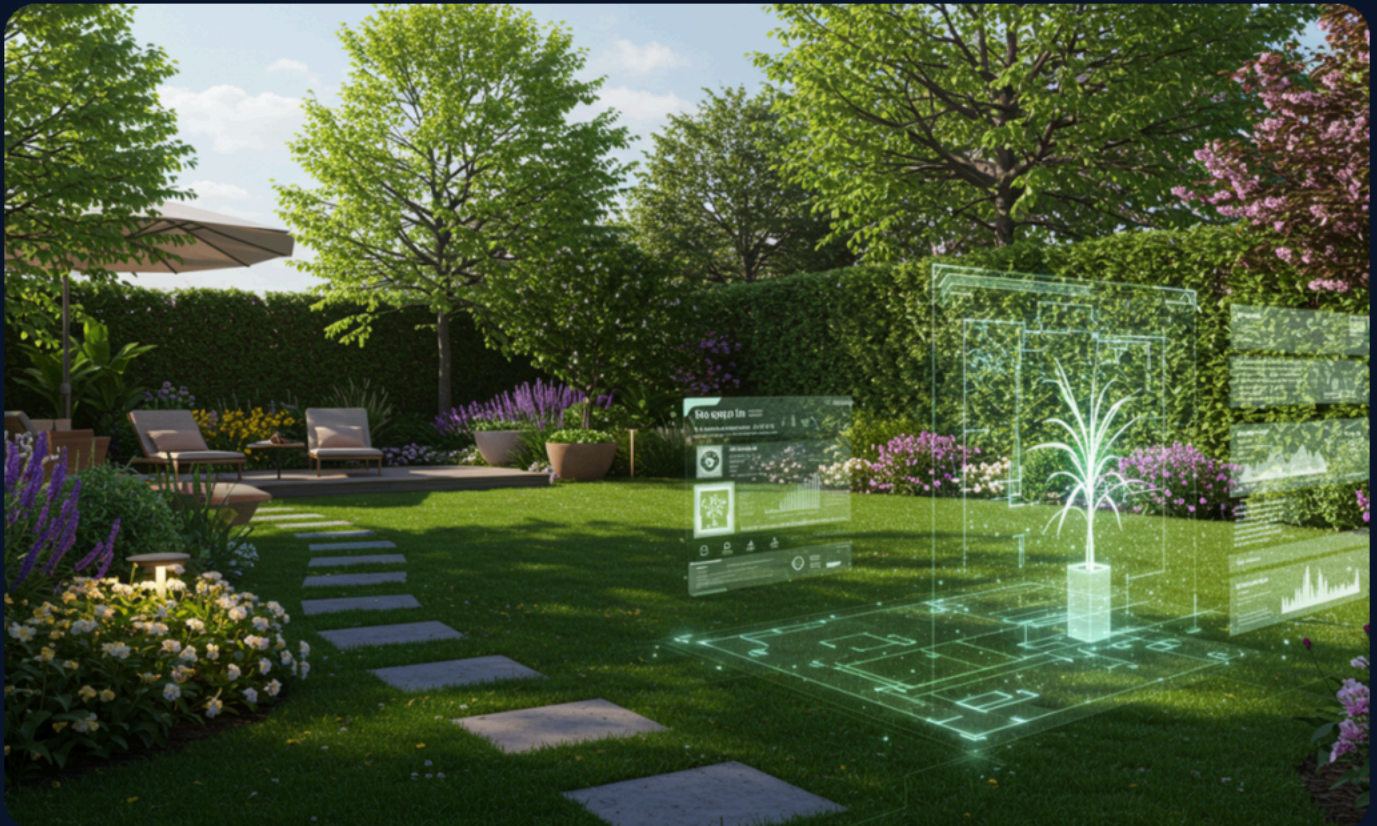


LANDSCAPING 101 —

A HEALTHIER YARD. A BETTER-LOOKING PROPERTY.

The essential questions every homeowner should know before planting, watering, mowing, pruning, grading or hiring a landscaper.



INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Lawn care • Watering • Drainage • Plants • Trees • Weeds
Mulch • Landscape design • Hardscaping • Seasonal care • Costs • Hiring

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Landscaping questions usually start with a symptom—brown grass, standing water, weeds, a damaged tree, a sinking patio or a yard that never seems finished. This version goes beyond generic advice by pairing practical homeowner guidance with measurements, regional cost benchmarks and documented facts. Prices are 2026 published benchmarks and should be treated as planning ranges, not quotes.

8B+

gallons/day of residential outdoor water use in the U.S.

50%

up to this share of outdoor water EPA says can be lost through inefficient irrigation.

QUICK CONTENTS

 01 Lawn Care	 08 Landscape Design
 02 Watering & Irrigation	 09 Hardscaping
 03 Drainage & Standing Water	 10 Exterior Property Care
 04 Weeds	 11 Snow & Winter
 05 Mulch & Landscape Beds	 12 Landscaping Costs
 06 Trees & Shrubs	 13 Hiring a Landscaper
 07 Plant Health	 14 Seasonal Landscaping

RESEARCH NOTE: Cost figures use 2026 published Detroit-area estimates where available because they are a useful Southeast Michigan planning benchmark. They are not Southfield quotes. Municipal rules are identified as local rules; they should not be presented as statewide Michigan law.





Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

Why is my grass turning brown?	Brown turf can come from drought, heat, compacted soil, poor sprinkler coverage, disease, insects or the wrong grass for the site. Check soil moisture first, then inspect irrigation coverage and look for a repeating disease or pest pattern before adding products.
How often should I mow?	Mow by growth rate rather than a fixed calendar. The standard one-third rule means removing no more than about one-third of the blade at one mowing. If turf is 4.5 inches and your target is 3 inches, mow before it gets much taller rather than cutting it down hard.
What height should I mow in Michigan?	For lawn health, Michigan State University Extension recommends roughly 3.5–4 inches for many Michigan home lawns; it notes that mowing below 3 inches can stress turf. Separately, Southfield's local property rule says lawn grass may not exceed 8 inches and weeds 12 inches. The 8-inch figure is a legal maintenance ceiling, not the ideal mowing height. [1] [2]
When should I overseed?	For cool-season Michigan lawns, late summer into early fall is usually the strongest renovation window because soil remains warm while summer weed pressure is declining. Small repairs can be seeded when soil and moisture conditions are suitable. [3]
Does aeration really help?	Core aeration is most useful where traffic or clay/compaction restricts air and water movement. Current Detroit-area pricing data puts professional aeration around \$63–\$119 for many jobs, while larger or more difficult lawns can cost more; core aeration can run higher. [4]
Should I leave grass clippings?	Yes, when clippings are short and spread evenly. Returning clippings recycles nutrients; the key is avoiding heavy clumps. Never use mowing as a substitute for correcting drainage, compaction or poor turf selection.

