

The **ULTIMATE**
& Landscape Care
Maintenance Guide



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Introduction

Welcome to *The Ultimate Landscape Care & Maintenance Guide!*

A beautiful, tidy landscape is as good for your soul as it is for your property value. After all, your landscape is a huge part of what makes your home, well...home. It's the last thing you see when you leave every morning and the first thing you see when you arrive home every evening. It's the view from your windows. Its shapes, colors, and textures frame your house like a painting.

You have the option to create a landscape (or to reshape an inherited one) to suit your tastes. Just keep in mind as you plan that no matter how simple your landscape may be, it *will* require regular maintenance so your knowledge, level of interest, abilities, and budget all have to be factored into your decisions.

Here's a look at the kinds of maintenance your landscape might require.



Landscaped Beds

If you have landscaped beds, the major tasks on your maintenance to-do list will include weed control, mulching, transplanting perennial plants and grasses, planting bulbs and annuals, and deadheading.



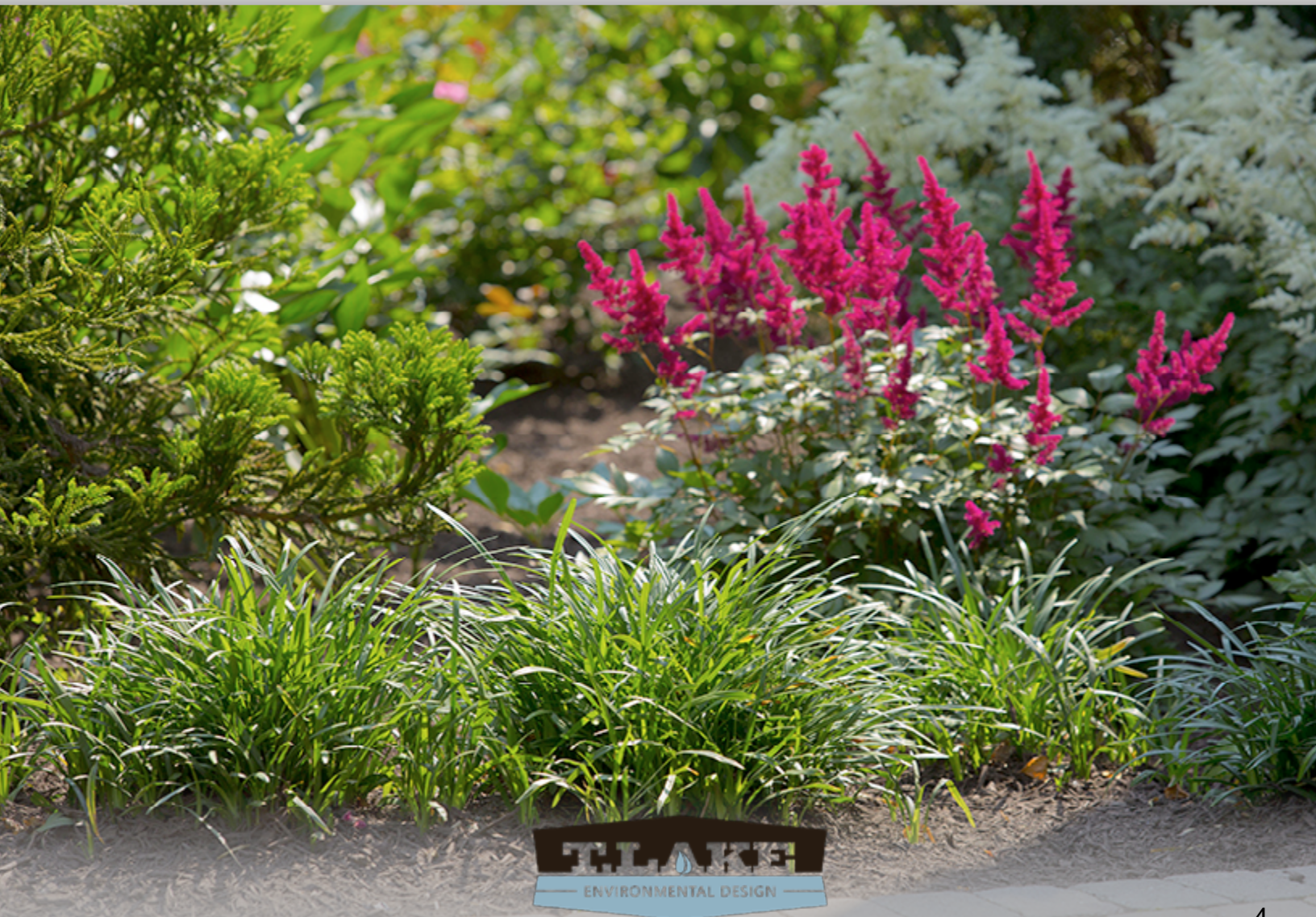
Weed Control

Keeping weeds under control is crucial in landscaped beds. Weeds can crowd out desired plants and take up soil nutrients and water needed by your bedding plants.

There are a few things you can do to make the job of weeding less difficult. First, whether it's an existing bed or a new bed, make sure the soil is in good shape. You may want to have your landscaper or your local Cooperative Extension perform a soil test. The results will help you determine what amendments your soil may need to reach optimum fertility.

If your soil is poor and you plant without amending it properly, you're just inviting weeds to take over, dooming your bedding plants to short, sad lives, and pretty much ensuring all your weekends will be spent bent over pulling weeds and groaning with back pain.

Once your soil has been properly amended and you've done your best to make sure it's as free of weeds as you can get it, you'll want to add...



Mulch

There are lots of different materials, organic and inorganic, that can be used to mulch landscaped beds. These include bark chips or nuggets and other wood products, stones, paper, shredded leaf compost, nut hulls, pine needles, black plastic or landscape fabric. Some mulch products are offered free or at low cost by local municipalities.

Mulch helps to smother weeds, keeps soil from drying out quickly, and protects young shrubs, trees, and perennials through the cold winter months. It's awesome stuff. It can even be mixed and matched. For instance, Six to seven sheets of newsprint can be useful beneath bark mulch to smother weeds in a landscape bed. Just be aware that organic mulches will decompose over time and will need to be replaced.

