

Greening Government Campuses: Transforming Spaces into Sustainable Landscapes

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A visitor begins forming an impression of an institution long before entering its main building. The entrance avenue, trees, lawns, flower beds, pathways and even the cleanliness of an unused corner quietly communicate something about the organisation. A green, orderly campus suggests care and professionalism; neglected lawns, exposed soil and overgrown vegetation can send an entirely different message.

For government offices, research institutions, educational establishments, training centres and other public campuses, landscaping should therefore be viewed as more than beautification. A well-planned landscape can improve the working environment, provide shade and comfort, support biodiversity, demonstrate sustainable practices and create a distinctive identity for the institution.

The good news is that a green facelift does not always require a completely new landscape or a large budget. Many government campuses already possess valuable assets mature trees, established gardens, open spaces, orchards, water bodies and naturally growing vegetation. The challenge is to recognise these assets, protect them and bring them together through thoughtful planning.

Begin with what already exists

A careful assessment of the campus should be the starting point for any landscaping improvement. Existing trees, lawns, pathways, drainage, irrigation systems, service areas and unused spaces should be examined before introducing new landscape features. Valuable mature trees and established vegetation should be protected, while poorly maintained lawns, waterlogged areas, exposed soil and neglected corners can be identified for improvement. Instead of developing individual gardens whenever funds become available, the campus should be viewed as one connected green system. The entrance, buildings, pedestrian routes, parking areas, recreational spaces, demonstration plots and boundary plantations can be integrated through a landscape master plan. Research on campus planning has highlighted the importance of organisation, connectivity,



context and greenness in creating successful institutional environments (Hajrasouliha, 2017a; 2017b).

Long-term planning is particularly important when selecting and planting trees. A seasonal flower bed can be redesigned every year, but a tree planted today may become a defining feature of the campus for decades. Planting should therefore consider not only immediate visual appeal but also the mature size of trees, future shade, root spread, maintenance requirements and their relationship with buildings, pathways and other infrastructure. A well-planned landscape can thus develop gradually while protecting the existing green assets of the campus and reducing the need for costly corrections in the future.

Let the landscape tell the institution's story

Agricultural and horticultural research organisations can incorporate fruit orchards, medicinal and spice gardens, crop demonstrations, native plant collections and seasonal flower displays to showcase their scientific and educational activities. Training and research institutions can also use demonstration gardens to highlight practices such as composting, mulching, rainwater harvesting and water-efficient irrigation.

Plant selection can further reflect the ecological character of the region. Native and locally adapted species are generally better suited to local climatic conditions and can provide habitat and food for birds, butterflies and beneficial insects. In Telangana, for instance, regionally

suitable trees, shrubs, flowering plants and drought-tolerant species can be combined to create attractive landscapes without relying heavily on exotic ornamentals. A distinctive institutional landscape does not need to be elaborate or expensive. It should be purposeful, practical and closely connected with the character of the institution and its surroundings.

Make the entrance the green face of the campus

The entrance is the first physical contact between a visitor and an institution and therefore deserves careful attention, though not necessarily extravagance. A well-maintained avenue lined with suitable trees can provide shade and create a welcoming sense of arrival, while shrubs and hedges can guide movement and screen service areas. Flower beds and groundcovers can add seasonal colour without making the entrance visually crowded. Plant height and visibility should also be considered carefully; tall trees should not completely conceal important buildings or signboards, and dense shrubs should not obstruct traffic junctions or pedestrian crossings.

The institutional sign can be integrated into the landscape through appropriate planting, lighting and clear visibility, creating a stronger visual identity. Simple digital interpretation can further add value. *Amrit Udyan* at *Rashtrapati Bhavan*, for instance, uses QR codes to help visitors identify plants and access information about them. Similar technology can be adopted on a smaller scale in government and research campuses, turning the entrance and surrounding landscape into an attractive and informative first point of contact.

Create a green heart

A campus needs more than lawns. It also needs places where people can pause. A central shaded space can become the “green heart” of an institution- a place where employees take a short break, visitors wait comfortably and informal interaction takes place. It could contain a modest lawn, mature or newly planted shade loving shrubs/plants, flowering shrubs, seating and accessible pathways.

