

The Value of Landscaping

Your Greatest Asset May Be In Your Own Backyard!

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Contributing a diverse background of nursery, greenhouse and landscape experience, Miller challenges all to 'GoGreen'.

"One of your greatest assets may be in your own backyard – literally. As the housing market turns softer, Americans are realizing that one of the best ways to increase a home's resale value is to revamp the landscape," was the lead-in to the March 2003 issue of The Wall Street Journal Magazine of Personal Business SMART MONEY, which featured a cover special report "Fertile Ground – Add 15% to Your Home's Value".



While today's housing market downturn is even more serious, and home values are declining, there are some things that you can do to maintain or add value to your home, whether you're trying to sell your home or maintain it as one of your most valuable assets. Simple basic landscape maintenance and upgrades in your landscape are some of the few things that you can do that have been proven to all value to your home and not depreciate.

What is the first thing your guests, potential buyers or bank appraisers see when they pull up in front of your home? It's not the re-modeled bathroom or kitchen or the new carpet or hardwood floors; it's your yard and landscape! First impressions are everything! If they have a great first impression; other problem areas won't appear to be such a big deal. It's all about curb appeal!

Trees are greatest asset, literally growing in value. They still need occasional maintenance – just like your car needs a periodic lube job and wash/wax.

Native plants in the landscape are the current popular trend and are a good idea under the right conditions. Native plants do not grow well if there is major construction/grading disruption of the existing soil. If your lot is graded, topsoil removed and replaced, it's not a native situation any more. Native plants have a symbiotic relationship with other native plants. Some depend on others for shade – if they don't have shade, they will have a difficult time surviving, even though they are in their "native soil".

More than Money – reduce your carbon footprint!

While you are increasing the value of your home, you have another added value that automatically comes with this – improvement to the environment and a reduction in your carbon footprint! According to Bob Dolibois, executive vice president of the American Nursery & Landscape Association, "over a 50-year lifetime, a single tree generates \$31,250 of oxygen, provides \$62,000 worth of air pollution control, recycles \$37,500 worth of water and controls \$31,250 worth of soil control!"

Energy savings

Besides aesthetic value, that shrub is also valuable for its other properties such as noise abatement, windbreak, and energy savings. Research shows that shrubs surrounding a house reduce traffic sounds, offer a buffer against winter's chill winds, and if placed along the foundation, provide insulation against the cold and keep temperatures down during the hot spells.

That last feature translates into huge savings on heating and air-conditioning bills. The same is true of trees. In fact, studies show that three well-placed trees around a home can trim energy bills by 50 percent!

Landscaping Adds Value to Your Home

Did you know that the sale price of your home may be significantly higher if your property includes quality landscaping? According to the American Association of Nurserymen, installing healthy trees, shrubs, and plants can be a wise investment. Think of a \$20 plant; as it grows into a \$200 shrub it brings more value and beauty — among other benefits—to your home's property.

Reports show that a well-designed and maintained landscape can boost a home's sale price, by some estimates as much as 27 percent. Landscaping is so valuable to real estate agents, they say they prefer listing homes with attractive, neat low-maintenance yards and gardens because these properties sell faster.

The agents reveal that besides the fact that they have an easier time selling landscaped homes. These properties sell closest to the asking price. Why? According to these property experts, the

public values homes with what is known as "curb appeal" — the curbside view of warm-looking inviting dwelling, surrounded by a lovely landscape.

This advantage, they say, yields a tremendous return on investment. And besides this financial profit, a homeowner reaps hefty rewards in the form of pride in and satisfaction with the home's appearance.

Experts say that if you're considering a first-time landscaping or re-landscaping project to revitalize and rejuvenate your home's looks, concentrate on the entrance of the property. They say that it's important to place emphasis on this area because it, more than any other location, reveals a great deal about the people who inhabit the house.

Observations confirm that a person viewing the property from the street will focus on the point of entry, so this is where the viewer receives their very first impression of the dwelling, the structure, and by extension, its inhabitants. This information suggests then that the front of a home should be designed to communicate a friendly, inviting feeling.

It should be open, warm and welcoming to guests. And most important, the entryway design should also give the message that besides being friendly, the dwellers take pride in the appearance of their home.



Driveway entrance before (top) and after (bottom) landscaping.



Door entrance before (top) and after (bottom) landscaping.

Wise Investments

Today's homeowners are becoming more and more selective about how and where they choose to spend their financial resources. Electronic gadgets and luxury trips are fast losing their appeal as consumers become increasingly sophisticated about making wise investments. They are rechanneling their resources into their most vital asset — the home that tells who they are, where their family will grow and share memories over the years, and where friends will remember parties and gatherings as much for the beautiful surroundings as the warm hospitality.

Unlike gadgets and other fleeting luxuries, your residence is a tangible investment in monetary terms and in other ways as well: It will always be home to all who've lived there. With that kind of value at stake, you'll want the exterior of your home to exhibit the same high quality that you choose for the interior.

Professional Advice

Make sure that you set that quality, which provides a firm foundation for continued smart investments. To be certain that your landscape looks as beautiful as it can while it reflects your tastes and preferences get professional advice from your local retail nursery/garden center or landscape firm. These experts are well-versed in color, design, maintenance requirements, and selecting the best plants for your home landscape. Professional advice even if on a tight budget is a valuable investment for the long term success of your landscape project.

To find a Virginia Certified Landscape Designer, visit: <http://www.vslld.org/default.htm>

A message from the author: As the 'GoGreen' columnist for the Virginia Green Industry Council, I want to challenge you to 'GoGreen', keep the Commonwealth of Virginia green and growing. Familiarize yourself with drought tolerant and pest resistant plants. Then, join me and my colleagues in our effort to enhance the beauty of the state's environment, the well-being of our citizens, improving our state's economy, and improving the health and wellness for everyone in Virginia. For details of the Council's activities, see <http://www.viriniagreen.org>, call 540-382-0943 or email info@VirginiaGreen.org.

Together, let's 'GoGreen'!

Photo Credit: Jerry Carter, Outdoor Environments, Richmond Virginia.
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