

Consider Landscape Facts When Examining A Prospective Home

Often home buyers hire an inspector to evaluate the roof, plumbing, heating system and structure of a prospective home. However, seldom does the landscape receive similar scrutiny. Buyers should consider investing time and perhaps money in careful evaluation of landscape up for purchase. Healthy landscape adds significant equity to property value.

Properly sited trees and shrubs add beauty to the landscape; however, unhealthy trees with weak limbs can seriously damage property and threaten human safety. Adequate inspection of property before purchase is a good investment.

- A planting plan or plant list developed by the present occupant can assist evaluation. This suggests the owners have been interested in landscape care.
- If possible, look at photos of the landscape taken throughout the year. Photos may show such indicators of problems as early leaf drop, standing water or thin or off-color turf. Photos can help buyers evaluate the seasonal change of the landscape.
- Evaluate the soil. Most Nebraska soils range from silty clay or clay to sandy. Because many plant problems are due to poorly drained soils, check the property for indications of standing water.
- Is the soil compacted, rock or riddled with construction debris? Does the topsoil appear to have been removed during construction and not replaced? A soil test will identify soil composition and nutrient deficiencies.
- Check the lawn's condition and color, as lack of uniformity may indicate improper application of fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides or soil compaction.
- Ask the current owners for records of fertilizer/pesticide applications and other cultural practices. Check if all areas of the lawn are accessible and of a size appropriate for mowing equipment. Otherwise, many areas may need to be hand-trimmed.
- Evaluate the spacing of existing plants in relation to one another and to the home and other structures. Crowded plants may not be healthy. Plant types also can affect the time required to manage the present landscape. Some plants require more maintenance or time.
- Make sure materials have been planted properly. Planting trees, shrubs and perennials too deeply can result in root death and eventual loss of the plant. Mulch should also not be too deep or mounded against the trunk or crown of a plant.
- Trees and shrubs are important in a landscape and may take many years to reach a size significantly impacting design. Therefore, it's important to know their health and structural integrity.
- Check if the property has an irrigation system and is zoned to allow for watering different plant types separately. If no irrigation system is present, check if faucets are located to minimize moving hoses and sprinklers.
- Fences, raised bed, walls, arbors and other built structures should be evaluated for placement, soundness and function.

A home is the largest purchase most Nebraskans ever make. If the decision to buy a particular house is influenced at all by the building's site and plantings, be sure to give these the same careful scrutiny the house is given.