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## Association of Professional Landscape Designers® Frequently Asked Questions

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### 1. WHAT IS APLD?

The Association of Professional Landscape Designers® (APLD®) is an international organization dedicated to establishing the highest standards for the landscape design profession. The purpose of the organization is to advance the quality of landscape design by establishing standards of practice, providing continuing education and certification of its members, and educating the public about good landscape design.

### 2. WHY HIRE A LANDSCAPE DESIGNER?

A professional landscape designer translates your dreams into reality using residential design education, advanced horticultural knowledge, graphic and drafting skills, and hands-on experience. After listening to your ideas and priorities and analyzing your site's character, the designer creates a plan that allows you to visualize your new landscape and provides clear instructions for your contractor. Installing a new landscape without a plan may result in disappointment if the end results don't match your expectations. It can also lead to higher installation costs due to change orders, modifications, and rework.

### 3. HOW DO I CHOOSE A LANDSCAPE DESIGNER?

Factors to consider when hiring a landscape designer include education, experience, and compatibility. Ask what level of formal training the designer has achieved. Ask to see samples of their work. This may be in the form of photographs or plans from a portfolio or website, or the designer may refer you to an installed design.

Equally important is finding a designer whose style and personality are a good fit for your project. Landscape design is a collaborative process, so trust and confidence are key to a successful designer/homeowner partnership.

### 4. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LANDSCAPE DESIGNERS, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, AND LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS?

**Landscape designers** may provide design ideas, landscape plans, planting plans and lighting plans. Some also offer installation-related services such as material selection or plant placement. While they may provide conceptual ideas on garden structures, they are not licensed to provide construction drawings. Likewise, while they may work closely with contractors overseeing the aesthetic elements of an installation, they are not licensed to provide actual construction services. Their education is in residential design which emphasizes design strategies, hardscape options, and plant materials appropriate for residential projects.

**Landscape architects** are licensed by the State of California and, in addition to the plans typically provided by a landscape designer, are qualified to produce construction-ready plans that may include complex retaining walls, grading and drainage plans, and physical structures. Their training emphasizes design for large public and commercial spaces such as parks and commercial landscapes, although some specialize in residential projects. Their fees are usually (but not necessarily) higher than those of a landscape designer.

**Landscape contractors** are licensed to install the designs created by landscape designers and landscape architects. Some are design/build businesses, and provide design services as well. When working with a design/build firm, be sure to clarify the design process used and whether you will receive landscape drawings for your review and approval or just a verbal or written description of the landscape to be installed. Some design/build companies bundle the design fees with the cost of construction, but it is still important to understand the design cost component should you decide to hire a different company for installation.

## 5. HOW DOES THE DESIGN PROCESS WORK?

While the process may vary depending on your designer and the complexity of the project, most design projects include the following:

**Initial Consultation.** This is a chance for you to meet the designer and review your requirements and objectives. Many designers charge for this visit, so to get the most out of the experience, ask the designer the best way to prepare and be sure you understand exactly what will be covered at this meeting.

**Concept Plan/Landscape Plan.** After listening to your ideas and priorities, the designer analyzes your site's character, strengths and problems, and then draws up a plan for review. Depending on your requirements, the designer may provide several alternative options prior to finalizing a landscape plan.

**Planting Plan:** This is a working drawing from which the garden will actually be planted and includes botanical names, container sizes and specific plant locations.

## 6. I LOVE THE LANDSCAPE SHOWS ON HGTV — WILL I HAVE THE SAME EXPERIENCE?

Yes and no. Shows like *Curb Appeal* and *Landscape Smart* correctly demonstrate the vision, creativity, practical advice and plain old fun a designer brings to a project. In fact, many APLD members have appeared on these shows.

Some shows, however, may mislead homeowners as to the time and money the design and installation processes actually require. Design time and construction labor is not included in the installation costs revealed at the end of the show, and materials have often been discounted or donated. Cost and time for important installation components such as demolition, grading, and irrigation are often ignored.

## 7. WHAT DOES A LANDSCAPE DESIGN COST?

You purchase a landscape designer's expert consultation time, and, typically, your project's design plan. Landscape designers bill for their services in various ways. Design is ordinarily billed on an hourly basis or as a flat fee. It is important that the homeowner and the landscape designer have an early discussion and agreement about the cost of services.

For assistance in locating a professional landscape designer in your area, visit [www.apld.org](http://www.apld.org).

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**Association of Professional Landscape Designers®  
Why Hire a Professional?**

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### WHY HIRE A PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPE DESIGNER?

Your landscape designer works closely with you to create a personalized and customized design that is best suited to your home, lifestyle and unique set of wants and needs. You receive guidance and a comprehensive plan of action from someone who has your best interests at heart and the desire to give you the garden of your dreams.

Your landscape designer:

- ❖ **reviews and analyzes your property** from an architectural, environmental, horticultural and artistic viewpoint and uses the findings to create the Master Plan that is best for your site.
- ❖ **develops site-specific solutions** to the problems and opportunities presented by your property using her education, experience, imagination, talent and creativity.
- ❖ **provides an artistic eye** and gives your outdoor space a form and a sense of style that will be the heart of your garden.
- ❖ helps you **choose the most appropriate plants and materials** for your site.
- ❖ **works within your budget**, or, advises you on how your landscape plan can be installed in stages, if that's what you'd prefer.
- ❖ helps you **avoid costly mistakes** by providing a clear direction in which to proceed.
- ❖ **brings a network of industry professionals** to help insure the immediate and ongoing success of your project.
- ❖ **acts as your independent advocate** throughout the process.