

Landscaping Guidelines

Landscaping is one of the most difficult activities to balance with grave markers. A lawn is attractive but the headstones are permanent. The trees are magnificent but the headstones are art. The way we want cemetery operators to view the balancing act is to consider lawn as renewable and headstones as finite. Grass will keep growing, trees will return, but no one can replicate the stones of the 1800s – once they are gone, they are gone.

History: Pioneer cemeteries were not as closely shorn as modern lawn cemeteries are today. A more natural, less trimmed appearance is appropriate for historic cemeteries. This practice has two advantages: reducing maintenance costs and preserving the historic setting of the cemetery.

Damage: Mowers and trimmers are main sources of damage to cemetery objects. Damage to the older markers appears as scratching, chipping, and toppling. Destabilization or breakage of a marker or damage to curbs and fences is often the result of an accident while using maintenance equipment.

Mowing: Cut grass to a height of about three inches. Mow as many as three times a month during the fastest growing season and less often (once a month or as needed) in the slower growing seasons. The fewer times the cemetery is mowed, the less likely there will be damage to the markers and curbs.

Riding Mowers: Keep the riding mowers to the open areas and areas with flat markers. Do not use the riding lawnmowers in narrow areas with irregularly placed upright stones. Consider attaching a pool noodle or pipe insulation on the edge of the blade guard to provide an extra layer of cushion around the upright stones. Most important of all: slow down.

Push Mowers: Use push mowers in narrow areas. Keep mower at least six inches away from the markers, bases, and curbs. As with riding lawnmowers, attach guards to keep the steel and tires away from the stones.

Broken Monuments: Avoid mowing close to damaged grave markers that are lying on the ground. Flag the marker if necessary to make the stone more visible. Do not mow over the broken markers. Do not remove footstones to make mowing easier. Do not move fragments during routine maintenance.

Trimming: Avoid trimming next to the fragile grave markers, bases, and curbs. Install guards or distance gauges on string trimmers when trimming around cemetery objects, particularly those made of marble or



sandstone. Leave a border of long growth around fragile stones if necessary, and periodically use hand clippers to trim around these markers. Nylon filament (lightweight gauge, no heavier than 0.09 inch) is the only trimmer string recommended for use in a cemetery.

Herbicides: Herbicides are not recommended around the gravestones as they contain salts and acids that cause deterioration of softer stones such as sandstone and marble. However, if an herbicide is chosen over string trimming, then apply the herbicide while a spray shield is held against the stone bases. Be aware that even if the salts do not land directly on the stone, they can be wicked up with water from the surrounding ground and into the stone. Salt crystals can then clog pores, expanding and contracting, and eventually spall the stone.

Fertilizing and Seeding: Broadcast grass seed and fertilizer can find its way into the nooks and crannies of cemetery objects. Be conscious of where the granules are going so that grass does not take root within the joints of grave markers.

Irrigation: Watering and sprinkling can be hard on stones, especially if the water is rich in minerals. Rust staining on porous stones is nearly impossible to remove. We prefer that a cemetery not water their lawn and allow it to go brown in the summer.

Trees: Limb-up trees and shrubs extending over or growing close to cemetery objects. A good portion of the historic and natural setting of a cemetery is provided by the overhanging limbs of mature trees. Trees and shrubs need to be good neighbors of cemetery objects and only maintenance can keep the relationship a positive one.

Cull: Remove dead or dying trees before breakage occurs, potentially damaging markers or injuring visitors or maintenance personnel. After the tree is removed, do not remove the stump if it is too close to grave markers, curbs, or graves. This action might disrupt the graves or cemetery objects. Grind down the stump to ground level, if possible, without damage to cemetery objects.

Prune: Remove small volunteer trees or shrubs growing at the base of grave markers or plot enclosures that might obscure, rub, lift a marker and curb, or might encroach on cemetery objects in the future. Prune branches that threaten cemetery objects. These can cause damage to the object by exerting pressure, scraping the surface, or retaining moisture.

Animals: Burrowing animals, such as gray diggers and gophers, can cause havoc with cemetery stones by undermining bases. Burrowers like nothing more than a stone roof over their heads. There are a variety of humane methods and services for removing burrowing animals.

