



# PLANNING YOUR **LANDSCAPE PROJECT** FROM START TO FINISH



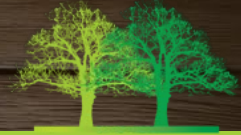


## About the Artist



Chris Speen is the owner and General Manager of Twin Oaks Landscape, a full-service lawn and landscaping company serving Ann Arbor, Michigan and its' surrounding regions. With more than 20 years of experience in the landscape industry, Chris shares a passion for creating and maintaining beautiful outdoor living environments. He is committed to providing reliable landscape services to residential and commercial clients through his experience, adaptability and loyalty, and he provides them with the education necessary to understand and help maintain their landscaping beauty in the future.





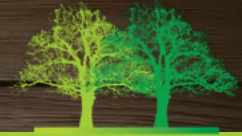
**TWIN OAKS**  
LANDSCAPE

## About Twin Oaks Landscape



Twin Oaks Landscape has been expertly designing and maintaining Michigan landscapes for more than two decades. Through their versatility and reliability, Twin Oaks has proven over and over again why they are an industry leader, serving the state of Michigan with innovative and up-to-date landscape care techniques to keep homes, businesses, and communities always looking beautiful and remaining functional along the way. The professional, experienced team of architects, contractors, builders, engineers, designers, gardeners and licensed specialists work together to ensure that every job is fully completed to exceed customer expectations.

Twin Oaks Landscape has been recognized, both throughout the state of Michigan and the nation, as an industry leader in the world of drainage solutions. They are committed to providing their clients with the education and service they need to maintain beautiful, healthy lawns and landscapes.



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# Chapter 1: Why Invest in Outdoor Landscaping?

You made the decision to invest in a home that you can live in and enjoy, hopefully for years to come. And, you understand that your home is an expression of your style, interests, and personality. There is a saying that goes, “You never get a second chance to make a great first impression,” and this applies to your home and property, too. Your outdoor landscaping gives your guests a visual picture of the rest of your home. You will most likely spend thousands of dollars in updates and repairs to the inside and physical structure of your home over the course of a lifetime. Your outdoor landscaping shouldn’t be left out of the equation when looking to improve the value of your home. According to the American Society of Landscape Architects, it is recommended that homeowners spend approximately 10 percent of a home’s resale value on exterior landscaping. So, whether you invest in a complete overhaul of your property landscaping, or choose to make a few select changes to one or two aspects of the yard, the return on investment is sure to be worth it in the end.



There are many benefits to investing in a beautifully landscaped yard. When you invest in outdoor landscaping, not only do you increase the value of your home and property, but you also extend your living space out away from the conventional walls of your physical house. With the right design, your yard can become a place of beauty and function that all can enjoy for years to come.

## Extend Your Living Space Outdoors

In Michigan, and throughout the Midwest, the seasons can be unpredictable. Too often, residents remain indoors, never fully enjoying the outdoors, or possibilities that their yards have in store. If this sounds familiar, and you've spent too many days indoors and want to find a reason to get outside a little, you're not alone. A beautiful, highly functional lawn and patio can expand your living space and provide you with countless opportunities for enjoyment and relaxation. You can:

1

Maximize your time spent outdoors as weather permits during spring, summer, and fall with an inviting atmosphere that promotes exercise, relaxation, and community.

2

Bring the party outside with a well-crafted patio, proper lighting, and the natural ambiance of strategically selected plants, trees, and shrubs.

3

Pursue a hobby or interest through the outdoors. *Do you enjoy gardening? Bird watching? Reading?* With the right landscaping, you have the opportunity to pursue a wide range of hobbies, or activities, without being limited to the confines of your home. If you are looking to just create a haven of quiet solitude and rest, some well-placed trees or a beautifully crafted boulder wall could help create a quiet space for rest and relaxation. No matter what you choose to do for personal enjoyment, the right outdoor landscaping design can help you accomplish it.





