

Selecting a Landscape Contractor

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Based on guidelines by the *Associated Landscape Contractors of America*

The *Associated Landscape Contractors of America* (ALCA) recommends the following guidelines to help you select a landscape contractor for a residential project. Homeowners should determine the following:

What services do you want?

- Determine how the landscape will be used, and project requirements such as design services, plant selection, construction, and maintenance.
- Decide if you plan to care for areas of the landscape yourself.

Are they professional?

- Make appointments to review prospective firms' portfolios. Plan to ask a lot of questions such as:
 - How long has the firm been in business?
 - What's the education background and work experience of the employees who will work on your project, and what kind of continuing education do they receive?
 - What certifications do workers hold?
 - What professional affiliations does the company hold?
 - Does the firm intend to use subcontractors?
 - How are the design fees structured?
 - What is the payment schedule?
- Ask to see proof of insurance for liability and workers' compensation. Be sure to ask about locally required licenses and permits; for example, a nursery license, pesticide applicator's license, or plumbing license may be required for certain projects.

Are they reputable?

- Ask for customer references, and take the time to visit previous jobs of prospective contractors. Also visit a job in progress to see if the crew's appearance and job presence are acceptable. Talk to past and present customers to answer questions such as:
 - Did the contractor display good work habits like returning calls promptly and keeping appointments?

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- Did the contractor honor the contract with the customer?
- Was the contractor responsive to concerns expressed by the customer?
- Did the contractor meet the customer's expectations for technical competence?
- Would the customer hire the firm again?

Will they put it in writing?

- Ask the firm to provide a detailed written contract. Be sure the contract includes the scope of work to be performed (including the ongoing maintenance necessary to protect your investment), total costs, method of payment, guarantees, and mediation or arbitration clauses for resolving any dispute that might arise.
- Review the contract carefully before signing