



8 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER
WHEN PLANNING YOUR LANDSCAPE GARDEN

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Disclaimer:

This book is designed to provide general information only, and does not provide advice specific to a particular site. To ensure you get the best out of any investment you make in your garden, we recommend that you seek the services of a qualified landscape professional.

Tohm Hajncl and Lisa Fry

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START AT THE BEGINNING



This might sound really obvious, but taking on a landscape project is akin to building or renovating your home and can be quite overwhelming before you start. Often the first thing people ask for when approaching a landscaper is a quote. But a quote is not what you are buying. In fact, the price is the last thing you need to know. The first question to ask yourself, before talking to any landscape designers or contractors is,

“What do I actually want in my garden?”

Don't be surprised if you are not sure of the answer to this question. If you find yourself thinking that you don't really know what you want, or you're not sure of the options available to you, then ask yourself this question:

“How do I want to use my outdoor space at home?”

This is where you consider who will be using the space as well as how. Your lifestyle and personal tastes will bring much to bear on this point. Do you want to use your garden to relax and entertain in? Do you want to cater for the changing needs of a growing family? Do you need a tranquil sanctuary to return home to after a busy day at the office? Do you want that 'wow' factor when guests come to visit?

Sit down and make a list of all the ways that you want to engage with your garden. Don't hold back – let the ideas flow. It's really important to get everything down on paper, even if some things seem to conflict at this stage. While you're at it, make a second list of any problems or issues that need to be resolved. This may include erosion control; repair work on existing features; or you may have drainage issues during periods of seasonally high rainfall.

At the end of this process, you should have two lists: one is your wish list, the second outlines issues that need resolving. Now it's time to have some fun before knuckling down to the nitty gritty.

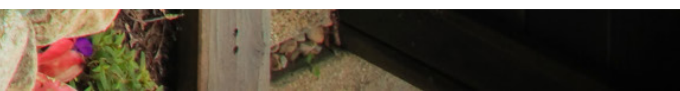


Armed with your two lists, now is the time to do some research. How have other people met the needs that you have identified? Here are some good places to start.

- Consider your local environment. Start taking notice of what people are doing in your neighbourhood. What plants do you see that you like and obviously thrive well locally?
- Go and visit landscape supply yards, nurseries and hardware stores. What outdoor living accessories and structural materials are out there that you love?
- Newsagencies stock a range of home and garden lifestyle magazines that are full of inspiring ideas, with articles often explaining details about the landscape designs featured.
- Lifestyle shows on TV or the internet are also great sources of inspiration. When you see something that gets you really excited, try and analyse what it is exactly about that landscape garden that you love? Is it the colours used; the use of natural elements such as plants and water; is it a particular theme that you like? Make notes as you watch so you don't forget.
- An internet search is potentially overwhelming. Choose your search terms carefully. Try and determine the location of landscapes you particularly love to ensure they are climatically similar to where you live, especially when plants are involved.
- Visit landscape and garden expos to get that real, hands-on experience of how different elements look and feel in the landscape. These are also fantastic sources of cutting edge design, new plant cultivars and current landscape trends.

Ideally, by the end of this process, you'll have compiled some kind of scrapbook. Whether the cut and paste variety, an electronic version or a bit of both, this helps you start to focus in on what you'd like to achieve at your home. It is also invaluable when it comes to communicating your ideas to a landscape designer or contractor.

GET INSPIRED





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PRIORITISE

You now have a wonderful collection of inspiration and ideas for your outdoor living space that needs to be put in some kind of order. On the top of a page, write the following headings:

MUST HAVES

NICE TO HAVES

Put each item from your wish list into one of these columns. Then within each column, rank each item from highest to lowest priority. Usually, the “must have” column will include any issues that need to be rectified while the “nice to have” column may be where the more whimsical ideas will sit.

These lists will be an essential part of the conversation you have with prospective landscape designers and contractors. They will also help you to prioritise if your budget doesn't cover everything on both lists.

In landscaping, prices usually vary for the following reasons:

• **Comparing apples to oranges**

This is harder to get right than you might think. Having a plan will help, but also make sure any quotes include detailed specifications. A common example is where one retaining wall is much cheaper than another because one will have proper drainage installed behind it and the other won't.

• **Quality of materials**

Cheaper materials can make a difference to the up-front cost of a job, but using better quality materials, especially for key structural elements like retaining walls, can make a huge difference to the life of the work. For example, if the expected life of two retaining walls is 25 years versus 10 years, the first one will actually add value to your home. If you decide to sell your home within 5-10 years, the wall with a 10 year life will be a liability while the other will continue to be an asset for years to come.