## *Reasons to Hire a Contractor vs. a Do-It-Yourself Project*

You may be the type of individual that enjoys tackling new and challenging projects. You might even be someone who has a difficult time trusting others do quality work around your home. It's your home, and your domain, right? But, when it comes to a complete design update to your outdoor landscaping, hiring a certified landscape contractor is worth the investment.

If you opt to take on your landscaping plans as a DIY project, you may save yourself a little money in labor costs, but in the end your efforts could cost you more than you anticipated. Choosing to hire a licensed and accredited contractor can save you time and money, while making sure your work is completed safely while meeting industry standards. Plus, the experience that comes from years of work in the landscaping industry is invaluable to a labor-intensive project.



***Hiring a contractor saves you time and money.*** Professional landscape contractors have experience in all the various areas of outdoor landscaping. Unless you are well-versed in paving, lawn drainage, botany, gardening, soil variances, structural design, electrical work, constructing outdoor water features, and regional weather patterns, a major landscaping project may prove to be more than you can truly handle. Labor mistakes and the cost of additional materials can become very expensive. A professional contractor has the knowledge and experience needed to get the job done quickly, and most importantly, cost-effectively.

***A contractor knows how to do the job right, the first time around.*** Unless you are properly trained, making sure that electrical wiring for lighting, boulder wall construction, and tree placement is done correctly can be rather challenging. You should have confidence knowing that your investment into your outdoor landscaping is something that you will continue to benefit from for years to come. You don't have to worry about uneven patio bricks that just won't lay flat or trees that never seem to grow the way they are supposed to in your yard. The experts really do know what will work best for your landscape and can get the job completed right so you can sit back and enjoy the end result.



***The right contractor will have vast experience working with all of the materials you'll need for your landscape project.*** You may have some knowledge working with one or two of the materials needed for a complete landscape project, but a professional contractor should have the past experience, training, and tools necessary for any landscaping job you plan to tackle. Some contractors even work within a team, comprised of experts from every arena in the landscaping industry. In these cases, the team works together to ensure that every aspect of a landscaping project is completed properly and fully.



## Chapter 2: Common Pitfalls to Watch Out For When Hiring a Contractor



So, you've taken the first step in your landscaping project and decided to hire a professional contractor. You have an idea of what you would want to see, and you trust that a contractor is the best person to handle the work. Now, you just need to find the best person for the job. Should you ask around for recommendations? Maybe you can find a contractor online that can do the work for a cheaper price than an established company may quote you?

The truth is, when you go out on a limb and put your lawn (and property) in the hands a contractor, you're placing a lot more than just your grass and landscaping budget on the line. If the wrong individual is chosen, you could end up with an incomplete or haphazard project that is a potential safety risk for you, your loved ones, and your guests. Understanding the common warning signs to look for when you hire a landscape contractor is the first step in ensuring that you end up hiring the right landscape contractor from the start.



# Common Pitfalls Among Landscape Contractors

***A price that is too good to be true usually is.*** If a contractor is quoting you an unbelievable deal that is too good to pass up, ask yourself, “Why?” This contractor may be cutting corners, using cheap materials, or failing to build according to the necessary specifications.



***Fly-by-Night contractors are often times lacking evidence of their reliability and commitment to industry standards.*** A contractor is a rather general term that almost anybody can call themselves if they choose to hire themselves out to perform work. When it comes to your yard, anybody who says that can cut your grass or lay some bricks can call themselves a contractor. But, professional and experienced landscape contractors should have actually credentials, including Green Industry Certifications, and other accreditations. You may want to be sure your contractor is a Michigan Certified Landscape Contractor, Manager, or Designer. These accreditations help to ensure that your contractor actually can expertly handle your project.



***Unqualified landscape contractors can have sub-par design capabilities, and may promise results that can't be achieved.*** If your contractor lacks the necessary training and experience, the design he/she chooses for your landscape could be a failure from the start. You don't want to be stuck with a contractor whose vision for your space won't be able to be accomplished as planned.



