



PRESS RELEASE

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10 STEPS TO HIRING A QUALIFIED LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL

HERNDON, Va., March 14, 2008 – Landscaping and proper lawn care add value to your home and your neighborhood. The right landscaping and lawn care can increase the value of your home by 15 percent, allowing owners to recoup 100 to 200 percent of their investment. Your landscape is one of the first things prospective buyers notice when they visit your house. Realtors estimate that 95 percent of home shoppers will not even get out of their car if the house lacks "curb appeal."

Finding the right landscape professional for your needs is essential says the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). Reliable references for quality landscape professionals often come from family and friends. You can also contact your local, state or national trade associations for referrals. PLANET has member landscape companies listed on their website (www.LandcareNetwork.org). Interview several companies--you will learn from this process. Your landscape represents a real estate investment and asset.

A landscape professional can offer you a variety of services including design, installation and maintenance of your property based on your specific needs and requests. Many firms have landscape architects and designers on staff, offering the expertise to create and orchestrate the complete design, installation and maintenance of the most complex landscapes. Follow these 10 steps before you hire a landscape professional:

1. Decide how a landscape professional can help you. Many homeowners don't realize what a landscape professional can do to help them improve their living environment. Landscape professionals not only install plant material, but install hardscape material, including patios, decks, retaining walls, swimming pools, outdoor kitchens and living rooms, gazebos, and irrigation systems.

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2. Ask how long has the company been in business. Professional landscape companies should have employees with either a secondary education in Ornamental Horticulture or several years of experience. Additionally, professional companies are most often active members in national or state landscape associations. Affiliation indicates that a company is interested in excellence and progressive thought. Ask the firm for a list of references and professional affiliations. Look at each of the jobs listed to see if the work is the size, style and quality you desire.

3. Select a landscape company that is licensed or certified and insured. If required by state law, the company should be licensed or certified. This license will assure you that the contractor is accountable to you, that the company is knowledgeable, operating legally, and has passed examinations demonstrating experience, knowledge and a level of professionalism. Certified landscape contractors have either "CLP" (Certified Landscaped Professional) or "CLT" (Certified Landscape Technician) following their names. This identifies those who have passed a rigorous exam which demonstrates their professional knowledge and technical skills in the landscape contracting field. Certification is offered by the Professional Landcare Network nationwide.

4. Decide what you are looking for in a landscape design. Do you want an area for entertaining, an extension of your living space, a low maintenance landscape or a high impact design that is colorful? Determine your budget before you speak with a landscape professional. If you do not know what you want in a landscape design, a qualified professional should be able to help bring your needs and landscape style preferences into focus.

5. Concerning guarantees...Find out what is covered, for how long, and what's not. Proof of insurance for workers' compensation, liability and vehicles should be available to you. Check a company's limits and policy expiration. Ask if they have an active safety program to minimize accidents. Under some circumstances, **you could be liable for mishaps or accidents which occur on your property.**

6. Visit a job in progress. Ask to see a project that will be similar to the work you will request. You want to hire a company that does good work, reflects professionalism and integrity. Examine the quality of the job--and see if the crew's appearance and job presence are acceptable.

7. Ask the company to provide a written plan and/or contract. Prior to making any agreement, have the landscape contractor, designer, and/or architect prepare the details in writing. This plan can include the design, plant material to be used, all costs, a time-table and the terms of payment. You have the right to amend the contract.

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8. Tell the company if you want to care for areas of the landscape yourself. Once your new landscape is installed, you may wish to become more involved as a homeowner by maintaining the landscape yourself. If you want to care for certain landscaped areas, tell this to the company.

9. Know which services are provided in ongoing maintenance. Ongoing maintenance is necessary in order to protect your investment. You can do it, or you can ask the company to do the work. Generally, ongoing maintenance involves mowing, fertilizing, pest control, among other services.

10. Learn more! Visit the Web at *LandcareNetwork.org* to learn more about the value of landscaping and lawn care and to find a landscape professional or lawn care specialist near you.

PLANET is the association of members who create and maintain the QUALITY OF LIFE in communities across America. With more than 4,200 member companies and affiliates, these firms and their employees represent more than 100,000 green industry professionals. For more information on PLANET visit *LandcareNetwork.org* or call the PLANET office at (800) 395-2522.

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