

# 15 Things To Do *Before* Hiring A Landscape Designer



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———— Landscape Design ————

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## INTRODUCTION

Hiring a landscape design professional can be an unsettling task. Many questions might be on your mind, one of them perhaps whether you could do it yourself? If you have ruled this out, then where do you start?

To make the options less overwhelming here are a few guidelines to help you get started:



# 1. SCOPE OF PROJECT

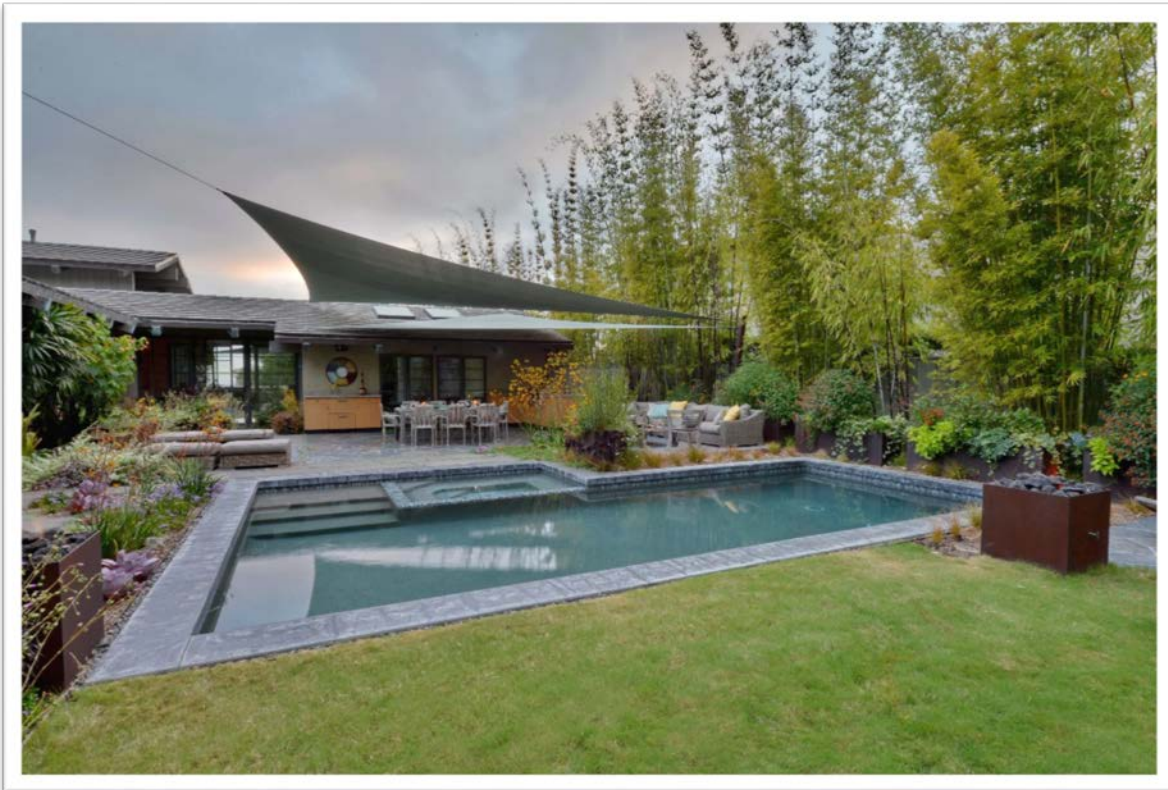
## ***Space***

Determine what you want to change. Concentrate on the functionality and limitations of your living space: Is it sufficient for the activities you are interested in?

Spaces to consider: Entertainment patio; play areas; private hideaway; flower/vegetable garden. You may even be interested in a combination of more than one of these uses.

If you don't use your back or front yard much now, it may help to consider how a change to the space will make you use it more.

Do any community design guidelines, HOA's or fire marshall requirements etc. apply to your design? Research into these is important to avoid finding out about restrictions or permit requirements after the design is completed.



