

# Landscape Planning

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*What Every Homeowner Should Know  
Before Landscaping Their Property.*

*cedar*gate  
LANDSCAPING

*All landscaping photos in this guide are actual Cedargate Landscaping projects.  
We encourage you to study the detail and craftsmanship of our work.*

*For more examples, visit our online gallery at [www.cedargatelandscaping.com](http://www.cedargatelandscaping.com)*

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## INTRODUCTION

A professional landscaping project typically requires a significant investment, so you want to be sure you avoid pitfalls and clearly understand how to get the result you desire. When carried out with professionalism, creativity and quality craftsmanship, landscaping can be a tremendous source of enjoyment, pleasure and pride. On the other hand, making poor landscaping choices can lead to extreme frustration and dissatisfaction for a long period of time.



Cedargate Landscaping has prepared this guide to assist you in planning a landscaping project. It was specifically written for the upscale homeowner who wants to transform a beautiful vision into a reality.

This guide is composed of four topic areas that will significantly impact the result of a landscaping project:

- 1] What to Consider Before Landscaping Your Property
- 2] The Five Elements of Landscape Design
- 3] Materials and Plants
- 4] How To Choose a Landscape Contractor

## WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE LANDSCAPING YOUR PROPERTY

*Seven critical factors that impact the transformation of your property*

### 1] CHILDREN

Children love to play outdoors and their needs and safety must be taken into account. Depending on the age of children,



parents may choose to incorporate a grassy play area; however, the plant material chosen should be of a hardy nature to withstand constant wear and tear.

As children play, they'll inevitably fall. The use of large rocks in garden beds can pose a serious hazard, especially as plants grow and cover the rocks beneath - creating a hidden danger.

When considering a water feature, ponds should be avoided until the smallest child is at least six years old. Water features often attract small children and pose a drowning hazard.

#### CEDARGATE NUGGET:

*Child safe play areas can be incorporated in a design to maximize the use of a property for all family members.*

*Pond-less waterfalls are a safer water feature alternative for small children.*

## 2] PETS

Homeowners often wonder how to take their pets into consideration as part of the landscaping design. An experienced landscape designer can create unique solutions such as formal or informal dog runs. These “backyard trails” can be discreetly built to make clean up easier while preserving the beauty of the overall landscape design.



For pet safety, plant material must also be carefully selected as some pose a health hazard to animals if ingested.

## 3] PRIVACY

In many neighbourhoods, particularly new developments, backyard privacy is a major concern. Strategically placed large trees - particularly evergreen trees with year round foliage - can help to screen areas where privacy is desired. Patience must often be exercised - it can take years before a tree grows to the size where it provides adequate privacy.

A good alternative is creating garden beds around a patio area. By bringing plants closer to a patio, plants don't have to be as large and will provide more immediate privacy. This also creates more of a cozy atmosphere when entertaining.

### CEDARGATE NUGGET:

*Because larger trees tend to absorb much of the planting budget, consideration should be given to how long you'll be living in this home.*

## 4] OUTDOOR LIVING

How do you envision yourself using your property? Do you entertain regularly? If so, the size or shape of a patio would be a key consideration.

Do you see yourself sitting in your front yard? If you have children, would it make sense to have an area to sit and watch them as they play?

Your landscape design should be based on how you use your home and your preferred lifestyle.



### CEDARGATE NUGGET:

*If you are new in a home, it may make sense to see how you use the property before you make an investment in landscaping.*

## 5] POOLS

One of the more common mistakes made by homeowners is installing the pool before a design is decided on for the whole backyard. A reputable landscape design contractor and pool company should work together to come up with a plan that makes sense for the given space.

An experienced contractor understands how to incorporate a pool in the overall design, while keeping the backyard both functional and esthetically pleasing. Often there is limited space, and a well developed plan can

help eliminate mistakes and avoid regret later on. This is particularly true of newer backyards that are smaller in size and where the proper use of plant material is critical in softening the dominating presence of a pool.

