

**Behind
the scenes**

The landscaping of Canberra, Australia's national capital, makes it an unusual city. Most cities and towns have parks tucked away in a busy network of streets, houses, shops, schools and public buildings of all shapes and sizes. But in Canberra, streets, buildings and park-land are intermingled. Suburban houses are set back from the road leaving a deep grassy verge; schools adjoin public sports ovals; a man-made lake with gently undulating foreshores meanders through the city and, in close proximity, Parliament House presides over a formal landscape which extends across the lake to the grandeur of Anzac Parade and the Australian War Memorial.

Canberra's scenic beauty is no accident. When the site for the national capital was selected in 1908 it was a windswept plain. But as brick was laid on brick and concrete slab joined to concrete slab, grass was sown and trees were planted alongside. The roads, the buildings and the surrounding landscape were designed and established together.



Streets, buildings and parklands are intermingled

Seeds and saplings are not as easy to produce as bricks and mortar: they need soil, water and time—the seasons—in which to grow. So in 1911, the same year as the Commonwealth Government launched an international competition for the design of Canberra, work started on a plant nursery. By the time Walter Burley Griffin (the young American landscape architect who won the contest) became Director of Design and Construction in 1913 a dedicated and expert horticulturalist, Thomas Weston, had supervised the planting of some 5000 trees and shrubs.

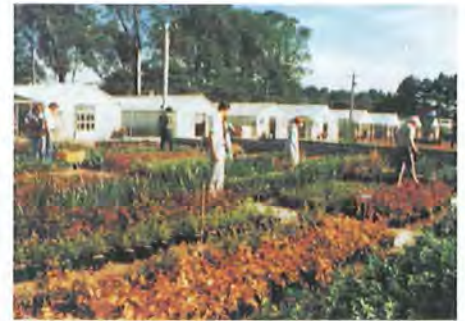


Instant landscape—a 7m tree is lifted into place

In the same year, Weston, who was Canberra's first Director of Parks and Gardens, selected a site at Yarralumla for a permanent nursery. He began testing varieties of plants to find out which would thrive in Canberra's climate. Heavy frosts in winter and hot, dry winds in summer were too severe for many species and some landscape plans had to be modified. It became clear that successful development of the projected 'garden city' and Burley Griffin's vision of 'great garden and water vistas' would require consultation and cooperation between designer and horticulturalist.

This close cooperation continues today. The National Capital Development Commission, responsible for the planning of Canberra, draws on the knowledge and experience of the City Parks Administration—part of the city's management organisation, the Department of the Capital Territory—in matters of design detail and management requirements. City Parks Administration provides most of the plantstock used in city landscaping and maintains it when and wherever it is planted. This maintenance includes the upkeep of street and city trees, picnic areas, parklands, lake foreshores, the sites of all public buildings, and public sports ovals. The area maintained exceeds 6000 ha.

Autumn colour in a suburban street



Householders select plants at Yarralumla Nursery

Thomas Weston's Yarralumla Nursery now produces hundreds of different native and exotic species providing about 500 000 trees, shrubs and flowering annuals each year for the city's landscape development. The Nursery also provides each new household with a free selection of ten trees and forty shrubs to encourage the cultivation of private gardens in keeping with a 'garden city'.

A link between public and private garden scenery is created by nature strips—the deep grass verges lining each suburban street. The beauty of these streets commands attention in its own right in spring and autumn when street trees burst into blossom or change their leaves from green to a riot of colour—shades of crimson, amber and gold.



Leisure activities on lake and foreshore

The foresight of Thomas Weston's stock-propagating program and the advance planting of shelter and shade trees have given the young city an established, settled appearance. Even in 1927 when visitors came to Canberra for the opening of the new Parliament House they found the main avenues of the skeleton city lined with trees, many of them sixteen years old, matured from

that first planting in 1911. It is hard to believe that the 11 million trees now growing in Canberra have been planted since then and came from the 17 ha nursery in Yarralumla and a 14 ha annex in Pialligo.

There are many popular picnic spots in the natural bushland surrounding Canberra and a number of these have been developed intensively to increase their recreational use. Up to half a million people a year swim, fish, canoe and bushwalk in and around these havens of relaxation on the banks of the Murrumbidgee and Paddys Rivers.

A new man-made lake in Canberra, Lake Ginninderra, situated in the satellite town of Belconnen, is still in the early stages of development and will be maintained in as natural a state as the urban environment will allow.



