

# The “No Surprises” Guide to Planning Your Outdoor Space: 9 Practical Tips To Maximize Your Budget For Rooftops and Gardens.

Starting a large outdoor renovation can feel very overwhelming, particularly because it’s difficult to know where to start. It’s like learning to play a new game, but when you know the rules it’s WAY easier to succeed. **So, let us guide you through the initial steps and point you in the right direction.**

We want you to understand all that you need to think about BEFORE you begin. While you may not have definitive answers to each question at this point, you’ll know when you meet with your landscape designer what to expect and what decisions you’ll need to make.

## 1. Prioritize

**The clearer you are about your priorities, the bigger the bang for your buck.** If there’s more than one area, can you prioritize them? What’s the first non-negotiable area that you want transformed?

Why is this an important question?

- **Scope of Work.** A not so fancy term that describes all that will be completed in your project. Designers and contractors need parameters in order to provide you with the best outcome.
- **What can you live with or without while demolition and construction are taking place?** Wherever our staff are working, that space will be inaccessible. Additionally, access to your outdoor space means that staff could be walking through your home on a regular basis. If you’re fortunate enough to have a service elevator or an exterior stairwell, this may not be such an issue. (Topiarius prefers to use cranes when working in Chicago to help minimize the amount of traffic through your home.)
- **Budget.** See #8. If you only have the budget to focus on one area based on your budget, which would you choose?

## 2. Identify how you want to live in your outdoor space a MAJORITY of the time.

In the design of a small space, you will be surprised how versatile it will be, but you may not be able to have everything. There may be limitations that are out of your control such as space-flow needs or city codes. (Don’t worry we can work that part out for you.)

If most evenings all you’ll want to do is relax with a glass wine and recline on your chaise, then in the rare times that you have a large party, family gathering, or kid’s birthday party, you can easily move some furniture out of the way or set up an additional table. **Plan for 90% of use, accommodate for 10%.**

### 3. What do you want to look at?

It may sound like a funny question, but when you live in the city, views are a premium. If you've got the luck of looking at Lake Michigan, at a park, or at the amazing skyline, then that's an obvious answer. But, if you are nestled between some buildings what view do you want to highlight?

We love to use all components of our designs to help provide screening from what you don't want to see *and* what you do want to see. So, bring a chair out into your space. Rotate it in different directions to see all the views from each direction. Now you will know exactly what you want!

### 4. How solid is the roof?

If you have identified a roof as the renovation space, do you know the status of the roof structure? Both the membrane (what you see) and the joists (what you don't see) are integral to the project. One small cut in the membrane can cause water damage, immediately and over time. If the construction of your home was not done correctly, then the weight of materials on your new roof deck can cause structural damage, immediately and over time.

**Great news though!** This evaluation can be done through a visual inspection, and if need be, with the help of a trusted structural engineer. *We definitely have those folks on speed dial.*

### 5. Water and Gas | Common elements, but are they common in your space?

Plants in containers, and in environments that are unprotected like on a roof top, require more water than plants in-ground. Soil in containers will dry faster because there will always be less soil volume and fluctuating temperatures. So when you have any containers, water access is a must.

Gas powers both grills and fire features, both of which are staples to outdoor living. While propane tanks can be a solution, having a dedicated gas line means no more trips to The Home Depot.

In newer constructed homes, developers have caught on to this need and are making sure that roof tops are constructed with plumbing/spigots and gas lines. If you have a home that doesn't have a pre-existing water source or a gas line then we will help solve this.

### 6. Are you flexible on your timeline?

From first phone call to your first party, you may be surprised by the timeline it takes to get your project completed.

Start conversations with your design team a minimum of 6 months to 1 year before your deadline to have the space completed.

Factors that impact this timeline (in no specific order):

- Availability of design team
- Other projects that are already scheduled for the design team

- Coordination of installation team and sub-contractors
- Your ability to make decisions quickly throughout the project
- Lead times for ordering products and custom-ordered pieces
- Back orders of products and materials
- Weather
- Permitting process
- Results of roof / structural inspections
- Any needed architectural drawings
- Your neighbors (potentially)
- Access to your property
- Personal financing

## 7. What's your taste? Design esthetic? Or . . . style?

If one of our designers walked into your house, would they know from how you have decorated the inside what your taste will be for the outside?

A well-designed outdoor spaces takes its cues from your interior design and décor. It's one of the best ways to communicate with a designer about what you see as simple elegance or classical French or contemporary modern. Such descriptors can mean different things to each of us, so hearing how you describe your home's style will be priceless.

If not, do not fret. There are trusty online tools that can be used and also enhance your conversation.

(Our favorite is Pinterest. It's so easy to put in search words and see endless ideas scroll before your eyes. It's also extremely easy to create a place (aka a Board) on Pinterest to save and share your ideas.)

## 8. Investing wisely.

How the heck do you know what to budget when you have no idea what this will cost?

A first place to start is knowing how long you intend to live in this home. It may or may not matter to you what you want to spend, but for many people it can be an influence.

**A rule of thumb for budgeting: plan on spending 10-25% of your home's value.** This should be your budget if you're planning on staying for a while and if you really want your outdoor space to wow.

If you want to create the outdoor space as an investment that will help you sell in a year or two, you may want to spend less than 10-25%.

The saying, you get what you pay for, is well used. . . because it's true. Quality design time costs money. Quality products cost money. And, installation costs money. They all equal a quality investment.

## 9. There are so many kinds of companies, how do you choose?

We get it. It can be very confusing, but we have broken it down into 4 simple categories for you.

1. Companies that only do design work.
2. Companies that only do the installation.
3. Companies that do both.
4. Companies that do both and then some.

Each company or person has an area(s) of expertise and that is how they will design your experience for you. (Note: these do not include any home builders or architects. These are companies that specifically focus on landscaping.)

*Companies that do the design* place a high value and premium on the design they will create for you. You will be buying your design from them. Because you own it, you can then take that design to whomever you want to do the installation. Often times, these companies will offer you their management services as well. You pay them to facilitate the multitude of subcontractors needed to implement your project. These subs operate on their own timeline because they are working for many clients at the same time, which can cause management headaches and longer timelines.

*Companies that do the installation* will work with a plan that is provided to them. (These are often the companies subcontracted with by the first category.) Depending on the scope of work needed, there may be need for multiple companies to complete your project, and then you become the project manager. Quality companies that do the installation will not have any issue reading plans to complete the work, but if there are any changes with design or construction, you also take on the responsibility of making these decisions.

*Companies that do both the design and the installation are a perfect combination.* Not only are the designs of high quality, but they are also implemented by teams under the same roof. These companies know their staffs' skills and manage their timelines. If there are any issues that come up with design or with construction, the designers are immediately accessible.

*Companies that do both the design and the installation and then some are the crème de la crème.* At Topiarius we not only provide in-house design and installation, but we continue our service with fine gardening/maintenance and seasonal rotations. So once the project is complete, we will continue to provide care and annual color through all seasons.

Having an outdoor space is within reach! Understand the “surprises” before you get started and you’ll be able to maximize your outdoor space, **and also your budget.**

**Contact us today.**

**We’d love to get started with our complimentary consultation.**