Drainage is another reason for preparing a landscape plan before a pool is installed. This is discussed below.



### CEDARGATE NUGGET:

*If you're thinking of a pool, complete a full landscape design before the pool is installed. Understanding how all the space will be used is critical to the enjoyment of your pool and back yard space.*



## 6] ELEVATION, DRAINAGE AND GRADING

Drainage problems must be avoided for both the sake of homeowners and their neighbours. Drainage problems can cause property damage and leave homeowners liable for repairs.

Elevation can often pose challenges in making a design both functional and esthetically pleasing. An experienced landscape contractor with expertise in grading is critical - particularly if your

property has noticeable elevation changes.

Retaining walls are often necessary to ensure proper drainage. Poor grading can lead to pooling of water - making parts of the property unusable. Worse, if the water is misdirected towards the home, it can lead to flooded basements and erosion around the perimeter of the home.

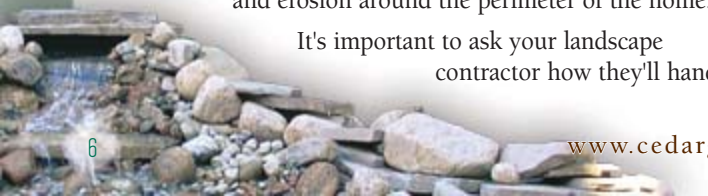
It's important to ask your landscape contractor how they'll handle this issue.

### CEDARGATE NUGGET:

*If you have problems with pooling water on your property, make sure to tell your landscape contractor during the planning phase.*

### CEDARGATE NUGGET:

*The creative use of River Rock can turn a water problem into something esthetically pleasing.*



## 7] LENGTH OF STAY AND BUDGETING

The length of stay in a home should determine the amount to invest in landscaping. If you plan to stay in your home indefinitely, an investment in landscaping should be balanced between the look and usability you desire for the property and the return you will realize if and when you sell your home.

If your stay in a home is short, try to add as much colour as possible without making a significant investment. Landscaping has one of the highest rates of return for any home renovation. First impressions are lasting; impressions about a home begin with the “curb appeal”. People often decide whether they like a house based on the walk from the road to the front door.

### CEDARGATE NUGGET:

*If you have a pre-determined budget, don't hesitate to share it with your landscape contractor. Share your budget and ideas with 3 reputable contractors and ask to see what they can do. You may be amazed at the possibilities that emerge.*

## THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN

There are five key elements that can be incorporated in every landscape project. Understanding the options for each and how they harmoniously interact is the key to transforming a beautiful design into a sustainable reality.

The possibilities of landscape design are endless and choices can be overwhelming. The difference between good and bad landscape design can make thousands of dollars of difference to the property's value, and may significantly impact your enjoyment of the property.

An experienced landscape designer will take the time to understand your needs and desires, and balance your design between function, esthetics and cost.

The five elements that can be incorporated into every landscape design are:

### 1] HARDSCAPING

Hardscaping refers to the elements that provide structure such as the materials used for patios, walkways and driveways. These building block elements are often considered first in the design process and will determine the style of landscape.

### 2] SOFTSCAPING

Softscaping refers to the plant materials that are integrated into the landscape's architecture. Plants should be chosen based on their structural and textural qualities. There are many considerations that should go into plant selection. A harmonious balance of plant material will make a big difference in the uniqueness and usability of the outcome.



### 3] WOOD STRUCTURES

The use of gazebos, pergolas and arbours can provide a dramatic feature to a landscape design. Wood structures also provide privacy and a year-round point of interest.

### 4] WATER FEATURES

Another dramatic element of design is the use of water in a garden area. Much can be said about the tranquility that a water feature provides. Cascading water can also mask undesirable noises such as vehicle traffic and the whirring of air-conditioning units in the summer. Water features can range from a simple wall mounted fountain to a large pond with a waterfall and fish.



### 5] LIGHTING

Often an overlooked element, lighting brings the landscape alive at night. The use of up-lighting in combination with accent lighting can help make the landscaped area as interesting by night as it is by day. Well thought out lighting is particularly important for people who like to entertain outdoors.

