

Seven Things You Must Know Before Hiring a Landscaping Company

Introduction

Have you ever heard the term “the first impression is everything?” Chances are, you’ve heard this about everything from job interviews to purchasing a home.

The thing is, in many cases the first impression *is* everything. If you give a poor first impression, there’s a good chance you won’t get that job, or the client won’t purchase that home.

This is just one reason why your landscape is so important. It doesn’t matter if you’re a homeowner or manager of a Fortune 500 business- the condition of the landscape gives an important first impression.

Now since you’re a self-respecting person, I assume that you want to give a great first impression with a quality, beautiful landscape. So the question at this point is- how do you achieve that?

Well before you go off and hire the first landscaping company you come across, here are a few things to consider.

Let’s start with the first question most people ask- if you really need a professional, or if you can just do everything yourself.

Do I Need a Professional or Can I do it Myself?

Typically the answer for this question is... **it depends.**

There are multiple factors to consider, so let's take a look at each individually.

Budget

Most people who choose to do their own landscaping have one thing in mind- money. They're doing everything they can to save money, which generally means doing it all yourself.

If you're very budget-conscious, here are a few things to keep in mind with doing it yourself:

- There is an upfront investment of tools and equipment
- There is an opportunity cost of other, more important activities you can be doing
- You probably aren't as fast or effective as a professional
- Learning about the different grasses, bushes and trees requires research time

So even though it might save money in the long run, you will still have upfront investments to manage.

Also, consider the fact that you may try to do it yourself, do a poor job, and end up hiring a company to fix the mess you made. If that happens, you've lost both time and money, so it would've been cheaper to hire someone else to do it in the first place!

Professional Image

What kind of image are you trying to portray about yourself or your business through your landscape?

That you're a professional businessman?

That you take care of all the details?

That you're proud of the home you live in?

Chances are you want to put the best foot forward, right? You want your landscape to look good- not necessarily perfect, but good. That means clean-cut grass, trimmed bushes and trees, and some personality with flowers without over-doing it.

Even though this sounds simple to achieve, it takes quite a bit of work. While most people simply think of the maintenance required for something like this, there's one more thing to consider.

Design.

Designing a beautiful landscape takes practice and know-how. You can't simply change your landscape on a whim, as it takes time for plants to grow and develop to their full potential.

Again, this is something you can learn how to do yourself, but it will take some time.

Speed

In the United States, speed is important. We like for things to get done quickly and efficiently, right?

We have fascinations with fast cars, fast roller coasters, fast bikes- fast everything.

When you're working on a project, it's the same way. Most people don't do projects around the house or at work for the fun of it. Instead, it's to reach an end goal.

Landscaping is (usually) the same way.

If you're developing a nice landscape for the goal of looking good, speed is important. Hiring a professional will make that happen, as you'll have multiple guys out there doing what they do every single day.

Not only will each person do it quicker than you, but since there are a few of them doing it, they might get done in 5-10 times faster than the time it'd take you.

Recreation

If you like being outside in the garden and doing yard work, you're in a completely different boat than most people.

Some people love working in the yard, and view landscaping as relaxing and a great way to spend spare time. If that's you, and you don't have other things you'd rather do with your time- by all means, do it yourself and have a blast!

But if you don't like landscaping, or even if you do but have a few other things you like *even more*, hiring a professional to do the work is the best choice.

Understanding the Different Types of Landscaping Services

Most people don't realize how many different types of landscaping services are out there. Deciding that you want to a professional is just the first step.

Deciding on *exactly* what you want, and the types of services you need, is the next. This section will help you do just that.

Landscape Architects

Just as you might expect, these services are meant to help you craft your landscape to give exactly the kind of impression you're looking for.

Generally if you're a home owner, you probably won't hire a landscape architect unless you have big dreams for your yard!

But if you're a business owner, hiring a talented, experienced landscape architect will make all the difference in the world. If you have a limited budget, as most companies do for something such as landscaping, try to hire a quality landscape architect and lower the budget a bit for maintenance.

Typically it's much easier to maintain something that already looks good than to completely redesign something later.

Landscape Designers

Similar to landscape architects, designers help you get started in making the landscape give the impression you want.

The only difference between designers and architects is in education. Typically, designers have fewer qualifications and less formal education than architects.

Landscape/Build Contractors

Once your layout is designed, you need to hire a company to implement the design. This generally includes leveling ground, planting seeds, and laying mulch, gravel, dirt, etc.

This can also mean planting adult trees and plants, removing unwanted or dead plants, building fountains, or anything else you need.

Landscape Maintenance Contractors

Sometimes this will be the same company that installed your landscape, or you can choose to go with a different one. This is your recurring cost, as regular maintenance should take place at least biweekly, if not weekly.

Specialties

Some companies specialize in certain areas of landscaping. A few examples are arborists, pool builders, and horticulturalists.