***A lackluster work ethic may leave you less than satisfied with your end product.*** Many contractors will work to meet the bare minimum when it comes to customer expectations and industry standards. A great landscape contractor will be committed to creating a finished product that exceeds customer expectations and goes above and beyond industry standards. You don't want to end up with a finished product that you're ashamed to show off or enjoy.

***The quality of work you receive may be a reflection of how a contractor's business functions professionally.*** Some fly-by-night contractors work out of their truck, literally. They don't have an office or dedicated business phone where they can be reached, nor do they work off of a professional business plan for success. If they don't manage their business professionally, they may not complete your project professionally, either.

***Does this contractor have a strategic process that is followed throughout the project, from the time of the initial consultation to the project's conclusion?*** Some contractors may show up on site, do the job, and then leave with very little communication, instruction, or planning time with you. These contractors usually do not offer follow-up maintenance programs or provide guarantees on their work once completed.



## Chapter 3: What to Look For In a Landscape Contractor

Choosing the best landscape contractor to hire for your upcoming project is a very important decision to make. Some projects may only take a few short days, while other more labor-intensive ventures may require you to maintain an ongoing business relationship with the contractor or company. So, it's important that you find that contractor that is creative and flexible, dependable, and professional. Whether you choose to hire a single individual, or opt to employ the skills of a team of experts (typically working within an established landscaping business), there are many different factors to look for and consider. Ultimately, the end result of your outdoor landscaping project will be something that you proudly showcase to neighbors and friends, or, it will be an experience that you hope never to repeat again.





# *Interviewing a Landscape Contractor*

When you are in the process of speaking with various contractors about a planned landscaping project, it is important that you know and ask the right questions to ensure that you hire the best possible individual or company for the task. Taking a few minutes to ask some specific questions may prevent your home improvement project from turning into a disaster. Be sure to ask each contractor you speak with these questions:



## ***What is your experience with landscaping projects similar to mine?***

Ask to see what mediums that are most experienced working with, and if they are equipped to handle the specific needs of your property. How long have they been in the business? What are their areas of specialty?

## ***What types of projects have you completed in the past?***

Ask to see pictures of finished projects, or if there is a list of past clients they use as references. Are there any past projects that they are especially proud of?



## ***Do they have references or client testimonials to share?***

Ask to see a portfolio of past clients, or read customer reviews about other individuals' landscaping projects. This will help you see evidence of the quality, creativity, and effort that will go into your landscape project.

### ***Can you check out their past work in person?***

You may or may not be able to do this, but don't be afraid to ask to see up front what their finished work looks like. Did they work on any public property that you can see? Going in person can help you inspect the finer details of their work and see the craftsmanship that goes into each project they work on.



### ***What is their reputation within the community?***

Do they come recommended by other contractors in the industry? Is their business in good standing in the community?

### ***What is their accreditation, certification, or licensure standing?***

There are many various licenses and certifications that an experienced landscape contractor should have if you are going to hire them for your project. Michigan offers Landscape Contractor Certifications, Landscape Design Certifications, Irrigation Professional Certifications, and many other accreditations. The International Concrete Paver Institute requires certification for all installations. The contractor or company you hire should provide evidence of these.





## *High Quality, Long-Term Solutions for Your Landscaping Project*

Your outdoor landscape project is not a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants type of event. The end result can impact the value of your home, the amount of time you spend outdoors, and the impression your home gives within the community. A shoddy landscape job can cost you time, money, and maybe even your reputation if the wrong person is managing the project. The contractor that you select should always demonstrate professionalism, a commitment to industry standards, and a guarantee for customer satisfaction. Your contractor should always stand by the work he or she does.

***A professional contractor will avoid cutting corners on a project.*** Your contractor will follow and meet every code, and build the design your project to the planned specifications.

***Quality materials should never be sacrificed to save you money.*** Although you want your project to fall within the planned budget, poor quality materials can create an unsafe environment when your project is completed.

***Proper installation standards must be met 100% of the time.*** Whether your outdoor landscape project includes the construction of a boulder wall, the laying of a paved patio, or the installation of electrical outdoor lighting, it is important that the installation process be followed through completely and properly.

