

Free From Landscape Firms

A phone book and your local newspaper can be great tools to get your garden going and growing this spring. No, you're not going to shred them & use them for mulch (although, this is not a bad idea).

What you want to do is look up the landscape firms in your local area. Make an effort to contact as many as you can until you come up with at least one willing to "work" with you. And, no, you're not going to pay them to work in your yard.

Landscape firms have a problem that you can help them solve. In their work, they have a lot of yard waste and plants to dispose of and they are usually forced to pay fees in order to get rid of these items. If given the choice, most would rather give the "waste" away for free than to pay fees to have it hauled away. This is where you come in.

All you do is contact the landscape firms and see if they have items that you need that they need to get rid of. What is their "waste" may be exactly what you are looking to use in your garden. By taking the time to find them and to introduce yourself (and your garden), you can come to their aide.

If you are looking for specific garden items, you can ask for specifics. An easier way may be to just come right out and ask if they have anything they are paying to get rid of. Either way, you stand to gain "goodies" for your garden and they stand to save some dump fees. Most landscape firms have the following items after finishing a job:

- Mulch, especially if you live in an area where lawns are being mowed. Just think of all that fresh grass mulching away in your garden beds, or between the rows of your veggies. If you've got room for the company's truck to come in and dump a large pile, and you don't live on the other side of no where, this might be a win-win

situation for you and the landscapers.

- Cuttings. Again, this depends on your area and time of year, but think of all the plants that are being cut back, pruned and trimmed back. With a little work and a couple years worth of patience, you will see new shrubs and trees for your effort.
- Plants. Most commercial accounts pay for their landscape company to switch out their plant displays regularly. Where better for the old plants to find a new home than your garden?

Be warned, you'll more than likely receive a number of "no thanks," "we already donate to someone else" or "that would be too much work." Don't be discouraged. You can explain how you are willing to come to them to pick through the old plants, grab the cuttings before they hit the dumpster or bring trash cans for them to fill with grass clippings. The easier you make it for them, the more likely that they will let you help yourself to their waste. If they still say no, thank them for their time and move onto the next company on your list.

I've had a landscape company agree to dump a truckload of their trimmings in my yard with no extra work for them. In this case they were happy to do so because then they didn't even have any dump fees to pay. It meant that I did have the job of digging through pile to find the items worth saving and then preparing the rest of the pile to be used as mulch, but it's almost like Christmas uncovering an armload of hydrangea trimmings (how many plants can I get from an armload?), the equivalent of flats of bedding plants or enough ground cover starts that I can share (and trade) with all my friends.

Grab your list and get your garden growing!