



Landscaping is a condominium asset that can, and should, improve with age.

Tips for Mature Landscapes

By Nathan Helder

FIRST IMPRESSIONS ...

you only get one chance to have a “first impression,” be it personal or for your property/home. It’s astonishing



what impact your landscape has on the curb appeal of your investment. To make a good impression, your condominium exterior has to convey to the casual observer from the street that “I would like to live there!” We have all seen a new property, new gardens, new fence and thought, “Wow, I love that” only to drive by several years later and wonder what happened?!

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Aging landscape is what occurred. Just like a wine maker needs to care for his wine in different ways depending on its age, so you as managers, condominium directors and owners have to watch for and “care” appropriately for your landscape.

Each landscape of your property naturally consists of plants i.e., trees, shrubs, vines and hedges, the hardscape such as walkways, patios and curbs and equipment or hardware such as lighting and irrigation systems. All of these are potential trouble spots as the landscape ages.

Common Trouble Spots

The entry points into a condominium complex are often the most impor-

tant area on site for first impressions. These areas can either be welcoming or can turn off a first-time visitor. Aging plant material can potentially block the entrance signs which should be visible from all angles.

Drainage can be an aging issue as settled areas will cause water to drain towards the building or units that will eventually seep down along the foundation wall. Those condominiums that have patio stones should be aware that re-leveling should occur every 10 years. Uneven patios become potential tripping hazards and will cause water to drain towards the building. You might find full-grown evergreens beginning to change colour and lose

their needles; it might be because the water is not able to drain away properly.

A well-functioning irrigation system is essential to maintaining healthy landscapes. However, many municipalities have enforced watering bans and insist that complexes reduce their water consumption and as the landscapes changes, plant and tree requirements for water also change. These restrictions on water and aging landscapes require updates to the current irrigation system. It is also important to note that irrigation systems lose efficiency as they age. The life span of an irrigation system is around 20 years, so if you have an aged or inefficient system, it may be time for an update. Keeping the system in good repair will help keep its inefficiencies to a minimum.

Condominiums built during the building boom of the 1980s often find themselves today with areas of the property where the trees have matured and have created a lot more shade, depriving the remaining plants and lawns of sufficient light. These sun-deprived lawns become weak and sparse. In other areas of the property, large numbers of trees die due to storms, disease, irrigation, drainage problems or poor specimen choice. Choosing the right tree or plant for the right place is very important; sometimes the original trees planted grow quickly and within 6-8 years they start to show signs of trunk split or disease caused by weather and canopy weight.

Also back in the 1980s developers planted a lot of Norway maples or other attractive fast-growing trees which were rightly thought to be extremely tough and durable. However, they are too tough and have been seen to break up walkways and foundations as their roots have spread.

Another affliction common to an aging landscape is the erratic growth of “privacy hedges.” These plantings are originally positioned to screen units from their neighbours – natural fences that have now outgrown their purpose, leaving some owners exposed to public view. Recently, I came across this problem at a 2-storey condominium. The company that did the original design

put in a simple row of white pines to screen one building from the next. Everyone was happy until they grew too large and started losing their lower branches, so there was privacy on the second floor but no longer on the first floor.

Many shrubs and trees have a life span. Over the years, shrubs and trees require regular pruning; if that is not done they will block unit owners’ windows and grow beyond the property lines. Other aggressive plant materials are vines. Vines, if not properly cared for, will grow along the side of your building and up into the eaves trough causing damage. It is very important to select the right type of vine for the right type of building. Vines are never recommended to be grown on wood, siding or painted surfaces. Brick that has become weak or contains questionable mortar is also not conducive for vines. Wood can be softened by the combination of shade and moisture retained by a vine covering, adding to the ease with which the wood grain can be split, cracked or penetrated by vine rootlets or tendrils. Wooden windowsills and doorframes should also be kept vine-free to avoid this damage. Siding (whether wood, vinyl or aluminum) can be pried apart by vines – the new growth enters the tight spaces, and then as the growing stems swell the siding is deformed outward. Painted surfaces, meanwhile, will be permanently scarred by vines’ adhesive tendrils or rootlets.

■ Seasonal Prep

Fall is near and winter is not far behind; you know what that means? Snow storms and high winds. Will your fence stand up against the punishment that these winter storms inflict? Many fences show signs of weathering: aging (turning grey), dry-rot (the grain of the wood is blackening), fading, cracking, splintering, leaning, and of course structural failure. Many of these symptoms of aging can easily be reversed by power-washing the fence and reapplying a protective sealant and/or stain to the fence.

Landscaping is a condominium asset that can and should improve with

age. However, diligent attention is required in order to make this happen. Skilled maintenance, along with occasional and ongoing improvement work, are essential. Assess the appearance of the property on a regular basis and develop long-term plans to improve common area landscaping.

Keep your community looking beautiful, lush, safe and inviting year round! ■

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