



Fact sheet

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How to Hire a Landscape Maintenance Professional

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Research has shown that a properly designed and maintained landscape can contribute 20% or more to the overall value of your property. Mature trees and shrubs can take years to establish but can be destroyed abruptly with poor management. It is therefore important to choose a professional that will properly maintain the aesthetics and long term health of landscape plants and your landscape investment.

Range of Services

Consumers should first decide the range of services needed or desired. Landscape maintenance companies may provide lawn and tree care as well as care of ornamental landscape beds and gardens. Other companies may specialize in only one or select services. A lawn maintenance company may provide mowing only or complete services including pest control. Maintenance of landscape ornamentals (shrubs and small trees, ground covers and flower gardens) may include fertilization, pruning, mulching, insect, disease and weed control, and seasonal clean-up. Highly skilled services such as pruning and pest control require a higher level of qualifications and more experienced personnel than simple seasonal clean ups. In any case, care should be taken to decide on the desired services and then to find a reliable company.

Finding a Landscape Maintenance Company

Family, friends and neighbors can be helpful resources for compiling a list of business for initial contact. Make sure the companies offer the services needed by checking Yellow Pages ads or making preliminary calls. Landscapers in New Jersey who plant perennials and/or nursery stock must be registered and certified by the NJ Department of Agriculture, Division of Plant Industry. This

certification assures consumers that only pest free stock will be sold and planted. For landscapers outside New Jersey, please check with your state's Department of Agriculture. Landscapers who apply pesticides must have a NJ Certified Pesticide Applicators License or company employees registered as commercial operators who work under the supervision of someone with a valid pesticide applicators license. Their business must also be registered as an applicator business with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). If you are outside of New Jersey, please check with your state Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Environmental Conservation, or Department of Agriculture for pesticide applicator licensing needs. Some services may have NJ Certified Tree Experts, International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborists, or Certified Landscape Technicians on staff. Besides personal recommendations, criteria for choosing companies might include business longevity and record of complaint filed with the Consumer Bureau or Better Business Bureau.

Choosing a Landscape Maintenance Company

First, be an educated consumer. Try to learn something about the type of services needed before interviewing prospective companies. For example, if shrub pruning is on the list, read about proper pruning fundamentals so that you have some way to judge whether the proposed work is appropriate. There are many informative, succinct publications on this and other relevant topics available through Rutgers Cooperative Extension and other Cooperative Extension Services. Armed with some basic information with which to judge prospective companies, ask relevant questions such as:

- When and how often are services provided?



- Is soil testing conducted?
- How are plant problems diagnosed and decisions to use pesticides made?
- Will I receive copies of the soil test and plant diagnostic results?
- What approaches to weed control are used?
- What kinds of mulch are used and how is it applied?
- If providing pest control, do you follow Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices?
- Are you a NJ Certified IPM provider?
- Do you have a valid NJ Pesticide Applicators License?

In addition to land care practices, you should also ask questions about the business itself, such as:

- How long have they been in the business?
- What are the management and staff qualifications or areas of expertise?
- If tree care is provided, is there a NJ Certified Tree Expert on staff?
- For pesticide applicator services, is the business registered with the NJDEP as an applicator business?
- Will they tour and evaluate the property and maintenance needs before finalizing the contract?
- Does the company carry business insurance?
- Will they provide customer references for recent work?
- Do they participate in a professional organization?

If a company will be applying pesticides for insect, disease or weed control they must by law have a valid NJ Pesticide Applicator Business License, employ Licensed Applicators or Registered Operators, and provide the consumer with a written notification or copy of:

- proposed date of application.
- brand name(s) of the pesticide(s) to be used and, if available, the common chemical name of the active ingredients.
- the label instructions that relate to the customer or general public safety.
- a Consumer Information Sheet that includes the name, address, and telephone number of the applicator business, telephone numbers of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, National Pesticide Hotline (Oregon), and the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System.

Notification requirements also include posting of signs on the treated property. Copies of the pesticide labels must be provided at the customer's request, and adequate time allowed for reading all materials.

Hiring a Landscape Maintenance Company

Once a company has been selected, a written agreement that fully describes the services and materials to be supplied and the costs should be worked out between the company and customer. The agreement should include timing of services where relevant. If additional services or materials are deemed needed during the life of the contract, there should be a written statement regarding customer approval for additional services and charges.

Additional Resource Information:

RCE Fact Sheets

For current fact sheets and other publications, please contact your county Rutgers Cooperative Extension office located in the blue pages, under "County Government" in your telephone directory or visit our website, www.rce.rutgers.edu.

Professional Organizations

The New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association (NJNLA), 605 Farnsworth Avenue, Bordentown, New Jersey 08505, call 1-800-314-4836, via email, njnlal@aol.com or online at www.gardennj.net.

The New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (NJLCA), PO Box 604, HoHoKus, New Jersey 07423-0604, call 201-703-3600, or online at www.njlca.org.

Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), 150 Elden Street, Suite 270, Herndon, Virginia 20170, call 703-736-9666, or online at www.alca.org.

Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS), 720 Light Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21230-3816, call 1-800-609-PGMS, email pgms@assnhqtrs.com or online at www.pgms.org.

Nursery & Plant Dealer Certification in New Jersey

New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Division of Plant Industry, PO Box 330, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0330, call 609-292-5442 or online at www.state.nj.us/agriculture/plant/nursery.htm.

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Desktop publishing by Rutgers-Cook College Resource Center

Revised: October 2004

**RUTGERS COOPERATIVE RESEARCH & EXTENSION
N.J. AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK**

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