

How To Hire A Landscape Contractor

Getting It Done Right The First Time

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Introduction

Things You MUST Know Before you Hire a Landscape Contractor.

Congratulations on your decision to redo or install new landscaping! It's very exciting to see your dream design become a reality. To make your project as simple as possible, this publication will show you how to hire a licensed landscape contractor.

Inside this publication, you will find tips and ideas from a licensed landscape contractor with many years experience in the industry.

Here's what you can expect:

- Why should you hire a licensed landscape contractor?
- Licensing requirements for contractors.
- What to do before you contact a contractor.
- Interviewing & hiring a landscape contractor.
- Understanding every phase in your landscape project.
- What to expect throughout your project.
- Tips to help keep your project on time and on budget.
- Glossary of landscaping terms.

You might be considering hiring an unlicensed landscaper or gardener to save

money. The truth is, you might be able to save money. But what happens when you run into problems with your project? If your landscaper hired people to help him with your project and one of the workers gets injured while on your property, you could be held personally liable for the injuries. If your landscaper is not knowledgeable about permits and inspections, that too can cost you time and money.

Landscaping is an investment that will likely increase the value of your property. It's an important job. It's an investment. If an unlicensed landscape contractor could potentially cost you thousands of dollars and stress, why risk it?

Chapter 1: Why Should You Hire a Licensed Landscaping Contractor?

Requirements of A Licensed Landscaping Contractor:

- Experience in the industry.
- Regulated by State laws. The laws were implemented to protect consumers.
- Carries insurance and is bonded.
- Carries workers' compensation insurance.



The licensing requirements for contractors varies from State to State. In some states, a contractor is not required to have a license while other states require contractors to be licensed.

California Licensing Requirements for Landscape Contractors.

- The contractor must have at least four years experience in the trade and/or meet certain educational requirements.

- The contractor must be able to pass a complex examination.
- The contractor must maintain a bond written by a surety company that is licensed with the California Department of Insurance. The bond is required to protect consumers.
- Workers' Compensation Insurance. This insurance coverage will cover your licensed contractor's workers in the event of injuries on the job.

Unlicensed Contractors:

- Don't have a license.
- Are not required to abide by laws or regulations.
- Are not required to have experience in the industry.
- Are not required to carry workers' compensation insurance. If someone gets hurt on the job and your unlicensed contractor does not have insurance, you could be held personally liable for any injuries.
- Are not required to secure a bond.

Potential Danger of Hiring an Unlicensed Landscape Contractor:

You want to save money on your project so you hire your cousin Joe, a gardener/landscaper to complete your landscape project. Joe has worked in construction in the past and promises he can complete your project inexpensively and in a short amount of time.

You give Joe half of the money and he starts the next day. Things are looking good. Joe has showed up several days now with a crew. One day he shows up by himself and the crew never comes back. Joe assures you he can complete the project himself.

A few weeks go by and with very little progress, it doesn't look good.

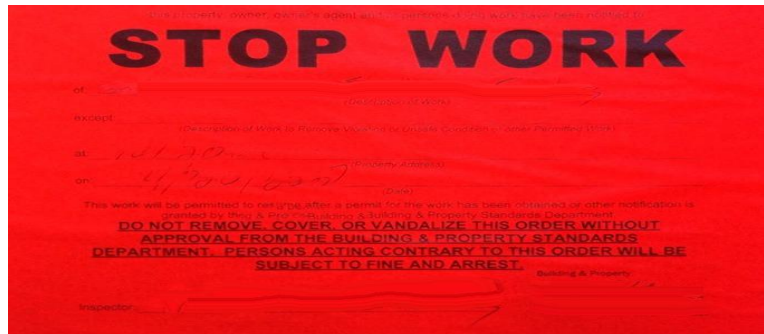
With tensions mounting and tempers flaring, the arguing between you and Joe escalates. Joe decides he doesn't want to do the project anymore, he walks off the job and doesn't come back.

Less than one-third of your project is complete and what's worse, Joe installed the irrigation system, ran the electrical lines for the outdoor lightning and started the gas line for the new propane grill.

A good rain reveals Joe installed the irrigation system about an inch below the ground. That's not good. Now you're thinking about what else Joe did that was substandard work.

Joe didn't realize permits were needed for the electrical and gas lines. An

inspector shows up, takes a look at the electrical and gas lines and puts a red tag on your project. That means the project has to stop until you get the necessary permits.



Joe said he ordered plant materials, wood for your new deck and pavers for your new patio. You can't reach Joe; he is not returning your calls. From the amount of beer cans you had to pick up over the past several days, it's a good guess Joe didn't spend the money on materials.

Now, what do you do?

Without a written contract in place, litigation might not be the best way to go.

- ☐ You can contact a lawyer and pay a ridiculous amount of money in legal fees with no guaranteed outcome.
- ☐ You can call all of your relatives to put the word out that Joe needs to contact you.
- ☐ Pay a private investigator to find Joe, but then what?

At this point, you're angry and you have every right to be. You've spent how much money? And now you have to start over.

The issue of a contractor not carrying workers' compensation insurance should be enough to deter you from hiring an unlicensed contractor. If workers gets hurt

on your job, you could be held personally liable for their injuries. That could mean lawsuits against you with a possibility of finding you liable for injuries and damages that could result in hundreds and possibly thousands of dollars.

Why should you hire a licensed landscape contractor?

- They have experience in landscaping.
- They successfully passed a rigorous written examination.
- They secured a bond with a licensed insurance company.
- They carry Workers' Compensation Insurance.
- They have experience, expertise and knowledge .
- They will keep you informed of the progress of the project.
- They will obtain all necessary permits and inspections.
- They have a business and care about their reputation. If you require assistance after the job is complete, there's a good chance a licensed contractor will address and resolve your concerns.

To make sure you hire the best licensed landscape contractor for your project, there are several things you need to do before you pick up the phone.

