



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
**COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION**

College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
College of Family and Consumer Sciences

Landscape Design

Working with a Garden Designer

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Designing a landscape is much like designing the interior of a house. Colors, patterns and textures must be arranged in a manner that is functional and suits the taste of the owner. The one major difference with landscape design is that most of the elements are living, providing seasonal change, forever growing taller and wider, and occasionally dying. An experienced garden designer has the ability to incorporate all this information into the design, but the homeowners must do their homework and be prepared to talk to the designer. This publication will help homeowners develop a plan for working with a landscape designer.

Landscaping Goals

Prior to hiring a garden designer, have basic goals in mind. Skilled questioning by the designer will help prioritize the goals and keep them realistic. He or she will discuss the full range of choices and options available to help you make informed decisions about everything from water gardens and lighting to trees and turfgrass variety. Because so many options are available, professional guidance can help make the best choices, but only if there is good communication between homeowner and designer.

The first question to answer is, “What purpose will the landscape serve?” Is cooking a hobby that requires fresh herbs and vegetables? Is the landscape viewed only from the house, or will the occupants spend time outdoors? Are children a consideration? Is outdoor cooking and entertaining likely? Is privacy — like building a hedge to separate the yard from the neighbor’s — an important issue? The designer will also need to know how long a homeowner plans to remain in the house. This will affect the type and size of plants specified. Though the subject of budget is tricky, it

is important to provide a rough estimate to keep the scale of design within those constraints. The answers to these personal questions need to be shared during the initial meeting with the garden designer.

Landscape Preferences

Even though the garden designer will be drawing the final plan, the homeowner can help by collecting pictures of desirable landscapes and making notes about what is attractive about them. A list of preferred and disliked plants is a good starting point for plant selection. A similar list of color preferences will help with the selection of certain plants or varieties. A folder of clippings and lists given to the designer during the initial meeting will speed the process along and avoid costly revisions due to misunderstandings.

Charges and Services: What to Expect

“You get what you pay for” is an expression that often applies to landscape design. Garden designer fees vary. Some designers charge an hourly rate. Others charge a flat fee based on the extent of the project and the amount of detail required. Services provided also vary and depend on the scope of the project. Some companies provide a complete package that includes design, installation and maintenance, thus establishing a long-term relationship with the client. Other professionals are limited to design and consulting, and may subcontract with other firms for installation and maintenance, or they may suggest a firm to do the installation.

The landscape plan can be achieved in many different ways. It may be a simple consultation with verbal instruction or it may be an elaborate drawing. The plan from a landscape designer may include a concept plan (various ideas about what to do with the property), a

master plan (drawings showing a specific vision for the site) or a detailed construction plan that will enable the homeowner (or a professional landscape contractor) to construct the project. Detailed construction plans may include site plans, grading plans, planting/landscape plans, construction plans and details, irrigation plans and lighting plans. Garden designers can also provide detailed construction specifications, bidding documents and construction oversight. The more detailed drawings and specifications required, the more likely the services of a landscape architect will be required. Some projects may require more than one visit or multiple preliminary drawings to arrive at a suitable plan. Some designs are so detailed or site-dependent that they may require close supervision by the designer. Be sure to discuss the specifics of what drawings and services will be provided and how much each part of the process will cost before hiring any garden designer.

Like other professional services, garden designers should provide a written estimate and formal agreement for services provided. It is not unusual for these agreements to leave room for flexibility in cost, de-

pending on such things as the amount of information provided, the number of revisions required and the extent of drawings required for the project. Shop around; fees and services can vary greatly. A better deal is usually possible if the same firm designs, installs and maintains the landscape.

Other Considerations

A garden design project may require special permits or approval, depending on local restrictions such as condominium guidelines, city zoning laws, neighborhood covenants and even water-wise restrictions. A good landscape designer should be knowledgeable about these requirements and help move the landscape project through any approval process. Just because someone is hired to draw a plan, however, does not exclude the homeowner from liability for violations.

Working with a garden designer can be a pleasurable experience. The exchange of ideas and solutions between homeowner and designer is often stimulating and the end result is a beautiful landscape that makes both parties proud.