

Landscaping Business Playbook

1. Most In-Demand Landscaping Services by Region

- **Core Maintenance:** Mowing, edging, hedge-trimming, fertilization and pruning dominate. Nearly **80%** of landscapers report regular mowing services ¹. Monthly contracts for lawn care (\$250–\$350/mo on average) are common.
- **Design & Hardscapes:** Over **70%** of companies offer landscape design and construction (patios, decks, walkways) ². Custom outdoor living spaces (fire pits, kitchens, lighting) are a rising trend ³ – think beyond just grass.
- **Specialty Services:** Eco-friendly landscaping (xeriscaping in drought-prone West) and high-end plant installations see growth. Water-feature installation and irrigation services spike in hot/arid regions.
- **Seasonal Services:** Spring (Mar–May) surges with cleanup, mulching, aeration, fertilizing. Summer (Jun–Aug) workloads focus on mowing, irrigation checks, pest control. Fall (Sep–Nov) demands leaf/branch removal and winterizing plants. In cold climates, winter (Dec–Feb) means snow removal and holiday lighting services. Service demand often peaks in early spring and dips mid-fall.
- **Regional Focus:** **South/Southeast** sees year-round green growth – clients expect constant mowing and seasonal color. **Northeast** has a four-season cycle: spring planting and fall cleanup are big, plus snow plowing in winter. **Midwest** (continental climate) emphasizes reliable lawn and bed maintenance. **West/Southwest** (drier climates) prioritize water-wise solutions: drip irrigation, hardscapes, native plants. Southern states like FL, TX and California are industry hotspots with many landscapers.
- **Market Split:** About **61%** of business is residential vs. 39% commercial. (Commercial work includes office parks, HOAs, retail centers.) Maintenance contracts are the bread-and-butter, with commercial accounts often for large campuses or municipal parks, and residential for homes.
- **Niche Trends:** Clients increasingly value “outdoor living” upgrades. Installations like pergolas, outdoor kitchens, and fire pits are in high demand ³. Sustainable practices (native gardens, rain gardens) appeal to eco-aware regions. Overall, routine maintenance (mowing/fertilizing) remains core, while **design+build projects** and “one-off” installations drive growth ¹ ².

2. Real-World Pricing Tactics and Profit Margins

- **Pricing Models:** Beginners often charge **hourly** (crew-hours + material markup) for flexibility. Established firms increasingly use **fixed/project pricing** (quote one lump sum including materials, labor, overhead and profit). Hourly quoting protects against uncertainty; flat bids protect profits on repeatable jobs. Bundled maintenance plans (e.g. seasonal packages) can be flat-rate as well.
- **Area-Based Quotes:** Quoting by square-footage (e.g. \$x per 1000 sq. ft.) is less popular. In practice many pros calculate needed man-hours and materials. As one contractor noted, “people often calculate by square footage, but I calculate by time” (time-based avoids underestimates). If using area pricing, be very thorough in site measurement.
- **Typical Rates:** Industry data shows **\$50–\$100/hour** labor rates or roughly **\$4–\$12 per sq.ft.** for installs ⁴. Lawn-care subscriptions average ~\$300/month per property ⁵. Many landscaping

companies now offer fixed-price lawn service packages (e.g. “\$X per month for weekly service”). Always clearly define scope when using low flat rates.

- **Cost-Plus Markup:** A common formula is $Total\ Cost = (\text{Sum of materials} + \text{labor} + \text{equipment costs} + \text{overhead}) \div (1 - \text{profitMargin})$. For example, Cornell’s guide advises adding **10–30% profit** on top of all costs. Equipment “rental” is often marked up (roughly 40–50% of its fair rental value).
- **Profit Margins:** Aim for **~15–20%** net profit per job. (Industry averages are around 5–20%.) In practice, leave room in bids to handle small extras. Some top operators even embed a buffer: “we price our projects with enough profit so we don’t have to nickel-and-dime the client” ⁶. For new businesses a lower margin (10%) may be acceptable at first, but strive upward as you stabilize.
- **Additional Factors:** Include surcharges for *remote locations, large volumes, special materials, or tight deadlines*. For example, many pros add a fuel/travel charge for distant jobs, or a rush fee for off-season or weekend work. Efficient quoting means planning: measure the site, list all tasks, and account for all “what-ifs” (extra soil, hidden debris, inclement weather) before giving a final price. If you underbid (lowball), you risk eating overruns; overbid too much and you’ll lose jobs. The sweet spot is competitive but profitable pricing that covers overhead and yields that ~15% profit.