Michigan lawn note: MSU says 3.5–4 inches is a healthy target for many home lawns; Southfield's municipal ceiling is 8 inches. [\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)

QUICK WINS

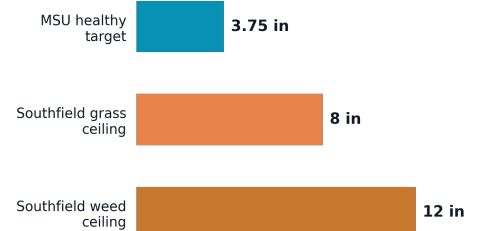
3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



- 1 Set the mower higher. For many Michigan lawns, about 3.5–4 inches is a good starting point. Taller grass can grow deeper roots, stay stronger in summer, and shade the soil so weeds have a harder time getting started.
- 2 Follow the one-third rule. Try not to cut off more than one-third of the grass blade at one time. If the lawn gets too tall, raise the mowing height first instead of cutting a lot of grass at once.
- 3 Check the soil before adding fertilizer. If the grass stays thin, push a screwdriver into the soil. If the ground is very hard, compacted soil may be the problem. Loosening the soil can help more than simply adding more fertilizer.

3.5–4 in.

MSU's (Michigan State University's) healthy mowing target for most Michigan lawns — well below Southfield's 8-inch legal limit, which is a maximum allowed height, not a recommended one. [\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)



Mowing height vs. Southfield's legal ceilings

1/3

THE ONE-THIRD RULE

Never remove more than one-third of the grass blade in a single mow. For example, if your lawn is 4.5 inches tall, mow it down to about 3 inches — not shorter. Cutting more than that in one pass stresses the lawn, weakens its roots, and opens up bare patches where weeds can move in.

MSU (Michigan State University) Extension is the university's public research and outreach program — it studies practical lawn and garden questions for Michigan homeowners and publishes science-based advice, like the mowing heights shown in the chart above.

What the chart shows: MSU's healthy mowing target (about 3.5–4 inches) is well below Southfield's legal limits (grass can't exceed 8 inches; weeds can't exceed 12 inches). Those city numbers are a maximum allowed height, not a healthy one — so don't wait until you're close to breaking code. Aim for MSU's shorter, healthier range instead.



Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

How much water does my lawn need?	A useful starting point is about 1 inch of water per week, including rainfall, but weather, soil, turf and shade can change that substantially. EPA recommends adjusting irrigation to actual conditions rather than using a fixed seasonal schedule. [5]
How much outdoor water is used in the U.S.?	EPA estimates residential outdoor water use exceeds 30% of household water use on average and can reach 60% in arid regions. Across the U.S., residential outdoor water use is nearly 8 billion gallons per day. [5][6]
How much water can irrigation waste?	EPA says up to 50% of outdoor water can be lost through wind, evaporation and runoff from inefficient irrigation. That is why fixing overspray, broken heads and poor scheduling can matter as much as adding more irrigation. [5][6]
What time should I water?	Early morning is generally preferable because evaporation is lower than in the hottest part of the day. Water long enough to wet the root zone, then pause if runoff begins. Cycle-and-soak scheduling can help on compacted or sloped soil. [7]
Should I install an automatic controller?	A WaterSense-labeled controller can save an average home up to 15,000 gallons of water per year, according to EPA. Soil-moisture-based controllers can also save more than 15,000 gallons annually under appropriate conditions. [6][8]
How do I test sprinkler coverage?	Place straight-sided cans across a zone, run the system, and compare depths. Uneven amounts point to clogged heads, pressure problems, poor spacing or mismatched nozzles. Inspect irrigation at least monthly during the watering season. [7]

Water-smart benchmark: nearly 8 billion gallons/day of residential outdoor water use; up to 50% may be lost through inefficient irrigation. [\[5\]\[6\]](#)

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



HOMEOWNER TIP
Small steps add up.

- 1 Start with about one inch of water. About 1 inch of water per week, including rain, is a useful starting point for many lawns. Your yard may need more or less depending on heat, soil, shade and the type of grass you have.
- 2 Water in the morning. Early morning is usually a good time to water because less water is lost to heat and evaporation. If you see water running down the driveway or sidewalk, stop and let the water soak in before starting again.
- 3 Check your sprinkler pattern. Put a few straight-sided cans or small containers around the lawn and run the sprinkler for a short time. If one container has much more water than another, your sprinkler may need to be adjusted.

50%

EPA estimates that up to half of all water used on lawns and gardens is wasted — lost to wind, evaporation, and runoff — usually from sprinklers that run too long, at the wrong time, or aren't aimed correctly. [\[5\]\[6\]](#)



Water lost to inefficient irrigation

Why this matters: Watering the wrong way can hurt your lawn even more than not watering enough. Soggy soil drowns roots and invites disease, while a few deep waterings each week build stronger, deeper roots than frequent shallow ones.

Worth knowing: A WaterSense-labeled irrigation controller can save the average home up to 15,000 gallons of water a year — roughly a small backyard pool's worth — by adjusting watering to actual weather instead of running on a fixed timer. [\[6\]\[8\]](#)

How to fix it: Adjusting sprinkler heads and resetting your timer is usually a simple DIY job. If your yard still won't hold water evenly after that, the real issue may be drainage rather than watering — see Section 3.



Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

Why does my yard flood?	Typical causes include low spots, compacted or clay-heavy soil, poor grading, roof runoff, blocked drains and saturated soil. The first question is not "Which drain should I buy?" but "Where is the water coming from, and where can it safely go?"
Can grading fix a wet yard?	Often, if the problem is surface runoff. Grading can move water away from foundations and low areas, but it cannot solve a groundwater problem or a site with nowhere safe to discharge water. Diagnose the source before moving soil.
What does drainage work cost?	Detroit-area 2026 published estimates put complete yard drainage projects around \$1,860–\$6,950, with an average near \$4,405. French drains were listed around \$2,010–\$7,030 locally, while catch basins were roughly \$605–\$2,010. Actual Southfield pricing depends on layout, access and discharge options. [9]
Is a French drain always the answer?	No. A French drain is one tool for intercepting or redirecting water. Other fixes can include grading, downspout extensions, swales, catch basins or a dry well. A drainage system that has no viable discharge point is not a complete solution.
Should downspouts empty near the house?	They should discharge where water can move away without eroding soil, flooding a neighbor or concentrating water against the foundation. Extensions can be inexpensive compared with correcting repeated foundation or landscape damage.
How do I diagnose standing water?	Observe the yard during and after a storm. Trace roof runoff, downspouts and slopes; mark low spots; note how long water remains. A wet spot that lasts after surrounding areas dry can indicate a soil-infiltration problem rather than a simple grading issue.