## 2. HARDSCAPES

Now you will want to consider the materials used in these hardscapes (patios, decks, pathways, shade structures, arbors etc.): Flagstone, pavers, concrete, gravel... Knowing what you'd like to use for these areas will help determine cost and possible layouts.

By the way, you can find many inspirations and landscape design ideas at such websites as [houzz](#) and [pinterest](#). Also the website of the Association [of Professional Landscape Designers APLD](#) and their members.

## 3. LANDSCAPE LIGHTING

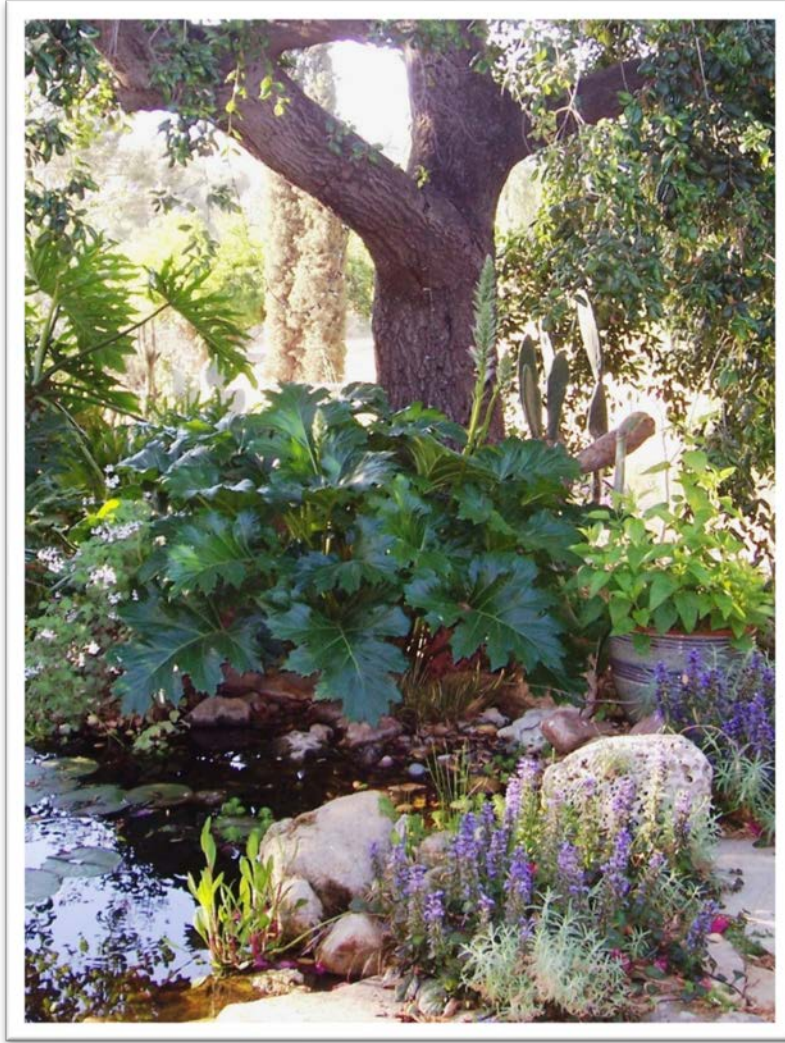
A [well lit landscape](#) will make the home landscape design come to life even after dark and help you enjoy your investment longer.

## 4. SOIL & PLANTINGS

The type of soil on your property is a determining factor in your plant selection. Plants that are selected for your soil will be much happier. Have a soil analysis done (ask your local cooperative extension or garden center, or find it online), or have the landscape designer take care of this.

What's the style of the new plantscape; what type of feel should it have? Any existing plants that you want to preserve?

Do you need privacy, or screening? Can your garden start with small plants at planting, or do you prefer a more mature look?



## 5. MAINTENANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Most plants need a periodic clean-up to look their best. However, 'their best' is a relative term, and the degree of tidiness that you prefer determines the maintenance and, up front, the selection of plants.