Riverside recreation areas are popular

The first man-made lake, Lake Burley Griffin, however, is in the heart of the city and has many lovely shoreline features. The lake, named after Walter Burley Griffin, has heavily wooded bays ideal for fishing and sandy beaches used for bathing; sailing enthusiasts use jetties and launching areas for their craft,

Hauling stepping stones into the river at a picnic spot



Anzac Parade, then . . .

and in Weston Park, an area named in memory of Thomas Weston, children play in the forts and tree houses constructed among pine trees while nearby barbecues shaded by eucalypts are put to good use.

The lake waters extend into the lily ponds and model boating pools of Commonwealth Gardens, a park designed by the well-known English landscape architect, Dame Sylvia Crowe. Although still under construction, these pleasant gardens are thronged with up to 10 000 people on Sundays in summer when 'Sunday in the Park', a kaleidoscope of events, is held. These include open-air theatre, bush bands, games for children and many stalls.



Manning the fort at Weston Park

Parliament House stands at the apex of an area known as the Parliamentary Triangle. This embraces the National Library, Treasury, other government institutions and the central basin of Lake Burley Griffin. Anzac Parade extends from the Australian War Memorial to the base of this triangle. The formal design of Anzac Parade and the Parliamentary Triangle creates a magnificent vista—a fitting setting for the nation's ceremonial occasions.



and now . . .

Another notable feature of Canberra is its Botanic Gardens. Walter Burley Griffin's early plans included botanical gardens with separate areas devoted to different countries of the world. Canberra's climate, which has temperatures falling to -10°C in winter and reaching 39°C in summer and a rainfall of 665 mm, made this plan impossible. A site for a botanical gardens was set aside, however, and in 1949 the first tree was planted.



Students sketching the rainforest gully in the Botanic Gardens

Canberra Botanic Gardens is devoted exclusively to Australian plants and has the largest collection of native Australian flora in the world. Plants from all over Australia are collected, identified, preserved and grown here. Last year alone more than 6000 specimens were collected.

The Gardens' activities cover research, education and recreation. Last year over 300 000 people visited the Gardens, 6800 of them students. A number of trails, each with a printed guide, enable visitors to explore and learn for themselves. Rangers conduct larger groups and students and are available for answering questions.

One trail leads through trees and plants used by the Aborigines and information on why and how they were used is provided. Another passes through an eroded ravine showing biological and

geological features while in another area a rainforest has been developed in a gully which is almost frost free. Hundreds of misting nozzles controlled by a time clock enable plants normally found only in Australia's warmer rainforest areas to thrive in Canberra.

The Canberra Botanic Gardens is operated and maintained by staff situated at the Gardens. Suburban depots house the workforce for the rest of the city; the maintenance program for the more than 6000 ha of diversified land treatments and settings requires considerable organisation, management and, of course, labour. Earth must be dug; ground covers selected and planted; grass mowed; weeds, insect pests and plant diseases controlled; trees watered and pruned; dead plants replaced.

Areas requiring the most labour-intensive maintenance are the school and public sportsgrounds—the major one being the National Athletics Stadium.



The National Athletics Stadium groomed for action



Mowing on a large scale

City Parks employs horticulturalists, arboriculturalists, botanists, technical officers, tree surgeons, gardeners, mechanics, plumbers, carpenters, bricklayers, stonemasons, painters, plant operators and labourers.

The work ranges from identifying and cataloguing newly acquired plants in the Botanic Gardens' Herbarium to transplanting seedlings in the gardens of Government House, the Governor-General's official residence at Yarralumla; from mowing large tracts of land with a sixty-blade, 2.5 m cut, mower at speeds up to 12 km/h to pruning the formal rose gardens at Parliament House; from preparing turf cricket wickets to clearing storm-damaged trees with travel towers and mobile cranes; from cutting aquatic weed 2 m under water in Lake Burley Griffin to repairing and servicing some 600 pieces of plant equipment.

A panoramic view of Canberra



A small unit set up in 1961 to carry out research into the improvement of horticultural techniques and practices gives advice and support to the City Parks Administration and provides information to the public.

Canberra's climate has been mellowed in some areas by shelter trees and some plants previously unsuited to the city can now be grown. Experimentation in this area still proceeds. Ground covers and grasses are tested for hardiness and low upkeep properties. Pest control chemicals are put through stringent trials to verify their safety and effectiveness. Developments elsewhere in Australia and overseas are monitored with a view to improving the landscape and reducing maintenance costs in Canberra.

Today Canberra stands resplendent in a graceful setting diligently created through the vision and aesthetic appreciation of the city's planner, the National Capital Development Commission, and the organisation operating behind the scenes—the City Parks Administration.



International cricketers in action at Canberra's main cricket ground