How to Build a Professional Landscape Bed

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When making a new landscape bed there are some things you can do that will make your beds look like a "pro" built them, at the same time making them easy to maintain.

Here are some "RULES OF THUMB" you can use to build beds that will give maximum enhancement for your property.

1) **Use curved lines that will flow with the property.** You can lay out a garden hose or rope and experiment with shapes until you get something that pleases your eye. Be sure that your curves are gentle so that your lawn mower will be able to easily navigate them.
2) **Go around the perimeter of your new bed and make a V-shaped groove using a garden spade.** Throw the dirt towards the center of the bed.
3) **Take the sod off the area by sliding a shovel under the grass roots.** You can simply turn the sod over so that the grass underneath and the soil side are up. Other methods you can use at this stage.
    - You can till the area to make a finer area to plant smaller plants and perennial/annual flowers.
    - Alternatively, you can use weed killer to eliminate old lawn and weeds
    - Lay several layers of newspaper or cardboard under a new layer of black topsoil.
    - If you don't mind waiting to plant, you can kill the current vegetation by solarizing the area by laying down a temporary layer of black plastic or woven ground cover.
4) **Add new black dirt over the top of the bed.** To a depth of 6-12 inches and rake the bed into the shape you'd like it to have.
5) **You can plant a this stage.** Or you can finish the bed with mulch and wait to plant at a later date.

USING LANDSCAPE FABRIC

We typically don't recommend using landscape fabric because weed seeds will come in from the wind and birds. They then sprout and maintenance hoeing is still necessary. You need to check the planting holes regularly and open them up more as needed to keep them from being chocked out by the too-tight fabric. Roots can begin growing out on top of the fabric and dry conditions will then stress or kill your plantings. The exception might be beds where there are only a few trees an shrubs rather than perennial flowers. But, you must remember to open those holes wider as the plants grow.

USING LANDSCAPE ROCK

Some people think that rock will be a more permanent and less time-consuming way to care for a bed than bark mulch. There are a few problems with rock:

- You can't just run through it with a scuffle hoe or keep it tidy.
- Weed seeds will still settle in and sprout from above, and you must hand pull each one or use chemicals. If you use chemicals you run the risk of killing plants along with the weeds.

Rock can damage stems of tender perennials. It also holds and concentrates heat. If you use rock and if you want to plant soft stemmed perennials we recommend covering the immediate planting hole with bark. Finally, when it comes time for garden remodel, removal of rock is very difficult.

7) **To plant, set out the plants in their positions.** Begin with the larger trees or shrubs, and then add the smaller supporting plants according to your plan. Tweak the layout, keeping in mind the mature size of the plant. Remember, it will get there sooner than you think.

8) **If you already have placed the mulch, pull it well back from the spot that the plant will go.** If you used a paper or fabric ground cover, cut an "X" twice the width of the root ball. Plant the plants just a bit above the level they were originally at in the container, since they will settle a bit lower than originally planted. You don't want the plants to end up too deep because that can encourage root rot. Also, the roots need to drain well and oxygen needs to permeate soil and into the root system.

9) **Apply bark mulch at least 3 inches deep to cover your bed.** Add a bit of extra mulch along the edges and rake excess from grass to make a sharp and slightly bermed up edge. This will further keep grass from encroaching and give a tidy, finished look. Pull mulch back from the stems and trunks of your plants, leaving only a thin layer to come up against them. This will prevent damage from excess moisture retention, as well as from insects and rodents.

10) **Water your new plants thoroughly at planting time.** The mulch will help retain water and once plants are established they shouldn't need additionally water except in drought conditions (very sandy soil would be the exception). In the first weeks as a new planting works to send roots out into the bed, check moisture levels by putting your finger down in the soil directly under the plant, into the original root ball, and if there isn't moisture in the top inch, the bed needs some water. When watering, give the bed a good soaking that will settle into the lower layers of soil, encouraging the roots to go deep. It is better to water deeply less often than lightly more often.

11) **It is helpful to sprinkle a layer of pre-emergent weed killer.** Such as Preen or the professional product—Snapshot - that we make available. Sprinkle over your bed to discourage weed seeds from sprouting.

12) **Maintain your bed by running one wheel of your lawn mower up on the edge of the mulched bed.** No need to hand trim.

13) **Run a scuffle hoe (stirrup hoe) over the bed once a month to rid the bed of any small weeds trying to get a foothold.** Possibly more often if necessary. This will freshen up your mulch so it looks freshly applied and will keep you from having to top off your mulch layer as often. Hand pull the occasional larger weeds.

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