

Deck. Patio

Ask a Pro

Interview by Kelly Roberson Photography by Bryan McCay

Jeffrey
Erb

New York City landscape designer Jeffrey Erb started his career in horticulture as a grand champion strawberry grower. He specializes in garden design, installation, and maintenance for rooftops, terraces, street plantings, backyards, townhouses, and estate gardens. We caught up with Erb to find out more.

What's the main challenge with most home landscapes?

Maintenance. I don't believe in a landscape that is marketed as maintenance-free. There is always upkeep in one way or another. Routine maintenance is important to identify potential pest problems or

diseases before they spread throughout a garden. Maintenance is also important to help preserve the designer's vision as a garden grows and matures.

What's the No. 1 mistake people make in their landscapes?

Focusing on one area of the garden instead of the bigger picture. Sometimes people decide they want a specific feature in a particular part of their garden and forget to visualize how it connects and relates to the rest of their landscape and property.

Are there plants you think are underrated?

I tend to gravitate toward plants that contribute something to the landscape other than showy flowers. For instance, I love lady's mantle. When the morning dew covers the leaves in perfect tiny droplets and the sunlight catches them just so, it is a magical moment in the garden. Lady's mantle also features understated chartreuse flowers that are about texture.

How do you use containers strategically in a small space?

I use them to build a framework around a furniture layout. Plant selection will dictate planter sizes, but I love playing with different heights and shapes of containers to add movement to an otherwise lackluster space. Using tall planters in a small space can make the space feel larger.

What trends are you excited about?

I am seeing more and more recycled furniture coming on the market. Some of these pieces are well-designed and durable and require very little maintenance. Any furniture that doesn't need cushions is ideal in the city, because cushions become dirty quickly and finding storage for them can be tricky.

How do you create interest year-round, especially in cold climates?

I like to use a framework of evergreens to have a mass of green color year-round. Try planting broadleaf evergreens that might suit your space, such as *Aucuba*, *Prunus laurocerasus* 'Schipkaensis', or *Pieris japonica*. Dedicate several planters as focal points for seasonal display.

What changes do you see in residential landscape design?

I can confidently say that media and TV shows are having more influence on clients who want to re-create their home's entire exterior space. More and more people want fully stocked kitchens with appliances outside of their homes. I have mixed feelings as to whether that is as necessary as we are led to believe. More often than not, the outcome is chunky and doesn't connect to the rest of the landscape.

Anything else you would like to add?

I truly believe that gardening and landscapes are healing for the soul. Sitting on a park bench for a moment and watching the sun dance through leaves casting shadows across a lawn, or finding an unexpected bloom in a garden allows me to pause and clear my mind and just appreciate nature. If I can create those moments for my clients, I know my work is appreciated in this chaotic city.

For more information, see Resources on page 124.



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