

HISTORIC ZONING

News

Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission
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Historic Landscapes

Although most landscaping does not require approval from the MHZC, we are often asked for guidance on historic landscape treatments. Here, then, is information to give you an idea of what kind of landscaping your historic house might have originally had.

If you're planning a landscape project in a historic zoning district, please remember that even though plant materials don't require approval, structural landscape features such as plant bed frames, terraces, statuary, trellises, walls, fences, and sidewalks, do require prior approval by the MHZC (when visible from a public street).

To create an authentic-looking or period landscape, you'll need to know what kind of landscaping was popular during the time your house was built. We hope the following information will help. It's not absolute; there were few hard and fast landscaping rules of thumb. Generally speaking, though, your house will probably fall within one of the two historic periods—eras of tastes or trends in fashion and philosophical ideas (beginning on page 2).

B&Bs in Historic Homes Ready to Work?

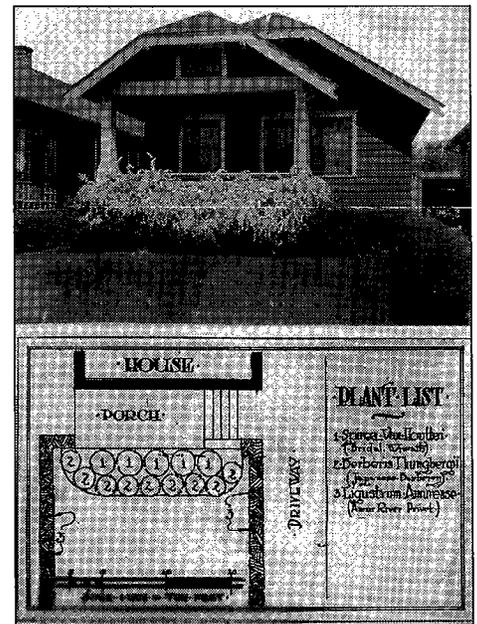
The Metro Council recently passed an ordinance which allows bed and breakfasts (with up to three guest rooms) to be operated in owner-occupied historic homes approved with a B&B zoning overlay and a conditional use permit.

The MHZC determines whether a house qualifies as a B&B and reviews parking and screening plans to ensure that B&Bs are buffered from adjacent homes.

In addition to approval by the MHZC, there are numerous steps to follow to obtain approval for using a historic home as a B&B. These include getting approvals from the Metro Council, Metro Planning Commission, and Metro Board of Zoning Appeals. For more information, contact the MHZC at 862-7970.

Metro Approvals Needed. Please remember to get the appropriate Metro approvals if you plan to do exterior work on property located within Nashville's four historic or conservation zoning districts. A Certificate of Appropriateness from the Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission (MHZC) is required for certain types of work, depending on which type of district your property is within. Building permits are also required from the Metro Department of Codes Administration.

House Doctor: Free Advice. The MHZC staff is available for free architectural/rehab consultations. They can advise you on how to plan projects that will preserve the architectural importance of your house and improve its property value. Call for an appointment, 862-7970.



Above is a planting plan from the 1920s for a Nashville bungalow. Foundation plantings and hedges, rather than fencing, are features typical of the period. More information on historically appropriate plantings for both the Victorian and post-Victorian periods begins on page 2.

Historic Landscapes

Victorian Period 1850-1900

"...all rare blossoms from every clime, grew in that garden in perfect prime."—quote written about Woodstock, Nashville home of Mr. and Mrs. James C. Bradford

In a word, landscaping during this period was "ornamental." Perhaps like no other, this period was a celebration of ornamental horticulture (the science of growing flowers and plants) and was characterized by tropical plants in pots, lots of color in annual flowers and foliage, and the use of planting beds.

Nashville experienced a time of rapid population growth and relative opulence, expressed even in residential landscapes. Lewis and Clarke and increased trade with China made wonderfully new exotic plants available for the first time. Many prized tropical specimens, requiring overwintering in greenhouses, were commonly displayed in garden pots on porches, at the base of steps, and sometimes at sidewalk intersections.

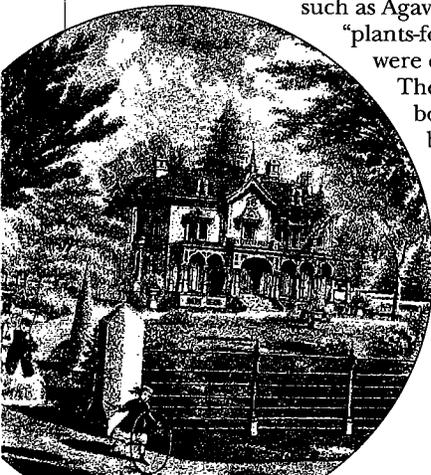
Grounds were planned to be looked upon more so than lived in. This planting design theory was influenced by author Andrew Jackson Downing, who advocated an informal "picturesque" English landscape.