Cost benchmark: Detroit-area yard drainage projects average about \$4,405, with published ranges around \$1,860–\$6,950. [9]

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK

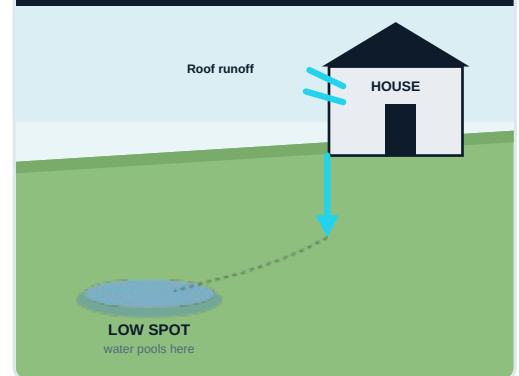


HOMEOWNER TIP
Small steps add up.

- 1 Watch the water during a storm. Next time it rains hard, walk outside and watch where the water comes from. Look at downspouts, driveways, slopes and low spots. Finding the source is often the first step toward finding the right fix.
- 2 Move roof water away from the house. Make sure downspouts send water away from the foundation and toward a safe place. A clogged or poorly aimed downspout can put a surprising amount of water in one small area.
- 3 Mark the wet spots. Take a picture of places that stay wet after the rest of the yard dries. Write down how long the water remains. This simple record can help you tell the difference between a small low spot and a larger drainage problem.

\$4,405

average Detroit-area cost for a full yard drainage project; most fall between \$1,860 and \$6,950 depending on yard size and how the water needs to be redirected. [9]



What these fixes actually involve:

Grading gently reshapes the slope of your yard so rain flows away from your house instead of pooling against it — usually done by adding and shaping soil.

Downspout extensions are simple pipes or flexible tubing attached to a gutter downspout, carrying roof runoff several feet further from your foundation before it's released.

Catch basins are small drains set into low spots in the yard; they collect pooling water and funnel it through an underground pipe to a safer place, like the street or a rain garden.

Why it's worth fixing: Standing water isn't just unsightly — left alone, it can rot wood, crack foundations, kill grass and plant roots that need air as much as water, and attract mosquitos. A wet spot that keeps coming back no matter the weather is worth having assessed by a professional before it becomes a bigger, pricier repair.



Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

Why do weeds keep coming back?	Weeds often exploit weak turf, bare soil, compacted ground, excess moisture or thin planting beds. Treating the visible weed without fixing the condition that created the opening usually produces a repeating cycle.
Does mowing higher help with weeds?	Yes. Taller, denser turf shades soil and competes more effectively. MSU Extension reports that lawns mowed at 3.5–4 inches can out-compete weeds better than lawns maintained around 2.5 inches. [1]
Does mulch stop weeds?	No. Mulch reduces light and can make weeds easier to pull, but it does not create a weed-proof barrier. A 2–4 inch layer is commonly recommended for landscape beds; excessive depth can create plant-health problems. [10]
When should I treat lawn weeds?	Identify the weed first. Annual weeds, perennial broadleaf weeds and grassy weeds can have different treatment windows. Use the product label as the controlling instruction, especially around ornamental plants and newly seeded turf.
Can compacted soil cause weeds?	Yes. Compaction limits roots and water movement, weakening turf and leaving openings. If a lawn repeatedly thins in the same traffic lanes, investigate compaction before simply increasing herbicide use.
Is hand-weeding worth it?	For scattered weeds in beds, yes. Pull or dig before plants mature and seed. Repeated small removals can prevent one season's weeds from becoming a much larger seed-bank problem.

Key lawn fact: MSU recommends keeping many Michigan home lawns around 3.5–4 inches to improve turf competition with weeds. [\[1\]](#)

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



HOMEOWNER TIP
Small steps add up.

- 1 Help your grass beat the weeds. A thick, healthy lawn leaves fewer open spaces for weeds. Keep the grass at a healthy height, water when it needs it, and repair bare spots instead of trying to fight every weed one at a time.
- 2 Pull bed weeds early. When you see a weed in a flower bed, pull it while it is small. It is easier to remove, and you are less likely to let it flower and drop new seeds into the soil.
- 3 Fix the reason weeds are winning. If weeds keep returning to the same place, look at the soil and the plants around them. Thin grass, bare soil, compacted ground and too much moisture can all give weeds an easy place to grow.

3.5–4 in.

MSU found that lawns kept at this height grow thick enough to shade the soil and choke out weed seedlings, while grass mowed shorter (around 2.5 in.) lets more sunlight reach the soil and gives weeds room to sprout. [\[1\]](#)



Why this matters: Weeds steal water, sunlight, and nutrients from the grass and plants you actually want. Most weed problems are really a sign of something else going on underneath — thin grass, bare soil, or soil that's too compacted for roots to spread.

How to fix it: Fix the underlying cause first, then pull or treat what's left. If weeds have taken over most of a lawn despite your best efforts, that's usually a sign it's time for a larger renovation — a lawn care professional can help plan one.



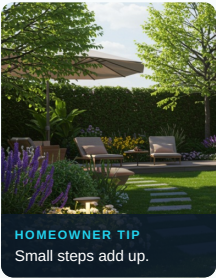
Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

How deep should mulch be?	A practical range for many landscape beds is about 2–4 inches. Too little may not suppress weeds well; too much can hold excess moisture and reduce air around plant bases. [10]
Should mulch touch tree trunks?	No. Keep mulch pulled away from trunks and stems. A mulch 'volcano' keeps the bark damp and can contribute to decay and other problems.
How often should mulch be replaced?	Check depth and condition rather than automatically removing everything every spring. Organic mulch decomposes, so replenishment is often more appropriate than full replacement.
What does professional mulch installation cost?	Current national 2026 estimates put professional mulch delivery and installation around \$75–\$325 for a standard yard. Removing old mulch, edging or adding landscape fabric can add roughly \$150–\$300. [11]
What mulch should I choose?	Wood and bark mulches are common because they improve appearance and add organic matter as they decompose. Stone can last longer but behaves differently around heat, soil and plantings. Choose for plant needs and maintenance, not appearance alone.
Should I use landscape fabric?	It can help in some beds, but it is not a universal weed solution. Fabric can make later planting and maintenance harder. Proper mulch depth, plant density and weed removal remain important.

