

Wave Outdoors Landscape + Design provides landscape design and construction in Mount Prospect. Use these planning questions to prepare a project conversation.

Start with purpose, constraints, and a plan

Before any shovel hits the ground, clarify why you're landscaping. That sounds basic, but it shapes everything from plant selection to drainage installation. Are you creating an outdoor renovation for entertaining, or aiming for the most low maintenance landscaping you can get? Do you want the kind of landscape planting that adds the most value to a home, or is this about water management and erosion control? Define the must-haves, nice-to-haves, and what you can phase.

Homeowners often ask how to come up with a landscape plan. Start with a simple base map of your lot, house footprint, doors, and utilities. Trace it and test pathways, patio sizes, and planting beds with paper cutouts. If you struggle to visualize grade or proportion, that's a sign to call in a professional. The benefits of hiring a professional landscaper include technical knowledge of grading tolerances, plant performance in your microclimate, and a build sequence that respects your budget and timeline.

Site assessment and survey

Walk the site after a rain, or run a hose test. Watch where water sits, where it flows, and how it leaves the property. Note sun exposure by hour, wind corridors, and the best soil and the worst. Flag mature trees, shallow utilities, septic fields, and easements. Get measurements, elevations, and soil tests if you're building on clay or fill. Soil tests help you decide on topsoil installation, soil amendment, and whether you need raised garden beds or planter installation for picky plants.

A quick note on bad layouts: an example of bad landscaping is a raised bed against the foundation with no waterproofing and no surface drainage route, paired with a sprinkler head soaking the siding. Another is a paver walkway pitched toward the house. These are common and avoidable if you read the site correctly.

Budgeting and phasing

Is a landscaping company a good idea? It depends on scale and risk. If your project involves grading, a complex drainage system, irrigation installation, or masonry for a stone walkway or paver driveway, the cost of mistakes can exceed a pro's fee. Are landscaping companies worth the cost? For most multi-trade projects, yes. They bring equipment, scheduling discipline, and warranties.

If you're phasing, prioritize the work that must come first or that is cheapest to do before other items go in. Drainage solutions, conduit and sleeve runs, rough grading, and sub-bases for hardscape top the list. Planting, mulch installation, and lawn seeding live later.

Seasonal timing and how long things take

What is the best time of year to landscape? If you're in a temperate climate, hardscape can happen spring through fall, with spring <https://trentonztid667.bearsfanteamshop.com/outdoor-lighting-design-safety-security-and-nighttime-drama> and early fall ideal for plant installation. Is it better to do landscaping in fall or spring? For planting, fall often wins. Soil is warm, air is cool, and roots grow without heat stress. Spring works well too,

especially for early-blooming shrubs and perennials. Summer installs require more watering and care. Winter is planning season and an excellent time for tree work and certain masonry if temperatures allow.

Maintenance cadence and costs

What is the difference between landscaping and yard maintenance? Landscaping creates or renovates the space. Lawn service or yard maintenance sustains it. A typical maintenance contract includes lawn mowing, lawn fertilization, weed control, pruning, mulch refreshes, and seasonal cleanups. What is included in landscaping services varies by company, but ask for clear scopes: lawn aeration and dethatching schedules, irrigation system checks, and plant health care if needed.

What is most cost-effective for landscaping? Put your dollars into drainage, durable materials underfoot, and right-plant-right-place. A paver walkway over a properly compacted base will cost more upfront than stepping stones dropped in soil, but it saves endless resetting. Irrigation with drip in beds reduces water waste and disease pressure. Native plant landscaping saves on inputs once established.

Choosing and working with a pro

What to ask a landscape contractor? Ask for recent references, insurance, licensing, and who will be on site. Ask how they schedule trades, what is included in a landscape plan and a landscaping service, and how they handle changes. Discuss warranties on plants and hardscapes. What to expect when hiring a landscaper: a schedule that flexes with weather, a messy middle during demolition and grading, and then a fast push as finishes go in. Good crews protect existing features, keep a tidy site, and communicate when surprises occur.

Is it worth paying for landscaping? Should you spend money on landscaping? If you care about resale, curb appeal, safety, and outdoor living, yes. What type of landscaping adds value? Functional improvements like a well-designed entrance, a paver walkway that guides guests, attractive foundation planting, landscape lighting, and a patio with room to dine deliver predictable returns. What landscaping adds the most value to a home and backyard? Typically a cohesive front yard with healthy turf or groundcover, layered plantings, a defined walkway, and a modestly sized patio. For backyards, usable square footage with a seating area, shade, and a simple kitchen or fire feature if you'll use it.

