

Installation and maintenance

CONSTRUCTING A GARDEN IS A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

Installing a new landscape or maintaining an existing one requires considerable knowledge. Ideally the landscape plan for a new installation should be done in conjunction with the architectural plans. This will allow the garden features to be harmonized with the architectural features. In other cases the landscaping is installed after the buildings are completed or the installation is a renovation project.

The two parts of any landscape installation are hardscaping and softscaping. Hardscaping refers to items such as drainage, grading, irrigation, retaining walls and paving stones while softscaping deals with soil, soil amendments and plants. Both are equally important to the long-term success of the project.

Once the landscape installation is finished plants and soil have to be maintained to ensure continued health and vigour. Flower beds, shrubs, lawns and trees all have to be irrigated, fertilized and maintained to keep them growing and looking their best.

Constructing a garden is a long-term investment and making the right choices is critical to the success of the project. Ask yourself: is the project something I have the expertise to do myself, or would it be better to hire a certified landscape professional to do the work? A third option is to hire a professional to guide or assist you in doing the work. This assistance may range from a few sketches and a sequence of tasks to be done to a series of regular visits to the site to supervise each phase of the work. Regardless of which option you choose, you should select the best quality materials to build the garden.

Try to choose paving products with good durability, drain pipes that will support the weight of soil, wooden timbers that will not decay, quality top soil and healthy plants. Creating a garden or landscape with quality materials provides a long-term structural foundation.

The BC Landscape & Nursery Association (BCLNA) in conjunction with the B.C. Society of Landscape Architects (BCSLA) has prepared a book titled the *B.C. Landscape Standard, 6th edition*. This document lays out a se-

ries of acceptable standards and makes recommendations for all major aspects of the landscape industry. Acceptance of the *Standard* has grown, with each edition allowing for more universal enforcement of performance levels.

The *Standard* is divided into two main sections; installation and maintenance. Installation covers topics such as sub-grade elevations, types and depths of top soil, turf grass quality, plant and pot sizes and mulching requirements. The



Be Confident About Hiring!

Place your trust in horticulturists who have the training, skills and experience to provide you with quality service. Many BCLNA members hold journeyman status, horticultural certificates, diplomas or degrees, all programs based on extended periods of formal training.

Industry certification programs have been established to make it easy for consumers to measure qualifications. These programs include Certified Horticultural Technician (CHT), Certified Irrigation Designer and Contractor, and Certified Arborist. CHT is proof of skills and knowledge for landscape installation and maintenance and retail. Horticultural qualifications are your protection.



topics under maintenance include levels of maintenance, scheduling, mowing heights and frequencies, fertilizer programs and recommended maintenance procedures.

When you have decided to hire a landscape professional to do an installation project or to do a followup maintenance job it is important to have a signed contract or letter of agreement. This will detail the work to be done, fees and expenses, schedule of work and payments, standard of work (*B.C. Landscape Standard, 6th edition*) and a workmanship warranty. A reputable professional will always make such an agreement part of a contract because it will protect both the client and the contractor and set the basis for their future relationship. When in doubt, seek a second opinion from an independent landscape professional or call the BCLNA office for assistance.

If the contractor does not wish to sign a contract it is best to look for another contractor.

Maintenance contracts are generally much less detailed and usually include the work to be done, the work schedule and the terms of payment. On large commercial or strata contracts it might be advisable to hire an independent landscape professional to monitor the contract to ensure the terms of the contract are being met. Inadequate maintenance can lead to a slow but costly decline in the quality of the landscape.

Always interview your prospective contractor to determine their environmental philosophy. Ask for references and locations where they have done work. Do they use new, low level noise equipment and practice integrated pest management? Do they plan to use organic fertilizers where possible and are compost mulches used for soil enhancement?

See the section on good garden management for more details (page 6). ■