***Your finished work should last longer than the time it took to install it.*** This seems obvious on the surface, but your new plants shouldn't die so quickly after they are planted. If they do, they may have been the wrong types chosen for your landscape. Your pavers should be perfectly flat, without waves or cracks. You've made a significant investment into your completed project, and it should have a long life expectancy that you can enjoy for years to come.



## *You Really Do Get What You Pay For*

When you interview and consider various landscape contractors, it is natural to want to hire the individual or business that can do the job for the cheapest amount. Cost does matter, since the size of your budget will determine the extent of your landscaping project. When you look at the estimated cost of your project that the contractor quotes you, be sure to take these factors into consideration:

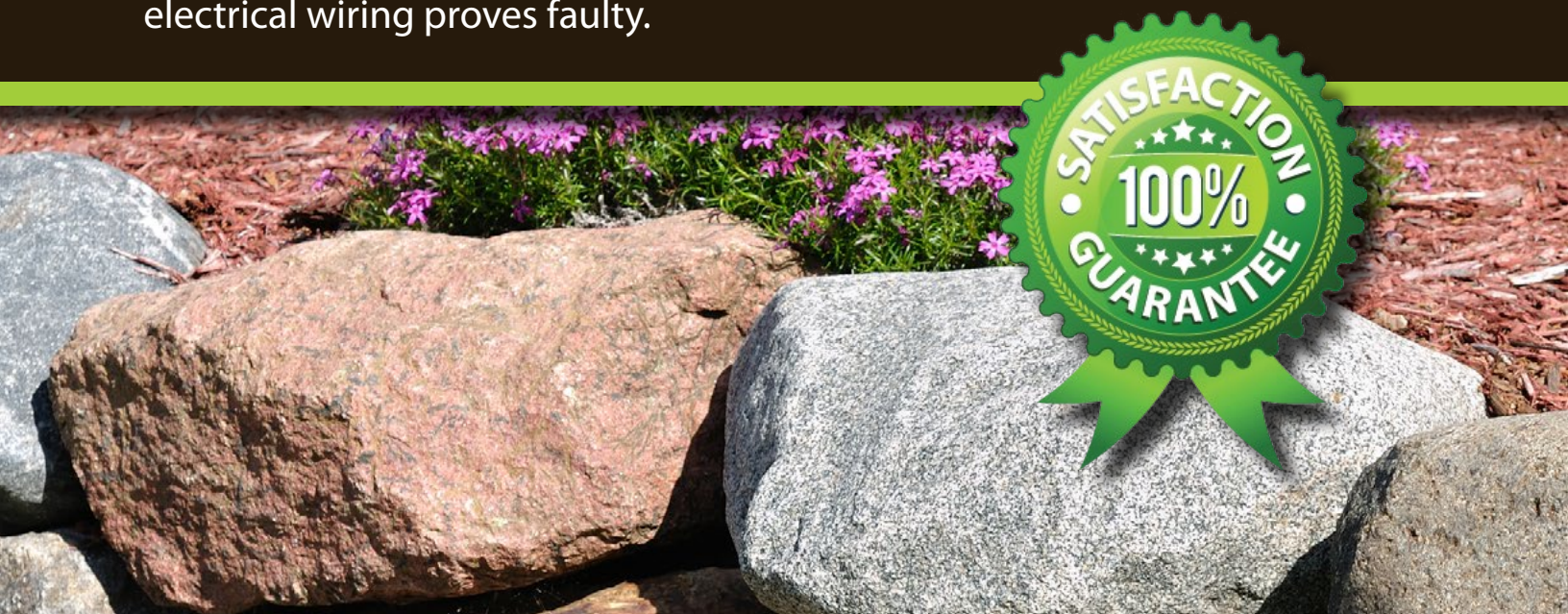


***The training and expertise of the staff*** - Those who have undergone trainings, received industry certifications and accreditations, or have decades of on-the-job experience will probably charge more than an inexperienced contractor. However, along with that increased price comes the industry expertise that is needed to transform your landscape into something beautiful.