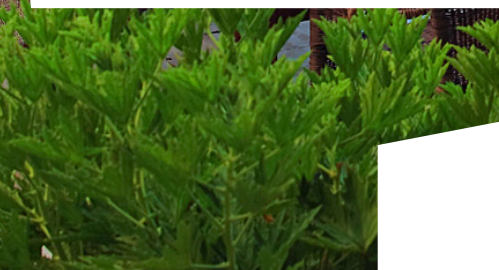
• **Professional versus amateur**

Licensed, insured tradespeople will have higher operating expenses than those that aren't, but you are covered if anything goes wrong. The peace of mind this brings you is very valuable indeed.

Now we reach the point where you start to consider the cost of your job as you have a much clearer idea of what you'd like. Even though you have done some research - maybe quite a lot - you still won't really know what the job will cost until you start talking to landscapers themselves.

Like anything you buy, there are usually different price points for seemingly similar items. People often ask for a few quotes when looking to engage a tradesperson in an effort to avoid being ripped-off. What is important to understand, however, is how the price was arrived at in the first place.

SPEND OR INVEST?





Did you know that if your landscape project includes structural elements such as paving, retaining walls, a pool or outdoor structure, in most cases the work must be undertaken by a licenced contractor?

To find out what your rights are in Queensland, visit the Queensland Building and Construction Commission (QBCC) website at qbcc.qld.gov.au and explore the Home Owners section.

Here are some important questions to ask when talking to a landscaping professional:

- Are you licenced to do the work as outlined in the proposal?
- Are there any council permits required? If so, can you organise them for me?
- Could I see your certificate of currency for your insurance?

Make sure you carefully read any contract outlining the scope of works before signing it. If you don't understand something, ask for an explanation. Be especially wary of what is not included in the contract. While variations are sometimes unavoidable, the possibility of them occurring should be flagged in the contract. An experienced landscaper should be able to minimise the likelihood of unforeseen expenses or eliminate them all together.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS



The secret to a successful landscaping project is to have a relationship with your landscaper that is built on mutual trust. It is very important to feel comfortable with the contractor you engage. Here are some key signs that things are on the right track:

- You are treated with professionalism from the outset: phone calls are answered, appointments are kept, just the basics really.
- Your questions are answered in a way that really clarifies what you want to know.
- Be wary of contractors who just say 'yes' to everything. True professionals should be to offer a range of solutions and be able to explain the pros and cons of each.
- There needs to be some kind of connection. If you don't like the guy, then it's probably not going to work. Embarking on a project like this takes a lot of emotional investment. You need to feel happy to go on the journey together.
- Don't rush into anything. If you're feeling pressured, stop and take some time to think. Remember, if something seems too good to be true, it usually is.

LISTEN TO YOUR
INNER VOICE

ENJOY THE PROCESS

By following the first six essential elements, you should now be at a stage when you have found a landscaper whom you feel you can trust and that you are looking forward to working with on your outdoor space. Take some before shots of your garden. Regardless of the size of your project, it is always interesting to compare how different a space can look after the work is done. It is particularly gratifying to go back months or even years later to revisit the before shots, as most landscape projects improve with time as the plants become established.

The process of having work done at your home is exciting, as you are able to watch the transformation developing daily. Inevitably, your garden will look worse before it gets better, but that's a normal part of any construction process. If you do have concerns throughout the project, a conversation with your landscape contractor should answer any queries you have.

The final benefit of having followed this process to date is that you have a clear outline of the scope of works, minimising the need for variations. Making major or frequent changes during a landscape project is one of the main sources of stress for both you and the contractor. This is where budgets and time schedules can blow out significantly. By being prepared, however, you greatly increase the likelihood of being able to enjoy a project that runs smoothly from start to finish.



At the beginning of the first chapter of this book, we compared landscaping to building or renovation projects in regards to scale and complexity. However, there is one major difference between the two and that becomes evident when the work is complete. With building works, the point of handover is where the project looks the best it ever will. With landscaping, though, the best is yet to come due mainly to the fact that any plants will now take time to reach their full potential.

The fact that most landscaping projects include the ongoing care of living elements means that you will need to consider how this will happen. The first and most crucial stage is the first month after completion, when plants and turf are establishing their roots. Ongoing, the amount of maintenance required will depend on the style of garden you've installed and how mature the plants were initially. Keep in mind that low maintenance is not no maintenance.

Talk to your landscaper about the most appropriate maintenance regime for your garden. Then, depending on your preferences, you can either undertake this yourself or engage a garden maintenance team to do it for you. Don't forget your structural elements as well. Just as our homes need ongoing maintenance to retain their value, so too do our outdoor spaces.



CONSIDER YOUR FUTURE

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Tohm Hajncl has over 35 years' experience relevant to the landscaping industry and a laundry list of qualifications and industry memberships. He has published hundreds of articles, some of which can be accessed at amberleaflandscaping.com.au

Lisa Fry's background is in marketing, communications and business management, and has recently completed a major in English Literature. She currently manages Tohm's landscape design and construction business.

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LOVE COMING HOME...
TO A SPACE THAT'S UNIQUELY YOURS.

07 5445 9801

amberleaflandscaping.com.au