





Boxwoods and purple angelonia, a self-deadheading annual, team up around a Kinnelon pool in this project by Cipriano Landscape Design and Custom Swimming Pools.

COURTESY OF CIPRIANO LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND CUSTOM SWIMMING POOLS

Growing Concerns

For optimum landscaping success, follow these do's and don'ts

BY MARY VINNEDGE

WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN IF YOU IGNORE BEST PRACTICES IN LANDSCAPE DESIGN?

"Your plants die, and it's heartbreaking," says Pamela Dabah of Dabah Landscape Designs in Morristown. Even if they hang in there, you'll have an underperforming landscape, adds landscape designer Lisa Mierop of Mierop Design in Montclair. That means slow-growing plants that never reach their full potential for blooms and lush foliage.

Sound design begins with a master plan, says Chris Cipriano, president of Cipriano Landscape Design and Custom Swimming Pools in Mahwah. "You can take the plan and have someone else do the installation," he says. "You can phase the plan. Homeowners can take the plant list and Google the shrubs."

Dabah agrees: "Once you have a plan, you can even do it yourself. A good designer can give you a plant list and the number of plants you need."



COURTESY OF CIPRIANO LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND CUSTOM SWIMMING POOLS



COURTESY OF DABAH LANDSCAPE DESIGNS

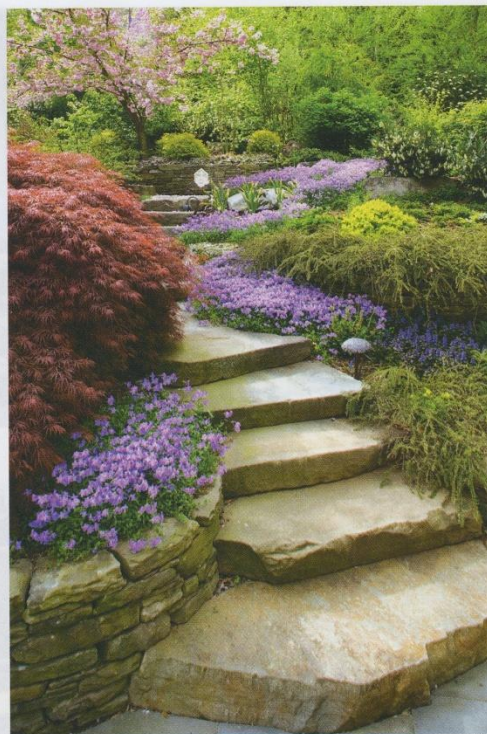


PHOTO BY STEVE HOCKSTEIN

Above: Lisa Mierop encourages homeowners to opt for some deciduous plants such as the Japanese maple (left) in this Montclair planting. The shade garden derives months of color contrast from the maple's red foliage plus lavender-blooming *Phlox stolonifera* and variegated cotoneaster (right).

And don't rush, say Dabah, a member of the Association of Professional Landscape Designers and New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association, and Mierop, a member of APLD and an affiliate member of the American Society of Landscape Architects. "Wait a full year after you move in," Dabah says. "Get familiar with the light and determine whether you have drainage or erosion problems" that the plan can fix.

Mierop says to invest time learning the best seasonal indoor and outdoor views. Around the pool or outdoor dining area, you want plants that are showy in summer, she says, and for views looking outside your windows, plants should have fall and winter

interest. "Landscaping is not point and click. It's about slowing it down and taking it year by year ... It's worth waiting for and making good decisions." She says your plan will take into account your lifestyle—whether you have kids and dogs and frequently entertain outdoors—and whether you need to screen out a neighbor's view, a pool, utility equipment or garbage cans.

Here are some of our experts' additional landscaping do's and don'ts.

■ **DO** choose your landscape designer carefully. "Look at the company's prior work," Cipriano says.

Left top: Plantings, which include ornamental grasses and Knock Out™ roses, are stepped back from the pool to avoid maintenance headaches, Chris Cipriano explains. The waterfall is basalt.

