

## **A green thumb for a great price**

Spring has arrived and many South Africans are eagerly hoping to get stuck into their gardening. Not only an enjoyable pastime, landscaping and garden maintenance is a surprisingly good investment, provided it is well designed.

The outdoor garden typically defines the first impression of a home for potential buyers. This is especially true for an environment like South Africa, given the size of many of our residential properties, and our fondness for outdoor living.

A study in the United States found that the attractive landscaping and well-maintained gardens added between 6% and 11% to the value of a property. Research in the UK suggests that it could improve property values by as much as 20%.

This depends on getting the design right. In general, ensuring that the garden is healthy and orderly is the key. Gardens are fundamentally about life. Plants need to be blooming rather than surviving. Lawns must be manicured and weeded. This says to buyers that they are inheriting a thriving asset.

Garden features like a braai area or a tool shed can either add or detract from the appeal – design being crucial. An attractively painted shed tucked away among some bushes can add a touch of rustic charm – while an arbitrarily placed prefab can look terrible! Garden ornaments must be especially well cared for and regularly repaired and painted, or risk an impression of decay.

As a rule, keeping garden design simple is advisable. A limited number of plant species, for example, implies that less maintenance will be required.

South African gardeners are increasingly confronted with the harsh reality of water scarcity. Recent water restrictions across the country – including complete water shedding in some parts, and bans on sprinkler irrigation in others – demand new thinking on what the ideal garden will look like.

Installed sprinkler systems have in the past been a major selling point, but this may not be the case into the future.

Rather the selection of plants may be the key. Hardy, indigenous species which require less water will ensure resilient gardens appropriate for the climate – and be an attractive surrounding to the family home.

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