

Adding Home Value With Land

Alabama Ag Credit customer Guy Hood has been supplying plants for landscapes across the country for almost two decades, and says that now is the perfect time to invest in home landscaping.

There is good news for homeowners interested in sprucing up their landscapes, says Guy Hood, owner of 3am Growers, a specimen plant material supplier headquartered in Tallahassee, Ala. Current economic conditions have created a unique opportunity for a homeowner looking to landscape, as the cost of plant material is lower than it's ever been, Hood says. He explains that the current plant supply was started 10 years ago, based on the demand at that time. However, once the economy began falling, homeowners cut back on landscape spending, leaving a surplus of these established plants and consequently lower prices.

In other words, Hood believes there has never been a better time to invest in landscaping. A tailored landscape not only can create a unique sense of place and a good feeling when you arrive home, but it can add significant value to your home.

"Landscaping can make a significant difference in the appearance of a home or office, and the money spent can actually be

one of the best investments you can make this year," Hood says.

Curb Appeal

Landscaping can be particularly important for people who are selling their homes. Curb appeal can entice a buyer to take a closer look at a property, and, conversely, a negative first impression can be hard to overcome. When it comes to selling a home, Hood has observed that an investment on the front end can pay off in the sale.

"I would encourage anyone trying to sell their house to go out and buy the biggest trees you can find," he says. "If you spent 10 percent of your home's value on landscaping, it could easily give you a 300 percent return."

Hood understands the value of trees, in particular, because he has built his business on them. His company specializes in trees and shrubs, particularly hollies and crape myrtles. Since its establishment in 1993, 3am Growers has grown into one of the premier plant material suppliers

for the southeastern United States, as well as parts of the East Coast. His plants are sold in local independent garden centers from Texas to Alabama to New York. He focuses on producing fine-quality, field-grown woody ornamentals. He also works with preferred landscape contractors, supplying plants and providing expertise for the retail market.

Planning a Landscape

In landscaping, Hood says that planning ahead is the key to a successful project. He says that most people visit a local garden center and pick out plants they think are pretty but that may not be appropriate for their project.



Guy Hood

They need to consider that plants need certain soil conditions, exposure to sunlight and adequate irrigation and drainage.

"The No. 1 mistake people make when doing a landscaping project is not planning," he says. Buyers need to be asking themselves lots of questions. Will this plant max out at four feet or 40 feet? Will it like sun or shade? If I'm inside my house, looking out the window, will it eventually block the view by growing above the window sill?

For example, when considering the types of plants to use, Hood says that many homeowners make the mistake of planting a woody shrub such as a holly or crape myrtle too close to the house. While the plant may look nice for a couple of years, it will eventually outgrow the space and then can't easily be moved. "A plant is not like buying a piece of furniture; it doesn't stay the way you bought it forever. It is continually growing. You need to plan on what

Tips for a landscaping project

- Plan ahead.
- Research plants you like and that will perform well.
- Keep in mind the root system and the possibility for structural damage. Roots of large trees can become extremely powerful over time. Roots can crack concrete and foundations of homes, and can also break water and gas lines.
- Consider hiring an expert to help you create the landscape you desire.
- Make sure you have adequate drainage and irrigation.
- Be patient — plants take time to grow.

scaping

the space will look like 10, 20 or 30 years from now,” he says.

He advises planting a tree first, letting it grow, then coming in later and filling in with plants that thrive in shade or sun. “Try annual color underneath for several years while the tree establishes itself, so sunny annuals can live until the canopy gets to be real full, and then come in with a shady perennial,” he adds.

Factors to Consider

Hood offers these additional considerations for designing a landscape:

- **Roof line** – Watch for areas where a sloped roof will create a big drainage area by funneling water off the roof into one location.
- **Amount of sun and shade** – Assess which areas of the landscape will get the most sun, and which will stay shady most of the day, and then select plants accordingly.
- **Soil type and composition** – In parts of Alabama, the soil contains heavy clay, which retains moisture and can cause root rot. Hood’s landscapers compensate for this with mound-style planting eight inches high, so that half of the root system will be above existing ground.
- **Height of the plants** – Consider how tall a plant will get. In many of his landscaping projects, Hood selects plants that will not grow taller than the window sill.
- **View** – Think about the aesthetics from the outside and the inside. When you’re outside looking at the landscape, do you have a mix of shapes, shades of greens and other colors? When you’re inside, what will you see when you’re looking out the window? Also, some plants can be used for a specific purpose; for example, sky pencil holly works well for hiding air conditioner units.

Example of how landscaping can add value and curb appeal



Before



After

Plants Used



Sky pencil holly for sun



Caladiums for shade, begonias for color



Hostas for shade