

# Renovate

*those 'tired' commercial landscapes*

*Don't let an aging landscape reduce the visual impact of a property. Use these smart renovation strategies to get maximum bang for the buck*

By KARMA L. GROTELUESCHEN  
Landscape Designer

**N**othing dates a property like old landscaping. Building styles have not changed significantly in the past few decades, so many of today's corporate buildings still have a modern look to them. Yet many of these corporate buildings date themselves with their aging landscapes. Even buildings with classical lines can look tired with old or overgrown landscaping.

Many corporate landscapes can benefit from a landscape renovation that replaces or expands plantings that are mature and are no longer accomplishing their intended purpose:

- ▶ Some plantings are in decline and should be completely replaced. These decisions are easy.
- ▶ Some plantings are perfectly healthy and are simply not contributing positively

to the landscape any more. Often, this is because the plants have grown larger than anticipated, so the planting has become a problem in some way.

▶ Sometimes styles have changed or better plants are available.

#### **Out with the old**

While it is difficult to remove and replace a perfectly healthy plant, it can be an important step in creating and maintaining a contemporary and high quality corporate image. Shade trees are an excellent example.

A properly chosen shade tree species grows in value as it matures, providing shade and offering a better scale to larger buildings. In the early years of a landscape, when the shade trees are small, they are often planted in long rows that give horizontal lines to the landscaping. These horizontal lines complement and balance the strong verticality of most multistory corporate buildings.

As the trees grow taller, they become vertical elements, so renovation is needed to bring horizontal lines back into the landscape. One way to do this is to join the individual mulch rings around the trees into one long bed, filling it with a linear planting of a short ornamental grass such as dwarf fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln'), prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) or with a low-growing shrub such as Gro-Low sumac (*Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Low').

#### **Short shrub lifespan**

Most shrub species need to be replaced every 10 to 15 years because, unlike trees



These overgrown junipers obstruct visibility and are dangerous. Lower shrubs would be safer and would be just as attractive in this location.

that appreciate in value, shrubs have a relatively short span of usefulness. They may need replacement or removal because they are in declining health. For example, if sun-loving shrubs are planted under a tree, its growth can create shade that stresses the shrubs, which then begin to decline. A simple mulched bed may suffice once the shrubs are removed, but if you need a replacement, the plants must be a shade-tolerant species (don't forget to consider the impact of removing and replanting in the tree's root system).

A group of plants may be in decline because some of the plants have died. In a hedgerow or continuous border, gaps usually cannot be filled with new plants in a way that will ever match satisfactorily. And a design meant to read as a continuous flowing line will be compromised seriously by mismatched fill-ins.

If you have grouped plantings or rows, the plant may no longer be commonly used. Finding a matching plant to fill the gaps can be difficult. For example, honeysuckles were once common, but are now known to seed themselves into natural areas to become environmental pests. It would be irresponsible to plant more of these shrubs, even if we could find them.

#### Screen for safety

When a shrub row or grouping is at the perimeter of the property, it usually divides it from another property by defining the boundaries, or is used to screen an undesirable view. Often, the shrubs selected are large and end up growing too wide with age.

If the shrub row is within a property, such as in a parking lot or near walkways, they should be kept below eye-level so that pedestrians can see over them and feel safe.

Shrubs near traffic can block sight lines, creating an inconvenience or hazard to drivers or pedestrians trying to cross traffic.

#### Update with dwarf plants

Who hasn't seen shrubs that have been repeatedly sheared into unattractive balls to maintain their size? They seriously date a property. Sometimes, shrubs can be renovated by drastic hand pruning, but often



Overgrown shrubs obscure the multiple trunks of these crabapples. A band of Happy Returns daylilies winding in gentle curves within this bed would be a nice, low replacement and would add texture and seasonal color.

the labor involved is as costly as replacement (and the pruning can result in a period where the shrub looks worse before it looks better, which many commercial property owners will not allow). Here are some ideas for various landscape elements:

► To rehabilitate areas where shrubs no longer perform as intended or cause a perceived or actual danger, remove all existing shrubs and replace them with appropriately sized species. In recent years, more dwarf cultivars have been selected and developed, so a renovation can be even more successful than the original planting, as the new shrubs naturally remain lower without shearing.

► For perimeter edging or screening, new compact versions of traditional species are available, such as compact burning bush (*Euonymus alatus* 'Compactus'), Isanti compact redbud dogwood (*Cornus sericea* 'Isanti') and compact highbush cranberry (*Viburnum opulus* 'Compactus' or *V. trilobum* 'Compactum', 'Bailey' or 'Hahs'). These stay around 5 to 6 feet tall. Dwarf lilacs such as dwarf Korean lilac (*Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin') and Miss Kim lilac

cont. on page 60

## Replacement plants suitable for use in Zone 5

### Screening: Plants under 7 ft. tall

#### New compact shrub cultivars

- Compact burning bush (*Euonymus alatus* 'Compactus')
- Compact highbush cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum* 'Compactum' and *V. opulus* 'Compactus')
- Compact redbud dogwood (*Cornus sericea* 'Isanti')
- Mohican viburnum (*Viburnum lantana* 'Mohican')
- Miss Kim lilac (*Syringa patula* 'Miss Kim')
- Dwarf Korean lilac (*Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin')

#### Tall ornamental grasses

- Porcupine grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Strictus')
- Variegated maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Variegatus')
- Maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus')

cont. on page 64

cont. from page 59

(*Syringa patula* 'Miss Kim'), mature between 4 feet and 6 feet tall and stay more uniformly dense near the ground than old lilacs with their 'bare feet.'