Even with careful preparation and mulching, you're going to get a few weeds thanks to the wind or birds, but these should be fairly easy to remove by hand as long as they're not permitted to grow unchecked. Take an evening walk around your garden a few times a week and pull any stray weeds that pop up. Try to get all of the roots when you pull them or they will likely grow back. You may need to use a screwdriver or special weeder to get rid of weeds with long tap roots like dandelions.


If your problem is worse than a few stray weeds here and there, talk to your landscape maintenance contractor or visit your local garden center. Show them the weed that's giving you trouble and ask whether they can recommend a procedure or product to help eliminate the problem.

If they suggest a chemical product, make sure you fully understand the directions for use. Some chemicals work when sprayed on the leaves of specific plants and must be applied very carefully to avoid spraying desired plants in the garden bed. Others work by being taken up from the soil by a plant's roots and will require cautious application to protect your other plants as well. You may want to ask about organic alternatives, particularly if you live in an ecologically sensitive area like a watershed..

If you purchase a weed control product, don't forget to ask about any possible danger to children or pets and take all the recommended steps to mitigate those dangers.

TIP: When mulching, don't place mulch right up against plant stems — leave a few inches around the base of each plant clear of mulch to prevent damage to plants.





TIP: Most plants are best transplanted in the fall at least six weeks before your area's anticipated first hard freeze. This will give them time to become established before winter sets in so they're ready to grow the following spring.

Transplanting

You may need to transplant perennial plants or grasses for any of several reasons.

Often, gardeners fail to take into account the mature size of perennials when planting them, so when they've gotten too big for the chosen spot — or perhaps they'd just look better in another area of the garden — they must be transplanted.

When transplanting a perennial plant or ornamental grass, dig carefully around the entire clump with a pitchfork or narrow shovel and remove it from the hole roots and all. If you don't have the new hole for the plant dug yet, put it in a shady spot, water it and cover it with damp newspapers until the new hole is dug and make sure you keep it moist until you're ready to replant it. Ideally replanting should take place the same day.

