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**SEVEN LANDSCAPE "FAILS" THAT  
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MAY 2013

**HOMEOWNER'S  
RESOURCE  
GUIDE**

By Maria LaPiana

# Landscaping Fails

*Common missteps homeowners make—  
and how to fix them*

Spring can be harsh—the lawn isn't green enough, the flowerbeds not pretty enough and the foliage not abundant enough to mask the mistakes we've made over the years. What's the No. 1 landscaping blunder homeowners make? "Choosing the wrong plants for sun, shade or soil conditions," says Linda Tasko, landscape architect at The Garden Barn in Vernon. Being shortsighted is a close second. Many of our miscues simply come from not understanding the basic rules of landscape design (balance, proportion and scale, among them). Sometimes it's the hardscape that cries out for a do-over. While we know there's no substitute for consulting a pro with a good eye and a deep knowledge of horticulture, we asked experts around the state to identify some of the most common landscaping slipups they see—and the best ways to remedy them.



## Follow the Sun

**FAIL:** Choosing the wrong plants for orientation and soil conditions.

A nursery can be a seductive place when every plant is in bloom and looking its best. It's easy to see why people are lured into buying one of everything they see, but more often than not, "they haven't considered whether the plants are right for their yards," says Linda Tasko of The Garden Barn. "It's really easy to figure out what kind of bush you need for a particular corner of the house," says Tasko. "Just observe the spot—once in the morning, once at noon, and again at 3 p.m." Take note and let the experts at the garden center help you choose healthy plants that will do well. Sometimes you may get the orientation right, but a check of the soil is important, too. And even if the conditions are perfect, says Tasko, you'll want to stagger bloom times to make your garden last longer. Finally, she says, "Don't forget that in Connecticut you'll have bare sticks for a long time. So consider mixing in evergreens. Texture can enhance any yard, and you'll have some color to look at all year long."



Staggering bloom times can make your garden last longer. This pyracantha's red berries provide color to the landscape in fall and winter.

© SHIRLEY FELDMAN VETZ



A landscape plan—and subsequent plantings—should be in proportion to the size of a home.

## The Big Picture

### FAIL: Waiting too long to consider a landscape plan.

There's an unfortunate tendency for homeowners to view a landscape design as an afterthought, says Chad Frost, a partner in Kent+Frost Landscape Architecture in Mystic. "This is especially true in new construction, or when there's an extensive remodel involving an architect," he says. Sometimes it's a matter of budget and that's understandable, but the result can be a disconnect between structure and site. "In fact, an architect and landscape architect should collaborate from the start," says Frost. "You want the house and the landscape to work together harmoniously. And often the greatest impact can come at the beginning." Landscape architects don't just come out and plant, says Frost. "We use the whole site to create outdoor living spaces." He advises homeowners to remember the reason why they bought a piece of property—was it the view?—and make that a focal point. "We work to create a complete vision around that," says Frost. "The experience doesn't stop at the building's edge."

## Walk This Way

### FAIL: Digging faulty foundations for paths and patios.

"We see a lot of mistakes when we get called to repair or replace a walkway or patio," says Mike Lenares of Lenares Landscape & Design LLC in Newington. "Mostly we find that base materials were poorly chosen. Did they use only sand? Or stone dust? Did they go to the right depth?" The thing to remember here in the Northeast, says Lenares, is that frost heave can wreak havoc with paved paths and patios. So he likes to provide a minimum

of 6 to 8 inches of compacted base material. Dig deeper (12 to 15 inches) for driveways. Another common problem, says Lenares, is the walkway that isn't properly edged. "You may start out with a 4-foot-wide path, but over time it spreads out, so instead of 48 inches, now it's 50 or 52 inches." The fix: landscape edging and paver restraints that are buried partway underground. Weeds and cracks that crop up in between pavers in a patio can be prevented with the use of some newer, innovative materials. "Twenty years ago we used regular sand between pavers, but a new product, polymeric sand, has changed everything," says Lenares. "This very fine sand has a wetting agent that hardens to secure pavers. Just install, sweep off excess and mist."



Forming a garden path in shape requires a good foundation from the start.

