



7-Steps for Creating a Standard Operating Procedure Outline for Your Landscape Maintenance

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) have many levels of detail. It all starts with the driving strategy and mission that will set the tone for what you want to accomplished each year.

Next, there are the structural elements that create the architecture of the document that will define the landscape in terms of its parts and resources. For a landscape SOP, there will be a seasonal break down that divides the document into the operational elements that are directly connected to and affected by the seasons.

Last, are the many tasks that will define your year of work. This is the meat of the document. It will be easy to get caught in a quagmire of details, but a really good SOP will define the tasks broadly and allow for (as well as invite) critical thinking to be a part of the annualized work.

This exercise is crafted to help you to develop the starting outline for your SOP. The 7 steps will guide you in organizing the structural elements of the document and help you to get clear on your overall mission. Over time you will continue to fill in the seasonal elements and task lists that will make your SOP unique to your property and your Life-Scape goals.

If you are the main landscape care provider, this exercise will help you to organize your work over a season and property. If you hire professional services to manage your landscape, doing this exercise will help you to better understand what they are doing and why. Stewardship of a landscape is really satisfying when there are some go-to procedures you can count on annually!

1) The Map & Areas

Example – If you have a property plan (or a detailed landscape plan), this is a great document to use to map out your property. Basically, you are going to NAME your landscape areas. For instance, you have the front yard and back yard and within the front yard, you may have the front foundation garden, the lamppost garden, the sidewalk beds, etc. This naming is going to help you create directional language to use when talking about your landscape.

2) The Area Profiles & Characteristics

Example – Each of these areas will have unique characteristics. Your front yard may face west, so it's hot and dry. The front foundation may have morning shade and not get sun until noon,

but that sidewalk bed is in the sun from morning until night. You'll list out all of the defining features of these areas so that you know them intimately and can plan work accordingly.

3) The Specific Horticultural Elements

Example – For each area, there will be plants that need to be called out. I think it's important to know your plants and where they are located in order to help you to understand what care will be needed. There may even be a few unique plants – like maybe you have a beautiful Paper Bark Maple tree off to the side of the garage that you want to call out as special for care and monitoring.

4) The Problems – Insects, Disease, Decline, etc.

Example – For obvious reasons, it's a good idea to list any problems that you can identify in your landscape and tag the issues to specific areas. And, note dates and times of identification. This will help you to keep track of the treatments and care providers you are using to tend these plants.

5) The Seasonal Attributes & Needs

Example – This is where the document will get fat and take time to develop. Each plant will have needs that are going to be tethered to its growth cycle and the seasons. For example, we always note where all the roses are on all of our properties. We have a list the seasonal tasks that roses need from pruning to deadheading to fertilizing to winterizing. This helps us stay on task with this one plant type across all of our properties.

6) The Long-Term Projects & Curations

Example – This is where landscape stewardship gets really fun. If you've been living on a piece of land for any length of time, you know that all gardens, all plants, evolve and change over time. They don't always improve. In fact, some areas will start to decline and degrade. This is nature and normal. Watching and assessing your landscape and taking note of what you love and what's doing great is a very useful exercise. Then, do the same for areas that are not performing as you want. Here is where you will start to make plans for the future projects. It is also here where you can begin to curate new plant selections and/or hardscape additions that will help you to develop your Life-Scape further.

7) The Team Players

Example – You may or may not be able to do this all on your own. You may need landscape professionals to help you to develop your SOP. If you have a good team of pros working for you, then you can request to hire them for consultations to help you to understand their specific expertise better. You may want to talk to your lawn pro, your irrigation pro, your arborist, your fine gardener who can all give you important pieces of information about your property, how it works, and what they do to keep it managed well. These partnerships are invaluable.