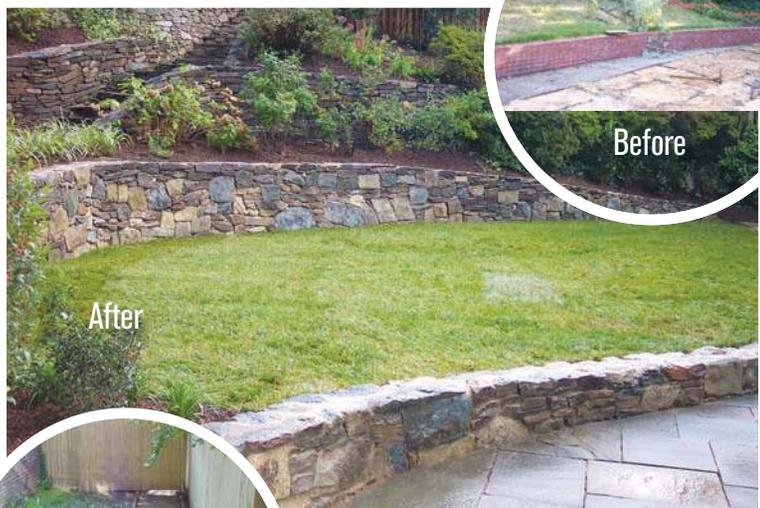




These before and after pictures show how good landscaping can add value to your home



# Recession-Proof Landscaping

Keeping Value above Cost in any Economy

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY DEREK THOMAS

*Washington's real estate is feeling the impact of the housing market slowdown. Properties are staying on the market longer, and it is difficult to ignore the negative housing reports that have been in the media on a daily basis. Yet Capitol Hill is one of Washington's most desired neighborhoods, and a well-priced home can still fetch multiple offers when the homeowners and agents take the time to ensure every aspect of the home is in tip-top shape.*

Renovating your landscape even in today's slower housing market may be one of the best investments you can make in your home for your enjoyment and, if listing, to aid in selling your home. Landscaping now will add value to your home, and if professionally done, you will gain a significant return on your investment. For example, if you have an old brick patio that has poor drainage, or worse, is crumbling under your feet, the money you invest in its renovation will add immediate value to your home. Those overgrown shrubs that you are thinking can wait another year for pruning are bringing down your property's value. If you happen to be in the market to sell, nothing screams neglect louder than bushes that look like they were borrowed from an old "Addams Family" set. Scary!

Once you are ready to have your garden landscaped, consider the following.

## Budget

Conventional wisdom says that you should expect to spend 5 percent to 15 percent of your home's value on landscaping; however, there are ways to reduce costs if you are willing to do some good old-fashioned research.

If working with a landscape professional, decide how much you are willing to spend before your consultation. Don't be afraid to say what your budget is; letting the professional know what you can afford to spend will help you both have a good experience.

A defined budget will allow the landscaper to make intelligent choices when choosing plants and supplies – a one-gallon plant may cost \$15 installed, whereas a five-gallon plant of the same variety may be \$100. The good thing about plants is that with proper care, the \$15

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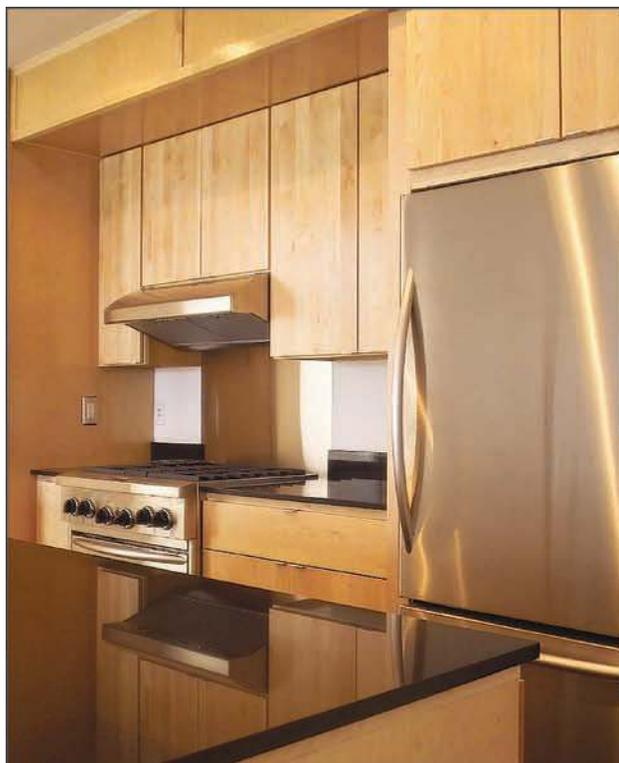
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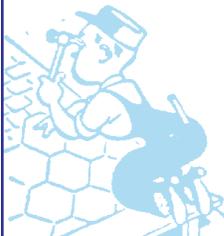


