

# What You Need to Know BEFORE *Hiring a Landscaper*

8 Steps to Success





## LANDSCAPING PRE-PLANNING TO POST-PROJECT PROCESS GUIDE

### INTRODUCTION

As you begin the process of considering outdoor renovations, your vision for what you want to do may be general, such as:

- You want to use your outdoor spaces for entertaining
- You want incorporate an outdoor play or sporting space in your yard for yourself, the kids and/or pets
- You want your landscape to look good, to increase the value of your home, to have curb appeal and/or to become an extension of your interior design

You may also have some specific ideas about what you want, such as:

- A list of features and ideas about placement and materials

Regardless of how far along you are in your vision—and whether you are considering hiring your first landscaper for some specific work (like a patio) or for a major yard renovation—being informed about the process will help give you confidence and lead to better results.

This Landscaping Pre-planning to Post-Project Process Guide will help familiarize you with common questions you'll consider during landscaping process and is written to help support you in achieving three main goals in your landscaping process.

You'll want to be happy with the outcome:

- Aesthetically (it should look good)
- Experientially (the experience of the process should be a good one)
- Financially (you'll want to make an informed investment)

We hope that the information we provide will help you achieve these three goals and support you in feeling more confident in your decision making when you are ready to begin considering a relationship with a landscaper—whether you are simply upgrading some landscaping features or plotting out an entire renovation.





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## A FEW LANDSCAPING TERMS TO KNOW

**Aeration:** The methods of increasing water and oxygen into compact soil by creating holes throughout the areas.

**Dethatching:** The process of removing dead grass from a lawn.

**Grading:** The process of adjusting the slope level of an area.

**Green Roof:** A green roof (or living roof) is a building roof partially to completely covered with soil or a growing medium in which vegetation is planted. Green roofs may help reduce pollution, moderate urban heat and improve air quality along with a host of other benefits, including offering green space to city dwellers, reducing noise pollution and reducing electromagnetic radiation. (For more, see [www.greenroofs.org/index.php/about/greenroofbenefits](http://www.greenroofs.org/index.php/about/greenroofbenefits))

**Hardscaping:** Any of the non-plant materials and features incorporated in a landscape design. The materials range from rock to wood while structures run the gamut, including patios, walkways, driveways, outdoor kitchens, fire pits, rock or retaining walls, pergolas and many other features and materials.

**Landscape Architect:** A person with a degree or graduate degree in landscape architecture who is licensed as a landscape architect by the state in which they operate. A landscape architect has training in complex site development and installation and build issues and challenges, such as the ability to:

- Solve elevation or drainage issues
- Work with slopes
- Develop retaining walls and outdoor structures
- Offer insight and advice on the placement of driveways, service lines and the like

(\*In the world of landscaping, a great deal of crossover can exist between the landscape architect, designer and contractor.)

**Landscape Contractor:** Typically, the contractor has experience in the planning and planting of grounds (softscaping), although some contractors do handle hardscaping projects.

**Landscape Designer:** Although a landscape designer may have equivalent training to the landscape architect, a designer is licensed as a landscape architect by the state in which they operate. Designers often work on projects ranging from garden design to handling all the intricacies of a full yard renovation, including soft- and hardscapes.

**Sod:** Mature lawn grown for transplant to new locations.

**Softscaping:** The live horticultural elements incorporated into a landscape.



## ABOUT YOUR LANDSCAPING PLAN

### *How To Develop Your Landscaping Plan*

This is likely the single biggest question facing someone who knows that they'd like to renovate all or part of their yard but aren't quite sure what to do, how to start or how to figure projected costs.

#### I. Start with an Assessment

Figuring out your landscaping plan begins with an assessment. You can start by taking an inventory yourself of your property's challenges and features and then prioritizing what you think you'd like in your landscaping master plan while you also give some thought to what's possible given your property. At the same time, begin giving some thought to your budget and what's affordable for you.

This assessment along with thought about your budget is a great launch pad for starting a conversation with a landscaper and should be done before you schedule a home consultation. We offer a Landscape Assessment & Planning Checklist as a free download. [You can get this free tool here.](#)

#### II. Book a Landscaping Consultation

After you've done an assessment, schedule an on-site consultation with a landscaper when you are ready to start getting outside ideas about your property. Be sure to ask if there is a charge for the consultation and what you'll "get out of it" once it's done.

You may have heard that you can get a landscaping plan for free from local nurseries or garden centers. Many of these outlets may have designers on staff and some may even offer you free plans, but before you start implementing it, remember that there can be "hidden" issues in landscapes that require an experienced eye. In a nutshell, if you want to start implementing a landscaping plan tailored to your specific needs and the challenges of your property, consider your landscaping plan as an investment and a blueprint.

