

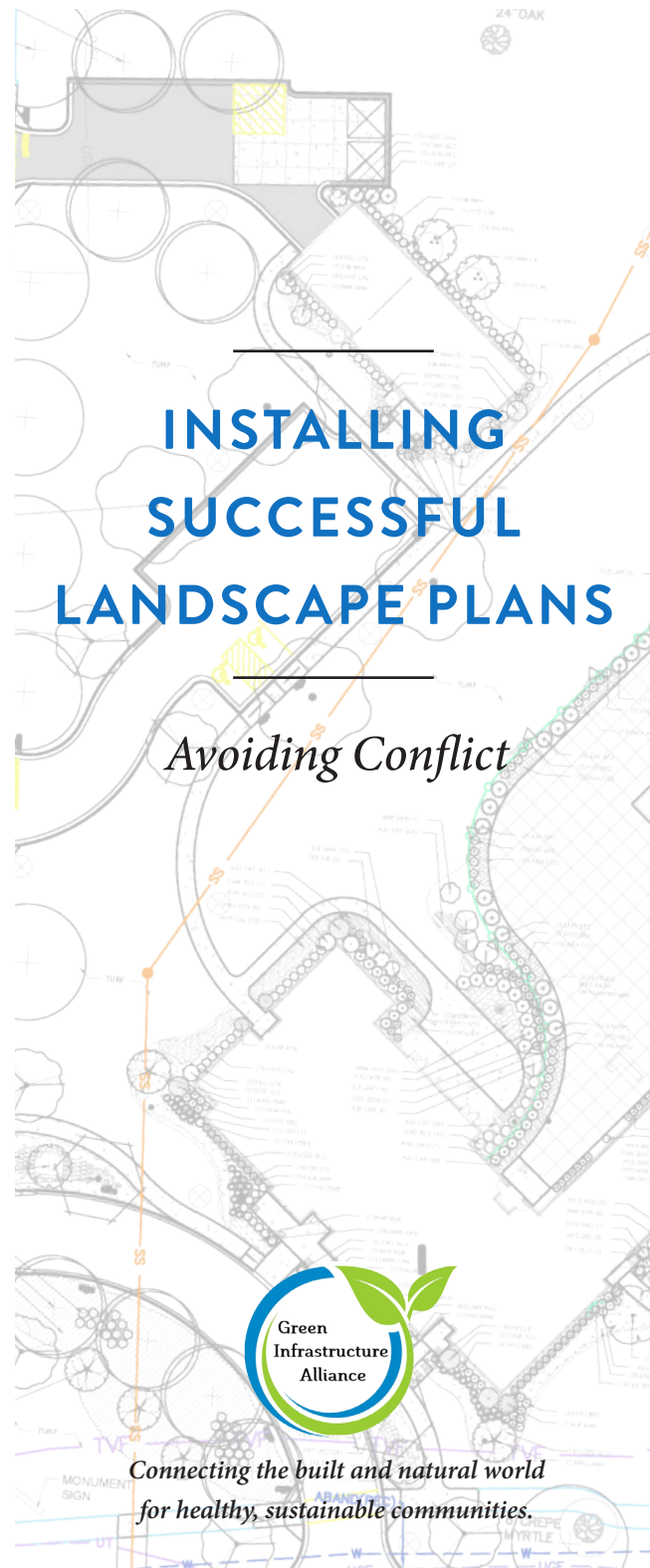
Green Infrastructure Alliance is affiliated with



To unify green-industry and municipal professionals in the effort to develop functional environments that contribute to healthy, livable communities.



To advance the adoption of research-based green infrastructure policies and technologies across multiple green-industry and municipal disciplines.



