Cemetery Weed Control

Vegetation of any kind within a cemetery should never be totally taken for granted and or discarded without thought or extensive consideration. However, when it begins to impose upon gravestones, burial plots or anywhere else it was not intended, and is having a detrimental effect, then appropriate action should be taken.

What must be understood when it comes to practicing cemetery conservation, is that what has taken many years to occur, grow, build up and accumulate; by no means be undone overnight or just within a single day.

The best approach in dealing with intrusive vegetation is going after and removing the entire root system first and waiting for the vegetation to die prior to totally removing it and then dealing with and addressing any ill effects that it may have had.

This would be performed by first cutting back the vegetation to better access its roots. In some cases, the overgrowth may be so massive and thick; that the only other option is to consider the use of herbicides. When an herbicide is ever to be used within a cemetery, a selective herbicide should be applied to the targeted vegetation only. A selective herbicide contains a 'cocktail' of a chemical mixture that is designed for the elimination of specific species of plant(s) without other plants. The preferred herbicide would be dependent upon what type of species of vegetation that is to be abated. If cutting back the vegetation is not practical or even possible, a selective herbicide should be applied to the overgrowth only. The reason being is that most herbicides intended for weed control contain salts and often are highly acidic and should not come in contact or applied near a gravestone. Marble and limestone grave monuments can sustain significant, irreversible damage as a result of these salts and acids. It is because of the threat of this damage, the primary purpose for the use of herbicides within a cemetery, particularly an abandoned ones that have suffered deferred maintenance; is to kill the overgrowth just enough to gain access to the sight so that the remaining vegetation can be removed by hand.

Most all cemeteries are different and not all areas of a cemetery contain burials much less even gravestones. Controlling weeds within a cemetery is no different from typical weed control practices other except for trying to protect gravestones and monuments form being affected from weed control treatment applications and mechanical removal methods for weeds and other intrusive vegetation. The safest and most effective means of applying herbicides within cemeteries is to apply them in the fall during weather and then resuming weed removal in the spring. If applied correctly and thoroughly enough, herbicide should not only kill the exiting growth, but hinder the growth of new or other intrusive and invasive vegetation as well.

There are also other chemicals on the market that are specific to trees and tree roots that are also very effective. Their application needs to be controlled, specific, and deliberate to be totally effective in achieving the desired results.

It cannot be emphasized and reiterated enough that the primary purpose for applying any herbicide within a cemetery is to gain access to the areas that are so overgrown that access cannot be obtained any other way—that the particular vegetation that is hindering access is poisonous and/or detrimental to one's health. It is to enable enough access so that the remaining intrusive and evasive vegetation can be controlled and/or removed by hand. Not for the total destruction and abatement of all vegetation.

This approach is far safer, less aggressive, and far better for the hardscape as well as to both the environment as well as human beings.

Hand pruning is another preferred method to reduce the overgrowth of vegetation. Depending upon the type of vegetation, there are certain guidelines that exist to aid in guiding the way the vegetation should be pruned. The National Park Service provides many free instructional booklets as well as pamphlets on the subject.

Dealing appropriately with vegetation within a cemetery requires both discipline and patients which means one should not expect to have intrusive, evasive, overgrown vegetation completely removed and controlled within a single day.

Successful weed control within cemeteries and cemetery properties can be achieved by carefully applying appropriate and selective treatment chemicals to offending weeds and vegetation while minimizing the risks of coming in contact with and/or harming the gravestones, monuments, as well as any part of the hardscape.