

An Architect's Guide to Interior Plantscaping for Biophilic Design





An increased focus on bringing the outdoors inside means architecture teams are frequently tasked with bringing biophilic design into the spaces where we work, live and play. From atriums to live plant walls, there is a fine art and balance to planning out a space and ensuring that desired plants are given the environment and continued resources they need to sustainably thrive.

As architectural design and interior plantscaping continue to merge and plants become an increasingly integral part of the built environment, **it is crucial for architects and plantscapers to collaborate and develop partnerships to create truly stunning and sustainable biophilic design in the built environment.**

To ensure lush, long-lasting plants and a seamless process when it comes to plant installation and maintenance, experienced interior plantscapers compiled a few best practices on how to best leverage their expertise for biophilic design projects.

Consult Interior Plantscapers as Expert Project Contributors

Planning space for a verdant indoor jungle? Or simply adding plants as an accent? In either case, be sure to integrate interiorscaper expertise starting the very beginning of the design process.

There are a lot of considerations that need to be addressed, especially when using plants as an integral part of a building's overall design. From plant recommendations and placement to lighting and containers, interior plantscapers can guide architects on best practices to ensure greenery thrives long-term.

By fully committing to incorporate plants and partnering with an interior plantscaper, planning and installation can be turned into an effortless process with stunning results.





Ask Interior Plantscapers to Join Projects Early

For a more streamlined process of bringing plants to built spaces, ask for an interior plantscaper's expertise early. Not only does this help from a resource planning and scheduling standpoint, but can help prevent more costly issues down the road.

For example, if live trees are going to be a fundamental part of a building design, considerations need to be made to ensure they thrive. Beyond just nursery availability, planting time can be seasonal.

Additionally, trees require extra large planters or built-ins, and additional space within those containers to account for growth. Doorways have to be wide enough to get both the trees and required equipment inside. Adequate lighting is also a key concern. Is there enough sunlight filtering in through windows or skylights? Or will artificial lighting be needed as a supplement?

By bringing interior plantscapers on early to projects, these types of concerns can be discussed, addressed and preemptively solved.





Picking Plant Varieties

Depending on the space, the desired plants may not thrive or be practical in the space provided. For example, a fiddle leaf fig placed in a dark area will quickly wither and die, while a staghorn fern will burn if placed somewhere with too much sunlight. Some indoor tree varieties drop leaves and create messes and slip and fall hazards in spaces with lots of foot traffic.

Though some plant varieties may look amazing in some spaces, they may not be great choices unless clients are prepared for listless plants or constant replacements.

An interior plantscaper can help to guide and educate clients on plant selections that form a cohesive look, while keeping both design and plant care needs in mind.



Plants First, Planters Later

The size and scale of desired plants often determine the size and specifications of the plant container needed for a design. A 12 foot tall plant won't fit into a 12 inch planter. Grow pots, sub-irrigation, roots, growing space, and soil all need to be considered along with the plant variety before plant containers are selected for an installation.

Though the type of desired plants often dictate the size of a planter, the proposed placement and usage also informs the type of planter material that should be used. Fiberglass, plastic, metal, and faux concrete planters all have varying durability and differing aesthetic looks. Built in planters must be planned to account for waterproofing and drainage.

Interior plantscapers can best guide the size, material, shape and finish of planters and proposed containers that meet the needs of the plants while also matching aesthetic and installation requirements.

Pick Placement Wisely

For completed buildings, it's easy for an interior plantscaper to walk the floor and determine appropriate plants and placement based on lighting, care and overall looks.

Determining plant placement when a building is in the design or construction phase is a bit more challenging and requires a bit more planning.

Detailed floor plans—particularly of the furniture layout—allow interior plantscapers to plan and work out design and logistical issues before funds are spent on plants, containers, delivery and equipment needed for installations.

Unfortunately, some places just aren't good spots for plants. For example, most interior plantscapers advise against placing plants in the way of foot traffic, near outdoor exits, and in windowless corners due long-term damage concerns.

Additionally, don't assume that just because a plant could be placed somewhere, that a plant should be placed there.

For example, coordinate with design engineers to avoid placing permanent planters over pipe or electrical runs. Spots above doorways or on ledges can be used, but are often more troublesome for techs to maintain.

Work with an interior plantscaper to help determine ideal plant placement that takes overall looks and plant care and maintenance into consideration.



Plan for Lighting

Plants need light, soil and water to thrive. Though interior plantscapers have more control over the amount of soil and water a plant receives, indoor lighting can be a bit more of a challenge.

For designs that heavily incorporate plant material, **planning for lighting is key for healthy plants.** Though artificial light can do wonders, natural sunlight is always preferred. Windows and skylights incorporated into a building design are wonderful aids to make sure a plant gets the light they need.

However, window placement, tint, glass thickness and the distance between where a plant is placed and the light reaches can affect the lighting needs of greenery.

Though lighting needs often change depending on the plant species, plants more than 15 feet away from a window will typically not get enough natural sunlight to survive, and will need to be supplemented with artificial light sources.

In the built environment, floor space near a window encompasses only a small percentage of a building's square footage. Additionally, blinds, drapes, and other obstacles can shield plants from sunlight so artificial light solutions must also be considered.

Collaborating with an interior plantscaper ensures plants receive enough light from natural and artificial sources, all while creating a balanced lighting scheme for building occupants.



Offer Early Installation Access

Offering interior plantscapers early access to install sub-soil structures and plants before final finishing touches are implemented in a build saves everyone time, money and stress, especially on large installations.

By allowing early installation access, interior plantscapers can best estimate the time, tools and resources needed to fully complete a plant display.

It's projected that 70 percent of the world's population will live in cities in the coming decades. As more people continue to live, work and play in built environments, access to nature and greenery will increasingly become a necessary feature to include in our surroundings.

Working together, architects and interior plantscapers can offer a unified vision of the maintenance, associated costs, and return on investment that biophilic design can offer, and can help make the world we live in just a little bit more beautiful.



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