



**MA Department of Conservation and Recreation
Office of Cultural Resources
Best Management Practices**

Vegetation in Historic Landscapes

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Goal: Preserve significant vegetation in historic landscapes through maintenance; keep DCR's historic park and building settings intact for interpretation and public enjoyment.

Guidelines

General

- Historic landscapes in DCR facilities can include the grounds around historic buildings, designed gardens, cemeteries, historic agricultural landscapes, and landscapes associated with the recreational development of the DCR parks system (parkways, CCC camp complexes, beaches).
- Non-Natives and Invasive plants may have been intentionally planted in historic landscapes. The preservation plan for a historic landscape may include plants that are ornamental, non-native or even invasive, as historic gardening designs often took advantage of new imported species. The Office of Cultural Resources (OCR) may have options for controlling potential invasives or appropriate substitute plantings for more aggressive species when those plants are critical to the historic landscape character.
- DCR's *Terra Firma #2 – Caring for Mature Trees in Historic Landscapes* provides additional information. Available online at www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/conservation/cultural-resources/ and by request to OCR.
- Related BMPs: *Historic Landscapes – Built Features, Historic Building Maintenance, Mothballing Historic Buildings, Archaeological Features*



Invasive and Volunteer Growth

- Volunteer trees and shrubs can destroy the design of a historic landscape, eliminating views and introducing plants that are out of place and out of scale to the original character. Volunteer tree saplings should be pulled immediately, and larger trees should be cut to grade.
- Invasive species can quickly overtake a historic landscape, so their control or elimination should be a priority. The treatment of an invasive plant may depend on the species. The New England Wildflower Society has developed guidelines for controlling the most common invasive species: <http://www.newfs.org/protect/invasive-plants/removal/common-invasives-management.html>.
- Park staff should first attempt to control invasives using pulling, cutting to grade or mowing (see link to guidelines above). If an infestation is severely out of control and requires the application of herbicides, staff should contact one of DCR's licensed applicators for treatment.

- Invasive species can also be managed using a controlled burn. Fire can be used effectively in and around built landscape features (stonewalls, pavilions, buildings) but fire can also threaten surviving historic plant material. OCR should be consulted to determine whether fire is an appropriate treatment (and how to protect historic plants), or if the potential damage to the landscape outweighs any benefit.
- **Priority areas** for controlling or eliminating invasive species and volunteer plants include designed gardens, and grounds around historic buildings, open agricultural fields, lawns, and recreational fields, formal entrance roads, parkways, pond shorelines, and vistas and overlooks.

Trees

- Preserve the location, species, form and arrangement of trees within a historic landscape.
- Prune for tree health and public safety according to professional arboricultural practices.
- Avoid root collars during mowing and leaf clean up and any work involving motorized equipment.
- Protect the tree's critical root zone. Avoid activities that might compact the soil in the root zone (driving, storing heavy equipment, trails). The protection zone should be as wide as the drip line of the tree canopy and should be clearly marked during major construction projects or events.
- Plan for the replacement of mature trees that decline due to age or are lost to natural disaster; consult with OCR on options.
- Replace historic trees in kind; if an alternate plant is needed, replacements should retain the size, form and location of the historic plants

Lawn and Grasses

- Mow formal lawn areas regularly to achieve a clean, clipped lawn look. These include lawn in formal gardens, designed cemeteries, golf courses, building grounds, training/parade grounds, and some campgrounds.
- Formal lawns in high traffic areas and on steep slopes may also require aeration, fertilizer and reseeding to reverse effects of erosion and compaction.
- Mulch leaves directly into turf, adding a source of nutrients and eliminating waste.
- Use mowers and line trimmers with care, avoiding damage to the bark and root systems.
- Large meadows, recreation fields and farm fields are not meant to be formal lawns and can be mowed less frequently. Wide paths can be cut to provide recreational access and prevent tick exposure, but most areas can be left to grow higher.

Shrubs

- Several DCR facilities have extensive horticultural collections, including rhododendron, azalea, mountain laurel and other shrubs. These collections should be managed not only for the visual character, but also for their botanical identity.
- Shrubs should be pruned to maintain their historic form and size. Overgrown shrubs can change the character of a historic landscape. If historic shrubs cannot be pruned back to their intended form, they should be replaced in kind.

- Select replacement shrubs to maintain the overall character, size, shape function and location of historic plants whenever possible.

Perennials and annuals

- Historic landscapes can include perennials, bulbs and annuals, but not all do. Before planting any new plants, consult with OCR.
- Divide perennials every 3-5 years to ensure plant health and to retain landscape character.
- Annuals may be planted only in existing plant beds and/or containers in historic landscapes.

Vines and Ground covers

- Historic vines include Boston ivy, wisteria, climbing roses, climbing hydrangea; ground covers include pachysandra, periwinkle, and wintercreeper (to name a few). Vines can exert excessive weight, increase moisture and directly grow into historic structures and should be trained onto secondary supports whenever possible.
- Provide adequate support for climbing vines.
- Prune vines regularly to avoid overgrowth onto historic structures and plantings.
- Root prune or install root barriers around plants that are particularly aggressive (wisteria).
- Cut back groundcovers that are impacting pathways, encroaching on plant beds, or otherwise spreading beyond their original borders.