

Wave Outdoors Landscape + Design provides landscape design and construction in Mount Prospect. Use these planning questions to prepare a project conversation.

Planning considerations

If you have ever walked your property and imagined a serene patio, a shaded pergola with vines, or a front yard that finally looks pulled together, you have already taken the first step a landscape designer takes: seeing potential. The gap between a mental picture and a beautiful, durable outdoor space comes down to translating ideas into a plan that fits your site, your budget, and the way you live. That translation is what a good landscape designer does every day.

Designer versus landscaper, and why the distinction matters

The terms get tossed around as if they are interchangeable, yet they are different roles. A landscape designer focuses on site analysis, concept development, planting design, hardscape layouts, and the integration of architecture with outdoor space. Some designers work inside a full service landscape design firm that also builds and maintains projects. Others hand off drawings to local landscape contractors who perform the installation.

A landscaper, in common use, means the crew that performs landscape installation, landscape construction, and landscape maintenance services. They handle lawn mowing and edging, mulching and edging services, seasonal yard clean up, irrigation installation services, and tree and shrub care. Many excellent landscape contractors have in-house designers. Many independent designers partner with the best landscaping services for build and maintenance.

When to hire a landscape designer

New home, blank lot, or a total landscape renovation. Grading, drainage solutions, planting structure, and hardscape installation services need to be sequenced and engineered from day one. You want outdoor living spaces that feel cohesive. Patio design tied to a pergola installation, fire pit design services, and an outdoor kitchen design services package all work best as part of a single plan. Water issues or complex terrain. Retaining wall design, yard drainage, french drain layout, and surface drainage details require a plan, not guesswork. Limited time for upkeep. If you need low maintenance plants for your region, drought resistant landscaping, or xeriscaping services, a designer will curate plant palettes, irrigation strategies, and mulch choices to keep care realistic. Commercial or shared properties. Office park landscaping, HOA landscaping services, hotel and resort landscape design, and school grounds maintenance have layered needs, from codes to foot traffic patterns, and benefit from an experienced plan.

If your goals are modest, like improving flower bed landscaping along a walkway or adding seasonal planting services, a strong local landscaper can carry the ball without a full design engagement. The line is not rigid. Many designers offer one time landscape consultation meetings where you get site advice, rough sketches, and a punch list you can implement over time.

What landscape designers actually do

A good designer listens first. They ask how you move through the site, who uses the yard, and which rooms look out onto which views. They look at sun paths, prevailing wind, soil texture, and drainage. From there, the work

divides into concept and detail.

Concept sketches show use zones and circulation. You will see where the patio could live for morning sun, how a garden path ties the gate to the garage, and where a shade structure might anchor an outdoor room. For small properties, landscape design for small yards hinges on layering vertical elements and using curved retaining walls or seating walls to create intimacy without clutter. For larger suburban lots, designers often balance front yard landscaping for curb appeal with backyard landscaping for private life.

Detail drawings translate ideas into buildable plans. Here is where patio and paver installation patterns get specified, retaining walls step down grades with proper geogrid reinforcement, and plant species are sized and spaced for maturity, not just the day they go in. Drainage installation and irrigation installation get coordinated so trenches are dug once and utilities do not compete. Outdoor lighting plans lay out low voltage lighting that respects night skies while making steps safer.

If you are leaning toward artificial turf installation for a dog run or play area, your designer can explain base preparation, edge restraint, and how to blend synthetic grass with adjacent plant beds. If you prefer native plant landscaping and eco-friendly landscaping solutions, the plan might pair permeable pavers in the driveway with bioswales, drip irrigation, and a plant list heavy on regional perennials and ornamental grasses.

On sites with pools, poolside landscaping ideas matter more than most people realize. Water reflects sun, which roasts nearby plants. Chlorine can stress foliage that tolerates rainwater just fine. A designer will adjust plant selection, plan pool deck installation, and set pool hardscaping joints for comfortable barefoot walking. If you love a pool pergola or louvered pergola for shade, structural footings need to consider utilities and pool setbacks.

