

First and Lasting Impressions

by Christine Wenzel

Numerous studies conducted by real estate boards and university horticultural departments have proven that consumers often perceive value in a home by its landscaping. Homes with good landscaping can increase their value by 5% to 11% according to these studies.

Curb appeal isn't just good landscaping it also encompasses, lighting, hard-scape, paint and iron treatment. Landscaping though is an area you can focus on without breaking the bank and gain immediate gratification.

Ask any landscaper and you'll hear that it's not uncommon for them to be called in as an afterthought at the end of a home construction and often there isn't much left in the budget for planting. Another scenario is deciding to sell your home and realizing some sprucing up outside is in order. If you fit into either of these categories the best advice I can give you is to resist any impulse to throw in a lot of common inexpensive plants just to fill space or look colorful. Common plants add far less value to your property. You would be just as far ahead to rake the dirt and make it look neat.

Instead think about buying younger exotic plants that will grow fast, save you money and give you the enjoyment of watching them grow. It is also less stressful for a plant to get established in a spot when younger rather than being transplanted when fully grown. Once a smaller plant is taken out of a container and put in the ground the growth speeds up and in little time this plant will fill the space you've allotted. It also helps that Los Cabos has a year long growing season.

Choose a style for your landscaping and give the plan time to evolve. Make sure you put into this plan at least two or three specimen palms or cycads. If your budget does not allow a finished landscape right now, keep your overall plan in mind and buy in phases.

If you feel you don't have the time for young plants, another suggestion is to choose just one or two varieties and make a statement with them. A home in Palmilla used almost exclusively *Zamia furfuracea* (common name Cardboard palm) with stunning results. This plant has the added advantage of being salt resistant, great for planting beach side. It's important to create a few focal points to direct the eye to. Planting one species in groups of three is a landscaper's trick to achieve this. A home value survey conducted in California, showed respondents ranked design sophistication as # one, plant size as # two and diversity of plant type as least important.

A professional well planned irrigation system that eliminates the need to drag hoses to planters and can ensure your plants are watered even when away is an expenditure that shouldn't be forgotten. With water a precious commodity, drip irrigation is effective and lower in consumption than hand watering.

There are three types of landscaping you can consider. The first is **Xeriscape** done with native plants and are in the low water consumption category. These are drought tolerant plants, but even desert-scape plants grow better and are healthier with regular watering. The *Bismarkia nobilis* is a majestic palm with bluish colored fronds that has high drought tolerance and is fast growing. They need space can easily become the show stopper in your landscape plan.

I would be remiss not to caution you about helping yourself to any of the native plants growing in the desert. You would be breaking the law taking them out of habitat for your own personal use. Desert plants can be purchased from a few nurseries who have been given authorization by *Semarnat*, the government agency in charge of environment and natural resources. These nurseries will have an *UMA* registration number on their invoices.

The second type is **Minimal Landscape**. This would include palms, cycads, specimen plants, drip and fixed irrigation sprays, pathways, rocks and boulders. In this type of landscape there would be no lawn or plants that require pruning or constant sweeping up of leaves or flowers. You can achieve a lush look without intensive care.

The third type is **Extensive Landscape**. This type of landscaping requires more maintenance than the other two. It would include lawns that to look good need to be cut and edged two to four times a month. There would be bushes that need to be trimmed and a variety of plants with different watering needs necessitating pop-up irrigation heads. A little more complicated irrigation system with higher water consumption would be used in this landscape type.

The impression people are given about your home starts outside. You can have many spectacular features inside but people, and buyers in particular have already formed an opinion by the outside curb appeal. An anonymous quote I stumbled across, sums it up;

“You cannot make a second first impression”