Mulch benchmark: about 2–4 inches for many beds; professional delivery/installation commonly runs \$75–\$325 for a standard yard. [\[10\]](#)[\[11\]](#)

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



1

Keep mulch at the right depth. For many landscape beds, about 2–4 inches of mulch is enough. Measure it with a ruler before adding more. A little mulch can help with weeds and moisture, while too much can cause problems.

2

Keep mulch away from trunks. Do not pile mulch against a tree trunk or plant stem. Pull it back so you can see the base of the plant. Keeping bark dry and uncovered helps protect the plant from decay and other problems.

3

Add mulch instead of starting over. You usually do not need to remove all of last year's mulch. If the old mulch has broken down and the bed is too thin, simply add enough new mulch to bring it back to the right depth.

2–4 in.

the depth most landscape beds need — enough to block weeds and hold in moisture, without smothering roots or trapping excess water against plant stems. [\[10\]](#)[\[11\]](#)

0-2 in

2-4 in IDEAL

4-6 in

0"

1"

2"

3"

4"

5"

6"

Ideal mulch depth range

What is mulch? Mulch is simply a protective layer — usually shredded wood, bark, or wood chips — spread over soil in garden beds and around trees. It locks moisture into the soil, blocks sunlight from weed seeds, insulates roots against extreme heat and cold, and slowly breaks down to feed the soil.

Why the depth matters: Too thin a layer won't stop weeds or hold moisture; too thick and it can suffocate roots or trap so much moisture it invites rot and pests. The 2–4 inch range is the sweet spot for most beds — enough to do the job without overdoing it.



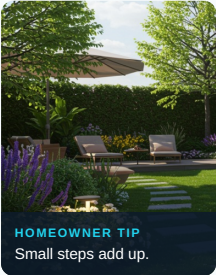
Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

When should trees and shrubs be pruned?	Timing depends on species and purpose. Pruning should remove dead, damaged or poorly placed growth while preserving natural structure. Avoid routine heavy pruning just because a plant 'looks too big.'
Can I prune a tree myself?	Small, reachable cuts may be reasonable. Large limbs, unstable trees, work near utility lines and elevated work can turn a routine cut into a serious safety risk. When in doubt, use a qualified tree professional.
What does tree trimming cost?	Detroit-area 2026 estimates put tree trimming around \$271–\$1,805 overall, with many 25–50 foot trees around \$200–\$900. Trees over 50 feet can run roughly \$400–\$2,100, with access and tree condition pushing costs higher. [12]
How do I know if a tree is declining?	Look for combinations of dead branches, sparse foliage, trunk wounds, decay, poor annual growth, root-zone problems or repeated pest/disease symptoms. One yellow leaf or one dead twig is not enough to diagnose decline.
What is the root flare?	The root flare is where the trunk begins to widen as major roots emerge. It should generally remain visible. Soil or mulch piled against the trunk can create moisture and bark problems.
How far should plants be from structures?	Use mature plant size rather than the nursery container size. A shrub that is 2 feet wide today may be 6 feet wide at maturity. Planning for mature width reduces future pruning and access problems.

Regional cost benchmark: Detroit-area tree trimming is commonly quoted around \$271–\$1,805 overall; 25–50 foot trees often fall around \$200–\$900. [\[12\]](#)

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



1

Plan for the adult size of the plant. A small shrub at the garden center can become a large plant. Before planting, check its mature height and width. Leave enough room so it will not crowd a walkway, window, wall or other plant.

2

Keep the base of the tree visible. Do not bury the lower trunk in soil or mulch. You should be able to see where the trunk widens as it meets the roots. That area needs air and should not stay covered and wet.

3

Know when to call for help. Small pruning cuts may be fine for a homeowner. Large branches, unstable trees, work near power lines or cutting from a ladder are different. For those jobs, use a qualified tree professional.

HOMEOWNER TIP

Small steps add up.

\$271–\$1,805

typical Detroit-area tree trimming cost, driven mostly by height — trees over 50 ft, or growing near power lines, cost more due to extra equipment and safety precautions. [\[12\]](#)

25-50 ft trees

\$200 - \$900

Over 50 ft

\$400 - \$2,100

Tree trimming cost by height

Why mature size matters: A shrub that looks small in its nursery pot — say, 2 feet wide — can easily grow into a 6-foot-wide plant within a few years. Always check the plant tag for its full-grown size before deciding how close to plant it to your house, walkway, or other plants.

How to fix it: Planting too close means you'll be stuck heavily pruning it, or moving it, later — which costs more time and money than spacing it out correctly from the start. For large limbs, unstable trees, or anything near power lines, call a qualified tree professional rather than tackling it yourself.



Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

Why are leaves turning yellow?	Yellow leaves can result from overwatering, underwatering, nutrient issues, root stress, pests, disease or normal aging. Check the pattern: whole-plant yellowing, older leaves first, leaf edges, veins and new growth can point to different causes.
Can too much water hurt plants?	Yes. Saturated soil reduces oxygen available to roots and can promote root disorders. Before increasing irrigation, dig or probe the soil and check whether moisture is lingering below the surface.
How often should I inspect plants?	A weekly walk-through during the growing season is a practical habit. Catching chewing, spots, wilt, dieback or irrigation problems early can prevent a small issue from spreading.
What is integrated pest management?	IPM starts with identification and monitoring, then uses cultural, physical and biological controls before targeted chemical treatment when needed. The goal is to solve the cause rather than automatically spray every symptom.
Does fertilizer fix sick plants?	Not necessarily. Fertilizer cannot correct poor drainage, root damage, disease or the wrong plant for a site. A soil test can identify pH, nutrient and organic-matter conditions before fertilizer is applied.
How often should soil be tested?	University of Minnesota Extension recommends soil testing every 3–5 years and when changing a landscape's use. Testing can provide pH, texture, organic matter and nutrient information that helps guide fertilizer decisions. [13]

Diagnostic rule: identify the pattern first. Water, roots, light, pests and nutrients can produce similar symptoms, so fertilizer should not be the default response. [\[13\]](#)

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK

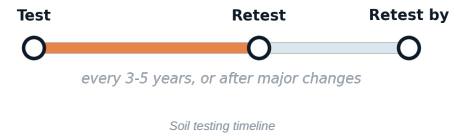


HOMEOWNER TIP
Small steps add up.