What it costs, and where the money goes

Construction costs hinge on site prep, access, material choices, and local labor rates. A paver patio can range widely per square foot depending on the base thickness, edge restraints, and the paver chosen, from concrete interlocking pavers to natural stone. Retaining wall installation costs are driven by height, curves, soil conditions, and whether the wall is a segmental wall or poured concrete. Irrigation system installation and smart irrigation controls add upfront cost but reduce water waste and long-term plant stress. Outdoor kitchen design services require gas, electric, and ventilation planning, which increases both design time and trades coordination.

How long it takes

Design can take two to eight weeks depending on scope, decision speed, and whether surveys or engineering are required. Building can stretch from a long weekend for a small walkway to several months for a complex landscape transformation with patios, walls, lighting, irrigation, and planting. Weather matters. In a freeze-thaw climate, hardscape construction often pauses in winter while planting windows sit in spring and fall for best transplant success.

If you are trying to prepare yard for summer, start the design in late winter. That allows permitting and ordering materials before crews get booked. For seasonal landscaping services like seasonal planting services and seasonal landscaping ideas, you will work on a shorter cycle, refreshing beds for spring bloom, summer durability, and fall color.

What happens during installation

Good crews protect existing structures, set up access paths, and stage materials in a way that limits lawn damage. Demolition comes first. Old concrete, rotted timbers, or compacted subsoil needs to go. Grading follows. A tiny change in slope makes a patio drain correctly, keeps water off thresholds, and allows soil to accept rainfall rather than shed it.

Irrigation needs a check before crews leave. Spray heads should not hit walls, drip lines should deliver water at plant roots, and smart irrigation controllers should be set to local weather patterns. An outdoor lighting walkthrough makes sure fixtures are aimed and dimmed to avoid glare.

Maintenance is part of the design

Sustainable landscapes bake maintenance into the plan. A lawn that needs weekly mowing and heavy fertilization demands a different watering budget than a xeriscape that thrives with drip irrigation. If you want to design a low maintenance backyard, you focus on structural plantings that look good year-round, ground covers that block weeds, and hardscape joints that do not invite grass to colonize.

Plant selection and planting design

A strong plant palette does more than look good in May. It provides structure in winter, nectar in early spring, shade in summer, and color in autumn. Flower bed landscaping benefits from layers: canopy or ornamental trees, medium shrubs, perennials, and groundcovers. In a small front yard, the best plants for front yard landscaping depend on orientation and scale. On a south facing site, drought tolerant perennials paired with native grasses and a small tree for dappled shade can carry from July heat into October color.

Hardscape choices, trade-offs, and details

Hardscape is the backbone. Paver patio systems handle freeze-thaw cycles well and allow access for future repairs. Stone patios deliver a timeless <https://zanderloal930.fotosdefrases.com/pollinator-friendly-garden-design-with-native-plants> look but demand careful grading and a thicker base. Concrete patios are cost effective for large surfaces but need control joints and thoughtful finish choices so they are not slippery when wet.

Walkway installation benefits from gentle curves that read as intentional, not meandering without purpose. Pathway design should consider clearances for two people walking side by side and landings at thresholds. For driveway installation, permeable pavers help manage stormwater on-site and reduce runoff into streets. Driveway landscaping ideas range from narrow planting strips with ornamental trees to low walls that lift plantings above road salt.

Retaining walls need respect. Segmental walls are engineered systems. Stack height, batter, base width, drainage stone, and geogrid spacing all matter. Natural stone walls look beautiful, yet without proper base and drainage, they can bulge. Curved retaining walls soften the look and reduce point loads, but curves complicate block cutting and time on-site. If you hear someone promise a six-foot wall without engineering, get another bid.

Fire features change how you use space. A built in fire pit with seating walls creates a defined gathering area. Wood burning pits require spark management and clearances. Gas fire bowls add convenience and shoulder-season use. Consider wind patterns and neighbors before you set locations.

Shade structures shape microclimates. A wooden pergola throws dappled shade and frames vines. An aluminum pergola with louvers lets you dial in sun and rain protection. If you want a pavilion with a solid roof for an outdoor kitchen, height and proportion relative to the house matter. Posts need footings that do not interfere with utilities, and rooflines need to avoid blocking views from inside.

Water features change sound and air. A pondless waterfall adds movement and white noise without open water. A simple garden fountain can transform a small courtyard. Pumps need access and electrical supply, and basins need proper volume to avoid frequent refills.

