

Expert Advice

Enjoying the Great Outdoors

Fall is an optimal time to start planning next year's landscaping projects

By Jane Berger

It's autumn in the DC area. The crisp, cool air is filled with falling leaves and the heavy perfume of tiny osmanthus flowers—and landscaping and construction crews are everywhere.

Fall is definitely one of the best times to begin landscaping projects, whether large or small, simple or complicated. If fences are erected, walls put up and patios laid throughout the fall and winter season, then planting can begin in the spring. Successful projects, however, always begin much earlier.

The following two projects shed light on how to go about planning and executing successful outdoor renovations.



Tranquility in DC

Kathleen Litchfield, President of Petro Design Build, Inc., says clients first “have to think out the project” during the design phase. “It’s so easy to change your mind on paper,” she says.

Litchfield sends clients a detailed questionnaire before she schedules the initial design consultation. It covers everything: the number of children and family pets; where the trash cans are located; the styles and colors the clients prefer and the materials they sim-



Petro Design Build started with a lockluster yard (top) and transformed it into a lush oasis complete with a spa, a fountain and a stone fireplace (left). In the process, Petro's crew had to solve a number of drainage and infrastructure challenges (above).

ply do not want in their yard. A key question is how long the homeowners plan to stay in the house. “That determines where your energy should go financially,” she says. “If you’re going to sell the house in a couple of years, maybe you should think about curb appeal.”

Petro Design Build develops a couple of different design scenarios, presents sketches to the clients, then works with them to make sure everyone is “on the same page,” as Litchfield explains. Planning is comprehensive and detailed. Drainage issues must always be considered, along with the installation of outdoor electrical wiring and outlets and underground pipes for lighting and irrigation.

(continued on page R-4)

Landscape Design and Construction: Petro Design Build, Inc., Mitchellville, Maryland

Final Photography: Lawrence Ruggeri, Clarksburg, Maryland