

## A Fun Time with Realtime Landscaping Pro Software

By Veronica C. Valero

© June 2008

How *doth thy* garden grow? Mine has less weeds but still is not filled with California natives and the vegetable garden that I hoped to plant by now. But, I'm getting closer, thanks to landscaping software programs like **Realtime Landscaping** that are helping me "visualize" before committing time and money to actually doing the work.

### FOUR OPTIONS

Idea Spectrum ([www.ideaspectrum.com](http://www.ideaspectrum.com)) has four landscaping software programs to assist in the process. The low-end program is **Realtime Landscaping (RTL) Photo** for \$59.95 which allows you to import a digital picture of the space you want to landscape and then you add plants and other elements. **RTL Plus** for \$79.95 includes **RTL Photo** and allows you to design houses, decks, fencing, edging, lawns, and gardens in 3D. You can also do a walk-through using 3D animation. And, you can create movies and snapshots to share with others. **RTL Pro \$99.95** include features found in the *Photo* and *Plus* versions but adds water features like sprinkler systems, fountains, pools, spas, ponds, streams. **RTL Architect \$249.95** does all of the above and includes Computer Aided Design (CAD) tools – this one is for the professionals and the do-it-yourselfers who are not afraid to take the time to learn the software. I reviewed **Realtime Landscaping Pro**.

### LEARNING CURVE

As with any software program, there is a learning curve. Those with experience working with photo and design programs, that use picture boxes and photo editing tools, will have an easier time mastering these programs. Software companies can make this easy or challenging. *Idea Spectrum* made it a bit challenging by not providing a video overview either with the CD or on-line, or giving more details in the written material. *Realtime Landscaping* written material includes a brief 27 page Quick Start Guide pamphlet, their on-line User Guide, and the Help menu. I really don't like reading manuals to learn new applications. A video tutorial would help the user get excited and started. A small investment for a great return. Unfortunately, there were some features I couldn't figure out how to use because I couldn't find it in any of the written resources. Frustrating. The company does have a free help phone line, but only during business hours. I'm a night and weekend owl.

### THE 3D DESIGN

*Realtime Pro* actually includes two programs. The first is the 3D design tool which lets you build a house and garden from the ground up. You need to come to this program with all your data: size of land, dimensions of house, etc. Or, you can use one of their templates to get you started. Once I got to know the dropdown menus, toolbars, and buttons features I found it easy to create. Once done, I could use the 3D walk-through to do a virtual tour my design! The navigation was extremely easy. The software adds ambient sounds like birds singing and water flowing in my garden. My 7-1/2 year old came over to see what I was doing and said "Cool! Can I play?" He thought I was playing a computer game!

### THE PHOTO DESIGN

The second software program that comes with this package is *Realtime Photo*. I love this photo-based landscaping design program! If you don't have time to design your house using the 3D program, go out and take a digital picture of your house or area you want to landscape, then import it into this program. I did. (See "*Before*" picture.) Now, all I needed to do is select my plants from the 4,000 provided. I could also use their catalog to select other elements like gazebos, benches, birdbaths, flower pots, people and even pets, including a duck! You can do a "Save as..." and create a different version using different color schemes or elements and then share with others. My son, again, was walking by and said "Wow! Look at the plants in front of our house!" (See "*After*" picture.) He was so excited he brought in his friends to debate which layout was the best.

Another great feature is that if the program doesn't have a plant or element you want to include, you can take a picture of it and import it into the program. Or, do what I did and go on-line to visit websites that have pictures, I went to [www.mostlynatives.com](http://www.mostlynatives.com) to get pictures of my California native plants. Then used the photo editing program to crop and cut out the undesirable elements. Unfortunately, one of the bugs that I haven't been able to resolve is that the empty background I knocked out imports in as a solid color. The "Help" menu and on-line Users Guide didn't help. I'm hoping my call to the company will resolve this problem.



***BEFORE: How my yard really looks!***



***AFTER: How it could look!***

***Features added: Plants in front, A dog, a green waste can, a cat, a bird bath, two boys, a chair and a table.***

***Realtime Landscaping Pro*** is well worth the money with two-programs in one. I think the *Photo* feature is an excellent way to get started. But the 3D design feature can really give you a sense of space and is more accurate. If you want professional designs to print, invest in the *Architect* version. This could easily be a 4 star program, but I give it 3 stars because the written manuals weren't detailed enough to figure things out and solve problems. As they say, the devil is in the details.

To view my "before" and "after" landscaping creation in color and read the another landscaping review, visit my website [www.ComputerTutorMarin.com](http://www.ComputerTutorMarin.com)

*Veronica C. Valero is a Golden Gate Computer Society member and started her own computer tutoring business five years ago in Marin County California. For more info [www.ComputerTutorMarin.com](http://www.ComputerTutorMarin.com) or 415-897-2302.*