Not every outdoor space needs to be active. Quiet corners can also be valuable. A bench beneath a tree, a shaded walking path or a small garden beside a building can provide a peaceful place away from busy work areas. Research on university campus gardens has shown that green spaces can contribute to social interaction, wellbeing, community building and a stronger sense of place (Walshe



& Law, 2022). Although government campuses have different functions, the underlying principle is equally relevant- people benefit from attractive and usable outdoor spaces.

Rethinking the institutional lawn

For decades, a large, neatly trimmed lawn has been considered a sign of a well-maintained institution. Lawns have an important role around main buildings, ceremonial areas and frequently used open spaces. However, extensive turf can consume considerable water, labour and maintenance resources. The answer is not to eliminate lawns but to use them intelligently. Less frequently used areas can be converted into tree groves, native plant patches, butterfly gardens, medicinal plant collections or other low-maintenance landscapes. Trees can provide the upper canopy, shrubs can occupy intermediate spaces and groundcovers can reduce exposed soil.

This creates a more diverse landscape while potentially reducing irrigation and mowing requirements. The Central Public Works Department has recognised horticulture and landscaping as important components of built environments, including gardens, lawns, terrace gardens and roadside plantations (CPWD, 2016). The modern institutional landscape should therefore consider the purpose of each space before establishing a lawn.

Turn gardens into living classrooms

For ICAR institutions, agricultural universities, horticultural departments and research organisations, the landscape can serve another important purpose. A medicinal plant garden can introduce visitors to useful species, while a spice garden can demonstrate economically important crops. A fruit block can showcase cultivars, a butterfly garden can demonstrate the relationship between plants and pollinators, and a native tree collection can introduce people to local biodiversity. Proper labelling can

turn these gardens into valuable educational resources. Labels containing common names, botanical names, families and uses can provide basic information, while QR codes can offer more detailed content.

This approach is particularly useful for institutions involved in agricultural education, research and extension. Students, farmers, school children, employees and visitors can learn simply by walking through the campus. In this way, the garden becomes a laboratory without walls.

Sustainability must be designed in

A campus should not be called green simply because it contains a large number of plants. If those plants require excessive water, fertiliser and maintenance, the landscape may be green in appearance but not necessarily sustainable. Water management should therefore be incorporated into landscape planning. Rainwater harvesting and recharge systems can be connected with campus drainage where technically feasible. Drip irrigation can be used in suitable planting areas, with watering scheduled according to season, soil and plant requirements. Mulching is another simple practice with multiple benefits, as organic mulch can conserve soil moisture, suppress weeds and gradually add organic matter to the soil (Laycock & Robinson., 2018).

Garden waste should also be treated as a resource. Fallen leaves, grass clippings and pruning material can be composted and returned to the garden instead of being routinely transported away, reducing waste while producing a useful soil amendment. Biodiversity deserves equal attention. A campus does not need to become a forest to support wildlife; native trees, flowering shrubs, grasses and groundcovers can provide habitat for birds, butterflies and beneficial insects.

Learning from Amrit Udyan

India already has examples of institutional landscapes that have become closely associated with the identity of the organisation. Amrit Udyan at Rashtrapati Bhavan is perhaps the most prominent (Rashtrapati Bhavan, 2026). The garden incorporates several distinct spaces, including the Central Lawn, Long Garden, Circular Garden, Musical Garden, Spiritual Garden, Sensory/Tactile Garden and Arogya Vanam. Together, these demonstrate how a large institutional landscape can accommodate different themes and experiences. The lesson for other government campuses is not that every institution needs a



garden of similar scale, but that every landscape element should have a purpose.

One campus may benefit from a medicinal garden, while another may need a tree interpretation trail. An agricultural research institute may gain more from a crop demonstration block than from another ornamental lawn. A training centre might find greater value in a sensory garden or shaded outdoor learning area.

A green facelift should be phased

One of the biggest mistakes in institutional landscaping is trying to transform everything at once. A better approach is to work in phases. The first phase should address the basics like cleaning, pruning, removal of hazardous vegetation, protection of mature trees, restoration of damaged irrigation systems and improvement of existing lawns. The second phase can focus on high-visibility areas such as the main entrance, major avenues and spaces surrounding important buildings. The third phase can introduce thematic gardens, biodiversity areas, demonstration plots, composting systems and improved seating.

Later improvements can include plant interpretation boards, QR-based information, rainwater management features, additional shaded areas and other facilities according to available resources. Phased development also allows the institution to learn from experience. Plants that perform well can be expanded, while species requiring excessive water or maintenance can be avoided in future. In government institutions, where budgets and manpower must often be planned carefully, this gradual approach is more practical and sustainable than a one-time makeover.