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plant will grow to fill the space of the \$100 plant.

It's also helpful to understand landscapers' rates. Most landscapers charge between \$50 and \$75 per hour for regular maintenance. And when purchasing a one-time renovation or a new install, expect to pay a 50 percent to 100 percent markup per installed plant. This will make a \$4 plant cost \$6-\$8 at install time.

### Current Inventory

Take an inventory of the plants you currently have. The tree that you are thinking of removing and replacing may bring you happiness if properly pruned. Preserving existing plants and trees can help you reduce your bottom line.

Know your yard. If you like shade-loving plants but your garden faces south with no mature shade trees, you should probably choose to plant sun-loving plants. For growing tips check the US Forest Service website or consult a landscape professional.

### Avoid Costly Mistakes

Think about what you want for your outdoor space. If you love water features yet hate the summer heat, perhaps your water feature could be an indoor fountain that would give you year-round enjoyment. Ask yourself what your expectations are for your garden, and make a checklist of things you can do yourself. This will help you choose plants and features that are important to you while adding appeal to your outdoor space.

Don't over-landscape. This is perhaps the most important reason for hiring a professional landscape company. How many times have you seen neighbors take on a landscape project by themselves only to be shocked at the outcome? Or worse, seen neighbors hire an obviously unskilled and probably uninsured person to do the landscaping only to see the space return to wasteland in a hurry.

Plants and trees need expert care and installation. The company you hire should have

references and be established in the community. Or the results will be amateur at best.

### Hire a Landscape Consultant

Having a full landscape design done can cost thousands of dollars. Consider hiring a landscaper who is willing to consult with you, look over your design ideas and do a checklist of things that need to be done. One who can explain the different plants that can be used for your yard and provide you with a list of plants suited to your garden will only cost a couple of hundred of dollars yet will save you thousands in improperly purchased and poorly placed plants.

### Maintenance

When installing your gardens, think about and budget for ongoing maintenance. Whether you do the work yourself or hire a company to do your maintenance, you will be protecting your investment by properly maintaining it.

### Be Water Smart

Planting drought-tolerant plants will save you loads in the water bill department. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that outdoor water use constitutes around 20 percent of the home's total water bill. There are many plants available that will survive well between periods of normal rainfall. Please note that even drought-tolerant plants will need water to survive extended droughts like the one we experienced this past spring.

These ideas will help you have the garden you desire while adding value to your home. If tackling the landscape yourself, check out the universities in Washington, DC, and take a class or two. Or hire a professional to do the landscape, then sit back, pour an iced tea and enjoy the process.

*Derek Thomas, a certified professional horticulturist, is principal landscape designer of Thomas Landscapes and Maintenance. He can be reached at 301-642-5182 or [www.thomaslandscapes.com](http://www.thomaslandscapes.com).* ■

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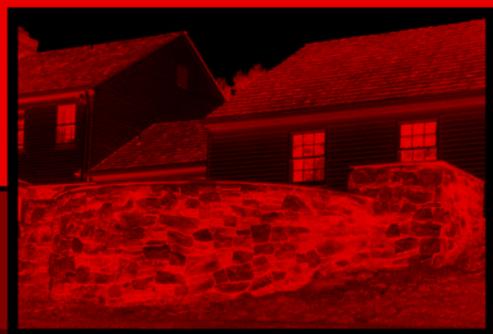


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