Chapter 2: What to Do Before You Hire a Landscape Contractor

Before you contact landscape contractors, there are several things you should do to be prepared. From creating a realistic budget, to considering the best function for your space, your overall design - including any elements you want to use, your favorite colors, types of plants, any problem areas, a general timeline, and future maintenance.



Budget

This is the most important. Create a *realistic* budget and be prepared to be *flexible*.

Realistic means that you only have \$X amount of dollars to spend on your landscape project. Should the outdoor kitchen and pizza oven you want cost as much as your entire budget, that's not a realistic budget.

When you're prepared to be *flexible* with your budget, that means you are willing

to make compromises. The wood you want to use for the deck is expensive. If you bought similar wood but it's cheaper, you can use the money you save on the wood for another area in your project.

Be willing to make adjustments to your project.

Always include an amount in the budget to cover incidental or unforeseen expenses, such as when the contractors are digging the hole for the pool, they hit caliche (a hard rock) and it's going to take more money, manpower and time to remove the rock.

Don't worry about putting a price on every item you want in your landscape design. That's why you're hiring a professional, a licensed landscape contractor. They have completed many landscaping projects and will provide you with a written, detailed bid that itemizes everything you want.

Your budget is set, now it's time for the design process. It's important your design matches your lifestyle. The perfect function for your design is one that suits the way you live.

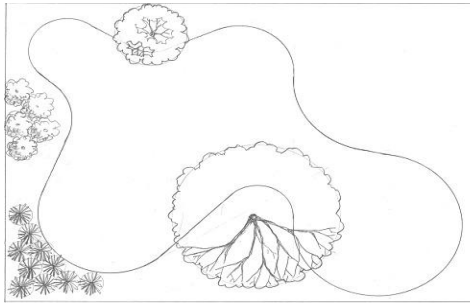


Functionality

Take some time to think about what you want to achieve with your landscape design. You might want an area to entertain family and friends, an area for the kids and dogs, a garden, secluded sitting areas.

The photo above depicts a flagstone patio with a cozy seating area for six people around a fire pit. The water feature to the right of the sitting area balances the design. The grass is perfect for pets and kids. The fence in the back creates a screen from a neighbor. The wrought iron fence to the left of the sitting area is a nice design feature, adding another level of balance and softened with plants. The flowers/planting areas soften the entire design and the outdoor lighting will add a nice ambiance at nighttime.

If you've been to a neighbor's home and they had an outdoor kitchen that was incredible, make a list of all the items they had in their outdoor kitchen. If they don't mind, take a photo. Maybe you want to create a WOW factor with curb appeal. Make a list of all the elements you would like to include in your design and next, let's draw or sketch a simple design.



Design Sketch

Your drawing is merely a simple sketch of what you want in your design. It will help your landscape contractor get an idea of what you're looking for. What's important is that you have some idea of where you want certain elements in your design plan. You don't need a fancy computer program or graph paper to draw the design to scale. Draw a simple sketch of your design after you decide what elements you want included.



Elements

Do you want to add more living space to your outdoor areas? Maybe you're thinking about an entertainment area with a grill and plenty of seating for guests? An outdoor kitchen? A pool? Make a list of all the elements or features you want in your landscape. Next, we'll discuss some tips to get ideas for your new design.



The photograph above is a patio constructed with pavers.



Ideas

You can get ideas from magazines, online, or maybe you've

seen a friend's landscape design you absolutely love. Either cut photographs out of magazines or mark the pages to show your contractor. If you see a design online that you like, print it out. Maybe you've been to a friend's house and there were certain elements in their landscape that you'd like to implement in your design. Write them down or ask if you can take a photograph.

Photographs are good to show your contractor what you want. When you're showing the contractor photographs, you can also talk about color.



Color

Start thinking about the colors you want in your landscape. Keep in mind the exterior color of your house plays an important role in the colors you want to choose for your landscaping. You want to colors that compliment the color of your house and any other existing or planned structures.

You can take a look at a color wheel to get some ideas of what colors work well together. Your experienced, licensed landscape contractor knows how to group colors in both plant materials and hardscapes (patios, decks, arbors, etc.)

As a general rule, when you're looking at a color wheel, select colors next to each other or directly across from each other. You can use different shades of the same color to create a soft effect.

The colors of plant materials are important and so is the scale or size of plants.

If you want a particular plant next to your front door, it might get so big in a few years you'll have to transplant it. Let's keep scale in mind when we're deciding on which plants to use in our design.



Scale

The photos above are Sago palms. Without a doubt, they are gorgeous and a wonderful plant to use in your landscape.

As you can see, the one on the left is a five gallon plant you would buy from a nursery. The photo on the right is a Sago palm that is several years old and has not yet reached it's full maturity. It is important you know how big the plants will get to plant them in the proper areas.

The plants you like and want to plant next to the house might not work.