- 1 Walk your yard once a week. Take a five-minute walk through your beds during the growing season. Look for wilted leaves, holes, spots, broken stems or branches that are dying. Catching a problem early is usually easier than fixing a large one.
- 2 Check the soil before watering more. Yellow or wilted leaves do not always mean a plant needs water. Push your finger or a small tool into the soil a few inches and see whether it is actually dry below the surface.
- 3 Find the cause before treating it. Do not reach for fertilizer or a pest spray just because a plant looks sick. First look for clues and identify the problem. Treating the wrong problem can waste money and sometimes make the plant worse.

3–5 yrs

how often UMN's (University of Minnesota's) Extension recommends testing your soil, so you know what it actually needs before adding fertilizer. [\[13\]](#)



Two terms worth knowing:

IPM (Integrated Pest Management) is a simple idea with a technical-sounding name: figure out exactly what's bothering your plant — and why — before reaching for a pesticide. Often the real fix is watering differently or improving drainage, not spraying something.

UMN Extension refers to the University of Minnesota's public outreach program, which — like Michigan State's — studies practical lawn and garden questions and publishes free, research-backed advice for homeowners. Most states have a similar university extension service worth bookmarking.



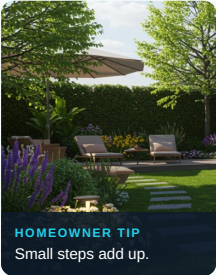
Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

How should I design a front yard?	Start with constraints: sunlight, soil, drainage, mature plant size, access and maintenance time. Then organize the yard into layers and functions instead of buying plants first.
What is 'right plant, right place'?	It means matching the mature plant to actual site conditions—sun, soil, moisture, winter exposure and available space. University extension guidance emphasizes that choosing plants for the site reduces future maintenance and replacement. [14]
How do I create privacy?	Layered shrubs, small trees, hedges, fences and screens can work together. Design to mature height and width. A plant that blocks a window at 3 feet may eventually block a walkway or overhang the house.
How do I make a small yard look larger?	Use fewer plant types, repeat forms, preserve sight lines and scale plants to the space. A simple design with clear circulation often feels larger than a crowded collection of unrelated plants.
Should I design for maintenance?	Yes. Count the real maintenance burden: mowing edges, pruning, watering, weeding, leaf cleanup and access. A beautiful design that requires weekly pruning may be a poor fit for a homeowner who wants a low-maintenance yard.
How much does a basic landscape project cost?	Detroit-area 2026 published estimates put a standard landscaping project around \$1,319–\$5,397, averaging about \$3,269. A 200-square-foot modest update was estimated at about \$905–\$2,410, while 2,000 square feet was about \$9,030–\$24,100. [15]

Planning benchmark: a local Detroit-area published 2026 estimate places standard landscaping around \$1,319–\$5,397, with an average near \$3,269. [\[15\]](#)

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



1

Look at the yard before buying plants. Spend a day noticing where the sun shines, where water collects, where people walk and where the soil stays dry. A simple map can save you from buying plants that will struggle in the wrong spot.

2

Plan for the full-grown plant. Use the mature height and width listed on the plant tag, not the size of the plant in the pot. This keeps plants from growing into windows, sidewalks, driveways and each other.

3

Make the design easy to care for. Repeat a few plant types instead of buying dozens of different plants. Keep clear paths for mowing, watering and trimming. A simple yard can look more organized and take less time to maintain.

HOMEOWNER TIP

Small steps add up.

\$3,269

average Detroit-area cost for a standard landscaping project; most fall between \$1,319 and \$5,397 depending on size and how much planting, grading, or hardscape is involved. [\[15\]](#)

200 sq ft

\$905 - \$2,410

Standard project

\$1,319 - \$5,397

2,000 sq ft

\$9,030 - \$24,100

Cost scales with project size

What counts as a 'standard' project? In the cost data above, that typically means a mid-size update to an existing yard: new planting beds, a few shrubs or small trees, fresh mulch, and maybe a small walkway or some edging — more than a single small task, but well short of a full property renovation.

'Right plant, right place' means choosing plants based on your yard's actual conditions — sun, soil moisture, winter exposure — instead of picking something just because you like how it looks. A shade-loving plant stuck in full sun will struggle no matter how well you care for it, and you'll likely end up replacing it within a year or two.

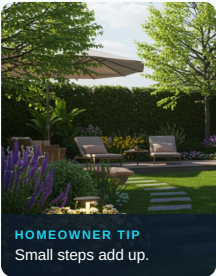
Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

How much does a patio cost?	Detroit-area 2026 estimates put a professionally installed patio around \$2,099–\$7,562 overall, averaging about \$4,707. Basic concrete was listed around \$7–\$12/sq. ft.; paver installations around \$14–\$20/sq. ft.; premium stone can be much higher. [16]
What should go under a patio?	A stable, compacted base and controlled drainage are critical. The exact excavation and base depth depend on soil, material, loading and local freeze-thaw conditions. Skipping base preparation can create settlement and uneven surfaces.
Why do patios crack or settle?	Shrinkage, frost movement, settlement, drainage problems, tree roots and inadequate base preparation can all contribute. In Southeast Michigan, freeze-thaw cycles make water management and proper base work especially important.
How much do paver patios cost?	Current Detroit-area published figures put paver installation around \$8–\$25 per square foot, with premium materials potentially reaching about \$50/sq. ft. A 10×20-foot patio could therefore span roughly \$1,600–\$5,020 before unusual site conditions or premium upgrades. [17]
What causes patio puddles?	Low spots, settlement, insufficient slope or drainage failures. The best repair addresses the cause. Simply adding a thin layer on top can create a new problem at door thresholds or adjacent surfaces.
Should I phase a hardscape project?	Often. If the budget is limited, establish drainage, grading and base work first. Decorative elements, planting and lighting can be added later without rebuilding the foundation work.