\* For areas where people need to see over the shrubs, several smaller species that stay around 4 feet tall are available, such as black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) and Peking cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster acutifolia*). Several smaller cultivars also work: Sprite winterberry (*Ilex verticillata* 'Sprite' fruiting females with *I. verticillata* 'Jim Dandy' pollinating male planted at a ratio of 5:1) and Kelsey dwarf redbud dogwood (*Cornus sericea* 'Kelsey') will grow to around 3 feet tall, while Gro-Low sumac (*Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Low') and dwarf alpine currant (*Ribes alpinum* 'Green Mound') will stay at around 2 feet tall.

#### Myths about evergreens

Nothing dates a landscape like foundation plantings, especially those of evergreen



Because these shrubs hide interesting window sill detailing, they should be removed and replaced with shorter shrubs or ornamental grasses.

shrubs. That concept was devised to hide the foundation on a building raised above grade to allow for a basement. Few commercial buildings are built with a foundation that needs hiding. In fact, many buildings are of an attractive enough architecture that a foundation planting

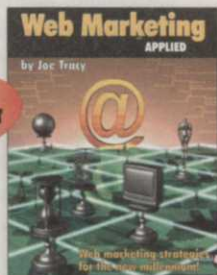
hides some aspect of the architecture that is meant to be seen.

In the landscape's early years, the shrubs along the foundation may have been low enough to create a horizontal line near the ground, which may have complimented

cont. on page 62

## You're *Open* for Business on the Web

Coming in December



**\$31<sup>95</sup>**  
Item#DMGB100  
Over 300 Pages  
Soft Cover

Written by internet specialist and leading author, Joe Tracy

Read This Book!

...What's Your Next Move?

**Web Marketing Applied, Web Marketing Strategies for the New Millennium**, is the must-have book for Webmasters, Web marketers, Web developers...or anyone involved in the marketing or promotion of a Website. Every chapter is filled with powerful ideas to help you drive traffic to your site. Excellent for any industry, business or profession.

Master Your Next Move with Success!

Call 1-800-598-6008

Fax: 218-723-9146 • Outside the U.S. call 218-723-9180

Please mention code 950918LM when ordering

Visit our Website and order online at

[www.advanstarbooks.com/webmarketing/](http://www.advanstarbooks.com/webmarketing/)

INFORM ♦ INTRODUCE ♦ INFLUENCE ♦ INSTRUCT

# REPRINTS

Reprints of *Landscape Management* articles, advertisements, news items or special announcements are available through Advanstar Marketing Services. Customized to meet your specific needs, reprints are highly effective when you use them to:

- Develop direct-mail campaigns
- Provide product/service literature
- Create trade show distribution materials
- Present information at conferences and seminars
- Train and educate key personnel, new hires
- Enhance press kits
- Compile reference materials
- Track trends and emerging technologies

ARTICLES  
NEWS ITEMS  
ADVERTISEMENTS

**LANDSCAPE**  
*management*

ADVANSTAR MARKETING SERVICES

1-800-736-3665

216-891-2744

FAX: 216-891-2740

cont. from page 60

the architecture. Most soon outgrow the usefulness they had and need to be replaced. Sod may be the best replacement,

but if the architecture demands a low line at the foundation, use dwarf cultivars.

Over-sheared evergreen shrubs can be one of the worst offenders, making land-

scapes look old. Shearing results because few species are truly dwarf enough. The best option may be to replace outdated and overgrown evergreens. The idea that evergreen shrubs provide winter interest is a myth — the junipers turn a drab olive green and the yews turn a dark, almost black-green in winter. These unsightly 'evergreens' add little value to a winter landscape.

One way to add genuine winter interest is with deciduous shrubs that have persistent berries, such as Sprite winterberry or compact highbush cranberry. Another idea is to use plants with colored branches, such as the redbud dogwood cultivars or the bright green Japanese kerria (*Kerria japonica*).

#### Grasses do it all

With the advent of available ornamental grasses, we don't need evergreen shrubs for winter interest. Ornamental grasses

cont. on page 64



The sheared junipers give this property a dated look, as well as hide the graceful architectural elements at the base of this building.

