

Pro vs. Schmo

How to Hire a Landscaper

By Jeff Foley, Para Space Landscaping Inc.

With over 3,000 landscapers in British Columbia, how do you know you are hiring the right company? Below are some questions that you will want to ask prospective companies to ensure you are hiring a professional and are getting good value for your money.

What is their range of expertise and what type of landscaping does the company specialize in? If you haven't hired a company based on a word-of-mouth recommendation, it is always great to see a portfolio of their work and ask for current and past client references. Visiting one of their projects will give you an even better idea of the service they are providing and the product they are selling.

What accreditation does their staff hold? It is important to know that the people working on your property are accredited. The Landscape Industry Certified Technician designation is recognized internationally and means someone has completed extensive written and practical hands-on testing proving his or her competency in front of an industry accredited judge. Certified Arborists and Irrigation Technicians are also good designations. Landscape Horticulturist is a Red Seal Trade so you may want to request a journey person to be on site as well.

How long has the company been in business? The age of a business doesn't always tell you about the quality of their work, however, a long-established company does indicate that the business has been successful over time. This may be a way to weed out a fly-by-night operation.

Are they a member of the BC Landscape & Nursery Association or other professional associations? Being a member of a professional association often means that the company has agreed to abide by a set of professional standards or code of conduct and ethics.

Will the work be done in accordance with the BC Landscape Standard? The BC Landscape Standard is an essential reference for growers, landscape installation companies, landscape maintenance companies, municipalities and anyone buying their services or products. It is developed by the BC Society of Landscape Architects and BC Landscape & Nursery Association (BCLNA)

and establishes levels of quality to minimize variation in production.

Do they offer a warranty for their product? Plants are living organisms and rarely have a 100 per cent success rate. However, credible companies should warranty all plant material for one year, subject to adequate maintenance of plants.

What kind of insurance do they have? Ask for a certificate of liability insurance. If it's an extended job, you want to make sure that you are added onto their policy as an additional insured and notified of cancellation/material changes within 30 days. Coverage of \$5 million is preferred these days.

Is the company in good standing with WorkSafe BC? You definitely don't want a company's poor safety record to become your problem. You can easily get a clearance letter on the WorkSafe BC website.

Have they won any awards? Awards are a great way to vet a company, as their work has been professionally judged to a high standard.

How much of the work will be subcontracted? You will want to ensure that your general contractor is familiar with all subcontractors. It is also advisable to ask many of the above questions of subcontracted companies working on your property.

A final word of caution is to ensure you have a signed contract that outlines the scope of work in detail. This will ensure clarity between you and the company you hire and will be helpful should there be any disputes over the project.

Jeff Foley CLP, CLT is the Executive Vice President of Para Space Landscaping Inc. Para Space has won numerous awards for their landscape maintenance and installation and in 2011 & 2012 was honoured as one of B.C.'s best companies to work for. Jeff also currently serves as the First Vice Chair of the BCLNA.