

Landscaping Can Make or Break Home's First Impression

Your front yard is the “face” of your house: the first thing people see when they visit you.

Whether you plan to landscape your front yard for your own pleasure, or to prepare your house for sale, make sure it looks its best. After all, you never have a second chance to make a good first impression.

Before you make the first trip to the nursery, determine what your long-term goal is for the front yard. Would you like trees for shade, grass for the kids to play on, or flowers and plants to cater to your gardening hobby?

Once you have your yard's purpose in mind, do some homework. It is important to monitor the cycles of light and moisture in your yard. Take note where the sun is at different times of the day. Watch for areas of day-long shade or sun so you can match the plants to their lighting needs. Also, take a sample of the dirt in your yard to a lawn and garden center and ask them to determine the pH and chemical composition of your soil. Your soil's characteristics will have a significant impact on what you will be able to grow successfully.

Think locally. Choose trees, flowers, shrubs and other plants that are indigenous to your area. By choosing plants that are native or are tolerant of the weather in your locale, your yard will require less work and give you better results. Find out what is native to your area by contacting the local cooperative extension system office. Visit <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/> for information.

For a garden, keep in mind two key elements — shape and texture. To give character to your garden, select a variety of plants of different shapes and sizes. For example, combine hostas which have large, coarse leaves with small flowery shrubs such as azaleas. Also, keep architectural details in mind when you choose plants. Rough, textured plants will highlight stucco walls, but a picket fence will look better with soft flowers and gentle vines.

Finally, keep it simple. Make sure your landscaping complements the structural details of your home instead of overwhelming it.

By taking a few additional steps in the planning process, you'll spend more time enjoying your yard instead of working in it. And, if you are preparing your house for sale, you'll see an added benefit since a well-planned landscape adds value to any piece of property.