

Why hiring a landscaper may be for you

The majority of homeowners want their properties to appear as appealing as possible. While many homeowners want to be proud of their properties and come home to a welcoming home each night, the benefits to maintaining landscaping go beyond the notion that well-cared for lawns make for more comforting retreats.

Because numerous variables, including landscaping, influence property values, it's difficult to assess just how much the property values of homes with impressive landscapes are influenced by those very landscapes. Indeed, studies have produced varying results regarding the effect of well-landscaped homes on property values. But what many studies have shown and what many realtors indicate is that impressive landscaping adds a significant amount to property values, with estimates suggesting landscaping increases home values by anywhere from 5 to 20 percent.

Such estimates are good news for homeowners, and they also highlight the stakes involved when making landscaping decisions. Homeowners with green thumbs may embrace the challenge of revitalizing their lawns and gardens, but many, especially those pressed for time, can benefit greatly from working with professional landscapers.

Why hire a professional landscaper?

Maintaining a property requires more than just mowing the lawn every couple of weeks. Even homeowners committed to making their properties as pristine as possible can run into problems when adverse weather conditions pose a threat to lawns and gardens. The following are just a handful of reasons why homeowners may find working with landscaping professionals is the best thing for their properties and their bank accounts.

- Professionals understand the local climate. Experienced professional landscapers will understand the local climate and the challenges it presents to your lawn. Experience can prove invaluable as lawns battle adverse conditions that threaten its survival. While homeowners going it alone may struggle through a trial and error period as they try to address problems threatening their lawns, experienced professionals are more likely to identify the problem immediately, providing a ready solution that can prevent potentially costly repairs down the road.

- Professionals can provide inspiration. In addition to maintaining properties, many landscaping professionals have vast experience improving properties through landscape design. Professional landscapers may have a host of ideas for your property that you would never think of. Homeowners with little to no lawn and garden experience may not realize all the things they can do with their properties, and those who go it alone may end up with unappealing landscapes that do not attract buyers' attention when the home hits the market. Professionals typically have a wealth of ideas and, perhaps more importantly, they understand which ideas will and won't work on a given property.

- Professionals can remove some of the stress of managing landscaping projects. Homeowners know that home improvement projects, whether they are addressing home interiors or exteriors, can be stressful. Professional landscapers typically have a network of professionals, including contractors, who they have worked with in the past. Such connections can ensure more complex projects that require both landscapers and construction contractors go as smoothly as possible. In addition, homeowners who receive contractor recommendations from their experienced landscapers tend to rest easier knowing the people working on their properties have already developed a rapport and established a successful track record working together.

Professional landscapers can be just what homeowners need to turn their properties into appealing oases no buyer can resist.

How to make spring projects more eco-friendly

The arrival of warmer weather means different things to different people. Some anticipate opportunities for outdoor fun, while others may be considering redecorating or remodeling their homes. For the latter group, home improvement season provides a great opportunity to make homes more eco-friendly.

When planning home improvement projects, it's best to first choose a project and then look for ways to make the project more environmentally friendly. Such an approach may not only benefit the environment, but it also may benefit homeowners' bottom lines.

Interior decorating

Longer days and warmer temperatures often translate into wanting to freshen up the interior of a home. Heavy draperies and comforters are put away, and lighter fabrics are taken out of storage. Whenever possible, reuse or repurpose items you already have rather than purchasing new items. Longer drapes can be cut and hemmed to be used as window treatments in other rooms. Making a patchwork blanket out of old T-shirts is a crafty project that makes use of items that would otherwise be destined for landfills.

When laundering linens, skip the energy-using dryer and let items line dry in the sun and fresh air.

If you decide to purchase some new items, look for products made from sustainable or organic fabrics. Hemp and bamboo textiles have grown in popularity. Hemp and bamboo plants grow quickly, and their durability makes these materials smart choices.

When replacing items around the house, donate older items to a charitable organization.

Flowers and plants

Spring and summer call to mind beautiful blooming plants. Relying on native, sustainable plants is practical,

environmentally friendly and cost-effective.

According to the National Wildlife Federation, sustainable plants are native plants. Native plants sustain local wildlife more effectively than non-native alternatives, so include native plants in your sustainable garden. Native plants also are less reliant on pesticides and herbicides to keep them healthy and viable.

Don't forget to bring plants indoors as well. Even though you may be opening the windows more, indoor plants can filter and purify indoor air. The NASA Clean Air Study, led in association with the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, found that certain common indoor plants naturally remove toxic agents such as benzene, formaldehyde and trichloroethylene from the air. Efficient air cleaning is accomplished with at least one plant per 100 square feet of home or office space.

Proper disposal

Spring cleaning is another tradition for many families come the end of winter and dawn of spring. Many people use spring as a time to go through closets and garages to remove items they no longer use or need. In an effort to clean up fast, some people may dispose of chemical products, paints, treated lumber, and many other items in ways that can be damaging to the environment. Always learn local municipal guidelines for proper disposal of potentially harmful products. Area recycling centers may have drop-off areas for stains and paints, used motor oil and other potentially harmful prod-

ucts.

Before discarding something, see if it can be donated or sold. This will result in fewer items ending up in landfills.

Exercise caution outdoors as well. Runoff from cleaning products used on home siding or driveways can leach into the surrounding soil or find its way into sewage drains that ultimately direct fluids to public waterways. Choose environmentally responsible products whenever possible.

Springtime renovation and cleaning projects provide the perfect opportunity to adopt eco-friendly practices that pay dividends for years to come.

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Home Upgrade To Do List:

- ✓ New backyard patio
- ✓ Get energy efficient appliances
- ✓ Remodel the kitchen
- ✓ Replace the roof
- ✓ Upgrade bathroom fixtures
- ✓ Re-insulate the house
- ✓ New computer for home office

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