People enjoy attractively designed gardens, public parks and playgrounds, residential areas, college campuses, shopping centers, golf courses, and parkways. Landscape architects design these areas so they are not only functional but also beautiful and harmonious with the natural environment. They plan the location of buildings, roads, and walkways, and the arrangement of flowers, shrubs, and trees. They also design and plan the restoration of natural places disturbed by humans, such as wetlands, mined areas, and forested land.

Working with building architects, surveyors, and engineers landscape architects help determine the best arrangement of roads and buildings. They also collaborate with environmental scientists, foresters, and other professionals to find the best way to conserve or restore natural resources. Once these decisions are made, landscape architects create detailed plans indicating new topography, vegetation, walkways, and other landscaping details. In planning a site, landscape architects first consider the purpose of the project and the funds available. They then analyze the natural elements of the site, such as the climate, soil, slope of the land, drainage, and vegetation. They also assess existing buildings, roads, walkways, and utilities to determine what improvements are necessary. At all stages they evaluate the project impact on the local ecosystem.

After studying and analyzing the site, landscape architects prepare a preliminary design. To address the needs of the client, as well as the conditions at the site, they frequently make changes before a final design is approved. They also take into account any local, State, or Federal regulations, such as those protecting wetlands or historic resources. In preparing designs, computer-aided design (CAD) has become an essential tool for most landscape architects. Many landscape architects also use video simulation to help clients envision the proposed ideas and plans. For larger scale site planning, landscape architects also use geographic information systems (GIS) technology, a computer mapping system.

Throughout all phases of planning and design, landscape architects consult with other professionals, such as civil engineers, hydrologists, or building architects, involved in the project. Once the design is complete, they prepare a proposal for the client. They produce detailed plans of the site, including written reports, sketches, models, photographs, land-use studies, and cost estimates and submit them for approval by the client and by regulatory agencies. When the plans are approved, landscape architects prepare working drawings showing all existing and proposed features. They also outline in detail the methods of construction and draw up a list of necessary materials. Landscape architects then monitor the implementation of their design, while general contractors or landscape contractors usually direct the actual construction of the site and installation of plantings.

Some landscape architects work on a variety of types of projects. others specialize in a particular area, such as street and highway beautification, waterfront improvement projects, parks and playgrounds, or shopping centers. Still others work in regional planning and resource management; feasibility, environmental impact, and cost studies; or site construction. Increasingly, landscape architects work in environmental remediation, such as preservation and restoration of wetlands or abatement of stormwater run-off in new developments. Historic landscape restoration is another area where landscape architects increasingly play a role.

Landscape architects most of their time in offices creating plans and designs, preparing models and cost estimates, doing research, or attending meetings with clients and other professionals involved in a design or planning project. The remainder of their time is spent at the site. During the design and planning stage, landscape architects visit and analyze the site to verify that the design can be incorporated into the landscape. After the plans and specifications are completed, they may spend additional time at the site observing or supervising the construction. Those who work in large national or regional firms can spend considerably more time out of the office traveling to sites.