

Sustainability Assignment

Comparing the True Costs of Landscape Materials

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This Fall I will be teaching a class that introduces students to many different materials and supplies that are used in the Landscaping Industry. Traditionally, we compare these materials for cost, longevity, aesthetics and workability. I will include a new component into these comparisons- the impact on our environment of manufacturing, transporting, installing and disposal of the products. Hopefully, students will gain more understanding about evaluating products and how to educate clients.

This activity might be used in any class that asks students to evaluate and compare materials or methods. I expect to work with many of these same students in a variety of classroom settings in future quarters and we will come back to this often. For example, a hands-on Landscaping class will look at a selection of mulches and weed control methods and we can discuss and evaluate our options including the sustainability aspect. A design class will look at materials to build patios and decks, walls and fences for a project that aims to be as sustainable as possible.

I plan to introduce this activity early in the quarter because I want it to be a part of how students look at all of the materials and supplies covered. I will introduce the concept in lecture and then provide a few examples of common products. The 'bag tax' that is currently on the ballot in Seattle has brought up some very interesting issues that make us realize that many of these questions do not have a simple solution. By examining these issues, students exercise critical thinking as well as quantitative skills.

After introducing the topic and providing examples, I will show students a variety of templates they might use to compare materials or products. We will also look at websites and other resources for the information necessary to make the comparisons. Students will work in groups of 3-4 to examine a variety of materials for construction of a patio and then make a choice and provide a rationale for that choice.