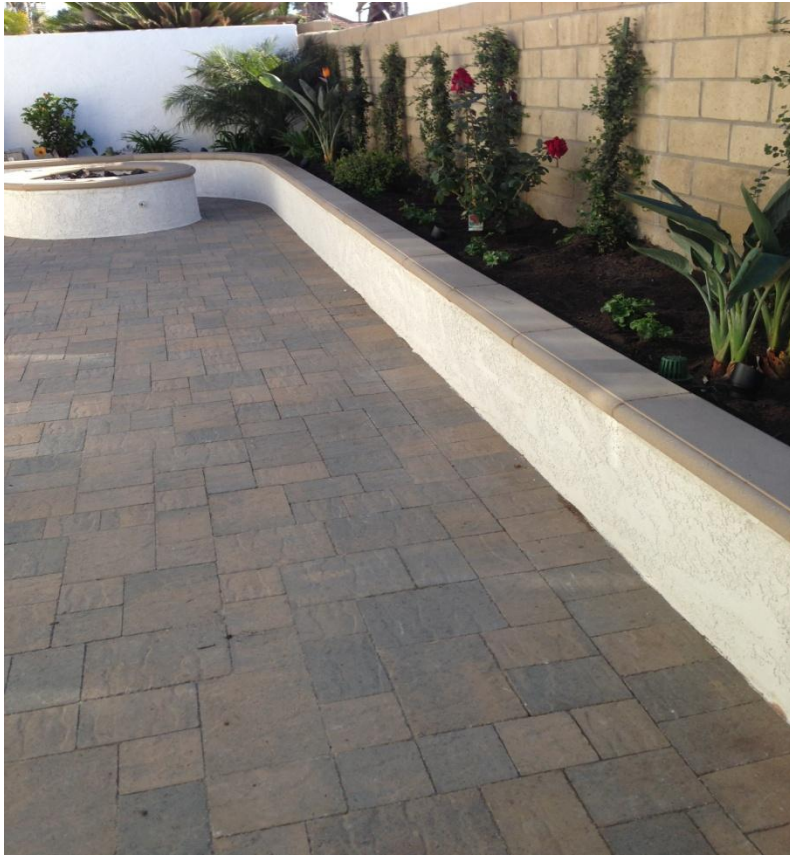
This is another area of your landscape design process where it pays to have the opinion and expertise of a landscape contractor. They know how big plants will get when they mature. They will suggest that you do not plant certain flowers, trees, shrubs and other plant materials in areas where they could be problematic several years from now.

Landscape contractors also know about a plant's root system. Some plants have root systems that will seek water which could be very detrimental to your home in the future.

Plants are where you can save money. When you buy smaller plants, you can include some larger anchor-type trees and get smaller filler-style plants that will grow in over time.

Before you choose plants for your landscape, either go to the nursery or talk to your contractor about viewing samples before you buy them and plant them. You don't want the headache of planting trees that will be a problem in a few years.

Problems in your existing landscape should be noted. Maybe you have areas that don't drain well or a slope that needs some magic, write the problem areas down and discuss solutions with your contractor.



Problem Areas

Make a note of any problem areas. You know when it rains there are certain areas of your yard where the water collects. Although your landscape contractor will be able to see the grades or changes in elevation in your landscape, you can help by telling your contractor where the problem areas are located.

You might want to block neighbors to add privacy, address a noise problem, hide a storage shed, enhance a sloped area, or add an attractive way to access a certain area in your yard. Simply make a note of all the problem areas to discuss with your contractor.

When you're looking at your space, making notes of the problem areas, think about areas of your landscape you want to access. If you want a garden in the back of your yard, a path leading to the garden is a nice touch. Next, we'll talk about how paths should have a purpose.



Paths

All paths should lead to something. Whether it is a garden, a sitting area, a driveway or a patio. Have fun with your paths!

You have many choices when it comes to path materials, including concrete (with many finishes), pavers, gravel, crushed granite, tile, stone, and more.



The photograph above is concrete path with an acid wash.



The photograph above is stamped concrete before it is sealed.



The photograph above is custom concrete path/steps that transform an entryway.



The photograph above is exposed aggregate concrete. You'll notice the rough-type texture.



The photograph above is a path/steps constructed with exposed aggregate flagstone.



The photograph above is a hammered edge concrete path.



The photograph above is stamped concrete.

Depending on the path you choose is what will determine how long it takes to construct the path. The time involved to create a path will be included in your bid proposal and considered in the overall timeline.



Timeline

If your daughter wants to get married in your

new backyard, you're obviously up against a deadline. Although your landscape contractor will help determine a feasible deadline for your project, you must be prepared for delays. Be sure to let your contractor know of any event you are planning or a certain deadline you wish to meet.






Time is important in maintaining your landscape. Your bid proposal will not include future maintenance, but it's important to know how much time and money you want to spend maintaining your landscape.

Maintenance

How much time and money do you want to spend on maintaining your new landscaping? If you're busy and would rather enjoy your weekend doing something other than yard work, choose a landscape design that requires little to no maintenance. Certain materials will require a lot of water while other materials can be used to eliminate your water consumption. Talk to your contractor about your criteria regarding the amount of water that will be required to maintain your landscape.

Now that you've completed the necessary steps to do before you hire a landscape contractor, here's a summary that will help you get organized.

Summary of What to Do Before You Hire a Landscape Contractor

-  Prepare a realistic budget.
-  Consider the functionality of your space.
-  Create a simple sketch or drawing of your landscape design.
-  Prepare a tentative timeline for completion of the project.
-  Decide how much time and money you want to spend on your landscaping.

These five steps will help you determine the perfect landscape design and allow you to communicate effectively with landscape contractors. Now, you're ready for the initial contact with potential candidates for your project.

Chapter 3: Initial Contact with Landscape Contractors

Your initial contact with landscape contractors can be by telephone or email. Here is a list of questions to ask landscape contractors:

Insurance

Ask the landscape contractor if they have workers' compensation insurance. This is important. If the contractor has employees and an employee gets hurt on your property, your could potentially be held liable.

Although this is a requirement for licensed contractors, **for every contractor you want to meet in person, ask them to bring a copy of the proof of insurance.**

License

Landscaping contractors might tell you they are licensed when in fact, they are not. Ask the contractors you want to interview to bring a copy of their license.

Referrals

Get the names and contact information of the landscapers' customers. Call them and ask them about their experience with the contractor. Was the project completed on time? Was it on budget? Are they happy with their landscaping? Were there any problems? Would they recommend them?

Maintenance

Should you decide to hire the landscape contractor to maintain your landscape, including the grounds – flowers, grass, trees, lighting, etc., ask them if they provide a service, the anticipated cost and what the maintenance service includes. The contractor could offer a maintenance service that includes mowing the grass and edging. Another tier of service would include mowing the grass, edging, fertilizing, pruning, etc. Ask about the types of maintenance services that are available.