#### III. Consider the Landscaper's "Style"

Some landscaping neophytes worry that a landscape designer or architect will project his or her tastes or style onto your project. While every professional will bring his or her own flavor to a project, designing to your style is the charge of the landscaper.

Because it goes without saying that each professional's creative and practical conclusions would not be identical in a design and style plan, when looking at professionals you might consider the overall flow of their design work. Try to take a read on the landscaper's sense of artistry and flow, then imagine how he or she might plan your project within the parameters of your tastes and preferences.





#### IV. Find out who “owns” the landscaping plans, once they are developed

Regardless of who may be assisting you in creating your outdoor master plan or landscaping blueprint, find out if you are granted copies of the design in the case of disputes or in case you decide you want to tackle some of the projects yourself.

#### V. Consider design trends

Outdoor living areas are trending as extensions of the home itself, incorporating a seamless, expansive look spanning the interior and exterior spaces.

#### VI. Consider researching options before making final decisions.

For example, there are a multitude of garden types alone to consider, such as:

- Entry Gardens
- Evergreen Gardens
- Perennial Gardens
- Bonsai Gardens
- Rain Gardens
- Edible Gardens
- Shade Gardens
- Butterfly Gardens
- Native Gardens
- Rooftop Gardens
- Container Gardens
- Seasonal Displays & Rotations

Shade Garden



As well, if you have the time and are interested, think about researching softscaping styles, hardscaping materials, accessories and plants that will work in your zone before or while you are talking with a landscaper. You might find yourself drawn to a particular style of hardscaping materials, particular plants or landscaping styles, which you can then convey to your landscaper.

#### VII. Consider the Landscaper’s Expertise

Keep in mind that a large part of the reason to consider using professional assistance is for the knowledge and expertise that the landscaper brings to the project.

On the softscaping side, a landscaper has a wealth of knowledge about plants and their needs; their experience can save you time, money and grief by preventing you from making costly mistakes.

On the hardscaping side, a landscaper possesses the wisdom to guide you on materials that will work given your particulars, the experience to advise you on the placement of those materials, and the insight to know how to both prevent and to solve landscaping problems.



## COSTS AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT

### Discuss Your Budget Upfront

One of the best things you can do is discuss your budget up front to help the landscaper help you get the most “bang for your buck.” When you’re ready to landscape, your budget will determine which priorities you can afford for your project.

After you have defined your budget, you could consider asking several companies how they would use the budget on your project. With that information, you would be in a position to choose the company that offers a plan that most satisfies you, given that the landscaper meets your additional criteria (such as a sense of good rapport, sufficient years in business and a solid reputation).

Consider that as with any interior home project, the lowest bid may not be (and probably isn’t) the best buy. Work that is safe and efficient delivered by knowledgeable, trained, bonded and insured professionals can save you headaches down the road and may offer a better return on your investment.

Find out if you can expect a detailed estimate from your landscaping company. That way, if you cannot afford part of the plan now, you can decide which items you’d like to install now and which you’d like to budget for in the future. Likewise, if you receive a plan that you love but can’t afford, ask if there are ways to reduce the cost somehow, such as by substituting materials, doing some of the work yourself or opting for a payment plan..

### Figure Out Real Return, But Consider What It’s Worth to You

Figuring out how much of a percentage of a home’s value can be increased with an outdoor renovation could be figured by talking to a real estate expert. Don’t be afraid to call your agent and ask if he or she might be able to offer insight into how your investment might affect your home’s value—or if he or she can recommend someone who would be willing to do this.

As a rule of thumb, it has been recommended that you consider capping outdoor spending at 28% of the value of your home unless you are doing the renovations for your own personal pleasure.

Keep in mind that overspending can be as detrimental to your bottom line as underspending. Landscaping adds real value along with emotional appeal to a property. Great landscaping can make your home extremely desirable in a competitive market.





## CHOOSING A LANDSCAPER

In addition to reviewing how each landscaper might suggest spending your budget, consider the following as you narrow your choice for a landscaper:

- Check customer reviews on business pages, such as Facebook.
- Check your landscaper's rating with the Better Business Bureau.
- Look online or ask for the landscaper's license and insurance information, length in business, certifications, education and experience.
- Ask yourself how comfortable you feel with the landscaper. Does he or she return calls and inquiries promptly?
- Inquire as to whether the landscaper offers a guarantee. If they do, ensure that the guarantee is in the contract. Also, ask for a contact you can communicate with if there is an issue.
- Finally, don't be shy about bringing up topics that might matter to you, such as sustainability or organic methods of care.

