

How to Hire Gardeners and Landscapers

Welcome to the path to PRFCT! We're thrilled you're embarking on this journey with us. When you commit to using nature-based practices, you maximize health, biodiversity, and sustainability benefits and help create a planet that supports all living things. Together, we can make a difference.



If you haven't read it already, download our primer on Nature-Based Gardening for free or order a print copy here.

Step 1

CONTACTING GARDENERS AND LANDSCAPERS

Now that you know about nature-based practices, hiring gardeners and landscapers to care for your property should be easier. When you're setting up an initial appointment, discuss your goal of nature-based land care. Let them know you want to be pesticide- and fertilizer-free, that you want to keep leaves and grass clippings on your property, that you welcome clover in your lawn, that you'd prefer manual or electric tools to gas-powered ones. Then ask if they are able to accommodate your needs.

Here is a list of services you may need. Let your gardener or landscaper know which you want:

- Mowing and edging
- Lawn health care program
- Irrigation management
- Garden bed maintenance
- Shrub and tree care
- Spring and fall clean-up
- Pots and planters care
- Vegetable garden maintenance

Ask potential gardeners and landscapers:

- How much experience they have with nature-based or organic practices.
- Whether they are successfully managing other properties with those practices.
- What their educational and professional background in grounds management or horticulture is.
- Whether the same crew will be maintaining your property every visit. If not, ask whether every staff member is trained to provide the same kind of care.
- How do they train their staff?
- What certifications do they and their staff hold? For example, do they have organic accreditations or ecological certifications?
- Whether they are licensed and what licenses they hold.
- Whether they are insured and what insurance they carry.
- Whether they are willing to use nature-based practices if they are not using them already.
- How they plan to invoice: Annual contract, monthly charge, or hourly rate?
- Whether they are willing to give you a client reference for nature-based work.

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Step 2

ASK FOR AN INITIAL SITE VISIT:

During an initial visit, discuss how nature-based practices will be implemented on your property.

Here is a checklist of things to go over with potential contractors:

- Can they use electric or manual tools instead of gas-powered ones?
- Can they mow to 3-4 inches?
- Can they use mulching mowers and/or mulching blades and leave grass and leaf clippings in place?
- Can they mow at least once a week in the spring and fall when growth is most active, and only as needed in summer?
- Can they install a WaterSense irrigation controller to ensure proper watering? If not, how do they successfully ensure proper watering?
- In the fall, can they aerate, overseed, and spread compost (if needed)?
- Do they use a regionally specific, disease resistant grass seed blend?
- Can they test your soil? Soil tests for macro- and micro-nutrients should be made before applying any amendments to lawns or garden beds. If a soil test calls for amendments, what is their process? Are they able to use compost or organic products?
- When pruning, are they willing to remove only dead wood that is at risk of falling and causing damage?
- When doing spring and fall clean up, are they willing to mulch your trees with the leaves on your property, making sure to keep the trees' root flares clear?
- Can they rake those leaves into garden beds, mulch mow or mulch vacuum them to spread in garden beds, add to a compost pile, or leave on the lawn?
- Are they willing to accommodate nesting birds and hibernating insects when planning late winter/early spring cutbacks?
- Are they willing to forgo fertilizing and spraying of trees and shrubs?

Step 3

REVIEW CONTRACT

Request an itemized quote for the work, which includes hourly rates for labor and costs for trucking and materials; frequency of visits; and per-visit costs for mowing, edging, weeding, spring and fall clean up. Make sure there isn't a pesticide application notice in the contract.

Step 4

BEGIN IMPLEMENTING NATURE-BASED PRACTICES

Pay attention to these key indicators to know how well the practices are being implemented:

- Are there grass clippings on your lawn after mowing?
- Is the grass cut to 3- to 4-inches?
- Are leaves being reused on your property, either as mulch for trees and flower beds or mowed into the grass?
- Are the root flares visible on the trees in your yard?
- Have you spotted any chemical or pesticide notices?



To be PRFCT is to work with (not against) nature toward an ideal that's toxic-free, biodiverse, and beautiful. We are no longer trying to control nature into an outdated idea of perfection that has been pruned, mowed, and sprayed into submission. Instead, we envision gardens that are vibrant ecosystems, teeming with native plants and humming with wildlife. In other words, PRFCT.

Learn more at PerfectEarthProject.org