



# LANDSCAPE Planning Guide



*A Homeowner's Guide To Designing,  
Installing And Maintaining The  
Landscape Of Your Dreams*

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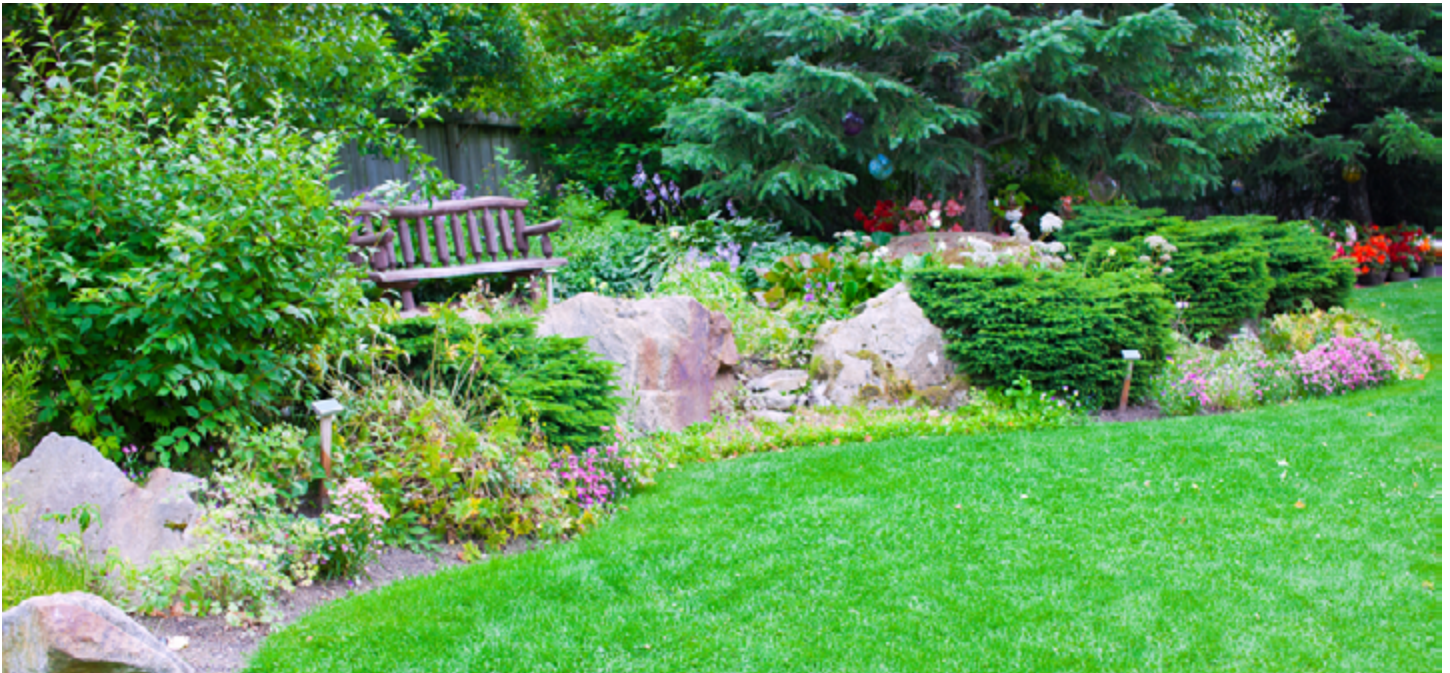
# A Homeowner's Guide To Designing, Installing And Maintaining The Landscape Of Your Dreams

*"I don't divide architecture, landscape and gardening; to me, they are one."*

*Luis Barragan*

As a homeowner, you should take great pride in where you live. But if you subscribe to this Mexican architect's philosophy, the area outside the walls of your home is just as important. Your landscape should be a place of pride, too, somewhere you can relax and unwind, whether you're with friends and family or enjoying a moment of solitude.

How you express yourself in your landscape requires the same type of thinking as designing your home and its interior — it's a process, one you may not know how to begin. And that's where we come in.



T. Lake Environmental Design's team of landscape designers, installation crews and maintenance professionals come together to offer our clients decades of experience in the industry.

And because the best customers are informed and know what they want — or at least know the right questions to ask — we've put that experience to work and compiled a landscape planning guide for homeowners like you.

In this guide, we'll outline the basic landscape design process, from the initial site walkthrough to the moment we remove our last shovel, trowel and piece of equipment from your site.

If you've got unanswered questions when you're finished paging through the guide, we're ready to help. Better yet, if you're ready to get started, well, we're ready to help with that, too. Learn more about how we can help by visiting the **T. Lake website**, or get in touch with us at (478) 750-7733 in Macon or (478) 272-3878 in East Dublin.

