

JOYCE LANDSCAPING

How to choose a landscape contractor

By Christopher J. Joyce

When searching for a landscape contractor for your business or home, there are a variety of factors to consider that can help ensure a satisfactory outcome.

Perhaps the most important qualification to look for is certification. A Massachusetts Certified Landscape Professional offers you the most advanced knowledge and assistance in caring for your property. This certification requires individuals to pass a stringent examination on subjects such as landscape design, plant selection and placement, construction and planting techniques, tree care, treating turf and shrub insect/disease damage, as well as pruning techniques and much more.

In addition to the MCLP certification, the state of Massachusetts offers certification for Horticulture (shrubs, flowers and trees) and Arborists (trees). Contractors who hold these certifications are considered experts in their field.

There are several professional organizations for landscape contractors. **PLANET** – Professional Landcare Network is a national organization for landscapers. **ALCM** – Associated Landscape Contractors of Massachusetts is the state organization. **CCLA** – Cape Cod Landscape Association is the local organization that encompasses Barnstable, Dukes and Plymouth counties.

Landscape contractors who belong to these organizations have invested time and money, and are committed to staying up-to-date on new products, innovations, techniques and equipment, as well as the local laws and legislation to better serve their clients. Many landscape projects may require permitting, so be certain your contractor has experience working through the regulatory process.

Be sure the contractor has the necessary manpower, tools and equipment to properly handle the project. Most contractors use bobcats, excavators, loaders, cement mixers, mulch blowers and other heavy equipment to perform large tasks. If a contractor does not have the proper tools to perform the work correctly, it could cost you more money.

Keep in mind, some landscape contractors only specialize in one aspect or another, such as softscape installation, hardscape installation or maintenance services. It is always desirable to choose a single contractor who is experienced and can handle all aspects of your property needs.

Be certain to inquire about workers compensation and general liability insurance. Most landscape contractors will have the proper coverage, but the potential consequences to you could be devastating if they do not.

Finally, ask for references, photographs or schedule a site visit to view other similar projects completed by the contractor. Visit properties that are currently being maintained. Ask for a written proposal for the work to be performed and the estimated time for completion.