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**How Does Your Garden Grow: Tips For Hiring A Landscaper**

**By Jason Flintstone**

Just when you're done with shoveling snow, you can set your sights toward spring (and summer)

and mowing the lawn. But, for many the grass would be a lot greener if they could just get someone else to do it (the mowing that is). But, weeding out a reputable landscaper, one who not only knows what he is doing, but also one you can trust and can afford can be quite challenging and tricky, especially if your not sure of what to ask about or look for. With that said, professionals offer the following advice for homeowners who are a bit "green" in the gardening arena.

1. Put Your Money Where Your Word Of Mouth Is: If you're going to invest in any professional, your best bet is to chose among those that come highly referred by those you know and trust. After all there's no better advertising, than a content client. And, by all means don't be afraid to ask strangers and neighbors (with lovely lawns) for their recommendation.

2. Dig A Little Deeper: Go beneath the surface and unearth some solid references. Not only should you ask for client approval but ask to take a look at their yards. You'll also want to ask your potential service provider to see a sample of his work, including photo albums and any work featured in magazines.

3. Refrain From Planting A Financial Seed: Sometimes service professionals will charge you based on what they think you can afford, or a "comfortable" number you've revealed to them. Instead experts suggest giving the prospective landscaper a detailed wish list and allowing him to generate an estimate.

4. Sign On The Dotted Line: Although many (service) professionals may insist that their word and their handshake is as good as a written contract, experts suggest "getting it in writing" It's likely your chosen landscaper will request a 50 percent down payment (up front) with the balance due upon completion of the job/services. However professionals point out that a landscaper worth his weight in soil will honor the contract even if you hold back 10 percent of the payment until 30 days after completion (or sooner if you're happy with the work). And, they suggest asking for a specific guarantee for the services agreed upon.

5. **Get An Education:** Get informed by brushing up via the latest gardening books and magazines, you that you learn the lingo and can properly ask for what you want, and maybe even have some pictures to show making your expectations more concrete and clear.

6. **Insta–Garden Alternatives:** If you've got the time, energy, and ambition about doing much of the the work yourself, experts suggest hiring a landscaper or landscape architect to draw up the plans and a planning schedule (preferably starting in the spring). And they note that some nurseries offer this service either for free or for a nominal fee.

<http://www.lifamilies.com>

### **The Installation Of Garden Ponds & When To Call A Professional**

**By Dennis Conner**

A beautiful landscape is what many look for in adding the finishing touch to their home's appearance. For many, a part of that beauty includes the addition of garden ponds to help decorate their outdoor paradise.

The addition of garden ponds is not an easy task, but is possible for anyone who has experience in excavation and landscaping techniques. A garden pond kit can either be purchased as a whole or piece–by–piece at a local home improvement store, which may also have information relating to it's construction. There are a few important things to keep in mind, however, before beginning any outdoor project.

\$If you suffer from allergies, an outdoor project may not be the best idea. Depending on the severity of your condition, allergies can increasingly worsen when doing any type of landscaping. If you think this could be a problem, you may be better served to call a contractor or professional landscaper for the installation of your garden pond.

\$\$peaking of allergies, some individuals suffer from an allergic reaction to bee stings. If you know this is a problem, you will either need to hire a professional or have your allergy medication on hand in the event of a sting. The best way to do this is to visit your doctor, explain the project that you will be doing and that you will be spending a lot of time outdoors and ask for a prescription.

\$\$While outdoors, it is best to wear long pants and a long sleeve shirt. This is especially true if you are working in the evening hours, which is when many mosquitoes are out and about. During certain times of the year, these little nuisances can be quite dangerous. You will also want to be mindful of snakes, spiders and other problematic creatures when working outdoors.

If you opt for hiring a professional, you will need to shop around for the best estimate. Make sure that you get everything in writing, check out the contractor or landscaper with the local Better Business Bureau and ask for references. One of the most important criteria to consider when selecting a professional for installing garden ponds is whether or not they have experience in the type of project that you need completed. The more experience he/she has with the installation of garden ponds, the

better likelihood that your project will be completed with success. And finally, make sure that you choose a professional who stands behind their work and has been in business for several years.

The author is a regular contributor to

<http://www.gardenpondsplus.com>

where more information about

landscaping and ponds is available.



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