# The Landscape Design Process

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Having a solid plan in place is the first step in creating a beautiful landscape. But before you can begin planning, there are a few questions you should ask yourself. The answers to these questions will inform how you'll use your landscape and just what's possible given the nature of your space.

## Questions to ask yourself:

- » What challenges does your site present?
- » What opportunities does your site present?
- » How will you be using your outdoor living space?
- » Do you have small children or other factors that present safety concerns in your landscape?
- » What's your budget for designing your landscape?
- » What's your budget for maintaining it? (Remember: time is money!)

Above all things, be honest with yourself during the planning and design process.

Your next-door neighbor may love his exquisite garden full of English roses, but maybe you'd prefer to admire them from afar (like the other side of your fence.) You may enjoy the smell of grilled meat wafting from another neighbor's spared-no-expense outdoor kitchen, which can make it tough to keep in mind that you're more of a "be one with nature" type.

If you decide to work with a professional landscape designer, they'll work through these questions with you and create a design that's tailored to your answers.

## Step 1: A complete walkthrough.

After thorough soul-searching and answering all the preliminary questions, the first step in the landscape design process is a complete walkthrough of your landscape site

That walkthrough should not only take an aesthetic perspective. It should be a thorough analysis of your site's strengths and weaknesses, including soil quality, sun and shade, hills and slopes, and more.

That analysis will help your designer create a design plan that complements your home's architecture and your personal style. It will also help dictate steps that need to be taken before installation to ensure a healthy, successful landscape for years to come.

This walkthrough is also where you'll talk about budgeting, scope and preliminary timelines. You should always have a rough project budget in mind, even if you have big dreams. You never know what a professional can help you accomplish, even with limited resources to spend on it.

## Step 2: The plan.

If you've been gathering landscaping inspiration from books, magazines or Pinterest, share them with your designer. Even the smallest touches can be incorporated into a holistic design that reflects your personal design style.

Once you and your designer have talked through your ideas, he or she will return to their office to begin drawing up a preliminary design for your new landscape. Whether your designer presents you with old-fashioned paper drawings or a realistic 3-D modeling program, these should give you a good idea of what your outdoor space will look like when installation is complete.



# The Landscape Construction Process

The landscape construction process begins by sweating the small stuff: enduring the inspections to securing your permits, bringing in the backhoes and other big equipment to prepare the terrain, and more. This part of the process might be scary for a solo homeowner, but an experienced landscape design, installation and maintenance company will see you through this step – and all the others.



Once the details are worked out and construction has begun, you shouldn't have to manage every detail yourself. At T. Lake Environmental Design, we provide a single point person who will be your contact throughout the installation process – and beyond, if you need help with your landscape's maintenance, too.

That point person will oversee the rest of the process, so you'll know your landscaping project is being installed to the exact specifications it was designed to. Here's a look at how all the components of your landscape design will come together in one beautiful finished product.

## Plantings

The plants you select to line your beds and fill your containers will be what literally bring your landscape to life. And while aesthetics are important, it's even more important to choose plants that work in your climate, with the conditions your site offers.

Your home's location — specifically, which ARS Heat Zone you reside in — as well as the degree of sun and shade, and soil moisture and drainage, are especially crucial to consider if you want plant life that will thrive long-term. Maintenance is also an important thing to consider when choosing plants.

There are plenty of resources online — from plant producers to local extensions — that provide all the information you could want on each specific plant. But a landscape designer is also a wealth of knowledge and will be able to help you select plants based on their color, growth habit, water and sun needs, and care requirements.

## Hardscaping

Hardscaping is, put simply, any design element that isn't a plant. And unlike plants, as long as you're willing to maintain them regularly, you're really not as limited by environmental factors when choosing hardscaping materials. Here are a few hardscaping elements you might consider.



**Patios:** Whether you choose a patio with brick pavers, natural stone, stamped cement, this is where you'll spend much of your time in your landscape. A patio is the foundation for many homeowners' outdoor dining and entertaining.

**Decks:** If you have a multi-story house, live on a steeply sloped property or just love the feel of wood under your feet, a deck may be a perfect addition to your outdoor living space. Decks can be constructed from treated wood, composite materials or even plastic. (Bonus: With a high enough deck surface, there may even be room to create some storage underneath.)

**Paths and walkways:** If your landscape has several elements, you may want to consider a walkway to connect them. Paths not only provide a clear way from one area to another; they're also another opportunity to get creative with hardscape materials, plants and even landscape lighting. Your Accounting System.

**Walls:** Walls made from natural stone, brick, rustic river rock and other materials can create visual separation among different areas of your landscape, as well as offer extra seating and, if needed, provide a border around a safe area for children to play in.