Left bottom: Pamela Dabah shared this "don't" example from the lush landscaping near her own pool: The plants shed into the water, creating maintenance challenges.



COURTESY OF MIEROP DESIGN



COURTESY OF CIPRIANO LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND CUSTOM SWIMMING POOLS



COURTESY OF DABAH LANDSCAPE DESIGNS

Above: Create a little mystery in your garden — as Pamela Dabah did for a Boonton homeowner — by not showing the end point of a pathway.

Left top: Lisa Mierop designs landscapes with views in mind. During prime outdoor entertaining months, she aims for an explosion of warm-weather blooms and foliage colors and textures. When the view is best enjoyed from indoors by looking out a window, she ensures fall and winter interest.

Left bottom: This Upper Saddle River backyard by Cipriano Landscape Design and Custom Swimming Pools showcases textures in the hardscaping and plant materials, which include hakonechloa grass (yellow, foreground); spiraea (small pink blooms) and a purplish, mounding Japanese maple (left and right midground, respectively); white hydrangea (background); and rose of Sharon (next to fence).

Left top: Pamela Dabah designed this garden for a Boonton homeowner. The path leads to a hidden garden. Left bottom: Lisa Mierop designed this garden for a Boonton homeowner. The path leads to a hidden garden. Right: Pamela Dabah designed this garden for a Boonton homeowner. The path leads to a hidden garden.

“Visit projects that were installed five years ago to see if the design still looks good.” Mierop cautions not to base your choice on money alone. She also says to pick someone you like and to ask past clients whether the landscaping team stayed on schedule and on budget.

■ **DO be realistic about what’s achievable**, Mierop says. The overall terrain (whether it’s mountainous or flat) will have a huge impact.

■ **DO create a little mystery**, Dabah advises. Design a path so you can’t see where it ends. In the hidden part, place a sculpture garden, swing or water feature.

■ **DO start by preparing the soil for long-term success.** Mierop amends clay soil with a compost-topsoil mix and sand. Peat moss is beneficial also.

■ **DO listen when the pros say a plant won’t work.** You want the right plants in the right place so soil, water and sun suit the plant, Dabah says.

■ **DO consider maintenance.** Formal clipped hedges and topiary, for example, take regular upkeep; cottage gardens take less, Dabah says. Most roses (Knock Out™ varieties are a notable exception) need coddling; caryopteris and spiraea are easy-care, Cipriano says. Geraniums require constant pinching of spent



PHOTO BY STEVE HOCKSTEIN

Left: "When you decide to have a child, you don't get a 20-year-old, you get a baby," says landscape designer Lisa Mierop, who advises clients to be patient. "It's the same with landscaping — it has to grow up." The bounty of blooms from mature 'Nikko' hydrangeas (plus the picket fence) in this Montclair yard evoke Nantucket style, she adds.

Below: Splurge on your deck because it's closer to your house so you'll see and use it more, Pamela Dabah says. This one is made of Azek, a low-maintenance man-made material. The colored "stones" are man-made and less expensive than natural ones.

blooms, he points out, so he prefers self-deadheading plants such as angelonia.

■ **DO consider texture.** Dabah dials it up with mahonia, a spikey-leaved plant (some are variegated) and weeping Canadian hemlock, "a little magic tree." Cipriano says rhododendrons, with their large opaque leaves, look great with ornamental grasses for contrast.

■ **DON'T plant a large expanse of one thing** because it can look weedy. For example, a large bed of Russian sage [perovskia] "could be planted with something such as rudbeckia [black-eyed Susan] or echinacea [purple coneflower] that blooms at a different time to form an attractive contrast with the fine, gray-green Russian sage foliage," Dabah suggests.

■ **DO opt for some deciduous plants,** Mierop advises. River birch, paperbark maple, crape myrtle, coral-bark Japanese maple and red twig dogwood provide winter interest. "And think about berries. Nandina berries are beautiful in winter," she says.

