

Advanced Landscape Management, Inc.

Finding the best (and most affordable) landscape design possible

To many people, the world of landscape design is a little mysterious. It seems as if some people are born with the ability to design a great-looking landscape, or that others are simply computer whizzes who totally understand the kind of software that produces accurate and beautiful landscape designs. Where does that leave the rest of us, when we don't particularly feel like we've got a lot of options? That's what Advanced Landscape Management is here to help you with.

Quite simply, it leaves us doing just fine, thank you very much. Why is that? Well, a couple of reasons.

First, landscape design is not the trickiest thing in the world. It doesn't take a Picasso or a Rembrandt to create really attractive landscape designs even if you're starting from scratch. If you're low on cash reserves you can still do a lot of great work in your landscape simply by pulling up your sleeves and exercising a little bit of will power.

Second, we live in a free country - we can *hire* people to do it for us if we're not sure how to go about creating a masterfully-designed landscape. These two options mean that either we can find the confidence within ourselves to create a landscape design that works really well, or we can find the shrewd spender within ourselves to hire someone who's more capable of creating a landscape design than us. Either way, if you put a good amount of effort into doing it right, you can really end up with a result that surprises even you. Partnering with Advance Landscape Management is a great option.

So what does that mean? Where do we proceed from here?

It's really not as hard as it seems. A quality landscape design doesn't have to be performed by a mega firm from downtown in order to look great - it's all about finding someone with talent and a good eye for landscaping to make things happen for you, like Advanced Landscape Management. In some cases, heck, that might even be *you*! Let's dive a little deeper into the world of landscape designs to see how we can make a beautiful landscaping design happen for your home.

“Many landscape design programs can run several hundred dollars to procure - sometimes, it’s just easier to hire someone who already had a program to do a cheaper design for you.”

Landscape design programs

If you’re a little intrepid and have a Type-A personality, your clear first instinct is to simply handle a landscape design yourself. “Ha!” you scoff. “I can handle a landscape design without buying a fancy program or hiring some ‘expert’ to do it for me.” Hey, to each his own.

But designing your own landscape will come with a few problems. If you’re determined enough, these problems are merely obstacles standing in your way - not always very serious. But if you don’t feel especially determined to make a beautiful landscape happen by yourself, you may want to simply avoid this part and move on to something a little more “cooperative” with other people.

You Type-A readers are still bearing with me, so let’s focus on what it might be like to design your own landscape from scratch. It means:

- You’ll have to do lots of measuring
- You’ll have to do the sketches and outlines either on paper by yourself or in your head - either way, it’s not always a perfectly precise process unless you make it that way
- You’ll have to do a lot of pre-planning and base your design on what you know you can afford; you shouldn’t leave your design to chance
- You’ll have to make sure that your design will be attractive to other people in your house and that you get simple design concepts like shape, color, and contrast

In other words, there will be some obstacles to take on. This isn’t a big deal if you really have your heart set on doing it yourself.

But what if you want just a *little* help - and not necessarily from a person? Enter the world of landscape design programs. These programs can be very expensive to acquire and tough to learn but once you know them, they can be greatly beneficial.

One of the best ways, if you’re starting from scratch, to get the benefits of such a program is to hire someone who designs landscapes already and have them work with you. You might even be able to collaborate with them on the actual design - you just need to make sure that they can use their program to be faithful to your overall vision. This means, in any case, that you’ll be involving someone else. Unless you want to buy the program yourself, and we usually don’t recommend doing that unless you plan on starting a landscape or landscape design business.

A simple Google search for “landscape design software” will tell you how many products there are out on the market today - all designed to take some of the work of landscape design out of your hands. Typically - as is often the case - the best software will *not* be available for download for free or very cheap. Making the decision as to how to integrate landscape design software into your overall plans will be up to you.

Our recommendation? Find a way to use the software somehow. Make a sketch of your yard and take it to a landscape designer to plan out precisely if you must. But if you really want precision and good estimation of what kind of work will be required in your landscape, it's best to really plan it out in precise software or with one of the Washington Certified Nurserymen at Advanced Landscape Management. Maybe your landscape won't turn out exactly the way you had hoped, but you'll definitely notice that things go more according to plan if your plans are high-quality in the first place.

