



SELECTING A LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR:

10 MISTAKES TO AVOID MAKING

1. ASSUME ALL CONTRACTORS HAVE THE SAME LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE AND CERTIFICATIONS

With landscaping in Canada the industry isn't regulated the same as other trades with journeyman tickets and standardized trade schools. That said, oftentimes landscape contractors have no formalized training. Try to do some research to see if a contractor has industry certifications so you know you are hiring someone who is qualified to do the work. If a contractor has experience and certifications you can have peace of mind knowing you are dealing with a professional.

2. FAIL TO REVIEW PAST WORK EXAMPLES AVAILABLE ON WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Don't make a blind decision without at least checking some past work on social media and websites. Do you like what you see and the styles they produce? If they have no social media or online presence that could be a red flag. Are they an active business you can rely on to be present and communicate with through the whole project?

3. RECEIVE A FINAL QUOTE FROM A CONTRACTOR THAT HAS NEVER VISITED THE JOB SITE

If a contractor gives you a final quote without ever visiting your job site you should take pause. Even if you already have a design the contractor should still visit the job site. They should check for machine access, delivery locations, elevations for drainage and water management, utility locations and so much more. Accurate quotes require knowing all the variables. Be wary of quotes that come in lower when the job site was never visited as you may end up getting charged more at the end because they didn't do their homework and a site variable was missed.

4. ASSUME ALL QUOTES ARE USING THE SAME MATERIALS

Make sure the contractor is quoting the actual brick, plants, etc. you want in the yard. Sometimes quotes are done using lesser quality materials in order to lower the initial bid. One contractor might be quoting 10 gallon trees and the next a 5 gallon tree. This might result in you getting charged upgrade fees to use materials you thought were included in the original quote.



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5. ASSUME ALL QUOTES ARE USING THE SAME CONSTRUCTION METHODS

This is a big one, not all things are created equal! A paving stone patio built by one contractor is not the same as one built by the next. The construction methods matter for the quality and durability of a project. If someone says they can install something cheaper that could be another red flag. Is it cheaper because lesser build standards are being quoted in order to win the bid? If they aren't certified and aren't willing to share the build specs ask for more information. A build spec would look something like the ones compiled here: [Standard Build Specs](#). In the end, default to certified companies if they cost a bit more because you can trust the process and build standards.

6. ASSUME ALL QUOTES ARE USING THE SAME MATERIAL QUANTITIES

You received a quote that has certain areas that are thousands of dollars cheaper than the next contractor. If the material type is the same and build spec is the same the next thing to do is check the quantities. For example; your rock and mulch groundcovers that are supposed to be at minimum 4" thick may have been being quoted at 2" thick, or the irrigation system hasn't been designed by a certified designer and you end up with 2 zones where you should have had 6 to water properly. Reputable companies will be happy to share the details with you and won't reduce quantities to lower a bid.

7. ASSUME EACH QUOTE ISN'T MISSING ANYTHING THAT WILL SHOW UP LATER ON A BILL

You don't speak "landscaper" so can get muddled or lost in what is actually included in the quote & build. You think you did great and got the best price but the build is coming to an end and things you thought were included aren't. Your final bill has inflated past the company you wanted to go with originally because the quote you selected was missing items you weren't aware of. A good contractor should be happy to review their quote or a competitor's quote and make sure neither party missed anything that will be a forgotten cost that is passed on to you later. In the end what matters is that you are quoted for and pay for exactly what you want.

8. NEVER MEET CONTRACTORS TO DISCUSS THE QUOTE THEN MAKE A PRICE BASED DECISION

You get a quote via email or paper from a contractor and now it's time to make a decision. You compare the quotes, look at prices, and make a decision. Stop! A good contractor should not only be willing to, but want to have a meeting with you to go through a quote line item by line item and explain exactly what you are getting. If they cost more or less for a specific item you should know why. Don't just try and interpret things on your own and make a price based decision, this could make you miss one of the previously listed issues!

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9. ASSUME THERE WILL BE A COMMUNICATION PLAN IN PLACE FOR THE BUILD

Is there a communication plan for the build? So you liked the contractor when you met them and they had a better price so you selected them. Now you cannot get ahold of them, you have no timelines or schedules, and get elusive answers. Did all the efforts go into closing the bid and then the contractor disappears or is hard to reach? The job gets done but you had to fight every step of the way to be kept up to date on where things are at. Don't just take someone's word that "they will answer the phone", it's too easy to say that only for it to never happen. Ask what the communication plan is like; do they have an office staff you can get ahold of, how does billing work, how do you communicate with the foremen once the job is underway, how are you kept up to date on scheduling, etc.

10. THINK OF CONTRACTORS AS COMMODITIES AND EVALUATE SOLELY BASED ON PRICE

And finally...you are paying for more than just a commodity to be had at the lowest price. By only trying to find the cheapest number or haggle down the cost you are devaluing everything a good contractor brings to the table. This doesn't mean you should just go with the highest price, but it does mean there are usually a few reasons (like the ones outlined above) why the price is higher. If you are shopping for the bottom number the end result is often poorer quality. Experience, professionalism, and certified industry professionals cost more because they have already seen and know how to provide the best solutions for your yard. If you make a call based on price alone you might be disregarding important variables like experience and certifications that ensure your final install is durable and exceeds expectations.

BONUS - 11. DON'T LET THE POTENTIAL OF WHAT COULD GO WRONG SWAY YOUR EXCITEMENT FOR WHAT WILL GO RIGHT IF YOU FOLLOW THESE 10 GUIDELINES. GETTING A NEW LANDSCAPE WILL BE AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY WHEN YOU KNOW YOU TOOK THE TIME TO SELECT THE RIGHT CONTRACTOR.

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