

GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LANDSCAPE BEAUTIFICATION OF HOA MAINTAINED AREAS (PART 1)

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Topics

- Who should be an HOA Landscape Director
- Importance of the contract – know your maintenance contract
- Elements of a good landscape maintenance contract
- Improving the quality of landscape maintenance and beautification while making landscaping more fire resistant (part 1)
- Next Steps

Presentation will focus on sharing information, common experiences and future planning incorporating “lessons learned”, horticultural knowledge and experience. Will try to avoid personal aesthetics

My Experience and Qualifications or Why Listen to Me?

- MS in Botany / Horticulture
- Taught Horticulture at University of Wi – Milwaukee
- Involved with several major nurseries and landscape design firms
- Founded own firm emphasizing natural landscape design and maintenance
- Designed landscape for 250+ residential and small business
- Landscape Director for PVOA for 3 seasons (so far!)
- Managed many large scale contracts in my professional life

Who Should be a HOA Landscape Director?

- Most critical need – HANDS ON and WANTS TO BE ACTIVE OUTSIDE!
- Expect to spend *at least* 5 hours per week “***managing by walking around***” – this is not a “desk job” (nor does it pay well) !
- Ideally, some horticultural knowledge or “love of plants”
- Contract management might even be a more important knowledge set than horticulture

Know Your Maintenance Contract

- READ the contract – *REALLY READ IT!*
- **Do you understand it?** Could you determine *exactly and specifically* what the contractor is responsible for doing each week? Or....
- Is the contract too general in nature and / or “flowery” :
“*Environmental stewardship and Integrated Pest Management principles will be employed*” and “*fertilize as necessary to maintain plant health and vigor*” are nice statements but do not specify what is to be done and critically when / how often!
- Are the people who actually do the work – your weekly crew – knowledgeable about what is in the contract?

Simple Steps to Improve your Maintenance Contract

- **Goal:** You can “audit” and determine if the contract is being met
- Confirm a clear description of scope / areas of maintenance, e.g., *front of homes to street and 30 feet along sides and rear of homes*
- Ensure contract specifies how many and how long staffs will be **on site** each week (may need documentation of “travel time”)
- Ensure that **YOU** have the right to accept / reject field staffs
- Require a site review by a horticultural competent staff person at least monthly
- Incorporate a “Frequency of Service” schedule into the contract – *best way to accomplish goal of auditability*

What is included in a Frequency of Service Schedule?

- Areas of Maintenance:
 - Turf
 - Planted Areas
 - Trees and Shrubs
 - Irrigation System
- Maintenance activities in each area, e.g., turf:
 - Mow and clean up
 - Edge Hardscape / Softscape
 - Broadleaf Weed Control
 - Debris Removal (pay particular attention to this)
 - Fertilize, etc...
- How often each maintenance activity is performed *at each home / structure*, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually

Examples of Frequency of Service Schedule

TURF AREAS

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
Mow & clean up	Once		Weekly								Monthly	
Edge Hardscape	Once		Twice Monthly								Monthly	
Edge Softscape	Once		Monthly								Once	
Blow	Every Other Week		Weekly								Every Other Week	
Fertilize	None		Once			Once			Once			
Spray Obstacles	Once			Once			Once			Once		
Broadleaf control	None		Once			Once			None			

PLANTED AREAS

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
Trim Edges	Once			Once			Once			Once		
Fertilize	None		Once		None							
Pre-Emergent	None		Once		None				Once		None	
Spot spray weed control	None	Monthly								None		
Hand weed & trash	Twice per Month											
Remove Leaf litter	Twice Monthly	None						Twice Monthly			Weekly	

Last Thoughts on Contract Improvement

- As you make your contract more specific and auditable, expect “pushback”
- You need an open / honest dialogue to be sure your contracted services can actually be reasonably done within the monies you are paying the maintenance firm
- Consider separating your landscape needs into three “specialties” each one using a different firm:
 - Basic “weekly maintenance”
 - Enhancement work , e.g., new planting or “refresh” pruning
 - Tree work (trees above 12’ – 15’)
- And then there is irrigation (more to come)

Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance

- Focus on the following 4 areas of maintenance
 - Turf
 - Planted Areas
 - *Trees and Shrubs*
 - *Irrigation Systems*
- Another “Inconvenient Truth” – Horticultural skills are wanting in the crews on-site (and possibly their immediate management).
- Lack of horticultural skills results in poor practices in maintenance of shrubs and trees and management of irrigation systems.
- *Management by walking around is essential – use to develop a “to do” list and meaningful dialogue about the maintenance work*

Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance – Homeowner Interaction

