

Spring Into Sustainability

Scott Milnes

Approach landscaping as a capital improvement

As we begin to shake off the colder-than-normal winter and look ahead to enjoying warmer days with friends and family, now is the time for restaurants to begin working on a summertime exterior services plan to ensure their curb appeal matches the interior brand equity.

Perfect landscapes leave a lasting impression on customers. However, your exterior doesn't always have to be the greenest grass with a lush array of trees, plants and flowers. With careful planning and a proper strategy, it is not difficult to achieve a long-lasting landscape that is aesthetically pleasing with established dimensions, lines and textures. Along with updating your curb appeal, sustainable landscapes can be written off as a capital improvement.

Capital Improvements

It makes good business sense for restaurant owners and operators to make capital improvements to their properties—not only for the ROI in customer experience but for the potential deductions or increase to the cost basis of owned property.

According to the IRS publication 535, a capital improvement is the addition of a permanent structural change or the restoration of some aspect of a property that will either enhance the property's overall value, increase its useful life or adapt it to new uses. When installed, these improvements must have a life expectancy of more than one year. Improvements can include:

- Comprehensive updated landscape design
- Making landscaping environmentally friendly
- Updating and renovating outdoor common areas
- Adding new hardscape, such as fences, concrete, pavers, rocks and walls
- Updating existing landscape lighting
- Installing irrigation or smart irrigation systems that help reduce water waste, runoff and watering times

With these things in mind, let 2018 be the year that your restaurant leverages native greenery with a little help from these sustainable landscaping practices to help improve your restaurants' curb appeal.

Native Landscaping Tips

- Use native perennials that easily adapt to the environment and require less water and fertilizer. These plants can help reduce the number of harmful insects while also providing soil with the right nutrients for long-term growth.
- Properly plan out landscaping for your climate. In warmer climates, a strategic configuration can help block out intense sunrays while channeling cooler breezes. Colder climates can benefit from blocking winter wind while capturing solar heat.
- Plant flowers, shrubbery and grass that will flourish in your area. Plants that thrive in your climate will keep your store exterior looking great even during droughts and summer heat.
- Look for plants, flowers, shrubs and trees that thrive in warm conditions. Black Eyed Susans, Bell flowers and Shasta Daisies are essentially immune to extreme temperatures, even in southern states. With the proper vegetation, no one will even notice a drought exists.

Reducing Water Waste

According to CNN, as of January 15, 2018, the South African city of Cape Town had less than 90 days' worth of water in its reservoirs, putting it on track to be the first major city in the world to run out of water. With regions around the globe facing a water crisis, it is vital to help protect the environment by actively reducing the amount of water needed to keep your restaurant looking good.

Reduce unnecessary water waste by using drought-resistant varieties of grass and grouping plants and flowers that have the same watering requirements. Examples of drought-resistant grass include Bermuda, tall fescue and Zoysia. In addition to maintaining a healthy looking lawn, you can take comfort in knowing that you are helping to promote a greener environment.

Drought-resistant grass decreases the amount of water needed to care for your lawn. By reducing the need for large quantities of natural resources, you will be positively impacting your environment and your budget. Lastly, keep soil hydrated by laying mulch over all plant beds. This effectively reduces the spread of weeds that can harm surrounding plants.

Regular Inspections

Along with regular mowing, weeding, blowing, edging, fertilizing and pruning, preventive maintenance through regular inspections of your sustainable landscape and capital improvements will ensure long lasting and exceptional curb appeal. The following tips can help throughout the year:

- Frequently inspect irrigation systems to ensure you are targeting the plants that need it most. Continue to monitor to prevent water waste.
- Understand your landscape's soil type, and regularly conduct tests to determine what type of fertilizer is needed to facilitate optimum growth.

- If your lawn is not drought-resistant and is experiencing the tough effects of a harsh summer, it is important to temporarily refrain from fertilizing or over-watering your lawn.
- If your grass is extremely dry, the nutrients will not be absorbed properly. As temperatures change and the rain returns, restoration of the fertilization and watering process is suggested.

Customer Perspective

While having sustainable landscaping that works for your facility is an important undertaking that can ultimately save your business money and attract prospective customers, your goal should be to leverage the exterior as an extension of your store's interior and overall brand equity.

Studies show it takes around seven seconds to grab a customer's attention. Consider your customers' vantage point. Are they walking or driving? What environmental barriers are stopping them from noticing you?

When implemented properly, your business' exterior imagery, layout and presentation should work together to draw in customers from the moment they first see your facility, to navigating the exterior presentation and accessing the location.

And if your customers and brand equity aren't enough reasons to embrace your exteriors with sustainable curb appeal strategies, do it for the water supply alone. We only have one Mother Earth, and it's our job to all pitch in and protect it!

Scott Milnes is the President of DENTCO, a leading exterior services management company. His career includes more than 20 years in hospitality management.