Hardscape benchmark: Detroit-area published 2026 figures put standard patio installation around \$2,099–\$7,562 overall; concrete about \$7–\$12/sq. ft. and pavers about \$14–\$20/sq. ft. [\[16\]](#)

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



1

Fix water flow before choosing pretty materials. Before buying pavers or patio furniture, figure out where rainwater will go. A beautiful patio can still become a problem if water pools on it or moves toward the house.

2

Ask what is underneath the surface. A strong patio needs more than attractive pavers on top. Ask how the ground will be dug out, what base material will be used, and how it will be compacted for your soil and the way you plan to use the space.

3

Do the important work first. If money is limited, take care of grading, drainage and a solid base before adding expensive finishes. You can add furniture, lighting and decorative touches later when the foundation is right.

HOMEOWNER TIP

Small steps add up.

\$4,707

average Detroit-area professional patio installation cost; most fall between \$2,099 and \$7,562, with material choice (concrete, pavers, or stone) as a leading factor. [\[16\]](#)

Concrete

\$7 - \$12

Pavers

\$14 - \$20

Premium stone

\$20 - \$50

Material cost per square foot

Why costs vary so much: The material you choose — concrete, pavers, or natural stone — sets the price per square foot, but what’s happening underneath matters just as much. Excavation depth, soil type, and drainage all change how much prep work is needed, so two similar-looking patios can cost very differently.

‘Base first’ means the ground underneath a patio matters more than what sits on top. A patio built on a properly compacted base, over soil that drains well, stays flat and crack-free for years. Skip that step to save money upfront, and cracked or sinking pavers within a few seasons usually cost more to fix than doing it right the first time.



Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

How often should I inspect my property?	Do a quick seasonal inspection and another after major storms. Look at gutters, downspouts, drainage paths, erosion, trees, irrigation heads, retaining walls and areas where water crosses walks.
What should I inspect after heavy rain?	Check for new ponding, soil movement, washed-out mulch, exposed roots, overflowing drains and water approaching foundations. Photograph problem areas before making repairs so you can compare conditions later.
Should leaves stay on the lawn?	A light layer can often be mulched into turf, but heavy leaves should be removed or processed. A thick layer can block light and air and contribute to winter turf problems.
How do I protect landscaping during construction?	Define equipment routes, protect root zones, keep heavy equipment off planting beds and plan material staging. Soil compaction is often easier to prevent than repair.
What does seasonal yard cleanup cost?	Detroit-area 2026 estimates put yard cleanup around \$201–\$602 for many projects, averaging about \$361. Leaf removal alone was reported around \$125–\$600. Size, debris volume and hauling change the price. [18]
What should I do with storm-damaged branches?	Do not climb or handle unstable limbs. Keep people away from hanging branches and contact a qualified tree professional when large limbs, structural damage or utility lines are involved.

Cleanup benchmark: Detroit-area 2026 published estimates put typical yard cleanup around \$201–\$602, with leaf removal around \$125–\$600. [\[18\]](#)

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



HOMEOWNER TIP
Small steps add up.

- 1 Walk the property after big storms. Look at gutters, downspouts, drains, slopes and places where water crosses the yard. Also check for washed-out soil, exposed roots or new puddles. A quick inspection can catch small problems before they grow.
- 2 Take pictures of repeat problems. If the same spot floods, erodes or collects leaves, photograph it from the same place each time. A few pictures can make it much easier to explain the problem and decide whether a repair actually worked.
- 3 Protect the soil around trees and beds. Heavy equipment can crush soil and damage tree roots even when the tree itself looks fine. Keep trucks, trailers and piles of heavy material out of planting beds and major root areas whenever possible.

\$361

average Detroit-area seasonal yard cleanup cost; leaf removal alone, if that's all you need, often runs \$125–\$600 depending on volume and hauling. [\[18\]](#)

Leaf removal		\$125 - \$600
Full cleanup		\$201 - \$602

Cleanup cost by scope

Why photograph problem areas? A photo taken from the same spot every few weeks lets you see whether a wet patch, eroding slope, or cracked walkway is getting worse, staying the same, or improving after a fix — hard to judge from memory alone. It also gives a contractor clear evidence if you need to call one in.

Why leaf removal matters: A thick, wet layer of leaves left on the lawn blocks sunlight and traps moisture against the grass, which can smother it and invite fungal disease over winter. A light, dry layer can usually just be mulched in with a mower — but anything hiding the grass underneath should be raked or blown off.



Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

Does road salt damage grass and shrubs?	Yes. Salt can injure foliage and increase soil salinity when salty meltwater accumulates in planting areas. Manage snow placement and avoid unnecessary salt near sensitive plants.
Where should I put snow?	Choose locations where meltwater will not repeatedly run across walkways, foundations, drains or sensitive planting beds. Avoid piling snow against shrubs that are exposed to road salt.
Should I prune shrubs before winter?	Not automatically. Heavy pruning can stimulate tender growth at the wrong time for some plants. Prune according to species and purpose rather than using a one-size-fits-all fall schedule.
How do I protect evergreens from heavy snow?	Avoid aggressively shaking frozen branches. If snow is heavy, let it melt when possible or use gentle support for vulnerable plants. Avoid compacting snow against shrubs.
When should I winterize irrigation?	Before sustained freezing weather, but exact timing depends on local conditions and system design. Cold-climate systems are commonly winterized by removing water from lines to reduce freeze damage.
How much can winter damage cost?	The cost is highly site-specific, but prevention is often cheaper than emergency repair. For example, Detroit-area tree trimming can reach \$2,100+ for trees over 50 feet, and compromised trees may cost more because of access and safety requirements. [12]

Winter principle: manage water, salt and snow placement before freeze-thaw cycles turn a small landscape problem into a repair project.

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



HOMEOWNER TIP
Small steps add up.

- 1 Choose a safe place for snow. Before winter, decide where plowed snow will go. Pick a spot where melting snow will not run toward the foundation, block a drain, cover a walkway or repeatedly flood a planting bed.
- 2 Keep salty snow away from plants. Snow pushed from a road or driveway can contain salt. Try not to pile it against shrubs or lawn edges. If salt damage is a concern, move snow to a safer area before it melts.
- 3 Prepare irrigation before hard freezes. Do not wait until the ground is frozen. Have the irrigation system winterized before sustained freezing weather so water left in pipes or equipment does not create expensive damage.

2 in.

a common late-fall guideline: don't mow Michigan lawns shorter than this as winter approaches — short grass has less stored energy to survive the cold.