In front and side yards, plant groupings were distributed carefully about the lawn to maximize effect and frame views. (A favorite Nashville pastime was to stroll along the brick sidewalks of tree-lined streets and admire one another's landscapes.) Foundation plantings were generally not used during this period.

Carpet bedding was a common practice with annuals planted in colorful, intricate patterns in the lawn (often emphasized by a mound). Annuals had to be carefully grown from seed or cuttings and cultivated in greenhouses until transplanting time. Though it required considerable horticulture enthusiasm, many small residences had carpet bedding in the form of a circular, patterned bed of annuals, perhaps surrounding a delicate rose trellis or a single specimen plant.

Displays in planting beds of unique plant material such as Agave, Yucca or Palms, became "plants-for-the plant's sake" exhibits, and were considered signs of worldliness. The rarer, coarser-textured, bolder or brighter the plants, the better.

Climbing vines were very popular, providing shade, color, and fragrance. A combination of species would many times be planted together to prolong their welcome attributes.



The degree to which these landscape elements were expressed depended largely on the scale of the house. A larger, more elaborate home or mansion would have used cast iron urns and statuary to embellish its landscape along with the planting. Cast iron statuary of classical figures or animals such as dogs or deer was typical as were garden seating and structures such as gazebos and fencing. A more modest, working class cottage, like many here in Nashville, would have a similar feel but its landscaping would be scaled down (less ornate, busy, or loud), more proportionate to the house and yard.

Behind the house, landscapes were typically more utilitarian, with a drying yard, vegetable garden and sometimes a rose garden if space allowed, all separated from neighboring properties by a high solid board fence.

Post-Victorian Period 1900-1935

"The garden is, in fact, as it should always be—a living room..."
William Robinson from *The Old House Journal*, April 1986.

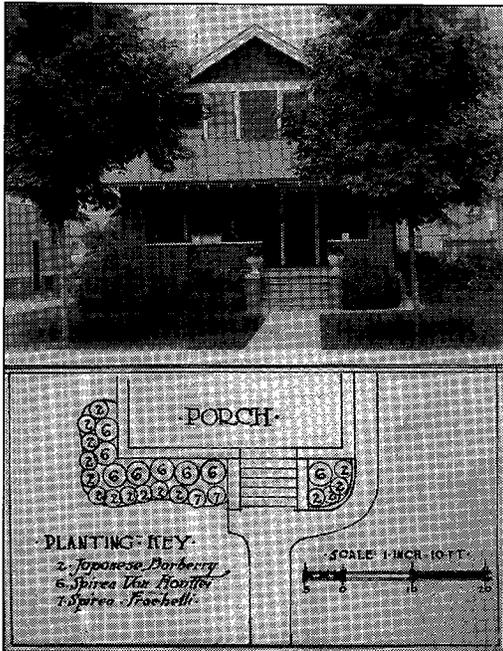
An architectural revolution took place around the turn of the century—the excesses of the Victorian era were given up in favor of the simplicity of classical forms. The elaborate, exotic Victoriana were replaced with simple design, natural materials, and fine craftsmanship—reuniting people with nature.

The "neo-classical" architectural style became popular and grounds began to relate more strongly to this classic simplicity. Later, as the new century progressed, this style evolved toward period revivals, such as Colonial and Tudor, and Craftsman styles.

Post-Victorian, or early twentieth century, landscapes were designed not only to be visually admired, but to be lived in. The house flowed to the garden with large banks of windows, French doors, window boxes, and broad front porches. The ancient concept of the patio was revived at this time. Rear patios and terraces became rooms for outdoor living that extended the living spaces of the house.

Planting design theory was simple. Plants were carefully clustered around building foundations and property boundaries with an open central lawn. Species and arrangements of plants were selected with an emphasis on low maintenance. The use of easy care groundcovers, such as vinca, English ivy and ajuga, became popular. Designs occasionally varied from informal, irregular forms associated with the Bungalow or Craftsman style to simple rectilinear forms related to more formal Period Revival homes. But it was not uncommon to combine styles.

The perennial border was a hallmark of the early twentieth century landscape, inspired by the traditional gardens of the English countryside and the works of Gertrude Jekyll, William Robinson and Beatrix Farrand. In contrast to Victorian carpet



bedding, the perennial border consisted of soft colors, old-fashioned flowers and native wildflowers with an everchanging succession of bloom. The Cottage Garden, as it became known, was simple, often very long and straight with drifts of harmonious color to mimic nature.

Generally, gardens were noted for their lack of fencing, especially

those of Craftsman bungalows. Instead of fencing, hedges were planted. This new "fencing" technique typified the Arts and Crafts emphasis on the combination of beauty and utility, using utilitarian plants in ornamental ways. The Bungalow often had unclipped hedges, while the more formal Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival style gardens had clipped hedges. Fruit trees became the flowering trees in the yard and grape vines covered pergolas.

