

Top things to consider for great landscaping results

What project can instantly update your home's appeal and make it the shining star on the block? Landscaping can add value and curb appeal. Good landscaping doesn't have to be time consuming or expensive. With the right plan and some creativity, you can easily be the envy of all your neighbors.

Lawn: *Should you sod or seed your lawn?*

"Lush green grass will always add to a home's appeal," says John W. Shields, certified landscape irrigation auditor, production manager for the landscape architecture department at Lose & Associates in Nashville, Tenn. In this job, Shields has been the principal designer for most Cracker Barrel Old Country Store locations for over 10 years. He says, "The decision to grow your lawn by using seed or pre-grown sod is based on many factors, primarily the cost and climate of where you live."

Cost comparisons:

Pricing is approximate and varies from region to region.

- Dry seeding averages 10 cents to 12 cents per square foot
- Hydro seeding (typically a mixture of seed, mulch and water) averages 16 cents to 17 cents per square foot
- Sod averages 45 cents to 50 cents per square foot

Timing considerations:

When to seed or lay sod varies from region to region.

You can find out more about your area by accessing the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map online.

"The grass you select and the region you live in will dictate when to plant," says Shields. "If you plant fescue grass, fall is the best time for planting because it's cooler. Soil temperature should be around 50 to 60 degrees F with air temperatures around 60 to 75 degrees. Temperatures above 90 degrees and below 50 degrees will cause your fescue to go into dormancy. If you plant Bermuda grass, be sure to plant in the summer when the soil temperature reaches above 60 degrees at night. Always remember the grass must have moisture for one to three weeks after planting."

Remember to be patient when growing grass. Seeds can take weeks to grow and not every seed will germinate. The rate can be as low as 60 percent, but the end results are well worth it.

Garden: *What's the best way to organize plants?*

As you plan a garden, keep an eye out for inspiration in daily life. Look through magazine pictures and gardens at your favorite local restaurants for ideas.

For example, Cracker Barrel restaurants tier their front gardens, a strategy you can easily duplicate at home by planting from largest to smallest. Start with large foundation trees such as evergreens in the back. Then move to the medium level tier and install shrubbery. Finally, think about the lowest level

for ground cover. Cracker Barrel uses Liriope, commonly called monkey grass, for ground cover. It is a hardy plant that thrives in many hardiness zones — from Georgia up to Maine.

"Adding mulch around trees and in a garden makes for a nice clean look in your landscaping," adds Shields. "Remember not to pile mulch too high — 3 to 4 inches should be plenty. Mulching increases moisture retention and will actually reduce weeds in your garden."

Care: *How much should you water?*

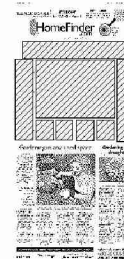
Plants need sun and water to survive, and while you can't control the sun, you do have more control over water.

"If you want to water correctly, you must know the zone in which you're located," says Shields. "For example, if you're watering grass seed in zone six — which goes across the center of the U.S. from coast to coast, you would water fescue 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 inches a week. You would water Bermuda grass seed 3/4 to 1 inch per week."

If you need additional guidance, ask your local gardening center or nursery. Also, remember to follow your city's watering regulations since most areas have specific rules for residents on days and times to water.

With these tips you can revamp your landscaping to add value to your home and increase your personal enjoyment as you pull proudly into the driveway every day.

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Tiering your gardens by planting areas with largest to smallest and by height creates interest and a way to conduct maintenance easily.