To hire or not to hire: should a landscape designer handle everything for you?

Of course, one of the big questions you'll face is: should I do the designing myself or outsource even this aspect of the operation to a landscape designer? As is the case for many custom orders, you get to choose your own level of involvement. And when you're in charge, that means you're the one who's got the power to make the landscape a real make-or-break type of process.

Really, though, there's nothing to be worried about. Making sure that your landscape design ends up well doesn't take a miracle or any type of special insight - except for the insight you'll gain in this report, of course.

Let's take a look at the different options you have if you decide to work with a landscape designer and contractor.

- **Total outsourcing** - You don't tell your designer what you want; you simply let them know that you need a landscape design and it'd be really nice if they could do it in whatever way they see fit. This can be a lot of fun for a landscape designer and might make you a popular customer, but it isn't necessarily going to jive with the kind of budget and limitations you might be working with. Sure, it's great to have a beautiful landscape design, but if that design ends up being completely unworkable because you gave your designer no specifications and no directions - or worse, you didn't let them know about what you really *don't* want to see on your landscaping - then you are in for a bit of trouble. Or, at the very least, you're probably going to have to find another landscape design somehow.
- **Some management** - Being able to offer some management and basic guidelines while not impeding on the freedom of the landscape designer to, well, *design* often strikes us as the perfect balance. You'll be able to let them know what kind of framework the project comes attached with without having to impede their creativity or skills with the program you're using. On the flip side, you're also allowing a smooth operation to take place because you are at least notifying your landscape designer about the basic ideas you have. There's less risk here for a

total meltdown if the project doesn't come out the way you like it, but of course that doesn't mean there are no risks associated with this approach. We find, however, that this is the most balanced and appropriate choice.

- **Total management** - Sometimes, you just can't help yourself: you want everything to go right and so you end up doing a majority of the thing yourself. That's great when you step in to someone who's burning the morning toast, but when it comes to landscape design, it can be a trickier road to drive. That means you'll have to not only handle all of the work yourself, but handle the idea that you might be over-managing the project and drying it out of all its creativity. Sometimes, this is what you want: you want to make your idea come to life and the landscape designer is really only there to facilitate making your vision come to the screen. But there's always a chance that you get so hung up on what you wanted originally that you work hard on your design only to realize that it never ended up being what you really wanted in the end. It can mean a lot of time and effort gone to waste.

As we stated before, deciding your own involvement with the landscape project will mean that you're going to have to gauge yourself as a designer. In many cases, even if you are naturally talented artistically, you will have to make sure that you acquiesce to the familiar pitfalls that the landscape designer knows to avoid. Sometimes it pays to heed the advice of experience.

Tips for designing for types of landscapes and common errors and notes

If you do decide that you want to get in touch with a landscape designer with some amount of your own involvement, it will help to know some of the ropes of basic landscape design. Let's take a look at some of the elements involved in landscape design and make sure that you're on the same page with your designer before the project starts.

Color

One of the first things people notice about your landscape design will be color. You can under-design and keep things simple, but if you have a bright-pink driveway with red glowers then you're going to stand out on your block. The color, therefore, is one of the most crucial aspects of landscape design. Some tips to remember? First, that your landscape design should mesh and complement your house color. If you want your house to look another color, it's best that you take care of that before you tackle landscaping. Second, you'll want to keep colors simple and usually lean toward earth tones. Remember that your landscape isn't a painting on an empty wall; it's something that interacts with the nature and scenery around it.

