



Landscape Design Considerations Checklist

In a good design nothing is casual: everything has a purpose.

It is difficult to express succinctly what is required to develop, install and maintain a good landscape. There are many factors involved. But, for certain, everything flows from an intelligent and meaningful design. Here we present a few basic principles that we use at Landscape Symphonies to determine the success of a design.

As you begin any new landscaping endeavor, whether from a blank slate or revising an existing landscape, keep the following to use as a checklist and point of reference.

If you hit on any questions, connect with us for advice and assistance on putting these considerations into practice.

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1) Determine Intended Use and Audience:

- Shared Spaces
- Private Areas
- Functional Areas

2) Define Universal Aesthetics:

- Balance
- Focalization of Interest
- Simplicity
- Rhythm
- Proportion
- Unity

3) Integrate Personal Aesthetic:

- Style
- Hobbies
- Entertainment
- Family Structure
- Attitude to the Outdoors
- Habits
- Materials Preferences
- Use of Outdoor Space

4) Consider Cultural Requirements:

- Zoning
- Homeowners Associations
- Easements
- Setbacks
- Historical Areas

5) Integrate Existing and New Materials:

- Integrate Hardscape Considerations
- Integrate Softscape Considerations

In this document, we briefly present what is required to design, install and maintain a proper landscape. A proper landscape is a space custom-tailored to your way of life: that takes into consideration not only your aesthetic tastes and practical needs but the potential of the site. A proper landscape will grow with you, will be sustainable, will be environmentally conscious, and will require less maintenance, which ensures your enjoyment and the lands maximum potential.

While we encourage you to boldly step into designing your own landscape, let us know if we can help.

Connect with us to see how experts put these considerations into practice.

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1) Determine Intended Use and Audience of the Design:

In the end, landscape design success is measured by whether the whole landscape and all of its elements provide the space with the aesthetic and functional benefits for which it was designed. As in most spaces, with landscapes form should always follow function, even when function is beauty. To reach that end, begin by considering your audience and use needs before anything else, because audience and use determine function.

- **Shared Spaces** – These areas are for everyone’s use: they are available to anyone. Before you skip this point, thinking it doesn’t apply to you, consider your front yard, which is the connection between the outer world and the inner world of your home. One of the main purposes of this area is to connect the building with the outside world in an interesting and functional manner, giving curb appeal to the property. Other areas to consider as public would be outdoor entertainment areas. These areas need a direct connection to the building itself and have very definite purposes, which will determine the shape, size, location and materials used to design and build them.
- **Private Areas** - These areas are where more intimate activities occur, like a family playing area, an area of private seclusion, an area of contemplation, a family or couples breakfast nook. Even within a shared space, one can create areas intended for private use. How do these areas enter into your landscape? How do they connect to or separate from your home structure?
- **Functional Areas** – Even around our homes, very particular utilitarian activities take place. Thinking about where to place elements such as a garden shed, a vegetable garden, a greenhouse, clothes lines, or a garbage and recycling area determines much about how we structure and plan out the space. What are the functional areas either required or desired around your home?



2) Define Universal Aesthetics of the Design:

- ❑ **Balance** - Landscape elements have a visual and emotional aesthetic weight. Determine if the arrangement of your landscape elements generally makes the composition too heavy or sparse. Our sensory experience of balance can enjoy both symmetry and asymmetry.
- ❑ **Focalization of interest** - Determine if there are points of interest in your landscape that naturally draw your attention. It can be a sculpture, water feature, a signature tree or shrub, or it can even be done with color or change of texture. These points add definition and fullness to the design. While some landscapes can handle multiple points, remember that too many focal points go against the principle itself.
- ❑ **Simplicity** - If we have too many elements in our landscape composition it can create a sense of confusion. Keeping it simple helps the landscape have clarity, bringing a sense of peace. Using simple lines of design, fewer species of plants, or fewer colors add simplicity without detracting interest from the composition
- ❑ **Rhythm** - This principle refers to the repetition of landscape elements, giving the landscape a sense of unity, of belonging together. Try repeating lines and materials on hardscapes in different areas of the landscape, or repetition of trees and shrubs. Rhythm can also aid us in leading the attention to the focal points.
- ❑ **Proportion** - Sensitivity to the relationship between the size of landscape elements and the way they are arranged to create a space, determines in many ways how we experience the landscape. Proportions elicit thoughts and emotions, and therefore how we will use and feel the landscape. Widely spaced elements draws the eye out creating a sense of possibility; closely placed elements give a cozy, intimate feel. Keep in mind that children experience space differently than adults do. If children are a part of the audience, consider the spacing of elements from their perspective.
- ❑ **Unity** - This is probably the most important principle of all because it is the result of the proper application of the all the previous principles. Consider: do the elements and their placement do what you want the landscape to do?



