

# Lawn & Landscape MAINTENANCE

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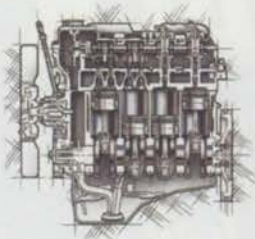
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# Lawn & Landscape MAINTENANCE

VOLUME 16, NUMBER 6

JUNE 1995

Cover Photo:  
Jim Krebs Photography,  
Aurora, Colo.

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# Editor's Focus

CLASS OF '95. Late spring always calls to mind the season of commencement, when graduates of everything from kindergarten to medical school finish their studies and step into the next phase of their lives.

It reminded me of the landscape students from nearly 40 colleges around the country that I saw compete this March at the Student Field Days in Acworth, Ga., which was sponsored by the Associated Landscape Contractors of America.

I wonder how many of those graduating seniors have landed good jobs in this industry? They looked bright, capable, eager to work. They obviously prepared themselves well for the competition, which was tough and thorough. They made finely crafted wooden tables, planted entire landscape plots, installed mockup irrigation systems, identified hundreds of plants and weeds and even operated front-end loaders through a particularly tricky course. They even got experienced contractors to sign on the dotted line during the sales competition.

But the one thing no competition can measure is a person's ability and desire to work hard and stay motivated. Many contractors I've talked to bemoan the lack of "good people" to hire. While I admit that the students I saw could be characterized as the "cream of the crop," I also suspect that there are many more "good people" as yet undiscovered all around the country.

A good employee doesn't have to be a graduate of a landscape program, or even a graduate of a college. A good employee doesn't have to come prepared with knowledge about agronomy or horticulture or even business management. Those are bonuses in this industry.

Plenty of contractors would be more than happy to hire a person who is eager to learn, who is willing to work hard, who applies what he or she learns, who is motivated, who takes responsibility for personal actions and who can communicate. Most of these qualities will see a person through life successfully and none of them can be taught very well. Each person has to work hard to develop these attitudes or skills.

Students being what they are, many at the Field Days were more focused on the competition than on the recruiting program, which was going on hot and heavy. Some of the country's largest and most progressive landscape firms were represented there, waging a competition of their own to attract the best prospects from the schools that participated.

I wondered at the time if many of those students were aware of the high caliber of companies represented at this event. Did they know that some of those firms could be called "progressive" and "sophisticated," in



any business? Were they aware of how valued, and valuable, they will be at these companies? Did they have any idea of how much they will be able to grow personally and professionally at these firms?

Contractors who say they can't find any "good people" might want to look in the mirror and ask themselves why a person would want to work for them. What do they offer to the Class of '95? How will they compete for entry-level people against fast-food franchises that offer a signing bonus? (Some do, you know).

Do they give employees the basic comforts of good wages and benefits, job security and respectful treatment? Do they train them properly and give them the right tools to perform their jobs proficiently from both a technical and personal aspect? Do they offer a career path that motivates employees to stay with the company long term?

A tight job market means that contractors have to be inventive and go that extra step to convince those potential "good people" to commit to their company.

One firm that has developed a workable approach to a tight job market is Swingle Tree & Landscape Care, which is the subject of our cover focus story on page 24. Its emphasis on cross-training and building a career path gives its employees new options they may not have otherwise considered.

Our article on customer service (Business Management Series Part 6, page 69) offers additional ideas for getting and keeping "good people." While the contractors interviewed for this article initially talked about serving their clients, the conversations inevitably switched to issues dealing with the "internal" clients — employees. It works both ways, I guess. You have to instill a good attitude in the employee before he or she can share it with your customers. ■

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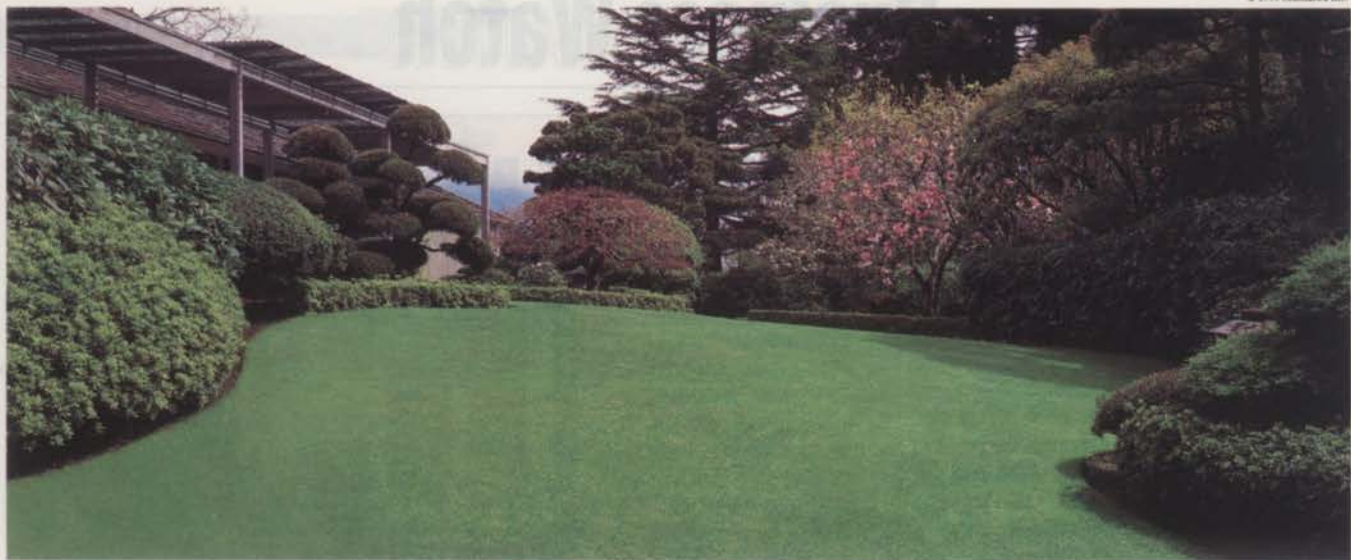
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*Cindy Code is on the board of trustees of the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation*



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Investment options include bond and stock funds, balanced funds and money market funds. The annuity's value fluctuates with the performance of the investments you choose.

Variable annuities are an excellent way to save over the long term. The assets grow on a tax-deferred basis during the initial "accumulation" phase. It can then provide monthly income payments or provide a guaranteed death benefit — which gives it an unquestionable advantage over most other market-sensitive investments.

**WHAT ABOUT TAXES?** "Tax-deferred" means that no current taxes are due on the accumulated earnings on the investments in your variable annuity. All dividends, interest and short- and long-term gains are reinvested in your annuity, and thus, remain tax-deferred. You do not pay taxes until you actually withdraw the earnings. This means that 100 percent of the annuity's earnings continue to work for your benefit until annuity payments begin. You may also alter your investment mix at any time — without tax consequences.

This enables the assets with your variable annuity to compound faster than if they were invested in currently taxable investments.

**WITHDRAWAL OPTIONS.** You may take par-

## CONTRACTORS PLAN '95 PURCHASES

Lawn and landscape contractors will spend a major portion of their 1995 budgets on trees and ornamentals, trucks, bedding plants, irrigation equipment, fertilizers and mowers, according to the latest *Lawn & Landscape Maintenance* reader survey. The study, conducted by Research USA, asked random samples of our 48,000 readers to

give an average amount spent for a variety of business purchases.

Those specifying average planned expenditures ranked trees and ornamentals first at \$28,660, trucks second at \$18,950, bedding plants third at \$8,680, irrigation equipment fourth at \$8,590, fertilizers fifth at \$7,760 and mowers sixth at \$7,700. Other planned purchases include: loaders (\$4,310), turf seed (\$3,380), pre-emergent herbicides (\$3,330), postemergent herbicides (\$3,280), debris handling equipment (\$2,970) and insecticides and hand-held sprayers (both at \$2,960).

Additional categories included: computers (\$2,390), uniforms (\$1,840), lawn renovation equipment (\$1,540), landscape lighting (\$1,500), organics (\$1,300), engines (\$1,040) and fungicides (\$990).



tial withdrawals or receive a lump-sum payment from a variable annuity at any time. You may also elect to annuitize your contract. Depending on which distribution option you choose, the IRS considers each monthly check to include a partial return of your principal, which is tax free.

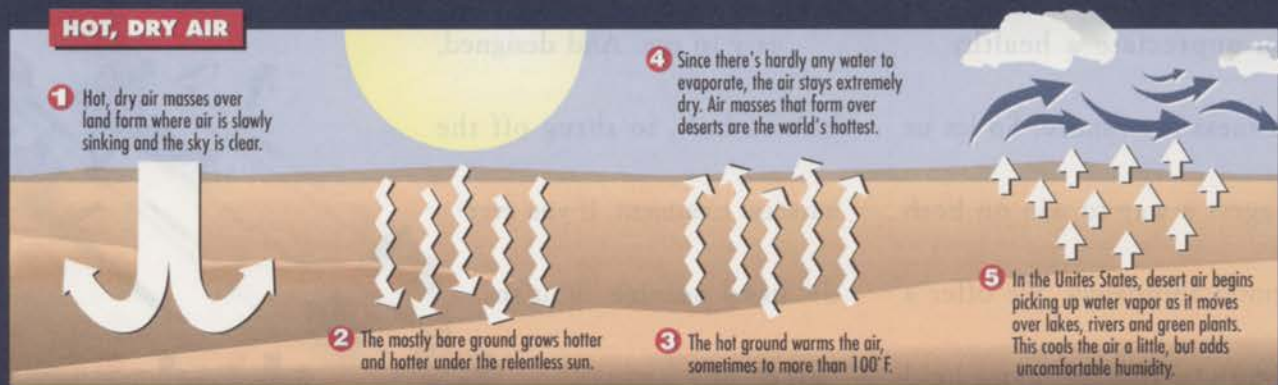
Should you need liquidity, provisions of your plan may enable you to withdraw all of your accumulated interest, or up to 15 percent

of the annuity's total account value per year, free of insurance company charges.

Withdrawals from the interest portion of a tax-deferred annuity will result in taxable income and, prior to the owner's attaining age 59 1/2, may also be subject to a 10 percent penalty. Withdrawals made as a result of death or disability are not subject to penalty. — *John Houlihan, Dean Witter Reynolds Inc., Melville, N.Y.*

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Environmental Forum

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# Environmental Forum

## REDUCING PESTICIDE USE.

The Georgia Green Industry Association is developing a reduced-pesticide landscape design for Georgia's urban environment, according to its trade publication, the *Journal*. The move is in response to ongoing public and governmental concern about the use of pesticides in home and urban sites, the report said.

The project has evolved from continuing research on the pest resistance qualities of certain woody ornamentals and turfgrasses, as well as the effect of greenhouse cultural factors on pest insect problems both during production and afterward in the landscape.

Presently, selected plant material are being planted in various combinations to determine how the need for pesticide applications can be reduced. This includes the use of pest resistant and pest-susceptible plants grown with very limited use pesticides as compared to the use of pest-susceptible plant material grown under "normal" chemical pest management.

The "normal" level is being determined through a survey of application practices by metropolitan Atlanta lawn and landscape companies. Once the reduced pesticide landscape beds are established and the normal level determined, the impact of landscape management practices will be evaluated in terms of plant quality and pest problems.

The *Journal* also noted that the Georgia Station Research and Education Garden is currently being developed for projects like the reduced-pesticide landscape design. With an emphasis on research, the Garden will be open to growers, landscapers, educators, students and other scientists interested in seeing ongoing research and its results.