What Types of Services Does the Landscaper Specialize In?

Most landscaping companies specialize in a certain industry or type of landscaping.

For example, some will cater specifically to homeowners, while others work with more commercial clients.

Even though these can look similar on the surface-level, asking a few simple questions can help you identify if the company is right for you.

The first question to ask is this- *“Do you specialize in landscaping for businesses or homeowners?”*

If most of their customers are in the same boat as you, here’s another question to ask: *“What services do you provide for most of your customers?”*

Note that this isn’t directly asking what they specialize in. However, by having them identify the work they normally perform, you’ll pick up on what they’re specialties are.

If you have specific concerns or questions, be sure to ask them over the phone the first time you talk to them. Even if they don’t specialize in those areas, they’ll probably be able to let you know what your options are.

For example, they could sub-contract out the work to someone who does specialize in that field. A good example is outsourcing to arborists.

The important thing is to hire companies that specialize in what YOU want.

A company that mainly works with homeowners may not be able to give a business owner the type of service they're looking for.

Likewise, a company with mostly commercial customers won't be used to working with a homeowner creating a flower garden.

Where Should I Start Looking for a Good Landscaper?

It's amazing how many landscaping companies are out there. The main reason is that people figure "hey, I can cut my own grass- why don't I start a landscaping company?"

The problem is that because there are so many options, it can be tough to find the right landscaper for you. If you follow what we recommend in this section, you'll have much better chances of finding a good company to work with.

Who do You Know?

Asking your friends, family, coworkers or neighbors for a recommendation is the first place to start. This is especially true if that person has a beautiful landscape!

The only thing about this is that you **should not** go with the first company you hear about. Even if you're referred to a company by a person with a great yard, do your due diligence. Be willing to walk away from a company if they don't seem like a good fit for what you're looking for.

Also, be extremely skeptical when someone recommends their brother, cousin, etc. They'll obviously be biased because they want to help out a loved one. The thing is, that loved one's company might be horrible at landscaping, but of course they would never say that out loud.

Big G Knows All

Google is one of the best research tools on the planet. Not only can you find local landscapers, but you can also find customer reviews and testimonials to see what people think about the company.

The reason we don't recommend going to Google first is because you don't know the personality of the company simply by looking at a website. Even if there are pictures of happy, smiling people- that doesn't tell you anything.

Meanwhile, by first going to people who you know and love, you at least get a feel for the personalities of different companies out there.

Something else to keep in mind when looking at reviews online about a landscaper is this- **unhappy people whine**. What I mean by that is this-

When you have a happy experience with a product or service, you probably don't think about leaving a positive review, right? Instead, you're just content because you got what you expected.

Meanwhile, people who are dissatisfied are much more likely to say something. The internet allows them to voice that opinion, similar to calling over a manager at the restaurant where your food was cold.

Chamber of Commerce

Most people don't utilize their Chamber very much at all. That's a shame, because the Chamber of Commerce exists to help quality businesses connect with quality customers.

Consider calling to see if they can give you any recommendations. Chances are, they will know at least a few landscaping companies nearby and give a good recommendation.

Review Sites

There are specific review sites such as Angie's List that you may consider joining. The good thing about these sites is that you'll find unbiased views of different landscapers.

Because the entire site is based on the model of helping others, it's a good way to help you make a decision if you're having difficulty choosing between two companies.

What Things are Absolute Musts for Hiring a Landscaping Service?

Most people make their entire decision around budget- that's a no-no.

Budget is an important factor, but here are a few other things to consider.

Licenses, Memberships and Protection

Is your contractor licensed?

Do they have Workmen's Comp insurance?

Are you, the client, protected in case of property damage?

Are they a part of ALPD or the Better Business Bureau?

These are VERY simple but important questions that most people overlook! Even though they don't necessarily need to be part of the ALPD or BBB, membership does speak volumes regarding their ethics and business practices.

Experience

Some landscaping companies have been around for a few months. Others, you'll find, have been serving your local area for over a decade.

The biggest advantage to having lots of experience is customer testimonials. While a newer contractor will have very few previous customers, a landscaper who has been around for a while can point you to dozens of happy, satisfied customers.

Another reason why experience makes a difference is cost. If a landscaper has experienced teams, they'll be able to perform the work more quickly than a newer contractor. Less time = less money, so you may actually save a few bucks by going with a more experienced team.

Knowledge

There's a lot more to landscaping than just knowing how to cut the grass or trim edges. You want someone who knows their craft like the back of their hand, right?

That means knowing about different fertilizers, plants, pesticides, and pests in the area.

It means knowing how to help your plants look as beautiful as possible, without accidentally killing them due to poor treatment.

Knowledgeable landscape architects can listen to your thoughts and quickly sketch out exactly what you're picturing.

Horticulturalists will help create not only a professional landscape, but also a healthy habitat for the plants and insects living in it.