■ **DO choose masonry materials carefully.** Bluestone gets too hot in sunny areas such as pool decks, Cipriano says, adding that it also takes too much maintenance because it expands and separates in the cement joint. Instead, he says, use quartzite and dolomitic limestone, which can go 10 years with zero maintenance. Mierop keeps bare feet comfort-

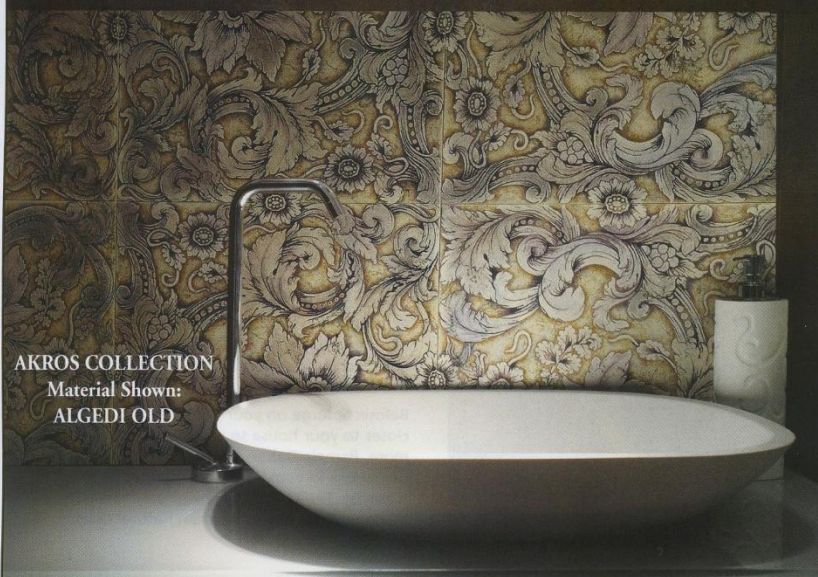


COURTESY OF DABAH LANDSCAPE DESIGNS

able with travertine or tumbled pavers. Companies such as Techo-Bloc offer man-made bluestone and travertine that's somewhat less expensive than natural stone, she says, "and you save on labor because it's uniform and easier to install." She also likes more lawn around swimming pools.

■ If you must pare costs, **DO choose younger, smaller plants and man-made pavers for the patio.** But Dabah says to "spend on the deck, which is next to the house and where you hang out the most."

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■ **DO** make sure plantings near your pool don't shed into it.

■ **DO** be careful about irrigation. "Plants can die from too much water just as much as from not enough," says Mierop, who has seen rhododendrons fail in over-irrigated sites.

■ **DO** make your outdoor rooms as inviting as possible, Dabah says. "Create a ramada or pavilion, add surround sound and put a wine cooler in your outdoor kitchen."

■ **DO** choose properly harvested plants so they have an adequate root system, Cipriano says, and **DON'T** plant too deeply, which encourages root rot.

■ To regulate soil temperature, "**DO** apply a premium undyed hardwood mulch 2 to 3 inches deep around trees and shrubs, less around perennials," Mierop says.

■ **DO** use plants that are less deer-resistant inside your pool fence to enhance variety in your overall landscape, Dabah says.

■ **DO** place appropriately scaled container plantings in your landscape. "**DO** consider how the whole space will look furnished—down to the pillows. Container plants are like a scarf—you can keep changing it," Mierop says.

■ For fast-growers, **DO** choose northern red oak, redbud, variegated willow *Salix integra* 'Hakuro Nishiki' and Schip laurel, Dabah and Mierop say.

■ **DO** get what you want; **DON'T** compromise. "Every time you look at your landscape, you'll see the compromise and regret it—or you'll be happy if you didn't," Mierop says. "If you can't afford to do what you want right away, phase it. Remember that houses sell for more when they have good landscaping. Unlike a car, a landscape adds value with time." **DON'T**

Mary Vinnedge moved from New Jersey a few years ago to return to her extended family in Texas. She still misses the great gardening in the Garden State.

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