Another important element in the planning is whether you want to develop a sustainable landscape design or xeriscape landscaping. All these details will inform the selection of materials and the plants and need to be communicated to the San Diego landscaper.

## 6. BUDGET: YOUR INVESTMENT

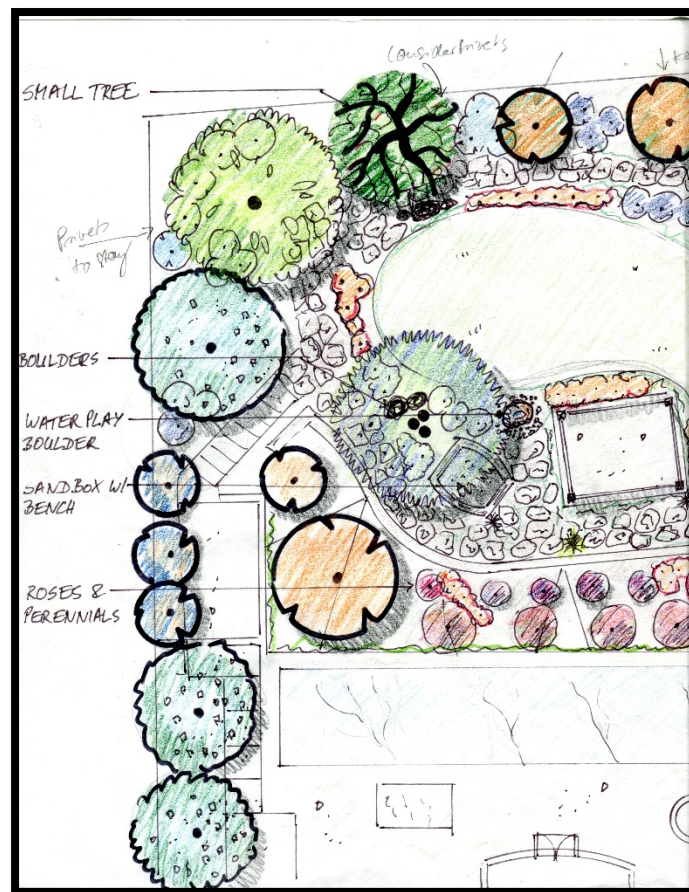
Before any design work starts, determine how much you can invest in your landscape dream. Be honest with yourself and set yourself parameters in advance.

To save money, some do-it-yourself warriors may hire a landscape designer for only a plan and do all the physical work themselves.

If you have a limited budget, would “phasing” work for you by spreading the improvements over several years?

A good rule of thumb is to invest no more that 5-10% of your homes market value. This will prevent you from overspending.

Landscape is different from other home remodeling projects. Historically, landscape renovations continue building equity as the years progress. Check out this article to learn [Why Curb Appeal is a Worthy Investment](#).



## 7. THE LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

With the answers to these questions in hand, you will be better prepared to get landscape design help. Like working with a contractor, you might want to interview with at least a couple of design professionals. Here are a few things to look for when hiring a landscape designer:

## 8. CREATIVITY, IMAGINATION AND GUIDANCE

Get a feel for their imagination and responsiveness to your vision. If you feel that none of the landscape ideas that they propose appeals to you, it's probably not a good fit for you.

Your landscape designer should help guide you through the entire process and make you feel comfortable about the project at hand. They should be able to articulate the pros and cons of each layout. Ask yourself, did I learn something new?





## 9. VISION

However, you need to feel assured that your vision is understood and respected. Listen well to what they are proposing to see whether their ideas will suit your needs and complement your taste and vision.

## 10. EXPERTISE IN WATER-CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Are you aiming for water conservation? Can the landscape designer show any expertise in water-wise plants and the principles of xeriscape design?

Important: Can she or he guide you in the selection of these plants, and can they refer you to an experienced, licensed landscape contractor? Will they want to be involved in the planting, and remain involved on a continuing basis with you after the installation, to assure the landscape's success?

## 11. FEES & REFERENCES; WHO TO SELECT?

It might not be to your advantage to compare designers' fees; their personality and their creativity need to appeal to you also. Of course communication needs to be good, and by asking their previous clients about their appreciation of this professional will help you firm up your choice.