## AFTERCARE, AFTERCOSTS & CONSIDERATIONS

Don't forget that softscaping materials are an ever-evolving part of your landscape. Consider asking your landscaper:

- How long it will take to "grow in" this new landscape?
- What do you need to know about maintenance and aftercare?
- How might caring for this landscape affect water bills; should you consider an irrigation system if you don't already have one?

Keep in mind that the strategic placement of hardscaping materials can reduce water consumption and installing a good irrigation system—or fixing or improving your current one—can positively affect your water bills (and even your water softening bills; if you are watering from a faucet that is tied into your water softener).

If you don't have the time or interest to maintain your landscape yourself, look for a landscaper who can help you by offering maintenance services. You can sign up for services like:

- Spring & Fall clean-up
- Pest & Disease control
- Cultivating
- Fertilizing
- Weeding
- Edging
- Pruning
- Winter protection
- Mowing





## BOOKING A LANDSCAPER

It's not unusual to find yourself as one of many in a long line of people waiting on landscaping services. One reason is that it's natural to consider our needs "when we need or want" them. The good news is that you can start planning your landscape at any time, and you don't need to wait until the lines are long to do it.

In cooler months, consider making contact with landscapers in the "off season" to begin developing your plan. Not only will that offer you a longer stretch of time to consider your options, but it will allow the landscaper an unrushed window of time to work with you in developing a plan. Additionally, your forethought may offer you advantages in booking times.

When you are ready to book a landscaper, find out:

1. How long the process can take—from assessing to designing to completion
2. Ask about lead times for booking: How far ahead should you book?
3. Additionally, ask what you should do to be well prepared for the planning consultation.





## ABOUT THE LANDSCAPING PROCESS

A good landscaping process starts with a landscaper who will:

- listen to your needs
- listen to your desires
- take your lifestyle into account

The landscaper should then assess your specific site conditions, take soil tests if necessary, and present you with several concept drawings that assist you in creating a vision and budget that works for you. An environmentally conscious landscaper will also refrain from using invasive plant species and talk to you about rain barrels, rain gardens, native plants and green roofs. He or she will listen to your concerns about harmful chemicals and offer environmentally friendly alternatives, where possible.

### I. In Your Initial Meeting

A landscape designer should visit you on site to learn about your needs and the property. This allows the landscaper to intelligently discuss ideas and concepts and answer any questions you may have. They should take pictures of your property in order to provide you with a site-specific design. Note: If you are able to provide a copy of your property survey, that will help make the process go smoothly.

### II. Concepting

A good landscaper will take the information gained from the initial meeting and then present you with conceptual drawings for further discussion. After you approve one of the designs, the designer should begin the process of rendering a final landscape plan for your approval.

### III. Design & Approval

After concept approval, you should receive a final rendering of the project. Ideally, this draft should contain detailed specifications on plant materials, hardscape and all costs specific to the installation.

### IV. Installation & Quality Control

Once your final plan has been given the green light by you, the landscaper's crew should install according to the design blueprint.

Additional Questions you may want to ask your landscaper:

- Is there a system for checks and balances/plan agreement?
- Will the landscaper be able to work with me my pets/kids around?
- Will there be trucks and cars from the company in my parking spaces?
- Who is my touchpoint during the process, if I have questions or concerns?





## CONCLUSION

Developing and implementing a timely landscaping plan you'll be happy with on every front (aesthetically, experientially and financially) is dependent on:

1. Understanding landscaping vocabulary for clear communication
2. Taking the right steps to develop a solid landscaping plan
3. Making smart choices with your budget
4. Choosing a landscaper you feel comfortable with
5. Taking maintenance and aftercare into consideration as you plan
6. Your understanding of booking and lead times
7. Knowing how the process will flow, from design through installation

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## Additional Resources Available Online include:

### Roedell's LANDSCAPING ASSESSMENT & PLANNING CHECKLIST

When you feel grounded enough to begin assessing your outdoor spaces in preparation for your first meeting with a landscaper, our downloadable checklist will prepare you for that conversation. Get this ultra-helpful tool [HERE](#).

Roedell's is the Orlando area's premier family-owned landscape business, and we love what we do! Our business has grown by providing quality landscape design, install, and maintenance services with passion, dedication, hard work and a "customer first" service attitude. We work with both residential and commercial clients, and there is no project too big or small.

Are You Ready? [Contact Us For A Free Consultation and Quote!](#)