

Landscape is the first and last impression of every person who comes and goes, so make it positive

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Let's start this article with an exercise. Think back to a time when you were out in nature, maybe hiking in the woods or strolling through a park. I want you to think about how that made you feel. If you're like most people, the experience probably left you more relaxed and feeling more balanced than when you started. Now think back to the last time you were at a hospital. When you were walking in, what emotions were you experiencing? Whether you were seeing a doctor for yourself or just visiting, I'm guessing the answer involves a combination of the words nervous, uncomfortable, and anxious. But what if the serenity of nature could be brought to a medical environment—even before the enter the building? The healing process could be set in motion by the time you park the car!

At Winterberry Gardens, we are doing just that. Winterberry Gardens is a full service Landscape Design Build Maintain Company. We handle all outdoor needs for residential and commercial clients, from irrigation, lighting, fence installation, and landscape design, all the way through construction and annual maintenance. In recent years, Winterberry has developed a special affinity for transforming medical properties, and changing the way people view local medical centers. Literally.

When Winterberry comes into a new property, the evaluation process needs to answer many questions. Does it appear well maintained? Does it match the aesthetics of the local buildings and surrounding area? Does it help intuitively guide people to where they need to go? What kind of a first impression does it give? These are just a few of the questions we answer when deciding whether our clients are getting the best return for their landscape investment. We often see facilities that have a misguided strategy in their landscaping: overly sterile; uninviting; too much negative focus on intimidating building facades. Or the landscaping may just be overly generic, uninspiring, and undeserving of the investment already put in.

One of the biggest mistakes we see in a facility's strategy is poor planning of pedestrian flow. Walkways that don't make sense, signs that are poorly placed, and vegetation that is overgrown and obscure sightlines all negatively affect pedestrian flow. This makes it confusing for people trying to find their way, which just increases the anxiety level. A well designed facility will have the opposite effect. The flow will be designed so people will naturally be guided to the most relevant areas. Signage will be attractive and easy to read. By making it easier for people to find their way, they will be better able to appreciate their surroundings.

Then the aesthetics come into play, and this is where facility managers get really excited. We are able to identify a look that will show the brand of the facility. Do you want to portray a modern, technological feel? Classic New England charm? Something specific to the organization's character and mission? The possibilities for a facility brand are endless, but no matter what choice is made,

one truth always remains: branding starts long before anyone walks in the front door. It begins the moment a visitor or employee first sees the facility. The landscape is the first and last impression of every person who comes and goes, so make it a positive one.

Definitely the biggest issue we see in facilities, medical or otherwise, is improper landscape maintenance. A landscape is a living, breathing organism, and it needs consistent maintenance in order to remain healthy and effective. A good landscape design is meant to be something that evolves as plants mature. But this maturation needs to be guided, and managed, or the end result will be a wild, untamed mess. The worst part is that this can happen to even the best design. And once it does, it takes a much larger investment to reclaim a landscape than it would have taken to keep it maintained through the years. That includes proper trimming of shrubs and trees, perennial or rose care, turf maintenance, consistent mulching and more. A consistent, expert yearly maintenance plan is the single best way to keep a landscape looking its best. Basically, it's preventative medicine for your landscape.

A properly designed and maintained landscape is easy to detect: there is a sense of harmony, beauty, and balance. It becomes a haven, whether for a visitor coming to the facility for the first time, or an employee who's there every day of the week. You and your staff work so hard to make sure patients and visitors who visit your buildings leave satisfied, healthy, and happy. Let your landscape start the process even before they get there.

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