

# HOW TO HIRE A GARDEN DESIGNER



## Intro.

Designing a landscape is akin to designing the interior of a house. Rooms, furniture, colors, patterns and textures must be arranged in a manner that is functional and suits the taste of the owner. The one major difference with landscape design is that many of the elements are living, providing seasonal change, forever growing taller and wider, and occasionally dying. An experienced garden designer has the ability to incorporate all this information into the design, but the homeowners must do their homework and be prepared to talk to the designer. This paper will help homeowners develop a plan for working with a garden designer.

## Goals.

Prior to hiring a garden designer, have basic goals in mind. The underlying emphasis should be about the homeowner's aspirations, needs and challenges. Skilled questioning by the designer will help prioritize these goals and keep them realistic. He or she will discuss the full range of choices and options available to help you make informed decisions. Because so many options are available, professional guidance can help make the best choices, but only if there is good communication between homeowner and designer.

The first question to answer is, "What purpose will the garden serve?" Who are the primary users of the space and what is the programming? Is the landscape viewed only from the house, or will the occupants spend time outdoors? Are children a consideration? Is outdoor cooking and entertaining likely? Is privacy -- like building a hedge to separate the yard from the neighbor's -- an important issue? The designer will also need to know how long a homeowner plans to remain in the house. This will affect the type and size of plants specified.

Though the subject of budget is tricky, it is important to provide a rough estimate to keep the scale of design within those constraints. The answers to these questions and many more need to be shared during the initial meeting with the garden designer.

As your relationship with the designer evolves so will his/her familiarity



with your lifestyle become inherent-- which will only assist them in customizing this outdoor room to your modus vivendi.

## Landscape Preferences

Even though the garden designer will be drawing the final plan, the homeowner can help by offering their preferences, aspirations, needs and challenges. Many times discussing inspirations or special destinations the family has shared together are helpful. Additionally, collecting inspirational pictures and making notes about what is attractive visually and emotionally is most helpful. A conversation of color preferences will help with the selection of certain plants and materials. Offering these items to the designer during initial meetings will speed the process along and avoid costly revisions due to misunderstandings. Remember, the garden designer is creating a custom space tailored to you. The more they understand your preferences the more effective the landscape design plan will ultimately be.

## Charges and Services: What to Expect?

“You get what you pay for” is an expression that often applies to landscape design.

Garden designer fees vary. Some designers charge an hourly rate. Others charge a flat fee based on the extent of the project and the amount of detail required. Many landscape and garden designers now charge a flat fee for design based upon the scope of the project and then an hourly charge to project manage and oversee the job. Inherently, it makes sense to have the garden designer involved in every step of the process. Much like you choose an architect to oversee the building and details of a home, similarly paying attention to the details and scope of an outdoor construction project is to your advantage. Services provided also vary and depend on the scope of the project. Some companies provide a complete package that includes design, installation and maintenance, thus



establishing a longterm relationship with the client. Other professionals are limited to design and consulting.

The landscape plan can be achieved in many different ways. It may be a simple consultation with verbal instruction or it may be an elaborate drawing. The plan from a garden designer may include a concept plan (various ideas about what to do with the property), a master plan (drawings showing a specific vision for the site) or a detailed construction plan that will enable the homeowner (or a professional landscape contractor) to construct the project. Detailed construction plans may include site plans, grading plans, planting/landscape plans, construction plans and details, irrigation plans and lighting plans.

Garden designers can also provide detailed construction specifications, bidding documents and construction oversight. The more detailed drawings and specifications required, the more likely the services of additional professionals will be required. Some projects may require more than one visit or multiple preliminary drawings to arrive at a suitable plan. Many designs are so detailed or site-dependent that they may require close supervision by the designer. Be sure to discuss the specifics of what drawings and services will be provided and how much each part of the process will cost before hiring any garden designer.

Like other professional services, garden designers should provide a written estimate and formal agreement for services provided. It is not unusual for these agreements to leave room for flexibility in cost, depending on such things as the amount of information provided, the number of revisions required and the extent of drawings required for the project.

## Other Considerations

A garden design project may require special permits or approval, depending on local restrictions such as condominium guidelines, city zoning laws, neighborhood covenants and even water-wise restrictions.



# Todd Haiman

A garden designer with a practice based in New York City creating bespoke gardens and landscapes for properties large and small within the Northeast. Todd Haiman designs and builds residential gardens, roof gardens, brownstone gardens, large landscapes, vacation properties and public spaces. The company offers custom garden design, project management, budgeting and cost estimating services, scheduling, oversight and installation of these landscapes. Additionally, they support their clients with long term oversight of their landscapes to insure their lasting beauty.

He instructs within the graduate landscape design program at Columbia University. Mr. Haiman is a member of APLD (Association of Professional Landscape Designers), Royal Horticultural Society, Metro-Hort, ASLA and AIA.

For more information refer to his website:  
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To read more on the design of outdoor space, [click here](#)\*

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