



Your Garden Landscaping Checklist

What to know before you start
and where to go when you don't know.

And why you need it.

If you ask 3 landscape designers to look at the same backyard, you'll get 3 different quotes.

Yet all of them may still leave out the same handful of things that actually decide whether your budget, your timeline and your finished garden can be achieved.

This checklist will help guide your vision, clarify who to engage, answer questions on permits & compliance, site drainage, pools, managing the build, budget, etc.

It is worth working through before you commit to anyone, even if you don't end up hiring us. Each point links to a fuller explanation if you want more information - just click on the live link below each point.

Setting your garden vision & direction

1

Have you articulated your garden vision? Clarified what you want, why you want it, and how you want it to feel, before you call anyone?

A wish list of garden features isn't a brief. The clearer you are on what you want, why you want it, and how you want the finished space to feel, the further your first conversation with any designer will go.



Read more: [The 3 Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Call a Garden Designer](#)

2

Should you skip the design to save money?

Mostly no! Trying to landscape a garden without a design creates a reactive, one-decision-at-a-time process, causing reworking more costly than the design fee.



Read more: [Do I really need my garden designed before I start landscaping?](#)

3

Are you familiar with Concept Designs, Master Plans and Working Drawings? Can you confidently compare different landscape designers on the basis of what each provides?

A garden Concept Design shows the vision for your garden. A Master Plan shows all the details. Working drawings carry the dimensions, levels and detail that the landscaper actually needs and any permits require.



Read more: [What's included in a Landscape Design Master Plan?](#)

Choosing who to engage as your landscape designer/architect

4

Are you fully confident in the landscape designer you're about to engage?

A website portfolio of past garden work and genuine client reviews are the first 2 things to check. Look at what they've actually designed and how past clients describe working with them, not just their sales pitch.



Read more: [Top 10 things to know when engaging a landscape designer](#)

5

Should you choose a separate landscape designer & separate landscaper, or the one design-to-construction company that handles everything?

A designer who has never built a garden, and a builder who has never designed anything, can lead to a beautiful design that can't be built for the budget. One team carrying the entire vision from creation to completion avoids this.



Read more: [Our Tandem Approach: A better way to bring your garden vision to life](#)

6

Does your garden designer have enough horticultural knowledge to choose plants that will actually thrive in your location?

The plant you love mightn't be the right plant for your soil, aspect or climate. Ask your garden designer if they did horticultural training to ensure the plants they choose will thrive in your garden.



Read more: [How we choose the right kind of plants for your Melbourne garden](#)

Permits, Approvals & Compliance

7

Does your project need a building permit or other council compliance?

Most substantial landscaping projects require building and/or planning permits. Some may require other compliance. You should ask this before you sign up with a designer, so you don't find out too late.



Read more: [Which permits will I need for my landscaping project in Melbourne?](#)

8

Will items on your project trigger council or town planning issues?

Being too close to a boundary is a big one. Building a structure like a deck or pergola too close to a fence line can trigger a separate report and consent process with council, with its own timeline & costs.



Read more: [Landscape Plans for Town Planning permits - avoid common mistakes](#)

9

Will your project require an engineer?

Often retaining walls, pools, or anything near a boundary will require you to hire an engineer. Their sign-off is frequently a permit requirement, not an optional extra.



Read more: [Will I need engineering for my Melbourne landscaping project?](#)

10

Are you planning to landscape over an easement on your property?

Building anything on or near an easement on your property requires its own separate approvals process. Building without approval can result in demolition.



Read more: [Can I landscape over an easement on my property?](#)

11

What other compliance issues may you face, such as a heritage overlay?

If your project is in a mid-to-inner city location, heritage overlays may apply. Never assume they won't. A heritage overlay can restrict what you're able to change, particularly anything visible from the street.



Read more: [How might a heritage overlay affect me landscaping my home?](#)

Site, structure & drainage

12

Can I pave right up to my back door, level with the internal floor?

As a general rule, no. Finished paving should sit a step below the internal floor level so water is directed away from the house, not into it.



Read more: [Should I pave or have a deck? Your questions answered.](#)

13

Have site drainage issues been considered, or just assumed?

Wet zones and how storm water moves across your site are meant to be resolved at the design stage, not discovered half-way through the project. Ask your designer if they have considered these.



Read more: [Where to start when considering landscaping your home](#)

When a pool is included in your project

14

Have you chosen your pool type and allowed for the additional costs? A fibreglass pool may carry extra costs that a concrete pool may not.

On a sloping block, a fibreglass pool often needs retaining walls or extra piers to support it. But a concrete pool, which is built as one structural shell, will most likely not require this extra expense.



Read more: Which is better in Melbourne, a fibreglass or concrete pool?

15

What should you choose first, the garden designer or the pool installer?

You should always choose your garden designer before selecting a pool. A pool sits inside a designed garden landscape. The landscape does not get built around a pool that's already gone in.



Read more: Which comes first, the pool or the garden design? Know the answer.

Managing the garden construction process

16

Who will actually coordinate all various tradespeople and suppliers on-site?

If your designer/landscaper does not manage the site, scheduling which tradespeople or installers arrive in which sequence or co-ordinating delivery of materials etc, it can all be left up to you to project manage.



Read more: Who's responsible for managing contractors in a landscaping project?

17

Have contract terms like Provisional Sums, Prime Costs & Variations been fully explained to you?

Make sure you understand how variations to the price of items in the contract such as Provisional Sums & Prime Costs must be applied before you sign. Don't discover this half-way through construction.



Read more: Provisional Sums, Prime Costs & Variations: Know Before You Sign

Managing the budget for your project

18

Do you require a ballpark figure before you engage a designer?

You don't need to wait for a formal quote from anyone to get a sense of the potential scale of your project. A cost estimator can give you a realistic starting range before you engage anyone.



Try it: [Landscaping Cost Estimator Tool](#)

19

What deposit and payment terms should you consider reasonable, and what should raise concerns? Do you know the rules?

Deposits and progress payments are governed by law for registered practitioners. Know what the industry standards are before you're asked to pay well ahead of any work being done.



Read more: [How are progress payments handled during a landscaping project?](#)

20

How to actually control your landscaping budget.

A well-managed project starts with an accurate budget worked out before the design is locked in. You do not want to just be given a guesstimate that is adjusted substantially after the work begins.



Read more: [How to calculate an accurate budget for landscaping](#)

21

What issues are most likely to cause your landscaping budget to blow out?

Things discovered underground when digging, changes made once the project is underway, or a design created without input from the construction team are the most likely source of budget blowouts.



Read more: [What causes landscaping budget blowouts?](#)

About Whyte Gardens

Whyte Gardens is a Melbourne-based landscape design and construction firm with over 30 years of experience. Our unique Tandem Approach ensures that garden design & construction run as one co-ordinated project from our first conversation to your finished garden. Want to talk through where you are at with your project, under no obligation?

Call (03) 9017 4344 or email andrew@whytegardens.com.au to book a free design consultation. whytegardens.com.au