



The Association of
Professional Landscapers



Choosing a landscaper

A practical guide to picking a reliable professional for your garden project

www.landscaper.org.uk



With many landscaping companies to choose from, deciding which one to create your dream garden, can be very confusing. It is so important to hire professionals, people you can trust and who can give you the garden you want. In this guide, garden designer and writer Claudia De Yong looks at how to pick the right people for your job.



Plan early

It helps to plan ahead for your garden to be designed and built. Quality landscapers have considerable lead times. The person who's available straight away isn't as likely to be as good as someone with other clients lined up. It's definitely worth allowing time to get the right person in and to make sure you're comfortable with them.

Do your research

There's nothing better than a recommendation from a friend or family member who's used a landscaper or designer. But if they can't help, make sure you see if they've got any reviews online, for instance in their Google business listing. You can also use trade associations like the Association of Professional Landscapers' (APL) online 'Find a Landscaper' service. Trade association membership is a sign that a business takes its reputation and standards seriously. They're a good way of identifying quality professionals.

Next have a look at company websites. It's a good idea to make sure you look for landscapers who've done work similar to what you would like done in your own garden.

For example, if you wish to have a koi pond, look for a landscaper who has this experience. If there are no images or examples of this on the landscaper's website, you may need to consider whether to work with that particular company, however impressive the rest of their other work is. As most garden projects include specialist elements, search for companies that clearly show how they can bring these specific skills to your project. If possible ask to visit a recent project. Most landscapers will be delighted to show you their previous work and while you are there you can get a personal reference from a satisfied customer.

Write a brief

It is very helpful when you first meet a landscaper to prepare a written brief. If you can, it can be helpful to include drawings or sketches of what you're looking for. Have a clear idea of what you want from the finished garden and how you will use the various spaces within it. A good landscaper will be happy to provide you with suggestions and alternatives to consider, and discuss the various build techniques required for each element. Remember, you don't need to have designed it, but telling a designer or landscaper what you want from your garden will help them to help you.





Be clear on budgets

Having a clear idea of budget can be difficult, especially if you've never had your garden landscaped before. However, your budget for the work is very helpful to the landscaper from the outset. Knowing this can help them make realistic suggestions and proposals for you. You might not know all the details like what materials you want to use at the briefing stages, but if you give an idea of budget up-front then the quote you get won't come as a surprise. Remember also to factor VAT into your budgets. Most landscapers are VAT registered and being clear whether figures include or exclude VAT from the start helps avoid nasty surprises.



Estimates

It's best when looking for landscapers, that you shortlist three, give each of them your written brief and compare their quotes and estimates. Each company will have a different way of presenting their estimate but make sure everything is in writing and ask for a breakdown of each element where this has not been explained. If some seem a lot cheaper than others ask how they will achieve the design work for the price without cutting corners. Please remember an estimate can take a while to prepare especially if there are various elements required for the project. It's a good idea to allow the landscapers a few weeks at least to get their quotes together. This means that they can compare their suppliers' prices, giving you a better chance of best value for your money.

Schedule of works & payment

Most companies will give you a schedule of works. They'll also have their own method and timetable with regards to payments, some will be weekly or monthly while others may be staged payments throughout the project. You should be clear in writing about what these are before starting a project. A deposit is normal practice before work starts. Any changes to the contract should be agreed in writing at each stage of the build so that each party is fully aware of any extra work, costs or changes to the original brief.

Plan for aftercare

Once your garden has been built, it will need looking after. It's a good idea to brief your landscaper on how much time and effort you can or want to make on looking after the garden. If certain amounts of follow up work (e.g. watering) are going to be needed, it's worth asking your landscaper about this too, when they put forward their proposals.

Reassurance

By following these steps, you're giving yourself every chance of ending up with the garden you've dreamed of. The chances are you'll end up working with someone who's passionate about gardens, and who cares as much as you do about the results you get. Enjoy the experience!





About the APL

Founded in 1995, the APL is a trade association at the forefront of professional standards and services. It represents hundreds of businesses and gives you the confidence you need when choosing a garden landscaper.

To join, a landscaping business must have been trading for at least two years and go through a rigorous vetting process.

The process starts by obtaining six client references, followed by site inspections ensuring members meet all health and safety requirements, workmanship is of the highest standard, and the business is professionally run.

Once accepted as a member, landscapers undergo an annual inspection. This ensures the high standards required to remain a member are kept up. The vetting process is so rigorous that the APL is the only landscaping trade body whose members have all been accepted by the Government backed TrustMark scheme.



For more information on the APL or to find an APL member for your project, go to:

www.landscaper.org.uk



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