



New build or renovation requires a detailed landscape plan

Whether you're building a new home or simply want to spruce up the current landscape, it's important to get a plan in place. The landscape is more than plants – it's also landforms and man-made structures. Fences, garden bed borders and lighting are just as important as the trees, shrubs and turf.

A well-designed landscape improves the property's value, increases the area's beauty and creates a space for enjoyment and relaxation.

When planning a landscape, conduct a site evaluation that identifies positive and negative features, as well as environmental conditions. Also, identify the goals of the landscape. Do you entertain outdoors? Do you need open spaces for children to play or to place a play structure? Do you have pets that will also use the area? Does there need to be some definition between your space and the neighbors? Define areas for each planned use of the space. Knowing how the space will be used is important in developing a plan.

The site evaluation will be used in the initial planning stages, and later when designing plantings. Be sure to record the locations of existing elements such as trees, shrubs, fences, flower beds, etc. Be sure to note the spread of a tree's canopy as that can impact what can be planted nearby.

Walk through the property at different times of the day to record the amount of sunlight available. Also keep in mind that environmental conditions such as soil moisture and wind protection will vary in different locations throughout the area, along with soil type and slope of the land. Avoid installing garden beds in low areas that retain water.

Once your wants and needs in the landscape have been identified, start putting those ideas on paper. It's not uncommon to go through several paper drafts before nailing down exactly what you want. Don't forget to include service areas such as where firewood will be stored, a composting bin and garbage can storage. Patios, walkways and storage sheds can be included, too. Draw in these elements to approximate size and shape.

Irrigation is a big factor in landscape design. Are you planning on an in-ground irrigation system or will you water with sprinklers attached to hoses? Make sure there are adequate faucets to accommodate watering requirements. Consider working with a licensed contractor to create an irrigation plan.

For those who may not feel confident with the design you've come up with, consider hiring a landscape architect or designer to complete all or part of the work. Services offered by these companies vary greatly – from design work only all the way to designing, installing and

maintaining the space. Look at photographs of a company's past projects and ask for references. Visit some of those sites if possible.

I'll be addressing elements and principles of design in the next few columns.