

Inside, Outside, All Around!

Invigorating your home with plantscaping

Whether you live in a 3-bedroom ranch, a condo or a turn of the century estate, a little greenery can go a long way toward improving the image that your home projects. Landscaping can add to a home's value — and that's true for condo and townhouse owners as well. Patios, fountains, decks, and foliage, all add value to your home, while providing you and your family with recreation areas, privacy and a serene environment. Most importantly, the natural environment that you create in and around your home serves to create a visitor's first impression of your home (especially when it's on the market).

Steps to landscaping your home

Whether you're looking to grow some visual drama on your average urban plot or completely reconstruct a yard that hasn't been touched since the mid-80s, here are some guidelines to help get you started.

1. Gather your thoughts

Brainstorm, take notes and answer the questions below:

- What do you want to achieve with your plants, yard, deck, etc.? Are you preparing your home for sale or simply aiming to beautify your home for personal reasons?
- Are you aiming for a complete overhaul of your exterior or simple cosmetic upgrades?

Sometimes simply replacing a few overgrown bushes, painting the shutters and purchasing a small potted tree for your front entry is all you need to refresh your home's image. Don't be afraid to think big. By building your wish list for big-ticket items into your long-range plantscaping plan, you can begin to budget and plan for them now.

2. Check your limitations

Determine your budget.

Many experts plan the landscape of a home as a multi-year project, which can help spread costs and work over several years instead of just one summer. With such a plan, you can plant your trees and annuals in year one, and by the time you finish your deck in year five, it will be surrounded by mature greenery.

Assess your available land and features.

How much space do you have, and how much sun do those areas get? Picture how these spaces should be connected or separated for efficient use.

3. Create a plan

Here's where the hopes and dreams laid out in step one meet the reality that you defined in step two.

Draw it out.

Make a pencil layout of the areas you have to work with, showing the house/condo, balconies and windows (for window boxes), driveway, etc. Note where you want to eventually add plants and trees, and draw in the water features and patios that you plan to install.

Research costs.

Make a list of each of the above items and determine the cost associated with obtaining and installing each of them. Balance this against your budget and determine when you will tackle each step in the process.

Although this step is the most complex, it can be enjoyable if you are willing to accomplish your goals in stages. Be realistic about how much you are capable of doing in a year, and when your job is complete, you won't regret the time you invested in doing the job right.

4. Consult with the pros

As you plan, design and build your landscape, don't be shy about asking for professional advice. Ask family members and neighbours for referrals

on landscape professionals that they trust. Choose someone who listens and seems open to your ideas. A professional is especially valuable if you're dealing with a job that requires permitting. In addition, working with a pro can save you money in the long run.