Lush climbing vines continued in popularity as coverings for pergolas, trellises, fences and walls, and were a wonderful way for the post-Victorian garden to blur the boundary between inside and out. Container gardening, both in window boxes and in large pots set about terraces and porches, also helped integrate interior and exterior space.

Cast iron garden ornamentation gave way to the natural influence of the period. Natural materials such as carved stone, cast concrete, terra cotta and glazed pottery, flagstone, brick, and gravel were utilized. A homeowner of the period may have chosen a sundial, birdbath, or birdhouse as garden ornament, relating again to the desire to strengthen man's tie to nature.

—Contributed by Hawkins Partners, Inc., Landscape Architects

HISTORIC PLANTING:

DO use native plant material and native wildflowers for post-Victorian gardens. Introduced species from Japan or Europe are more appropriate for Victorian gardens.

DO use stone, brick or concrete, if building a terrace in the rear yard, for a post-Victorian home. Exposed aggregate concrete, railroad ties and decks should be avoided where visible from a street.

DO let shrubs grow in their natural form without excess pruning, unless they were intended to be clipped hedges.

DO use plant fencing (hedges) in front yards of post-Victorian cottages.

DO use cast iron or light painted wooden picket fences if you plan to fence your Victorian front yard.

DO find places to use vines! Include pergolas, arbors, trellises or other foundations that are appropriate means of support.

REMEMBER, if your house is in a historic zoning district, anything structural needs prior approval from the Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission (this includes arbors, terraces, plant bed frames, walls, decks, statuary, etc.)

GENERAL

DO research the house type to better understand its heritage and then try to extend and complement that design expression to the grounds.

DO look over the property for clues to the past, such as old walls and planting remnants that would hint as to the earlier planting design. Try to let your garden go through one growing season untouched to uncover "evidence" before renovating.

DO attempt to design with plants that exhibit the spirit of the period, without being be afraid to use modern varieties of plants with "improved" genetics (for instance, resistance to pathogens) if they satisfy the design expression of the period.

DO use twining vines on support wires or trellises instead of species that attach themselves to surfaces. Though the use of vines is appropriate, they can severely damage the masonry or siding of the residence.

DO limit the use of foundation planting for houses built earlier than the 1890s; some foundation planting is appropriate for post-Victorian gardens.



Nashville's Historic Districts Featured

The Blakemore conservation district is featured in a recently published revised edition of *Reviewing New Construction Projects in Historic Areas* by Ellen Beasley and published by the National Trust.

Edgefield and Richland-West End were the focus of "Landmark Communities: How Two Nashville Neighborhoods Are Protecting the Architectural Character of Their Communities," a comprehensive case study by free-lance writer and resident of Lockeland Springs, Donna Dorian, published in the March 1993 issue of *Lifestyle Magazine*.

And the Lockeland-Springs and East End neighborhoods were highlighted in a discussion of Nashville's conservation zoning in a new publication, *Innovative Tools for Historic Preservation*, from the American Planning Association and the National Trust.

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Commission News

New Commissioner. Gary L. Hawkins, NASLA, a resident of the Lockeland Springs neighborhood, was appointed to the MHZC by Mayor Bredesen. Mr. Hawkins, a principal in the firm of Hawkins Partners, Inc., Site Planners/Landscape Architects, with offices on historic Second Avenue, has lived in the historic East Nashville area for the past seven years. During this time, he has been active in the Lockeland Springs Neighborhood Association, has served as a member of the Sub-Area 9 Planning Citizen Advisory Committee, and currently serves as a board member of Historic Nashville, Inc. He and his wife and business partner, Kim Hawkins, have two children.

Mr. Hawkins replaces Jean Thompson whose term on the commission expired in April. We thank Mrs. Thompson for her dedicated and tireless work on the commission throughout her years of service, and we welcome Mr. Hawkins.

New Office, Again. Since the last issue of this newsletter, the MHZC has moved again. This time, we've moved from 176 Third Avenue, N., to 400 Broadway, a historic building beautifully renovated by MDHA.

Staff. Timothy Netsch has joined the MHZC staff, filling the position vacated by

Mark Sturtevant who resigned to accept a position directing MDHA's real estate division. Tim, born in Nashville and raised in Anchorage, Alaska, has a bachelor's degree in History from Pepperdine University and a master's degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Oregon. He worked as a self-employed preservation consultant before coming to the MHZC where he will continue to work with homeowners and contractors on technical restoration issues.

The staff has continued to be called on for professional expertise and for sharing information on Nashville's historic zoning program. In the last year, executive director Shain Dennison conducted training on historic zoning for the landmarks commission of Decatur, AL, and spoke about conservation zoning at preservation, neighborhood, and design symposiums in Dalton, GA; Columbus, MS; Jackson, MS; and Athens, GA. She was one of six individuals invited to participate in a symposium to analyze and recommend a system for communities to use in developing design guidelines. The symposium, held in Charleston, was sponsored by the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

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