Maintenance is important. After all, you spending a lot of money on your landscaping. It is an important investment and one that must be taken care of. If you do not want to maintain your landscape, the landscape contractor you choose should be able to do so.

Plants

Where will the landscape contractor get the plant materials? The main reason you will ask this question is to make sure the plant materials are local. If you want some exotic plant that will not perform well in your climate, a good landscape contractor will know it and suggest alternatives that are native to your area. It's a good idea to use plant materials from a local nursery, because they are generally plants that will perform well.

Design

Do you *need* a professional design? It depends on the size and complexity of your project. A professional design is generally not included in the cost of the project.

If you *want* a design, the contractor can create several types of designs for you. The price of each design will vary based on the style.

A hand drawn sketch to scale is probably the cheapest design. You can also request a more comprehensive design that is created using an automated program (AutoCAD), or a design using 3 dimensional imagery. Each design will have different amounts of details. Be sure to ask the contractor what types of designs they provide and the cost of each design.

There are many advantages to get a professional design. You will be able to visualize what your project will look like when it is completed. The design will

also help you get a better idea of everything that is involved or the scope of the project.

Your design will show many items, including structures (decks, patios, paths, walkways, curbing, etc.), plants, trees, and shrubs, and more.

Something that appears so simple as the direction of the sun can save you time and money. For example, if you want to plant certain plants on the south side of your home, you might not have considered the plants' needs to survive and thrive. It is better to know that information before you start the project than make a change in the middle of the project which will cost time and money.

This is another reason why your decision to hire a licensed landscape contractor is a good idea.

You can take your professionally designed plan you get from each landscape contractor and compare all of them before you make your decision.








Timeline

When can the contractor start your project? If they tell you they can start tomorrow (or soon), that could be a red flag. A good contractor is busy and is generally not able to start a new project for several weeks, maybe even months away. A contractor cannot tell you how long your project will take until you meet and discuss everything in your design.

You should have eliminated some contractors by talking with them over the telephone and talking with their customers. If the contractor was difficult over the telephone, imagine how they will be if you work with them to complete your landscape design. Now your list should be narrowed down to at least three contractors to interview.

Summary of Initial Contact with Landscape Contractors

Your telephone interviews with landscape contractors included the following:

-  Insurance. Be sure to ask the contractors you want to meet with in person to bring a copy of their proof of insurance.
-  License. For the contractors who made your list of people to interview, ask them to bring a copy of their license.
-  Referrals. Call all the referrals of the contractors you are interviewing.
-  Maintenance. Get an estimate of maintenance service the contractor charges and what they do to maintain your landscape.
-  Plants. You know where the landscaper buys plant materials.
-  Designs. You know if the contractor charges a fee for a professional design and if you want one.
-  Timeline. You have an approximate date when the contractor can start your landscape design.

Now that you have completed the initial contact with landscape contractors, your list is narrowed down to at least three contractors. Contact the contractors and make an appointment to interview them in person.

Chapter 4: Interviewing Landscape Contractors

If you have a partner who wants to be part of the decision-making process in your landscape project, make sure they are available to meet with the contractor. There's no sense in wasting time arranging two meetings with the same contractor.

You should meet the contractor at your home or wherever your project is located. It's important that you are able to show the contractor your existing landscape (if any) and discuss your expectations. It's also important the contractor sees your site to be in a better position to give you an accurate bid proposal.

When you meet with landscape contractors in person, you will learn about their communication skills, their personalities and overall, you will know if the contractor is someone you believe you will get along with and be able to work on the project *together*. Keep in mind, you'll be spending a lot of time together in this professional relationship.

A good landscape contractor will take the time to *listen* to you. They won't just hear you, they will listen to your ideas and take notes. Be ware of the contractor who wants to talk more than he listens and attempts to “sell” you a landscaping package. Good landscape contractors are in business and intend to stay in business for many years. They do this by making sure they create landscape designs that exceed their clients' expectations.

List of items to discuss, in person, with landscape contractors.

License and Insurance

You asked the contractors to bring a copy of their license and insurance. Make sure you get a copy for your file.

Budget

Tell your contractor how much money you have to spend on your project. Let them know you are somewhat flexible, but you expect your budget will not exceed \$X dollars when it is completed.

Functionality

Your contractor should ask you about the functionality of your space. Discuss your desire to create an area for the kids and/or dogs, a place to entertain, problem areas, etc. You've already made notes about the type of landscape you want to install (we covered in the *What to do before you call landscape contractors* section, in Chapter).

You can either give the contractor a copy of your notes or be sure they are taking notes. It's not easy to remember everything during the initial meeting. When the contractor goes back to their office to prepare a design, they must keep the functionality in mind.

Design

Sketch - Give the contractor a copy of your simple design or sketch. Talk about all the elements with the contractor. Walk around your space and discuss the approximate location of all your desired elements, such as outdoor living areas, fire pits, outdoor kitchens, pergolas, paths, patios, etc.

Do not expect the contractor to draw a design for you, free. Good contractors are busy and it takes time to draw a professional design. That's why we suggest you draw your own design to make sure you see all the elements you want implemented in your landscape project.

Ideas - Give the contractor all the photographs you cut out of magazines or printed online. If you found an outdoor kitchen design, a covered patio, a pergola, arbors, etc., contractors can tell you how the structure will look in your design and if the scale is appropriate in the location you desire.

If you know the address of a friend or neighbor's house that has curb appeal you love, give them the address of the property. (Note, we suggest you don't take photographs of neighbor's or friend's homes without their permission.)

Colors & Plant Materials - Discuss the colors and types of plants you want to use in your design. You can show the contractor some pictures of plant materials or ask their advice. They have completed many landscaping projects and when you tell them the look you are trying to achieve, they will have many suggestions.

Problem Areas - Be sure to point out any problem areas in your existing landscape. Landscapers will address possible solutions to resolve and beautify the problem areas.

