



RESPONSIBLE *Beauty*

After more than 20 years beautifying outdoor spaces, James Landscaping’s success has grown in quite nicely. Rhonda and Cassie James—founder and lead designer, respectively—have become quite the media darlings and have put a familiar face to the greening of residential landscapes in Northeast Tarrant County.

The economic slow down should have been disastrous for James Landscaping. It wasn’t. If not the economy, then perhaps the crescendoing drumbeat of impending environmental calamity would nip growth? That didn’t either.

The James Landscaping team isn’t winning hearts and minds with hardline tactics. They have taken a simpler approach—a focus on client satisfaction, extensive communication and delivering exceptional work at a fair price—in short, good, honest customer service. “Many contractors are notorious for making promises they can’t keep,” says Cassie. In a business as vigorously competitive as landscaping, longevity counts. “You really have to ask how long they’ve been in business. You don’t want to work under a cloud of uncertainty. You want to know that you’ll work with someone who’ll still be in business next year.”

Relationship building comes easily for this crew. Even after more than two decades in business, it’s still compact enough for human-scale interaction. “Being good listeners, that never changes,” says Rhonda. “It’s still important to really listen and understand what the client wants,” she adds.

Think of the time wasted when client and landscaper aren’t on the same page, the hours spent reconfiguring a design that clearly doesn’t reflect a client’s wishes.

“In the end, it has to fit into their vision and their budget,” says Cassie. “Even if it’s something unrealistic, if you take the time to listen and communicate, you can guide them to something else, something even better than they imagined. That needs to happen right at the start.”

These days, they’re hearing more of an interest in eco-friendly landscapes, though responsible stewardship of the planet is nothing new to James Landscaping. Catch phrases like *organic*, *sustainable*, *climate change*, and *conservation* may be the buzzwords of our time, but they’ve been at the heart of this team’s best practices before they were in vogue. Now they’re at the forefront of a movement that, while generating excitement, still seems nebulous and elusive. Rhonda and Cassie swiftly demystify those notions.

“Most of our clients are already on board the whole green thing,” says Rhonda. “They just need to be informed of what’s available to them—and how accessible it really is.” Even if the “tree hugger” label fits as dubiously as a scarlet letter among your peers, it’s hard to argue with its economic benefits.

Take water, for example. Americans use a lot of it, an EPA estimated seven billion gallons per

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James Landscaping’s Sustainable Growth





day on landscape irrigation, about 1.5 billion gallons of which are wasted due primarily to evaporation, wind or runoff from overwatering. With the North Texas population expected to continue its boom, and with experts projecting intensifying drought conditions in the near future, a major water shortage could cost us upwards of \$9 billion to redress. The government is currently appealing to its citizens to cut water use to avert a potential crisis. Before state mandates are officially put into law, James Landscaping is already helping its clients to be more proactive with water conservation.

Here's another area where experience really comes into play.

"We take care of a lot of the planning that's involved, from prepping the soil, to choosing plants that don't use a lot of water, to designing more efficient plant beds, to using organic methods that minimize pests and don't rely on chemical fertilizers," says Cassie.

This big picture planning process isn't immediately apparent when you see a verdant, James-designed stream or a lush backyard retreat, but it certainly makes a statement on paper. They can incorporate innovative sprinkler heads and nozzles which produce larger droplets to prevent water loss from evaporation and wind—coupled with smart sprinkler controllers—which are programmed to calculate evapo-transpiration and only replace the amount of water lost. That can translate to a 25% savings on water.

James Landscaping is also accredited by the American Rainwater Catchment System Association. Though it's rarely practiced in the mainstream, catching rainwater to supplement or even replace traditional irrigation methods is the next leap forward in water conservation. James Landscaping offers options from rain barrels that catch rain from your roof, to more complex systems that involve permeable pavers and below ground cisterns that can be linked to smart irrigation controls. We're still getting used to thinking of lawns and yards in such techno-whizz-bang contexts, but they certainly present thrilling possibilities and conveniences. And, what's the saying? Once you go tech, you never go back.

"You have to remember that we work with busy professionals. Even if they wanted to, they simply don't have the time to work outside," says Rhonda. Rain catchment, smart controllers and even simple things like mulching can go a long way to maintain the health and beauty of landscapes with minimal upkeep, while helping the environmentally-minded among us sleep better at night.

Speaking of night, Cassie and Rhonda say that outdoor lighting is making a major comeback thanks to energy-saving bulbs. They're excited by LED lighting that make a dramatic impact on curb appeal, but leave a lighter footprint on the planet and on our pocketbooks. LEDs use a fraction of the power of traditional bulbs while also emitting a purer and more brilliant light. At the end of the day, you probably won't use a full minute to reflect on global warming, but you can kick back on the patio and see your beautiful landscape come to life at night without draining your conscience.

Rhonda and Cassie have spotted another green-hot trend—incorporating edible plants into landscapes. "The recession sparked a lot of requests for gardens, mostly small, simple ones for herbs, tomatoes and cucumbers," says Rhonda. But even planters have become



hotbeds for comestible flourishes. Think strawberry ground cover, ornamental kale and blackberry brambles.

"We're really getting away from the formal hedge look," says Cassie. "People want a more natural look, something with more movement and color, and of course less maintenance." They've been incorporating more native grasses that sway in the wind, and perennials in jubilant hues. An ecologically balanced pond can also provide that rustic look, with the added value of an eye-catching water feature that doesn't require the same time-and-cost-consuming care of a pool.

"A lot of times, the landscape is just an afterthought, especially in new homes," says Rhonda. "It can be so much more than that. We help our clients make the most of their outdoor spaces. These are landscapes you can actually use and appreciate."

If you're building a home, Rhonda and Cassie suggest having a serious discussion with your builder about the landscaping. Often, there's not enough money left in the budget to seriously address it after the home is built. It ends up being an added expense down the road when homeowners bring in another landscaper to redo everything to their liking.

"It's important to give it attention up front," says Cassie. Discuss a landscaping credit that gives you flexibility to choose your own contractor and have more control over its design. This may actually free up your overall budget and you can mark off one more item from your builder's long to-do list.

If you're overhauling an existing landscape, it's paramount to check and recheck a landscaper's credentials. Rhonda, Cassie and company have encountered several projects that were essentially fix up jobs to repair sloppy work left behind by far less meticulous contractors. "Do your research," says Cassie, "Not just about who's going to do the work, but about the kind of work they'll be doing. Know what a pergola costs. Know what a waterfall might cost. You

don't want any surprises." And if the timeline they give you sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Chances are, if you have difficulty reaching a live person on the phone, you may never hear from the contractor again for quite some time—even after promises have been made.

When you call James Landscaping, you'll most likely speak to Marie Weil—a live person. When you visit their website, you'll see several examples of their diverse body of work, get seasonal gardening tips and find answers to many common questions. When you friend them on Facebook, you'll find expanded photos, testimonials and more valuable information to make those informed decisions. It's research made simple.

In a perfect world, hiring a landscaper and greening your yard should be this straightforward. We may not live in a perfect world, but James Landscaping aims for nothing less than the best for your outdoor spaces. It may sound simplistic, but keeping business uncomplicated this long is what will likely keep James Landscaping in business for another 20 years.



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