



# Landscape Symphonies

## Landscaping in Ancient Rome



The purpose of a garden, according to the Roman philosopher and naturalist Pliny, was "otium," what we would call seclusion, serenity, and relaxation. Pliny, like all of us nature lovers, was always looking for an escape from the "negotium" that often classified busy urban life. Landscapes, both civic and residential, were places to reconnect with one's friends, oneself, and one's environment.

Strongly influenced by classical antiquity, Roman landscapes closely adhered to these time-tried principles of structure and formal design. Garden spaces for civic use were highly common. As pleasing the populace was considered synonymous with maintaining social structure, water became the most important feature developed in Roman landscaping. Their complex systems for water distribution, public baths, fountains, and aqueducts all became hallmarks of both Roman social life and landscaping achievement.

Landscaping was just as important in residential use. These three-segment gardens reflected both status and personality. Approaching the property, they constructed a long shaded avenue which generally encircled a lively garden of favorite flowers, vegetables, trees, and foliage. This lower garden was overlooked by what the Romans called the xystus, a terrace that served as an open air drawing room and connected to the home via a covered portico. Together, the development of these three landscape segments marked a home of distinction and taste.

Curious about how to apply these principles to your own landscape? Email or call us for tips on maximizing function and beauty in your civic or residential landscape!

Martin Carrion van Rijn (530) 632-3263  
[martin@landscapesymphonies.com](mailto:martin@landscapesymphonies.com)