



It can be a real challenge to find service providers in any field – whether it is a medical doctor, a home builder or a landscape service. The approach for service selection will vary a bit in some regards, but in others – it will be the same. When choosing a landscape service, seriously consider what type of gardener you are. To make it easy, let's break gardeners into two groups – those that are do-it-yourselfers and those that prefer to have the work done by someone else. Even if you lean more toward the latter group, take the time to list out all of the aspects that you want to maintain control over and then budget time and money accordingly. Minutely itemize your needs, and then try to stick to your decision. If you like to do the work yourself, it is essential that you objectively consider how much physical and nonphysical labor you are capable of, and how much time you can devote to various aspects of any gardening process. And remember – just because you can do something doesn't mean you have to.

Planning, planning, planning. How well any planning is done will depend greatly on your ability (or lack thereof) to accurately envision the end goal as well as the entire path to get there. Come on people - if you don't have any training in or great aptitude for, landscape work – leave it to a professional. If you are looking for someone to provide a new design for any area of your landscape, what to ask? Does the firm or individual provide plans or full service? Some landscape architects and designers prefer to see their projects through from design concept through complete installation. This helps them to ensure control and satisfactory completion of a project that will, after all, have their names attached. If you want to do any of the installation process on your own, get recommendations for an architect or designer that specializes in providing just plans. Be aware that your design will only be as good as your input into the process - so find someone with whom you can work easily.

Service providers that come to your home and do something – whether that is bed installation, weeding, turf care, pruning, tree removal, or chemical applications - should have a clear understanding of your needs. You both have responsibilities that should be agreed upon, up front, through clear verbal and written communication. Be specific – do you prefer that grass clippings be bagged and removed or mulched into the lawn area

(by the way – the latter would be an eco-friendly thing to do). Make arrangements for either on-site or off-site disposal of weed materials removed from beds. List out all circumstances where organic or synthetic products are to be used. If you prefer to have a written report on services provided, products used, time allocations – specify what should be reported and when that must be submitted.

As a homeowner you have the burden of responsibility for many aspects of any work done on your property. According to John Ball, South Dakota State University horticulture professor, it is the duty of the homeowner, when requesting service provision at their home, to be sure that a safe and secure environment is provided. It is imperative that you check with your homeowner's policy to make sure that all on-site workers and equipment are covered by your insurance policy. If not, be aware that you can be personally liable for anything that may happen on your property to anyone or anything that is uninsured. To be safe, ask any potential service provider to bring a copy of their current business insurance certificate when they come to give an estimate. This seems a bit over the top but guess what has happened lately to some unfortunate and uncovered homeowners?