**Outdoor kitchens:** If you love entertaining outdoors, bring the whole process outside, so you never have to take a break from the conversation and fun. Running water, refrigerators, grills and more can be incorporated into top-of-the-line outdoor kitchens that blend right into the rest of the landscape. (How about a walk-up bar, too?).

**Fireplaces and fire pits:** Create a cozy place to relax when the sun goes down, or add warmth to your landscape even after prime outdoor season is over. Whether you install a built-in outdoor fireplace or add a portable fire pit that you can move to suit your whim, fire features can be a beautiful addition to the landscape.

**Driveways:** Don't forget the front yard! A beautiful driveway or front walkway can exponentially increase your curb appeal and offer a warm welcome to visitors. Driveways are a perfect opportunity to create a cohesive, coordinated look between your landscape and your home's architecture.



You can even create visual interest by using varied hardscaping materials in different areas of your landscape.

Using brick pavers on your patio? Consider a natural stone pathway that leads to a pool deck paved with stamped concrete, perhaps. Hardscapes can really add personality to the landscape — use your imagination!

## Drainage

All homeowners hope for enough rainfall to keep their landscapes healthy each season, but no matter how much moisture your area gets, it's important to ensure proper drainage to divert water to the right places and keep your plants and outdoor living spaces in good condition.



If you've noticed puddles throughout your property or areas of streaming water during storms, that may be a sign of a drainage problem. But a professional assessment of your drainage is the best way to know for sure.

Once you've determined where your site's drainage issues are, there are many ways to address them. Here are a few:

**Grading:** On an improperly graded site — a problem that stems from initial construction — water runs every which way (except for the right way). A landscape professional can alter your landscape in a way that encourages water to run in the correct direction.

**Dry creeks:** Dry creeks are a lovely addition to many properties with drainage problems. Usually shallow trenches lined with small stones, dry creeks divert water in the right direction while adding a beautiful natural element to the landscape.

**Trench drains and French drains:** Both trench and French drains are subtle, structural ways to correct drainage problems. Whether you're looking to protect a heavily paved area or keep your basement from flooding, there's a drainage solution available for any property

## Lighting

What good is a beautiful outdoor living space if you can only see and enjoy it for a few hours out of the day? You can design landscape lighting to highlight areas of visual interest after the sun goes down, but it's also a great way to keep your home safe from intruders at night.

As with many landscaping features, things have really changed and become more beautiful. No longer are

homeowners relegated to flood lights that cast a wide glare over the entire backyard! A landscape design professional can help you create a lighting system that transforms your outdoor living space into something truly special once the sun goes down.

**Patio lighting:** If you've made a big investment in a beautiful patio where you and your family spend a lot of time, it makes sense to illuminate it by night, too! Whether you're creating a space to dine and enjoy company after sundown, or illuminating landscaping elements with night blooms or glowing, silvery foliage, a lighting professional can help you create a plan that highlights your landscape's most beautiful elements by night.

**Pool lighting:** If you have a backyard swimming pool, you'll want to be able to enjoy that investment as often as possible. Standard lighting within your pool's walls is just the beginning!

**Walkway lighting:** If you're creating a series of outdoor "rooms," you may want to add lighting that connects them for safe passage once it gets dark. Walkway lighting can also create a soft, magical view from your back door of a constellation of landscape elements.

**Security lighting:** Whether you live in a city, cluster of suburban homes or the middle of the countryside, keeping your family safe is always a primary concern. Motion-sensor and other security lighting, combined with fencing and other precautions, is a great way to keep intruders at bay.

Lighting can even be controlled in a number of ways now, whether you want solar lights, manually operated illumination or a full-featured lighting system operated from a single control panel.

## Irrigation

Regardless of rainfall, it's important to have an irrigation system in place to ensure the optimal health of your turf and plant life. An irrigation system takes the guesswork out of watering by hand and makes sure each individual plant specimen gets the perfect amount of water delivered exactly where and when it needs it.





**There are two basic types of irrigation.**

**Sprinklers:** Sprinklers deliver irrigation from overhead, keeping foliage and blooms moist as well as keeping turf irrigated. Sprinklers can be installed in zones to switch on and off automatically, timed with the sun's position and your landscape's irrigation needs.

**Drip irrigation:** Drip irrigation is an eco-friendly option, minimizing wasted water by delivering it directly to plants' root zones, right where they need it. Drip irrigation is especially helpful in beds but can be used everywhere, even in container plantings.

Of course, these two main types of irrigation can be blended into one overarching system to provide optimal watering for all types of plant life in your landscape.

And depending on your tastes and budget, there are manual, partially automated and fully automated irrigation systems available for residential use. (There are even systems available that use weather data and moisture sensors to determine whether your landscape needs to be watered on a particular day!)

