

## Landscape Budgeting: Introduction

David Cristiani

**Summary:** Consider what you want vs. what you really need, then stick to those priorities. Give up clichés, too.

Landscapes cost less per square foot than many other property improvements, but that does not mean they are cheap or should be. Their larger area than most other property improvements more than makes up for their low square foot cost. Like anything, landscapes have a great value, but only **if** they are designed properly. Of course, one must also consider the **long-term costs** including maintenance and watering, or replacement of plants.

**Budget, quality, and quantity** are factors that constrain all projects; a person can only choose 2 of them:

*One example:* if a person has a large lot requiring removals of past mistakes, wants a detailed design, a great-looking landscape complete with boulders, flagstone paving, low-voltage lighting, and large specimen trees and plants, their budget will have to be vast, as in tens of thousands of dollars...this is an **expensive** project.

*A second example:* if a person has a \$5000 budget for a front landscape project, wants a basic design, some existing features to be removed, a colorful planting with year-round interest, instant shade, some lighting, and a wood trellis (requires constant, expensive wood care in our dry climate), the project area has to be extremely **small** to fit their budget.

*A third example:* if a person has a \$6500 budget for a 2000 square foot front landscape project with a small tree and some dead turf to be removed, wants a basic conceptual design, an appropriate planting that will eventually become attractive, 2" depth of crusher fines mulch without filter fabric, and drip irrigation...this is a more **reasonable** project.

The bad news: most budgets are inadequate for a quality landscape project, given the options required. Some budgets are mistakenly made based on what a neighbor spent. Also, costly site decisions are often made during building design and construction. **The good news:** it doesn't have to be that way! Decide which design ideas will work together, which won't work, or which ideas are affordable, even if they are installed over time. Finally, delete items that are not affordable or ones that do not fit into the overall design concept.

<b>Common Beliefs:</b>	<b>Realities:</b>
+ "This is a desert and landscaping it should not cost so much."	+ Deserts are just as valuable as other places. Quality desert landscapes often cost as much <b>initially</b> as a high water-use landscape because of similar material and square footage costs. They cost less <b>long term</b> .
+ "We can always delete some plants."	+ Bad idea. Plants bring life into a space.
+ "Restoring native vegetation should not cost that much...after all, I can just throw out some seed."	+ It takes more than just seed, plus this is more expensive than if the vegetation had been preserved...and you would already have mature, diverse natural

	plantings and less erosion. Seed needs more care: soil preparation, raking, etc.
+ "Our property is not that large, about 1/2 acre."	+ That is large, about 20,000 square feet. A large lot and a small budget is a bad idea. The larger the area, the larger the cost.
+ "We want more varieties of trees and plants...why did you design so few? Why are there no boulders, edging or lighting?"	+ Budget and to avoid busy-ness. More is less; less is more. Be willing to reduce desired features to a few that are truly necessary; what is affordable. Avoid busy designs.

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