#### CEDARGATE NUGGET:

*Garden lighting helps draw insects away from the seating area.*

#### CEDARGATE NUGGET:

*Make sure "brickstop" is used along the perimeter of tumbled stone. Brickstop comes in the form of plastic or aluminum eight foot pieces that are spiked into the ground and keep the edges of patios, walkways and driveways in place.*

## MATERIALS AND FEATURES

### HARDSCAPING MATERIALS



**TUMBLLED  
STONE:  
PORCHES,  
PATIOS,  
WALKWAYS AND  
DRIVEWAYS**

This type of interlock is very popular. Tumbled stone is

interlock that is put through a tumbler machine which roughs up the edges of the stone and gives the stone an Old European look. The stone comes in different colours and sizes and can be sealed to produce a more shiny look.

Tumbled stone offers a great deal of flexibility - it





can be used to cover existing porches, for patios, walkways, and driveways, and to accent driveways.

Over the years, natural settling can occur and an advantage of tumbled stone is it typically requires only minor repair in comparison to other types of materials. Another benefit is in the event of an oil leak on the driveway; the stone can simply be pulled up and flipped over since most tumbled stone is reversible.

The main complaint with interlock is the growth of weeds and erosion of sand between the cracks. In recent years, polymeric sand has been used to help control weeds and grasses growing in the cracks. The sand contains a polymer mix that hardens like concrete when it dries. It is necessary to top up the sand annually by sweeping it into the cracks. However, applying polymeric sand should take no more than 30 minutes with a material cost of approximately \$20.

#### **PATTERNED OR AGGREGATE CONCRETE: PORCHES, PATIOS AND WALKWAYS**

Patterned or aggregate concrete comes in many colours and textures and offers an option for people who prefer poured concrete. Patterned concrete has a smooth textured finish while aggregate has more of a rough finish. Many people prefer this type of application for its consistent appearance. The down side with any type of concrete is that if there is settling, it is not an easy repair and normally involves the removal of the concrete. If there is settling, cracking can be a problem.

Some smooth finishes can be dangerously slippery in snowy or wet conditions. Salt should not be used because it will damage the seal required to protect this product. Calcium can be used to help prevent ice build up.

#### **FLAGSTONE: PATIOS AND WALKWAYS**

Flagstone is a natural stone that can provide great beauty to a landscape. Flagstone can be installed as a loose walkway or as a patio set in limestone screening or sand. It can also be set on a concrete base with the use of mortar. This is a more stable and costly application. When using flagstone it is very important that the stone is as flat as possible. Since flagstone is a natural product



there are imperfections, which can cause instability. The rocking effect on lawn chairs and tables can be an irritant.

Loose flagstone should be installed in infrequently used areas. Loose flagstone is normally less stable and

snow clearing can be difficult. Its uneven surface is better suited for heavy wooden outdoor furniture or stone benches.

Cost is a major consideration with mortared flagstone because the stone itself is expensive and the installation is very labour intensive. Mortared flagstone can cost up to three times more than tumbled stone. If settling does occur, repairs are more time consuming but it may be repaired to its original condition.



## DEALING WITH ELEVATION ISSUES

Wooden decks are a very good option when there are elevation issues. Some homes have walkouts that are 10 feet above the ground. Wood can be used to create various levels of patios, and is cost effective when dealing with elevation.



The main drawback of wood is the maintenance. It has to be sealed or stained to preserve its integrity. Cedar does not require sealing but its initial cost is considerable in relation to regular pressure treated wood.

## PLANT MATERIAL

Plant material is an integral element of any design, however there are many things to take into consideration.



## PRIVACY

As mentioned earlier, privacy is a key factor. A well thought out plant list can blur or conceal a boundary line, or hide an unappealing structure such as a shed.

## MAINTENANCE

By correctly measuring the initial spacing and overall height and size of plant material, you can avoid overcrowding that will require removing plant material in as little as two years after planting.

