

IMPROVING CURB APPEAL

Creative And Cost-Effective Landscape Plans

By Pam Badar

With everything in life, property managers need to do their homework. Careful planning and detailed information are critical to a successful landscape plan. Property managers also need to give thought to what they want the landscape area to convey. What is their objective? Is this area to simply look a little green, or does it convey the polish of a well-run, well-groomed establishment? Remember how important first impressions are to potential new clients. The little piece of land might be the deciding factor for new tenants.

Design Elements

Elements can be various components of the property's landscape. The establishment may have "hardscape," such as fountains, an arbor, bench, or trellis. The "softscape" aspect of the landscape plan is the actual plants. These may be a combination of short, medium, and tall plants, which allows you to use them in various ways to create depth and visual attraction.

Water elements make a lovely feature, but they can add to a property manager's maintenance time. Keep in mind that waterfalls and fountains require electrical support and cleaning on a periodic basis. While this maintenance takes time, the soothing sounds of falling water is beneficial. In addition, water almost always attracts wildlife.

Cost Analysis

Property managers will certainly stretch their landscaping dollars by conducting research and planning in advance. The biggest downfall of most amateur gardeners is to make a selection based upon what they think will look good without giving any credence to the requirements of the plants. No matter how pretty that flowering shrub looks in the layout plan, if there is not enough sunshine, it will be the last time it blooms.



Photo courtesy of Storhouse Storage Center

Always read tags and ask questions of the nursery assistants. The Internet is another great source of information. Many novice gardeners share their experiences; for example, you may find that something will work if it is protected from the wind. Another aspect to keep in mind is the mature size of a plant. Allowing room to grow may look a tad sparse in the beginning, but overcrowding simply equates to throwing away money. Unfortunately, some of the plants simply will not survive.

Gardeners should add two to three inches of mulch around trees and plants. Mulch shades the soil and moisture from the sun, thus lessening water evaporation and saving water. It is best to water the landscape before 8:00 a.m. to reduce evaporation and interference from wind.

Financial assistance is provided to upgrade existing commercial, homeowner associations, multi-family, and single-family residences of one acre or larger with more efficient irrigation equipment. Incentives are based on documented water savings. Sites irrigated with mixed-use meters or recycled water are considered on a case-by-case basis by the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (see guidelines for qualifications at www.bewaterwise.com).

Property managers did not take up the profession of gardener, so the landscape should be designed for low maintenance. This eliminates endless gardening tasks such as replanting. Of course, this area may be one of the first impressions new customers receive so it should be pleasant to the eye.

Plant Life

There are numerous, low-maintenance plants that require many hours of sunshine a day. Property

Because your landscape is the first element of your self-storage facility that customers notice, it is important to make a good first impression by keeping it in excellent condition.

W O W !

Never Miss a Telephone Call

Long Range Cordless Phones by EnGenius



Never Miss a Walk-In

Courtesy Phones



Call Boxes

**Enhance Customer Service
Capture Customer Prospects**

**Toll Free:
(800) 903-6609
selfstoragephones.com**



LEADER IN PROVIDING

**Elevator Phones
Telephone Kiosks
Installation | Wiring
Maintenance**

Operations

managers should consult local nursery employees who are familiar with what types of plants grow in the climate where the facility is located. With water restrictions being placed on residences and businesses, try to educate yourself about what type of plants can be grown with minimal water.

The length of time an area is in the sun or shade each day is valuable in plant selection. Certain plants require a minimum number of sunlight hours. This same information is needed for the winter months and summer months. Challenges can occur if there is an area that has sunlight in the summer, but is blocked from the sun in the winter months.

With the focus on saving water these days, there are more and more drought-tolerant plants that are being made available in the local nurseries. This can benefit the property manager immensely. Remember however, a plant needs to have some tender loving care in order for it to become established. It requires a bit of care to allow it to grow and build its root structure. Once established, drought-tolerant plants are relatively maintenance free.

Selecting the "right" flowers can save property managers money in the long run. There are different types of flowering plants: annuals, bi-annuals, and perennials. Annuals only have a life span of one year. This means they grow, bloom, and wilt in one season. If the property manager is looking to save time and money, he/she should stay away from annuals. However, if property managers are experiencing a big open house or some other feature to draw new clients, this is the perfect way to quickly spruce up an area.

Perennials are probably the best bet for the property manager seeking nice healthy plants with minimal maintenance. These plants grow and live happily for many years. They will go through a bloom cycle each year. No plant is in bloom all the time. This is not how nature intended. Just as the seasons come and go, plants must thrive, bloom, and rest. Keep in mind what a plant looks like in its non-blooming periods. The shapes, sizes, and colors of the leaves can add to your overall plan. There are many different

shades of green that can create visual interest as well.

Drainage Systems

A constant water source can become a smelly nuisance if left unattended. This can send the wrong message if it is near a high traffic area. Property managers need to remember that any area can be made attractive if handled correctly. With today's popularity of ponds, nurseries offer a multitude of water loving plants. This type of plant may be the solution for this challenge. A few stepping stones in the right spot and that problem area has been transformed into a peaceful, polished corner.

Energy Conservation

The energy conservation idea can be taken two ways. Is the property manager hoping to conserve their own energy or that of others? If any type of lawn is included in the landscape, there is a weekly or periodic mowing that needs to be addressed. Low growth ground covers can alleviate this need and look sharp at the same time. All plant materials require periodic watering of some fashion. Drip irrigation is the best water conserving method of irrigation available today. Also, property managers may want to include a timer system in order to water during the early morning hours—the optimal time for watering. This keeps the water from evaporating and prevents moisture from staying on plant material all night long which encourages bacterial growth.

Conclusion

Property managers should review this article as it applies to their landscape situation. Whether it is a first impression or simply an impression, landscaping should be viewed as an opportunity to send the right message. The ultimate goal is to successfully convey this message while being efficient. Low maintenance and upkeep hours can be achieved if the research and planning are addressed in the beginning. ■



Pam Badar is Vice President of Essex Realty Management, Inc.