



Landscape-Wisely Guide

Looking to turn that ho-hum backyard into something special this year? Like a home renovation, some landscaping upgrades add value to your home, while others do not. This "Landscape-Wisely" PDF, compliments of The Landscaping Company, outlines the best returns homeowners can see on landscaping investments.

Landscaping builds equity

Money spent on landscaping can add a significant amount to the resale value of your home.

If you're looking for a good investment, step outside your house. Studies have shown that properly done landscaping provides the highest return on investment of any type of home improvement.

Money Magazine did an extensive investigation into the value that landscaping adds to a property and determined that well done landscaping enhances sales appeal, increasing the actual speed of the sale. A study found that homes with "excellent" landscaping can expect a sale price about six to seven per cent higher than an equivalent house with "good" landscaping. A Canadian survey found that hedges raise property values by 3.6 per cent and a landscaped patio raises the property value by 12.4 per cent.

Even if you're not planning to sell in the near future — the Money Magazine article found that landscaping can bring a recovery value of 100 to 200 per cent at selling time. Kitchen remodeling brings a 75 to 125 per cent recovery rate, bathroom remodeling a 20 to 120 per cent recovery rate, and addition of a swimming pool a 20 to 50 per cent recovery rate. What better reason to invest in your property now and enjoy the benefits of an enhanced outdoor lifestyle?

Even more reason to invest in a well-designed landscape — a study published in the Journal of Environmental Horticulture found that poor landscape design can decrease property values by up to 10 per cent. Plantings too close to a house can reduce the appraisal value. The most common mistakes made by do-it-yourself landscapers are planting trees and shrubbery too close to each other and too close to houses, fences and other structures.

- Trees are the best investment in a landscape. As soon as you plant them they begin to rise in value and appreciate over time as any solid investment should. Trees can enhance property values anywhere from five to 20 per cent.
- Landscaping could add up to 15 per cent to a home's value. National Association of Realtors president Walt McDonald of Riverside, Calif., says "When people ask me how they can get strong interest in their property, I always tell them to fix up their landscaping."
- Spending on landscape design and installation has more than tripled in the past five years, hitting \$14.3 billion in 2002. And no wonder — it offers the best return on investment of any home improvement you can make.
- In one study, 99 per cent of real estate appraisers concurred that landscaping enhances the sales appeal of real estate.
- In a recent Gallup research project, home buyers revealed they think landscaping adds 14.87 per cent to a home's selling price.
- Consumers value a landscaped home up to 11.3 per cent higher than its base price, according to a Clemson University and University of Michigan study.

A University of Florida study on landscaping's effect on home values advises homeowners to invest in a good landscape plan for added value. Even discounting the potential return on investment in landscaping dollars, there are additional non-monetary gains a quality landscape investment provide.

Some of those benefits include:

- Lower noise levels
- Blocks unpleasant views
- Reduces crime
- Lowers heating and cooling costs
- Improves home appearance
- Optimizes the use of land and outdoor space
- Reduces chemical usage on the property
- Provides an attractive setting for garden ornamentation and statuary

Think twice before installing extreme elements into the landscape that are unlike anything else in your neighbourhood. Everyone likes to think of themselves as unique and our properties are an extension of ourselves. However, your garden is not only part of your own identity, it is also part of the neighbourhood's identity.

The lowest return on investment comes from landscaping, asphalt paving, building a fence or interlocking brick walkways, or even installing a home theatre room, which all return about 25 to 50 per cent. The home renovations that are least likely to increase property value are skylights, whirlpool tubs and swimming pools, which return between 0 and 25 per cent.

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Sources: The Appraisal Institute, the nation's largest professional association of real estate appraisers, MoneyMagazine.com, and TheGlobeAndMail.com