Remove all rocks and debris from the new hole, which should be about 1.5 times as big around as your plant, and add some compost. To replant, shake most of the dirt off the roots and place in the new hole with the roots spread out over dirt mounded in the center, then refill, tamp down gently, and water.



Planting Bulbs and Annuals

Bulbs and annuals are a great way to give your garden beds some early spring color and to make sure they stay colorful throughout the summer and fall as your perennials wax and wane. Perennials, while not needing to be replanted every year, are not as long-blooming during a given season as annuals are, so planting annuals among them is a smart way to maintain a profusion of color throughout the growing season. Healthy, vigorous annuals also help keep weed growth down by shading the soil.

Spring bulbs like daffodils and tulips are planted in the autumn once the summer heat has ended, and can generally be planted from October through late December in Central Georgia. The rule of thumb is to plant bulbs at least twice as deep as they are high, but check package directions or with your local garden center for each variety. If you're planting a grouping, make sure all of the bulbs are planted at the same depth to ensure they bloom at the same time. When you're done planting, water once and then they won't need water again until the first leaves appear.

When the soil has warmed up in the spring — April 1st is the average last frost date in Central Georgia's Zone 8 — you can begin planting annual bedding plants outdoors.

When planting annual bedding plants, make sure to plant them at the same depth as they were planted in their cell packs or flats. Begin by removing them from their packages by gently squeezing the pack until they pop out. Gently separate any roots that have become tangled with the roots of their "cell mates" and place them in their prepared holes. Make sure the holes you've prepared are at least the distance apart recommended on the plants tags to guarantee they'll have enough room when they mature. Backfill the holes with soil. Water them well and continue to keep them moist (not soggy) until they are established. Once they're established, you should only need to water them during periods of extreme heat or dry weather.

TIP: If you're growing your annuals from seed, they can be started indoors generally about six weeks before the average last frost date so they're ready to be set out when the date rolls around. Seedlings started indoors will need to be hardened off first by being placed outdoors for longer and longer periods each day prior to being planted in the garden.



Deadheading

This is the process of removing spent blooms from your flowers to encourage new growth and extended bloom. Some plants do much better when deadheaded. Others do not. There are plenty of resources available to help you know which plants should be deadheaded — and which shouldn't.

Again, this is a much easier task if done frequently, so when you're taking that evening stroll through your garden, look for brown, dead blooms and remove them. Beats spending precious weekend hours doing it!




A scenic view of a lake and trees from a white wooden deck with a table and chairs. The deck has a white railing and a round table with four chairs. A potted plant sits on the table. The background shows a calm lake, lush green trees, and a blue sky with white clouds.

Trees and Shrubs

Most landscapes contain at least a few trees and some shrubs. Knowing how and when to prune them, fertilize them, and transplant them can make all the difference in their health and vitality as well as their appearance and the contribution they make to your landscape.





TIP: If pruning a large tree requires the use of power tools or requires you to work above the ground, it's much safer to hire a professional to do the work for you.

Pruning

Pruning, for many people, is like eating potato chips: Once they start pruning their trees and shrubs, they can't seem to stop. Others never prune at all. While not pruning at all is probably better for your trees and shrubs than pruning too much, it doesn't enhance the appearance of your landscape and, worse, can lead to fallen branches during storms that can result in property damage.

Pruning is the removal of tree/shrub parts to improve form (shape) and growth. No cut should ever be made that there is not a compelling reason to make. But when should you prune?

Removal of dead, weak, or diseased tree/shrub limbs can be done anytime of year without causing too much stress on the plant. That said, a good time of year to prune many trees and shrubs is in late winter before the spring flush of growth. The exception to this is flowering trees or shrubs that bloom in the spring. If you have spring bloomers, wait until after their flowers have faded to prune them or you'll cut off the year's flower buds. On the other hand, flowering trees or shrubs that bloom in mid to late summer should be pruned in late winter or very early spring.

Reasons to prune:

1. To eliminate hazards such as dead or dying branches
2. To remove crowded or rubbing limbs
3. To increase light or movement of air in the center of the tree or shrub (thinning)
4. To remove the lower branches to provide clearance below a tree for buildings, cars, pedestrians, etc.
5. To reduce the size of a tree to accommodate utility lines, etc.