Borders	Borders are one of the most important aspects of landscape design. Many designers will flock toward borders in order to establish a kind of form. And why not? Your property's natural borders deserved to be highlighted and look like they've been treated with respect by their owners. Setting up attractive, complementary borders is a great way to ensure a great landscape design. The key word: complementary. Borders are meant to seal and to highlight - they're not necessarily the star of the show. If you can embrace that, then you're on your way.
Shape	Shape is like color in that it is an essential element of all design that cannot be ignored. We love snowflakes because no two snowflakes are alike, yet they often have a symmetry that looks beautiful. Similarly, the shapes and contours of your landscape design should be able to look unique without necessarily begging people to look at it. A beautiful landscape should get people to remark "wow, that's beautiful" as opposed to "what on Earth is <i>that?</i> " The latter response can often be encouraged by an odd shape that simply doesn't look like it belongs.
Interaction with the environment	Everywhere your landscape goes, it's interacting with its environment. We don't mean it's interacting with nature in a hoity-toity way; we simply mean that the surrounding environment of your landscape will play a key role in what you decide to design. Sure, if you have an unlimited budget you can usually knock away hills and create your own paths; but how many of us these days really have that kind of money to blow? Interacting with the natural environment helps your property to feel natural and organic without impeding on its beauty. Complementing is key.
Highlighting	A good landscape doesn't only look beautiful; it also highlights the surrounding nature and - of course - your home! Have you forgotten about your home? Of course not. Your home is the central piece and it's important to remember that the landscaping, while it should look great, is often there to really accentuate what you want guests to feel when they come into your home. The landscaping can sometimes be the star, but in most cases, your house is: it's the job of the landscape design to make sure that the house is highlighted but doesn't overshadow the entire property.

That's it. Pretty simple, right? If you can grasp those concepts you'll have a good idea of how a great landscape design should go. And that will help you as you delve further into

the world of hiring a landscape designer, which is what you're about to do.

Making the leap - your decision

So how do you come to a final decision? There may be a number of ways, including:

- Getting a recommendation on a landscape designer from a friend whose landscaping you admire
- Looking someone up online and finding out how you can hire them to create a landscape design for you. You might also try more traditional methods like contacting the local chamber of commerce or looking through a phone book
- Deciding that you have the tools and resources to design your landscape
- Finding a way to use landscape design software with the help of someone else without necessarily burning through your home building budget

Whatever you find, it's important that you give your decision a once-over before you continue. Sure, sometimes you'll find a great deal that you don't exactly need to second-guess, but in many cases you'll want to just give yourself a moment and ask yourself: "am I spending too much on the landscaping design here? Is there anything else I can do?" If you don't find any good answers, it may be a hint that you're already making the right decision.

Hiring a landscape designer can be easier than you think, and if they're cheap enough, you might ask yourself why you were ever nervous about the process in the first place. You might find that after all the thought you put into your landscape design that making the decision is actually quite easy compared to what you thought it might be.

Whatever it is that you find out at this point, we can't really tell you how to make a decision for you. It will come down to factors like price, convenience, quality, recommendations, and scheduling. If you can find someone who fits a lot of the variables you're especially looking for, then you should have no problem making the right decision for you.

Where to go from here?

Once you've made a decision about where to find your landscape design, it's important to remember some other things about the process along the way. Customers who are going through a landscape design will probably need to remember:

- No landscape is going to turn out exactly the way you imagined - and, in fact, you may find that your imagination was actually pretty vague about the details. Even the best landscape designer in the world can't give you exactly what you saw in your imagination, but they should be able to give you something close to it that at least matches or exceeds your expectations for overall quality.

- Be careful not to over-manage a design. Some designers might be a little insecure and ask you for directions along the way - that's fine. Simply give the directions as they're asked and let them use their own creativity from there. You will want to make sure that you set overall project parameters and share your overall vision with the designer, of course, but beyond that be wary of over-managing.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a new layout. A design that isn't all that great doesn't have to be the final verdict. Ask if they'll do another layout for free - or simply assume they'll do it for free and ask for another layout. You might be surprised by what they come up with. You'll also be happy that things change - usually for the better at this point. To this end, it's important to remember that even good designers sometimes produce bad designs - you don't have to feel like anything is set in stone

And that's it. By following the overall structure of this report, you'll probably have a better idea of what the world of landscape design really looks like and how you can be a better, more ideal customer if you decide to hire someone to help you out with said design. Is it always easy? Not necessarily, but many times you might be shocked at the fast turnaround a really good designer can create for you. There are no ironclad rules that you must follow every time, but keep in mind that a landscape designer with a lot of experience will generally have some interesting ideas to offer. Be open-minded and flexible and they just might surprise you with a beautiful landscape design.

Call Advanced Landscape Management, Inc. and speak directly to the owner, Jim Heald, direct at 206-799-0881 or the office at 425-485-2663. Jim loves to serve in anyway helpful.