

Where do I start?

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What does a landscaper do? Do I really need an award winning landscaper? What am I paying for?

Why pay \$2500 for a design when I know what I want? I could spend that money on more plants...

First of all, you definitely need a design to protect your investment and your relationships! Years ago I was engaged to do \$30,000 worth of landscape works at a friend's house. The couple didn't want to spend money on a design as they believed that they knew what they wanted. Reluctantly our team commenced work without a proper set of drawings.

After a week or so of construction, there appeared to be a little friction between the husband and wife. We would check daily with one or the other to ensure that the project was to their satisfaction and were always told that things were going swimmingly.

Yes, we were naive enough to believe that both husband and wife had the same mental picture of how the project was to look. But one partner was telling us one thing and the next day the other would come up with another interpretation.

One day the kids of the household were very distraught and told us that their parents had not spoken for days and were sleeping in separate bedrooms due to disagreements on interpretations of the husband's amateur plans.

We finally convinced them that a proper set of plans had to be drawn up with all elements explored to the total satisfaction of all parties (including the contractor). At the end of the exercise the customers were scratching their heads as to why they had taken so much convincing.

Without a proper set of plans the contractor has to guess how much to allow for certain tasks. Allowing for the unknown can make the construction quote more expensive... and you could have something built that is not exactly what you wanted.

You should choose a designer that suits your lifestyle requirements from the LIAV list, accessed from www.liav.com.au. Check out some of their previous works.

When you select a contractor you are generally selecting a team that is going to live with you for a minimum of say four weeks, and stay for up to four months.

What is it you are after? Do you want a contractor who is both the principal of the business and the main man on the tools? One good point for this option is that the person that you've been dealing with at the consultation stage is also the tradesman

accountable for the whole project. This thought can be comforting as a relationship

is established between you from the start.

But the sole trader / contractor will struggle to meet deadlines if hiccups occur along the journey. A smaller outfit will also rely more heavily on sub-contractors for specialist activities such as earthmoving or decorative concreting. The job will ultimately take longer.

If you engage a larger organization the experience may or may not be as intimate, depending on the reputation of the business and the rapport between management and trade staff. If you choose a reputable business, access to specialised trades within the company, as well as relevant machinery, should be advantageous in getting the job done quicker. The foreman of the project will establish a relationship with you during the process and he can call for back up staff if the job starts to linger on.

Whichever way you decide to go you must remember that there is going to be some sort of inconvenience or compromise in the day to day activities of the household during the construction period. The contractors employed to do the scope of works at your home are guests that will be interacting daily with you and your family. Your neighbours may also have to be prepared for occasional inconvenience.

Remember that there is as much involved in a landscape project as there is in an extension to your house. If you take shortcuts in the design and construction process it could all end in tears. Always engage LIAV approved designers and contractors. ●