Always use sharp, clean tools to prevent damage and disease.



Fertilizing

You probably don't need to fertilize your trees and shrubs if they appear healthy and are growing at an acceptable rate. However, if you feel your plant is not doing as well as it should, the best time of year to fertilize your trees and shrubs is in early spring or in the fall after shoot growth stops because plants take in few nutrients during periods of active growth.

Never fertilize plants during periods of drought unless you are able to water frequently because without enough water plants are unable to take in the nutrients you're supplying. Some fertilizers can damage the roots and scorch the leaves if there's not enough water.

Always apply fertilizer only as recommended for your tree or shrub. Heavily fertilized plants are more susceptible to the effects of diseases, insects, and environmental stresses.





Transplanting

Transplanting trees and shrubs is best done in the autumn. There are several reasons for this: Summer heat saps the energy being produced by the foliage that is needed to go into root growth as the plant becomes established in its new location.

1. The soil is still warm and conducive to root growth.
2. In the fall, plants are entering dormancy and putting all of their energy into root growth and storing nutrients for the coming winter — exactly what your newly transplanted tree or shrub needs!
3. By spring, your transplants root system will be well established, just in time for the growing season.

When digging the new hole for your tree or shrub, dig it 2 to 3 times wider than the root ball, but no deeper. Loosen the soil in the bottom and sides of the hole. Place the plant in the hole and backfill halfway. Water at this point and tamp lightly before filling the hole completely to eliminate any air pockets. Finish filling the hole, water and tamp again, making sure the plant is buried at the same level or slightly higher than it was previously. Mulch with 3 to 4 inches of organic matter. Continue watering regularly until the ground freezes.





Diseases and Pests

Healthy plants are not as susceptible to pests and diseases. However, if you notice wilting or discolored foliage, spots on foliage, growths or cankers on the woody parts of a tree or shrub, signs of rot, powdery or wooly film on leaves, or anything that just doesn't look right to you, don't hesitate to ask your landscape contractor to help you identify or diagnose it and suggest a course of treatment.

If you're taking your evening garden walks regularly, you'll be much more likely to notice and treat any small problems before they become big problems for your tree or shrub and before they can spread to other plants in your landscape.





Lawn Care and Maintenance

If you're someone who finds lawn mowing to be a zen experience, and many people do, you may want fewer landscape beds and a wider swath of lawn. A healthy lawn is beautiful and nice to walk on in bare feet, but if you have children or dogs or poor soil, maintaining a healthy lawn requires more than just mowing. You're going to need to fertilize, employ some sort of weed control (especially if your neighbors don't) and perhaps pest control, and you'll want to aerate and overseed it as well.

A soil test is an important first step in determining exactly what your lawn needs to grow lush and healthy.





Mowing

Don't start mowing until your grass reaches 3" in height. In the very early spring, before it's time to mow, take your mower in for service and blade sharpening so you're ready to go when the time comes. When you do begin mowing your lawn, check your mower's settings. You never want to cut off more than one third of the height of your grass.



Fertilizing

It's important to fertilize your lawn in the fall! A light application of lawn food in early fall and a heavier application about a month before first frost to give the grass time to become established before winter arrives. If you fertilize in the spring too, a light application of slow release fertilizer should do the trick once your lawn has reached 3" in height and is ready to be mowed for the first time.

Weed Control

A pre-emergent herbicide applied at the start of March — before soil temperatures are consistently above 50 degrees — will go a long way towards preventing crabgrass in your lawn. On the other hand, perennial lawn weeds like dandelion will be more susceptible to a fall herbicide application when they've begun winding down for the winter.





Aeration

Aeration is the process of punching small holes in your lawn to allow your soil to absorb water more easily, improving your lawn's access to water and therefore to the nutrients in your soil. If your soil is hard and compacted, spring is a great time to aerate.

Fall is also a good time to aerate as your grass begins growing again after perhaps going dormant due to the summer heat.

Overseeding

In the fall, about a month before your area's first frost date, overseeding will fill in patchy areas and help establish a thick, lush lawn that makes weeds cry "uncle."





