Wave Outdoors Landscape + Design provides landscape design and construction in Mount Prospect. Use these planning questions to prepare a project conversation.

Start with site and scale, not plants and pavers

Before you think about color or the look of a stone walkway, read the site. Where does water go after a heavy rain? How much sun hits in July compared to April? What is your soil texture and pH? A landscape designer or a professional landscaper will run through these in a first visit. If you are doing it yourself, test soil in three spots, note drainage patterns during a storm, and clock sunlight in summer and shoulder seasons.

A good landscape plan will show hardscape lines, utilities, grades, plant sizes at maturity, and a simple irrigation scheme. It should be scalable by phase so you can build one portion each season. If you are wondering what is included in a landscape plan, expect a site base map, demolition notes, layout dimensions, planting plan with sizes, lighting locations, drainage solutions, and material specs for walkways and patios.

Drainage determines success

Get the sequence right. Drainage installation comes before walkways and patios. If you plan a paver driveway with permeable pavers, the base is a deep reservoir of angular stone that stores water, so you will not need separate surface drainage along that run. If you choose a concrete driveway, slope is your friend, and a trench drain at the garage apron can save you from meltwater seeping under the door.

Avoid the shortcut of laying perforated pipe in a trench with no geotextile and no graded aggregate. That pipe will clog. Use washed stone, wrap the trench where soil is fine, and give the system a stable daylight outlet or a properly sized dry well. Surface drainage, swales with turf or native grasses, often costs less than subsurface systems and is easy to maintain. It also looks like part of the yard rather than a retrofit.

Hardscape errors that cost you twice

Entrance design gets ignored until the last week of a build. A front door that feels cut off by planting beds or a narrow path makes daily life harder. Make the path two people wide, add a small landing outside the threshold, and light it. Low voltage lighting along the grade is safer than bright uplighting that blinds guests.

Plant selection and placement, the quiet difference

Planting design starts with function: screening a view, framing a door, feeding pollinators, or stabilizing a slope. Then match species to microclimate. A plant that thrives in morning sun might crisp in afternoon heat. Notice wind channels around corners of the house and radiated heat near dark siding. Put a small tree too close to a foundation and later the crown presses windows and the roots conflict with downspouts. Many planting mistakes come from ignoring mature size. Plant tags are half true at best. Look up regional data and plan for the full size you see in your area.

Tree planting needs a wide, shallow hole, root flare at grade, and no staking unless the site is extremely windy. Remove wire baskets and burlap at least from the top and sides after the tree is in the hole. Water deeply and mulch with a flat ring, not a volcano. Shrub planting follows similar rules; rough up roots on pot-bound plants so they do not continue circling.

Maintenance is design, not an afterthought

How often should landscapers come? For full-service properties with turf, weekly visits from April through October, then monthly in winter. For lower maintenance designs, twice monthly during peak growth and three seasonal visits can suffice. If you ask how often should you have landscaping done, frame it by goals. Curb appeal for a home sale demands a push for three months. A new homeowner establishing planting beds may need more guidance during the first year, then less as the system matures.

Phasing and the order of work

Projects fail when they try to do everything at once without sequence. The order to do landscaping is consistent: demo and grading, drainage system and yard drainage, layout and base for hardscape, walkway and driveway installation, irrigation rough-in, planting and soil amendment, mulch, then lighting and final tuning. Do not install sod before heavy hardscape work. Do not lay a concrete walkway before you set final grades. Doing it once in the right order is cheaper than doing it twice.

The value question

Homeowners often ask is it worth paying for landscaping and should you spend money on landscaping. Good landscaping adds function, reduces maintenance, and can raise resale value. What landscaping adds the most value to a home depends on the neighborhood, but some patterns hold. A clear, welcoming entrance, a healthy lawn or well-designed low lawn alternative, a quality patio, and tidy foundation plantings help almost anywhere. In backyards, what adds the most value to a backyard is usable space: a patio big enough for a table and grill, shade, and a simple path network. Outdoor lighting increases evening use and perceived safety.

Are landscaping companies worth the cost? If the plan involves grading, drainage, irrigation, or structural hardscape, yes. The cost of a failure quickly outruns the savings of DIY. What are the benefits of hiring a professional landscaper? Experience with local soils and codes, access to better materials, and an eye for long-term growth. What are the disadvantages of landscaping through a contractor? Less personal control, scheduling constraints, and a higher upfront check. The way around the downsides is to choose well and phase work if budget demands it.

Timing and longevity

What is the best time of year to landscape? Separate tasks. Hardscape any time the ground is workable, often spring through late fall. Plant trees and shrubs in fall for strong root growth or in spring if supply and scheduling require it. Sow cool season lawns in late summer to early fall. Install warm season sod once soil reaches the right temperature in late spring. The best time to do landscaping for your project is the window that aligns with materials, crew availability, and plant health.

