

Landscaping for fun and functionality

For some people, the opportunity to exercise their green thumbs is one of the things that prompted them to buy a house. Others recognize that keeping up appearances in their neighbourhood makes life easier and increases pride of ownership and community.

Either way, landscaping and gardening are tremendous assets to homeowners and will improve the enjoyment and value of your home.

As in making any improvement to your home, the first step is thorough planning. Develop some basic premises or assumptions about your aims. Consider how much time or money you're willing to put into it. With proper research, you can do a lot on a little cash and not much more work. On the other hand, you can spend considerable money doing complicated and exotic landscaping that will completely transform the appearance of your property.

Landscaping is a long-range, never-ending project but still, if you take it step-by-step, it need not be overwhelming.

Consider your lifestyle and the uses you'll make of the area around your home. Are you going to use the garden area for entertaining, a playground for children, outdoor living space, occasional family sit-downs or primarily as a nice view to look at from inside your house? All those uses, and many more you can think of, will suggest different approaches to landscaping.

Do you want people to see your front entrance area as something distinctive to stop and look at, or simply a neat and tidy functional area? Again different approaches, and different levels of cost and efforts.

Give considerable thought to your landscaping design, and realize that letting plants, shrubs and other elements happen randomly in a piecemeal manner can spoil the appearance and limit the value of your home.

Make sure your plan also takes into consideration such diverse elements as the overall look and style of the neighbourhood, the condition of the soil and drainage you have to work with and the noise, traffic and other aspects of the area.

Depending on the premises of your plan, the possibilities in landscaping are almost unlimited.

You will probably want a mix of "hard" and "soft" elements in your long-range plan. The hard elements will include flagstones, paving brick, asphalt, gravel and wood, in such things as decks, trellises and fences. The soft elements will be plants, grass, flowers, shrubs, vines and trees. In urban areas with restricted space, there may be more hard elements than soft, in suburban areas the reverse is probably true.

In addition to improving the value of your home, good, thoughtful landscaping can also save you money. Well chosen and placed elements can reduce heating and cooling cost and reduce maintenance costs. Trees and shrubs, for instance, can provide screens to control wind, erosion, sunlight, shade and snow.

There are lots of basic (and more sophisticated) books and magazines available on gardening and landscaping. Also, your local nursery can provide you with valuable information.

The results of carefully, planned landscaping can be functional, aesthetically pleasing and cost effective.

This article is provided by local Realtors and the Ontario Real Estate Association (OREA) for the benefit of consumers in the real estate market.

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Yvonne Christie - Broker/Owner
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Getting your house ready for sale

It's almost time for the For Sale sign to go up, and time to make sure your house will be looking its best when the first prospective purchasers walk through the door.

A clean, uncluttered house looks bigger and more inviting, so begin by packing away bulky or unused furniture and making the best use of your space. Be ruthless when you go through closets, spare rooms and cupboards.

If you haven't used that bread-making machine for a while, and if you're not likely to need that extra set of china or cutlery in the next few weeks, pack it away. Those knick-knacks on the mantelpiece may have sentimental value to you, but they'll just look like knick-knacks to the people who come through your home. Take a deep breath and move them out of sight.

You can make a head start on packing by cleaning off bookshelves, clearing clothes, shoes, extra towels and bedding out of closets, and boxing the kids' toys, out-of-season sports equipment and garden tools.

Take a tour of your house and make a note of those easy-to-miss spots that need a good cleaning. Wash down walls, windows and woodwork. Scrub sinks, toilets, bathtubs and kitchen appliances until they shine. Clean out the cupboards under the sink, dust the tops of baseboards and wash all window coverings.

The more thorough the initial clean-up, the easier it will be to keep the house looking its best for visits from your realtor and prospective buyers.

Now is the time to fix the cracked light-switch plates, broken door handles, leaky faucets and squeaky doors you've learned to live with for years.

Shabby kitchen cupboards and a grubby hallway will benefit from a fresh coat of paint in a neutral colour - this is not the time to start experimenting with dramatic paint schemes.

Similarly, heavily patterned wallpaper or brightly coloured accent walls may tend to distract buyers from other features, or make it hard for them to imagine how their belongings will look in the room. If you can, repaint or paper the walls in a subtle colour.

It's often worth replacing carpet or floor coverings that are in really rough shape. If the state of your kitchen floor is lowering the tone of the whole room, for example, inexpensive stick and peel tiles can make a dramatic difference.

Realtors are familiar with the homes' market and can help you decide which improvements will be appealing to buyers. A major investment - adding a garage or deck, for example, may not be recovered through a higher selling price, while something as simple as replacing torn screens or filling cracks in walls and ceilings can add considerably to your home's salability.

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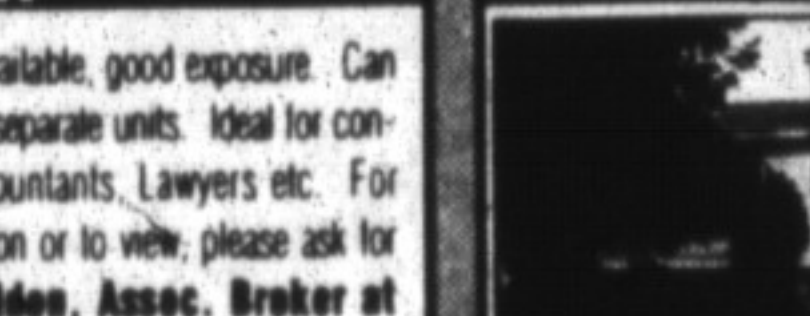
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