

CURB APPEAL *Counts*

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Landscaping done on a budget can create positive first impressions on prospective residents.

No assisted living provider wants a prospective resident's first impression to trigger a negative response, especially one that says, "Let's not even get out of the car."

Avoiding this knee-jerk reaction is precisely why Atria Senior Living Group invested millions of dollars into what can most simply be described as "curb appeal." But curb appeal does not have to cost millions. For facilities that may not have the resources of a nationwide company, steps can still be taken to make a property feel homey and inviting.

Trim Those Trees

Selecting an assisted living facility can be an emotional decision. But, literally

speaking, sometimes it's impossible for people who come and go from the same property on a daily basis to "see the forest for the trees."

So the first step that some property owners may need to take is to cut back the trees. It's a good idea to get rid of any dead, overhanging branches that not only create an unkempt look, but also pose a safety issue.

Also, making a canopy of trees less dense to allow the sun to shine through will create new planting opportunities or make a dramatic difference between a lawn with lots of bald spots and a lawn that's a lush blanket of green.

For example, if there is a giant piece of shrubbery that has grown out of control, but is too healthy and vibrant

to trim, there may be a large hole crying out for some adornment elsewhere on the property.

If the growing conditions are similar or otherwise right, don't assume that even a very large shrub or tree can't be transplanted.

It is not advisable to try such a major project alone or without professional assistance, however, as the result may be a second hole and a very dead specimen of what once was very healthy vegetation.

If done properly, labor costs should be less than the cost of buying and planting anew.





Atria Shorehaven enhanced its curb appeal with ornamental grasses and shrubbery. An outdoor dining area creates an inviting atmosphere.



region and growing conditions. Many plantings offer a wide range of looks, depending on the time of year. Beautiful flowering trees in the spring can provide lush, cooling greenery in the summer and then turn glorious shades of yellow, red, and orange for a final fall performance.

Certain rose bushes can bloom from Mother's Day through Thanksgiving if properly planted and tended.

Latest Design Trends

When Atria launched an initiative to strengthen the marketing appeal of its properties, the company worked closely with Daniel Sherman Landscape Architect to create new landscape designs.

Atria's holistic approach to creating and maintaining its communities starts with a first impressions design aimed at boosting curb appeal.

Among the high-end amenities

expected by residents are secondary dining venues, which have become another popular landscape design feature. Since not all residents are comfortable enjoying their meals in large dining rooms, some of these alternatives include "cocinas," or outdoor kitchens.

Cocinas can be purposefully incorporated into the overall landscape architecture design plans in order to encourage residents to get outside and enjoy the fresh air.

The sustainability trend is also reflected in as many

communities as possible. For both new construction and renovations, Atria's architectural design teams are seeking Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification wherever possible.

Sustainability can also influence landscape architecture decisions. For example, communities will often "recycle" existing plantings and other

Bargains Do Exist

The cost of a reputable landscape architect may be more affordable than most believe it to be, especially in today's soft economy. A local landscape architect may be more amenable to taking on smaller-scale projects than the company typically would accept.

The trained eye of a landscape architect may spot inexpensive design

details that can actually save money and protect landscaping investments in the long run. For example, choose a mulch product that will not only reduce the growth of weeds and keep the ground moist, but that also is and looks natural.

If the budget for new plantings each year is a concern, there are plants, shrubbery, or trees that will bloom consistently, depending on a community's



Atria Shorehaven takes advantage of the lake to create a space for enjoying the view.

decorative components when planning new designs.

Environment Dictates Design

Using native plants that are indigenous to the area has environmental as well as psychological benefits for prospective and current residents. The familiarity of a favorite rose bush, herb, and vegetable garden, or a bed of cutting flowers, can ease the transition and adaptation from a resident's home to an assisted living environment.

At Atria Guilderland, Slingerlands, N.Y., the approach to the main residence building on this five-acre campus is via a long causeway that passes by the kitchen's receiving dock. Consequently, the first-impression curb appeal was not very appealing at all.

At about the same time a decision was made to upgrade the property's landscaping, major renovations of the physical plant were under way. Both took their inspiration from the nearby Adirondack Mountains.

The lodge-style architecture of the main residence building called for an approach graced by stately pines and an undulating lawn, which replaced a scraggly hodgepodge of randomly placed trees and overgrown grass that served no purpose.

In addition, the setting naturally lent itself to incorporating a rough-hewn-timber-surfaced roadway, to further

evoke the feeling of approaching an isolated mountain lodge. This effect was simulated by grooving the road surface to create the feel of riding over a bridge.

Adding stone pillars and timber guide rails further enhanced the look and feel of the Adirondacks-inspired environment. The rails also provide a functional purpose, creating a subtle trail reminder for residents who like to hike but who could get confused.

Xeriscaping Serves Dual Purpose

The City of Sterling Heights was so pleased with the outcome of Atria Shorehaven's renovation project that its Beautification Committee presented the site manager with a recognition award. Located just north of Detroit, Shorehaven is situated on about 10 acres of land. Although the setting is beautiful, it was also competing for visual attention with several other assisted living facilities in the vicinity.

The community borders a man-made lake with a rocky shoreline that is punctuated by many nooks and crannies. The landscaping enhancements further accentuated the area with the addition of more boulders and cobblestones. It was also an ideal environment for introducing a variety of ornamental grasses, beach roses, and benches for enjoying the lake view.

Shorehaven's property offers plenty

of opportunities to employ several different landscaping styles. For example, in some particularly challenging growing conditions, low-maintenance, draught-tolerant xeriscaping was introduced, which reduces or altogether eliminates the need for watering.

Xeriscaping emphasizes the use of plants that are either indigenous to the local environment or otherwise appropriate for the growing conditions without any extraordinarily tender loving care. Although the specific plants used in xeriscaping depend on the climate, some commonly used plants in the Western United States are agave, cactus, lavender, juniper, sedum, and thyme, for example.

Elsewhere on the property a lovely recreation area, complete with a dance pavilion, was created on a peninsula that projects into the lake.

Water-scaping Makes Its Mark

Designing a lushly landscaped environment for Atria Cranford, in New Jersey, was perhaps the most creatively challenging assignment of the three communities.

In keeping with its proximity to New York City, New Jersey's large corporate parks, and its "gateway" location to the most heavily traversed route to New Jersey's beaches, a heavy emphasis was placed on "water-scaping." A three-tiered fountain, standing about six feet high and flowing into a 30-foot-long basin, was designed for the facility's large circular driveway entry. A sitting and exercise area was created where another fountain became the centerpiece.

The first impression that a property makes can mean the difference between drive-by traffic and traffic from prospective residents and their loved ones who drive up, park, get out of their cars, and take a closer look. ■

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