

Tips for Hotels ‘Greening’ Their Landscapes

By Rochelle Greayer (Green Lodging Newsletter)
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In an era when ‘eco’ products are saturating the markets and greenwashing is rampant, it can be difficult to evaluate which choices are truly good for the environment and also the bottom line. Guests of hotels and hospitality properties are increasingly aware of their own negative impact on the natural world so it’s no surprise that properties must compete for consumer approval by promoting themselves as environmentally friendly or green.

Designing and installing landscapes for hotels, restaurants, resorts and other mixed-use hospitality properties creates unique challenges when trying to be environmentally friendly. Where others might be able to sacrifice aesthetics for a “green” label, our industry must be able to continue to provide a welcoming and exciting environment while also being responsible. With this in mind, I have compiled some tips and ideas for going green in the landscape that may also help improve revenue and control costs.

#1 In Plantings, Consider Scale

When planning street displays, entry displays and other garden areas of the property, consider not only who is going to see this but more importantly how they are going to see it. Are they going to be driving by at 65 miles per hour (mph), 20 mph, 2 mph, walking to get somewhere, casually strolling or lingering? Is the guest 100 feet away, 50 feet away, 10 feet away, 1 foot away or within inches?

It is important to consider this, as a plan to intricately plant an area to be viewed from the freeway with a palette of 25 different plants mingling together will likely be completely wasted and probably look messy. Contrast this with a planting that is boldly sectioned with a smaller number of plants and the groupings large enough to read from this speed and distance and you have created an opportunity for savings and water retention. When mixing plants intricately you have to accommodate the neediest and irrigation systems will have to be designed to give more than is needed to those that don’t need it, but if beds can be sectioned to an appropriate scale, then water can be more effectively dispersed and saved.

#2 Make a Vegetable Garden

The National Restaurant Association lists “local foods” as its second hottest trend (behind bite sized desserts). Eateries that can market a locally or organically grown menu appeal to the increasingly educated clientele who want their food to have a pedigree. Locally grown is by nature fresher, healthier, better tasting and good for the local economy. It is an attractive message to luxury and boutique hotel clientele. Almost any rooftop, balcony, back corner or front corner can be made productive and with a great design team a kitchen garden doesn’t have to be a hidden utility.

Property managers should also consider partnerships with local schools or charity groups. If a sizable area on property can be allocated, there are many groups who would happily put to good use the inevitable excess bounty of the harvest and contribute to the labor involved in maintaining

a garden. If space is not available, partnerships with nonprofits can help to secure local vacant lots or other potential garden areas as well as create an opportunity for good PR.

#3 Capture Rain and Grey Water

Rain capture systems can be screened or completely hidden. With underground tanks, roof water and grey water can be held for use in irrigation, fountains or other water features. As the cost of water and water shedding climbs, make the most of what comes to your property naturally and make that which you do pay for do double duty. By getting the landscape team involved early with the architects, these options can be more fully explored.

4 Use Drip Irrigation—Even in Lawn Areas

New Technology has made drip irrigation for lawns the wave of the future. Because water delivery is below the soil surface, no water is lost from evaporation, runoff, or overshooting lawn boundaries, making the primary benefit water savings. But lack of overshooting also helps eliminate rotting and water stains on fences and walls, and prevents slippery walkways. It is also a benefit because of the lack of surface wetting. Because the lawn's surface is never soaked, it can always be used for activities. The incidence of disease—and need for toxic fungicides—is also greatly reduced when grass stays dry.

#5 Reconsider Displays of Seasonal Annual Plants

Excessive annuals (as opposed to perennials) are expensive, labor intensive, wasteful and all too often, just plain kitschy. Ask your design team to phase in some perennials and have your plant care company learn how to take care of them. You may find that the average “mow and blow” landscapers struggle with the fine gardening required to keep perennials looking their best, but the field is changing and true gardener services are becoming easier to find and the payoff in the long run can be significant.

The average perennial costs the same to install, and perhaps only two to three times more than the same sized annual, which means that if you are making seasonal annual displays of three times per year, you will start seeing a return on your investment in the first year. You will need your design team to consider bloom times to make sure you have a succession of interest but as your perennials continue to grow and take on a more established look they will add character to your property.

#6 Compost

Estimates say that between 55 percent and 75 percent of restaurant waste is compostable. On-site composting may be an option a landscape design team can incorporate into your property but if your facility doesn't have this option, consider giving it to a local grower or community garden. Separating out the waste is the first step and finding a home for it is becoming easier and easier. An on-site composting facility can be managed and designed to reduce the feared smell and provide for future landscape improvements.

Finally, make sure you consult with your landscape team to explore other options that may be available to you due to the specific nature of your property.

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