Timeline - Although the contractor will not be able to give you an exact time frame to complete your project, they will know approximately how long your project will take to complete. Be sure to let the contractor know if you have any deadline you want to meet, such as hosting your daughter's wedding in a few months. It's Winter and your plan includes a pool. You would like the pool to be completed by the beginning of summer. Just like you need to be flexible with your budget and be prepared to make changes, the same holds true with your timeline.

Delays - You're already prepared to expect delays due to inclement weather and unforeseen problems with underground work.

Start and Finish Dates - It's important that you're flexible with these dates. Your landscape contractor is experienced and has a good idea of how long it takes to do everything on your design plan. It is difficult to control acts of God and any delay due to inclement weather will delay the project.

Change Orders

There's a good chance changes in your project will happen. Ask how change orders will be handled. If you decide to change anything on the design plan after it has been approved and signed, it will be an additional expense and the

completion deadline could be extended.

Some changes that might occur are the construction a new patio. After it's completed, you think it's too small and want it extended. Obviously, it will cost more money and take additional time to extend the patio. The deck is being built and you realize you want it extended. A path is not wide enough, and you want it widened. The color of the fence is not what you expected and you want it repainted.

Maintenance

If you don't want to maintain your landscape after it is completed, ask your contractor to include a bid for maintaining the landscape after completion.

Ask the contractors when you can expect to receive a written bid or detailed proposal. When you have at least three proposals, you'll be in a position to make an educated decision about the perfect licensed landscaping contractor you want to hire.

Chapter 5: Hiring a Landscape Contractor

Now that you have at least three bids from landscape contractors, it's time to compare them. When you're reviewing the bids, it should be a fairly simple “apples to apples” comparison. In other words, your project is detailed in phases and lists every element from hardscapes (decks, arbors, sidewalks, etc.) to

softscapes (plants, trees and flowers).

Comparing Bids/Proposals

Every bid should be broken down into phases with an amount due to the contractor after each phase, as well as an estimated time of completion.

Compare the bids, paying attention to the cost, the time for each phase, what's involved in each phase, the payment schedule, and the start and end dates.

The lowest price bid will be tempting but it might not be your best choice. This is a big investment and you want to make sure the job is on budget, on time and completed to your expectations.

One of the contractors can start tomorrow! This might be good or bad. A good contractor is busy. There's a chance your project will not start tomorrow because the contractor is committed to completing other projects.

There could be a possibility the contractor has just completed a job and the next job on their schedule is a large project that is scheduled to begin several weeks away. If your project is estimated to take two weeks, then it's possible the contractor is able to fit your project. However, beware of the contractor who can start right away. Find out why.

It's important you have a good working relationship with your landscape contractor. Remember your face-to-face interview. Was the contractor easy to

get along with? Was everything explained in detail and easy-to-understand language? Were all of your questions answered?

When you called the contractors' references, were the customers happy? Were the jobs completed on time? Were they happy with the end result?

Choose the contractor wisely. You are going to be working with them for the several weeks and you want to make sure your project is completed the way you want it. When you make your decision, it's time to sign an agreement or a contract.

THE CONTRACT

After you make your decision, you will be signing a contract. Read the contract thoroughly and make sure you understand it. The contract should include:

- The amount of a down payment before the project begins.
- A detailed description of all the phases of the project, including a timeline and a payment schedule.
- How the payment of materials will be handled.
- How changes will be handled.
- Details of the final walk-through.
- How any potential future problems will be handled.

The contract is legal and binding. If you have any doubt regarding the language, you are free to hire an attorney for a legal opinion. After you sign the contract, keep a copy for your records.

Chapter 6: The Project Begins

Now that you hired the best licensed landscape contractor for your project, here's what you can expect:

Meeting

The contractor will meet with you to discuss the scope of the project. You will know what days the crew will work, how and when the trash is removed, how change orders are processed, and everything you can expect throughout your project.

Schedule regular meetings with your contractor throughout the project to discuss the progress. You should be informed of any potential setbacks in the schedule, as well as any additional costs that might be incurred. Before you incur costs for materials, you should know what you're getting.

Materials

Before you agree to materials, both hardscape (wood for decks, pavers, stone, brick, fences, arbors, trellises, etc.) and softscapes (plants, trees, flowers), ask for samples.

You want to see what products look like before they are installed. Don't take this step lightly. It's important you understand the materials that will be used in your

landscape design. Even the smallest attention to detail is important.

If the fence material is too dark, you don't want to be surprised after it is installed. If the flagstones you want for a path are not the color you want, you want to make the change before they are installed.

If you selected a certain type of mulch in your plant beds and you don't understand that it will disintegrate over time, you're going to be surprised when you go out to your plant beds one day and the decomposed granite you selected is gone. Educate yourself on all the materials that will be used in your project to avoid surprises after the project is completed.

Previewing the materials that will be used in your project will involve either your contractor bringing samples to you or making a trip to the various suppliers. If your partner wants to be involved in the decision-making process, schedule the trips where you are both available. This will save you and the contractor time and curtail any possible arguments with your partner.

Before materials are installed, there is a good chance you're going to need permits and inspections.

Permits & Inspections

If your project requires building permits, your contractor will take care of the applications and securing any necessary permits. In addition, the contractor will schedule and handle all required inspections.

San Diego Landscape Solutions always includes the cost of permits and any related fees in their proposals. Generally, all gas, electrical, sewer and water work will require inspections.

Patio Covers – In San Diego, any patio cover attached to the house, regardless of size will require a permit and three inspections. The inspection phase is for the footings, the ledger and a final inspection.

Retaining Walls – In San Diego, any retaining wall over three feet in height requires inspections – one inspection for the footing and rebar and a final inspection.

Fences – In San Diego, any fence over six feet in height requires a permit.



Demo Begins

Any existing landscape materials will be removed such as fences, patios, old decks, trees, grass, shrubs and other plants.

