Selecting a Landscape Professional

A Guide for Homeowners

www.rinla.org

Landscaping is an investment in your property’s value. Making improvement to an outdoor space can enhance a home or business by providing not only curb appeal but a place to spend time outdoors for family or clients.

Have you been thinking about improving an outdoor space, but are not sure what questions you need to ask when you hire a professional?

Your first step toward a solution is to visit our website at www.rinla.org to see more about the Rhode Island Nursery & Landscape Association and view a listing of our members by their location and specialty. Once you have selected a few prospects, the rating guide inside suggests some specifics to help you find the right company for your unique needs.

Give this rating guide a try today!

What is the Rhode Island Nursery & Landscape Association?

The Rhode Island Nursery & Landscape Association, which represents a $2.5 billion industry in Rhode Island, is one of the leading voices throughout the state for green industry.

RINLA’s six hundred green industry members include wholesale and retail nurseries, garden centers, landscape contractors, arborists, masons, landscape architects, landscape designers, green engineers, compost/mulch manufacturers, fruit/vegetable growers, suppliers and allied businesses.

RINLA members are professionals who take pride in their work and uphold the highest standards in horticulture, environmental practices and land stewardship. RINLA is also dedicated to the development and implementation of programs that provide skilled and licensed workers and contribute to the well-being of Rhode Island’s communities and environment.

This Landscape Professional rating tool is just one of the Rhode Island Nursery & Landscape Association’s efforts to ensure that you – the consumer – enjoy good experiences when you deal with RINLA member companies.

The best way to achieve that goal is to give you the tools to help you hire a landscape firm that provides competence, integrity and fairness. Our organization and member companies’ success is tied to your satisfaction with our members’ work.
Compare and decide:
A tool for RATING and SELECTING your landscape professional
Use this chart two ways:
1. As a simple guideline to the qualities you should be looking for in a landscape professional, or
2. As a rating system to help you determine more specifically the suitability of a company you are considering hiring. It’s your choice.

Company A: ____________________________
Company B: ____________________________
Company C: ____________________________

PROOF OF LIABILITY INSURANCE
Mandatory: Rate 23 or 0 only
All landscape contractors and businesses should carry liability insurance to protect themselves and their clients from the expense of any unforeseen workplace incidents that might cause damage to your own or neighboring properties. Ask to see a Certificate of Insurance; it should state the name and address of the insured company, the fact that the company carries a minimum of $1 million commercial general liability coverage, including coverage for bodily injury and property damage, and the effective and expiration dates of the policy as well as the date of issue of the certificate.

PROOF OF WORKERS’ COMPENSATION INSURANCE
Mandatory: Rate 22 or 0 only
Landscape businesses are required by law to pay workers’ compensation premiums on behalf of their employees. This insurance covers workplace injuries. Hiring companies that are not in compliance makes a project owner — you — liable in case of workplace injuries. Ask to see a proof of workers’ compensation insurance.

DO NOT HIRE AN UNINSURED FIRM! STOP HERE! —
SUPPLIER REFERENCES
Rate 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent)
By ensuring that the landscape professional regularly pays materials suppliers in accordance with standard trade terms, you can protect yourself from creditor liabilities. Depending on the size of the project, it is advisable to obtain up to three supplier references. If possible, obtain references from suppliers of materials designated for your project, such as interlocking paving, nursery stock, lumber, etc.

CONTRACT
Rate 1 to 5
A written and signed contract protects the interests of both the homeowner and the professional. Contracts should clearly stipulate details such as payment schedules, start dates, and the complete scope of the project. Areas of responsibility such as provision for locating underground services, obtaining permits, etc. should all be stipulated. A good contract also will define procedures for approval of change orders and costs of extras / added items.

WARRANTY
Rate 1 to 5
The terms and conditions of the contractor’s warranty should be clearly spelled out in writing and specify if the workmanship is warranted and for how long and the length of the guarantee on materials. It is important to specify responsibilities for ongoing maintenance, such as watering, that may affect the warranty. This is especially important for plant guarantees.

CLIENT REFERENCES
Rate 1 to 5
Whether the landscape professional you are considering is capable of handling your project can best be determined by asking for references from up to three recent clients. Answers to the following questions will help you rate the value of the references:
- Was the work completed on time?
- Was there sufficient supervisory staff on site?
- Did the business return phone calls promptly?
- Was the quality of workmanship acceptable?
- Did staff conduct themselves in a professional manner?
- Was the site kept tidy throughout the construction process?
- Were extra’s dealt with according to terms of the contract?

Visit www.rina.org to view a listing of member companies by location and/or areas of expertise

HUMAN RESOURCES
Rate 1 to 5
The number of employees, including supervisors, should be adequate for the size of the project. It is important to remember that a small company with one crew may well be sufficient for smaller projects, providing they have adequately scheduled their projects for the season. A company’s ability to schedule projects can also be determined through client references (see “Client References”).

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE, EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION
Rate 1 to 5
Determine the level of training and experience of key and supervisory personnel. Post-secondary degrees, apprenticeship program participation or certification through RINLA’S Rhode Island Certified Horticulturist program, Licensed Arborist, and/or Registered Pesticide Applicator are all indicators of skilled, committed employees. More information on green industry certification programs is available at www.rina.org.

EQUIPMENT RESOURCES
Rate 1 to 5
Professional landscape businesses should have adequate equipment resources to complete jobs efficiently. It is important to remember that it may be more cost-effective for certain or specialized pieces of equipment to be rented on an as-needed basis.

SCOPE OF EXPERTISE
(INCLUDING SUB-CONTRACTORS)
Rate 1 to 5
Determine which specific disciplines are required for your landscape project. The company should be skilled in all aspects or use reputable sub-contractors who specialize in this work. These include disciplines such as:
- Paving Stone / Masonry
- Excavation
- Design
- Arborists
- Maintenance
- Irrigation
- Outdoor Kitchens
- Lighting
- Water Features
- Earth-work (grading)
- State & local permitting

YEARS IN BUSINESS
Rate 1 to 5
How many years has the company been in business under its current name?

COMPANY PROFILE
Rate 1 to 5
Does the company project a professional image? Are its representatives in uniform? Are its trucks and equipment clean and well cared for?

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP
Rate 1 to 5
A referral procedure is part of the Rhode Island Nursery & Landscape Association membership application process. Members are required to follow a Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct. Association membership indicates a company’s commitment to professionalism.

Tip: A perfect score is 100; any total less than 75 indicates a score below 75 percent.