Low maintenance is a design choice

The most low maintenance landscaping cuts back on thirsty turf, uses drought-tolerant species, and simplifies edges. Curved bed lines look natural but are harder to maintain if they wiggle excessively. A clean lawn edging makes mowing faster and keeps mulch in place. Xeriscaping in dry climates means proper plant selection and drip irrigation, not a yard of rock and a few yuccas. Mulching services help in spring, but over-mulching year after year builds a mat. Two inches, refreshed as it breaks down, is enough.

Defensive and sustainable choices

What is defensive landscaping? It is design that manages risk. Think clear sight lines near entries, prickly shrubs under first-floor windows, non-slip pavers for shady paths, and plantings that keep a safe distance from structures. In fire-prone areas, maintain a defensible space with low, well-irrigated plants near the home and denser plantings farther out. In flood-prone zones, use permeable surfaces and rain gardens to hold stormwater. These choices overlap with sustainable landscaping: permeable pavers, native plants that support insects and birds, and smart irrigation that reduces waste.

Services and roles, clarified

What is included in landscaping services depends on the company. Many offer lawn mowing, pruning, mulch, and seasonal color. Full-service firms add drainage installation, irrigation system work, pathway design, paver walkway and driveway design, and plant installation. What do residential landscapers do day to day? They shape beds, set stones, tune sprinklers, manage weeds, and keep a property coherent across seasons. The difference between landscaping and lawn service is scope. Lawn service handles turf and basic cleanup. Landscaping covers planning, build, and planting. Yard maintenance is the ongoing care of all elements, turf and beds, often including outdoor lighting checks and minor irrigation repair.

Common traps and how to dodge them

Before you build: document grades after rain, flag utilities, decide your drainage plan, choose base specs for walkways and driveways, and size plants at maturity. Before you plant: test soil, confirm sun hours, lay out with a hose to visualize bed lines, set irrigation zones for turf and beds separately, and plan mulch only after planting.

Cost-effective decisions that age well

What is most cost-effective for landscaping is not the cheapest line item. It is the choice that lowers lifetime cost. Permeable pavers cost more to install than stamped concrete, but they solve water management and reduce future drainage work. A paver driveway with proper base outlasts a thin asphalt pour. Drip irrigation in beds uses less water and reduces disease, so plants live longer. Native plant assemblies may cost the same to install as more ornamental mixes, but they need less intervention and survive heat better.

Is a landscaping company a good idea for a small project? If it involves grades, utilities, or a warranty, yes. If you are laying stepping stones along a garden path, you might do it yourself with good base and patience. Should you spend money on landscaping? If you value the daily use and comfort of your outdoor spaces, it is rarely a bad investment. What type of landscaping adds value? Usable hardscape, clear entries, layered plantings that frame the house rather than hide it, and lighting that helps you linger.

Realistic expectations, smoother projects

What to expect when hiring a landscaper: a site walk, a design or at least a concept sketch for smaller jobs, a detailed proposal with materials and base depths, a schedule, and progress billing. Ask for plant warranties and what the warranty requires from you for watering. Clarify disposal of debris and protection of existing features. If a crew will be onsite for multiple weeks, ask where materials will be staged and how lawn repair is handled after heavy equipment moves.

If you are thinking how to come up with a landscape plan yourself, start small. Map your lot to scale, define use zones, pick one area that affects daily life the most, and build that phase first. The four stages of landscape planning can be summarized as analysis, concept, design development, and implementation. The three stages of landscaping in the https://storyvergey.com/p/5RA7Wqd_GCAC1euzAtKkD.pdf field are usually site prep, build, and plant. The three main parts of a landscape to keep in mind are hardscape, softscape, and systems such as drainage and irrigation. The five basic elements of landscape design, often taught in design classes, are line, form, color, texture, and scale. The seven steps to landscape design expand those into a process: site inventory, needs analysis, functional diagrams, preliminary design, final plan, installation, and maintenance.

A quick tour of good practice by element

Pathways: A stone walkway or paver walkway looks natural when it bends gently to match desire lines. Keep width generous near entries. If you prefer a flagstone walkway, choose consistent thickness and bed properly. For a concrete walkway, plan joints and consider broom finishes for wet safety. Driveways: Paver driveway with tight edge restraints stays crisp and can be repaired piece by piece. Concrete driveway requires a good subbase and control joints aligned with geometry. Driveway pavers with permeable bases help with drainage where codes tighten. Planting beds: Raised garden beds improve soil quickly and define space; use them for edibles or in poor native soils. Flower bed design benefits from repetition of plant forms so the eye rests. Ground cover installation fills gaps and reduces weeds. Lighting: Landscape lighting should be subtle. Light tasks and focal points, not entire walls. Avoid glare, use timers and photocells, and keep fixtures serviceable. Water systems: A drip irrigation system minimizes waste in beds. A sprinkler system with matched heads is fine for turf. Smart irrigation controllers save water but need setup. Plan for irrigation repair access; do not bury valves under pavers.

Proposal review

Read the proposal beside the project brief. Check which parts of the landscape are included and which choices still need agreement. Ask how changes to one area affect adjacent surfaces, planting or access. Save each clarification with the version of the proposal it changes so the next conversation uses the current scope.