Grading

The contractor will use equipment or personnel to prepare your site's elevation for the new design. New walls, footings or hardscape. If you are building new walls, fences, decks or any hardscape elements, the contractor will use lasers to make sure the location of each element is level.

Underground Work

The contractor will dig trenches for all drains, electrical, gas, sewer, and water lines.

Drainage

Trenches are dug and three or four inch drainage systems are installed for both residential and commercial projects. Installing brass drain caps is standard in all hardscape areas. Plastic flat caps are installed in all sod (grass) areas, plastic grate caps are installed in all planter areas. If your property has rain gutters, downspouts will be tied into the new underground drainage system and diverted to the curb. Please note, curb coring may be necessary to maximize the draining system.

Gas Lines

Inspections are required for installation of new gas lines. The trench must be approximately two feet deep. Two inspections are required for the trench and

pressure test and a final connections inspection ensuring the lines are equipped with appropriate shut off valves.

Electrical

All trenches for water features, outdoor kitchens and patio covers will be 18 inches deep. Electrical wires are run through conduit to protect the wires from erosion and for convenience should potential future repairs be necessary.

Irrigation sleeves are installed as well as underground pipes that will house all electrical wiring. A common mistake when installing electrical wires is installing them directly underground (not in a pipe). A licensed landscape contractor knows that if an electrical problem occurs in the future, a repair is easy when the wires were installed in an underground pipe.

Footings for Walls, Patio Covers and Fences

The footings for walls and planters are determined by the type of block used and the height of the walls and/or planters.

Stackable retaining walls and seat walls that are three feet in length or less are constructed using three-quarter inch gravel with the first block buried, ensuring a strong foundation.

Masonry walls have appropriate sized concrete footings reinforced with rebar, according to city requirements. The cells (holes) in blocks are filled with concrete

for added strength and finished according to your design plan, generally stucco or veneer stone.

Footings for patio covers are determined by size of the structure and the size of the lumber required. All footings are constructed pursuant to city regulations.

Post holes for fencing are 18 inches deep and filled with concrete. Metal postmasters are recommended to avoid the wood from rotting when using 4 x 4 treated lumber posts.

Pavers. Excavating/removing the dirt from the location where pavers will be installed. Pavers can be used for a patio, walkway and/or driveway. The pavers are topped with polymeric sand to help control weeds. The pavers can also be sealed with a protective coating to protect them from oil stains, normal wear and tear and tire marks.

Stone Work

If your design includes stone work, stones are generally installed over decomposed granite or DG. Polymeric sand is applied to stone walkways or paths to secure the stones, locking them in place. When stones are installed on top of concrete, the joints are grouted with mortar to secure the stones.

Electrical Outlets

A permit is required when electrical outlets are in the design plan. Two inspections are required. One for the trench depth and a final inspection when

all the outlets are installed.

Lighting

Low voltage lighting generally does not require a permit when plugged into a GFCI protected outlet. However, other lighting projects might require permits and inspections.

Installation of Irrigation Valves

The irrigation valves control the water flow/pressure to the pipes that are installed to water plants, shrubs, trees, etc.

Planting Large Trees

Holes are dug to accommodate the size of the large trees. Large trees require a hole larger than the root base. In many cases, the holes for large trees are large and are dug using equipment or landscaping personnel.

Construction of Hardscape Elements

All hardscape elements are installed at this phase in the project. Hardscape elements includes patio covers, BBQs, fire pits, fireplaces, outdoor kitchens, pergolas, arbors, decks, etc. Concrete bases for other hardscape elements are formed and poured.

Installation of the irrigation system

Pipes are installed from the valve system throughout the landscape design to water grass, plants, trees, etc. The irrigation system for grass is different than the irrigation system for plants and trees.

Grass is watered using an irrigation system with sprinkler heads installed at specific locations in the design to make sure the grass is watered sufficiently. Irrigation systems for trees, shrubs, flowers and gardens generally use drip systems or soaker hoses.

Install plants and drip irrigation to plants. All plants are planted and the irrigation or drip system is completed, ensuring the location of each watering device (bubblers, heads, etc.) is placed in the proper position to water the plants efficiently.

Install Mulch, Gravel and Ground Cover

Mulch comes in many forms. At this point, you and your contractor have already determined the type of mulch that will be used in your design.

Mulch is an important part of every landscape design. When you spread mulch over soil, it will save the soil from erosion and help the soil retain moisture. That means you won't need to water as often when you install mulch. Some mulches are made with organic materials that will breakdown or disintegrate over time.

Install Sod (Grass)

This is where you really start to see your dream come true. When it's time to lay the sod/grass, that means the job is almost complete and you'll be ready to enjoy your new landscaping soon.

Seal Hardscape Elements

The reason you seal hardscape elements (wood, stained concrete, pavers) is twofold. One, sealing the product will prolong the life of the product. Two, aesthetics. You can choose a sealer that will enhance the appearance of a particular element. For example, if you have a stained concrete patio, the sealers you can use are either a low sheen that results in a “matte” finish or a product that will result in a high sheen or shiny “wet look”.

Completion

Before you sign a document that you agree the project is complete, perform a complete walk-through of the project with your landscape contractor.

Your contractor will show you how to use an automatic timer for your sprinkler system (if applicable), how to best maintain your landscape, discuss warranties and guarantees and answer any questions you have.

List of Items to Get from the Contractor Upon Completion

- A copy of a release of lien form for everyone who provided labor and

materials on your job. This will eliminate any potential lien claims in the future.

- Get copies of receipts for all the payments made throughout your project.
- Get copies of all guarantees and warranties on all the items purchased for your project.
- Get copies of the permits and inspections (if any).
- Ask the contractor what their procedure is for any future problems.

San Diego Landscape Solutions, Inc.

We hope this guide has helped you with your decision to hire the perfect landscape contractor for YOUR project. If you have any questions about the materials contained in this guide, please feel free to contact us.