3. Free Landscaping Business Courses & Guides

- **Cornell University Planning Guide:** Cornell’s *Landscape Business Planning Guide* (free PDF) is a classic. It walks through writing a business plan, cost analysis and pricing. Key advice: add **all operating costs + overhead** and then tack on **10–30% profit** to set rates. (It even suggests equipment hours be valued at ~40–50% of rental cost.) Use its cost-plus table as a template for estimating labor, machinery and supplies.
- **Sustainable Landscaping Manuals:** Government and university guides stress eco-friendly best practices. For example, NOAA’s Chesapeake Bay Sustainable Landscaping Manual (free PDF) covers *site assessment* and *BMPs* (soil health, native plants, rain gardens, IPM). One tip: mow high and infrequently, never more than 1/3 of grass height. Another: recycle grass clippings and wood mulch on-site. Similarly, state Extension bulletins (e.g. UMass Turfgrass BMPs) provide science-based protocols for mowing, irrigation and fertilization that can save clients money and protect the environment.
- **Extension & University Resources:** Many Cooperative Extension services publish free guides. For example, Purdue or Texas A&M have publications on nursery business planning, pest management, or irrigation design. These often include checklists, worksheets, and region-specific advice (e.g. drought-tolerant plants for West, tick control measures for East). Even if not tailored to your area, they offer solid principles (soil testing, proper planting times, turf selections, etc.) to incorporate.
- **Industry Associations:** The National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) and state chapters (ALCA) offer business-management courses and certifications. While many require membership, some webinars and articles are free. Cornell notes that associations even match new owners with experienced mentors ⁷. Look into NALP’s Landscape Business Management Certificate series (covers finance, safety, estimating) – their slide decks and FAQs can be goldmines.
- **Online Tools & Templates:** Free online courses or templates abound. For example, Jobber Academy, YourAspire guides, and trade blogs often share checklists (site analysis, safety plans) and tools (pricing calculators, P&L spreadsheets). One notable tip: use an editable “services list” template to ensure every quote includes your full range of offerings (ask Aspire’s blog) ⁸. Even generic small-business courses (coursera or SBA webinars on marketing and finance) often have landscaping-relevant segments (e.g. pricing or customer service).

4. How Successful Landscaping Companies Upsell

- **Sell to Existing Clients:** Upselling current customers is far more cost-effective than finding new ones. Every maintenance or one-time client is an opportunity. Make it part of routine service to ask about additional needs. Data shows asking existing customers yields sales that advertising cannot match.
- **Educate the Customer:** Clients often don't know the full range of services. Explain value: "Monthly fertilization prevents weak turf, saving you money on re-seeding" or "Tree trimming now prevents branch hazards later." Be the expert advisor, not a pushy salesperson. Use simple language and focus on benefits (beauty, safety, saving time/money). One creative analogy is the "dessert question": always offer an upgrade. As one pro quipped, "They will never approve it if you don't give them the option... two out of ten will say yes" ⁹. In practice, that means explicitly "Would you like pest control?" rather than assuming clients know to ask.
- **Bundle Services:** Package complementary work together at a slight discount. Common bundles: mowing + weed control, irrigation tune-up + aeration, full-season "landscaping service" contracts (weekly mowing, seasonal cleanups, basic fertilizing). Bundles are win-win – customers save over buying à la carte, and you increase invoice size. Advertise these combos on your quote and bill (e.g. "Add ice melt service for 15% off spring cleaning price").
- **On-Site Offers:** Train crews to spot selling opportunities during jobs. For example, if they notice a dead branch or storm debris, they can say, "We can remove that branch right now for \$X, it'll prevent a future accident." WorkWave advises not waiting for an invoice — point out issues on the spot. For instance: "I see your sprinkler head is cracked; should I replace it while I'm here to prevent leaks?" This immediacy catches clients before they forget. It's a subtle "soft sell": You ask once, explain how it helps them, and then let them decide.
- **Scripts & Prompts:** Keep it conversational and optional. Examples: "By the way, our seasonal color package goes on sale next week – would you be interested?" or "Are there any other problems we can address today?" A Jobber tip: whenever a customer requests one service, follow up with "Any other areas or services you'd like us to inspect?" ¹⁰. Remember, always **ask** – one landscaper notes "if you don't give them the option, they'll never say yes" ⁹. Keep tone friendly, not pushy. If they decline, simply note interest for future; if they agree, schedule it before leaving to capitalize on the moment.

