

Designing the Perfect Backyard Green Space

Before you start a landscape project, you need to answer some basic questions that will help you pick the right plant and put it in the right place. Project EverGreen asked the pros at Spring-Green lawn care services, a long-time supporter of PE and advocate for green spaces, for tips on how to design the ideal backyard green space for your family to enjoy.

Starting Your Landscape Plan

First, you need to decide the basic layout and space available for the trees and shrubs you are going to buy. Take a survey of your property and make a drawing of the shape of your property.

Draw in the location of your house, driveway, sidewalks, and any other permanent structures. It is a good idea to try to determine the slope of your property and note any areas of your yard that may be influenced by surrounding structures or plants. An example of this would be the amount of shade coming from a neighbor's trees.

Sketch some ideas on paper to get an idea where you may want to add new plants, or replace old ones. On the layout, it would be a good idea to pencil in the location of the windows on your house; determine the distance from the window to the ground level; and write it underneath each window sketched. This information will be useful when choosing foundation plants.

Picking Landscape Plants

Second, you need to decide why you are planting what you are planting. Is it going to be a focal point of the entire landscape, or is it going to be used to fill in an open space? Are you purchasing it for its beauty and looks, or will it be functional, such as a border or hedge, or both?

Do some research by looking at landscape guides, garden magazines, or by visiting a local nursery or garden center. It is important to know the ultimate height and/or width of the trees and shrubs you are considering.

One common mistake that many do-it-yourselfers make is putting too many plants in too small of a place. Another common mistake is not considering the height or width of the plant. If the window is 3 feet from the ground and the plant you purchase will grow to 10 feet, there will be a shrub care problem in a very short time.

The same holds true when placing plants next to a door. If the plant will grow to a width of 8 feet and it is planted 2 feet from the front door, then it may soon become difficult to find the door. It can be deceiving when you go to purchase a plant that is only 24-inches wide and try to envision it at its full size. It is important to keep this in mind, or you may be redoing your landscape every 10 years, or so.

Placing Landscape Plants

The third consideration is the placement of the plants in relationship to the growing and maintenance conditions of the planting site and the growing requirements of the plant itself. An example of this is putting shade loving plants in shady yard areas and sun-loving plants in sunny yard areas.

Remember to consider the potential size of the surrounding plants. Finally, consider the aesthetic value and appeal of the plants you are choosing. You need to decide what looks good to you.

You could hire a landscape architect to make many of the decisions for you and offer suggestions for plant selections. Those services will cost extra money, but it may be worth it if you are at your wit's end deciding which plants to choose.