- When asked “how can we be a better customer / what should we (the association) do differently?” the immediate response from the landscape staff was “***please stop the individual homeowners from directing our work***”
- Hard work to establish the simple rule that homeowners (or renters) ONLY speak with the association landscape person and never with the maintenance crew. Habit was hard to break – *but critical and cannot be violated!*
- “Management by Walking Around” during maintenance work can help detect and eliminate inappropriate interactions

Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: Trees and Shrubs

- Mostly, Oakmont landscape is “mature” with lots of material 20 plus years old
- Mature landscapes are often overgrown due to poor original design spacing and improper “addition”
- Unfortunately, the combination of overgrown plantings and wanting horticultural knowledge have resulted in two extremely poor techniques being widely used – ugh!

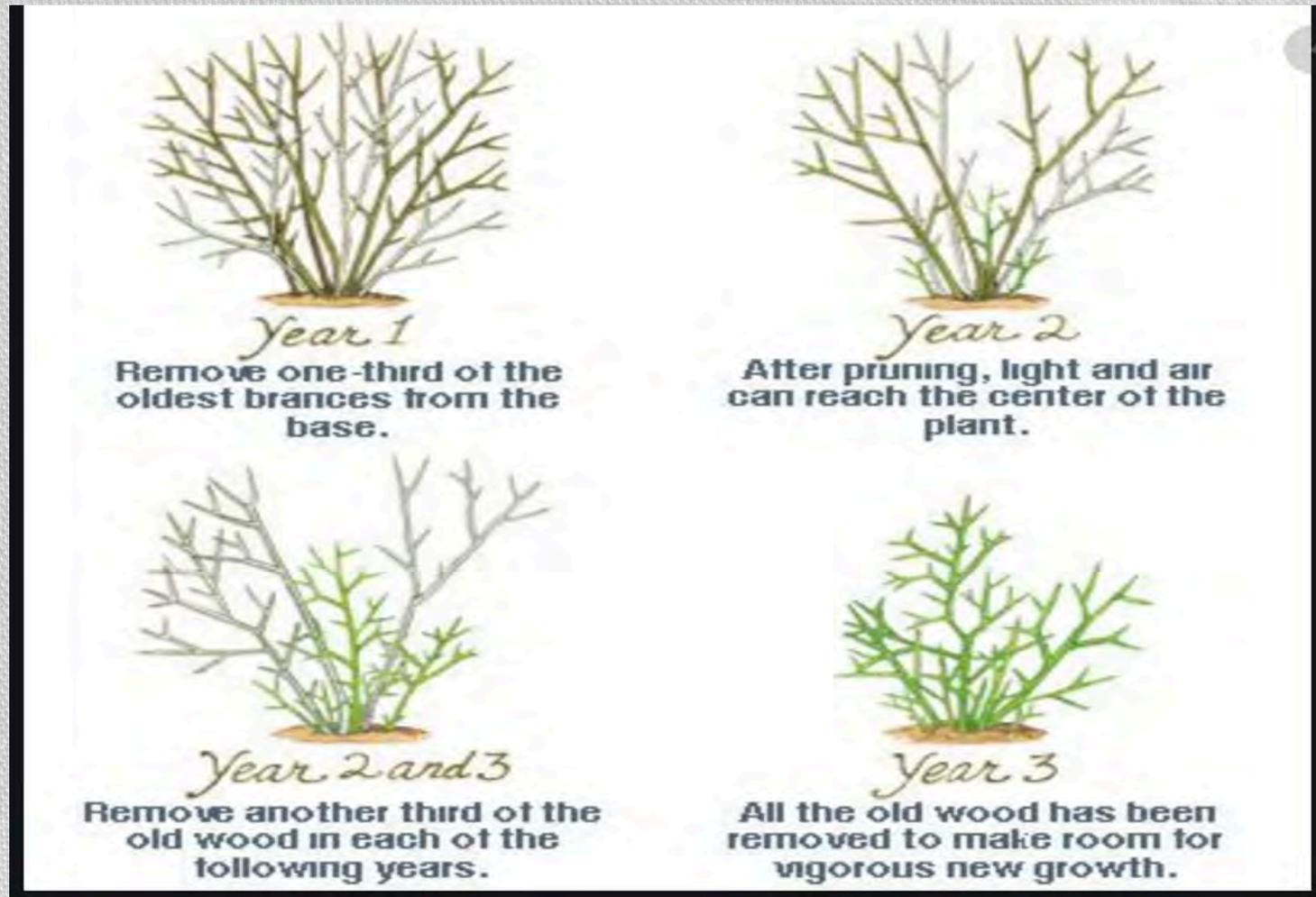
Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: Pruning Faux Pas

