

# Employees Enjoy Great Outdoors

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**The effects of COVID-19 on workplace trends has shined a spotlight on outdoor spaces.**



*As employees return to their offices across the country, landscape contractors have found opportunities to serve commercial clients by creating or improving outdoor areas for both employees and visitors at a business. Here are ideas to consider.*

**Britt Wood, Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Landscape Professionals ([NALP](https://www.nalponline.org/)), shares insights.**

As businesses welcome back employees and customers against the backdrop of COVID-19, it's important to make people feel safe and ensure that workplaces are inviting. One way for property owners and businesses to achieve this is to take advantage of the site their building occupies and transform outdoor areas into occupant-friendly spaces.

"If you can create some sort of outdoor amenity, I think that's going to be one of those things that will really change the re-entry process," says Gib

Durden, vice president of business development for HighGrove Partners, LLC, a landscape maintenance, design-build, and water management service company based in Austell, GA. "That's probably the biggest thing is just being able to utilize the property you have and have some area where people can congregate six feet away, but outside."

**Choosing The Right Spot.** If an outdoor area has to be created from scratch, take the time to consider the three site elements of shade, grading, and drainage first. "Every office or site has a potential spot for an outdoor space," Durden says. "Look for somewhere on the property that already has shade to a certain extent, so you don't have to spend a lot of money creating shade with shade sails and umbrellas."

Durden says another aspect of selecting a site for an outdoor space is choosing an area that is relatively flat. The less grading and retaining walls are needed, the more cost-effective the job will be. "The big thing is to really look into the drainage situation, natural flow," he says. "You don't want to have a spot that always creates a ponding or washout area if you don't put it in the correct spot."

Durden says the most important element of improving a property with inviting outdoor areas is for the client to go through a design process with their contractor to look for the existing opportunities on the site.

**Features To Attract People.** Fire pits are an obvious addition to encourage socialization in a residential setting. However, these aren't the most practical for commercial sites as most people don't sit by a fire at 10 o'clock in the morning.

Building patios surrounded by greenery can serve as a lunchtime retreat for employees to recharge without having to leave the campus. An outdoor patio can also be used for meetings. Water features can be particularly soothing, and they can block out any sources of noise that may be near to outdoor spaces.



(Photo courtesy of HighGrove Partners, Austell, GA, a member of NALP)



To create a successful landscape, assist clients in determining what features their employees and visitors will find most appealing in outdoor spaces. (Photo courtesy of LandCare, Frederick, MD, a member of NALP)

Depending how interactive the people on site are will ultimately determine what features are best suited for your space.

**Quick Fixes For Outdoor Spaces.** One easy amenity to add on a property are walking trails. Taking a quick walk can get workers' creativity flowing and companies that encourage exercise as part of their wellness program often receive discounted rates on healthcare. "People like to get out and be a little bit active," Durden says. "I see a lot of times as I'm visiting sites [that] people [are] just walking around the perimeter of the parking lot, which is not really the most ideal way to go get some exercise. So, you can create some sort of path system. It doesn't even have to be paved. It could be on gravel or a hardwood mulch."

Finally, simply investing in beautiful landscaping can be effective as people are more likely to want to linger in a space that is both relaxing and attractive.

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