

Set Priorities

Use experts for technical things like tree removal, grading, retaining walls and paving stones.

Getting these items done by someone else eliminates the learning curve, increases the safety factor and allows you to do the fun parts on your valuable time off. These people have the right equipment and expertise to make the job go so much faster.

Consider access issues.

Don't build things that will limit accessibility for the next part of the project, as this will significantly increase future costs.

In new neighbourhoods, you can often bring in bulky materials before fences or other houses are built.

Always make the big mess first! Items such as grading, retaining walls, and pilings for posts are the things that require space and equipment. The rest of the work fits into these important structural hardscaping components. Digging large tree holes will generate incredibly big piles of low quality soil so this is best done by equipment at the grading phase whenever possible.

Think of comfort. If you are staging the project, make an area of your yard that is a sanctuary from the mess - that might be a small deck for a couple of chairs or an area of grass for the kids and pets.



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It's free!

The fines are high and it could save your life...

If the budget is getting too stretched, consider staging the items in creative ways that won't sacrifice your desired outcome.

Examples include... making a pea gravel fire pit patio instead of using pavers;

putting in the gravel base for the patio or walks and then adding the pavers another year;

or digging out the planting areas and putting good soil in but putting in the trees and shrubs another year.

You can also buy smaller plants...they will eventually get to be the same size.

Always invest in excellent base preparation

Do It Well, Do It Once!

Dry wells

are deep pits filled with crushed stone where water can drain when it has nowhere else to go.

Grading, Drainage and Slopes

Rent a site level or hire someone to mark the elevations of the proposed construction. This will tell you how many steps you need, how high the walls should be, where you need to dig out the existing ground and where you need to fill in so that you have positive drainage.

Your designer can create a grading plan for you (this will add an hour or so to the design fee).

Regrade the site.

Correct the drainage problems so that water is not sitting stagnant. Add berms (rolling hills), and swales (gentle drainage courses).

Try to put excavated material somewhere else in the yard to avoid haulage and dumping fees.

Soil should slope a minimum of 2%

(that is approximately a 2 inch drop over an 8 foot span) away from the house. Some municipalities will require even more

slope than this so it pays to check.

Patios should not slope much more than 2% so chairs don't feel like they are tipping over! Sometimes a low wall upside or downside of the patio will be required to achieve a comfortable patio.

Rock In and Rock On

“Plant” large boulders at this stage. If you bury them by one quarter to one third, they will look much more natural.

Avoid the “ready to tip over”, the “ready to roll away” and the “tombstone” looks.

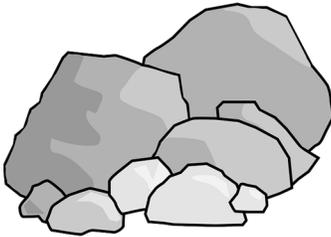
Examine the angles and bedding in the rocks as they may look better all aiming the same direction.

Place boulders in groups of 3 or 5 in a

triangular arrangement on the ground, and also arrange them from the front view like a family portrait with the tall ones at the back.

Try one laying down, a sitting one and a standing one for a visually interesting grouping.

Use a variety of rocks for dry river beds. Large boulders in the crook of the streams elbow looks more natural.



Tip:

A circle or group of boulders under a treed area is a magnet for kids. When combined with a bridge, a trail and a little shelter or hut, it can have more scope for imagination than a purchased play structure!



Did you know...

That artificial turf requires a similar road crush base preparation to that of paving stones? That is why it is costly to put in!

Road Crush Is Your Friend...

Install road crush bases for walks, walls and patios. Bring in the material using full truckloads whenever possible as this reduces your delivery and handling charges.

But never dump this material directly in a big heap into the excavated hole as you will not achieve enough compaction

and the pavers will sink in a bad way over time.

The road crush will be packed in 3 inch to 4 inch layers (called lifts) using water and a vibrating plate compactor/tamper. The final depth of this layered packing will often be 8 to 12 inches or more under a driveway. Soil cement is good for heavy duty applications.

Adequate compaction can be self tested for each layer by stomping with the edge of the heel of your booted foot - you should barely be able to see a mark.

Note that too much water or using material with a high clay content will result in a squishy base and a wave will develop in front of the compactor as you run it. Let it dry out.

A sand or “fines” levelling layer is usually less than 2” deep – just enough to be moveable with the screed board but not so deep that it can later wash away or become an ant farm.

Polymeric sand is often swept into the cracks of the pavers as a final step and acts somewhat like grout once it gets wet.

Landscape Fabric and Mulches

Some people don't mulch at all and simply scratch up the soil surface by regularly using a Dutch hoe or a cultivator tool.