It is normal to thin out overgrowth after approximately seven years. This is part of the maintenance of the gardens. The amount of time a person wants to spend in the garden is very important. Certain plants are more conducive to a low maintenance garden. The use of mulches and landscape fabric can also be effective in achieving low maintenance.



## SUN, SHADE AND SOIL TYPE

When choosing plant material, sun and shade requirements must be understood. Some plants have a very limited tolerance of sun or shade while others are more tolerant. Soil type is also a consideration when choosing plant material.



## WINTER GARDENS

A properly designed landscape should look appealing during all seasons. Winter strips a garden to a few fundamentals. With the use of pergolas, arbour, fixtures, iron and water features, new focal points are established. The use of grasses, evergreens, and shrubs with coloured bark or berries, help to add winter colour.



## FLOWERING TREES AND SHRUBS

The use of colour and texture is a key ingredient in the creation of a landscape paradise. From the beauty of the Magnolia flower to the contorted structure of the Corkscrew Hazel, plants create a wide variety of themes within a landscape. The choice of the plant material will set the theme for the overall landscape design.



When considering the various plant options, it is important to understand how the property will be used. Some roses have very sharp thorns and shrubs such as a barberry or a bayonet yucca can pose a danger to those who are unsuspecting. In addition, some plants may be harmful when ingested by small animals or children.

The presence of rabbits in an area can be an obstacle in choosing a good landscape design. Rabbits like to eat Euonymus, grasses and burning bushes among other things. On the other hand, there are some plants that encourage positive wildlife interaction such as butterfly bushes that attract colourful butterflies.

## EROSION CONTROL

Plants can assist in controlling soil erosion by minimizing the effect of rain on the soil. Leaves can help prevent direct contact with soil during a driving rain. The root system of trees and ground covers also help to keep the soil in place. When plants and retaining walls are used together, the problem of slopes and erosion can be managed.

By being selective with the plant material, plant growth will have a positive impact on the overall appearance of the landscaping.



## HOW TO CHOOSE A LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR

### *Avoiding the pitfalls of inexperience and poor workmanship*

At first glance it may appear that all landscaping companies are the same because, in general terms, they offer the same services. However, the landscape profession, like any other, has its good and bad players. The best landscaping companies have extensive expertise in design and materials selection and possess a high level of craftsmanship and creativity. In addition, they conduct themselves with integrity, and an unwavering commitment to customer service and to living up to their warranty policies.

Unfortunately, it's not uncommon to hear of problems with landscaping contractors, frustrating experiences and dissatisfied clients. To avoid disappointment, homeowners should conduct thorough due diligence on prospective landscape contractors. This will ensure the landscape contractor has the relevant experience, and established policies and procedures to provide precisely what the client wants and to complete the job on time and on budget - without any problems. You should not expect any less given the significant investment being made.

To help protect yourself from a sub-standard landscaping experience, carefully consider the following points:

#### **CEDARGATE NUGGET:**

*Use a checklist to keep track of and compare landscape contractors. You can download a free pre-formatted checklist from the "tips" section of our website.*

### **YEARS OF EXPERIENCE MAKES A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE**

Find out how long a contractor has been in business. Ask about the size of the company. Some have their own staff to assure quality work, while others rely on sub-contractors. Experience level is a critically important consideration.

### **ASK FOR REFERENCES**

A reputable landscape contractor will be able to supply a number of references attesting to their quality of workmanship and their commitment to customer satisfaction. If no references can be supplied, stop the interview right there - never hire anyone who's not willing to give you references. A professional portfolio should contain written letters of reference.

### **COMPARE APPLES WITH APPLES**

If you ask for a quotation from more than one company, make sure the size and nature of all materials is identified. Using materials differing in quantities and quality will cause a substantial difference in price, and the use of inferior materials may lead to problems.