5. Local SEO and Google Business Profile for Landscapers

- **Claim Your Google Profile:** Set up a Google Business Profile with complete info (exact business name, address, phone (NAP) as on your website) ¹¹. Upload high-quality photos of your work, list all services, and encourage happy clients to leave reviews. Respond promptly to reviews to boost engagement. Google favors profiles with lots of good reviews (aim for 4+ stars) and regularly updated posts (e.g. share pictures or specials).
- **NAP Consistency:** Ensure your **Name, Address, Phone** are identical everywhere (Google, website, social, directories) ¹¹. Even small variations (e.g. "St." vs "Street") can hurt rankings. Embed a Google Map snippet on your site's Contact page to reinforce location signals ¹¹.
- **Local Keywords:** Optimize content for local search. Use city/region names in page titles and headers, e.g. "Springfield Landscaping & Lawn Care" ¹². Include neighborhood names and "landscaper near me" phrases in service pages. Leverage Google's autocomplete suggestions and tools (Google Keyword Planner) to find common queries like "backyard patio contractor [Town]".

Naturally integrate these into website copy, blogs and service descriptions ¹² ¹³ . For example, a page title like *“Residential Landscaping in [City]”* targets a high-value local phrase.

- **Citations & Directories:** Build local authority by getting listed on key directories. Focus on high-trust sites: Yelp, Houzz, Angie’s List, BBB, HomeAdvisor, and local Chamber of Commerce. Also ensure consistent profiles on Facebook, Instagram, etc. Whitespark and BrightLocal recommend monitoring and managing these citations (they offer tools for that ¹⁴). Correct any duplicate or outdated listings. Each backlink from a reputable local site helps your Map Pack rankings.
- **Local Links & Sponsorships:** Participate in community & industry networks. Sponsor a Little League team, charity run, or “garden tour” – many local events list sponsors on their websites ¹⁵ . Partner with realtors, nurseries or home builders (cross-promotional backlinks). Even writing a guest blog for a neighborhood forum or getting mentioned in local press boosts local SEO. Every mention or backlink with your location keywords sends positive signals.
- **Reviews and Trust:** Encourage reviews on Google (and Yelp). Jobber notes **87%** of customers read online reviews ¹⁶ . A simple script helps: after completing a job, text or email “Thank you! If you loved our work, here’s a direct link for a Google ★★★★★ review” ¹⁷ . Use signage or cards to remind clients as well. More good reviews and detailed feedback (location-specific praise) drives higher local ranking.

6. Customer Retention and Review Strategies

- **Regular Communication:** Stay in touch with clients year-round. Send seasonal tips (“spring lawn prep checklist”) or reminder emails for upcoming services. Use a CRM or simple database to track client anniversaries, birthdays or anniversaries of their first job. (InvoiceOwl and Jobber articles recommend CRM/email automation to nurture customers ¹⁸ .) This keeps your name in front of them so you’re top-of-mind when they need service.
- **Loyalty & Referral Programs:** Reward repeat business. Offer discounts or bonus services for clients who sign ongoing contracts or refer neighbors. For example, give \$50 off for each new client referral. InvoiceOwl suggests formal referral bonuses turn happy clients into advocates ¹⁹ . Word-of-mouth is powerful: a personal recommendation often convinces more than any ad.
- **Exceptional Service:** The best retention tool is excellent work and customer service. Respond quickly to complaints or repair requests – ideally same/next-day service. One tip: provide an “on-call” number for urgent issues (storm debris, irrigation leaks, etc.) and include easy scheduling of re-visits. InvoiceOwl emphasizes on-demand support – being available builds trust ²⁰ . Even small gestures (e.g. a complimentary follow-up cleanup if client is unhappy) show you care and keep clients coming back.
- **Ask for Reviews:** Positive online reviews not only win new clients, they reinforce loyalty. After a satisfied job, gently ask: “Did everything meet your expectations? If so, a ★★★★★ review would really help us.” Jobber notes that most local customers look up reviews ¹⁶ . Send review requests via email/text with direct links (Jobber provides scripts like: “We really appreciate your business. If you’re happy, please consider leaving us a Google review” ¹⁷). Display signage or flyers in newsletters encouraging feedback.
- **Gather Feedback:** Periodically survey clients (e.g. post-service email survey) to uncover issues you can fix. Openly thank them for suggestions. Address any complaint immediately (and consider a small discount or bonus visit to rectify) – showing you listen converts one-time jobbers into loyal patrons.
- **Exclusive Offers:** Give repeat clients first dibs on new services or seasonal deals. For example, a “spring cleanup” email with a loyalty discount. These thank-you offers make clients feel valued. Over

time, the goal is turning every one-time project into an annual maintenance contract or package deal. Repeat customers have higher lifetime value and refer more freely.