**BAN WATCH.** Industry equipment-use ban watchers are reporting that, while there's no waning in the efforts of some communities to limit or eliminate the use of certain outdoor power equipment, their number of victories has been curtailed. Here's a sample of news from some of the hot spots:

- In Davis, Calif., in suburban Sacramento, the Davis Enterprise reported that City Council is approving the formation of an ad hoc committee to study new leaf blower restrictions and a possible education program for users of leaf blowers. The good news is a representative of the landscape industry was named to the panel.

- Officials in Tiburon, Calif., near San Francisco, discussed a leaf blower ban under pressure from the city's planning commission, according to the *Marin Independent Journal*. Council has been less than enthusiastic — Mayor Andrew Thompson admitted



that no one had complained to him personally about the ban, and Councilwoman Nicky Wolf agreed. "There's no question the noise is annoying. But I haven't had a single person mention it to me," she said.

- The city of Seal Beach, Calif., has instituted an educational program to curb "abuses" by leaf blower operators, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Complaints revolved around flying dust and debris rather than noise. Brochures listing leaf blower do's and don'ts are being distributed to users, and educational seminars are being conducted by city parks officials. A complete ban was not instituted due to the water use savings that blowers provide, but a ban has been threatened if the educational program fails to result in better usage of leaf blowers, city officials warned.

**BE PREPARED.** As the spring and summer lawn care season hit full stride, so too does national media coverage of lawn chemical use. Negative media reports tend to come fast and furious this time of year, and it will help you to be aware of the media's activities in this area. Here are a few tips from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America:

- When articles appear in the newspaper about pesticides and human health, be ready to respond appropriately and reasonably with a letter describing your company's practices and safety record. National professional associations such as the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, Professional Grounds Management Society, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America and others can provide guidance in composing such correspondence.

- Be prepared for questions about any protective gear you need to use during applications. When customers ask, let them know

that you are following the label instructions as required by law, and use the analogy of the X-ray technician. Even though occasional X-rays are completely safe for patients, the technician requires protection against repeated exposure.

- Be aware for the possibility of legislative initiatives that attempt to restrict pesticide usage in your state. Activists understand that media attention can be generated by introducing an anti-chemical bill in the spring — it's the most likely time for it to occur.

**BILL ENDORSED.** The Minor Use Crop Protection Act of 1995, H.R. 1352, introduced in Congress in late March, will be effective in helping to keep niche market pesticides from being taken off the shelves if passed, according to Ben Bolusky, director of government affairs for the American Association of Nurserymen. An AAN representative sat on the executive committee of the Minor Crop Farmer Alliance, which drafted the bill.

The bill would bring regulatory relief for minor use pesticides from 1988 FIFRA reform that required manufacturers to reregister all pesticides and their uses by 1997. The expense of reregistering marginally profitable formulations is forcing manufacturers to consider discontinuing certain products. Such actions could result in smaller market areas for growers, tighter plant availability and less plant diversity for landscape contractors.

Bolusky urged green industry professionals to contact their congressional representatives to encourage the passage of this bill.

**MANAGING SPRAY DRIFT.** Regardless of how careful you are in the application, drift from spray applications is possible. The Michigan Turfgrass Foundation made the following suggestions:

- Use nozzles that produce coarser droplets when applying pesticides on targets that do not require uniform droplets.
- Keep the boom closer to the spray.
- Keep the spray volume up and use nozzles with larger orifices.
- Keep the spray pressure up, and make sure pressure gauges are accurate.
- Use additives and thickeners if needed.
- Follow label recommendations to avoid drift with highly volatile chemicals.
- Avoid spraying on extremely hot, dry days, especially near sensitive vegetation.
- Do not spray when conditions favor atmospheric inversion.
- Do not spray when winds are greater than five miles per hour.





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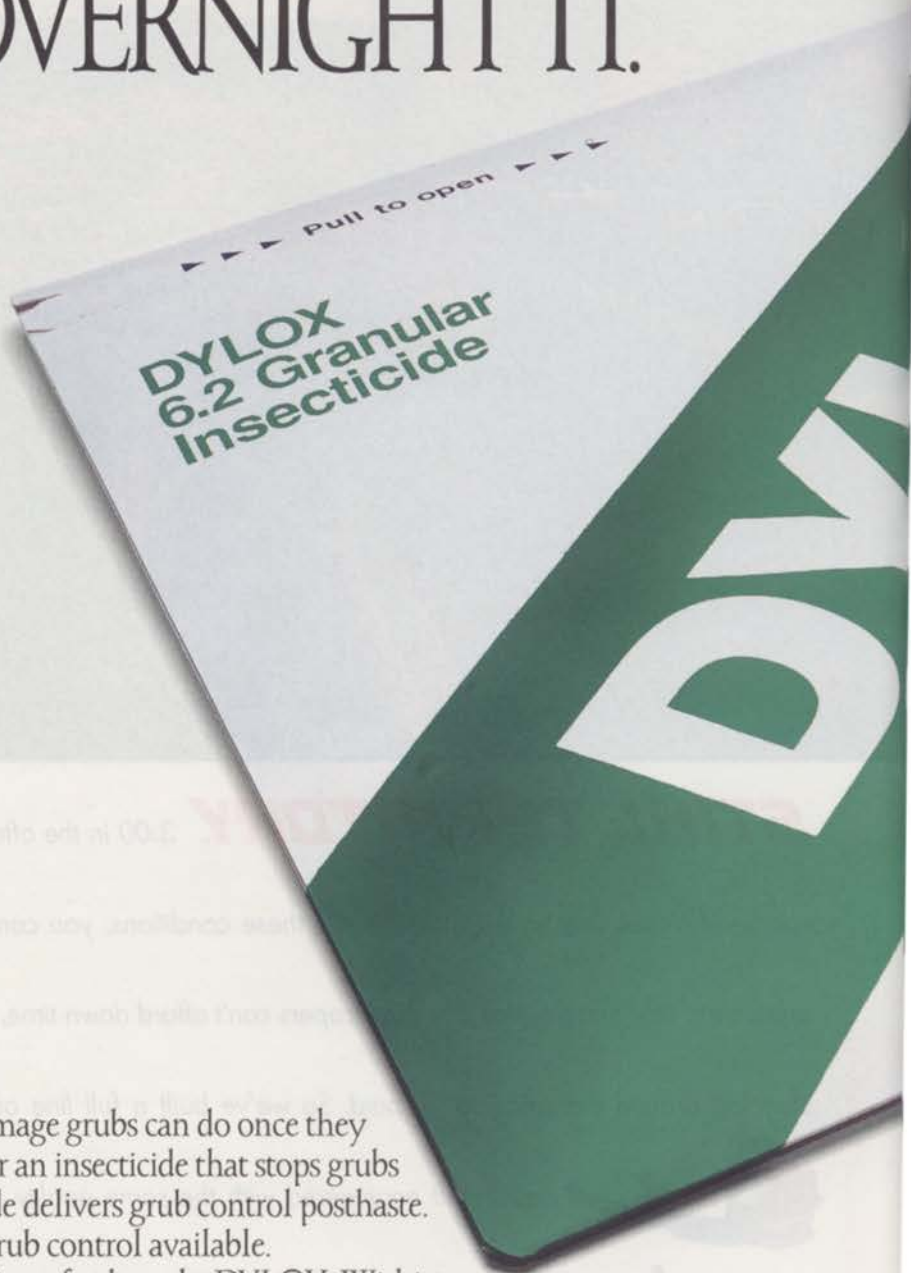
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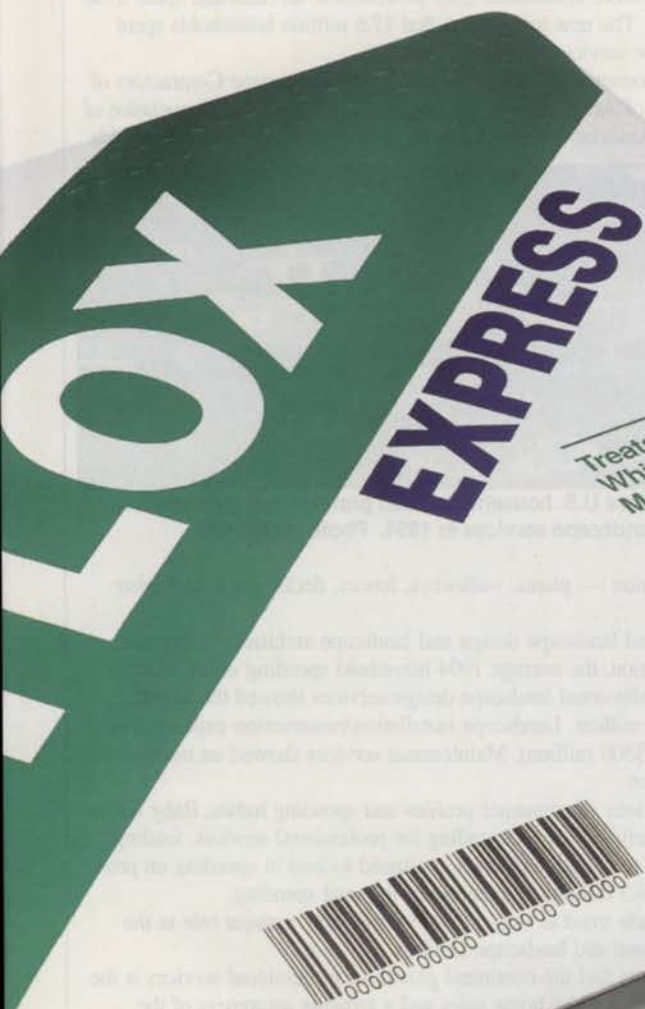
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## NEWS DIGEST

### **GIE Show Taps Plumb as Keynote Speaker**

Charlie Plumb, a former POW, will give the keynote presentation at the sixth annual Green Industry Expo, to be held in Fort Worth, Texas on November 13 through 16. The exposition will open immediately after his speech and will include the popular Outdoor Equipment Demonstration, to be held at Trinity Park on Thursday, Nov. 16.

### **Taylor-Dunn Acquires Myers Truck & Caster**

Developing one source for material handling trailers and utility vehicles is a priority at Taylor-Dunn Mfg., Anaheim, Calif., which recently acquired Myers Truck & Caster Co., Nashville, Tenn. The move will give the company a wider range of product offerings, as well as the ability to build custom trailers and vehicles.

### **BlueBird International Sold to Investor Group**

Doug and Bev Zehrung, owners of BlueBird International, Englewood, Colo., recently sold the 34-year-old lawn equipment firm to an investors' group headed by Dick Cornelius of Fort Collins, Colo. The Zehrungs will continue as consultants until January, 1996.

### **V&B Manufacturing Expands for Higher Production**

A new addition to V&B Manufacturing's Walnut Ridge, Ark., facilities will give the company a 50-percent increase in its capacity to produce landscaping tools. The expansion program includes a new dry kiln facility, as well as the acquisition of a saw mill plant in Centerville, Tenn.

### **Mitsubishi Invests in Fiber Optic Lighting**

Mitsubishi Corp. and its American subsidiary, Mitsubishi International Corp., have invested \$840,000 in Fiberstars Inc., Fremont, Calif. The deal calls for Mitsubishi to supply Fiberstars with plastic optical fiber for conversion into indoor and outdoor lighting products.

### **Bradshaw Adds Landscape to Name**

Bradshaw Companies of Houston, Texas, has changed its name to Bradshaw Landscape. The move more accurately reflects the company's range of services, which includes landscape architecture, design and construction for a variety of the area's residential and commercial properties.

## **Gallup: Professional Lawn and Landscape Services Continue to Grow**

THE LATEST GALLUP survey to track spending on the professional lawn and landscape industry shows a healthy rate of growth, reported the American Association of Nurserymen. In fact, the survey noted that 300,000 more households used professional services and spent \$900 million more in 1994 than in 1993. The new totals show that 17.6 million households spent \$13.4 billion on lawn and landscape services during the year.

