



A Homeowner's Guide:

Selecting a Landscape Contractor

**Your Home.
It's Your
Environment!**

Courtesy of

**LANDSCAPE ONTARIO
HORTICULTURAL TRADES ASSOCIATION**



No place like home ... Your property has plenty to do with how much your family enjoys life. Whatever its size, an attractive landscape offers tangible benefits.





A tool for you ... Overwhelmed with the task of selecting a landscape contractor? Just follow the steps for an easy system to help you make the right choice.

1.

Rate each contractor you are considering from one to five for each criterion.

2.

Total and compare to get the best landscaping value.

3. Enjoy a more attractive, healthy and restful environment for you and your family!

Compare and decide: A tool for rating and selecting your landscape contractor

Use this chart two ways:

1. as a simple guideline to the kinds of criteria you should be looking for from a landscape contractor, or
2. as a rating system to help you determine more specifically the suitability of the contractor you are considering. It's your choice.

Hint: a perfect score is 65, so anything less than 49 indicates a mark of under 75 per cent.

Score

Proof of Workers Safety and Insurance Board standing

Except for single-person companies, landscape contractors are required by law to pay WSIB premiums on behalf of their employees in the event of a workplace injury. Hiring companies that are not in compliance makes the project owner — you — liable in case of workplace injuries. Ask to see a Certificate of Clearance.

Mandatory: Rate 0 or 5 only

Proof of liability insurance

All contractors should carry liability insurance to protect themselves and their clients from the expense of any unforeseen workplace incidents that might damage your own or neighbouring properties. Ask to see a Certificate of Insurance; it should state the name and address of the contractor, the fact the company carries a minimum of \$1 million commercial general liability, including coverage for bodily injury and property damage, and the effective and expiry dates of the policy as well as the date of issue of the certificate.

Mandatory: Rate 0 or 5 only

Supplier references

By ensuring that the contractor regularly pays all materials' suppliers in accordance with standard trade terms, you can protect yourself from any creditor liabilities. Depending on the size of the project, it is advisable to obtain up to three supplier references. If possible, obtain references from suppliers of materials designated for your project (i.e. interlocking stone, nursery stock, timber)

Rate 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent)

Contract

A written and signed contract will protect the interests of both the contractor and the homeowner. Contracts should clearly stipulate all details such as payment schedules, work start dates, and the complete scope of the project. Areas of responsibility, such as the provision of underground service locates, permits, etc. should also be stipulated. A good contract will also define procedures for the approval of change orders and costs of extras.

Rate 1 to 5

Warranty

The terms and conditions of the contractor's warranty should be clearly spelled out in writing and should specify if the workmanship is warranted and for how long and the length of the guarantee on materials. It is important to know the homeowner's specific responsibilities with regards to ongoing site maintenance (i.e. watering) that may affect the warranty. This is especially important regarding the guarantee of plant materials.

Rate 1 to 5

Client references

A contractor's ability to handle your project can best be determined by asking for references from up to three recent clients. Look for answers to these questions:

- Was the work completed on time?
- Was there sufficient supervisory staff on site?
- Did the contractor return phone calls promptly?
- Was the quality of workmanship acceptable?
- Did staff conduct themselves in a professional manner?
- Was the site kept tidy throughout the construction process?
- Were extras dealt with according to the terms of the contract?

Rate 1 to 5

Human resources

The number of employees, including the number of supervisory personnel should be adequate for the size of the project. Remember, a small company with a single crew may well be sufficient for smaller projects, providing they have adequately scheduled their projects. Client references (see above) are the best indicators of scheduling ability.

Rate 1 to 5**Employee experience, education and certification**

Determine the level of training and experience of key and supervisory personnel. Post secondary degrees, the Horticultural Journeyman's Apprenticeship Program or certification through the Canadian Certified Horticultural Technician's program are all indicators of skilled, committed employees.

Rate 1 to 5**Equipment resources**

The contractor should have adequate equipment resources to complete the job efficiently. It is important to remember that it may be more cost-effective for certain or specialized pieces of equipment to be rented on an as-needed basis.

Rate 1 to 5**Scope of expertise (including sub-contractors)**

Determine which specific disciplines are required for your project. The company should be skilled in all aspects or have access to and use reputable sub-contractors for those areas in which they have no expertise. These include disciplines such as:

- paving stone
- carpentry
- lighting
- earth-work (grading, etc.)
- site clean-up
- soft landscaping (tree and shrub installation)
- natural stone work
- water features
- irrigation
- demolition

Rate 1 to 5**Years in business**

How many years has the company been in business under the current company name?

Rate 1 to 5**Company facilities**

Determine if the company has a landscape office, administrative personnel, equipment storage facilities, etc. These may be an indicator of the company's ability to deal effectively with problems during or after the construction process, return phone calls promptly, etc.

Rate 1 to 5**Association membership**

An accreditation procedure is part of the Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association membership application process. Landscape Ontario members are required to follow a Code of Ethics and a Code of Conduct. Association membership is a very strong indicator of a company's commitment to professionalism.

Rate 1 to 5**Total score**

A landscape gallery

Some projects completed by Landscape Ontario members.
Your property can look this good!



Landscape Ontario membership: A sure sign of pride

Landscape Ontario's mission is to be the leader in representing, promoting and fostering a favourable environment for the advancement of the horticultural industry in Ontario.

What does that mean to you?

That this contractor rating tool is just one of Landscape Ontario's efforts to ensure that you — the consumer — enjoy good experiences when you deal with member companies. We find the best way to achieve that goal is through competence, integrity and fairness. Our success is tied to your satisfaction with our work.

A list of L.O. members in your area is available at

www.landscapentario.com



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