- There are two common pruning techniques that should be avoided – they are almost always “horticultural homicide”
 1. **Shearing Shrubs** and
 2. **Topping Trees**
- Shearing shrubs to reduce the height or produce a ball or other “shape” is quick and easy, but it destroys the natural branching structure with the plant becoming a thin shell of foliage with a dense woody interior ***that can more easily burn!***
- Topping or “heading” is like giving a tree a ‘flat top’ haircut. Topping removes a large part of the tree’s food making capacity and depletes stored reserves. It stimulates ‘water sprout’ growth – unattractive upright branches – just below the pruning cuts

Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: Reducing Shearing

- Your contract should specify that “natural pruning” techniques are to be used (hedges are an exception)
- Rather than shear, *edit the landscape*, i.e., remove plants that no longer “fit” their location. This will have the most dramatic impacts to both landscape beautification AND fire risk reduction!
- Removal does not necessarily imply replanting 1 for 1. Remember to properly space any new material by planting *at least 100% of mature spread apart (improper spacing is an ENORMOUS problem)*
- Start a campaign to edit and “refresh prune” – *this is my number 1 recommendation*

Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: “Refresh Pruning”



- Can be done in less time – even 1 yr - on mature plants with strong roots

Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: Final Thoughts on Shearing

- Recognize that pruning requires horticultural skills that may not exist on your maintenance crew – but likely do in the firm you are contracted with. *Get the right people!!*
- Contractors often have their lowest skilled person doing shearing – very bizarre! Any shearing that you do requires a high level of skill to do correctly
- HOAs’ fear homeowner “pushback” as shearing has become an “Oakmont norm”. You may be surprised too learn that many folks actually despise shearing!

Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: “Before Edit and Refresh”



Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: “Before Edit and Refresh”



Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: Refresh Pruning Example



Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: “Before Edit and Refresh”



Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: “After Edit and Refresh



Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: Irrigation Systems

- Water is a precious resource and *expensive*, hence improving irrigation systems has a strong ROI
- Avoid emergency repairs – ensure YOU and at least one other know how to shut of the irrigation system “clock(s)” and even the main water valve. *Do you have keys to the irrigation clocks?*
- Practice Management by Walking Around when the irrigation system is running. Make notes of what you see. Note: may need to initiate a manual run
- What are YOUR “rules” for determining the amount of water to apply? Recommend reviewing <https://srcity.org/821/Watering-Recommendations>

Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: Irrigation Systems (con't)

- Seasonal Irrigation Schedule – based on “peak week”

Irrigation Type	Minutes* (Peak Week)	Summer - Watering Days & Start Times	Spring & Fall - Watering Days & Start Times
Grass (Pop-Up Spray)	45	3 - 4 days / 3 start times	2 - 3 days / 1 - 2 start times
Grass (Rotor / Impact)	120	3 - 4 days / 3 start times	2 - 3 days / 1 - 2 start times
Moderate Water-Use Plants (Drip)	65	2 days / 2 start times	1 day / 1 start time
Low Water-Use Plants (Drip)	32	1 - 2 days / 1 start time	1 day / 1 start time

- Spring and Fall are 50 – 75% of peak week

Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: Irrigation Systems (con't)

- NEVER mix turf irrigation types (rotor or pop-up) on same circuit
- Especially in hilly location ALL heads should have a check – valve (SAM printed on top of spray head). Otherwise water in pipes just runs out each time the circuit stops - wasting tens of gallons!!
- Always run turf circuits on multiple start times per day - *this is critical* (never exceed about 12 minutes per start time – pop up type).
- Deeper but less frequent watering is better – multiple start times facilitate deep penetration of water minimizing runoff

Improving the Quality of Landscape Maintenance: Irrigation Systems (con't)

- What to look for when “walking around” with irrigation system on:
 - Sprayers not working or very poorly working
 - Excessive overspray from 1) poor choice of nozzle or 2) head in wrong position - mark for checking or *likely replacement* (crews often simply rotate them back – but often the ratcheting mechanism is failing)
 - Overlapping coverage pattern – edges of spray from one head should overlap the other
 - When system turns off does water “bubble” out of any head? If so replace with SAM – type (check – valve) head
- You can also see a lot with the irrigation off:
 - “The plants will tell you” – look for brown areas , etc..
 - Are there dry or wet locations?

Next Steps

- Complete guidelines and recommendations for “turf” and “planted areas”
- What would you like to see prioritized?
 - Update the example landscape contract in the “LOMAA manual”
 - How to produce an irrigation map
 - LOMAA manual “plant list” – update .. Or?
 - Additional “detail” landscape maintenance topics
 - Other topics?
- THANK YOU!!