



THE RIGHT LANDSCAPE DESIGN CALLS FOR THE RIGHT INSTALATION AND MAINTENANCE

Well designed and installed landscaping will add considerable value to your home (As much as 15 percent), allowing you a return on your investment of 100 to 200 percent. It all begins with choosing the right designer. Once you have a design, you'll need to choose the right Landscape Contractor to do the installation. This is followed by someone to perform quality maintenance. The following should be helpful when evaluating your choices for installation and ultimately maintenance.

It all begins with your landscape plan. Use your plan to understand and communicate the scope of the project before you. Your plan will guide you in determining which services you'll need from the contractor. Areas to consider include installation of plant material, decks, pavers, retaining walls, irrigation systems and lighting. You may wish to work on some of these projects yourself. If this is the case, be sure to run this by your contractor.

I recommend that each client choose from at least three Landscape Contractors bidding for their business. Be sure to thoroughly investigate everyone. Ask the professionals you are considering whether they are licensed and how long they have been in business. Be sure to ask if they have insurance. Also consider what levels of expertise and education the employees have. Finally, I'd recommend inquire about recent references and even visit some of past jobsites. We have a list of preferred installers at the nursery. Just ask and we'll get you a copy.

There are a great number of clients that approach the nursery with "renovations" to poor landscaping. Often it is worth asking about guarantees. This certainly pertains to hardscaping, including concrete, paver and retaining wall work. A recent trend, especially on larger commercial jobs, is to require the landscaping company to maintain the project for the first year. This way, any serious installation mistakes can be dealt with in a timely manner.

Maintenance is a serious topic to consider from the get-go. If the installation company will be providing some or all of the maintenance, ask for the maintenance schedule. Basic lawn maintenance should include weekly mowing, monthly fertilization, weed control if desired and aeration or dethatching services. Ask which chemicals, if any, will be used on your property, and require the contractor to provide the material safety data sheet (MSDS) for each.

Landscaping is a relatively large investment and involves a lot of hard work. If you will be contracting some or all of your landscape installation and maintenance, take the time to evaluate all the possibilities. I often receive requests from young people about how to start out in design and landscape. I encourage folks to enter the field. A good attitude and quality work goes a long way. If you find someone with great references and quality work, give them a chance.