

Our Top Tips for Hiring a Landscape Contractor:

- Start talking to contractors early. Good contractors are often busy and may not be able to start your project right away. The earlier you find your contractor the easier it will be to get on their schedule.
- Always talk to multiple contractors and get multiple quotes for your project. Let them know you are comparing quotes and ask that they include as much detailed information as possible to help you compare the quotes you are getting. There is more than one “right” way to install a landscape and contractors may make different assumptions about plant sizes, irrigation, etc. The detailed quote is what will allow you to see if you are getting the same thing and at what prices.
 - When you are comparing quotes, the lowest cost quote is not necessarily the contractor to hire. A less experienced contractor may miss things that should be included and accidentally give too low a price. More experienced or specialized contractors may charge more for their work, but that work may be of higher quality.
 - Always ask to see a portfolio of similar projects the contractor has completed with a similar style to what you are looking for. You want to see at least some projects that are of a similar size or larger than yours to make sure they have the required experience.
 - Ask for references of their past customers you can contact. Check those references and find out if their past customers would recommend them. Additionally, ask if final costs were what they expected, if the project was completed in the amount of time the contractor said it would be, and if the crew showed up when they were supposed to and cleaned up well after their work.
- Contractors who specialize in providing design services or working with waterwise and California native plants may cost more, but you are paying for that specialized skill set and experience. Often this may be a good investment in having the best quality project, both in the beauty of the landscape as well as the long-term health of the plantings.
 - Not all contractors who offer design services are good at it! Be sure to ask for a portfolio of projects they designed, not just installed, before having a contractor design your project.
- Contractor licensing requirements: In California, any landscape project that costs more than \$500 of materials and labor combined can only legally be taken on by a licensed landscape contractor.
 - Ask the contractor for their license number, and verify that it is current by checking their number in the Contractors State License Board database at <https://www.cslb.ca.gov/OnlineServices/CheckLicenseII/CheckLicense.aspx>

- One of the reasons to hire a licensed contractor is that they are required to carry insurance for liability and for their employees. This helps protect you if a worker is injured while on your property. It is also always good to ask the contractor for verification of their insurance to ensure it is current.
- Don't be afraid to ask for recommendations! While more residential landscape contractors are beginning to offer waterwise and California native landscape installation and turf removal services, some community members still wonder how to find the right contractor for them.
 - If you see landscapes you like in your community or the nearby area, you can ask the homeowner if they worked with a contractor and if they would recommend them. Feel free to leave them a note with the question and your contact information. Many people are happy to refer their contractors.
 - You can ask your local nurseries (that sell the kinds of plants you are interested in), botanical gardens, native plant society chapters, etc. if they have recommendations for landscape contractors for the size and scope of project you are planning.