The survey, which was jointly sponsored by AAN, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, the International Society of Arboriculture, the Professional Lawn Care Association of America and the National Arborist Association, found that an additional 1.1 million households expect to purchase those services this year.

The U.S. Homeowner Landscaping and Lawn Care Survey interviewed a representative sample of 1,986 households about their 1994 spending. The data have a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent. Services were defined as:

- *Lawn/landscape maintenance* — lawn fertilization, mowing, renovation, insect or weed control, pruning and mulching.

- *Landscape installation/construction* — plants, walkways, fences, decks, pools and other water features.

- *Landscape design* — professional landscape design and landscape architecture services.

According to the Gallup organization, the average 1994 household spending on all of these services rose 5 percent to \$761. Professional landscape design services showed the largest increase, rising from \$488 to \$869 million. Landscape installation/construction expenditures rose to \$5.9 billion (an addition of \$300 million). Maintenance services showed an increase of \$200 million to a total of \$6.6 billion.

The survey showed strong indications of consumer profiles and spending habits. Baby boomers aged 30 to 49 accounted for nearly half of all spending for professional services, totaling \$6.2 billion. Those people living in the South and West continued to lead in spending on professional services, accounting for \$9.3 billion (69 percent) of the total spending.

Gallup pollsters also noted a definite trend to suggest that women play a major role in the decision to purchase professional lawn and landscape services.

According to AAN, industry experts feel the continued growth of professional services is the result of strong consumer confidence, healthy home sales and a growing awareness of the value-added benefits of professional lawn and landscaping services.



More U.S. households used professional lawn and landscape services in 1994. Photo credit: KEI

## **Growers Reject Plants for America Promotion**

The Garden Council reported that grower respondents to a survey on the Plants for America promotion order rejected the idea by an overwhelming 85 percent.

The survey was conducted by Ernst & Young LLP during March of this year. If approved, the order would have been enacted by Congress to mandate contributions from growers across the nation in a unified effort to market live plants to U.S. consumers.

During the survey, 35,888 growers were contacted by mail or fax. Of those, 7,141 (or 20 percent) responded to the ballot. Ernst and Young noted that 68 percent of respon-

dents had prior knowledge of the promotion order issue.

Sources at the Garden Council said that several growers had expressed concerns about the obligatory contribution to the program, which would be based on a percentage of sales.

Also, many growers experiencing good business this year felt there was little need for an industry wide promotion effort.

The Council, which dedicated a significant portion of its annual budget and resources to educate the industry and conduct the survey, plans to reassess its charter and mission with input from supporters and members. It has discontinued all promotion order efforts.

Survey results are available from the Garden Council, at 301/577-4073.

# Lawn & Landscape MAINTENANCE

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*(Please check only one)*

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(maintenance & installation)  
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(excluding mowing maintenance service)  
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## Databank Locates Mid-Atlantic Nursery Plants

EquiSystem Landscape Appraisals Inc., Harrisburg, Pa., has developed an extensive databank that will enable users to locate wholesale nursery plants offered at more than 140 nurseries in areas of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, Ohio and Virginia.

The databank, which includes more than 3,800 available classifications including tree, shrub, perennial, wetlands and native species, is expected to expand on a nationwide basis. Users can search for plants by specific species, root packages, form and size. Customized reports list plants at specific nurseries with data on wholesale cost and mileage to the nursery site. For more information, contact EquiSystem at 717/540-1400.

## NTEP Memberships Generate Seed Reports

The National Turf Evaluation Program coordinates a nationwide network of turf research facilities that measure turf performance under a variety of weather and stress conditions. Seed researchers pay \$6,000 to submit a turf variety to the program, which evaluates and ranks the samples.

The results of the survey have always been available, but Kevin Morris, coordinator of NTEP, said that greater efforts are being made to get the research out to anyone who would like to use it.

As a part of the group's five-year plan, NTEP has instituted a membership program. For a yearly fee of \$30, members receive the full complement of reports that NTEP publishes, which include rankings of many turf types that are presently available.

For more information, contact NTEP at Beltsville Ag. Res. Center-West, Building 002, Room 13, Beltsville, MD 20705. Telephone is 301/504-5125.

## Encore Adds More Production Space

The second recent addition of production and office space at Encore Manufacturing, Beatrice, Neb., was marked by ribbon-cutting and an address from Governor Ben Nelson. Several other local officials attended the event.

The expansion, which will add another



Ribbon-cutting ceremonies at Encore's plant expansion.

22,000 square feet of space, includes a new training area for service seminars. The plant has another 60,000 square feet of space for future additions.

## Illinois Pest Management Guide Updated

The 1995 Illinois Urban Pest Management Handbook, which includes information updated on an annual basis, is available from the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign. The 230-page guide to Midwest pests reviews insect controls, weeds and plant

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diseases, as well as local pesticide regulations. Pesticide applicator equipment and calibration references are included. For more information, call 217/333-2007.

## Cable TV to Explore Expo 95 Innovations

Home & Garden Television network will tape a one-hour special at the International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Expo to be held July 30 through August 1 in Louisville, Ky.

The program, which will be hosted by Willard Scott, will focus on the many new products featured by exhibitors. He also hosts Willard Scott's Home & Garden Almanac on HGTV network.

The show is scheduled to air in late August or early September, and is expected to reach more than 6.5 million homes across the country.

## Training Kit Highlights Safe Mowing Practices

Briggs & Stratton Corp. has introduced "Knowing All About Mowing," a new educational package designed to supplement the company's 10-year-old safety program, "Knowing Mowing."

The new kit contains an eight-page brochure and poster of mowing safety and handling tips for contractors or consumers.

It also discusses reduced engine emissions and methods of reducing pollution by avoiding gasoline spills, keeping the engine tuned, recycling oil, grasscycling benefits and first-aid tips. For more information, call 414/223-7520.

## JaiTire Wins Recycling Excellence Award

JaiTire Industries, Denver, Colo., received the Helen Putnam Award for Excellence in the category of Environmental Quality Partnerships — Tire Recycling Program from the League of California Cities. The program, which operated with the City of Lancaster, recycles tires into top dressing and soil amendment products.

## British Blooms to Enter U.S. Market

Yoder Brothers Inc., Barberton, Ohio, and Peppergrove Perennials, Lapeer, Mich., have joined together to form a joint venture to introduce perennial varieties developed in Great Britain. The new company, Blooms

of Bressingham, North America, will produce and market a wide variety of perennials developed by Alan and Adrian Bloom, well-known British horticulturists and nurserymen.

## Environmental Landscape Buys Moss Landscaping

Environmental Landscape Services Inc., Houston, Texas, purchased the Austin division of Moss Landscaping Inc. in April. The combined landscape installation and maintenance company will continue to be known as Environmental Landscape Services, with 77 employees in the Austin area.

## Body Language of Trees Seminars Scheduled

Claus Mattheck, a physicist who has spent his life studying trees as physical structures, will offer three one-day seminars on "The Body Language of Trees," a study on how to detect when trees become hazardous.

The seminars will be held Aug. 28 in Mahwah, N.J.; Aug. 30 in Cleveland, Ohio; and Sept. 1 in Chicago.

For more information, contact John Kirkland at Tree Care Educators, 503/254-0482.

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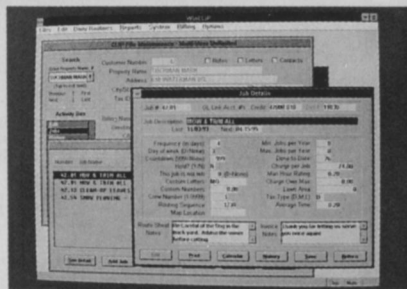
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# Association News

THE FOURTH annual MAPPA Grounds Maintenance Conference, cosponsored by the **Professional Grounds Maintenance Society** and the **Association of Physical Plant Administrators for Colleges and Universities**, will be held July 19-20 at Illinois State University. The 1995 conference will feature two keynote speakers — George Toma, playing field consultant with the Kansas City Royals and turf consultant to the National Football League; and Mike McCartney, speaker, trainer and consultant with green industry credentials.

In related news, **PGMS** announced that the 1995 edition of *Who's Who in Grounds Management* is available. The 80-page guide lists all PGMS members, as well as all Certified Grounds Managers, association officers, bylaws and award winners.

The **Associated Landscape Contractors of America** recently announced the winners of its Employee and Fleet Safety Contests, which covers the period of Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 1994. The awards are given in categories according to the total number of man-hours worked over the contest period.

## For more information...



### ALCA

12200 Sunrise Valley Drive  
Suite 150  
Reston, VA 22091  
800/395-ALCA

### PLCAA

1000 Johnson Ferry Road,  
NE, Suite C-135  
Marietta, GA 30068  
800/458-3466

### MRTF

P. O. Box 2285  
W. Lafayette, IN 47906  
317/494-8039

### PGMS

120 Cockeysville Road  
Suite 104  
Hunt Valley, MD 21031  
410/584-9754

### APLD

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Chicago, IL 60603  
312/201-0101

### IA

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Participating contractors reported on the number of time-lost accidents and labor time lost during the contest period.

The first-place winners in the overall employee and fleet safety record category are: N.E. Peterson & Associates, Lake Bluff, Ill. (1,243 to 46,180 man-hours); Rentokil Environmental Services, Riverwoods, Ill. (49,629.3 to 107,120 man-hours); and Green Seasons Lawn & Tree,

Dover, Del. (107,582 to 707,240 man-hours).

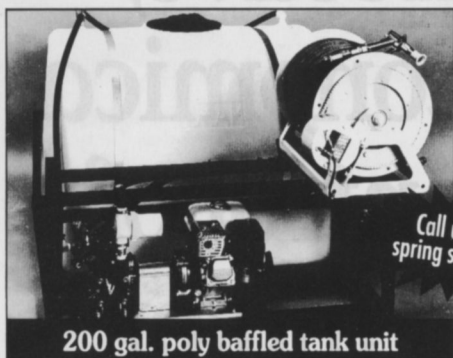
In related news, ALCA is accepting entries for its 26th annual Environmental Improvement Awards. Entry deadlines are June 15 for interior design entries, and Aug. 18 for exterior design entries.

In addition, ALCA will be hosting three Masters in Management for the Land-

*(continued on page 20)*



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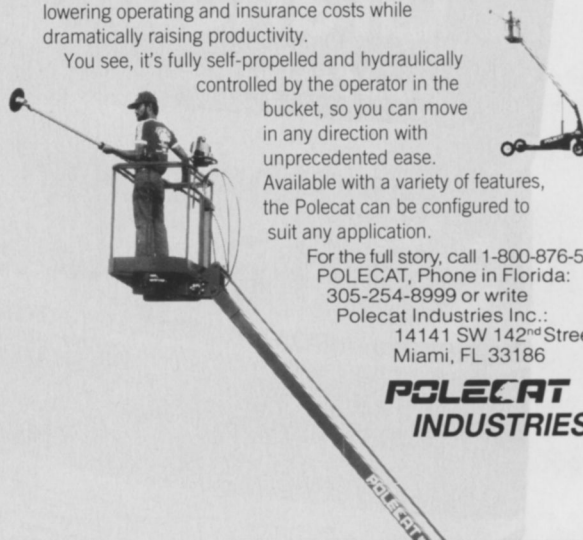
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\*Per ANSI B175.2-1990

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## Association News

(continued from page 18)

scape Industry seminars. They are: July 28-29 at the Harbor Court Hotel, Baltimore; Aug. 18-19 at the Omni Ambassador Hotel, Chicago; and Sept. 15-16 at the Westin Hotel, Denver.