# GREEN INDUSTRY EXPO/99

THE NATIONAL EXPO FOR LAWN & LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS

**YOU'RE INVITED TO GIE'S  
10TH ANNIVERSARY  
CELEBRATION**

**November 13-16, 1999**

**Baltimore Convention Center  
Baltimore, Maryland**



### Show Schedule

#### CONFERENCES

November 13 - 16, 1999

#### OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT DEMONSTRATION

November 14, 1999

#### TRADE SHOW

November 15 - 16, 1999

#### GIE SPONSORS

**ALCA**

Associated Landscape  
Contractors of America  
(800) 395-2522 • www.alca.org



**PLCAA**  
Professional Lawn Care  
Association of America  
(800) 458-3466 • www.plcaa.org

**PGMS**

Professional Grounds  
Management Society  
(800) 609-7467 • www.pgms.org

*"The Cadillac  
of networking  
within the  
industry."*

-GIE/98 Attendee

#### FOR HOUSING AND TRAVEL INFORMATION

Circle No. 132

**TRAVEL  
WORLDWIDE  
NETWORK**

Call Travel Worldwide Network at (800) 631-9675 or visit them at [www.travelworldwideneetwork.com](http://www.travelworldwideneetwork.com)

#### YES! I want to know more about GIE/99.

- Send me information on exhibiting my products!
- Send me information on attending conferences & show!

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Clip and send to:  
GIE, 1000 Johnson Ferry Rd., NE, Suite C-135, Marietta, GA 30068-2112  
Fax: 770-578-6071 Phone: 770-973-2019

**NEW! ❖ Visit GIE at [www.gieonline.com](http://www.gieonline.com)**

Circle No. 140 on Reader Inquiry Card

cont. from page 59

**Pedestrian visibility: Plants around 4 ft.**

*Shrub species*

- ▶ Black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)
- ▶ Alpine currant (*Ribes alpinum*)
- ▶ Peking cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster acutifolia*)
- ▶ Japanese kerria (*Kerria japonica*)

*New dwarf shrub cultivars*

- ▶ Sprite winterberry (*Ilex verticillata* 'Sprite', *I. verticillata* 'Jim Dandy')
- ▶ Kelsey dwarf redbtwig dogwood (*Cornus sericea* 'Kelsey')
- ▶ Anthony waterer spirea (*Spirea x bumalda* 'Anthony Waterer')

*Ornamental grasses*

- ▶ Northern sea oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*)
- ▶ Switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*)
- ▶ Fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*)
- ▶ Little bluestem (*Andropogon scoparius*)

**Massing for horizontal lines or automobile visibility: Plants around 2 ft. tall**

*New dwarf shrub cultivars*

- ▶ Gro-Low sumac (*Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Low')
- ▶ Bronx forsythia (*Forsythia viridissima* 'Bronxensis')
- ▶ Dwarf alpine currant (*Ribes alpinum* 'Green Mound')

*Ornamental grasses*

- ▶ Dwarf fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln')
- ▶ Prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*)

*Most reliable perennials*

- ▶ Happy returns and Stella d'Oro daylily (*Hemerocallis* 'Happy Returns' or *H.* 'Stella d'Oro')
- ▶ Siberian iris (*Iris siberica* 'Caesar's Brother')
- ▶ Autumn joy sedum (*Sedum* 'Autumn Joy')
- ▶ Hosta (*Hosta* 'Honeybells', *H.* 'Francee', *H.* 'Frances Williams', *H.* 'Lancifolia', *H.* 'Wide Brim')



Sometimes even a new planting is just wrong. These globe arborvitae will never grow together to form a contiguous flowing line and will never look right with this modern building. A planting of Gro-Low sumac would soften the angles and be an attractive complement to this building.

cont. from page 62

might be the single best way to update a property, but a token cluster or two around a sign may not be enough. Use them in place of traditional foundation plantings or in large, low beds around signs and entrances. The broad expanses and long lines of ornamental grasses at property or parking lot perimeters are the key to a truly contemporary look. They are very hardy, salt tolerant and best left standing so the golden tan leaves and silvery seed heads can provide winter interest.

There are grasses in a complete range of heights for sunny areas, from the diminutive 15-in.-tall prairie dropseed to the many six-foot tall maidengrass species such as porcupine grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Strictus'), variegated maiden grass (*M. sinensis* 'Variegatus') or Silver Feather maiden grass (*M. sinensis* 'Silberfeder'). Natives standing about five ft. tall include Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*). Some good cultivars of switchgrass have recently become available, such as Heavy Metal (*P. virgatum* 'Heavy

Metal') and red switchgrass (*P. virgatum* 'Rotstrahlbusch'). Fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*) grows to around three feet, while dwarf fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln') stays around two ft. tall. Few grasses tolerate much shade, but northern sea oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*) is the best, growing to around three ft. tall with drooping seed heads.

**Get back the investment**

Updating a property's appearance is an investment that enhances the building's modern look and increases the value of the entire property. Work with a designer trained in using contemporary plant materials. As the millennium approaches, a contemporary looking landscape to update corporate properties becomes increasingly important. **LM**

The author's firm, *PlannedScapes*, specializes in landscape renovation of corporate and housing properties and provides freelance design for landscape contractors and maintenance firms in the western suburbs of Chicago, IL. She can be reached at 630/393-4598.