What are the disadvantages of landscaping? Initial cost, maintenance demands, and the risk of poor design or installation. A rushed job without drainage can lead to a wet basement or heaving pavers. Choose realistic scope and a builder who stands behind the work.

The right order for small projects and refreshes

You don't need a full overhaul to benefit from sequencing. Say you want a fresh entrance with a new garden path, perennial gardens, and lighting. Remove the existing path and plants, check and adjust grades, run conduit, build the base and lay the paver walkway, set path lights and transformer, amend soil, plant, and mulch. For a backyard patio, set drainage first so runoff doesn't sheet into the neighbor's yard, then build the patio base, lay the surface, add a stone walkway connection to the side gate, pull in irrigation for new shrub planting, then plant and mulch.

For lawn repair after construction, topdress compacted areas, overseed with an appropriate mix, and keep it moist until established. Don't put down pre-emergent herbicides before seeding, or you'll block germination. If weeds creep in, tackle them later with targeted lawn treatment rather than blanketing the yard.

A word on fabric, plastic, and weed control

Is plastic or fabric better for landscaping? Plastic sheeting is a moisture barrier, useful under certain hardscapes or where you want to block water, but it suffocates soil and roots in planting beds. Landscape fabric can help under gravel paths. Under plantings, it often becomes a mess as soil and seeds accumulate on top and weeds root anyway. A better approach is deep mulch, dense ground cover installation, and proper spacing to shade soil. Weed control in lawns is about healthy turf first: correct mowing height, balanced fertilization, and good water management. In beds, hand weeding early is faster than fighting monsters later.

Defensive landscaping, safety, and access

Defensive landscaping has a practical side that overlaps with beauty. Keep shrubs under windows low or use thorny varieties to discourage easy access. Keep tree limbs trimmed up near entries for sightlines. Ensure the paver walkway, steps, and thresholds are even and lit. In winter climates, choose pavers and finishes with traction, and grade walkways so meltwater moves off, not onto, the walking surface where it will refreeze.

Care after the build

The first year sets the trajectory. Water new trees and shrubs deeply and less often to drive roots down. Check emitters and adjust for weather. For a seeded lawn, keep the top quarter inch moist until germination, then taper. For sod, water to keep the root zone damp but not soggy for two to three weeks, then test with a gentle tug. Schedule lawn aeration in fall or spring to relieve compaction, especially after heavy equipment has been on site. Fertilize based on soil tests, not habit.

How often should you have landscaping done? Think in seasons. Spring wake-up includes bed edging, mulch touch-ups, irrigation start-up, and lawn seeding for thin spots. Summer is pruning, light weeding, and irrigation tuning. Fall cleanup is leaf removal, perennial cutback, and irrigation winterization. Winter is design updates, tool maintenance, and planning next steps.

Quick reference: the build sequence that prevents rework

Demolition and clearing, with access routes protected
Grading and drainage installation, including downspout routing
Subsurface utilities and conduit sleeves for irrigation and low voltage lighting
Hardscape bases, edge restraints, and foundations for walkways and driveways
Surface installation for patios, stone walkway, paver walkway, flagstone walkway, concrete walkway, and driveway installation
Walls, planters, and structures
Irrigation heads, drip lines, and controller setup
Soil prep, topsoil installation, and bed shaping
Plant installation: trees, shrubs, perennials, groundcovers
Turf installation: seed, sod, or synthetic
Outdoor lighting aiming and programming
Mulch installation and final cleanup

If you're on the fence about hiring help

Why hire a professional landscaper? Because sequencing across trades is the difference between a clean build and a prolonged headache. A pro anticipates where a french drain will conflict with a patio footing, or when a catch basin needs to be set slightly higher to avoid ponding. They'll match driveway pavers to loads and subgrade, and they'll size a dry well to local soil percolation rates rather than guess. Is it worth spending money on landscaping? If the scope includes water, grade, or masonry, the answer is usually yes. If your project is modest and you have time, you can DIY portions like planting, mulch, and even a simple stepping stone path. Blend approaches to stretch the budget.

What adds the most value to a backyard? Usability. A patio sized to fit a table and a grill without crowding. Shade in the afternoon. A garden path connecting doors to destinations without muddy ankles. Lighting where you need it. A sound irrigation system that doesn't spray the fence. These are not flashy, but they are the difference between a space you maintain and a space you live in.

Follow the order, respect water, invest in the base layers, and you'll build a landscape that looks good now and still makes sense ten years from today.

Layout review

Review the proposed layout against everyday use. Trace the route from the house to the outdoor space and identify places where people sit, move or gather. Bring conflicting preferences into the discussion before choosing finishes. Keep the revised drawing with the notes that explain why a layout changed.