A record number of educational programs for landscape, agriculture and golf course irrigation are scheduled for the 16th Annual International Irrigation Exposition and Technical Conference, to be held Nov. 12-15 in Phoenix, Ariz. According to the **Irrigation Association**, professional seminar speakers Steve Miller and Bruce Merrifield will provide additional marketing and distribution expertise.

Sessions are planned on the use of new technology in efficient design, installation, operation and maintenance of irrigation systems. Many programs will be presented in English and Spanish.

IA also reported that the **American Society of Horticulture Science** will hold a two-day conference in conjunction with the Expo beginning on Nov. 15. For more information about the Expo and both association's programs, contact IA.

The **Professional Lawn Care Association of America** announced the publication of a new brochure designed as a consumer awareness tool. "Tips on Choosing a Lawn Care Service" can be used as a billing stuffer or handout at local community meetings. Other PLCAA publications available for consumer use are "A Healthy Lawn is in Your Best Interest," "ABC's of Turf Benefits," "What You Should Know About Lawn Care Products and Services" (U.S. and Canadian versions) and "Grasscycling Guide." Contact PLCAA for discount ordering information on these brochures and related video products.

The **Midwest Regional Turf Foundation** is planning two upcoming events for lawn and landscape professionals. On July 25, MRTF will hold its Midwest Regional Turf Field Day at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind. Attendees will see the latest in turfgrass research taking place at the University, including cultivar trials, pest management studies and turf studies.

On November 14-16, also at the University, MRTF will hold its Turfgrass and Ornamental Seminar. This workshop, for

the beginner and the advanced professional, will review various turf and ornamental topics.

The **Association of Professional Landscape Designers** recently announced that it selected CAG Management Company Inc., Chicago, to handle the day-to-day management and administrative functions, effective this past March.

Jack Lagershausen, a corporate officer and vice president of CAG, was named the association's new managing director. Lagershausen has been associated with the management firm for 10 years, and brings more than 25 years of association leadership experience to this position. He currently serves as the executive director for the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation and the Turf Equipment Technicians Association.

**IN BRIEF...**Kathy Kurth, co-owner of Barefoot Grass, Madison, Wis., was named Person of the Year by the **Grounds Management Association of Wisconsin**...Denny Church, Church Landscaping Co. Inc., Lombard, Ill. won the **National Landscape Association's** Hall of Fame Award. Church has been active in the landscape industry since 1963. ■

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# Irrigation News

## IA's Kimmell Briefs Congress On Concerns

THE IRRIGATION Association is boosting its input to Congress and the administration about irrigation technology and management, as both the Farm Bill and the Clean Water Act are on the legislative agenda.

Tom Kimmell, executive director, recently presented briefings to the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. He emphasized the technological capabilities of equipment in commercial, landscape and agricultural irrigation systems.

Kimmell asked Congress to reward those who invest in efficient technology instead of punishing those who use wasteful irrigation practices. Congressional leaders questioned him at length following the briefings.

## New Jersey Adopts IA Exam for Licensing

New Jersey recently adopted the Irrigation Association's contractor certification exam as the basis for its new irrigator licensing program. The state will add questions to the exam that pertain specifically to the region. The first

licensing course was scheduled for this month.

There is no grandfather clause for the new licensing program. All irrigation contractors in the state of New Jersey must be licensed by Dec. 31, 1996, or face penalties. Contractors who install or repair turf irrigation systems will have to retest every two years to maintain their credentials.

## Hunter Offers Self-Study Training Aids

"Precipitation Rates and Sprinkler Irrigation" is the first of a series of irrigation training modules developed by the educational services department of Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif. The program, which can be used in a self-study format, also includes an instructor's manual, 75 slides, a slide rule for calculations and student manuals.

The first module explores precipitation rates and their importance in the design and installation of efficient irrigation systems, with emphasis on determining proper rates and selecting appropriate head and nozzle combinations. Hands-on practice, problem solving and advanced topics also are presented. For more information, contact Hunter at 619/744-5240.

## Wilson Named New IA Education Director

Tim Wilson, a certified irrigation contractor, auditor and designer, is the new educational director of the Irrigation Association. Formerly with Turf Equipment & Irrigation Inc., Midvale, Utah, he has extensive experience in irrigation as both a contractor and distributor. He will coordinate IA education and certification training from his base in Logan, Utah.

## Weather-matic Acquires Valcon

In an effort to expand markets and offer more irrigation products, Weather-matic, Dallas, has acquired the line of PC-based irrigation control products from Valcon Automatic Irrigation Equipment, South El Monte, Calif. The line of hardware and software include independent field satellites and control software that can be linked electronically to monitor irrigation systems.

Engineering, research and development and manufacturing will be moved to Weather-matic's facilities in Garland, Texas.

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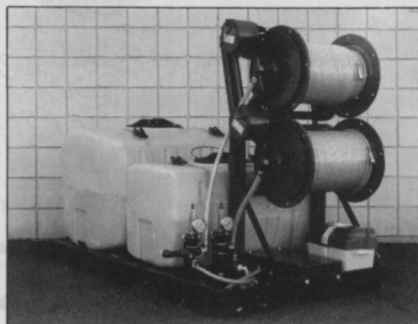
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# Leading The Pack

*Common-sense management and a willingness to take chances is a way of life at Swingle Tree & Landscape Care. Both elements work together in a company that knows where it's going and what it does best.*

*By Susan Gibson*

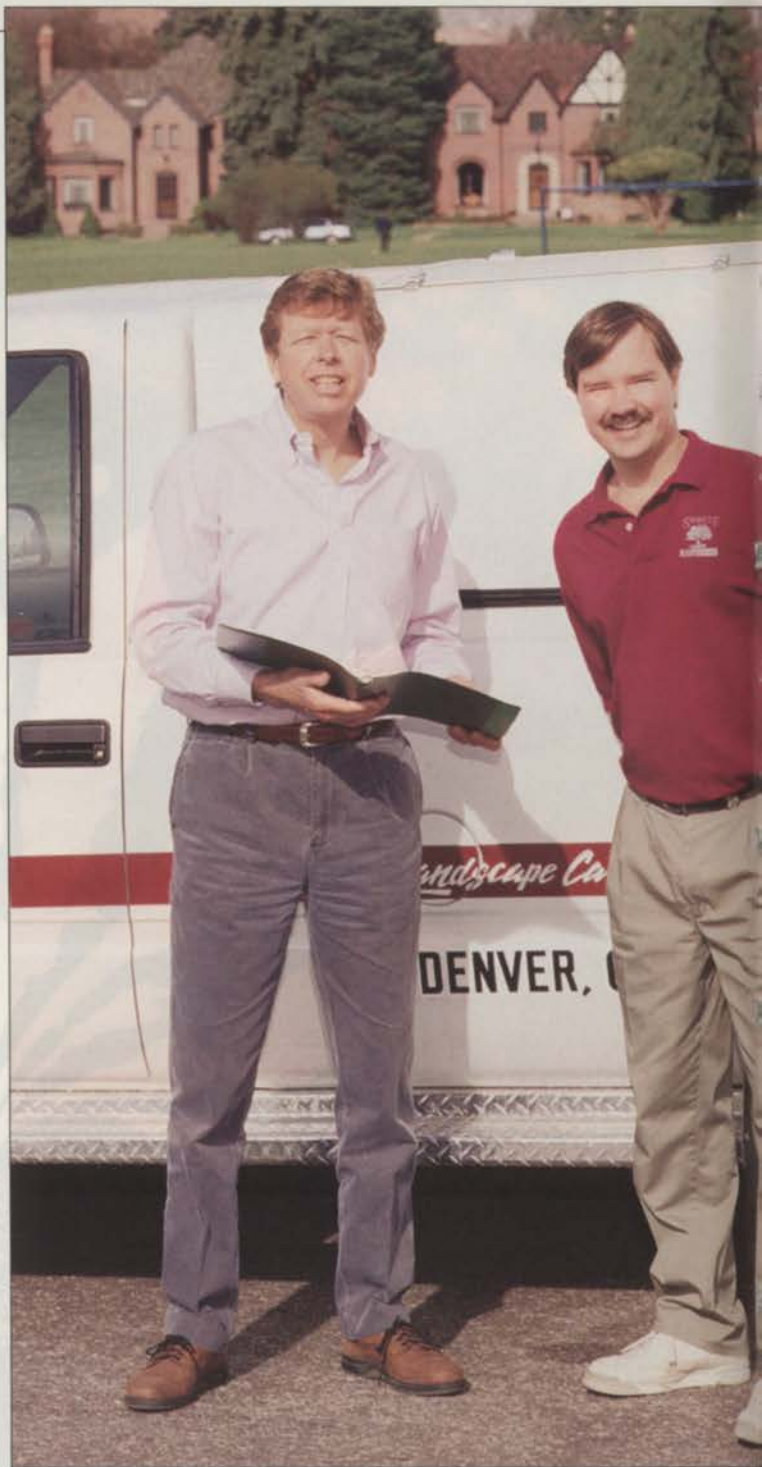
THERE'S NO "soup du jour" management going on at Swingle Tree & Landscape Care, Denver, Colo. According to Tom Tolkacz, vice president, the style more closely resembles a "good, solid blocking and tackling" kind of management.

That's not to say that things don't change at Swingle. Quite the opposite is true. The company's motto is "Stay ahead of the pack," and its managers are more than willing to take risks and try new ways to get the work done efficiently and profitably.

This ability to accept new ideas, tempered with common-sense management, has seen the company into its 48th year of business. What distinguishes it from others is that Swingle knows its place.

**CAREFUL MARKETING.** The story of Swingle's growth is a prime example of a company learning to understand its strengths. It started in the late 1940s as a tree expert firm, doing planting, spraying, pruning and removal of large trees. Early on, it was one of the larger tree companies in the area, noted David Dickson, president and owner. Its strongest market has always been residential work.

"In 1974, we started our chemical lawn service as an add-on," recalled Dickson. This service grew gradually as an ancillary offering to company clients. But tree services were always the major offering.



"We had been planting trees for 40 years and we were pretty efficient at it," said Dickson. "But growing demand from our customers gave us the opportunity to do larger, full-scale landscape installation jobs rather than limiting ourselves to small, single-tree plantings."

By the late 1980s, Swingle offered both landscape design/installation and irrigation installation, retrofit and maintenance work. The company's experience with subcontractors was disappointing enough that it learned to work on its own and rely on internal efficiencies to control production variables. "Now, we can promise dates and stick to them religiously," Dickson said. "If we lose control, we'll lose the efficiency factor. We're cognizant of what we do well."

The quest for efficiency led managers to split the tree work into two separate departments: Large tree pruning and removal (over





David Dickson, left, and Tom Tolkacz try to encourage creativity at SwingleTree & Landscape Care. Photo credit: Jim Krebs, Aurora, Colo.

30 feet high) and ornamental services. This was also considered a matter of common sense.

"We made a personnel decision there," Dickson explained. "We decided a person who is trained to work 100 feet high in a tree should not be wasting time in a 10-foot crabapple." He pointed out the decision was also a more efficient way to use equipment, because trucks outfitted for large tree work carry different fittings than those for ornamentals.

The growing lawn services department, which offers the standard fertilization, weed control and aeration, led to more specialization in bed and border maintenance, pre- and postemergent spraying and organic programs.

An offshoot from the tree departments has been called "plant health care," which comprises spraying trees and ornamental plants to combat insects and diseases. Swingle also offers chain saw repairs and a small power equipment sales department "that supports the mechanic's costs," Dickson said.

One service that used to be offered was commercial and residential mowing, which the company got into in the mid-1980s. In 1992, its managers made the difficult decision to bail out, because "the culture and philosophy of mowing is so different from the rest of our services," Dickson recalled. "It grated internally."

"It was a good, small business. We had three or four crews and did about \$200,000 in business," noted Tolkacz. "But the mind-set there was so different from that of the rest of the organization. It just didn't fit."