***The commitment to industry and client standards and expectations*** - What is the contractor's commitment level to the quality of work provided, industry standards, or your expectations? A mediocre contractor will most likely do the bare minimum and find short cuts to minimize costs wherever possible. An expert contractor will do everything possible to exceed your expectations and produce a finished design that meets and then exceeds all industry standards.

***The quality of the materials used for the project*** - It's rather simple. Good quality materials cost more than cheap materials. Look at the guarantees that come with your materials. What is the life expectancy of your renovation? You might save a few dollars up front, but in the end, be forced to pay full price again to have the project redone after trees die prematurely, walls collapse, or electrical wiring proves faulty.



***The company's guarantee*** - A customer satisfaction guarantee is worth so much more than a slight initial savings on a project. You are the one that will be hopefully enjoying your newly landscaped yard long after the contractor packs up the truck and drives away. Your investment should be paying off long after the work is done. When you spend a little more for a contractor or landscaping company that guarantees their work, you are also getting the reassurance that your job will be done the right way, the first time, without sacrificing quality in the slightest way.

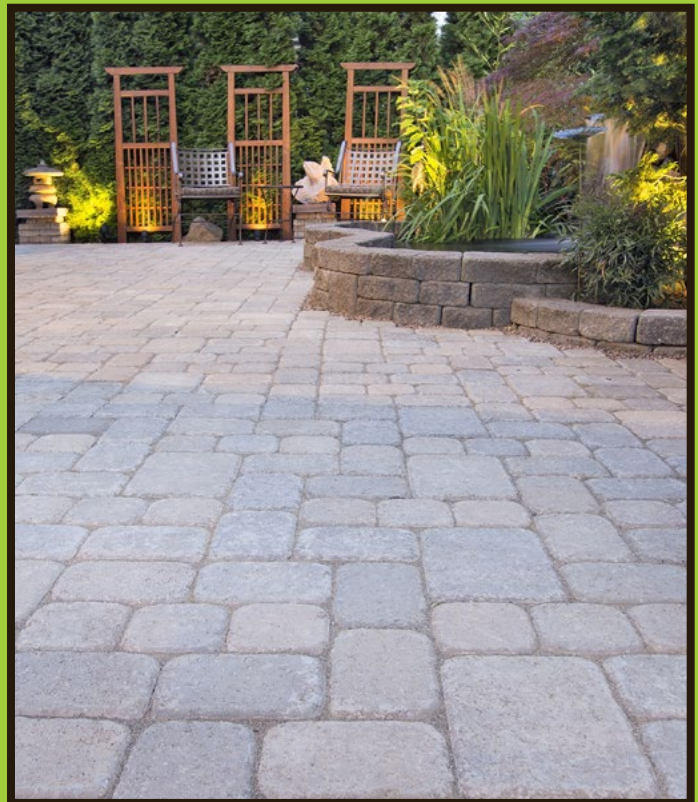
## *The Benefits of Pavers and Composite Decking Materials*

If you are looking to not only improve the natural beauty of your yard, but also expand your living space and home value, one simple way to accomplish this is to incorporate a patio or deck into your landscaping project. These additions are commonly known as hardscapes among the outdoor landscaping industry. Selecting the right materials for your patio, decking, or sidewalk project will enhance the beauty of your home and add functionality to your outdoor living space. By having a patio or deck, such can provide you, your family, and guests with abundant opportunities for entertainment, both personal and social.

**When including a deck or patio into the plans for your landscape project, here are a few things to consider:**

### **Pavers**

Paver patios are generally comprised of bricks or stones. Various designs or styles can have higher initial costs up front, but when paver patios are installed correctly, they will prove to be low maintenance and will save you money over time. Paver patios are durable and beautiful, and provide you with wide range of design and structural options to choose from. These types of patios are relatively straightforward to install, and any needed replacement pieces can be purchased rather inexpensively.





