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The Right Approach to Landscaping:

*Understanding what needs to be done —
and how to get the right professionals to do it —
will beautify your property and protect its bottom line*

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Few aesthetic elements contribute more to the value and quality of life of a residential community than landscaping. Certainly, every association Owner and decision-maker appreciates the beauty and enhanced 'curb appeal' that a well-groomed property offers. But unless it is done properly, and by the appropriate professionals, all the effort and resources invested in landscaping can yield negative results and overpayment for sub-standard services.

What to expect from your landscape maintenance contractor at this time of year ...

At this time of year, our South Florida flora and fauna are at their most beautiful. But the hot, wet Summer weather inevitably encourages rapid growth which, left unattended, can quickly develop into an unkempt and less-than-attractive appearance.

According to Mr. Randy Spangenberg, Branch Manager of The Brickman Group, a professional landscape maintenance organization serving all of South Florida, this is why early Summer landscape maintenance activity should focus on pruning and cutting plant material. "Appropriate pruning and cutting," says Mr. Spangenberg, "will create a well-tended appearance and will also encourage plant regeneration and thicker, fuller growth during the Fall growing season."

The Florida hurricane season, which commenced on June 1st, is another significant reason why deliberate attention should be paid to pruning. Both palm trees, and deciduous (or 'canopy'), trees should be pruned as soon as possible so that the high winds associated with hurricanes can pass through them instead of knocking them over or breaking off branches. Mr. Spangenberg advises engaging a licensed arborist who specializes in arboreal pruning for this highly essential service and also to ensure that the work done complies with the standards of Class I pruning as established by the National Arborists Association.

Attention also should be paid now to two other aspects of landscape care: pest control, and turf care. "Aphids and scales are piercing and sucking pests that affect the health and appearance of flowers and shrubs," Mr. Spangenberg explains, "and chinch bugs attack turf by eating the grass root. At this time of year, it's very important to treat properly and vigilantly so that trees, shrubs, plants, and grass are protected against these pests."

With regard to turf care, Mr. Spangenberg recommends that grass be cut to a height of three-and-a-half to four inches during the Summer to prevent grass stress and to ensure the consistent health of the grass plant throughout the year.

How to avoid landscape maintenance misunderstandings with Owners ...

While the rationale for Summer pruning (commonly referred to as ‘hard pruning’), cutting, and mowing in the ways described above is clear, many Owners typically misunderstand why these important land-scape maintenance activities are done the way they are. Owners may become angry or upset when they see their trees and plants being cut back so dramatically, and they may feel that their grass is not being properly mowed.

For this reason, it is helpful for the Board, through management, to inform Owners in writing why and how landscape maintenance services are being performed at this time, and how the grass, plants, trees — and the community — benefit from them. This communication can also include information about which landscaping services the association pays for, which services Owners are responsible for individually, and what types of plantings are acceptable and unacceptable for Owners to do on their own. By providing this information, management can help the Board to avoid misunderstandings about the financial and aesthetic responsibilities of the association and its Owners relative to landscape maintenance.

How to get the best value from your property’s landscape maintenance contractor ...

In general throughout the year, contracted landscape maintenance services should include grass mowing, tree and plant trimming, the application of mulch, and all other necessary services, performed at the appropriate times, to keep landscaped elements at their healthiest and most attractive.

Many so-called ‘full service’ management companies encourage — and even require — the properties they manage to accept the services of ‘in-house’ landscaping contractors, which may be owned by the management company. However, this practice may not provide the best service to the property.

In lieu of this arrangement, Boards are well-advised to contract independently with a landscape maintenance service that can give their property the specific attention it needs. This independent engagement is best accomplished through a sealed bidding process, such as the one employed by AKAM South.

Under this process, AKAM South, together with the Board, draws the specifications for the exact services required by the individual property. The specifications are sent out for bids; the bids are returned to, and opened by, the Board; and the bids are then discussed with AKAM South. The Board then authorizes AKAM South to negotiate on behalf of the association for the most comprehensive services at the most favorable price. (In addition, AKAM South also requires that all contractors, including landscape maintenance contractors, sign a Code of Ethics before they are engaged. This helps to ensure the honesty, integrity, and ethical conduct of all such service providers.)

Three significant benefits accrue to associations when they engage a landscape maintenance contractor in this way. First, the association is ensured landscape maintenance services designed specifically for its needs. Second, because there is no affiliation between management and the landscape contractor, management can more objectively supervise the contractor’s activities on behalf of the property. And finally, the property will enjoy all the benefits and beauty of professional landscaping at the most favorable cost to the association and its Owners.

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