TELL US WHAT YOU WANT

Every day landscape contractors are hired to install a design concept created to “finish” a construction project. From designer to contractor, everyone wants a functional, beautiful landscape that meets the needs of the owner. However, when contractors are not included in the design process or are asked to interpret conflicting or confusing plans, the final project may not meet the vision of the designer. Starting with a solid landscape plan, including accurate plant specifications, is critical to a smooth installation process particularly because it is often the last part of a project to be completed and a failed inspection can result in delays to occupancy. While there are a variety of factors that may lead to a stalled process, the most common, avoidable, problem we see is in the plant specification process. Here we offer suggestions to avoid confusion and make the process of buying and installing plants a breeze.

THE DOUBLE SPEC

A critical component to a landscape plan is the plant list. This list typically includes plant species, quantities, types and sizes of plants needed for the project. Often, not only is the plant size indicated, but also the container size - The Double Spec. One problem is that plants grow and pot sizes stay the same. Additionally, different species have different growth habits.

To illustrate our point, the plant list below shows two different plants specified for use on the same project. It is 100% clear that the designer wants 48” tall Chinese Ligustrum privet. The installer knows with great certainty that they must purchase and install a 48” tall plant. The problem is in how the designer specified the Carissa Holly.

CHINESE LIGUSTRUM PRIVET	48”
CHINESE HOLLY-CARISSA	24-36”, 3 GAL. CONTAINER

A contractor and their nursery partner do not know if the designer wants a 24-36” or 3-gallon Carissa holly. Problem? They can’t have both because it does not exist! This specific job had 400 Carissa hollies specified in this manner. Such mistakes directly impact the landscape construction budget and final project acceptance. If the contractor uses the 24-36” specification and the designer budgeted for the 3-gallon container, clearly the project will be over budget. Alternatively, if the contractor installs 3-gallon plants it is likely an inspector will reject this portion of the project for using under-sized plant material.



This example illustrates a daily conundrum for procurement agents and landscape contractors. In a sampling of over 200 North Carolina landscape plans, (specifying over 1800 container-grown plants), plants were double specified 35% of the time.

To prevent over budget projects or project rejection, we recommend using only one specification. You can achieve consistent project costs by specifying container size only, or consistent appearance by specifying desired plant size at planting. If you specify both, the installer may not provide what you actually want.

PLANT SIZE DESIGNATION

If you specify plant size alone, you must understand how each plant species grows, and what sizes are commonly available. Make sure to use the height or spread designation.

** CONTACT local nurseries to determine what heights and spreads are readily available for each species, and ASK what container sizes to expect. This will ensure you stay on budget and provide the plants the designer had in mind.*



NURSERY CONSIDERATIONS

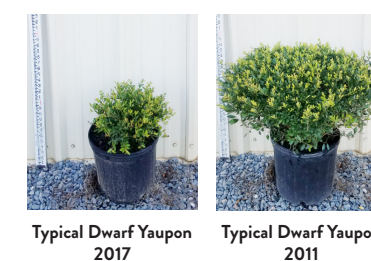
Plants are alive! This may be obvious, but often we forget that this means a plant - particularly its size, never stops changing. You must keep this fact in mind when specifying and purchasing plant material, and when inspecting the finished project. For example, the following photos of Hopley’s abelia show plants at two different ages, but in the same size container. The only difference is age and therefore size. Both are healthy plants, and the cost is the same to purchase and install.



Additionally, understand that during their time in the nursery, plants are maintained. Typically, most container plants are sheared 2-3 times per year, so a plant that meets your specification one day may change the very next. This does not mean that the plant is any less healthy or less expensive!



With a growing economy, demand for container plants continues to increase. This demand may outpace the growers’ ability to produce plants. After all, plants are alive and there is only so much growers can do to increase growth! Such shortages may mean a change in the landscape plan. You may have to buy larger plants or accept other species that will serve the same function.



The goal of any design/install project should be to enhance the functional contributions plants provide to the landscape - from screening to shading, stormwater interception to air purification, and of course to beautify our outside spaces. Writing clear, concise and plant-appropriate specifications is key to the successful installation of long-lived, healthy landscapes.