## WILL THE CONTRACTOR HONOUR THEIR WARRANTY?

Extreme weather fluctuations cause significant ground settling. The impact of settling is often noticeable on driveways and walkways, but can be particularly pronounced on steps. Settling is often not taken into consideration when interconnected step structures are designed. A well designed step can make any settling a minor repair. If settling does occur with a poorly designed step, the entire structure may have to be taken apart, which is a very time consuming and labour intensive process. It's often at this point you'll discover if your contractor will honour the warranty.

To avoid costly repairs in the future, it's important to scrutinize the warranties offered by various landscape contractors and to confirm they will honour their commitments. Always ask for the warranty in writing and ask the contractor to explain in clear terms what will happen in the event of a warranty claim.

Look for a minimum two year warranty on workmanship when comparing landscape contractors. You should also ask for evidence to show they honour their warranty as most testimonials and reference letters don't reflect post-completion service quality and response of warranty work.

### CEDARGATE NUGGET:

*There is a very high occurrence of settling in newer homes under two years old. It's therefore advised that when contemplating landscaping for a new home, the ground should be allowed to settle for two winters before proceeding.*

## DOES THE CONTRACTOR HAVE A “VALIDATED CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE” FROM THE WSIB?

All professional contractors must have proof of good standing with the Worker's Safety Insurance Board (WSIB). This is easily verified by a “Validated Clearance Certificate” which is issued only by the WSIB for employers who are registered and are current with their contributions. Coverage by the WSIB is important to the home owner because it is the home owner who will be held legally responsible if a compensative injury occurs to a person working on their property where the employer is not in good standing (or not even registered). For more information on WSIB, please visit [www.wsib.on.ca](http://www.wsib.on.ca)

## DOES THE CONTRACTOR POSSESS LIABILITY INSURANCE?

Make sure any landscape contractor working on your property carries an acceptable level of insurance. Professional landscapers will typically carry personal liability and property damage insurance on a minimum \$1,000,000 per occurrence basis. If your contractor holds no insurance, as the home owner, you will be liable for any accidents caused by or to his employees. Liability insurance is an expensive portion of a company's overhead, and the quotes provided by professional landscape contractors will reflect this.

## IS THE CONTRACTOR PRESSURING YOU TO MAKE A DECISION?

Remember, any legitimate company that wants your business will be more than willing to allow you the time to do your due diligence. The contractor should be up front about schedule availability, but should never use this as a ploy to pressure you into making a decision.

### ABOUT CEDARGATE LANDSCAPING

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Landscaping is too big of an investment decision to entrust to just any landscaping company. At Cedargate, we've developed a reputation over the past 15 years for unique and breathtaking landscaping results. Our distinct designs, problem free construction and industry leading Three Year Warranty have earned us three consecutive Oakville Beaver Reader's Choice Awards.



### DESIGN

We realize that the design options you have can be overwhelming. At Cedargate, we pride ourselves on balancing function, esthetics and price. In other words, we take the time to understand how you envision using your property, how you'd like it to look and your budget. We'll present you with options and work with you to maximize your landscape dollars based on your priorities.

### CONSTRUCTION

Some landscape contractors look perfect until they begin construction, and nobody wants to be the next contractor "Horror Story". At Cedargate, once we start your job, we don't leave to start another until we're finished yours. In fact, we've structured our company so a senior manager is present on your property throughout the project. This way, you'll always have our full attention and only one point of contact - to ensure the job is done right and on time.

If you've seen a Cedargate built walkway, patio, step, pond or waterfall, you'll immediately see the difference in our work. Our workmanship stands the test of time because we not only use quality materials - we understand their appropriate uses and we build it right the first time.



## HOW DO I GET STARTED?

You've taken the first step by reading this guide and we hope it's given you the confidence and information you need to proceed to the next step - speaking to a landscape contractor. If you do decide to call us - and we hope you do - we'll first set up a consultation to discuss your requirements and gather enough information to present you with a solution to your landscaping needs. Simply call us at 905-825-8636.

We also invite you to visit us online at [www.cedargatelandscaping.com](http://www.cedargatelandscaping.com) to read our testimonials and company policies, and to view our gallery and plant and pond libraries.

