

Top 5 Commercial Landscape Trends



Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

Forecasters are predicting vacancies will drop and rents will rise in office buildings, shopping centers, factories and warehouses, according to [Deloitte & Touche's 2014 outlook](#). And as job growth continues, activity in the retail and office sectors is expected to rise.

This is a big deal since the U.S. landscape industry is a highly fragmented one: The top 50 companies generate 15 percent of the revenue, and most of that total revenue, approximately 50 percent, comes from commercial landscape service accounts, per Hoovers research.

This growth is expected to bring more creative commercial landscape options since those property managers who were holding off on updates may now indulge, and they are coming with a whole folder full of ideas they've been collecting from traditional means, as well as online visual idea sites like Pinterest and Houzz.

While some trends bring fresh color to the landscape, others seem to be continuations of current trends. But even those ideas that aren't original are still coming with increased intensity, making commercial landscapes smarter, greener and more efficient.



PHOTO: SCHILL GROUNDS MANAGEMENT

Trend #1. More Work is Getting Done Outdoors

Office building owners today want to do everything they can to attract tenants to fill any existing vacancies, and that includes providing the spaces that commercial building owners know their tenants crave. These spaces include more meeting areas. As online social networks continue to increase in popularity, more face-to-face social networking spaces are popping up in hotels, workplaces, shopping centers and other commercial properties.

DNAinfo.com, a news source for New York neighborhoods, calls it creating “in-between places,” or lounges where people can meet and brainstorm in smaller groups. “It’s these common spaces ... that’s where work is being done,” explains Billy Hallisky, senior designer at [Luckett & Farley’s Media & Entertainment Group](#), which specializes in creative media workplaces.

As a result, outdoor meeting areas are growing, giving properties a differentiation factor from other office parks nearby.

“Building owners and managers recognize people can’t sit in their cubes for eight hours each day,” explains Gib Durden, vice president of business development for [HighGrove Partners](#), Austell, Georgia. “They need to get outside and disconnect in sitting areas and picnic areas or on walking trails and while going through exercise stations.”

And providing wireless Internet at outdoor sitting and picnic areas expands the workspace, taking employees from their desks to the outdoors for work, as well as rest.

While green roofs certainly aren’t a new trend, roof terraces are growing as

places that also provide pleasant green spaces to which people can get away.

“Green roofs bring nature back to the city and help clean the air of pollution and stop rainwater runoff from flooding sewer systems,” points out [Oasis Landscape](#) in Marietta, Georgia. “Proponents believe green roofs can be longer lasting as well, since traditional roofs expand and contract with temperature changes.”

When there are space constraints, and the heat and pollution of the city make it hard to grow plant materials, there’s also another method for bringing green to urban outdoor seating areas: vertical landscaping, which adds foliage to vertical building surfaces. “Vertical gardens are still a relatively new phenomenon, and can make a design statement even in a small space,” Oasis Landscape shares. “But they are still high-maintenance, and it remains to be seen whether they are tough enough to last for a long time.”



PHOTO: SCHILL GROUNDS MANAGEMENT

Trend #2. LEEDing the Way

Energy efficiency is definitely the watchword for green building in 2014, according to [Advanced Control Corp.'s Green Building Trends 2014](#). Net-zero-energy buildings are expected to surge. The focus on new green building design will shift to greening existing buildings. The [U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design](#) (LEED) is transforming the way commercial building owners think about how buildings are designed, constructed, maintained and operated.

LEED is continuing to come on strong in many major metropolitan areas, including Atlanta, where almost every Atlanta office park or facility has some sort of LEED credential, Durden says. Building owners continue to rely on LEED ratings as a top way to prove the sustainability of their structures.

LEED is showing up in landscape maintenance practices as well. Commercial landscape companies that can use fuel-efficient equipment, as well as equipment that reduces noise pollution, rank higher with municipalities that have regulations in these categories, Durden points out.



PHOTO: SEBERT LANDSCAPING

Trend #3. Effective Water Use & the ROI to Go With It

Water conservation continues to be a major issue, and responsible water use

has become a hot topic for commercial properties, especially in arid and semi-arid areas.

One way to do this is to use fewer water-dependent plants. That's why Mediterranean-style landscaping, inspired by places like Spain, Italy and Greece, has become popular, points out [Chapel Valley Landscape](#) in Woodbine, Maryland.

"These designs use drought-resistant plants like lavender, Mexican sage, rosemary, star jasmine, citrus and juniper that bring fragrance and color to the space," Oasis Landscape says. "This style also uses climbing plants to create the look and feel of lush greenery in contained spaces."

Plants that thrive in the dry, sunny climate of the Mediterranean, such as citrus and juniper, also provide great aroma and visual appeal, according to Chapel Valley.

Other elements in a Mediterranean-style design are flower pots either terra cotta or vibrantly colored and often grouped together fountains, decorative tile work and even a pop of color in the form of a brightly painted accent wall, Oasis Landscape adds.

