



Before You Sign

How to Hire a Landscape Company You'll
Want to Recommend to Your Neighbors

As a homeowner, it can be **difficult to discern** if the landscape professional you're hiring has all the **right qualifications**, licensing, insurance, etc.





Photo by: Exteriors by Chad Robert

In order to help you do your **due diligence**, we talked to Chad Robert, owner of Exteriors by Chad Robert, a landscape design and construction firm in Phoenix.

He offered these **10 questions** that homeowners **should ask** themselves and confirm before **hiring a landscaping professional**.

Licensing, Experience & Insurance



Q: How can I avoid being held liable for accidents or damage to my property?

A: Make sure your landscape professional has proof of **Workman's Compensation and Liability Insurance**.

Workman's Compensation protects you in the event a worker has an accident. Without it your **home and assets could be at risk** if someone is injured on your project. You could be held liable.

The contractor should also **carry an insurance policy** that has a general liability aggregate limit of a minimum \$1,000,000. This protects your property should something happen to damage it, like a fire.

If your Landscape Contractor does not have this insurance **you could be held liable** for any accidents that happen during your project; hospital costs, law suits, etc.





Q: How can I be sure that the company I hire will follow through and produce quality work?

A: Make sure the professional you select holds a valid state license or certification from a professional organization.

Contractors that are not licensed are not held to the high standards of the state's licensing board. Contracting with someone who does not carry a license gives you no recourse should you have a complaint against the contractor. Every homeowner wants to find the best price for their project, however, if you hire an unlicensed contractor you have no assurance of the project's quality - or even if the project will be finished at all.

Examples of complaints you cannot file if you are working with an unlicensed contractor:

- Fails to fulfill the terms of the agreement
- Has poor construction or workmanship
- Abandons contract or refuses to perform
- Fails to pay subcontractors or material suppliers
- Violates building codes or doesn't comply with safety of labor laws or fails to pay taxes or fees.
- Departed from project plans or specifications
- Used false, misleading or deceptive advertising

If working with a landscape designer, check with the Association of Professional Landscape Designers to find out if they are certified. If working with a landscape architect, make sure that they are licensed with the state.

Q: How do I know if the professional I want to hire is in good standing?

A: You should always check a landscape professional's standing with your state or the Better Business Bureau.

Just because a contractor is licensed doesn't necessarily mean that their license is in good standing.

Try searching online for "your state + contractor license lookup". Most states have an online database that allows you to look up a company's licensing status.





Q: When it comes to landscaping companies, how important is experience?

A: Incredibly important. You should **check references** and compare previous **examples of their work** to your needs and standards.

Make sure you **consider the following questions:**

- Is previous work similar to your project?
- Does the quality meet your expectations?
- If possible, visit a project that has been done for a few years to see how their work stands up to the test of time.
- Do they have a reference list with past clients and professionals that they have worked with?

If a company has not demonstrated **experience similar to your project**, how can you be certain that the work can be accomplished? Years in business doesn't necessarily equate to expertise in the scope of your project.

Other companies may over exaggerate their experience, knowledge, skill and capabilities. Can you be **certain of their abilities** just from a verbal promise? Can they show you past projects that **reflect their talents and aptitude**? Can you ensure they have the competence to complete your project?

Q: Is there any other background information I should look up before hiring a professional?

A: Yes, you should find out how long they have been in business and if they are registered with the Better Business Bureau.

How long a company has been in business can give you a glimpse into the reputation the company has built over the years.

The **BBB** has a "comprehensive set of best practices for how businesses should treat the public in a fair and honest manner."

"Landscape contractors" is in the top 10 of all inquiries at the BBB. Make sure the company runs a valid and trustworthy business.





Q: Who is responsible for pulling the required permits for a project?

A: Your landscape professional should be familiar with local codes and **pull all necessary permits**.

Many projects **require city permitting**, and doing work without permits can cause serious problems throughout the course of your project.

These problems include, but are not limited to: fines from the city, new permits required, and work could be stopped until the appropriate permits are pulled and **plans are submitted**, and prolonging the project and increasing the costs (aside from the fines).

Many contractors may try to complete projects without pulling the appropriate permits to avoid fees and increase their profit. This can be very harmful to the property owner, even becoming a **potential safety hazard**. If the proper permits are not pulled, the contractor's work can be **critically examined by city inspectors later**, adding more time and money to a project. You could be **responsible for the cost** of adding or removing elements of the project to **comply with city codes**.

Cost & Contracts



Q: Will the final cost of a project be the same as what the landscape pro quoted at the beginning?

A: Not always. Discuss with your designer, architect or contractor whether the quote is a fixed price or just an estimate.

Also ask how cost changes will be handled once your project is underway. Make sure you sign a contract agreeing to the circumstances.

Set unit pricing and signed contracts ensure the project's budget and direction and allows for changes through change orders. Contracts guarantee scope of work; design, installation, permitting, disposal, etc.

Other contractors may begin work without a signed contract or guaranteed pricing. This can be very bad for the property owner as the project progresses. Problems or additional work could begin to arise, raising prices on the project and billings without the client's consent.





Q: What payment options do I have when doing a landscaping project?

A: These will vary so always ask **how much money the company requires** down to start a project and what your billing options are (full upfront, upon completion, or down payment and balance upon completion).

How can you guarantee a contractor, designer or architect will **complete the work to your satisfaction** if they are paid in full up front? For some projects, that amount of money could be substantial and the potential is there for the contractor to take the money and run.

A full or large down payment in the beginning of a project **could be a HUGE red flag**. This could mean that they are unlicensed and have no plan on fulfilling the contract or finishing the project.

Unstructured payments lead to uncertainty and lack of organization, both of which are characteristics of a bad contractor.

Maintenance & Warranties



Q: How can I ensure that the plant material installed will thrive?

A: The professional you hire **should provide care instructions** for the plants they have installed on your property.

What is the plan for the plant material once the contractor has left? Who is to care for the plants, and how do they gain the **expertise of plant care**? Many contractors believe the project is done the day they are off site (or after the warranty has expired), and pay little attention to **the future of the project**.

Some companies also have a maintenance division and you can easily have them **transition from the installation of the plants to the maintenance**. If this is not the case they probably know of a good landscape maintenance crew that they could recommend.





Q: What happens if my new patio cracks or a plant dies?

A: Make sure the landscaping professional you hire **offers a warranty for plant material** and workmanship. Be clear on how long the warranty is and what exactly is covered.

What happens when the specimen saguaro you just paid \$5,000.00 for falls over? Who will end up **paying for a replacement?**

If there is no warranty, you will have to absorb that cost. If there is a warranty then **you are not liable** for the cost to replace it.

Companies that do not warranty their work don't believe in either **quality of their work or materials**. Warranties are **essential in reassuring clients** that designers, architects and contractors stand behind their product.

Additional Resources



- Share this guide:

<http://www.landscapingnetwork.com/landscape-design/hire-landscaper.html>

- Get more tips for hiring a landscaper:

<http://www.landscapingnetwork.com/how-to-hire-a-landscaper.html>

- Learn about working with a landscape pro:

<http://www.landscapingnetwork.com/landscaping-companies.html>

- Visit Exteriors by Chad Robert, Inc.:

<http://www.exteriors-cr.com/>

- Find a landscape company in your local area:

<http://www.landscapingnetwork.com/landscapers/>