Why not mow shorter than 2 in.? Grass cut too short heading into winter has less stored energy and a smaller root system to survive the cold, and it offers less protection for the crown — the part just above the soil where new growth starts each spring. A slightly taller cut in late fall helps the lawn come back stronger next year.

Salt = risk, explained: Road salt (and the salty snow it creates) pulls moisture out of plant tissue and builds up in soil over a season, making it harder for roots to absorb water — similar to how salt dries out food. Where you can, pile or direct salty snow away from lawn edges and sensitive shrubs.



Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

How much does landscaping cost?	For a regional benchmark, Detroit-area 2026 published estimates put landscaping at about \$1,319–\$5,397 for many standard projects, averaging \$3,269. National 2026 data puts professional landscaping around \$200–\$14,800, with an average near \$3,516. These are benchmarks, not quotes. [15] [19]
What does lawn mowing cost?	Detroit-area 2026 published estimates put a standard residential mowing visit around \$37–\$121, averaging about \$78. Lawn size, obstacles, slopes and add-on work change the price. [20]
What does a new lawn cost?	Detroit-area sod installation estimates are roughly \$1–\$3 per square foot, averaging about \$1,781 overall; larger or difficult sites and removal of an existing lawn increase the price. [21]
What does irrigation cost?	Detroit-area 2026 estimates put underground sprinkler installation around \$1,900–\$4,000 and automatic systems around \$2,400–\$3,600. Drip irrigation was listed around \$500–\$900 depending on zones and soil. [22]
What makes a quote expensive?	Excavation, drainage, difficult access, demolition, site preparation, premium materials, large plant quantities and custom construction can dominate a budget. Labor alone can represent roughly 40%–65% of landscaping cost in national cost data. [19]
How can I control the budget?	Separate must-fix work from cosmetic work. Address drainage, grading, unsafe trees and failed infrastructure first. Then phase planting, lighting and decorative features. Ask for quantities, materials, preparation, cleanup and exclusions in writing.

Cost snapshot: Detroit-area 2026 benchmarks include \$37–\$121 per mowing visit, \$1–\$3/sq. ft. for sod installation, and roughly \$1,900–\$4,000 for underground irrigation. [\[20\]](#)[\[21\]](#)[\[22\]](#)

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK

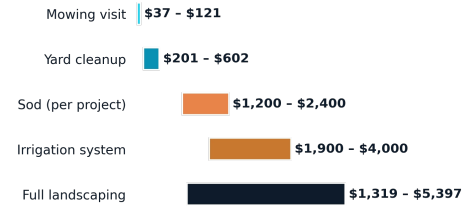


HOMEOWNER TIP
Small steps add up.

- 1 Separate needs from wants. Start with problems that can damage your home or yard, such as drainage, unsafe trees or failing hardscape. Then plan cosmetic upgrades like new plants, edging or decorative stone. This makes a big project easier to budget.
- 2 Compare the work, not just the price. When you get quotes, make sure each one lists the same basic work. Look for quantities, materials, preparation, cleanup and anything the contractor is not including. A lower price may simply leave out important work.
- 3 Keep a little extra money available. Older yards can hide surprises such as poor soil, buried debris or difficult access. A small cushion in your budget can help you handle unexpected work without stopping the whole project.

\$37–\$4,707

the Detroit-area range across common projects, from a single mowing visit up to a professionally installed patio — see how typical projects compare below. [\[16\]](#)[\[20\]](#)



Common projects, at a glance

How to read the chart above: Each bar shows the typical low-to-high price range for that kind of project in the Detroit area. A quick mowing visit sits at the low end; a full landscaping project sits at the high end because it involves far more materials and labor. Use this as a rough budgeting guide, not an exact quote.

What does '40–65% is labor' mean? On a typical landscaping project, a little under half to about two-thirds of what you pay covers the people doing the work — not materials. A much cheaper bid isn't automatically the better deal if it's cutting corners on labor, like skipping proper site prep, rather than on materials.



Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

Do I really need a landscaper?	Routine mowing can often be DIY. Professional help becomes more useful when a project involves grading, drainage, irrigation, large trees, hardscape construction, specialized equipment or recurring maintenance.
What should a quote include?	Look for the exact work, quantities, materials, preparation, demolition, cleanup, schedule, payment terms, exclusions and warranty. Two prices are not comparable if one contractor omitted base preparation or drainage.
Should I get multiple estimates?	For larger projects, two or three written proposals can expose differences in scope and assumptions. Ask each contractor to price the same basic scope so you are comparing work rather than just totals.
How do I verify a contractor?	Ask about insurance, references, written agreements and who will actually perform the work. For excavation, ask how underground utilities will be located. For tree work, ask about the qualifications and safety practices of the person doing the work.
How should I compare a low bid?	Do not judge price alone. Compare excavation depth, base material, drainage, plant quantities, soil preparation, cleanup and warranty. A lower number can reflect less work rather than lower efficiency.
When is professional expertise most valuable?	When the visible problem may have a hidden cause. Standing water can be grading or soil; yellow plants can be roots or irrigation; a failing patio can be base or drainage. Diagnosis can prevent spending money on the wrong fix.

Hiring rule: compare scope before price. A written quote should tell you what is being built, what is excluded and what happens if site conditions differ.

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



HOMEOWNER TIP
Small steps add up.

- 1 Give every contractor the same job description. For a larger project, ask two or three companies to price the same basic scope. This makes the numbers easier to compare because each company is responding to the same job.
- 2 Get the details in writing. A good proposal should explain what will be done, what materials will be used, what preparation is included, when the work should happen, how cleanup will be handled and what is not included.
- 3 Ask who will actually do the work. Ask about insurance, references and the crew that will be on your property. For tree work, drainage or excavation, ask about training and safety practices. Clear answers can prevent unpleasant surprises later.

2–3 quotes

the number of written proposals worth getting for any project beyond routine mowing — pricing the exact same scope is the only fair way to compare bids.



BEFORE YOU SIGN, VERIFY:



Insurance

Ask what coverage the contractor carries.



References

Ask for recent, similar jobs you can check.



Written quote

Scope, materials, schedule, and payment terms in writing.



Same scope

Have every bidder price the identical job.

Why get multiple quotes? Every contractor prices a job differently — quotes can vary widely depending on what's included (like site prep or cleanup) and what's left out. Asking two or three companies to price the exact same scope of work is the only fair way to compare what you're actually paying for, and it often reveals corners a lower bid might be cutting.



Common homeowner questions, practical answers, and useful numbers.

