



ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

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FACT SHEET

NOVEMBER 2021

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: Horticulture and Landscape

Arlington National Cemetery's [Memorial Arboretum](#) is a living tribute to those who have honorably served our nation. Rolling green hills, majestic trees and a diverse collection of ornamental plants create a rich natural tapestry on these hallowed grounds. Visitors can stroll through the cemetery's 639 acres, which blend formal and informal landscapes and feature more than 9,600 native and exotic trees. The oldest trees, at nearly 250 years old, predate the first burials. Intimate gardens enhance the cemetery's beauty and sense of peace. More than 140 [memorial trees](#) honor veterans, [Medal of Honor recipients](#), military units, battles, families and others who serve. ANC also has five [state champion or co-champion trees](#).

Like the cemetery as a whole, the landscape around the [Tomb of the Unknown Soldier](#) was carefully designed to create an atmosphere of quiet and repose, dignity and calm. The original tomb, dedicated with the burial of the World War I Unknown Soldier on November 11, 1921, was a simple, flat structure. In 1926, Congress approved a national design competition to complete the tomb. Architect Lorimer Rich (buried in Section 48) and sculptor Thomas Hudson Jones submitted the winning design, featuring the sarcophagus that you see today (unveiled on April 9, 1932). Rich also redesigned the approach to the Tomb, creating a paved granite plaza on the east terrace between the Tomb and Memorial Amphitheater. East of this terrace, a tapered mall lined by a border of trees crossed the proposed cemetery road (what is today Roosevelt Drive), terminating with another granite plaza featuring the Roosevelt Fountain.

The landscape surrounding the Tomb was also redesigned to include 22-foot-high clipped American beech hedges on either side of the ceremonial mall. Planted in 1931, this aerial hedge created a dramatic formal element as the main approach to the Tomb. At the time of its creation, the hedge was reportedly the largest of its type in the United States, measuring 100 yards long, 22 feet tall and 18 feet deep.

In the 1980s, the trees were replaced with little-leaf lindens, which were maintained as a hedge in the same manner that Rich had envisioned. In 2018, after several of the trees and the hedges had declined, the Linden trees were replaced. As these trees mature in the coming years, ANC will shape them into hedges.

The cemetery's earliest known memorial tree is closely connected, both physically and symbolically, to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The Mother of the Unknown Soldier Tree, located on Memorial Drive near the front of the Amphitheater, was dedicated on May 8, 1932 in honor of the mother of the World War I Unknown Soldier. The tree is a river birch.

To learn more about horticulture at Arlington National Cemetery, please visit:
arlingtoncemetery.mil/Explore-the-Cemetery/Memorial-Arboretum-and-Horticulture/Welcome.