It will also be beneficial to look at a couple of the projects they have done in the past. Preferably they will be projects similar to your project's size and style. Many landscape designers will have pictures available; however, if possible try to see a couple sights in person.



## 12. REFERRALS

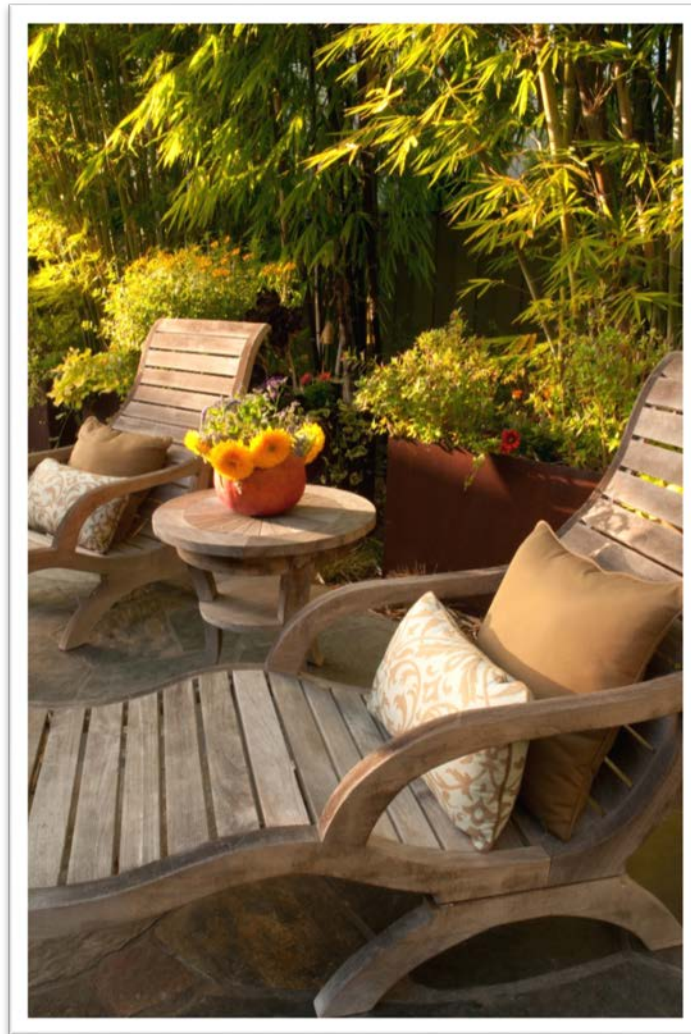
You may want to start in locating a landscape designer by asking friends, family and neighbors who may have firsthand knowledge of their work. You may also search the online database where you can examine examples of their work posted on their websites which may help in your initial selection process as well.

Finally, check with local nurseries in your area as they will more than likely know quite a few landscape designers (and they might be able to give some "reference" input as to their reputation as well).

## 13. SITE VISIT

A site visit such as an initial consultation is important, in which the landscape designer gets a first understanding of the project's scope and responds to the site conditions with first recommendations and suggestions. This way she or he can give a more accurate estimate. It is also helpful if you have a list of criteria, gathered during your pre-planning, to give the landscape designer as a guide to follow.

If you hire a design-build company, review licensing and insurance information. If their crew will be working on your property, you want to make certain they are covered by their insurance. Also make certain they are going to apply for or help you apply for any needed permits.



## 14. CONTRACT

Once you have decided on a landscape designer, get a written contract for the project. This should detail cost, payment agreement (never pay all in advance!), timeline, and all services included.

## 15. THE LANDSCAPE DESIGN QUESTIONNAIRE

Here's a [downloadable questionnaire](#) that is designed to help you define your preferences and formulate your design program. These questions are those that a landscape designer will ask when beginning the design process with you, to "get into your head" and understand your vision and needs.

With these suggestions, I wish you much success, as well as lots of enjoyment and fun during the process.