

Curb appeal is defined as the “attractiveness of the exterior of a residential or commercial property.” The term is used most often when discussing the appeal of a property to prospective buyers, but basically it is the way your property appears to others. Great curb appeal isn’t limited to flowers and shrubs around your house. It also includes things like doors, hardware, walks and paint. However, great curb appeal starts with great landscaping that enhances the style of your home.

Benefits of Great Curb Appeal

If you are selling your house, curb appeal could make the difference between people stopping to look or driving on by. You can help make sure they want to come inside by spending time working on the exterior appearance of your house.

There are times that adding plants to your landscaping can improve curb appeal, but there are other times when *removing* them is even more effective. If your house is 20 years or older, the plants surrounding it may need replacing because they are overgrown or nearing the end of their life cycle. The most important thing to keep in mind when improving your curb appeal is to be objective. Look at your house and yard as if you were a buyer, and determine curb appeal from that perspective.

If you are not preparing to sell your home, curb appeal is still important. The overall appearance of your neighborhood is important to others who are selling their houses as well as to the overall attitude of the people who live near you. Think about how you feel when you drive down your street and see a house whose curb appeal is lacking. Curb appeal makes for a more cohesive and friendlier place to live.

Cost

The cost of improving your curb appeal can vary considerably depending on how much you want or need to do. High impact areas for low cost include:

- Painting your front door
- Changing the hardware on the door
- Adding new house numbers, lighting, and foundation plantings
- Adding annual flower borders
- Adding pots filled with flowers at the front of your house

If you only need to upgrade plants and can do it yourself, it will be more cost effective. However, if you need to paint the exterior of your house and hire a painting company, it can amount to several thousand dollars. Determine how much you have to spend, what needs to be done the most, and start with that plan.

To help with plant selection, you can visit your local extension office for ideas, visit reputable garden centers or search the Web. Many companies have pictures and descriptions of hundreds of plants to help you make your selections. They will also send free catalogs that you can look through and compare prices. Of course your local library has many books to browse through as well. Taking the time to thoroughly research plants for your area is very important and can save you time and money in the future.

Make Your Plan

Decide whether to hire a landscape expert or do it yourself

This decision depends a lot on the budget you have for improving your home's curb appeal. If you do not have experience with gardening, it may be wiser in the long run to hire someone to design and plant. You don't want to place plants that aren't appropriate for your location and have to redo the work in the future. A landscape expert knows what plants will fit in the area for several years and won't outgrow the space. Additionally, they know what plants tolerate sun or shade conditions in your yard, as well as soil and zone requirements for the plants to survive.

However, if you have basic knowledge of plants for your area and have time to do some research on form, color schemes, scale and focal points, doing it yourself may be appropriate and enjoyable. Landscaping doesn't have to be expensive, only well thought out, interesting and cohesive.

Research plants that give interest in all four seasons

Too often, do-it-yourselfers build their plans around plants for spring and summer interest because that is when they more than likely do the work. However, you want your curb appeal to be pleasing all year. It is important to research plants that have form and texture for fall and winter months as well.

Decide which color schemes work best with your house and taste

Some homeowners want to keep their plants all one color, and others like the cottage style where all colors are combined and are planted together in no particular order. Consider the style of your house. If you live in a cottage or colonial style house, a less formal design will work well. But if you live in a more formal house with geometric lines and architectural features, then a more structured design with trimmed bushes and more uniform plants will look better. Researching plants may help you determine which style is right for you.

You can also determine style by what colors you like most or what plants you like the best. Choosing annuals or perennials for your site can also make a difference in what colors you can use. Since most perennials come in only one color, research plants to determine if what is available will give you the look you desire. For example, if you prefer only blue flowers, you won't find many plants that truly have blue flowers. It is helpful to look through garden catalogs or sites online to see what plants and what colors work best in your landscape. Flowers may be sufficient to achieve the color schemes you desire, but to create form and texture, ornamental grasses, trees and shrubs with interesting branching patterns and foliage work best. Color, along with form, line, texture and scale, is one of the basic elements of landscape design. All are largely a matter of common sense. If a scene looks good to you, then it is probably well designed.

Establish focal points that help direct the eye to prime areas in your yard

Learning about design concepts can be the key to helping you establish an enviable landscape. One focal point that is often used is a fountain. It not only creates a focal point, but a fountain creates the sound of moving water, which is very relaxing. And water features come in a multitude of styles and prices.

Another focal point can be small trees or large evergreens. Garden centers offer many different kinds of ornamental trees and shrubs with different textures and unusual forms that can be a starting point for designing your space. Weeping cherry, weeping peach, dogwoods and crabapple trees are small enough to fit in most front yard landscapes. They offer not only great shapes but fragrant and beautiful flowers in the spring. Evergreens also come in many shapes and sizes, which adds interest all year.

And last but not least, the front door or entryway can be the focal point.

Common Mistakes in Landscape Plantings

Here are some common mistakes to avoid when designing your home landscape.

Overplanting

Shrubs and trees are small when purchased, so it is tempting to plant them too close together. Plan for the mature size of the plants and space them out accordingly. You can plant small perennials or annuals in the gaps for the first couple of years to fill in the empty spaces.

Too many different types of plants

Landscapes with too many different plants lack continuity and look busy and unorganized. Repeated use of only a few basic varieties creates a more cohesive landscape.

Pyramidal plants at the corners of the home

Corners require plants that will soften them instead of draw attention to them. Choose rounded shapes and plant them so that they don't crowd the house by adding an extra foot of space between the house and the mature width of the plant. So, a 6-foot-wide shrub should be planted 4 feet away from the house (one-half the mature width plus 1 foot).

Poorly placed plants in the lawn

For a more pleasing design, locate shrubs and most trees in borders rather than scattered throughout the lawn. Trees planted in the front lawn look best when planted to the sides rather than centered in front of the house. This will prevent them from blocking the view of the front entryway.

Bright colors scattered indiscriminately

Bright flowers or foliage can create an effective accent or focal point, but when scattered through a landscape they lose their effect and make the scene chaotic.



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