3) Integrate Personal Aesthetic in the Design:

It is of utmost importance to consider the aesthetic tastes and attitudes of the audience towards landscaping and outdoor spaces in general. Here are some things to consider in terms of taste and attitudes before moving forward with a landscape design:

- Style preference** – Will the landscape be used formally and/or informally. Does the home present as modern or classic? What geometric shapes are already present?
- Hobbies** – What types of activities will typically take place in the landscape? Sports, gardening, a safe area for children, dining, or entertaining?
- Entertainment** - Who will use the space, how often, and for what occasions? Do you have a big family or social circle? How many people do you have over at a time? How often do you gather? What types of entertainment are provided? What size space can accommodate entertaining, and is it balanced with frequency of use?
- Family Structure** – Is the intended audience a mature couple, a young couple, a single person, a family, or several adults? What are the ages of the people who will use the space? Are there children or elderly people to consider?
- Attitude Toward the Outdoors** – How do you perceive your outdoor space? Is it an extension of your indoor home? Is it a part of nature? Do you feel clean and refreshed when working outdoors, or do you prefer to view it from a distance? These attitudes will determine how you handle maintenance, define requirements for the landscape, use of sustainable materials, and more.
- Habits** – Where do you: have breakfast, coffee, read, or learn? Where do you enjoy shopping and what do you like to buy? How often do you sit outside, or even sit down inside your home? Is your lifestyle active or more passive?
- Preferences** – What kind of impressions feed you the most? Which colors evoke the feelings and thoughts you wish to have in your landscape? What does it mean to you to balance textures? What materials are important to you and does sustainability, or use of space impact how you apply them? Are there brands you follow and could include?



4) Cultural Considerations in the Design:

In this case, cultural considerations refer to regulations set by neighborhoods, associations, or agencies that effect how you can build and what you can plant. Consider if your project falls under any of these requirements before moving forward with a landscape design:

- **Home Owner Associations** - Most community associations have specific requirement for different aspects of the landscape:
 - **Hardscapes** - generally they need to match the existing community in terms of materials, textures and color, it is generally more important in the front yard
 - **Softscapes** - some associations have restriction for kinds of vegetation that can be used, they have list of approved trees and shrubs as well as those that wouldn't be allowed.
 - **Maintenance** - most associations require home owners to keep a certain level of maintenance in their landscape, otherwise they issue a fine. Consider a low maintenance design to find agreement among all involved

- **Zoning** - Whether it is a commercial, industrial, or residential area, will influence what is possible in terms of height of vegetation, distance form roads, crossings, signs, materials to be used, and height of structures.

- **Setbacks** - Most properties require a setback of 5' from the sides of the property and between 10' - 20' from the back line of the property that prevents any structure to be build, this affects setting landscape structures, such as pergolas, patios, outdoor entertaining areas, and garden green houses.

- **Easements** - Very often utilities have easements on the sides of the property to allow them to make additions to their infrastructure or repairs. This means that no trees, patios, or other landscape items can be located in those areas in order to avoid utilities removing or disturbing them in the future

- **Historic Areas** - Special requirements are set by cities for maintenance or modifications on historic zones, which restricts what is possible in the landscape. Usually, this involves keeping additions within the style of the existing structures colors, materials, and textures. This can also mean preventing structures or views from being obstructed by trees and shrubs, as well as specific vegetation allowed.



5) Integrate Existing and New Materials:

Outdoor areas usually provide the greatest enjoyment, and functionality, when they are properly integrated with their corresponding indoor areas. Use of materials becomes key in marking this transition and making it flow. Hardscapes, meaning structural elements, and Softscapes, meaning plants, need to follow the requirements of the site. Actualizing this requires expertise and experience, but below we briefly describe some of the key considerations.

- **Hardscapes** – What are the existing architectural styles, buildings, materials, colors, and textures conjoined to the landscape? Are the new materials selected in harmony with these elements or replacing them? How do existing and new hardscapes interact and connect? Are there considerations to be made regarding legalities, property easements, setbacks, zoning, Home Owners associations, or property agreements? This becomes critical when you are investing in landscape elements that cannot be transferred to another site. Are all the decision makers in agreement with the landscape design?

- **Softscapes** – What are the existing soil conditions, biology, texture, structure, and ph of the landscape? Does the design incorporate functionality for drainage issues, storm water management, heat zoning, cold resistant zoning, shade, sun exposure, orientation of the site and buildings, wind, privacy from adjacent properties, and appropriate view from surrounding properties? How will color, blooming patterns, shapes of leaves, size of plants, density of plantings, and texture change and impact the landscape over time? Are selected plants of size, shape, and growing habits to fit the location? Do the selected plantings for the softscape match your requirements for maintenance and sustainability?

We encourage you to learn more about what it takes to design a successful landscape.

Connect with us to see how experts put these considerations into practice.

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