San Diego Landscape Solutions Inc has established a reputation as a leader in landscape design, construction and maintenance. We have a proven track record of creating spectacular, quality landscapes for both commercial and residential properties.

www.SanDiegoLandscapeSolutions.com

We are a full-service, licensed landscape company specializing in:

- **Design.** We have the experience and expertise to bring your design to life. We can work with your sketch or create a professional design. We don't just hear our clients, we listen to them.
- **Construction.** We are experts in all phases of landscape design including constructing hardscape elements, concrete work, lighting, and automatic irrigation systems. We have extensive horticultural knowledge and we will help you select the plant materials that fit your design.
- **Maintenance.** We are dedicated to our clients by providing maintenance services to help them take care of their landscaping.

**If you have any questions about landscape design,
please feel free to contact us for a **FREE** consultation.**

Tips to Keep Your Project on Time and on Budget

Do:

- ☐ Be prepared to pay for materials when they are delivered. This is cost is generally separate from the contractor's payment schedule.
- ☐ Keep a receipt for all the materials you pay for.
- ☐ Keep a receipt for every payment you make to the contractor.
- ☐ Have regular meetings with your contractor.
- ☐ Leave feedback for the contractor on online review sites.
- ☐ Refer the contractor to your family, friends and colleagues.

Don't:

- ☐ Assume your contractor will add any items not included in the contract.
- ☐ Pay a contractor in full at the beginning of the project.
- ☐ Make late payments to your contractor. This will delay your project and has the potential of damaging the relationship you have with your contractor.
- ☐ Micromanage the contractor you hired. You took the time to make sure you hired the right contractor. Trust them. If you are looking over the contractor's shoulder every day questioning their work, it will create tension between you and the contractor and possibly delay the project.

Glossary

Artificial Turf - Synthetic materials manufactured to resemble natural grass. Synthetic turf is a solution to drought-stricken areas and for people who are water conscious. The quality of artificial turf has improved over the years. The photo below is artificial turf.



Concrete

Standard Concrete – A building material that is produced by mixing gravel, cement, sand and water. The color is generally gray, however, you can color concrete with a wide variety of stains.

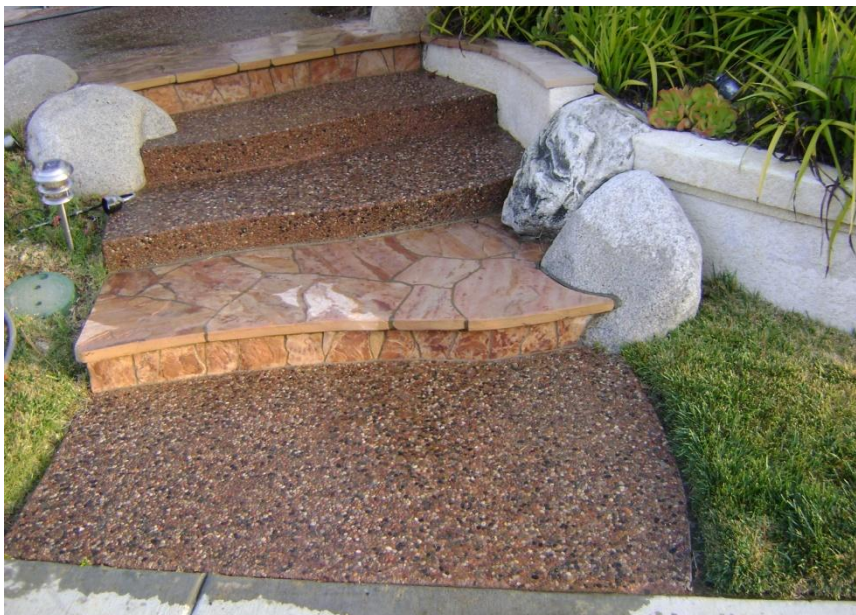


Glossary

Stamped Concrete – Concrete that is stamped using a rubber mold to resemble a particular structure such as stone.



Exposed aggregate concrete – The rock or aggregate in the concrete is exposed, resulting in a unique texture.



Glossary

Hand seeded concrete – Generally more expensive than other concrete treatments. Hand seeded concrete uses an aggregate that is cast over the surface of concrete. The process is complex and the services of a professional is suggested.



Dig Alert - This is also known as “Call Before You Dig.” It is a free service provided by the utility companies that come out and mark the location of their underground lines.

Electrical - Power to areas of the landscape for irrigation timers, transformers for low voltage outdoor lighting, fans, outdoor kitchens, etc.

Gas- Natural gas should be considered for fire pits, fireplaces, BBQs and side burners.

Grading - Site work that includes leveling or changing the elevation of the land.

Grass/Sod - There are many grasses available on the market from slow growing varieties that require little maintenance to lush lawns that require a lot of water and maintenance. Grass can be grown from seeds or you can install sod. Sod is sections of grass and soil held together by roots formed in a mesh-type material.

Hardscapes - A hardscape is a *hard* element - a sidewalk, path, curbing, arbor, trellis, patio, deck, pergola, water pit, waterfalls, fireplaces, fire pits, etc.

Irrigation - A system designed to water or irrigate plants, trees, and flowers.

There are smart watering systems available to conserve water. They shut off when it's raining and offer advanced features. Be sure to ask your contractor about all the options.

Low flow irrigation nozzle - This irrigation component produces a low flow of water and as a result, a great money-saving option.

MP Rotator Nozzles - An irrigation component that rotates, providing a solution to allow directly, using less water and encouraging growth.

Pop Up Spray Head - An irrigation component that sprays water, used for grass areas. The spray head is installed below the surface of the grass (making mowing easier) and pops up when the system is activated.

Rotors - An irrigation component that rotates, generally used to water large areas of grass.

Pressure Regulator - A device used for irrigation valves that reduces the pressure from the street water supply to the valve system.