Dickson and Tolkacz agreed that the low-bid aspect of mowing, and the fact that most clients see it as a "commodity" rather than a value-added service, did not sit well with the culture of specialty services at Swingle. The nearly constant changes in property managers also complicated marketing. Swingle dropped mowing and focused instead on a variety of services that were its strengths.

"By dropping mowing, we could refocus on irrigation and landscape services," said Tolkacz. "People trust us to do that work and we know our margins.

We're not interested in doing it just for the volume of work."

Swingle managers also have a strong sense of what the company does not do. "We don't sell firewood. We don't shovel snow. We don't do composting," said Dickson. "We decided we don't need to be in those businesses, that they distract us from our business philosophy."

**DEVELOPING PEOPLE.** Swingle prides itself on offering specialty services and having courteous, skilled employees. Its program to offer discounted pruning services during the winter months means that the season never ends, but it does slow down. This concerns company managers, who want to keep their skilled employees working all year.

The initial investment in training is aimed at providing efficient, quality services to customers. "One of our challenges is to

## SWINGLE TREE & LANDSCAPE CARE

**LOCATION:** Denver, Colo.

**FOUNDED:** 1947 by John Swingle as a tree care business.

Added lawn services in 1974 and other services in the late 1980s.

**OWNER:** David Dickson, president.

**PRIMARY SERVICES:** Large shade tree pruning; ornamental pruning; lawn services (fertilization, weed control, bed and borders, aeration and organic treatment programs); landscape installation and design; irrigation installation and maintenance; and plant health care (tree and ornamental fertilization, spraying and injections).

**SERVICE MIX:** Lawn care and plant health services total about 50 percent; large and ornamental tree pruning totals about 30 percent; irrigation totals about 10 percent; landscape installation and design totals about 10 percent. About 90 percent is residential; 10 percent is services to commercial clients

**EMPLOYEES:** 80 year round, full time; 120 to 130 employees in summer.

**1994 REVENUES:** \$5.5 million

**1995 PROJECTIONS:** \$6.0 million

(approximately 10 percent growth across the board)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**THE CONCEPT:** Stay ahead of the pack

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** Provide a career track for employees within the company, continue to grow into outlying geographical areas, maintain quality of services.

## PRINCIPALS

**DAVID DICKSON:** Age 55. Started in tree care in the East, relocated in Colorado and started at Swingle part-time in the late 1960s, moved up through the ranks and started the lawn service department in 1974, bought the company with a partner in 1980. When his partner retired in 1988, he took over company management.

**TOM TOLKACZ:** Age 34. Graduated from University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in turf and grounds management and forestry, interned at four places, worked in landscape installation and lawn services, started at Swingle in 1987. He concentrated on lawn services, then moved to operations manager in 1991 and vice president in 1993.

develop consistency in our departments," Tolkacz commented. An ongoing project has been to develop work standards for each service department that are easily understood as "representative of Swingle," he said. "This way, the customer knows what to expect and gets consistency between departments."

The move toward cross-training came about as a way to broaden employees' experience and also be more efficient. This system switches employees to different departments for a few weeks at a time. For instance, arborists may become aerators during the busy season, which gives them new experience and a change of pace. For the company, the system offers flexibility, with more employees able to help out during crunch times.

To Swingle managers, the idea makes perfect sense. "We'll get a better rate of return using a \$12 per hour tree trimmer for aerating

(continued on page 28)



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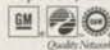
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### Cover Story

(continued from page 25)

in those three weeks than we will with a \$7 per hour guy off the street. Our employees are in good shape, they're hard workers, they know the routes, they know our system," said Dickson.

The system also gives Swingle a competitive edge during certain times of the season. "If we can have six crews out there blowing sprinkler systems and our competition only has three, we'll offer more advantages," Tolkacz commented.

Cross-training enhances another pet project of Swingle management: building a career path for employees. Denver's economic recovery and low unemployment rate means that the company has to work hard to get good people.

"Four years ago, we used to advertise saying 'this is what we demand,'" said Tolkacz. "Now we've raised our base rate in order to compete and we try to show employees how they can move up, or laterally, through the company. We recognize that not everyone wants to be a supervisor or manager but some may want to move laterally and earn more money at a job. Cross-training helps them see that."

Dickson agreed: "So many employees don't know what's out there in terms of opportunity. Cross-training helps get them to buy into the company and want to stay."

Swingle keeps in contact with approximately 40 universities as sources for college interns. "We wrote to those 40 schools and we're hiring 10 interns who are already studying to be in the industry," Dickson explained.

Once employees are hired, they are trained in Swingle's system and also have the benefit of training programs developed by several industry associations, he said.

"We belong to the National Arborist Association, the International Society of Arboriculture, the Professional Lawn Care Association of America and several state and regional associations. We use all the industry training programs available to us."

The company pays better than many others in the area, but also expects hard work, said Dickson. "We pay well. Perhaps the biggest complaint we hear from employees is that we work too hard, not that they don't get paid enough."

Beyond the standard employee benefits, Swingle offers a self-insured health and dental plan run by a third-party administrator, a credit union and a profit-sharing plan that contributes a percentage of each person's annual salary.

**CUSTOMER CONNECTION.** "I believe a customer will jump around within three years if you haven't built a personal connection with him," said Dickson.

The way to connect is through

Specialty tree and lawn services have made Swingle a major player in the Denver, Colo., residential market.

quality of the services provided, he maintained.

"If you compete with a larger company, you have to provide good services to keep customer retention high," Dickson said. Many of Denver's consumers are willing to pay for extra landscape services. "We have maybe 10,000 customers who spend an average of \$300 to \$500 a year on services."

Each year, customers sign on again for services. "We don't use automatic sign-ups because we believe there is a certain percentage who leave because of them," Dickson commented. "We require a yearly proposal, which is more expensive, but it also leaves no confusion in the customer's mind."

"Customer retention is our number-one challenge right now," explained Tolkacz. "We want to make sure that people don't leave because they don't know anyone at the company. We're trying to retain the small company service aspect."

This is challenging in a company that routinely shows growth of 10 percent or more each year. "We have a lot of customers who have been doing business with us since way back, but we also have to grow as a company to provide opportunities for the good people we have," he said. "We have to know our customers and listen to them, and not rely on fancy surveys."

Swingle assigns all customers to its eight sales representatives, who act as the single contact. All computerized forms and statements include that representative's name so that any customer can call and talk to his or her own contact. This helps foster good communication between customer and company.

The company does do telephone surveys, but past surveys showed that 95 percent of those contacted were happy with the service and the survey itself actually became a method of generating new business.

Customers also get postcards during service calls that they can use for compliments or complaints. "A complaint goes to the person who is responsible and he or she has 24 hours to get back to the customer about it," Dickson explained. "Then, they have 10 days to solve the problem or they get fined."

Swingle's culture stresses individual responsibility. "We tell our employees that a promise to a customer is a commitment and not just lip service," he said. "We try to empower them to act





Landscape design and installation have grown into a major part of Swingle's service mix.

Each department manager participates in the weekly team meeting. The group jointly decides goals, budgets and management policies. It's a combined effort that keeps every department closely in touch with overall operations.

"The system has benefitted us," Tolkacz remarked. "We try to bring professionalism into our management meetings and avoid re-inventing the wheel. The managers get a true pic-

ture of how to run a business, which fosters a feeling of ownership."

**NEW TECHNOLOGY.** Necrotic ring spot has developed into a major problem on residential lawns in the Denver area. It's a difficult disease to handle and as more customers found it in their lawns in the late 1980s, Swingle managers decided to take action.

What developed was an experimental program with researchers at Colorado State University to use several of Swingle's customers' lawns as test plots for disease control.

"Our attitude was if we have a disease problem and we can't get a handle on it, let's work with the university people and see what we can do," explained Dickson.

The program, which studied residential lawns for three years, gave researchers a chance to conduct research in real life conditions, rather than under artificial testing conditions. "What is going on daily in a customer's lawn is far different from what's going on in a university test plot," Tolkacz pointed out. "Homeowners' care is usually rather inconsistent, while the university conditions are controlled."

The study resulted in a level of "80 to 85 percent control over a two-year period, and this is a tough disease to control," he noted. The program was expensive for Swingle and the costs of the materials are "outrageous," but several competitors have referred customers to the company because of the program's success.

Swingle also took on the computer world by having its own software developed. The transition started this spring and is at times rather "painful," according to Dickson, but "we wanted something that would allow us to keep our originality." Managers reviewed several industry software programs but decided they needed a proprietary system for flexibility.

**GROWING ORGANIZATION.** A company with as many as 130 employees in peak season, 105 vehicles and thousands of clients must be organized, and Swingle's system works well.

His role is to help all departments flourish. "All the managers are busy doing their jobs. I try to work with each department and if I see a great tool one department is using, I pass it on to another to use."

This system encourages better operations and efficiency, he noted. "As our irrigation department grew, it took the routing system that we use in our lawn care and plant health departments and applied it for its own uses. This was very critical because turning on 600 sprinkler systems is a time-sensitive system — they all must be turned on within a 40-day period."

"Right now, we're planning our equipment needs for 1996," Dickson explained. "I'll get a wish list for equipment that would knock your socks off. The team will prioritize purchases, then lay it aside for a few months. Later in June, we'll revisit the budget when we have a better picture of the work volume that comes in for the rest of this year."

He noted that growth is cyclical in nature and that managers have to anticipate those cycles. "We'll watch the percentage of our costs change from time to time," he said.

"For instance, we may be building up our infrastructure by adding middle management. The overhead costs may stay at a certain percentage, then creep up as we add new people. We have to realize it may be a year later before we reap the benefits of those people, when costs stabilize again and our efficiencies are better."

The challenge of helping managers become better at their job recently took a new twist with a policy that gives managers rewards based on productivity, rather than automatic increases. The system was a radical change from methods used at Swingle in the past.

"The managers were upbeat about it because it allowed people to receive up to 25 percent of their salaries as bonus, based on percentage of sales increases or reduced cancellations," Tolkacz

(continued on page 90)

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USE READER SERVICE #79

# The Next Seed Revolution

WHEN IT COMES to turf seed, the lawn and landscape professional gets to enjoy the best of all possible worlds. While the price of seed remains relatively stable from year to year, the quality and diversity of the most favored varieties increase. In addition, seed researchers are focusing their efforts and money on specific varieties and characteristics with strong potential market niches, battling to uncover the next big breakthrough.

Of course, this creates a difficult situation for seed companies. With so many varieties available to the seed consumer, competition heats up, market prices stay low and profit margins are small. Also, research into developing significantly improved varietal characteristics is slow and very expensive work.

For all the negatives, there remains plenty of demand to go around. America's love affair with the lush, healthy lawn shows no signs of waning. The growing outcry for low pesticide and water use on turf, as well as demands for other turf enhancements, is opening doors to special market niches. This is keeping seed researchers in the labs, pumping out improved varieties and searching for the next turf revolution.

"I can't really be too pessimistic or too optimistic about the seed industry today," said Virgil Meier, manager of seed research with O. M. Scott & Sons, Marysville, Ohio. "The high level of competition to sell seed now has meant that profits are not what some companies would like to see. On the other hand, they're moving a lot of seed."

**BEAUTY CONTEST.** Over the last two decades, many of today's most common varieties of turfgrass were just gaining favor with consumers. The possibilities for improvement

seemed endless—appearance characteristics such as color and texture were being improved in quantum steps, and they were achieved with relative ease. Like a simple mouse maze, time spent winding through research was short, and there was a wedge of cheese at the end of nearly every research path.

In recent years, room for improvement has shrunk dramatically, especially in appearance characteristics. And customer demands are more sophisticated as the industry challenges researchers to develop varieties that not only look good, but that also tolerate the widest possible number of stresses from temperature extremes to insect attack.

