

Do it Right: What to know when hiring a Landscape Contractor



Congratulations on deciding to convert your thirsty landscape into a more sustainable one. There are a growing number of options for how to install it – one is to hire someone. Here's what to know to ensure you do it right.

First Things First!

Ask the landscape contractor:

- Are you licensed and bonded? If so, ask to see a copy of their documents.
 - This ensures that they are professionals covered by insurance.
- Are you trained in sustainable landscape design?
 - A sustainable landscape designer will have knowledge about native and climate-appropriate plants and rainwater harvesting. Ask to see samples of their work.
 - Some installers are not trained in design, but may have pre-designed packages to choose from. See below to ensure the choices are sustainable.

Be Informed!

Questions to consider:

What about using artificial turf?

- Artificial turf acts more like concrete than turf. It starves the soil of organic matter and the life it needs. It also produces heat.
- Artificial turf, rocks, and other similar heat producing materials should represent no more than 20% of the total landscape.

Which is better – rocks or mulch?

- Rocks and gravel look nice as accents to a garden or used as a garden path. However, they store heat, increasing the temperature of your yard.
- Organic mulch (wood chips) builds the soil and provides a healthier environment for plants to grow. Organic mulch holds in moisture, reduces weed growth, and creates a cooler landscape.

Does “sustainable” mean I have to plant cactus?

- Los Angeles is not a desert. There are numerous beautiful native plants that are adapted to our Mediterranean climate, have flowers that attract birds and butterflies, and once established need just a little water through the summer months.
- Other than native plants, you can choose climate-appropriate plants that don't need as much water. Lots of beautiful options are available.

What about using weed barrier cloth?

- Weed barrier cloth and plastic landscaping materials decrease the health of the soil by preventing organic matter from reaching the soil – decreasing plant health.

Can I use rainwater even if it only rains a few times a year?

- ❑ Yes! Water your garden with rainwater!
Work with the landscape contractor to ensure any downspouts from the roof are directed away from driveways and patios and into the landscape. Downspout extensions are an easy solution to prevent valuable water from going down the gutter.
- ❑ You can also redirect downspouts into tanks. For example, just seven inches of rain can yield over 4,000 gallons of water over a rainy season! This water is great for using on trees and landscapes.

What about my sprinklers?

- ❑ Convert your sprinklers to a drip irrigation system. There is no need to replace existing irrigation pipe.
- ❑ Although not as efficient as drip, you can also replace sprinkler nozzles with rotating stream nozzles.
- ❑ Install a smart controller that ensures your irrigation only comes on when needed.
- ❑ With a sustainable landscape, once plants are established, irrigation needs lessen over time.
- ❑ Typically, many native plants do not need any supplemental irrigation after the first two growing seasons.
- ❑ Install a simple laundry-to-landscape greywater system. You'll water your plants easily with every load.

Can I plant trees during the drought?

- ❑ Yes! It is especially important to continue to plant trees even during a drought since they help to cool communities during times of intense heat.
- ❑ Trees also help capture rainwater and allow it to soak down into the aquifer.
- ❑ Remember, it is important to continue to water and care for all trees during times of drought.

What is the maintenance of a sustainable landscape?

- ❑ This varies depending on the design and plants used. Be sure to ask the Landscape Contractor so you know what to expect.
- ❑ Check to see if they have a garden maintenance team or one they can recommend.