Shut Off Valves - An extremely important component in an irrigation system. A shut off valve allows you to turn the water off should an irrigation pipe break. This valve is installed between the main water supply and the irrigation valve system. When you have to shut down the irrigation system, it does not affect the water to your home or business.

Drainage - An underground system that carries excess surface water away from property foundations. Drainage systems should be installed behind retaining walls, areas of grass and planters, and depressed features.

Drip Irrigation - A type of an irrigation system that is used to water plant materials in planters. This system is pressure regulated with a nozzle that is installed at the base of each plant, ensuring maximum water coverage.

Subterranean Drip Systems - An irrigation system that is installed underground using perforated drip tubing such as netafim and Rainbird supplies.

Irrigation Timers - An indoor or outdoor electronic system that allows you to program how often you want to water your landscape. You can program your automatic timer system to water stations in your landscape design a certain amount of time and on specific days.

Landscape Architect - Most states require a landscape architect be licensed. A landscape architect designs landscape plans and generally works with licensed contractors to complete projects. A landscape architect might work with other trades such as engineers, horticulturists, environmental sample experts, and other specialized professionals to complete a project.

Landscape Contractor – In California, a landscape contractor must be licensed. A licensed landscape contractor has knowledge and experience in all aspects of landscape design and development. They create landscape designs, perform site work, grading, underground work, construct hardscape features, lighting and plant selection.

Landscape Designer - A landscape designer is generally not required to have a license. A knowledgeable landscape designer will have experience with all phases of a landscape project, including site preparation, grading, drainage issues, design, choosing materials, plant selection, and lighting.

**A landscape architect can be a landscape designer.
A landscape designer cannot be a landscape architect.**

Landscape Maintenance - The means to keep a landscape attractive, healthy and beautiful.

Landscape Styles

Modern - A modern design uses a style with clean lines and strong structural elements. The areas of color are distinctly separated. The composition and colors used in a modern landscape are intended to evoke an emotion. A modern design uses geometric shapes and focal points that are natural. Light and water are two elements found in a modern design.

Traditional - A traditional design generally includes built-in features such as BBQs, outdoor living rooms, fireplaces, and a special place for gardening work. Some of the most common materials used are pavers, stone, brick and wood. The traditional landscape is well balanced and defined.

Mediterranean - A Mediterranean design uses materials that are low maintenance or drought-tolerant. The landscape invites outdoor living. You can choose a classic Italian look with bright colors or select a design that provides an exotic-style design.

Tropical - A tropical landscape is described as a “free form” design. Plants used in this type of design are orchids, ferns, bougainvillea and hibiscus. The hardscape elements you can find in this type of design are pergolas and other elements that have arches or curves.

Lighting - Low Voltage Lighting – A lighting system that uses a low voltage system, such as 12 volt instead of 110 or 120 volt. A transformer converts the electrical power into the lower voltage output.

Mulch – Some mulch products help hold moisture in the soil, reducing the water consumption. It's also a great way to keep the weeds away. There are many types of mulches made of organic material that will break down after a period of time. This will enrich the soil, but at the same time, the mulch will need to be replenished.

Outdoor Kitchens – An outdoor kitchen can have the same features as an indoor kitchen. From refrigerators to sinks, wine coolers, BBQs, side burners, cocktail stations, drawers and cabinets. Everything you need right at your fingertips so you don't have to go indoors.

An outdoor kitchen can be completely customized with your choice of counter tops (granite, tile, stone, concrete, etc.). The exterior walls can be finished in veneer stone, stucco and brick. There are dozens of options when you're designing your outdoor kitchen.

Outdoor Living Areas - Outdoor living areas can have the same look and feel of indoor living areas. Couches, chairs, coffee tables, end tables, big screen TVs, bars, fireplaces and more.

Patio Covers - Patio covers can be constructed to match the existing roof on your property or you can choose roofing materials such as metal, clay tiles, concrete tiles, asphalt shingles, and wood shingles.

Pergola - A hardscape structure constructed with vertical pillars or posts that is used to shade a certain area in a landscape design.

Planters - There are many types, shapes and sizes of planters. From containers to wooden planter boxes, built-in planters constructed with a wide variety of outdoor materials.

Stone/Rock

Gravel – Gravel is available in multiple sizes used in river beds, dry streams, paths, walkways, ditches, sitting areas and plant beds.

Interlocking Pavers – Stone-like materials that are designed to lock together for added strength.

Flagstone – Flagstones are irregular shaped stones that are available in a wide variety of colors.

Outdoor Tile – Outdoor tile is manufactured specifically for use outdoors. There are many choices, similar to indoor tile.

Stone Veneer – A lightweight stone product that resembles real stone. It's easier to install than traditional stone and is designed for durability and style.

Sump Pump - An automatic pump system that pick up excess water at low points in a landscape and pumps the water out to drainage systems.

Walls

Retaining Walls – Retaining walls are designed to retain a particular area in landscape such as dirt on a steep slope. The blocks used to construct a retaining wall are designed with a lip, that makes them easy to stack and interlock, creating a strong wall to retain or hold dirt or other natural materials.

Cinder Block Walls – A wall constructed using cinder blocks. The construction is generally done by digging a footing to secure the first row of blocks beneath the surface. Mortar is placed on the bottom row of the blocks to increase strength. The blocks are stacked in a staggered pattern and provide a screen or border.

Free Standing Walls – Walls constructed with wood, plants or blocks to create a barrier or separate large sections of landscape.

Seat Walls – A multipurpose wall generally constructed using concrete or wood to provide extra seating while blocking a certain area in a landscape design.

Water Features - Water features are waterfalls, fountains, ponds, streams and used to create an ambiance in a landscape design and/or to subdue any unwanted noise.

Water Supply - The main water supply for your home is generally located in the front of the house. The water supply for an irrigation system is installed off the main water supply source to a valve system. The valve system runs water to your irrigation system through pipes that are installed underground.