

Hiring a Landscaper

Hiring the right professional is key to successful completion of complicated projects. Start by asking friends, neighbors and family for referrals and check local landscape and nursery associations for members. When interviewing landscape architects, designers or contractors, make sure you understand what services each provides, including what will be subcontracted out. Some companies may do design and project oversight, but bring in subcontractors for specific jobs, such as the installation of lighting or water features, major concrete demolition or construction. Here are some other things to think about:

- **What do you want out of your landscape?**
A relief from hectic days? A place where the kids can play? An expanse of green lawn or islands of trees, shrubs and flowering plants for year-round color? A place for entertaining?
- **Do you need any structures or hardscape?**
Hardscape includes sidewalks, pavers, patios, decks and walls. Structures may include gazebos, trellises, arbors or sheds.
- **Ask about references, licensing and insurance information.**
Is the company active in local professional groups? Certain kinds of work require specific licensing, such as plumbing and electrical installations. Building permits may be needed for certain kinds of construction, depending on municipal and state regulations.
- **Visit a job site or two the company has worked on, including one in progress.**
Ask the landscaper for references of jobs similar to yours. Is the site tidy and organized? Does the crew appear knowledgeable, hard working and have a professional appearance?
- **Determine your budget and decide if you can have the landscape job done all at once or if it will be done in phases.**
Do-it-yourselfers may want to contract with the landscaper for the drawings and plans only.

- **Make sure you understand any guarantees and what they cover.**
What happens if a plant dies within a year of planting? Within 2 years? What if the sidewalk cracks or the pond leaks?
- **Ask for everything in writing, including the plans, contracts, guarantees or warranties.**
This should also include costs, recommended plants, schedule, payment requirements and other contractual matters. Ask about the timeline and what could disrupt the process (material availability, weather, etc.).

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