

## Your Best Investment

# A GOOD DESIGN IS WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD

*A good landscape design may be your best landscape investment, saving hours of frustration, maintenance, and sometimes the cost of redoing an inadequately planned project.*

A design is economical. You can take as many months or years as you need to fulfill it, and you will always know what your finished garden will look like. The logical progression of construction becomes obvious on a design. Even if you would like your hot tub first, it may not make sense to install it and then move it when you put in the patio. Generally speaking, hard materials (retaining walls, patios, decks, swimming pools, etc.) are the first step. Later, they can be protected when the topsoil or other construction materials are dragged across them to complete another stage.

Building materials, plants and long-term care can be expensive. A well-developed landscape plan, drawn to scale, takes the guesswork out of construction. You will be able to accurately assess the required quantities (square feet, lineal feet, lawn area, plant materials, etc.). If you get estimates on all or part of the work, you will sleep better knowing that all the estimates are on the same finished product, not on the best description you could give about what you want. With proper planning, each stage can be enjoyed with a sense of accomplishment and the assurance that it will all fit together in the end.

A design will place the right plants in the right place. Plants that prefer sun, shade, damp or dry locations will be placed to flourish without sprawling over their neighbours or leaving gaps that Mother Nature will fill with weeds. The design of a garden directly affects the amount of care it requires. A plan can result in a virtually weed-free garden that requires minimal watering and is tolerant of insect or disease problems.

With a design, you can allow for different colours throughout the year and a variety of vistas to enjoy when you are stuck inside. The question, then, is not whether you can afford a landscape plan, but whether you can afford to start without one.

### Hiring a Pro

When you hire a designer, you are purchasing services that are part technical and part artistic, and his or her fees will vary with experience and reputation. Look for the type of gardens that you like. Interview several designers, watch for varied styles and personalities, and be sure it's a good match. Be prepared to pay for their initial ideas too – they are professionals.

### Questions to ask:

- Length of consultation?
- Fees?
- Time required to complete a design?
- Education and experience?
- Opportunity to see a portfolio of designs?
- Client references?

### On-Site Consultation

A few hours with a professional, at a cost ranging from \$75 to \$200 per hour, should give you a good idea of where you are headed and what to do next. You should know what is appropriate for your site, your budget; all your garden desires should be up for discussion. You may wish to proceed to a design following a consultation.

### The Design

The design is a "map" of what your garden can become; the designer should be able to tell you what a plan will cost. Design cost is entirely dependent upon the complexity of the site, the client wish list and the experience of the designer. Prices consequently vary, ranging up to \$5,000 or more. Developing the plan is a two-step process. First the spaces are defined (patios, walkways, lawn, etc.). Once these are approved, designate specific plants appropriate for the area. Decide if you want the designer to develop the plan in stages for installation over a period of time. ■

*Courtesy of Ruth Olde, author of Landscaping Made Easy by Design.*



### Return on Investment

Housing officials say that a well presented landscape will return as much as 50% of the funds you've invested when the property is sold – a better rate of return than from interior renovations. Landscaping also adds "curb appeal" which can speed up a sale or rental by a considerable margin.

If you do your own landscape work, or are planning to sell or rent your property, consider engaging a professional designer for a consultation, or to review your plans. You could save thousands of dollars by avoiding costly mistakes or considerably improve your sales or rental situation.

### Planting Near Powerlines

When designing your garden, pay particular attention to areas of your landscape that lie near power lines. Select trees and shrubs that are suitable to your climate zone and can be easily maintained under or near power lines. Consult with a landscape designer or qualified garden centre staff, or go to the BC Hydro website at [www.bchydro.com](http://www.bchydro.com) for information on recommended species for this purpose. Trees and shrubs planted in the right spot can effectively conceal or draw attention away from unattractive features, such as power lines or utility poles – e.g., a flowering cherry can be a beautiful way to screen a view of a utility pole.