

Landscape your sanctuary

Patios with seat walls, and low-maintenance plantings are top choices

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Here's one landscaping rule that makes a lot of sense: Plan and install features like patios, decks and walks first before you start planting.

After that, it's up to your taste and pocketbook, and there are lots of people willing to help.

Hardscape — those things you really need to put in first or risk getting your precious trees, shrubs and perennials trampled — can vary from decks and gazebos to walks and patios with built-ins ranging from seating to lights and grills.

Patios are very popular, and can be made from stone, bricks or concrete pavers that come in many different styles and designs from companies like Belgard and are often less expensive than stone or clay bricks, not to mention easier to install because they are uniform.

Suellen Furfaro, in-store designer at Lurvey Landscape Supply and Garden Center in Des Plaines, says the more tumbled, worn looking pavers are coming to the fore, ahead of the clean-cut, uniform looks.

Her clients like seat walls that create an outdoor room around their patios. In a formal design these roughly 18-inch-tall walls might be all around the patio. Or they could be in just one corner. And envision a pillar at the end of that wall, perhaps with a light, where you can put a pot of bright flowers.

"We're seeing a trend toward grander scale pavers

and slabs," said Ken O'Neill, vice president of marketing for Belgard Hardscapes. "Slabs create a more contemporary look and feel, which is increasing in demand, and they tend to install quicker, giving homeowners their dream patio in less time. Expect to see more large pavers and slabs introduced."

Belgard's Lafitt slab is 2 inches thick and as large as 15 by almost 22.5 inches.

Firepits, fire tables and fireplaces are also very popular, agreed O'Neill. And that's for obvious reasons here in the suburbs — they help you enjoy your backyard both earlier and later in the season.

Scott Goczkowski, landscape designer for Lurvey, said his clients like those fireplaces but also want more elaborate backyard kitchens drawn up, although he's not sure how many of those actually get built when people see the price tags.

"Sometimes we place the fireplace so you can see it from inside in winter," he said.

Natural stone is a winner, too, and those walls around the patio create a cozy feeling but also make it easy to use the outdoor area if nice days show up early — like they did this year — before you are ready to move the furniture outside.

Paula Popowski, landscape department manager for Knupper Nursery in Palatine, talks about the charm you can easily create in a bed of ground cover under an old tree by adding a flagstone path, perhaps to a bench.

And Furfaro doesn't argue, saying natural stones like bluestone are rising in popularity, but remember if you are doing a large project it is harder to install and more expensive. She is also seeing people use the more traditional clay or brick pavers.

Popowski likes to build a kidney-shaped bed of ground cover under an old tree with flagstone steppingstones and maybe a bench at the end of the path.

Flagstone is a great do-it-yourself project, she said,

See **LANDSCAPE** on **PAGE 3** because you can level it with sand or not, while bricks require a pro.

She also likes to create "outcroppings" around trees with flagstone, saying she thinks big boulders can overpower a smaller house.

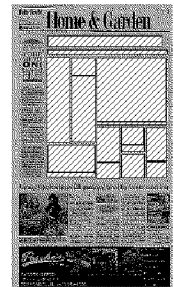
Both Lurvey and Knupper give in-store design help from customers' photos and measurements or make trips on site.

David Berryhill, owner of Archadeck of Chicagoland, says patios are definitely more popular than decks, but pergolas and canopies to block the sun are also a trend.

Fireplaces and pits are very popular, and Berryhill often builds nooks for grills that give that built-in look without the expense. These can be designed to protect the chef and food from winds, too.

When we're talking about plantings, Popowski's customers want their yards simplified.

"They say 'I want less variety of plants and more of one thing.' I think it's great, a clean



look with easy maintenance.”

Popowski likes any oak trees, especially swamp white.

“It’s totally false that oaks are slow to grow,” said Popowski. “They take a year or two to really start, but by the third year they can grow 2 feet a year.”

Texture is the answer in shade, and she likes to mix plants like ferns and hostas.

“I tell people get a pot that you love and fill it with annuals,” said Popowski. “You can move it around. Put a bunch next to a tree, and you can

get a lot of color in the shade that way. Bright green heucheras or hostas can pop in the shade.”

Sunnier areas call for drop-seed grass and calamint, considered a better-behaved, non-invasive member of the mint family.

Furfaro sings the praises of Knockout roses. “They bloom from June through October with no black spot. I recommend them for anyone who has full sun.

Ornamental grasses like fountain grass are low maintenance, says Furfaro. She

also likes maiden grasses, but they get taller and should go in less formal places like the backyard.

Many easy-to-grow hydrangeas are on her list, including Annabelle and paniculata that can grow to 6 feet and again blooms through the summer and even looks great in the snow.

Viburnums also bring spring flowers and sometimes later berries that feed birds, something that is important to more and more people.



COURTESY BELGARD HARDSCAPE

Mega Arbel and BelAir are the pavers in this Chicago area project.



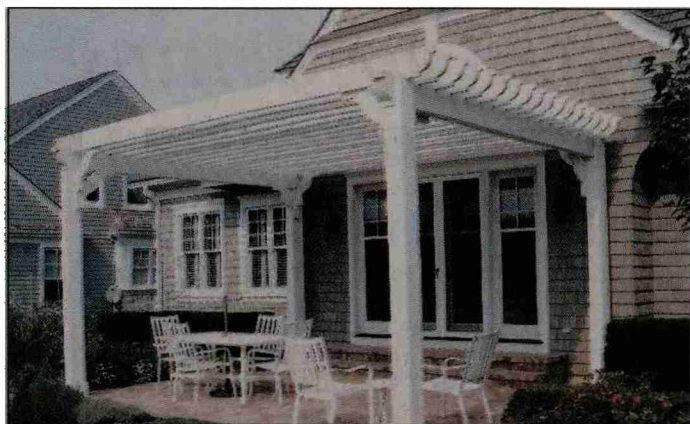
COURTESY LURVEY

Hillside Landscape, Inc., of Glenview and Buffalo Grove installed this grill with materials from Lurvey.



COURTESY **PROVEN WINNERS**

The dwarf hydrangea paniculata is called Bobo. It grows in full sun to part shade.



COURTESY ARCHADECK OF CHICAGOLAND

Archadeck of Chicagoland in Palatine created this example of a sunshade.



COURTESY **PROVEN WINNERS**

Bright red fruit grows on viburnum Red Balloon in late summer or fall. In the spring the shrub grows white flowers. It grows 6 to 8 feet tall and wide in sun to part shade.