



LOOKING FORWARD

Having your garden professionally designed is an investment in your family's future

Words: Amanda Elboz

The initial outlay for a garden design and properly drawn-up plan can seem prohibitive at first, but it can cost you a lot more if you overlook this important first step. Without a plan, you run the risk of ruining the appearance of your garden and ending up with an impractical, unwelcoming outdoor area.

Engaging a professional landscape designer to prepare a concept plan is a wise investment and a relatively inexpensive stage in the landscaping process compared to the expenses you can incur (for example, in work that has to be re-done) if you forge ahead without professional guidance. In short, a professional design and concept plan is the backbone of a successful landscape.

The benefits of expert design

The benefits of a professionally designed garden plan are many. A landscape designer

has a wealth of experience and knowledge they can draw on to produce a plan that is right for your site. They do this by taking into account aspect, topography, soil conditions, views, existing vegetation and how you would like to use your garden. These practical elements are always the first things considered by a designer before they move on to the "pretty stuff" and how the garden will look.

So many times, homeowners make the mistake of undertaking a garden renovation themselves, spending thousands of dollars on paving, decking, new plants and the like only to end up with an okay result rather than an amazing result. Having completed their garden makeover, the home renovator or enthusiastic do-it-yourselfer will turn around and wonder: "Now where do I hang my washing?" or "Where do my rubbish bins go?"

Further down the track, they will probably

find themselves asking "Why did I put that tree there? It's too big for the space" or "Why didn't I put the deck on the other side of the house where it gets the morning sun?" A professional designer will think of all these things, taking into account everything from the mature height of trees to the provision of utility areas to your future needs, thereby ensuring your garden can adapt as your family grows. They will also discuss any special permits or permissions that might be needed (for example, council permission to build a pool or a deck).

1-3. A concept plan will ensure everything is put in the right place, from shade trees and decking to water features and outdoor showers. Garden design by Space Landscape Design.

FIND A DESIGNER

- **Australian Institute of Landscape Designers & Managers**
• www.aildm.com.au
- **The Landscape Contractors' Association of NSW & ACT Ltd**
• www.lcansw.com.au
- **Landscape Industries Association of Victoria**
• www.liav.com.au
- **Landscape Queensland Industries Inc**
• www.landscapequeensland.com.au
- **Landscape Associations of South Australia**
• www.lasa.org.au
- **Landscape Industries Association of Western Australia**
• www.landscapewa.com.au
- **Landscape Industries Association of Tasmania Inc**
• www.liat.net.au

Design process demystified

Landscape designers' fees and the terminology used will vary somewhat from designer to designer, however the design process will usually begin with an onsite consultation so the designer can meet you, look at your existing garden and discuss your requirements. From this meeting, a quote can be produced for the initial concept plan. This quote can range from \$500 upwards to \$5000, depending on the designer's experience and the complexity of the plan.

A concept plan generally includes an overall plan of the garden, images of the key design elements (such as water features, decks, pergolas) and recommended plant species. Some plans will be hand-drawn, others computer-generated — either way, this is the "pretty picture" that gives form to your dream garden. There are many advantages to having this plan. One is that it allows you to be sure that your vision for the garden is the same as the designer's. Another is, should there be budget constraints, sections of the garden can be worked at over separate stages, knowing that

there is always this master plan to work towards.

The disadvantages of not having such a plan is that there is never a cohesive focus for the completion of the garden, meaning important elements could be left out or placed in the wrong location. It's obvious when a garden hasn't been thought of in its entirety. For example, by using a master plan, that beautiful jacaranda tree you've always wanted can be planted on the south boundary as in five years time, when the dream swimming pool will be installed, this young tree will have matured and will be in the right location so that it won't have to be removed. After all, you don't want to spend all your times removing dropped leaves and flowers from your new pool.

The next design stage

When I say the concept plan is a relatively inexpensive component in the design process, it is because it is not a drawing with enough details for it to be used for a Development Application should council approval be required for any works. Neither is this plan



detailed enough for landscape construction companies to quote from. Once the concept plan is fully resolved, it is usual practice for the designer to then produce Construction Documentation, and these comprehensive plans will include all information about the structural elements, planting plans and lighting plans. The fees for these documents can then ramp up, but are entirely necessary for a landscaper to produce the garden that has been designed by the landscape designer.

Fortunately for homeowners, there are many well-respected and creative landscape designers in the industry who can easily be found via their websites, press articles or advertising. Word of mouth is always a good way to find out about the best in your area but if you don't know anyone who can recommend a designer, try sourcing someone from the Australian Association of Landscape Designers & Managers or your state landscape contractors association, which will have listings of designer members.

Considering how much homeowners typically invest in home renovation work (such as updating kitchens or doing home extensions) and how popular outdoor living is today, "investing" in a professional garden design makes good sense. In fact, in the light of how much a well-designed garden can add to a property's value, a landscape designer's fee is actually very affordable and represents value for money. Put simply, the investment of, say, \$2000 in a concept plan could save you a small fortune and prevent you from making the kinds of expensive mistakes that can happen when a project is not thought out correctly. ■

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