

in the garden

by Stephen and Kristin Pategas



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## A Beneficial Relationship For Your Garden

If you use a landscape maintenance contractor, then motivating them is beneficial to your garden and wallet. The first step is your involvement in the process.

Pay attention to the way plants change through the seasons and what they look like in other yards under similar conditions. Remember that while the sun and shade conditions may be similar, there are other growth factors such as soils, nutrients, and moisture levels that affect how a plant grows and looks. Learn the names of some of your plants so you can talk intelligently about that green thing growing by the driveway. However don't micro-manage the maintenance unless you really are an expert or can back up your suggestions with facts.

Knowing the results of their efforts are appreciated is a positive motivation. Do you take a stroll in your garden in the morning, at lunch, or



On-site reviews aid communication.



Give a heads up well before containers need spiffing up.



Providing good irrigation coverage helps the garden grow.

after a day at the office? Do you lounge in a hammock or bench swing? Share how you enjoy the garden and what you notice whether it's something in bloom, a new fragrance, or horrors - even a pest or disease on a plant. Keep a running list of items that need attention and share them all at once. Determine the best way to communicate with your contractor (phone, fax, email, or text) and schedule regular on-site reviews to make suggestions, listen, and offer praise.

Provide the proper growing conditions so your contractor isn't swimming against the tide with struggling plants and weed invasions. If the irrigation system is not functioning properly, get it fixed. When mulch levels are not within the two-to -three inch depth range, beef them up. Remove invasive plants. Don't blame those doing the maintenance for plants that don't have the proper conditions to thrive. Do a soil test and get advice from a design professional and/or horticultural consultant. The improvements you make will inspire your contractor.

When guests are invited to an outdoor event, give your contractor a few weeks' notice so they can tweak the appropriate areas. If you get

glowing guest comments, share them with your contractor and don't hesitate to pass out their business cards. If you promote them they'll want your garden to shine.

Allow your contractor to work long enough to stay on top of the tasks on a regular basis. If you can't afford to increase their hours then minimize time wasters by redesigning high maintenance areas of the garden.

If your current contractor isn't up to the task then select a new contractor by getting references, checking their licenses and insurance, and viewing other properties they maintain. Look for landscape main-

tenance professionals certified as FCHP (Florida Certified Horticultural Professional) by the Florida Nurserymen, Growers, and Landscape Association. Make sure you have an agreement that details the minimum amount of time they will spend on your property and the tasks they will accomplish weekly, monthly, and yearly.

Motivate, communicate with, and empower your contractor to succeed. Your garden will thrive.

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