What should I do to my lawn in spring?	Let wet soil firm up before heavy equipment or repeated foot traffic. Start mowing when turf is actively growing and dry enough to cut cleanly. Repair small bare areas when soil and temperature conditions support germination. [3]
What should I do in summer?	Mow at the proper height, water by need, monitor irrigation coverage and inspect plants weekly. During heat or drought, raising mowing height can reduce stress and improve the turf's ability to compete with weeds. [1] [7]
What should I do in fall?	Fall is a strong period for many cool-season lawn renovation tasks. Remove heavy leaf cover, continue appropriate mowing, inspect trees and drainage, and prepare irrigation for freezing weather. [3]
What should I do before winter?	Finish appropriate fall mowing, remove leaves from turf, inspect drainage and trees, protect salt-sensitive plants and winterize irrigation where needed. Avoid piling snow where meltwater will repeatedly affect foundations or planting beds.
When should I renovate a Michigan lawn?	For larger cool-season lawn renovation, late summer into early fall is generally more favorable than early spring. Michigan State University Extension notes that fall conditions can support establishment while reducing competition from summer weeds. [3]
What should my annual checklist look like?	SPRING: drainage, cleanup, irrigation check, bare spots. SUMMER: mowing, watering, weeds, plant inspection. FALL: leaves, renovation, pruning where appropriate, irrigation winterization. WINTER: snow placement, salt exposure, storm-damage checks.

Seasonal benchmark: for cool-season Michigan turf, late summer/early fall is commonly the strongest window for major renovation and overseeding. [\[3\]](#)

QUICK WINS

3 SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK



HOMEOWNER TIP
Small steps add up.

- 1** Spring: start with a yard check. Look for winter damage, standing water, broken irrigation parts and dead branches. Let wet soil dry enough before heavy equipment or lots of foot traffic so you do not create new compaction problems.
- 2** Summer: protect the lawn from stress. Mow at a healthy height, water when the soil needs it, and walk through your plants once a week. During hot weather, avoid cutting the grass very short because that can add stress.
- 3** Fall: clean up and prepare. Remove heavy layers of leaves from the lawn, keep mowing while the grass is growing, and make larger cool-season lawn repairs in the fall when conditions are often more favorable. Prepare irrigation before freezing weather.

4

seasons, one repeatable rhythm — MSU notes that late summer into early fall is generally the strongest window for major lawn repairs or overseeding. [\[3\]](#)



A repeatable year-round rhythm

YOUR YEAR-ROUND CHECKLIST

SPRING

- Clean up winter debris
- Check for standing water or storm damage
- Repair bare spots once soil firms up

SUMMER

- Water deeply, a few times a week — not daily
- Mow at the correct height for your grass
- Watch weekly for pests, weeds, or stress

FALL

- Remove heavy leaf cover from turf
- Aerate and overseed cool-season lawns
- Winterize the irrigation system

WINTER

- Decide where plowed snow will go
- Keep salt away from lawn edges and shrubs
- Protect vulnerable evergreens from heavy snow



Sources & Further Reading

Key public and extension sources used to add measurable guidance and regional benchmarks. Accessed/reviewed September 2026.

[1]	Michigan State University Extension — Raise the Mowing Height for Weed and Grub Defense https://www.canr.msu.edu/home_gardening/uploads/files/RaiseMowHeight_AA%20%281%29.pdf	[12]	Angi — Tree Trimming Cost in Detroit (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/how-much-does-it-cost-hire-tree-service/mi/detroit
[2]	City of Southfield — Home & Lawn Maintenance / lawn height rules https://www.cityofsouthfield.com/departments/code-enforcement/home-lawn-maintenance	[13]	University of Minnesota Extension — Soil Testing for Lawns and Gardens https://extension.umn.edu/garden-and-home/yard-and-garden/gardening-in-minnesota/soil-testing-for-lawns-and-gardens
[3]	University of Minnesota Extension — Spring Lawn Care / lawn renovation timing https://extension.umn.edu/news/spring-lawn-care	[14]	University of Minnesota Extension — Lawns and Landscapes / right plant, right place https://extension.umn.edu/som/node/5621
[4]	Angi — How Much Does Lawn Aeration Cost in Detroit? (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/lawn-aeration-cost/mi/detroit	[15]	Angi — Landscaping Cost in Detroit (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/how-much-does-landscaping-cost/mi/detroit
[5]	U.S. EPA WaterSense — Statistics and Facts https://www.epa.gov/watersense/statistics-and-facts	[16]	Angi — Patio Cost in Detroit (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/how-much-does-it-cost-install-patio/mi/detroit
[6]	U.S. EPA WaterSense — Labeled Controllers https://www.epa.gov/watersense/watersense-labeled-controllers	[17]	Angi — Paver Patio Cost in Detroit (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/brick-paver-patio-cost/mi/detroit
[7]	U.S. EPA WaterSense — Watering Tips https://www.epa.gov/watersense/watering-tips	[18]	Angi — Yard Cleanup Cost in Detroit (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/yard-clean-up-cost/mi/detroit
[8]	U.S. EPA WaterSense — Soil Moisture-Based Controllers https://www.epa.gov/watersense/soil-moisture-based-irrigation-controllers	[19]	Angi — Landscaping Cost (2026 national data) https://www.angi.com/articles/how-much-does-landscaping-cost.htm
[9]	Angi — How Much Does Yard Drainage Cost in Detroit? (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/how-much-does-it-cost-install-landscape-drainage/mi/detroit	[20]	Angi — Lawn Mowing Cost in Detroit (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/lawn-mowing-cost/mi/detroit
[10]	University of Minnesota Extension — Mulching for Soil and Garden Health https://extension.umn.edu/garden-and-home/yard-and-garden/gardening-in-minnesota/mulching-for-soil-and-garden-health	[21]	Angi — Sod Installation Cost in Detroit (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/how-much-does-it-cost-lay-sod/mi/detroit
[11]	Angi — Mulch Delivery and Installation Cost (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/mulch-delivery-and-install-cost.htm	[22]	Angi — Lawn Sprinkler System Cost in Detroit (2026) https://www.angi.com/articles/how-much-does-it-cost-install-sprinkler-system/mi/detroit

Important: Cost ranges vary with property size, access, materials, soil, demolition, permits, disposal, labor and site conditions. Local ordinances can also vary by municipality. The Southfield 8-inch grass rule cited in this guide is a City of Southfield requirement—not a statewide Michigan mowing-height law.