7. Efficient Website and Conversion Funnel Strategy

- **Visual Portfolio & Strong CTAs:** Your homepage must immediately showcase *what you do well*. Include a prominent project gallery: high-res before/after photos or featured jobs. As one design analysis notes, “one look at a completed project... should tell people everything they need to know about your quality” ²¹ . Use this space to build trust (no reader can argue with good work).
- **Above-the-Fold Offer:** Place a clear call-to-action in the top section. For example, a “Request a Free Quote” form or click-to-call button above the fold. Research shows visitors spend **<15 seconds** on a page, so capture them early ²² . (Sites like Lawn Doctor put a quote form front-and-center to snag quick inquiries.) The earlier you prompt an action, the more leads you get ²² .
- **Trust Signals:** Display badges and guarantees to remove hesitation. For instance, add industry logos (HomeAdvisor, landscape associations) and guarantees (“Work as promised or it’s free”). One example: “We’ll do as we say or you don’t pay” boosts confidence. Also feature a few testimonials or review snippets on the homepage.
- **Clear Layout:** Keep content concise and organized. Menu should include Home, Services (with individual pages), Portfolio, About/Team, Blog, Contact. List your service area. Show your phone number prominently (click-to-call on mobile). Embed a Google Map on the Contact page. Use bullet points or icons to highlight key services, and ensure the site is fast and mobile-friendly.
- **Conversion Funnel:** Create a simple lead funnel. Offer a free estimate or a downloadable guide in exchange for contact info. After a lead submits info, send an automated thank-you and follow-up (e.g. “Thanks for requesting a quote – one of our team will contact you within 24 hours!”). Use email sequences: for example, if someone downloads a landscaping guide, send follow-ups about seasonal services. Having a blog or FAQ section also helps: useful content (e.g., “How to protect plants in winter”) positions you as an expert and can capture inbound leads during the “research” phase of their buyer’s journey.

8. Offline Marketing That Still Works

- **Local Direct Mail & Flyers:** Distribute door-hangers and flyers in target neighborhoods, especially around your current job sites ²³ . Neighbors often call the company working nearby – it’s cost-effective lead gen. Flyers can advertise first-time discounts or seasonal specials. Use Every Door Direct Mail (USPS EDDM) to blanket a postal route with postcards, focusing on subdivisions with lawns. Include a strong offer (e.g. “Spring Cleanup \$25 Off!”) and clear contact info.
- **Yard Signs & Business Cards:** When working on a property, place a branded yard sign at the curb ²⁴ . Passing drivers notice your name and phone (especially if your work looks impressive). At the job’s end, leave behind high-quality business cards or referral cards for the homeowner to give out. PostNet recommends cards that double as referral coupons – happy clients hand them to friends. These low-tech touchpoints are tangible reminders.
- **Networking & Community:** Build local partnerships. Work with nearby garden centers, hardware stores or realtors: swap referrals or have a stack of each other’s brochures. Join the Chamber of Commerce and local business groups to get listed and network. Sponsor community events or teams (e.g. youth sports, church events) – organizers often list sponsors on their websites or programs. Aspire’s SEO guide notes sponsoring local leagues can yield website mentions and goodwill ¹⁵ .

- **Referral Program:** Offer existing customers a bonus for referring new clients (e.g. \$50 credit or free service upgrade). Word-of-mouth remains one of the most powerful marketing channels; Incentivized referrals give clients a reason to recommend you to neighbors.
- **Local Media:** Advertise in neighborhood newsletters, community Facebook pages, or local papers. Even flyers on bulletin boards (libraries, community centers) help. Look for “Best of [City]” contests or local home shows where you can display your brand. Consistent branding (logo, colors) across offline materials builds recognition for when clients search for you online.

