintenance more frequently than buildings. They differ also in that they contain elements which change with the seasons, grow and die. However, the basic maintenance principles are the same for both: understanding what is significant about the place, and taking action to conserve that significance.

- The maintenance of heritage gardens should be based on good horticultural practice rather than current fashion. The intent of the original garden and significant subsequent changes should also be respected. The maintenance program should be designed to ensure that the garden 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.

- Conservation management policies for gardens should be included in any conservation plan for the buildings they surround.

### UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE

Gardens may be important both in their own right and/or as settings for heritage buildings. Because landscape elements alter not only with the seasons but also over periods of many years, understanding the place can be difficult.

This continual change means that the maintenance of a garden must always proceed cautiously, in conjunction with ongoing assessment. For this reason 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 which helps in understanding or interpreting the site.

### MAJOR PLANTING ELEMENTS

#### Mature trees

Many historic gardens 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 garden.

*Werribee Park Parterre*



Where there are gaps in formal planting, it may be possible to obtain mature specimens of certain species, such as some palms. However, mature replacement trees may have a limited life, and in many cases it is better to plant young trees.

This reinvigorates the landscape and extends its life considerably. Although replacing a whole avenue of old trees with young ones will have a visual impact, the end result will be better than replacing them one by one.

It is necessary to have a tree replacement policy for the garden.



*Thomson Fountain and mature trees in the Hamilton Botanic Gardens*

### Remnant bushland

The grounds of some old estates are significant for surviving indigenous (locally native) species. These may be threatened by:

- excessive compaction of surrounding soil
- erosion
- weed and grass invasion
- inappropriate horticultural practices such as 'whipper snipping' or over-fertilising.

Bush conservation and regeneration techniques are available to help the long-term survival of these native areas.

These techniques include:

- fencing off the area temporarily or permanently to allow natural regeneration

- instituting a weed removal program
- collecting seed and growing stock for replanting.

### Undesirable planting

Heritage gardens should continue to be planted with trees and shrubs which reflect the original species used in the design. The recent popularity of Australian native plants has led to the introduction of inappropriate species in many heritage gardens that were originally planted with exotic species. This can result in the original character of the garden being lost or obscured.

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

### Views and vistas

Important views or vistas in a garden can eventually become obscured by natural growth of trees and shrubs or by inappropriately placed new ones.

To reinstate significant views, modify plantings by thinning or pruning, and remove later intrusive plantings.

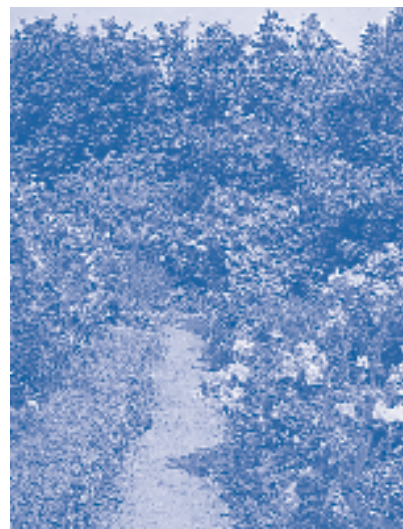
## MAINTAINING THE DESIGN

### Landscape features

As well as retaining or replacing original plantings, the form, materials and detailing

of the original landscape design should be conserved. Even if the contents of an old garden bed have changed, the form of the bed should be retained.

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.



*Cottage garden at Gulf Station, Yarra Glen*

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.

In certain cases, modern methods can be used to conserve original elements. For example spade-cut edges to lawns can be preserved using flexible timber or preferably special steel edging fixed beneath the turf level.

When considering landscape design, building maintenance should be taken into account. Gardens and sprinkler systems adjacent to masonry walls can often be the cause of damp problems. The building needs to be carefully investigated to identify all causes of moisture penetration. The removal of gardens and sprinklers or the introduction of adequate drainage can be a lot cheaper than the insertion of a damp-proof course.



### Structures and furniture

As a general rule, original garden structures, furniture, fittings and services should be conserved in their original locations. If they must be replaced and the original items are unavailable or unsuitable, a contemporary item may be preferable to a reproduction of an early item which is out of character with the place. In certain cases, reconstruction of original elements may be justified.

### 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, overseeding, weeding and control of pests and diseases.

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 which are wider than the paths.

The use of brush cutters and whipper snippers by inexperienced staff can result in damage to garden ornaments, edgings and ringbarking or plant injury.

### CARE OF TREES AND SHRUBS

Pruning of trees and shrubs will be necessary to:

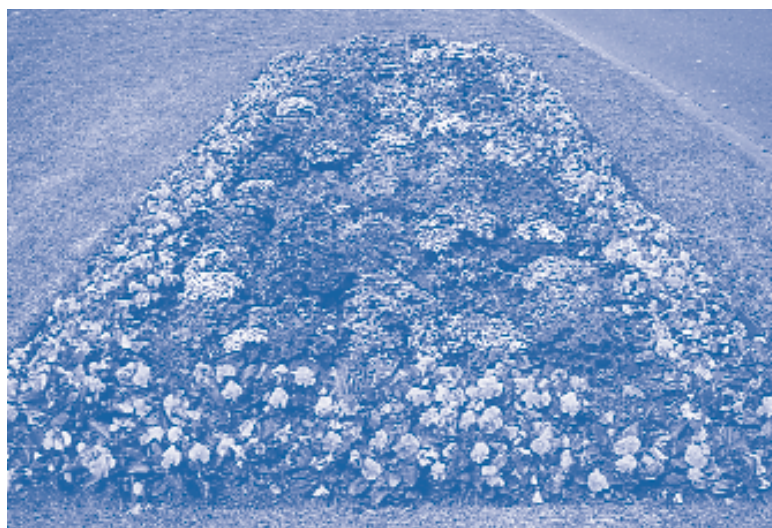
- control size
- improve shape, flowering or fruiting
- remove diseased, dead or dangerous material.

Pruning should not be done as a matter of course, but only after inspection if the need arises. Pruning large trees, especially those of heritage significance, should only be undertaken by a qualified tree surgeon or arborist. Trees should never be lopped back to a stump. Many experienced amateur gardeners will be able to prune small trees and shrubs such as roses.

Undiseased pruning materials should be chopped in a shredder and used with grass clippings for mulch and/or compost. This allows bulky material to be recycled on site rather than sent to a tip. Excessive use of woodchips and pine bark should generally be avoided, and if used should be mixed with leafy material.

### Wise water usage

All care should be taken to use water wisely. Mulching and watering in the cooler parts of the day are recommended. Taps, sprinklers and installed watering systems should be well maintained to prevent wastage.



*Flower bed in Queen Victoria Gardens, Melbourne*



*Wisteria Arbour, Government House Drive, Melbourne*

### Weed control

A specific plan to manage all problem weeds should be developed setting out action and timing for each weed. For instance, removal of weeds prior to seeding should be carried out.

### ANNUAL MAINTENANCE

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

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