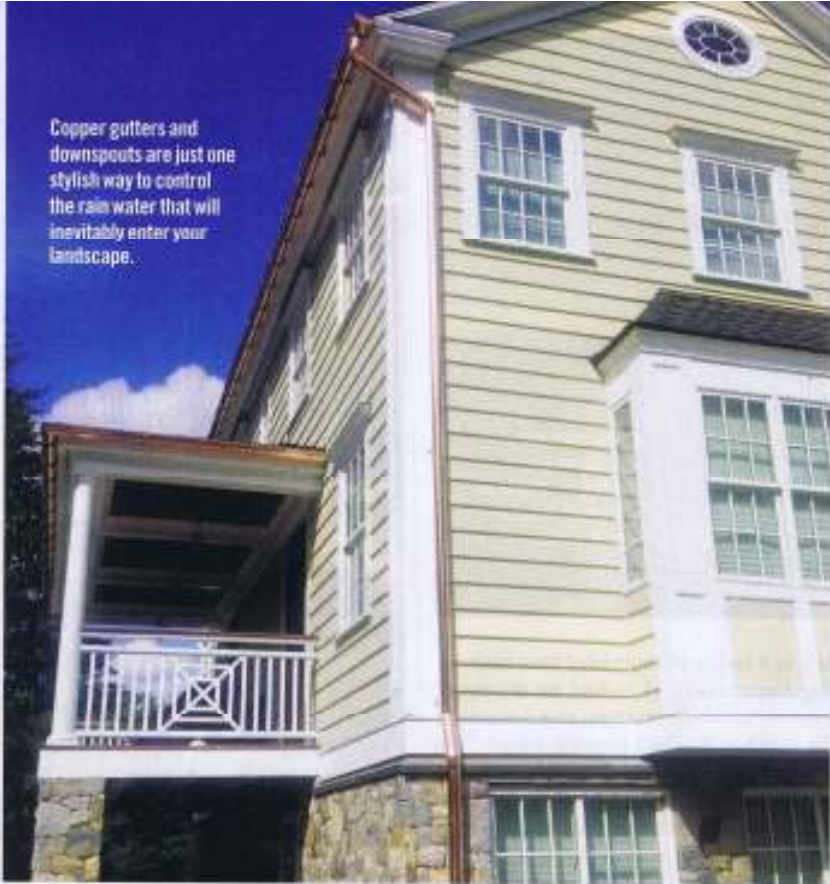


Home and landscape in sync: A Queen Anne surrounded by annuals, as was Victorian style.

## History Lesson

### FAIL: Designing a landscape out of sync with a period home.

Known for designing landscapes for historic homes, Richard Schipul of Designing Eden LLC in New Milford insists it doesn't really matter if your home is vintage with a pedigree or new and modern. The same design principles apply; you want a landscape that looks like it belongs. Granted, often homeowners inherit problems and they have to prune, trim, move (or remove) plants to better suit their home. With so much information available online, "it's not hard to find out what would have been an appropriate landscape or garden design for a particular period," says Schipul. "For example, a modern, minimalist landscape would have had simple lines, hard edges instead of formal hedges. An appropriate design would create shapes with plants that play off the architecture." For the Queen Anne pictured above, Schipul chose lots of annuals: "In Victorian times they loved their beds of flowers," he says. It's important to note that landscape plans in general were simpler prior to the mid-1800s, says Schipul. Around 1850, there was a gardening boom and plants were beginning to be imported from Europe and Asia; post-boom designs would have reflected that variety and abundance, he says.



Copper gutters and downspouts are just one stylish way to control the rain water that will inevitably enter your landscape.

## Water, Water Everywhere

**FAIL:** Forgetting that storm water needs a place to go.

While this common mistake isn't about plants or principles of good design, it is a serious problem seen frequently in Connecticut, says Chad Frost of Kent+Frost in Mystic.

Homeowners don't always think about designing a landscape that is environmentally responsible, says Frost. "Storm water is an important concern, but most people just don't consider it. They think the water just goes into the gutters and disappears, but it doesn't." A 4,000-square-foot home will, in the course of a year, have 100,000 gallons of water run off its roof, according to Frost. "Rain carries with it nutrients and chemicals that can be beneficial—or not," he says, and there are several ways to collect and filter water. These include rain gardens, piping it through underground chambers or installing filter strips. Adds Frost: "It may surprise you that many of these systems are not that costly. What's important is getting water back into the watershed as quickly and cleanly as possible."

