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Landscaping With Limited Mobility In Mind

by James R. Ziglinski, C.R.



Some time ago, one of my best clients was in an auto accident, resulting in his use of a wheelchair. Since he knew that our remodeling firm had a personal interest in limited mobility, he called upon us to alter his home to suit his needs. Doorways, bath, and kitchen areas were quickly adjusted so that he was able to roam freely within his home. However, something was incomplete. Even with his acceptance of the situation and his positive attitude, he still felt "imprisoned."

I discussed it with him and we agreed upon what the problem was. Before his accident, he was a planting and landscaping nut. I recalled how we had to take special care when working on the exterior of his home. He wanted to make absolutely sure that we didn't damage his flower beds or bushes.

From this conversation, we realized that we had to adjust his entire yard in order to return this activity and fill the void that seemed to take him over.

Assessing The Landscape

I rolled him out into the yard and we laid out a plan of attack, or in this case, adaptation. The yard was laid out into grids. Each square of the grid was surrounded by a walkway, which was constructed similar to his plank and style deck and ramp. This allowed for an even access and an aesthetically pleasing flow of movement throughout the yard area.

The squares were raised a bit, like large planter boxes. They were constructed from multiple materials, such as rail timbers, field stone, and so on. Each of the squares were easily accessible to him on all sides.

We then rolled over to the rear wall of the home. We made sure that the exterior water bib outlets were raised to suit his needs. They were fitted with quick-snap disconnect couplings, for ease of operation of the garden hoses. The faucet valves were changed to bar handles and hose winding reels were securely mounted so that they would not tip or fall when he drew the hose lines out.

Electrical Adaptations

The electrical outlets were also raised to suit his needs. In fact, some were added to the garage's exterior walls. This helped eliminate the need for long extension cords when he used power trimming equipment.

A tool cabinet was also constructed. This was in conjunction with a work bench that he could roll right up to when he worked on his flower potting or transplanting projects. Everything was easily accessible and hung within his grasp. The work area was illuminated with exterior lighting in both high and low voltage fixtures. We also used low voltage lighting around the planters.

By the time the whole project was completed, one could easily see that it was just what the patient ordered. The yard was simply beautiful and he was able to make it that way. We may have roughed it in for him a bit, but he added the finishing touches with his prize flowers and beautiful bushes.

An Improved - And Accessible - Landscape

While we did our thing in the yard, he adapted his extra chair to meet his planting requirements. A table was laid across the arms so that he could move large plants and bushes around. He also fabricated a hoist system which was connected to the back handle of the chair. It swung in and out over his head and enabled him to place his plantings in the beds the way he wished. This unit was completely portable and would take its place with the rest of his tools at the end of the day.

Of all the mobile adaptation projects we've done, this is one of which I am most proud. It gave him what he needed, his feeling of independence, and showed us that there's much more than we realized to adapting a home.

The entire environment should be looked at. It is important not to anticipate the needs of clients; rather, the contractor should get their input and suggestions as well.

Opening communication lines can go a long, long way in bringing back purpose and mobility to a disabled client or loved one.

We hope this information has been helpful to you! If you have any further questions, please visit our website at www.aroundyourhouse.net, or contact Jim at Around Your House.

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