

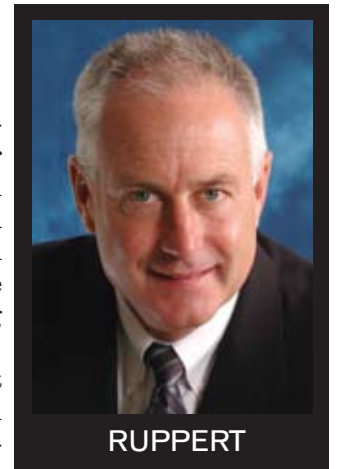
make your landscaping Work For You

Landscaping that can seal the deal, even in a bad economy. BY CRAIG RUPPERT

In an economy that continues to worsen, and with budgets that continue to tighten, property owners and managers can be quick to overlook the importance of establishing and maintaining a high standard for something like landscaping. But neglecting landscaping can be a big mistake. Landscaping is often the first touch point with a potential client or customer. From a visual standpoint, the landscape is the only opportunity to make a first impression, and speaks volumes toward how a property is maintained overall. It may even be the only chance a manager has to present his or her property.

Understanding the importance of stellar landscaping is easy, while paying for it might seem more difficult. The good news is that there are many efficient and cost-effective ways to create and maintain a beautiful landscape that will keep the process manageable, even in a declining economy.

The first step in reaching a healthy yet affordable landscape is to consult a trusted landscaping contractor. A property manag-



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Pictured here is Baltimore Inner Harbor in Baltimore, Maryland.

er should do some research on which landscaper would be the best fit and would provide advice that keeps your specific landscaping needs *and* financial limitations in mind. Once you've selected who that landscaping contractor will be, speak to him or her about the following solutions and how they can work within a certain budget.

When funds are limited, be sure to prioritize where investments are being made and focus on the well-traveled areas of your property first. Landscaping closest to the building, near pathways and around parking lots is likely to be the most visible and have the most foot traffic.

As you're planning your landscaping in these areas, consider designs that incorporate large flowing beds and sweeping areas of turf were possible as they are much less costly per square foot to maintain than the opposite: numerous little planting beds mixed with small areas of turf. Choose plants that will require minimal maintenance but that are still pleasant to the eye. Perennials, once planted, can last for many years and can add nice color and life to a property. If you need to draw attention to a particular area or property feature, consider planting small pockets of seasonal annuals or flowering bulbs that offer greater range of colors and color intensity.

As you make your selections, keep in mind appropriate spacing of plants to avoid the likelihood of overgrowth or the need for continuous pruning. Work with your landscaping contractor to plan for essential upkeep after the initial planting becomes established. This includes limiting the amount of open mulch space on the property mulching. Mulching performs a horticultural function in young landscapes but as they mature it is often used only to enhance the visual appeal of the landscape, but can be extremely costly and overused. Limiting from the beginning the areas that will need to be mulched is advised.

As property managers take a look beyond the most traveled areas, there are many other opportunities to save money, while still keeping a great looking landscape. Reducing the frequency of mowing in certain areas can allow the natural plants and foliage to thrive. "Naturalizing" parts of your landscape will encourage the growth of plants native to the local region, will reduce the need for maintenance, and ultimately will reduce your landscaping bill and your energy bill.

Property managers should also give thought to plants that can help save energy for the building. Deciduous trees, which shed their leaves in the autumn and stay bare until spring, are great for this. These trees, when planted near appropriate parts of the building, can provide shade in the summer when in leaf, and can let the warm sunshine through their bare limbs in the winter months. Another opportunity for trees to act as energy savers is to plant an evergreen screen that can help prevent winds from hitting the building.

As property managers work with their trusted landscaping contractor on implementing these cost saving measures, another concept to consider is the selection of plants throughout the property that require minimal watering. The less irrigation maintenance required, the less money you'll need to spend in the long run. Consider an alternative to using turf, which is expensive to maintain, and uses considerably more water than the average landscape. Instead, allow more room for naturalization or other less expensive and easier to maintain options. Native grasses and plants require less water than ornamental ones and can grow more freely. The time of day that watering is done is also a factor. Watering in the middle of the day can be wasteful, as the sun will dry the moisture quickly, stealing its benefits before it's able to fully saturate the ground. Try to do the watering in the morning or evening hours. It is also just as important not to overwater the landscape. While this may seem like a balancing act, your landscaper will be able to advise you on what will be most appropriate for your property.

Something to remember: Although we are facing difficult times, better times will follow. Be confident that your landscaping contractor will be with you through both the good and the bad, always willing to put your property's interests first. Speak with him or her about



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the various landscaping tactics that can allow you to take advantage of client and customer opportunities without paying a fortune. Now, more than ever, it's important to get ahead of your competition by differentiating your property with beautiful landscaping. **RFB**

Craig Ruppert is the founder and CEO of Ruppert Companies, based in Laytonsville, Maryland. Ruppert Landscape, Inc. is an organization built from a strong set of values and a genuine dedication to providing the highest quality in landscape services.