



Tips for Planning your Landscape/Hardscape Project

1. *Have a sense of your goals for the area:* What do you want to accomplish with the space? Are you simply focusing on aesthetics or do you want it to be functional, for example, integrating herbs and vegetables into the garden and designing a wall at a comfortable seating height? Are you an outdoor enthusiast who enjoys yard work or are you looking for something “low maintenance”? From what perspective do you want to enjoy the area- while sitting out back eating a meal or are you simply looking for enhanced curb appeal?
2. *Do your homework-*Before discussing your project with contractors, it might be helpful to refine your project a bit and get a sense of material costs. There is a multitude of information online. Customers can visit nurseries and hardscape dealers. Home and Garden Shows are also a good place to gather ideas. Hardscape dealers provide free catalogs and manufacturers provide lot of photos of completed jobs on their website. Pictures of projects you like, names or photos of plants you like, and simple hand drawn sketches can be very helpful in initiating the conversation with a contractor. Also, sharing things you do not like can also be helpful in making the design process more efficient.
3. *Know your budget:* How much are you comfortable spending on the project? Can the project be phased in over a couple of seasons to spread out the payment? Be open with your contractor about budgetary issues. The contractor might be able to find ways to contain the project or phase it in over time if you are not comfortable doing it all at one time.
4. *Define your timeframe:* What is the timeframe for your project? Do you want it completed by a specific date or event? Is it something that you would like to phase in over a period of several seasons or years? Do you want plantings to look relatively mature and concentrated now are you willing to wait a few years for them to fill in?
5. *Be aware that landscape projects require maintenance:* All landscape and hardscape projects will require some periodic maintenance to keep them looking optimal. If professional maintenance is of interest, you might want to select contractor who also maintains installations. Using the same contractor to maintain the project can help maintain the design integrity over time. When a landscape design is created, a certain level of plant maintenance may be envisioned overtime. The hardscape industry is constantly developing new and innovative cleaners, sealers, color enhancers, and sands.
6. *Understand that projects require time commitment and availability-* Planning and executing a landscape or hardscape project can be time consuming for customers that want to be involved. It takes time for all the decision points to be made- selecting a plants, determining final paver colors, styles, and precise designs. Your contractor should drive this process , but if you want to be involved, you need to dedicate the necessary time and energy- reviewing plant choices on-line, visiting a local nursery, or going to a hardscape dealer and looking a pavers. Some contractors are willing to accompany you to nurseries or hardscape dealers to help guide your selections. Are you interested in being around when the project is underway? Understand that this may require time home from work and other obligations. Most contractors want you to periodically check on progress to be sure the project is shaping up the way you want it to, but do not necessarily want nor expect you to be at all times.
7. *Investigate zoning permits and “blessings” of neighbors:* Hardscape projects may require a permit from your local township. It is a good idea to start pursuing this during the planning phase. Your contractor should be willing to work with you on this. In addition, it is a courtesy to apprise neighbors of plans especially when access issues are involved. Neighbors should be for-warned of noise issues and possible temporary disruption of grassy areas due to movement of heavy equipment.
8. *Select a landscape contractor with which you are comfortable:* One of the keys to success of a landscape or hardscape project is rapport with your contractor. The ride is much nicer if communication flows freely and it helps pave the way to a positive outcome. Once you select the contractor that is right for you, the specific details of the project will fall into place. Criteria such as references, credentials, certifications, experience, and portfolio are also very important.