



## 9 Landscaping Errors

[1] Not fitting in with your surroundings: Try to generally match your neighborhood. A wildflower meadow in your front yard might not be aesthetically pleasing if lawns cover the front yards of other homes on your street. Instead, have some lawn or a single species of low-growing groundcover, & plant wildflowers closer to the house or in the back yard.

[2] Planting before planning: You could design your garden in trial & error fashion, digging & moving plants & changing patio & other walk lines as work progresses. But it'll be a lot easier on your back if you first move the plants & walk lines with pencil & paper.

[3] Installing plants in a 'one of each' fashion: When you bought mums last fall, did you have trouble choosing the colors you wanted & get 1 or 2 of each? This can happen from not planning before planting. The same colors should be planted together. The bulbs you planted last fall should be massed the same way, with at least 10 of the same species & color together.

[4] Using deciduous trees as screening plants: A lot of home gardeners leave lower limbs on trees because they offer screening. Except those that are so small that they never grow tall enough to have a canopy, deciduous trees are more effective when lower limbs are pruned & the understory is planted with flowering shrubs & perennials. Some of the trees that should be limbed up 6' or more are large shade trees, upright growing Japanese maples, flowering cherries, dogwoods, redbuds, crabapples, deciduous magnolias, stewartias, & river birches. Prune the lowest limbs at the trunk just above their branch collar, or the flare at the base of the branch, as the tree grows taller; & always prune suckers, or water spouts, as they grow from the base of the plants.

[5] Too much ornamental bark mulch: People mistakenly think that ornamental hardwood bark improves soil. So in their efforts to enhance the landscape & soil, they pile it higher & deeper. Deep layers of mulch keep air, moisture, & nutrients from reaching the roots & kill plants when piles against a tree's bark. Further, hardwood bark mulch spread 4"-5" thick can cause manganese toxicity in soils. Use bark mulch sparingly to prevent weeds, hold moisture & give a clean, finished appearance to planting beds. Never spread more than a 1"-2" layer.

[6] Designing stairs without considering lighting: This is often the least considered aspect of stairs. Light all steps from above without casting shadows that hide the walking surface. Homeowners usually think about how their decks & yards are lit, but not the stairs that get you from 1 place to another. The best time to see how lighting will look is to check it at night.

[7] Designing 'trip steps': People generally do not notice a single step in a path. Where there are slight grade changes you're better off installing 2 low steps than 1 'trip step.' Risers of varying heights in a set of stairs are also a good reason to walk cautiously. The disparities in height will throw users off balance & send them to the ground, even when the difference is barely perceptible. The most comfortable sets of stairs have 6" risers & 14" treads on each step & at least 2 & no more than 10 steps without a landing.

[8] Obstructing visibility at driveway entry: Many homeowners plant shrubs or trees to mark property entries & create privacy. But if you can't see 300' in both directions from your car before approaching the street, the plantings are making it difficult to see oncoming pedestrians or autos before pulling into traffic. Check your sight line from the driver's seat while your car is at the entry of your driveway.