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**Tools Every Do-It-Yourself Landscaper Needs**

**By Chester Smith**

There is no doubt that choosing to do your own landscaping is the best way to go for many people.

Not only do you save a lot of money by not hiring professionals to do the work, you also will get to enjoy a lot of time outside. Landscaping is good exercise and a great way to spend an afternoon.

Any do-it-yourself landscapers will require a variety of tools, from basic to high tech, in order to get the job done right. Here are some of the tools that are essential for doing your own landscaping.

Software: Yes, believe it or not, a good landscaping program can be essential when you are designing the layout of your lawn and garden. I use the Master Landscape & Home Design by Punch! Software. I bought this program for my wife back in 2003, and we have used it a lot ever since. The 3D Photoview technology allows us to put in digital pictures of our home and garden and then implement any changes on the screen before we put them into effect in our yard. The PlantFinder allows us to find plants that are the most appropriate to the soil and climate conditions where we live, and it even has a calculator to help us estimate the costs of the plants from different stores. This is about as high tech as I get when it comes to landscaping, though.

Lawn mower: You might not realize it, but mowing the lawn is an essential part of any landscape. A lawn mower is therefore a critical part of doing your landscaping yourself. Buying a lawn mower can be a tricky business— you can get models with everything included but the kitchen sink. The fact is, a second hand lawn mower that works can be just as good as a brand new model straight from the catalogues. If you have a large area to mow, you will probably want to invest in a riding lawn mower to save time and aching muscles.

Weed Whacker: There are points on your lawn that your mower just won't reach, around fences and right beside patios, around any fruit trees or berry canes. For these, you will need a good weed whacker. The best models come with several attachments, appropriate to chopping down a variety of weeds— especially if you have slacked off and allowed some of the hardier varieties to grow up. These can be death for the average string-and-coil whacker, and you will need some good plastic to stand up to them.

## Tools Every Do-It-Yourself Landscaper Needs

There are several other tools that every landscaper needs, most of them relatively low tech in comparison to those above. A variety of shovels, rakes, and pruning instruments are all essential, as are a good pair of gloves. All of these tools will be dependent on what you have planted in your landscaping, and more complicated designs may even require some basic knowledge of electricity, carpentry, and hydroponics.

Chester Smith maintains a website for do-it-yourself landscapers. Check out his site at:

<http://yourlandscapes.com>

## 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 you 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.

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