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Tips for landscaping your new home

"Be prepared" is more than just an old saying. When it comes to landscaping your new house, it's the best advice money can buy.

Toronto Home Builders' Association member Alexander Budrevic, a leading landscape architect and president of his own landscaping firm, said planning your property's new look is critical to its ultimate success. A new home, he added, has distinct advantages.

"Owning a brand new home gives you the opportunity to design and implement your landscaping requirements to suit your own lifestyle and taste," Mr. Budrevic said.

"You do not have to cope with an existing

garden that was designed for someone else, and which might not be suitable to your particular living habits and requirements."

Mr. Budrevic has designed more than 3,000 projects and has won several awards for his work. He suggests new homeowners negotiate a landscaping allowance with builders since the preliminary features such as walks to both front and rear entrances and sod in both yards are usually limited.

Although a complete landscaping project may be financially impossible to undertake at one time, Mr. Budrevic recommends homeowners devise an entire plan to include patios, planting beds, shade trees, flower gardens, play areas and perhaps a swimming pool. He said by creating a master plan, the finished product will be cohesive.

"Do the plan for your total property even

if your budget does not allow everything to be done at the same time," Budrevic said.

"It is unlikely that everything you might like to have in your garden will fit in your property, so some important decisions of what to leave out will have to be made. It is much more economical to spend more time and effort in proper planning than to correct your mistakes after the work and money is spent in your garden."

Proper grading of the property is essential to landscaping projects, he said. To avoid wet basements and puddles in the lawn, all hard surfaces such as patios, driveways and walks, should slope at least one per cent away from the building.

For patio construction, one 12' x 12' area should be adequate for the placement of outdoor garden furniture, Mr. Budrevic said. As well, paving materials may consist of reinforced concrete, precast concrete slabs, interlocking stones, flagstones or similar hard surface supplies which complement existing building features.

If possible, select a new home with a southern backyard so as to be exposed to more sun for the proper cultivation of grass, Mr. Budrevic said. As well, select planting material with future maintenance in mind, he said.

"Don't plant large flower beds or construct waterfalls, fountains or ponds if you can't provide adequate maintenance yourself or hire paid help to look after it."

"Remember that shrubs and trees do eventually grow to their size and therefore it is important to know their ultimate size before planting it in the garden."

He suggests selecting planting material for all seasons so as to have year-round colour in the garden. Flowering shrubs, he said, are beautiful in both spring and early summer while some shrubs flower in late summer and fall. For winter, try evergreens and shrubs with berries.

While a colourful garden is pleasing, a healthy one is preferable, he said. In most new properties, he suggests homeowners prepare planting beds with additional topsoil consisting of 18 inches of sandy loam for flower beds, and 24 inches of sandy loam and topsoil for vegetable gardens.

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After bathing it's a good idea to leave a bathroom fan running for a few minutes with the door shut to exhaust the excess moisture in the air.

If your thermostat has a separate switch for your furnace fan, leave it turned on. Let the fan run continuously. This will help the air in the house circulate, helping to avoid hot or cool spots. If you don't have such a switch contact a heating and air conditioning contractor to have one installed.

Keep the kitchen exhaust fan running when cooking to get rid of heat.

Ceiling fans are not overly expensive, and they're an excellent way to improve comfort, summer or winter. Good ones are reversible. In the summer they'll draw the cooler air up from the lower parts of the house into the upper areas, where heat normally collects. In winter they'll blow the warmer air down to keep the overall temperature more uniform.

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