The real test begins after planting

The success of a landscaped campus is ultimately determined by maintenance. A newly developed garden may look impressive at inauguration, but its real character

becomes visible months and years later. Irrigation, pruning, weeding, nutrition, pest and disease management, lawn care and replacement planting all have to be considered. Plant selection should therefore begin with maintenance requirements. A plant that looks attractive in a nursery may not perform well under local conditions, while another may survive well but require constant pruning or watering.

The horticulture staff who will actually maintain the campus should be involved in planning. Their practical understanding of soil, climate, irrigation, pests, diseases and labour availability can prevent many problems. A simple landscape containing healthy, locally adapted plants is often more successful than an elaborate design that becomes difficult to maintain.

From beautification to placemaking

The future of government campuses landscaping should move beyond the narrow idea of beautification. Beautification focuses mainly on making a place look better, whereas placemaking considers how a landscape can improve appearance, functionality and the experience of the people who use it. This distinction changes the way institutional landscapes are designed, with each element serving both a practical and aesthetic purpose.

A tree-lined pathway provides shade as well as beauty. A demonstration garden provides knowledge, while a shaded seating area encourages interaction. A composting unit converts waste into a resource, and a native plant garden supports biodiversity. A well-designed entrance communicates institutional identity. When these elements are thoughtfully connected, the campus becomes more than a collection of ornamental plants; it becomes a living, functional landscape.

Bring greenery indoors

A green campus should not end at the entrance door. Government buildings contain many indoor spaces—reception areas, waiting halls, corridors, conference rooms, libraries and offices—where plants can extend the green character of the campus. Interior plant decoration can make these spaces more welcoming and visually pleasant while creating a stronger connection between the built environment and nature. However, interior landscaping should be planned rather than treated as simply placing pots wherever space is available. Plant selection should consider natural light, temperature, air-conditioning, available space and maintenance requirements. Low-maintenance foliage

plants such as *Aglaonema*, *Dracaena*, *Sansevieria*, *Arelia* and selected palms and ferns can be used according to the conditions of individual spaces. Table-top plants can enhance reception counters and work areas, while larger plants can create focal points in spacious entrances and waiting areas.

The arrangement of plants can further improve the visual character of interiors. Groups of plants can soften large reception spaces, while linear arrangements can add greenery to long corridors. Attractive planters can be selected to complement the architecture and colour scheme of the building. Where adequate light, irrigation and maintenance facilities are available, vertical gardens or green walls can be introduced at prominent locations. Indoor greenery should remain simple and purposeful so that it does not obstruct movement or interfere with office functions. Regular watering, pruning, cleaning of leaves, pest and disease monitoring, and timely replacement of declining plants are essential to maintain attractive displays. Containers should have proper drainage, and watering should be carefully managed to prevent damage to floors, furniture and electrical equipment. Thus, interior plant decoration should be integrated into the regular horticultural maintenance programme rather than being considered a one-time decorative activity.

Summary

A government campus should be viewed not merely as a collection of buildings, but as a living landscape that contributes to the identity, comfort and functionality of the institution. Thoughtful landscaping can transform neglected or underused spaces into attractive gardens, shaded areas, walkways and places for interaction, while interior plant decoration can extend this green character into reception areas, corridors, offices and waiting spaces. By combining mature trees, seasonal gardens, biodiversity-friendly planting, functional open spaces and well-planned indoor greenery, campuses can create a stronger and more continuous connection between people, buildings and nature. Such landscapes also grow in value with time as trees mature, gardens evolve, biodiversity develops and people gradually develop a sense of attachment to the environment.

The best green facelift is not necessarily the most expensive one; it is the one that makes intelligent use of existing vegetation, selects plants suited to local conditions, uses water wisely, recycles garden waste, supports biodiversity and remains manageable for those responsible for its care.

Indoor and outdoor greenery should likewise be planned with appropriate plant selection, efficient maintenance and long-term sustainability in mind. The ultimate objective is not a landscape that impresses visitors only on the day of inauguration, but a campus that remains attractive, healthy, functional and welcoming year after year. When trees provide shade, gardens change with the seasons, indoor spaces feel more inviting, people find comfortable places to pause and interact, and birds and butterflies return, landscaping becomes more than beautification—it becomes an investment in the environmental quality, identity and everyday experience of the institution.

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