



Onsite Interview: Landscape Contractors

1. Make it very clear the services you seek, and discuss each as you walk the property. (Options include: mowing, edging, lawn health program, irrigation supervision, garden bed weeding, shrub and tree pruning, spring and fall clean up.)
2. Be clear about what you want from your lawn/landscape; i.e. what is acceptable and what is not. There are various levels of lawn care. The more manicured the more expensive.
3. Keep in mind, a PRFCT lawn is deeper (longer) and contains clover, and dandelions and crabgrass are possible in the first year while the turf is getting strong enough to crowd them out. If you don't want a single broad leaf weed, it can be best to hand weed.
4. Using our PRFCT Lawn Basics, (<http://perfectearthproject.org/basics-of-being-prfct/#lb>) ask the following questions about the landscaper's practices. (Correct answers in parentheses)

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| a. How high do you mow? (3-4") | h. Do you use a subcontractor? (There are specialists who apply compost tea and similar products.) |
| b. What kind of mower do you use? (Mulching) | i. How do you decide the quantity and type of fertilizer needed? (Soil test/organic compost / compost tea) |
| c. What do you do with the grass clippings? (Leave in place, except for first mow in spring.) | j. What about thatch? (A properly managed lawn "digests" debris, there is no thatch.) |
| d. How often do you sharpen your mower blades? (At least once a week) | k. What kind of grass seed do you use? (Regionally specific, disease resistant) |
| e. How often do you mow? (Once a week is okay; best practice is to never remove more than 1/3 of the leaf blade.) | l. What is best for trees and shrubs? (Tough love. Mulch with leaf mold in fall, prune for dead wood or natural shaping. Once established / after 2 years, do not water except in drought conditions. Apply compost or compost tea if soil is deficient. For new plantings, use a mycorrhizal or similar root stimulant.) |
| f. What do you recommend for irrigation/watering schedule? (Best response: As needed, seldom and deep, 5". Worst response: The irrigation company sets the clock for the season in the spring at 3X or more/week) | m. What is your fall clean up program? (Best response: Mulch mow or mulch vacuum leaves and spread in garden or shrub beds, or put in compost pile. Leave fine bits on lawn. Worst response: Blow everything clean and bare, remove leaves from property.) |
| g. What is your lawn health care (fertilization and weed control) program? (Best response: Cut low, aerate, compost, and overseed in <u>fall</u> . Worst response: Rake bare patches, seed and fertilize in spring. While many toxin-free providers will add nutrients in the spring to green up a lawn fast, this is more expensive and can cause problems later.) | |

5. Inquire about the crew. How are they trained? Will same crew come every time? What is frequency of visits?
6. Get an itemized quote for the work. Generally this includes per-visit cost for mowing, edging, weeding, spring and fall clean up; frequency of visits, hourly rate for special projects, and cost of materials/rentals (compost/aerator).
7. Inquire if they are licensed and insured, and ask if they have a pesticide applicator permit. (Even safe pesticides, like cedar oil, kill pests and require a license to apply.)
8. Check your contract. Licensed contractors are required to inform the client of every pesticide used in a given season. If you aren't sure if it is safe, check: <http://perfectearthproject.org/pesticides-and-health-effects/#phe> or: <http://www.beyondpesticides.org/gateway/index.php>