Seed companies responded by investing more into researching these super varieties, but it has proven more time consuming—like a twisted labyrinth, it is fraught with dead-end paths and fewer rewards at the finish line.

"The opportunity for appearance improvements is not that great—a lot of the big improvements in color and texture have already occurred," said Art Wick, vice president, research and development with LESCO Inc., Rocky River, Ohio. "Now, turf breakthroughs are coming in baby steps. We're seeing incremental improvements in areas like insect and disease tolerance and seed yields."

*Popular seed varieties keep getting better, while new research responds to customer demands for turf that combines looks, low maintenance and stress tolerance.*

*By Paul Schrimpf*

As Steve Tubbs, manager of seed research with Turf Merchants Inc., Tangent, Ore., noted: "Since plant breeders have done a remarkable job of advancing the color and texture of most species, the next advancements will come in improved disease and insect tolerance.

"In the last National Turf Evaluation Program tall fescue trials, there was no statistical difference in more than 50 of over 90 varieties tested. Since the beauty contest has been won, the next logical step is increasing brown patch resistance in tall fescue, making bent-grasses more heat tolerant and increasing the disease tolerance of fine leaf perennial ryegrass."

Most of the seed companies are targeting a few strong niche areas of research to maximize the dollars they spend. Even then, it is still difficult and expensive work, because many of the most desirable traits are abhorred by nature.

For example, density, a positive aesthetic characteristic, naturally promotes the spread of diseases like brown patch due to the close proximity of the plants to one another. In bluegrass, the darker the color, the lower the yield of seed growers can expect to harvest. Consequently, darker color equals significantly higher price. Dwarf varieties mean less mowing, but slow

growth and shallow root base mean once they become diseased, they take a long time to recover and grow out again.

That's not to say that developing turf with these characteristics is impossible—just a challenge. Incremental improvements on the way to big changes mean that turf seed will continue to get better, which should come as good news to lawn and landscape contractors.

**PVP AMENDMENT.** Seed companies pushed for several years to have the Plant Variety Protection Act amended to clamp down on the number of copycat varieties on the market. On August 12 last year, the first amendment to the law since 1970 was passed, affording greater protection of turf varieties.

Provisions in the amendment include a longer varietal protection time, and the extension of protection to cover all parts of the plant, rather than just the seed. In addition, a researcher must prove that a new variety is different from the most similar variety, not that it is different from every other variety.

Gayle Jacklin, assistant vice president of marketing with Jacklin Seed Co., Post Falls, Idaho, said the law should be good news for both the industry and the customer.

"I feel the updated PVP law will greatly impact our business in the future as it relates to competitive varieties in the marketplace, international competition from both the production and marketing end and a trend for companies to bring private research programs in house, rather than rely solely on universities for germplasm."

Several seed companies are worried about the clarity of some aspects of the law. For example, the formula for determining what constitutes a new variety is based on



what percentage of a "newly developed" plant is not traceable to any existing, registered plant. Despite any weaknesses, however, most in the industry agree that the changes will make it more difficult for "me-too" varieties to gain protection.

"The market is flooded with varieties, and we have been hoping the government would move to close the window—shoring up the PVP law is a good start," said Tubbs.

**CHOOSING NICHES.** As research budgets have tightened, seed companies are choosing the focus of their new product development more carefully. Rather than a broad approach, they are tightly focused on one, or a few special niches.

Or, as Tom Stanley, marketing manager for Turf Seed Inc., Hubbard, Ore., put it, "we're trying to develop proprietary turf grasses with a measurable difference."

Some companies, such as Seed Research of Oregon, Corvallis, are targeting endophyte infection. Some are looking at leading the pack with certain varieties, like prairie junegrass from Barenbrug USA, Tangent, Ore., which has been designed for appearance-only areas around airports, hills and roadsides that get no maintenance.

Customer demands are creating new market possibilities as well. The demand for lower water and pesticide use is pushing researchers



to develop the lowest maintenance turf possible.

"There are several environmental factors that are changing demand," said Vicki Wallace, technical service coordinator for Lofts Seed Inc., Somerset, N.J. "Issues such as pesticide use reduction, use of recycled water or very little water and low maintenance are important—and the customer still wants the lawn to look good."

Wallace has reported good success with Lofts' alkalaigrass, a niche grass that withstands highly saline conditions along roadsides.

Demand for so-called environmentally friendly turf grass is starting to catch on, according to Steve

Johnson, senior research scientist with International Seeds Inc., Halsey, Ore. "It isn't huge yet, but some customers have been asking about it. It's beginning to influence buying decisions," he said.

**BABY STEPS.** Despite what many term as a peaking out in the quality improvements of many varieties, especially for tall fescues and perennial ryegrasses, there is still a great deal of value in having a highly rated variety in the NTEP trials.

Consequently, the quality of these varieties is still going up incrementally each year. "Many people buy off the NTEP test results," Johnson explained.

**Field research targets varieties that combine appearance and stress tolerance characteristics.**  
Credit: Seed Research of Oregon

"Everyone's goal is sort of the same," said Mike McCarthy, director of research with E. F. Burlingham & Sons, Forest Grove, Ore. "Darker color, finer blade, drought tolerance and disease resistance are the important characteristics."

Nearly all the seed companies will have ryegrasses and tall fescues available this season they claim are improved in some capacity. Pennington Seed, Madison, Ore., will offer three top-rated perennial ryegrasses. The mid-range product, Pennington's most recent acquisition, was added to provide a transition between the common and premium quality varieties, said Ronnie Stapp, senior vice president of seed operations, and will be available next year. Each variety features endophyte infection.

LESCO's entries for 1995 include a perennial ryegrass said to feature dark blue-green color, fine texture, excellent mowing qualities that reduce vertical growth and steminess and very high endophyte content. The tall fescue combines a finer leaf texture with very dark green color and reduced vertical growth rate.

Burlingham will present five new tall fescues, highlighting moder-

(continued on page 34)

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USE READER SERVICE #106

## Seed Research

(continued from page 31)

ately dwarf characteristics and good heat and humidity stress resistance. In the perennial ryegrasses, the company's two varieties are both low-growing but offering different levels of endophyte infection, said McCarthy.

John Zajac, general manager of Zajac Performance Seeds, North Haledon, N. J., is excited about the new generation of tall fescue, which were top performers in brown patch resistance, he said. "It's versatile, good in low maintenance areas and tolerates low mowing."

**BLUEGRASS BLUES.** From all accounts, Kentucky bluegrass is among the most temperamental of the cool season varieties, at least on the research side. Increasing quality for consumers while keeping the seed yield high enough to generate a profit has been an ongoing problem for researchers. Raising its performance under stress has also been difficult.

And, bluegrasses continue to reject endophytes, microorganisms



that, when living inside a turfgrass, have been proven to increase insect and other stress tolerance. Endophytes have been used successfully in perennial ryegrasses and in fine and tall fescues.

Despite the difficulty, Jacklin Seed honed in on bluegrass research, according to Doug Brede, director of research. "We had 15 varieties of bluegrass in national trials this past summer, and the top performers are head and shoulders above products available now. We expect the varieties will be available in 1996."

Brede noted that seed yield has to be a major consideration in the selection of what can go to market. The best looking bluegrasses are still poor seed yielders, so the seed on the shelf is the best balance of appearance and yield.

"It's a 'Catch-22' — seed farmers don't want to touch the high performing bluegrasses that don't yield enough seed, so the ones that get to market are good quality, high-yielders," he said.

Advanta Seeds West Inc., Albany, Ore., targeted high-yielding, mid-range bluegrasses that strike

Enhancing turf with endophyte is the subject of intense research. Credit: Jacklin Seed

the balance between less attractive common and high-priced elite, according to Scott Harer, sales marketing representative.

Harer said the new bluegrass for release in 1995 provides medium dark green color, good seedling vigor and rapid establishment, along with good early and late season color and strong stress tolerance. "There will be an influx of mid-performing varieties—it's an easier step up from common than to an elite," he noted.

Several other companies have upgraded bluegrass selections, including two varieties from LESCO and two from Cascade International Seed Co., Aumsville, Ore.

Barenbrug will make a new elite variety available this fall, which is said to feature excellent wear and stress tolerance and have a dark green color, according to sales manager Tom Peters.

Along with research challenges,

(continued on page 36)

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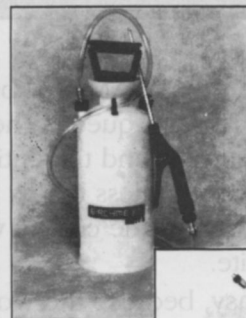


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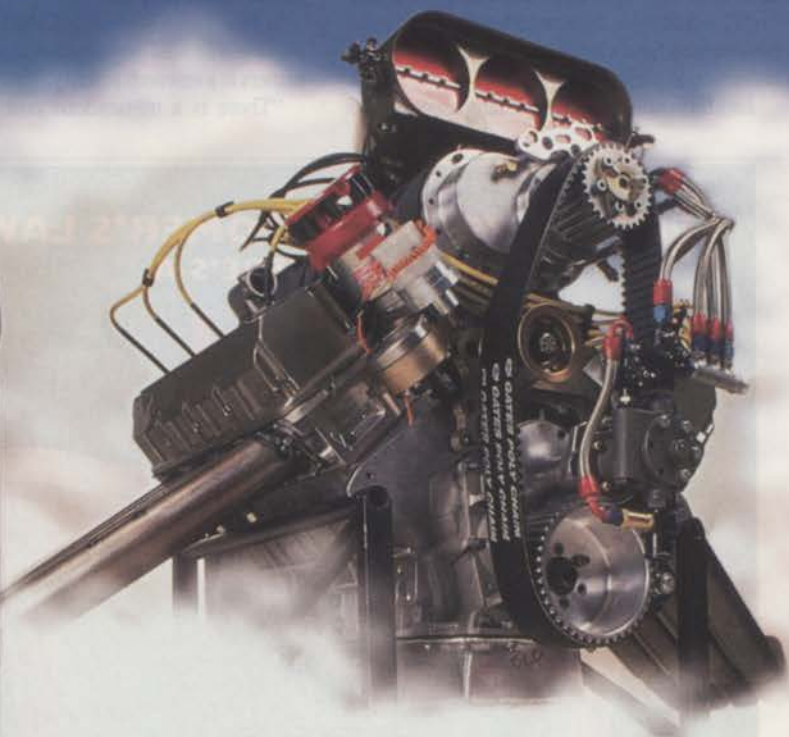
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## Seed Research

(continued from page 34)

bluegrass production is undergoing some changes in the Pacific Northwest.

A practice unique to bluegrass production — field burning — has been coming under fire in recent years as the increasing population in the region and environmental concerns have caught the attention of legislators, according to Jacklin.

"The difference between a burned field and a non-burned field can be as great as 80 percent reduction in yield," she noted.

Jacklin said the present legislature seems to be

in support of the industry's stance to develop alternatives to this practice at the corporate and university level.

**WARM SEASON.** The horizon for development in warm-season grasses is a bit clearer, as more work needs to be done to unlock their true potential. One of the biggest challenges has been to develop seeded varieties of a quality equal to those that are plug grown.

At Fine Lawn Research, Lake Oswego, Ore., making a seeded zoysiagrass available to consumers is a research priority.

"There is a tremendous cost advantage to

seeded over plugged varieties," said vice president Dennis Combs. "If we can get the seed to market, the demand is there."

Researchers are making good progress with bermudagrass, and lawn and landscape professionals can expect to see some improved varieties available.

Farmers Marketing Corp., Phoenix, Ariz., released two commercial varieties that will soon be available. Brenda Dossey, marketing manager, claimed Farmers is the first to release a fine textured, dense hybrid bermudagrass from seed. In addition, it released a new synthetic bermudagrass for turf.