## Romancing the Stones

**FAIL:** Taking hardscaping, including stone walls, for granted.

"There are several classic mistakes that homeowners make regarding the 'hardscaping' of their landscapes," according to Michelle Becker of English Gardens & Land

scaping in Killingworth, and these have to do with aesthetics and craftsmanship. Becker and Andrew Pighills are widely regarded for their expertise in the design and construction of stone walls. But because old stone walls are seemingly everywhere in Connecticut, homeowners often assume they don't require much maintenance. Nothing could be further from the truth. The key is finding craftspersons who understand the nature

of dry stone walls (which are of course constructed of natural stone, and not manufactured concrete products), says Becker. The classic aesthetic mistakes people make hark back to overall design principles, she says. There are many different types of stone walls, and when restoring or building new, it's critical to choose one that's appropriate in scale or style for the property or architecture it's meant to enhance.



Stone walls are popular 'hardscaping' in Connecticut, but there are many styles, materials and maintenance issues to consider.



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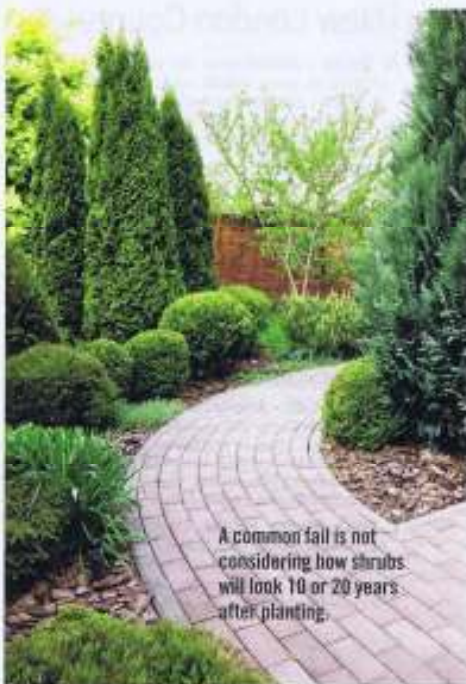
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## Top of the Trees

**FAIL: Not thinking far enough ahead when planting trees.**

Everyone wants to see their trees full and mature now, so they don't often think long-term when choosing them for their property, says Gary Nedorostek, a Bartlett Tree expert who works out of Simsbury. "If we're lucky, they're thinking five, maybe ten years down the road, but that creates problems—some fast-growing trees will get too tall, they'll compete with other plants or even compromise a house because they were planted too close." Frequently homeowners find themselves spending money on maintenance and pruning just to manage their trees. "A well-designed landscape is one with a 100-year vision—and beyond," says Nedorostek. "Selecting a tree is about preference, for sure, but you should ask yourself a few questions: What is its purpose? Is it for screening, shade, ornamental purposes?" There's a whole host of horticultural considerations that will impact the life of a tree, including proper orientation and soil conditions. Nedorostek's best advice is to have a soil sample analyzed: "That way you can see exactly what you're dealing with, and get a list of species that will do best in your yard." A final word on foundation plantings: "They are almost always planted too close to the house, which can cause problems. We actually like to plant them ten to fifteen feet away from the foundation," says Nedorostek. "You get the same effect of framing the house when you see it from the street, but you also get to enjoy the view from the inside."

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A common fail is not considering how shrubs will look 10 or 20 years after planting.





## Landscaping SOURCES

**Designing Eden LLC**  
New Milford  
(860) 350-5162  
[designingeden.com](http://designingeden.com)

**Kent+Frost Landscape  
Architecture**  
Mystic  
(860) 572-0784  
[kentfrost.com](http://kentfrost.com)

**English Gardens  
& Landscaping**  
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[englishgardensandlandscaping.com](http://englishgardensandlandscaping.com)

**The Garden Barn**  
Vernon  
(860) 872-7291  
[gardenbarn.com](http://gardenbarn.com)

**Lenares Landscape  
& Design, LLC**  
Newington  
(860) 666-3838  
[lenareslandscape.com](http://lenareslandscape.com)

**Bartlett Tree Experts**  
five Connecticut locations  
(203) 323-1131  
[bartlett.com](http://bartlett.com)

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