Pest Control

You'll probably need pest control more urgently if your lawn is stressed, so taking steps to improve the quality of your lawn may also help reduce pest problems. There are many different pest control techniques and products available including chemical and organic products. The introduction of beneficial insects and creating habitats that attract birds which in turn eat certain garden pests, etc, are becoming more common methods of pest control too. Any or all of these methods can be part of a successful integrated pest management plan.

The first step to controlling pests in your lawn is to identify the type of pest or pests you're dealing with. You will then need to learn about the life cycle of the pest in order to understand what methods of control will be most effective and when they should be employed to achieve maximum effect.

A lawn care professional will be an excellent source of information on lawn pests. Be sure to ask about the safety of any products they use or recommend, particularly if you have children or pets, or live near a body of water that might be affected by any products you use.





Hardscaping

Areas of hardscaping like decks and patios provide transition spaces between your landscape and your home and need to be maintained for both safety and aesthetic reasons. Regular maintenance of these areas will contribute to the beauty of your outdoor spaces and prolong their usefulness.





Wooden Decks

Decks require regular cleaning and sealing to protect their surfaces from UV rays, mold, mildew, and dirt that builds up over time. How frequently this needs to be done will be determined by many factors including the amount and type of use your deck gets, sun exposure and exposure to other elements.

But you'll know it's time when your deck boards begin looking gray.

Give your deck a good once over with a broom. Once it's clear of loose debris, examine it for popped nails, loose screws, splinters, rot, and loose, curling, or cracked boards — basically any structural damage that needs repair. Once the repairs are made, you'll be ready to begin cleaning your deck.

If you don't have or are unable to rent a power washer, you can use a scrub brush and soapy water. If you use a power sprayer, be careful to avoid directing the spray too hard for too long in any one place, as that can damage the boards. Rinse the deck to remove the soap and loose dirt and grime. Allow the deck to dry thoroughly. Through the next couple of steps make sure to wear a respirator to prevent inhalation of dust and fumes.

Sand any rough or splintered surfaces with a medium grit sandpaper and remove the resulting dust. Apply finish or sealant and allow it to dry. Your deck may require an application of a second or even third coat. Avoid stopping in the middle of a coat as it may result in an uneven appearance.





Paver Patios

Hardscaping with stone and pavers will need maintenance, too. Regular sweeping to remove dirt and debris will help prevent staining and make you aware of cracks between pavers that are allowing weeds to pop up here and there. This can be solved by filling any cracks with polymeric sand which hardens when moistened and prevents weeds from growing through the joints.

Spray the pavers with a hose to remove dirt, but be sure to avoid spraying directly into the joints between them. Scrub stains using a mild detergent and water and rinse completely.

Seal the pavers every couple of years with paver sealant.



A decorative water feature is the central focus of the page. It consists of a terracotta pot with a handle, which serves as a reservoir. Water flows from a small spout on the side of the pot into a shallow, rectangular stone basin. The entire feature is set against a backdrop of dense, vibrant green ivy leaves. The water is captured mid-pour, creating a sense of movement and sound.

Water Features

Ponds and fountains add visual and auditory appeal to the landscape, and for the pleasure we get from them, they really don't require much from us in return. They do, however, require some cleaning.





Ponds

Don't wait until it gets too hot to clean out your pond. It's best done when outdoor temperatures don't exceed 70 degrees and water temperatures are 55 degrees or below. If you've been faithfully skimming your pond and trimming your pond plants, odds are you won't need to empty your pond for cleaning more than every few years.

If there's enough debris on the bottom of your pond that netting isn't practical, you'll need to use a submerged pump to empty your pond. Remove the plants as you pump the water out and keep them in the shade and moist until you return them to their proper places. Rinse the pond walls and the rocks, then pump out the water you've used to clean the pond and then refill it. Replace the plants.

To winterize your pond, begin by covering it with netting or removing fallen leaves with a hand net. Leaves should not be allowed to remain in the pond all winter. When plant foliage has browned, trim it back to about 2" above the water surface and remove all debris. For lilies, cut off the brown leaves and stems. Set their pots in the bottom of the pond. When temperatures reach the point where the pond is likely to freeze over, turn off the pumps and bring them indoors.