International Seed is also introducing a new seeded bermuda that adapts to traditional bermudagrass and "is a big improvement over common varieties," said Johnson. A second variety is more adaptable to cold conditions and has good winter survivability.

LESCO's warm-season varieties — both bermudagrass and zoysiagrass — are nearly a decade in the making, and should be out in the next two years.

**PUSHING BORDERS.** Ronnie Duncan, professor of turf breeding and turf physiology at the University of Georgia, Griffin, searches for ways to extend the borders at which turf grass plants can survive.

In the Southeast where he works, the weather is murderous on turf. Extreme heat and humidity and a uniquely low pH soil take their toll each year.

"For all the heat stresses we have in this area, the number one chosen seed in Georgia is the tall fescue," said Duncan. "People have to reseed 50 to 80 percent of their turf area in July and August every year."

With the growing population in the Southeast, the market for a more survivable cool-season turf is obvious. So Duncan and his crew set out screening for tall fescues and perennial ryegrasses under those unfriendly temperature and pH conditions.

Duncan's group started testing tall fescues at 120 degrees F, 100 percent humidity and a pH level at 4.3 — well below the national average.

"We were looking for types that would not be limited by the soil, no matter what the soil condition," Duncan said.

There is also an advanced screening, where surviving turf plants receive further abuses, including scalping and extremely compacted soil. His work is a reversal of the kind of work that has been done in the past. Duncan selects stress tolerant varieties first, then works on the appearance characteristics.

He is pleased with the results, and expects the release of a series of true "Southeast cool-season grass" in the next few years. Some production of seed is being done in Oregon now.

The program is also expanding to try to make warm-season grasses better survivors in the region, and well over 15 seed companies are working closely with the program. ■

*The author is Special Projects Editor of Lawn & Landscape Maintenance magazine.*

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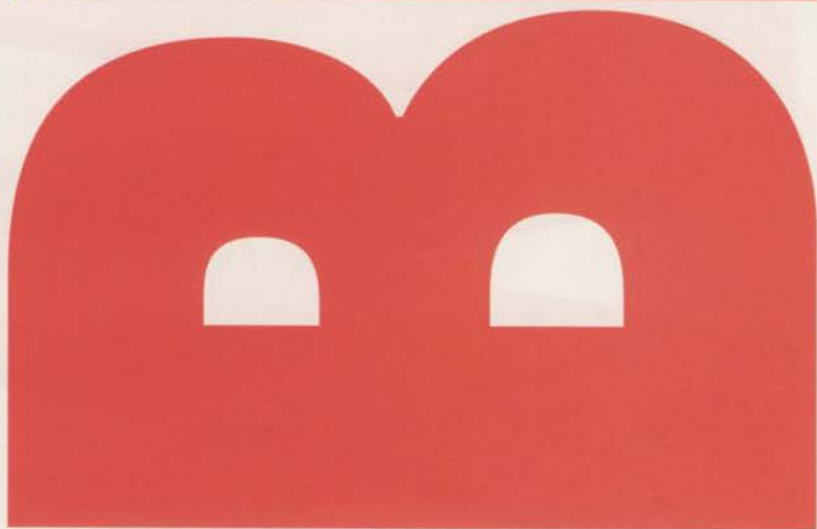
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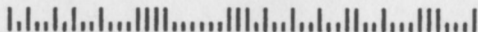
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# Landscape Lighting: New Ideas for Profit



*Innovative new technologies and clever marketing ideas are two more reasons to offer landscape lighting to both residential and commercial clients.*

*By Barbara G. Howell*

"DEDICATE the article to the landscaper. It's his business," admonished Dave Vanderwist. That comes from experience. Vanderwist's Irrigation Supply Co. in Warrensville Heights, Ohio, has sold landscape lighting since 1988. Much of that time, the company sold landscape lighting to irrigation companies.

His lighting business is growing rapidly now and he's marketing more fixtures and transformers to landscape contractors. Last year, sales of low voltage outdoor lighting amounted to about 30 percent of his sales. This year, Vanderwist estimated it will be 50 percent of the gross. "It only makes sense," he explain-

ed. "The irrigation contractor is on a property maybe once a year. The landscape contractor is there every month or every week. He's working with the flower beds and shrubs. He has access to the homeowner to talk about things that will make the landscape look great."

"Many of our high-end residen-

tial clients are receptive to the idea of landscape lighting as a way of extending the enjoyment of their landscapes at the end of a long working day," said David Luse of Arteka Natural Green in Eden Prairie, Minn. Two main reasons for lighting are "providing safe passage in the evenings and showcasing interesting aspects of the property at night."

Enjoyment of the landscape is the main selling point of landscape lighting, agreed John Baldasti, marketing manager for Lumiere Design & Manufacturing, Westlake Village, Calif. "As more dual-income families go to work and come home after dark, they aren't satisfied with seeing the landscape only one day a week. They've spent tons of money on landscaping and they are willing to spend a little more to enjoy it."

While landscape lighting is expanding, it is still not a major part of a landscape job, explained Bill Kilmer, chief executive officer of Lifescapes Inc., Canton, Ga. "If the budget for the landscaping is \$100,000, only about five percent

## SMART MARKETING BUILDS LIGHTING SALES

SUCCESS and profitability in landscape lighting are determined by the ability to market the service. Sources for this article were asked how contractors could best market landscape lighting. Below are some of their suggestions to create awareness and educate potential customers:

1. Approach customers when they are changing landscape plantings.
2. Work with developers and new home builders to make landscape lighting part of the landscape in model homes.
3. Low voltage converters are available for existing line voltage systems. Remind homeowners of low voltage's safety and economy.
4. Customers with low voltage lighting systems must return to the contractor who installed the lighting to get bulbs. Keep track of the systems you've installed and market maintenance service and replacement bulbs to these customers.
5. Customers who have installed landscape lighting systems are excellent candidates for additional lighting sales. Several contractors suggested landscape lighting is "addictive." After lighting the front yard, homeowners often want to do the side or back yard or add tree lighting on a property line.
6. When you complete installation of one home lighting system, suggest potential customers drive by it at night. The best selling tool is seeing the beauty the lights create.
7. When you complete an installation, pass out literature on landscape lighting to neighbors. Once they see the dramatic results, they are good candidates for an installation.
8. Work with a distributor or supplier who has a showroom. Custom-

ers can see the displays, choose their fixtures (and often add on more) and you can complete the installation.

9. One night when you are working late on a landscaping project at a potential lighting customer's home, ask if you can set up a couple of lights to finish. Homeowners will, generally, agree and come out to look. They'll often realize what an asset landscape lighting can be.

10. After examining the prospects for landscape lighting at a particular home, rig up a demo kit and bring along a 12-volt battery to power the demonstration.

11. Remember to market to municipalities, too. One suburb near Cincinnati, Ohio, is removing street lights and replacing them with tree and landscape lighting.

12. Consider specialty lighting projects like gazebos, decks, pools and hot tubs. One contractor does considerable work lighting outdoor weddings and receptions.

13. Include landscape lighting in your yellow pages ad.

14. Put landscape lighting on the list of services on the side of your truck.

15. Get literature from manufacturers and suppliers to pass out to customers.

16. Use reverse psychology, too. When you've completed a landscape lighting job, remind the customer of the new useable area you've just created and suggest appropriate shrubs and plantings.

17. Ask your customers about their interest in landscape lighting. Too many landscapers pass up profits because they do what the customer asks; they don't suggest services.

of that will go toward lighting.”

Lifescapes works with a number of subcontractors for design and installation of landscape lighting.

One manufacturer, Hinkley Lighting in Cleveland, Ohio, reported that many landscape contractors work on a 10 percent rule. Mark Gardner with Hinkley explained: “They should apply that to landscape lighting, too. If the house costs \$250,000, a contractor will suggest an investment of 10 percent, or \$25,000, in landscaping. He should apply that rule again and suggest they spend \$2,500 to extend the living space with landscape lighting.”

**VOLTAGE SELECTION.** While landscape lighting has been available for more than 25 years, its popularity has grown considerably since the advent of low voltage systems.

Bob Hobar of Irrigation Supply said landscape lighting is a \$120-million wholesale business and is projected to grow 15 percent per year in the next five years.

“There are two types of landscape lighting — line voltage and low voltage,” he explained. “Line voltage uses regular 120-volt current and requires a licensed electrician operating under building codes to install buried lines of conduit. Low voltage has reduced voltages, is safer and requires no special electrical training or observance of codes in most places.”

Rick Doesburg, vice president of Thorton Gardens, Maineville, Ohio, said recently that “few jobs go out of here without lighting these days,” and low-voltage “normally is the way to go.”

“Landscape lighting has come a long way in the past few years,” Luse recalled, “especially in the low-voltage lines. The quality and variety of fixtures has improved dramatically. This has allowed us to specify landscape lighting on our projects with confidence, providing additional revenues with an attractive profit margin.”

The American Lighting Association reports that many residential and commercial jobs use low voltage lighting for several reasons, including:



- It is more energy efficient and can produce more light output per watt.

- There is little or no risk of shock or other electrical hazard.

- It requires little disturbance of the lawn and garden because cable can be buried with conduit and junction boxes or it can be left above the ground.

- It permits easy relocation or addition of fixtures.

Line voltage systems generally light an area more brightly and provide longer beam throws. Commercial and security lighting are usually 120-volt systems.

Regardless of the types, landscape lighting is attractive to businesses and homeowners for a number of reasons, both aesthetic and practical.

It shows off the beauty of a home or building after dark and provides safety and security. Lighting also has been proven to deter prowlers and vandals.

**CLEAR ADVANTAGES.** Whether a company offers in-house landscape lighting design and installation service or subcontracts the work, marketing plays an important role in the success of the product line.

Thorton Gardens markets its lighting using before and after photographs and a lighting room to demonstrate products and effects.

Kilmer recommended gaining expertise in good customer communications to interpret what he or she wants in landscape lighting. “Education is both a challenge and

Advances in electronics, design and materials have given contractors a variety of innovative lighting systems for landscapes and pools. Photo: Lumiere Design & Mfg.

an opportunity,” he said. “There is a real need to educate the consumer about what lighting can do.”

If you’re interested in discovering what landscape lighting can do for your business, talk to a local lighting distributor. The supplier may have classes or programs which can help provide training.

Joe Rey-Barreau, director of education and training for ALA, offered some other suggestions. “Go to a local ALA showroom. Each one should have someone there to help with landscape lighting. Most

times, there is no conflict working with a showroom. Most of those companies specialize in selling lighting fixtures, not installing them.

"Or call the ALA at 800/60LIGHT," he continued. "We are working now to set up programs with other associations to put on

seminars and offer training. We will also have a video available by this fall to send out to people interested in landscape lighting."

*The authors are industry consultants with Key Solutions, a division of Iris Sales & Solutions Inc., Rocky River, Ohio.*

## BETTER MOUSETRAPS IN LANDSCAPE LIGHTING

"BUILD A BETTER mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door" rings true. Technology is changing rapidly in the landscape lighting field, too. New fixtures, controls and systems are introduced each year.

Originally, noted Mark Gardner of Hinkley Lighting, Cleveland, Ohio, outdoor lighting fixtures were made of plastic and then of painted steel. For many years, powder-coated cast aluminum fixtures were the standard of the industry.

The latest technology is composite materials — high-impact fiberglass and fiberglass combinations. These fixtures "are less expensive, more corrosion resistant and more durable," said Gardner. "They are resistant to heat and impact and contain UV inhibitors to prevent breakdown in sunlight."

It's easier and more convenient than ever to turn landscape lighting off and on, too. Homeowners can turn on lighting systems by using their car phones, a real asset to the family on the go. Computers can also be programmed to turn lights on automatically, too.

