



BEHIND THE SCENES

It's the costs you can't see that make the difference between a long-lasting landscape that will thrive and one that will fail

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Opening the front gate, you are greeted by a garden that provides an amazing spectacle of colour, texture and scent. All your senses are alive and you are instantly drawn in and want to see more. You ring the doorbell to the aroma of meat sizzling on the barbecue and the shrieks of kids playing in the pool. As you move through the house to the backyard you find yourself in another amazing garden — one in which the palette of materials blend harmoniously to create that sought-after sense of belonging, welcome and relaxation.

Impressed by what you've seen, you sit down and ask your friends for some advice as you are thinking of having your property

landscaped. You then ask the uncomfortable question "How much did the project cost?" and when you hear the answer, you feel a bit shocked and utter what is a common phrase to those in the landscape profession: "I can't see where all that money has gone."

Managing the costs

Much of the work that goes into producing a stunning landscape happens behind the scenes. The costs that you don't see, the ones that you can't quantify, are for those vital jobs that, if done correctly, ensure the landscape will stand the test of time. It's a false economy to skimp on doing the job properly or to try to save money by going with the cheapest quote. Experience counts for a lot.

You also want to avoid unanticipated costs. These can start as far back as the landscape design phase, from the initial consultation fee through to the design, including site and boundary surveys, sewer peg outs, engineer's costs, full construction plans, council DA fees, and the appointment of the certifier. You also need to choose a landscape contractor who has the right insurances, is licensed to do the works required, and is a member of an industry association to prevent the possibility of costly mistakes occurring.

Ins and outs of access

There are many common site issues that have to be properly dealt with — each requiring time and money — before you can have a beautiful garden, and one of them is access. Consider how will the machinery get in, how is the spoil going to get out, how are the materials going to get loaded in and how is the job going to be constructed? The landscaper may need to build a series of ramps up the side of a house

or, in some cases, a crane may be required to lift machinery, spoil and materials in or out.

From the ground up

Excavation is a large part of the unknown on the job. If we had x-ray vision we would have all the answers. Where is the rock and what type of rock is it? What is the quantity of overburden (this is the amount of material needed to be removed over and above the actual foot print of the job)?

A correctly executed excavation will ensure that the contours of the land are graded as per the designed levels to help with such things as surface water runoff and correct height for walling. Another factor to consider is if there is a need to shore up neighbouring structures or property to ensure there is no damage during the subsequent excavation through to the finished construction phases.

And, of course, all good things are built on solid foundations. A properly reinforced and constructed concrete footing is the key to a long lasting project. Concrete MPA and thickness (as per the engineer's specifications) ensures that the footing is founded on the correct material.

What goes beneath

The path to good drainage starts with the back of any retaining walls being correctly tanked (waterproofed), wall drains being correctly installed, the installation of geotextile fabric to reduce silting up of the ag lines, and then the ag lines being surrounded by drainage aggregate wrapped in geotextile fabric to help reduce the silting up of the drainage aggregate. This allows water to pass freely into



the ag line and away from the rear of the wall.

Another consideration is what type of soil is the sub-soil of the lawn area or garden beds. Is it free-draining or heavy clay? You may require sub-surface drainage which involves the excavation of a series of trenches to the required depth to ensure the correct, free-draining of water away from these areas.

A necessary investment

All of the above are expenses for vital works you can't see in the finished garden, but if they're not done correctly can result in the complete failure of the project. We live in a world where instant gratification is required,

so we sometimes forget that quality takes time — and, hence, costs money. It can take a while to realise that if the unseen, non-tangible expenses aren't incurred in the initial stages, then the project won't live up to expectations and you won't get the desired outcome. However, if done correctly, your garden will look amazing, flow through the seasons, age gracefully and stand the test of time. Would you risk all of that for a price difference of between 10 to 20 per cent?

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