TIP: When you're cleaning your pond, leave most of the algae where it is. It will help you maintain a healthy pond environment.





Fountains

Always check the manufacturer's materials to see whether they recommend any specific cleaning products or methods for the fountain model you've purchased. If they don't specify, simply be sure to clean the bowl and the pump every month or so. The bowl can be cleaned with a toothbrush and mild detergent. The pump can be opened and cleaned in a mild vinegar solution.





Irrigation

The installation of an irrigation system to keep your lawn and garden lush is a huge time-saver over hand watering. More importantly, these systems save water — and save their owners money.

Irrigation systems these days are designed to deliver water exactly where it's needed. Timers ensure plants and lawns are watered at times of day that reduce the amount of water lost to evaporation. Drip irrigation systems deliver water directly to the soil at the base of plants, keeping foliage dry and reducing the incidence of mildews and fungal diseases.

An irrigation system requires spring start up, fall winterization, and occasional maintenance and repairs. These services are typically available as a package through the company that performed your installation.



A raccoon is the central focus of the image, standing in a garden. It has its characteristic black and white fur, with a black mask around its eyes and a white patch on its chest. The raccoon is looking directly at the camera. The background is filled with lush green foliage, including tall grasses and various leafy plants. In the foreground, there are several small white flowers with green leaves. The overall scene is bright and natural, suggesting a sunny day in a well-maintained garden.

Animal and Pest Control





Wildlife

It's worse than frustrating to invest in your landscape, only to wake up one morning to the sight of a pesky rodent or some wild hogs treating it like their own personal buffet. It's a common problem in Central Georgia!

There are remedies you can try, but it can be a frustrating problem. Local landscapers are experienced in dealing with wildlife pests in the home garden and will certainly be able to recommend solutions that are working well for other local clients.

Some things you may want to try include:

1. Repellents (commercial or homemade)
2. Fencing
3. Motion detectors that set off sprays of water or loud noises
4. Choosing plant material resistant to your common intruders





Ticks

Other garden pests, such as ticks, are worse than frustrating: They're downright dangerous, in fact, to both humans and their pets.

Landscape companies now offer lawn treatments and other preventive care designed specifically to reduce ticks and fleas in the landscape, making your yard a much safer place for your kids and dogs to play.



Priorities, Time and Investment In Your Landscape

All of this maintenance may seem like a lot of work — and it can be a lot of work, depending on what elements exist in your landscape or on which elements you choose to add.

But these tasks are our focus every day at T.Lake Environmental Design. We can help you create a landscape maintenance plan based on the requirements of your particular landscape, how much work you want or are willing to do yourself, and the budget you have for the items you don't want to do or are unable to do yourself.

Decide, for instance, how important having an impeccable lawn is to you. If a flawless sweep of green is a priority, you'll have to consider whether the maintenance needed to keep it that way is something you enjoy doing and whether you have the knowledge, time and energy to do it. If not, that piece might be an item you decide to leave to an experienced landscape maintenance contractor.

Perhaps you love taking care of your own lawn and garden beds, but want someone to take care of maintaining your deck and patio.

Maybe you don't want to be bothered with any of it, and your budget is such that you can hire a landscaping company to take care of all of it, leaving you with nothing to do but enjoy your well manicured, beautifully maintained landscape.

The point: *Know thyself.* Before you sit down with a landscaping company to create a new landscape plan or to create a maintenance plan for an existing landscape, think about the investment of time and money you're willing to make to ensure your landscape is as beautiful as you want it to be year round.





Once you've decided what you want your landscape to look like and you know what you're willing and able to do to achieve it, sit down with experienced landscape professionals to craft a plan to bring it to life and keep it beautiful year after year.

Founded in Florida in 1990 and chartered in Georgia in 1992, T.Lake Environmental Design has a trained, knowledgeable staff that's large enough to be efficient — but can also provide personalized, professional service.

Ready to talk about your landscape maintenance plan for the future? If you reside in Macon, call (478) 750-7733. If you're a, East Dublin resident, dial (478) 272-3878. Or, contact us through [our website](#) to have us get in touch with you.

