

# HENLEY

## LIFE & HOMES

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# Making the most of your garden

Renovating your garden can be a glorious way to add value to your property, utilise your living space or change your lifestyle. Whether your budget is small or large it is imperative to get the most from your landscape contractor.

Consumer Rights Television presenter and journalist Matt Allwright from the BBC's *Rogue Traders* and *Scambusters* says: "As in many areas of life, saving money on your landscaping in the short term can cost you big in the long run. Base your decision not just on cost, but on solid research and checking out credentials you can trust, and you won't go far wrong."



Landscape work can be broken down into four general areas: landscape contractors, landscape maintenance, landscape designers and landscape suppliers, so if you want a complete renovation of your garden from start to finish, you will require both the design and build of your new garden, and also may require a company to maintain this work after completion. Many landscape companies have the facilities to carry out both the design and build of your garden, but if you have a more adventurous or specialist ideas, or really want the 'wow' factor in your garden, it may be worth contacting a Landscape Designer.

It is essential for you to have a basic understanding of what you require from your garden before contacting a landscaper. Take a look at other gardens in magazines or visit the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) website ([www.bali.org.uk](http://www.bali.org.uk)) and take a look at the domestic award-winning gardens for the BALI National Landscape Awards for ideas and inspiration. A good landscape contractor will advise on the specific requirements of your project, give you ideas for how to use the space and offer advice on any specialist design, materials or features which need purchasing, but a general idea of what you would like in and from your garden will help them to help you achieve your perfect garden.

The next step, once you have an idea of the type of garden you want, is to find a landscape contractor. Generally landscape contractors will work regionally, but some, especially larger companies, will carry out work nationally. Directory services such as the Yellow Pages and Yell.com are a fantastic way of finding landscapers in your area, but how can you be assured the landscaper you select is reputable and producing quality work? Selecting a member of a trade association can be one way to avoid hiring a 'cowboy' landscaper.

The British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) is the UK's leading Landscaping Trade Association. With around 700 members, BALI is the largest landscaping association and also the most stringent when it comes to

vetting its members. To become a full contracting member, the landscape company must undergo a site visit from BALI to the company office, to ensure all accounts, health and safety regulations, insurance and public liability are all up to date.

To become a BALI member a company must also provide ten client references and two trade references. An independent Quality Assurance officer will then visit a completed garden and a garden in which the work is ongoing. The officer will work with the company to ensure that the company's work and procedures are of the highest standard; only then can they be awarded BALI Membership. BALI members are also re-vetted every five years, to ensure these high standards are upheld.

The easiest way to find a BALI member in your area is to log onto [www.bali.org.uk](http://www.bali.org.uk) and enter your postcode.

To get a good idea of costs and procedures, get a quote from at least two landscapers, although three or more is recommended. If you haven't found your landscaper through the BALI website, ask them if they are BALI Members and also how long they have been a BALI member. Find out how long they've been trading, if they've got any speciality areas and who will be doing the work, them or a contractor. Who will be your point of call, a manager or supervisor? And what are their contact details (do get both a landline and mobile numbers and also take note of the company address).

You also need to find out how long the work will take, what condition the project will be left in at the end of each day, how the employees gain access to the site, how payment(s) will be made and on what schedule.

To avoid 'cowboy' landscapers always use a written contract, which sets out the proposed costs of the project, and read this carefully. A Landscape Contract should include the Landscape Contractors' business name, address, phone number, the consumer's name and address, the address of jobsite and a list of plants and materials used, their size and quantity (this can be referenced to the plan). It should also show a general description of the work to be performed, an estimated time for completion and completion date, a description of Guarantee and signatures of both parties. You might need to obtain any required building permits; usually contractors will do this for you, but it is your responsibility to make sure they are in place.

You will probably be expected to pay in instalments, with a down payment of 25 to 35 per cent. of the total contract price. It is important to find the "balance" where the business has enough money to buy the materials necessary to start the project but you retain enough money to ensure satisfactory completion. Keep a log of conversations, correspondence, the contract, orders and receipts, and, if you have any problems with your garden once the work has been completed, do try to speak with the landscaper, as many problems that arise can be resolved through communication. If you are still experiencing problems then contact BALI (for BALI members only) or if the landscaper you used isn't a BALI member then contact Consumer Direct, a government funded service which offers regional consumer advice.

The final part of your landscaping experience is to show off your beautiful garden to family, friends and neighbours, so enjoy it!



## Useful information

The British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI): visit [www.bali.co.uk](http://www.bali.co.uk), email [contact@bali.org.uk](mailto:contact@bali.org.uk) or telephone 02476 690 333.

Consumer Direct: visit [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk) or telephone 08454 040506.

British Association of Landscape Industries