This maintains a surface that is uninviting to weed seed germination.

Using mulch reduces (not eliminates) weed growth, keeps the roots cool and retains moisture. It is not used in wet locations.

It is very visible for the first couple of years, but disappears from view as the plants fill in.

Installing large planting areas will mean that you will need to buy mulch in bulk, so it will be most economical to order it all at once.

There are companies who can actually spray it onto the beds from a big truck.

However, you may choose to cover small areas as you go through the plan to give you a sense of completion!

Fabric is not required under bark, but it is sometimes recommended.

If you like to putter in the garden (move plants around, put bulbs in, etc.), your best mulch option will be a shredded or composted material **without** fabric.

Mulching is quite possible to do at a later

stage; however, it does become more challenging to install as the plants get bigger.

From a maintenance point of view, bark will need occasional top-dressing as it decomposes over time. It is a great natural option that reduces the initial weed potential.

Stone mulch that is on fabric needs to be vacuumed or blown clean to reduce the accumulation of debris (this is where weeds take root!).

Edgings

Some people don't use edgings at all and simply keep the plant beds dug out by hand with a square spade or a motorized edger tool creating a trench.

You can fill the trench with bark mulch for an easy casual look. The grass does not like spreading into the mulch except during extended rainy periods.

Well-executed edgings can really enhance the overall look of your project and is a good investment.

The idea is to reduce the trimming required while maintaining the initial crisp shapes of your design.

You can dig a test hole in your lawn where you will see how far down the grass roots are inhabiting the soil horizon. An edging that is shallower than these roots will logically be ineffective.

The black plastic edging is great for curves and needs to be the deepest and strongest kind that you can find. Be sure to install the stakes that go with them so the product stays in the ground properly during winter frost heaving. Then the mower won't chew it up.

There are also aluminum and rubber types that work for curves.

Precast concrete (pavers in a soldier course side by side, or small curb shapes), poured in place concrete, and wooden timbers are good choices

as long as they are not sticking up higher than the lawn making it difficult for you to trim it and achieve a tidy appearance.

If you are trying to contain those nefarious weeds along the fence line or those awesomely vigorous plants such as raspberries, goutweed or lily of the valley, consider using a 2 foot deep coreplast strip (cut up a 4 by 8 sheet from Windsor Plywood or a hardware store), a plank of wood, or even sheet metal (with a rolled edge so it's not sharp).

Large Tree Installation

Use large size trees in key areas for privacy, blocking views, and providing shade.

Large leafy trees are called caliper trees and are sold by the diameter of the trunk at your ankle height (just above where the trunk widens into roots) rather than by their height.

Evergreens are sold by height.

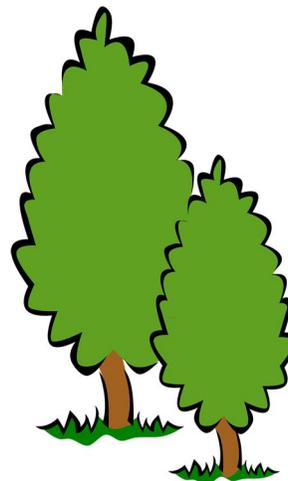
Consider using a tree spade to move large trees into areas that have good access. The tree nursery staff will tell you what times of year this can be done.

Always stake large trees according to Landscape Alberta industry standards as trees can

tip over in the wind and it is very difficult to straighten them.

Alert!

Remember to remove the guy wires in a year or two. If the wire grows into the trunk, the tree will choke and becomes stunted on the top and will later break off at that location.



Selecting Materials

Choose materials by going to the supplier's yards and bringing home charts and samples. Always see what goes best with your existing house cladding. Choosing complementary colours and/or blended colours sometimes works better than trying to match the house colour exactly.

Order the materials well in advance of when you need them.

Try to order all paver and wall areas at one time to avoid changes in colour batches.

Even though your landscape contractor can supply the plants, take the time yourself

to select and tag large plants in the nursery or garden centre because it is very difficult to change out a large tree after it is in place.

Availability can decline as summer progresses, so you may want to put a "hold" on your perennials and shrubs too.

We are here for YOU!

We know there is a lot to consider when installing your project.

This guide is an effort to make it a little easier... but of course it is not comprehensive!

It is a synthesis of our opinions based on years of installing and maintaining landscapes.

Please always use your own best judgement and ask lots of questions.

And remember that we are only an email message away!

Did you know that your designer will also stop by during construction if you need an extra set of eyes or another opinion? Our regular rates will apply.

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Now that you have a plan, take it shopping with you and let those landscapers and retailers help you to refine the decisions...it's going to be so much easier now!