Discuss your needs with your landscaping professional to determine which is best for your home.

## Accents and Other Features

Let's go beyond the basics! Once you've designed the elements that will make up the core of your landscape and outdoor living space, you can really let your personality shine by incorporating accents that reflect your unique design style.



Is your style sleek and modern? Rustic and Mediterranean? Traditional Cape Cod? Shabby chic? Chances are, if you look hard enough, you'll find something perfectly suited to the look you're hoping to create in your outdoor living space.

**Furniture:** The sky's the limit with furniture these days. From wicker and wood to chairs cushioned with all-weather fabrics — and luxurious chaise lounges to sofas that seat four — there's outdoor furniture designed to suit your style and entertaining needs. There are even indoor-outdoor rugs that can add a splash of color (and a soft surface) to your patio.

**Containers:** Plantings don't have to be limited to flower beds. Containers of all shapes and sizes are available to bring plant life closer to your home and add visual interest that coordinates with your design style.

**Other structural elements:** Sculpture, structures like arbors and pergolas, small water features and other whirlygigs can add personality and whimsy to your landscape. If you can imagine it, you can probably find it out there to add to your outdoor living space!

# Caring For Your Landscape

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After making a significant investment in designing and installing your new landscape, the next logical step is creating a plan to care for it so your investment is one that lasts long into the future. What will that landscape care plan look like? It's different for every homeowner: Some are DIY types who love spending every moment of free time in the yard, dirt on their hands. (We love those types!) Then there are homeowners who want a beautiful home but don't necessarily want to work to keep it beautiful themselves. (We love them, too.) And, of course, there's everything in between.



To figure out what type of homeowner you are, there are definitely some questions you should ask yourself about maintenance before you even start planning your new landscape:

- » Are you looking for a low-maintenance landscape or one that requires significant care?
- » How manicured will you want your turf and plantings to look?
- » How much time are you willing to spend on maintenance?
- » Are you prepared for the care required to transition your landscape between seasons?
- » Will you be able to do it all yourself — or will you need to hire some help?

Once you've answered those questions, take a look at some of the different types of landscape care you might need to consider.

## Lawn Care

Lawn care begins with selecting the right type of turf grass for your climate and environment, watering it properly and mowing it to the appropriate height for the season. Comprehensive turf care also means applying fertilizer and pest control when needed, and taking preventive steps to manage disease and other turf conditions.



If you run into problems like thatch or brown spots, you may need to consider aeration and over seeding to keep your lawn growing well and looking lush.

## Tree and Shrub Care

Taking care of your trees and shrubs involves not only watering them regularly, but also monitoring them for pests and diseases — and treating them when necessary, of course. Seasonal pruning is also important, not just for aesthetics but for your plants' overall health.



If your trees and shrubs are losing color, dropping leaves or shedding bark, you may have a problem. A professional can often diagnose the issue with a single glance; others may require a soil sample or more thorough investigation.

## Maintaining Your Hardscapes

Many hardscaping materials used in landscapes today are more durable and weather resistant than ever, but that doesn't mean they don't require regular maintenance to keep them in beautiful condition.

Depending on the type of material you choose, your hardscape maintenance will vary.

**Decks:** These wooden (or wood-like) structures are usually made with treated woods or composites that resist swelling and cracking, but you may need to scrub, sand or re-stain a deck periodically to keep it looking new.

**Patios:** Time can be hard on a patio, whether you've chosen natural stone, brick pavers or another material to pave it. Erosion and shifting, weeds that grow between pavers, mold and mildew, and fading and discoloration from the sun are among the problems you might run into. Regular sealing can keep all these issues at bay.

# Closing

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There are a lot of steps in the landscape planning process. Preparing for and executing your landscape's design, installation and maintenance are huge undertakings, but you'll come away with a landscape you can enjoy for years to come — and an addition to your home that could offer a considerable boost to your property value, too.

There may be several aspects of planning your landscape that you can handle on your own. But if you need a professional to help guide you through any part of this often lengthy process, consider giving the landscaping professionals at T. Lake Environmental Design a call.

Our experienced designers and crews can help you at any point in your landscape's design, installation or maintenance. We'll work with your tastes — and within your budget — to create and care for the landscape that's 100 percent tailored to you and your family's needs.

Call our Macon office at (478) 750-7733 or our East Dublin office at (478) 272-3878 to get in touch with us directly, or **fill out our contact form on our website** to have someone at T. Lake reach out to you as soon as possible.

**You don't have to go through the landscape planning process alone.**  
T. Lake Environmental Design is ready to be your partner every step of the way — but we'll let you take the credit.