LANDSCAPING

Make the landscaping on every site plan part of the larger open space system, incorporating natural features of the site, using native plants whenever possible, and connecting to the greenery patterns on adjacent parcels.

Landscaping is too often considered as decoration for the leftover edges after the site has been leveled and buildings and parking lots are designed. Standardized planting formulas, such as a line of junipers along the front, are primarily intended to screen or hide the ugliness of the parking lot and even the proposed buildings.

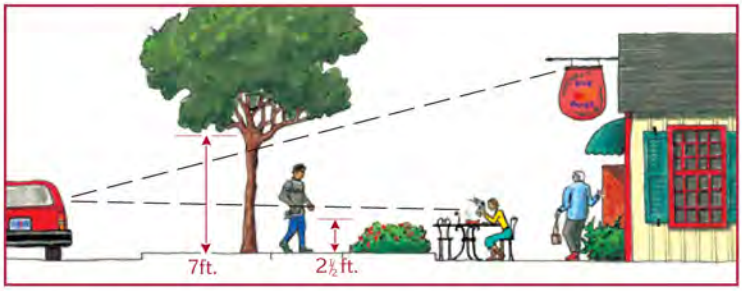
Good landscaping works with the architecture to enhance the site, not hide it. Plantings should be designed to reintegrate the developed property into its surrounding natural system.

Landscaping benefits go well beyond appearances:

- absorbs dust and air pollution
- reduces wind velocities
- dampens noise levels
- moderates temperatures (10-15 degrees cooler in wooded areas)
- reduces soil erosion/storm runoff
- filters water supplies
- provides bird and wildlife habitat
- increases property values

This restaurant in Rhinebeck replaced the front parking lot with attractive landscaping, outdoor seating, and a stone monument sign, putting its parking to the side behind a berm and street trees.

The very term "landscape" cannot be described within the property lines of a single parcel. Site plans, therefore, need to establish connections to the street and surrounding area. In centers the cultivated landscape usually involves more formal layouts with consistent setbacks, front yards that flow down blocks, and regularly spaced street trees and sidewalks to define the street edges. In outlying rural areas the landscaping forms become more organic, relating to natural topography, woodlands, open meadows, wandering paths, and plants in more informal groupings. In all cases plantings on the site need to respond to the surrounding landscape patterns, regional climate, and soil conditions.



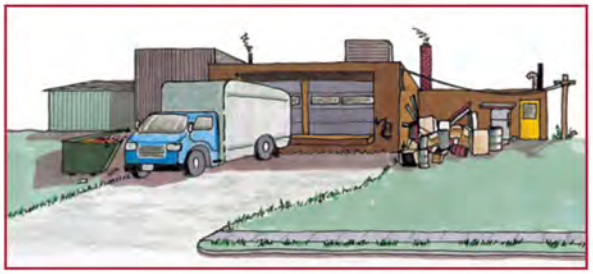
Overhead street trees along frontage, combined with low plantings, focus attention of passers-by on storefronts.

All-too-typical shopping center with minimal landscaping exposes large parking lot and pole sign.

Supermarket in Hyde Park features a low wooden sign and a 150-foot wide natural landscape buffer as part of a continuous open space system with stone wall frontages approaching the Franklin D. Roosevelt Historic Site.

General Landscaping Principles:

- Establish an open space system for each site, connected to the surrounding natural area or landscaping patterns on adjacent properties.
- Shape the site plan to take full advantage of existing natural features, such as mature trees, rock outcrops, slopes, stone walls, or streams.
- Set minimum open space guidelines for landscaping/permeable surfaces (can range from 10% in city centers to 75% in rural residential areas).
- Use low maintenance native plants when possible to reinforce the character of the region.
- Stress plantings along the public frontage, especially street trees and continuous landscaping to reinforce the flow of the street and bridge gaps between buildings.
- Encourage a diversity of plant species and combine trees with low plantings to provide contrasting forms.
- Use landscaping to frame views of architecture or open vistas.
- Generously landscape parking lot edges and dividing islands with shade trees and low plantings (Hyde Park and Pawling require at least one 3-inch diameter tree for every 10 spaces and 15% landscaped area within the perimeter of large lots).
- Include enforceable maintenance requirements in permit approvals.



Unsightly views, such as rear storage areas, can be screened with natural combinations of evergreens and low plantings or berms.

Sources:
Gary O. Robinette, Local Landscaping Ordinances, 1992
Urban Land Institute, Value By Design: Landscaping, Site Planning and Amenities, 1994