

Inside, Outside, All Around!

Invigorating your home with plantscaping

Whether you live in a 3-bedroom ranch, a condo or a turn of the century estate, a little greenery can go a long way toward improving the image that your home projects. Consider this: according to the American Nursery & Landscape Association, landscaping can add 7% to 15% to a home's value—and that's true for condo and townhome owners as well. Patios, fountains, decks and foliage all add value to your home, while providing you and your family with recreation areas, privacy and a serene environment. Most importantly, the natural environment that you create in and around your home serves to create your visitors' first impression of your home (especially when it's on the market).

Steps to landscaping your home

Whether you're looking to grow some visual drama on your average urban plot or completely reconstruct a yard that hasn't been touched since the mid-80s, here are some guidelines to help get you started.

1. Gather your thoughts

Brainstorm, take notes and answer the questions below:

- What do you want to achieve with your plants, yard, deck, etc.? Are you preparing your home for sale or simply aiming to beautify your home for personal reasons?
- Are you aiming for a complete overhaul of your exterior or simple cosmetic upgrades?

Sometimes simply replacing a few overgrown bushes, painting the shutters and purchasing a small potted tree for your front entry is all you need to refresh your home's image. Don't be afraid to think big. By building your wish list for big-ticket items into your long-range plantscaping plan, you can begin to budget and plan for them now.

2. Check your limitations

Determine your budget.

Many experts plan the landscape of a home as a multi-year project, which can help spread costs and work over several years instead of just one summer. With such a plan, you can plant your trees and annuals in year one, and by the time you finish your deck in year five, it will be surrounded by mature greenery.

Assess your available land and features.

How much space do you have, and how much sun do those areas get? Picture how these spaces should be connected or separated for efficient use.

3. Create a plan

Here's where the hopes and dreams laid out in step one meet the reality that you defined in step two.

Draw it out.

Make a pencil layout of the areas you have to work with, showing the house/condo, balconies and windows (for window boxes), driveway, etc. Note where you want to eventually add plants and trees, and draw in the water features and patios that you plan to install.

Research costs.

Make a list of each of the above items and determine the cost associated with obtaining and installing each of them. Balance this against your budget and determine when you will tackle each step in the process.

Although this step is the most complex, it can be enjoyable if you are willing to accomplish your goals in stages. Be realistic about how much you are capable of doing in a year, and when your job is complete, you won't regret the time you invested in doing the job right.

4. Consult with the pros

As you plan, design and build your landscape, don't be shy about asking for professional advice. Ask family members and neighbors for referrals on landscape

professionals that they trust. Choose someone who listens and seems open to your ideas. A professional is especially valuable if you're dealing with a job that requires permitting. In addition, working with a pro can save you money in the long run.



Bringing the Outdoors In

Enjoy the life and energy of plants, even in the smallest of spaces.

Even if you don't own acres of property, you can still enjoy the presence and benefits of plants or a garden in a small space. If you're one of millions of Americans who rents, owns a condo or simply doesn't have a yard, there are still plenty of opportunities for plantscaping in every window, balcony and corner of your abode.

The Benefits of Indoor Gardening

- Indoor gardens create vibrant, inviting spaces and can provide year-round enjoyment (unlike an outdoor plant in the dead of winter).
- Houseplants clean and clear the air in your home. According to a study by NASA, indoor plants along with carbon plant filters can help improve the air quality in your home.



- With a pinch of creativity, container garden arrangements and terrariums are a colorful way of providing living art in your home.
- If the above reasons aren't enough, consider this: plants provide a living, human touch that other interior elements just can't match.

The Needs of Indoor Plants

In designing your indoor greenery paradise, remember that potted plants have different requirements than their ground-dwelling relatives. Help them thrive by following the tips below.

Be consistent.

Read up on the plants that you purchase, and understand how much light and water they require and what temperatures suit them best. The more stable environment that you can provide for your leafy pets, the healthier they will be.



Feeding time.

Since potted plants have limited soil resources, it's crucial to get into the habit of fertilizing your indoor friends on a regular basis. Use liquid fertilizer, a special soil mix or fertilizing sticks to keep them healthy.

Room to grow.

As your baby blossoms outgrow their initial pots, transplant them into larger containers to keep their roots from growing out through the pot's drainage holes and coiling up around the container's edges.

Indoor Plants and Feng Shui

Houseplants are an integral component of the feng shui approach to a healthy home by providing life and vitality to your indoor environment. According to feng shui, plants connect us to the natural world and increase the flow of positive energy throughout our home. To take full advantage of the feng shui philosophy when it comes to your indoor garden, consider the following:

- Choose plants that have round or soft edges over spiky, more aggressive-looking species.
- Get rid of sick or dying plants to avoid negative energy. It is better to have no plants at all than ones that are sick.
- Create a positive impression and energize the entry of your home by placing a plant or floral arrangement near your front door.
- In feng shui, the angles and corners so abundant in Western architecture are seen as dumping grounds for

negative energy. In order to allow energy to flow freely throughout your home, place plants or indoor trees in the corners of a room.

- Conceal electronic equipment—it gives off an artificial energy as opposed to the natural energy of plants. Drape or hang a potted plant near your computer or stereo equipment, or place a plant that can be easily moved in front of the television to counter negative energy.
- No matter where you place them, know that the best way to enhance your home's feng shui with plants is simply just to have them.