In addition to choosing plants that use less water, "commercial property managers are trying to use the water they have more frugally," Chicago's [Sebert Landscaping](#) says. "In fact, watering responsibly is becoming a tactic no one wants to admit they don't do."



This means adding rain sensors to irrigation systems so they aren't watering when they shouldn't be, as well as installing smarter controllers that adapt to weather conditions and drip irrigation that targets water at the roots specifically where plants need it, Sebert says. Managing irrigation controllers throughout the changing seasons and shifting weather conditions can also save water – and money.

"It can even be as simple as retrofitting your existing irrigation system to a drip irrigation system or performing regular irrigation system checkups to look for broken sprinkler heads, clogged lines or other irrigation problems," adds [VMC Landscape](#) in Dallas.

While water saving for conservation's sake is valued, commercial property managers still want to know they are getting a return on their investment in irrigation and low-water-use plant upgrades. "Water conservation will always be key in the Atlanta market because of the area's ongoing water wars," Durden shares. "Property managers are interested in new landscape irrigation technology, including smart controllers, the latest valves and nozzles and weather station-enhanced systems, as long as they can see the return on investment that comes with water savings."



PHOTO: SCHILL GROUNDS MANAGEMENT

Trend #4. Multifamily Properties Are Booming

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, construction of multifamily units has been growing faster than construction of single-family homes. In 2014, builders are building structures with five or more units at a 6 percent higher rate than in 2013, the [National Association of Home Builders](#) reports.

Also, millennials who show a preference for living in walkable, urban areas continue to feed this demand because 54 percent of millennials rent vs. buy, says the Urban Land Institute's [2013 Survey of Views on Housing, Transportation and Community](#).

But millennials aren't alone. Baby boomers are also selling their homes to rent apartments within walking distance of downtown areas or moving into areas for active older adults, says the [2014 Emerging Trends in Real Estate report](#) from the [Urban Land Institute](#) and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Because of this growth, the multifamily market is becoming even more competitive. Besides a great location, people who have a choice to live in one place over another are looking strongly at the amenities each site offers as a major driving factor in their final decision, explains Erik Jarkins, director of design and landscape architecture at HighGrove Partners. "As a result," he says, "multifamily properties are including cyber cafes near outdoor pools with self-serve coffee and drink stations, as well as grand outdoor living areas with private beaches and cabanas and gaming and

entertainment centers complete with movie screens and televisions."



Trend #5. Distinctive Designs

Commercial property managers and building owners are referencing trends, colors and design ideas they are seeing on Pinterest and Houzz more frequently and showing them to their landscape designers for reference.

As a result, the design process is more interactive. “There is no longer one creative entity,” Jarkins points out. “These social tools are enabling entire teams to come up with ideas and solutions to their spaces. Everyone wants to stretch the boundaries of what’s traditional, and they are using pins and posts to find their inspiration. Ideas exist right at everyone’s fingertips.”

So, what’s new when it comes to design? Let’s start at the entryway. Many commercial building owners started with interior modifications to follow the trend of more social, open designs with simple shapes and lines, in addition to contrasting colors. Think Apple. Think Google. Think lively, playful and interactive. And this look is making its way outdoors to the signage, where commercial property managers are focusing some of their upgrade dollars, [HighGrove Partners says](#). “Traditional stone and column entryways are being replaced with color panels with raised layers of glass and steel,” Jarkins explains. “The looks are more contemporary, with clean lines and stacked layers. And different color and light combinations are dressing signage up even more.”

When it comes to color, the more distinctive, the better, Jarkins says. Commercial property managers aren’t afraid to push the boundaries of color combinations. Anything to grab attention and set themselves apart.

Every year, [Pantone’s Spring Fashion Color Report](#) highlights the color of the year. This year’s shade is radiant orchid, a captivating, magical, enigmatic purple. It already made its way onto spring 2014 fashion runways and the red carpet, so it’s sure to pop up in landscapes, VMC Landscape says.

Expect to see flower colors being mixed using unconventional palettes. Before, a landscape designer might recommend whites, pinks and reds that blend together in an expected way. Today, colors are being paired from opposite ends of the color wheel – orange, purple and red, for example. “The coupling throws the eye for a loop and forces the passerby to pause and look at the landscape a bit longer,” Jarkins explains. “Commercial property managers and landscape designers are also tossing aside go-to plants in favor of more unique varieties. Some examples include camellias that have distinctive blooms or roses in new shades.”



Lively shades will also be exploding in exterior furniture, including benches, patio sets and even containers, giving an outdoor seating area pop and punch.

And while concrete will no longer mimic stone or other natural textures and colors (the authentic, natural materials like stone, wood, brick and metal

are being used instead), it will get brighter. Instead of reds, browns and grays, concrete for spaces between parking lots and retail spaces is being mixed and poured in blues, greens and yellows, Jarkins says. "Colors that are more reminiscent of a children's playground will be more commonplace in retail storefronts," he points out. "There are even instances where commercial property managers are trying to liven up concrete with other materials like marbles or gemstones to give the walkway texture, color and, most importantly, something other properties may not have."