9. Common Operational Pitfalls (From Real Owners)

- **Hiring Mistakes:** Many struggle with staffing. Key pitfalls: not **promoting the job well**, or **paying too little**. As one expert advises, don’t just say “Help wanted.” Highlight perks (outdoor work, growth opportunities). Conversely, underselling the job (promising it’s easy money) attracts poor fits. Importantly, **pay competitively**. If you won’t match local wages, expect high turnover ²⁵. To avoid constant rehiring, set fair wages and clear career paths (e.g. training and raises). Always interview thoroughly: do phone screens first to weed out unsuitable candidates.
- **Scheduling Snafus: No-shows** or broken promises are fatal to reputation ²⁶. If you confirm a day/time, commit to it. Customers won’t care if your truck broke down – they only see you not showing up. One unhappy customer can tell dozens: as a saying goes, a single bad review is like broadcasting you “suck” to 20+ others ²⁷. Don’t overbook crews or ignore client requests (e.g. “Don’t come on Mondays”). Plan routes logically (cluster jobs geographically) and build buffer time for delays. Use scheduling software to visualize calendars and avoid conflicts.
- **Scope Creep:** “Little extras” add up fast. Clients often request unquoted tasks mid-job. To handle this, **specify scope clearly**. Include an exclusion clause in your contract ²⁸. For example, list any excluded items (dog damage repair, stump removal, etc.) so clients know what’s extra. One veteran landscaper (Steve Hansen) says he prices jobs profitably upfront so small add-ons can be thrown in as “goodwill,” making the client feel they got a deal. Anything truly outside original plan should be formalized via change order with additional charge ⁶. Communicate early: if an extra task is truly small, do it as a courtesy but label it a one-time favor. Otherwise present the additional cost before proceeding. This transparency avoids resentment and preserves profits.
- **Underquoting Costs:** Forgetting overhead (insurance, vehicle upkeep, admin) can leave you with negligible profit. Factor all fixed costs into rates. A common guideline is to add about **20–30%** on top of labor+material costs. Always carry contingency (extra soil, fuel, trash disposal). Cornell suggests adding 10–30% profit per category of cost. In short, if you quote too low to win jobs, you’ll lose money on them. As one landscaper said, calculate a healthy markup initially so you’re not “nickel-and-diming” later ⁶.
- **Operations & Cash Flow:** Don’t skimp on equipment maintenance. Breakdowns halt jobs and upset clients. Have backup tools (and a service buddy or subcontractor list) for emergencies. Require deposits on big jobs to improve cash flow. Set payment terms in contracts. Track invoices and follow-up on late payments promptly. Poor cash management (ignoring AR) can cripple growth even if sales are strong.
- **Customer Relations:** Under-communicating causes churn. Keep clients informed of delays or changes. Always do a walkthrough inspection before leaving a job – it’s the last chance to catch anything missed. InvoiceOwl highlights that clients appreciate 24/7 support and quick fixes if issues arise ²⁰. Listen and adapt (e.g. if a client repeatedly asks for weekend visits, try to accommodate next season if feasible).

10. Growth Models and Multi-Crew Scaling Plans

- **Systematize Before Growth:** Never expand on chaos. Develop **standard operating procedures:** SOPs for service calls, quoting, safety, etc. Invest in good scheduling and dispatch software so you can manage multiple crews (Aspire notes strong team management is vital to scale) ⁸ . Create checklists for each service to ensure consistency as crews multiply. Document everything in an employee manual or intranet.
- **Build the Team:** Hire or promote strong foremen/crew-leaders. The owner's role shifts from doer to manager of managers. Aspire emphasizes culture and retention: an inclusive, supportive environment keeps talent on board ²⁹ ³⁰ . High churn is a "momentum killer" ²⁹ , so reward loyalty (bonuses, career paths). Each crew should feel empowered and equipped to solve problems without constant oversight.
- **Incremental Hiring:** Only add crews when you have sustained demand. A good rule: a new crew should carry its own costs (including your supervision time) and target a preset revenue (e.g. \$XXX/month each). Use subcontractors selectively – for example, if you're not experts in irrigation or seasonal spikes, subcontract those to maintain quality control. But core services (mowing, pruning) are usually in-house. Ensure any subcontractors you use are reliable and insured, and treat them as part of your extended team.
- **Financial Discipline:** Treat each crew as its own profit center. Track revenue and costs per team. Most multi-crew shops aim for each crew to hit a certain gross revenue annually. Reinvest profits into equipment or marketing rather than increasing pay raises too quickly. Keep overhead ratio in check (Aspire's guides show slipping structure can stall growth). If growth outpaces process, efficiency drops: control driver travel (zone your crews), manage inventory/supply (to avoid rush purchases), and revisit pricing regularly.
- **Focus on Growth Drivers:** Instead of doing the work yourself, focus on sales, marketing and systems. Delegate or automate routine tasks. Consider specialization: as you scale, some crews might focus on maintenance contracts while others on installs. This allows you to train teams and buy equipment tailored to each function. For example, one crew may do weekly mowing routes (cadence-based pay), another does high-margin hardscape projects (bid out individually).
- **Continuous Review:** Set weekly metrics (leads, conversions, efficiency). If expansion causes profits to shrink (low productivity, high payroll), pause hiring and tighten processes. When crews are stable and hitting targets, cautiously expand territory. Many owners find growth by raising prices through better service, not just adding crews. In short, build a repeatable model – then duplicate it. Each new crew should fit a proven blueprint: same uniforms, trucks, quoting process and customer care. Scale sustainably, not recklessly.

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