Additional Notes:

For more information about soil building, composting, and natural yard and lawn care:

- King County: www.metrokc.gov/soils or www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/naturalyardcare/documents.asp
- City of Seattle: www.seattle.gov/util/Services/Yard
- Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline: 206-633-0224 or toll free at 800-325-6165, X 3-3050.
- The Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County at www.govlink.org/hazwaste/house/yard

This material will be provided in alternate formats upon request by contacting:
King County Solid Waste Division
206-296-4466
1-800-325-6165, ext. 6-4466
TTY Relay: 711
www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd

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King County
Department of
Natural Resources and Parks
Solid Waste Division

Five Steps to: Natural Yard Care

How to Choose a Landscape Company

. . . for a healthy yard and a healthy environment

Not all landscape companies are the same. When you hire a landscape professional who minimizes the use of toxic chemicals and works with natural processes, you can

- ❑ protect your family's health by reducing contact with chemicals.
- ❑ save money on water, yard waste disposal, and chemical purchases.
- ❑ protect the environment by reducing chemical use and conserving water supplies.

What's the Problem?

Overuse of chemicals can damage yards. Pesticides (weed and bug killers) and quick-release, high-nitrogen fertilizers can harm earthworms and other beneficial soil organisms needed to keep plants healthy.

Rain can wash pesticides from yards into nearby streams and lakes, where the chemicals can damage aquatic life. More than 80 percent of urban streams contain at least one pesticide in concentrations high enough to threaten aquatic life. Quick-release, high-nitrogen fertilizers may also wash into neighboring streams and lakes, where the fertilizer promotes algae growth and chokes out fish and other aquatic life.

Pesticides aren't good for children or pets — or you either. Children's small size and developing brains and bodies leave them more vulnerable to pesticides. In some studies, chemicals in combination with fertilizer-herbicide lawn products "weed and feed products" have been associated with an increased risk of cancer, reproductive effects and neurological impairment, and the Canadian Medical Association advocates banning these products. In addition, dogs die every year from eating metaldehyde-based slug baits. A recent study found an increased risk of bladder cancer in dogs exposed to lawns treated with herbicides and insecticides.

How to Choose a Landscape Company*. . . for a healthy yard and a healthy environment*

If you are planning to hire a landscape professional, here are some questions to ask prospective contractors:

Healthy Soil

Healthy plants need healthy soil. Does the company

- ❑ spend time preparing the soil before planting? This means adding compost and other amendments and examining soil quality by taking a core sample or doing soil tests, if necessary.
- ❑ mulch beds regularly with leaves, chips, or compost? A layer of mulch controls weeds, retains moisture, and provides nutrients as it breaks down.
- ❑ offer "natural organic" or "slow-release" fertilizers? These last longer, are better for soil and plant health, and are less likely to be washed away as runoff from rain.

Notes: _____

Plant Right for Your Site

Depending on the sunlight, slope, soil type and drainage in your yard, certain plants will grow better than others. Your landscape will be more successful in the long run if plants are carefully selected. Does the company

- ❑ note conditions in the different areas of your yard?
- ❑ look for plants that are native to the Northwest (or to areas with a similar climate)?
- ❑ look for plants that resist pests and use less water?
- ❑ group plants with similar sun, water and soil needs together?

Notes: _____

A layer of mulch controls weeds, retains moisture, and provides nutrients as it breaks down.

Smart Watering

Overwatering is common and causes many plant problems. Find a landscape professional who understands how to save you money and keep your plants healthy by watering appropriately. Does the company

- ❑ have staff that are certified water auditors, landscape architects or Certified Landscape Technicians?
- ❑ water infrequently, but deeply? It's important to moisten the entire root zone, then let the soil dry before watering again.
- ❑ take steps to reduce evaporation? Mulching, using soaker hoses, and watering only in the morning or evening help make every drop count.
- ❑ check that the soil drains properly and retains moisture? If not, will the contractor add amendments to the soil to improve its texture?
- ❑ use automatic irrigation systems efficiently? If you have a system, it should be checked regularly for leaks and the controller set to match seasonal changes.
- ❑ eesign landscapes so that they absorb rainwater? Open pavers allow rainwater to seep between them, and compost allows soils to absorb water. Well-aerated turf also absorbs more water.

Notes: _____

Control of Pests Without Chemicals

Overuse of pesticides (weed and bug killers) is bad for the soil, Northwest waterways, and the health of your family—particularly children and pets. Many landscape professionals don't use pesticides at all or use them only as a last resort. Does the company

- ❑ think first about preventing or managing pests rather than controlling them? This means choosing disease-resistant plants and pulling weeds before they spread.
- ❑ use pesticides as a last resort? Good landscape practices keep plants healthy and also help minimize weeds and pests. That means pesticides are rarely necessary.
- ❑ select the least toxic control method? Non-chemical methods like hand weeding are effective, and many less toxic products are now available.
- ❑ avoid calendar-based pesticide applications? Regular monitoring will determine if and when it is really necessary to use chemical controls.
- ❑ spot spray if pesticides really are necessary, rather than using broadcast applications?
- ❑ have a pesticide applicator's license if they ever use pesticides? Even "natural" products, like vinegar-based weed control products, require a licensed applicator if applied by a contractor.

Notes: _____

Natural Lawn Care

Low or no pesticide use, conservative watering, and easy mowing practices are among the strategies for a natural approach to lawn care. Does the company

- ❑ keep lawn mowed at a high level (about 2 inches long) to encourage healthier growth?
- ❑ leave grass clippings on the lawn to reduce fertilizer needs? Mulch-mowing does *not* cause thatch build up, and newer mulch mowers leave a clean-looking lawn.
- ❑ use a "natural organic" or "slow release" fertilizer at least once a year? Late September is best.
- ❑ keep the lawn healthy by annually aerating, overseeding and top-dressing with compost?
- ❑ avoid using "weed and feed" products?
- ❑ consider alternatives to lawns-especially on slopes, in narrow or shady areas, or near streams?

Notes: _____

Use a 'natural organic' or 'slow release' fertilizer at least once a year.

Other Questions

❑ **Are they EnviroStars-certified?**

EnviroStars is a regional program that certifies businesses based on their environmental practices. A list of EnviroStars-certified landscapers can be found at www.envirostars.org .

Notes: _____

❑ **Are they a member of Built Green?**

Built Green™ is a certification program for environmentally-responsible buildings and maintains a list of participating Built Green™ contractors and landscape professionals. See www.builtgreen.net/members

Notes: _____

❑ **Do they belong to a landscape professional association?**

Associations with chapters in Washington State include:

- Green Meridian www.greenmeridian.org
- Washington Association of Landscape Professionals www.walp.org
- Washington State Nursery and Landscape Association www.wsnla.org
- International Society of Arboriculture www.isa-arbor.com
- Washington Chapter, American Society of Landscape Architects www.wasla.org
- Washington Chapter, Association of Professional Landscape Designers www.apldwa.org
- Irrigation Association www.irrigation.org

Notes: _____