## Composite Decking Materials

Decks can be very popular additions to a home, and are typically made of wood. However, 100% wood decks require regular maintenance, time, and money to stay looking beautiful and remaining safe.

A great alternative to all-wood decks is to select a design made of PVC, plastic, or recycled

wood/plastic combinations. These composite decking materials require little maintenance, which means you'll have more time to enjoy relaxing on your deck instead of working on it. They do typically cost more up front than a traditional 100% wood deck would, but, these decks do prove to be a much better long term solution to your outdoor living needs. For Michigan residents, due to the extreme variances in weather and seasons, composite decking is a favored choice.



## Retaining Walls



Retaining walls are a beautiful addition to many landscaping projects. They can line gardens or create flowerbeds, create a border along a paver patio, and help retain soils to establish dimension within a landscape. No matter how you choose to incorporate retaining walls into your design, you will increase the beauty and

functionality of your outdoor space. If retaining walls are constructed properly (utilizing landscape fabric and the proper stone underneath) on a level surface, they can remain sturdy and upright for 30-50 years or more. Retaining walls truly are an investment that can last for the length of time you own your home.

## Bonus Features



Extra features like fire pits, outdoor fireplaces, outdoor grills, and even pizza ovens, can increase the entertainment value and functionality of your deck or patio. Incorporate the best styles and designs to fit your personal wants and needs, weather requirements, and space limitations.

## Outdoor Lighting



Outdoor lighting is the perfect way to increase the beauty and safety of your outdoor patio, deck, or landscape. The extra lighting outside allows you to continually enjoy your outdoor living space, even after the sun goes down. Be sure that a trained electrician is on site for the installation of your outdoor lighting solutions to ensure that all wiring is done properly and safely.

Making the decision about what to include in your outdoor hardscape designs, ask your contractor if you can see a 3D visual image of the space. These special computer programs are designed to provide you an advanced look at what your space will realistically and accurately look like in the end. Then, you'll be able to make changes and discuss your options before you even break ground. A 3D look at your future space can eliminate any potential disappointment you might feel if your finished project doesn't meet the expectations you had in your mind.



## *Incorporating Drainage Solutions Within the Landscape*

An investment into your outdoor landscaping is really an investment into your yard, patio, plant life, and outdoor living space. There are many different elements that make up your landscape environment, and all of those elements need to be taken care of to ensure that your space looks beautiful while remaining safe and functional. One of the primary ways to keep your investment safe is to incorporate drainage solutions into your landscaping project. When water is not properly directed away from your home, or provided an essential outlet to drain off of your yard, it can cause damage to your home and outdoor structures and destroy the work that you put into your landscape remodel.

**Incorporating drainage solutions into your landscaping project can:**



**1.** Protect your paver patio, brick sidewalks, or other hardscapes from cracking and shifting by directing water away from these places and into appropriate drainage areas.

**2.** Keep your home and personal belongings safe from possible indoor flooding by strategically placing gutters and downspouts to direct water away from the foundation and basement walls of your home.

If your landscape contractor is not experienced working with drainage solutions, you might consider finding a contractor who is. Otherwise, one heavy rainstorm could destroy all of the time and money invested into improving your outdoor space.

## Summing Up Your Outdoor Landscape Plans With Twin Oaks Landscape

Start to finish, the process of turning your dream outdoor living space into a reality requires an investment of your time and money, paired with the vision, skill, and dedication of the right team of contractors, designers, and builders. At Twin Oaks Landscape, we are more than just a lawn care service. Our team of fully certified experts has been servicing Michigan's residential and commercial landscaping needs for more than two decades, creating beautiful and functional softscape and hardscape designs for everyone to enjoy. Whether there's a need to design and install fresh, new lawns and plant life in the bare soil or construct beautiful stone additions to already established outdoor spaces, at Twin Oaks Landscape, we do it all. Our goal is to provide our clients with outdoor spaces that will enhance the beauty of their property, increase their personal enjoyment, and impress their communities. Can we transform your outdoor space, too?

Contact us today to see how we can help you transform your property into a space that you can enjoy and benefit from for years to come.