Timing your project for the seasons

People often ask, is it better to do landscaping in fall or spring. Planting succeeds in both windows. Spring offers cool soil warming into summer, giving roots time to establish. Fall gives plants warm soil and cool air, with less stress and a strong start the following spring. Install hardscapes almost any time ground is workable, but avoid pouring concrete in deep cold.

Commercial and civic environments

Commercial landscaping has different pressures than a backyard. Entrances must be visible, ADA routes kept clear, and plantings resilient to salt and foot traffic. Office park landscaping and corporate campus landscape design benefit from clear sightlines and durable plant palettes. Retail property landscaping should guide visitors to entries and keep signage visible at driver eye level. Hotel and resort landscape design adds the choreography of arrival, wayfinding to amenities, and year-round display in varied climates. Municipal projects juggle budgets, long procurement cycles, and equity in public space. A commercial landscape design company will understand maintenance contracts, insurance requirements, and municipal codes.

Sustainability that is not just a label

Eco-friendly landscaping solutions are not a single product. They are a set of choices. Use drought resistant landscaping and xeriscaping services where water is scarce. Capture roof runoff in rain gardens or direct it to lawn basins where it can soak in. Choose native plant landscaping for habitat and resilience, then pair those natives with a smart irrigation system that adjusts to weather.

Permeable pavers in a paver driveway or garden path allow infiltration. Mulch reduces evaporation, stabilizes soil temperature, and feeds soil as it breaks down. Outdoor lighting can be efficient and dark-sky friendly with shielded fixtures and warm color temperatures. Sustainable landscape design services also include selecting low VOC adhesives for masonry and avoiding overuse of fertilizers and herbicides that harm waterways.

Small spaces, big impact

Urban lots and narrow side yards demand precision. Landscape ideas for small yards start with removing what does not serve. If the grass is a struggle, switch to a stone patio with a grid of groundcovers to soften joints. Use vertical elements like trellises, arbors, and a slim pergola to gain privacy without building a wall. Keep furniture scaled to the space, and plan for storage so cushions and tools do not clutter.

Modern landscape ideas for small spaces often lean on a limited palette. Three materials, three core plants, and one accent color can look composed rather than busy. Lighting matters even more on small sites. A few path lights, a sconce by the back door, and a gentle uplight on a feature plant create depth.

Safety, storms, and what you cannot plan for

Trees fail. Storms shove water where it does not belong. A good maintenance relationship includes emergency tree removal and storm damage yard restoration. After a major event, the first priority is making the site safe,

then stabilizing slopes or exposed soil. Your designer can work with the maintenance team to adjust the original plan if a key shade tree is gone. Sometimes the best response to a storm is a new layout that suits the changed microclimate.

How to come up with a landscape plan on your own, then decide if you need help

Walk your property at three times of day. Note hot spots at noon, shade pockets in late afternoon, and what you can see from your main rooms. Draw a rough plan by hand. Mark doors, windows, hose spigots, and any slopes you notice. Write down what you want to do outside in each season. Maybe you grill in winter, garden in spring, gather for fire in fall. Use that list to prioritize.

Set a budget range that feels responsible. Ask two local landscape contractors for a landscaping cost estimate on a simple scope, like a patio and path, to get a feel for regional pricing. If the numbers surprise you, adjust scope or plan to phase. If you feel overwhelmed by the choices or the site has technical challenges, bring in a designer. They will turn that rough sketch into a buildable sequence and show you where to invest and where to save.

Final thoughts from the field

If you are searching for a local landscape designer or the best landscaper in your town, spend time with their work. Walk a project if you can. Feel the scale of a patio underfoot, the shade of a pergola at midday, the texture of a path at your ankles. Ask the homeowner how the space holds up after a few years. Landscapes should age well. Plants should grow into their frames, not out of bounds. Walls should stay level, patios should drain, and lighting should be easy to service.

Whether you build everything at once or in stages, a thoughtful design lets you stop at any point and still have a complete, functional outdoor space. That is the real value of hiring a landscape designer near you. They help you make the right moves, in the right order, so your property looks intentional from the first small step to the final flourish.

Proposal review

Read the proposal beside the project brief. Check which parts of the landscape are included and which choices still need agreement. Ask how changes to one area affect adjacent surfaces, planting or access. Save each clarification with the version of the proposal it changes so the next conversation uses the current scope.