Personality

Doing business with someone that you get along with is always better than the alternative.

When you call a landscaper, how do you want them to answer the phone? Or do you want them to sound rushed, busy, angry, and inconvenienced?

Or would you rather talk to someone who sounds happy that you called?

Keep in mind that this is about more than just talking to the secretary or "gate keeper". Try to get hold of someone who will actually come out and do the landscaping themselves. This will give you a better feel for the company's personality than just talking to someone at a desk.

The Power of the Written Word

This will be discussed a bit more in the next section, but it's important enough that it should be discussed twice.

When you work with a landscaper, **get the contract in writing.**

A simple handshake or verbal agreement isn't enough. Period.

I know that in some parts of the country, this is an acceptable way of doing business. But if it was up to me, this is never how business would be done.

The reason is that getting a contract in writing protects both the client *and* the landscaping company.

- The client is protected because if the contractor doesn't perform everything written on the contract, it can be pointed out.
- The contractor is protected because if they are not adequately paid for the service performed, the contract highlights the gap.

So don't work with a contractor who's unwilling to get this in writing. It's a simple but professional way of doing business- period.

Understanding the Estimate and Negotiation

Estimates shouldn't require the ability to translate Greek to understand.

You should easily be able to see what the contractor wants to do, how much it's going to cost, and how long it will take.

For example- a landscape architect may quote you a price to design X square feet with bushes and flowers, for Y dollars, and they'll deliver you the first draft in Z days.

The same may go for a maintenance contractor, but instead of submitting a quote for design, it'd be to maintain your landscape by coming out X times a month for Y dollars, and performing services A, B and C.

Materials, clean-up, number of workers, number of times a month service will be done- these are the kinds of numbers you want to see.

What you *don't* want is it to simply agree to and pay a piece of paper with one number on it.

The Power of Three

Something else to keep in mind is that you shouldn't receive a quote from just one contractor. Instead, try to get a least 3 quotes for the same services.

This lets you do 2 things:

- 1) Compare prices of the different contractors, and
- 2) Compare timeframes

Remember how I mentioned earlier that budget shouldn't be your only consideration? Well, this is part of the reason for that.

If a contractor's quote is much lower in both cost *and* time than the other 2, they might be "low balling", hoping to win the contract just based on budget.

The problem is- you may hire them, and then find out later that they're incompetent.

Meanwhile, you're also able to protect yourself from over-paying. If you only received one quote and just went with it, you might end up paying a premium for just an average service.

Negotiation Doesn't Mean to be Cheap

When some people “negotiate”, what they’re really doing is “looking out for #1”.

In other words- they’re stubborn and don’t listen to the other party.

When you sit down to negotiate a contract, be respectful and understanding but firm. Don’t compromise on your budget simply because they claim it’s necessary. Instead, see if you can hire them for fewer services.

Likewise, don’t try to get the absolute cheapest price you can squeeze out of them. Landscapers have families to feed too, so don’t expect them to do top quality work for pennies.

Quality work requires adequate payment. Would you want an underpaid, unhappy surgeon operating on you?

Other Important Questions to Ask

Besides what we've already covered, here are a few good questions to ask any prospective landscaping companies.

These will help you weed out the bad apples and move forward with the good ones.

“Could you give me a few referrals?”

Good landscapers will have plenty of happy customers from the past. If they don't have any referrals, you may want to re-think hiring that company.

“What's the active ingredient in your pesticides and weed killers?”

Thanks to Google, a simple search will tell you if their sprays are about to kill your most precious plants.

“What makes you different than other landscapers?”

Surprisingly, many landscapers won't be able to answer this question. They'll come up with an answer on the spot, and it will probably be very generic, meaning they haven't identified their true specialty or niche yet.

“What time do you start each day?”

Leaf blowers, lawn mowers, saws, and pressure washers are just a few things you (and your neighbors) might expect to hear at 7a.m. if you don't clarify and negotiate the starting time.

“Do you offer warranties for your work in case I'm not satisfied?”

A beautiful landscape is easily damaged if something dies or isn't taken care of properly. Make sure your landscaper will come back and right any wrongs they performed.

“How many employees do you have? Do you use subcontractors?”

Very few employees or a large number of subcontractors may indicate that the landscaper doesn't have much expertise or that the actual work can take longer than expected.

Conclusion

Hiring a good landscaper requires a bit of research time and financial investment. But even though it's more expensive upfront than doing it yourself, you'll thank yourself later- guaranteed!

First impressions are everything, and it will always be more difficult to give a great first impression if your landscape is in shambles. Hiring a top-notch, professional landscaper will boost your pride in either your business or your home.

The key to selecting the best contractor for your needs is to do your due diligence. By asking the important questions and explaining what you really want upfront, you'll almost always have a better experience.

If you have any questions or concerns, please give us a call, or email us. We look forward to hearing from you and helping you with your next landscaping project.

Sincerely,

Your Name