Motion and infrared sensors can be programmed into the system to provide illumination anytime someone enters a protected area. Light sensors turn a system on at dusk and off at daybreak for greater convenience and energy savings. Remote controls can energize transformers on various parts of a large property.

Sam Barker, president of SEBCO, a tube lighting company in Santa Anna, Calif., explained that the market has grown dramatically for the 3/8-inch tubes containing strips of small incandescent lights.

He pointed out that they can be buried in concrete or brick to illuminate walkways, outline roof lines and decorate gazebos. Tucked under the lip of a swimming pool, they provide illumination without glare or intrusion of fixtures.

One of the major challenges of landscape lighting has always been to hide the intrusive fixtures so they are not a detriment to the daytime landscape. Such a challenge created pop-up fixtures that hide during the day and pop up when turned on at night. Philip Kocsis, vice president of operations for Pop Light, Fairfield, CT, said "architects love the feature, as it allows them to place the lights where they will do the most good and yet not detract from the area. Maintenance is simplified as there is nothing to break during the day."

Hiding the fixtures is also a challenge successfully met by fiber optic landscape lighting. "For the first time, landscape architects can design landscape lighting without bulky fixtures," said Wes Mohr, vice president and general manager of the commercial lighting division of Fiberstars of Fremont, Calif. Consumers can avoid underground or underwater electric cables and fixtures, as the light for the landscape is transmitted through fiber optics. The fixtures can be so small they resemble twigs or so transparent that they are almost invisible during the day, but produce a kaleidoscope of colors and a wide range of light intensities after dark. All of these benefits come at "a fraction of the maintenance costs of a conventional system," he said. — C. Neal Howell

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# Contractors Eye Municipal Mowing Market

PRIVATIZATION is in the news. According to Webster's *New World Dictionary*, to privatize is "to turn over a public property or service to private interests." Typically in the service sector, privatization refers to government entities "contracting out" a specific service or group of services to a private firm for a preset interval of time.

Because taxpayers have been critical of the performance level of government services, in many instances, there has been a push to move more of those services into the private sector. Usually, at the local level, this push is concentrated on highly visible services, such as trash pickup and recycling.

Many citizens would be surprised to discover that their city or county has privatized certain other services for a number of years and, without prompting, is studying the feasibility of privatizing more.

In theory, government privatization is essentially the same as any other contracting arrangement. It's a way of increasing efficiency by hiring specialists to perform services for which they are either better trained or better equipped than the entity that requires the services.

**Municipal mowing work may include large, recreational areas that take a toll on equipment.**  
Photo: S. Trusty

*The trend toward government accountability has resulted in more privatization of local services, including landscape and mowing work.*

*This specialty market is profitable, as long as you learn the ropes correctly.*

by Steve and Suz Trusty

Rodney Bailey, president of Evergreen Services Corp. in Bellevue, Wash., explained how his company got into municipal work. "We worked with the local

municipality to develop its contract procedures. The City of Bellevue had a very aggressive park program that essentially outgrew its own staffing. It wanted the flexibil-

ity to adjust services to meet community needs without the limitations of fixed staff and overhead. It investigated the contract process as an economical alternative."

#### WORKING WITH CONTRACTORS.

The process evolved as the city became more knowledgeable about working with contractors, Bailey said. "The city started with an experimental program, using private contractors to mow and care for the turf and landscapes of specific parks. When this proved successful, they extended the process through the park system and other areas, such as street medians and neighborhood 'pocket parks.'

"Bellevue currently uses several contractors as well as its own in-house staff to achieve maximum flexibility in all areas of landscape maintenance, as well as mowing," he added.

For such a program to work successfully, the municipality has to have a clear picture of all costs. "If a municipality or other government agency recognizes the costs of in-house handling for lawn and landscape services (on a cost basis), as compared to contracting out those services, they'll generally find that the savings range from 35 to 55 percent," Bailey explained.

Agencies may find that

(continued on page 46)



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## Municipal Mowing

(continued from page 44)

service actually improves along with cost savings. "It also may be able to provide a quality of service It couldn't accomplish in-house. The key is accurately allocating all overhead and other costs to get a true comparison."

**CONTRACT RED TAPE.** Private enterprise uses contract services extensively and most mowing companies work use contracts with their commercial accounts.

So, is there a difference between contracting services to a government agency or a commercial account? The answer is yes—and no.

The degree of difference often depends of the amount of "red tape" built into the procedures.

The majority of municipal and other government contracts result from a bid process, with the low bidder generally being awarded the contract. The bid request documents outline the specific services to be performed, establish any qualifying parameters for those services, and list the time frame within which the services are to be performed.

Generally, the red tape stems from the qualifying parameters. Basic stipulations are to be expected, such as requiring the private company to carry an adequate amount of insurance, to be bonded and to comply with the agency's reporting and other paperwork procedures.

Any contractor interested in pursuing municipal work must first understand how each municipality administers its programs. Most likely, it will be different for each city or county.

Bailey explained, "The city of Bellevue hired an administrator to handle contracting and most agencies will have a contract administrator. It's necessary for the contractor to have a good understanding of what is needed to fulfill each contract and of the process itself."

"Our company also works with other government entities on a contract basis. Though government contracts are not a major percentage of our business, they certainly are an important and worthwhile part of it."

**TOUGH REQUIREMENTS.** George Pacheco, Jr., owner and president of Pacheco Brothers Gardening Hayward, Calif., provides contracted landscape and mowing services for several cities in the San



Francisco area. He said, "We entered the municipal market in 1989 and now do about \$3 million in municipality work, basically specializing in bulk mowing."

"Because of the volume of work that many cities contract for, and the costs involved for bonding, sufficient equipment, backup equipment and employee staffing to handle that volume, the number of companies bidding on the large contracts

### Mowing that is bid with other landscape services may be subject to regulations that affect crew makeup and pay scales.

is limited. A firm must make a major commitment of resources to handle this type of contract."

A commitment of resources should be matched by the realization that municipal work should be profitable, according to Bailey. "We view municipal work as comparable to commercial work and bid it within our regular commercial rates. If a company drops its rate in anticipation of the higher volume of business, it can go broke in the process of fulfilling the contract. You have to investigate the contract specifi-

cations, assess the site and then judge if your own company's internal strategies for bringing efficiencies to the site allow you to bid at a comfortable margin."

**PROVIDING A SERVICE.** The equipment needed to fulfill government contracts is essentially the same as that required for commercial accounts of the same size and scope. Occasionally a contract will specify a certain type of mower (such as a reel mower) be used in certain areas, or that backup equipment be available.

Most contracts stipulate that services be performed to a specific quality level and within a preset period, rather than mandating what type of equipment must be used to do the job.

From a practical standpoint, the mowing company needs equipment that delivers the desired quality of cut and is sturdy enough to withstand the rigors of heavy use in quantities sufficient to perform the contracted services.

It's a matter of analyzing the needs of the property in terms of the contract stipulations and obtaining the right mix of quality equipment to get the job done.

In addition, the savvy mowing contractor will establish a good working relationship with a reliable dealer who understands the demands of the business and can readily supply the parts and services necessary to keep that equip-

**Cutthroat bidding can drive down the price, and profits, for municipal mowing work.**  
Photo: John Deere & Co.

ment operating properly.

Before bidding a government contract, study the impact it would have on your business, cautioned Bailey. "If you're going to do a quality job, you must be willing to invest in the necessary equipment and facilities. There's always some degree of risk. You may need to purchase additional equipment to handle the mowing, or rent off-site storage for equipment. Compute what period of time you'll need to adequately allocate the added costs."

The practice of opening up contracts for rebidding also has enormous consequences that should be considered before venturing into the municipal market.

Bailey explained, "High-volume contracts that are let for bid each year have a higher risk than those that are rebid every two or three years, or those two- or three-year contracts that are subject to renewal, rather than automatic open bidding. There's less risk if you can amortize the added costs over the period of the contract."

Also consider the other opportunities within your area. If a short-term contract would require additional equipment, or a different type of equipment than you are currently using, how likely is it that you could put that equipment to work profit-

(continued on page 48)



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USE READER SERVICE #30

## Municipal Mowing

(continued from page 46)

ably on other accounts? Be realistic in your assessment of potential business, probable competition, and the degree of risk you are prepared to assume.

Cindy Clark, administrative assistant for Landscape Services of Birmingham, Ala., said the choice to go municipal has to fit with a company's business strategy. "We don't actively seek municipal contracts as a separate category, but we would bid on a contract if it 'fit' our operation, if we had adequate equipment and personnel resources and could generate adequate profits. We wouldn't necessarily go after every commercial account either. We want to be able to handle every account effectively. It's all part of planned growth and profitability."

**CUTTHROAT BIDDING.** Because all fees paid by government agencies are public record, any company wishing to bid on a contract can easily find the dollar amount of the previous bid. That fact, coupled with the failure of many municipalities to establish basic qualifications for bidding firms, can lead to some cutthroat bidding.

Bill Davids, president of Clarence Davids & Company, Blue Island, Ill., explained, "Most municipal bids in our area are let on an annual basis and few have qualifiers to assess company stability or the company's ability to do the work. As a consequence, anyone with a mower and truck is likely to bid, and fewer long-term professional contractors bother to bid."

Bailey added, "On a few of the government contracts in our area, some firms weren't even doing a site inspection. They just check what the officially recorded previous bid was and cut it by 10 percent. After a period of years of awarding these contracts to the low bidder, sometimes to firms under-equipped to provide the proper quality work, the sites suffered."

This practice has no benefit for the municipality or the landscape industry, he pointed out. "Skimping on services to a point that is detrimental to the landscape accomplishes nothing. These agencies would better serve the public trust by establishing contract procedures to insure receiving reasonable bids from financially stable companies that are able to do the work adequately."

**COSTLY QUALIFICATIONS.** Local governments can address the problem by making sure landscape companies "qualify" to provide professional work.

Pacheco explained, "Most municipalities in California require contracting companies to carry a preset amount of insurance and submit a bid bond with their bid. The company awarded the bid must post a performance bond equal to 100 percent of the value of the contract. When these qualifiers are in place, the number of bidders is



Some municipalities are now making sure that contractors 'qualify' for mowing contracts. Photo: Kubota

reduced, and those that do bid are capable of handling the job."

Check the fine print on contracts closely before placing a bid. Mowing that is bid with other landscape services may be subject to regulations that affect crew makeup and pay scales.

This can have drastic effects on both profits and employee morale, Davids pointed out. "Many landscape installation bids for municipalities stipulate that the contractor must pay prevailing wages. In Illinois, since no prevailing wage levels have been established for the landscape industry, the pay scale goes to the prevailing construction industry wages. This scale is considerably higher than our industry's normal rate.

It also creates financial and management problems, he explained. "This is hard on company morale. If you pay the crews working on these jobs the stipulated wage, other employees feel slighted. Employees also feel slighted if they work on the contract site at one wage rate, and on other job sites at their standard wage rate."

Some contractors may be tempted to circumvent payment of the higher prevailing wage rates, but the system is ready for that maneuver, he noted. "Contractors must be aware that accepting a contract with this stipulation and neglecting to pay the established wage could jeopardize their company. The government agency has the right to audit their records for a set period of years following the contract completion and require them to pay the designated wages, plus penalties, to all employees involved."

Davids does anticipate that, at some point, the excessive stipulations of some contract programs will result in so few long-term professional companies bidding that government entities will face the frustrations from both viewpoints and develop workable contracting systems.

He reasoned: "If government entities are short of funds and are looking at contracting out work to cut costs, what's the logic of adding cost-increasing restrictions?"

As safety concerns have increased over the years, so have the safety stipulations included in government contracts. Pacheco explained that they have a major influence on how his employees operate in the field. "In California, contracting companies must sign an agreement to con-

(continued on page 50)

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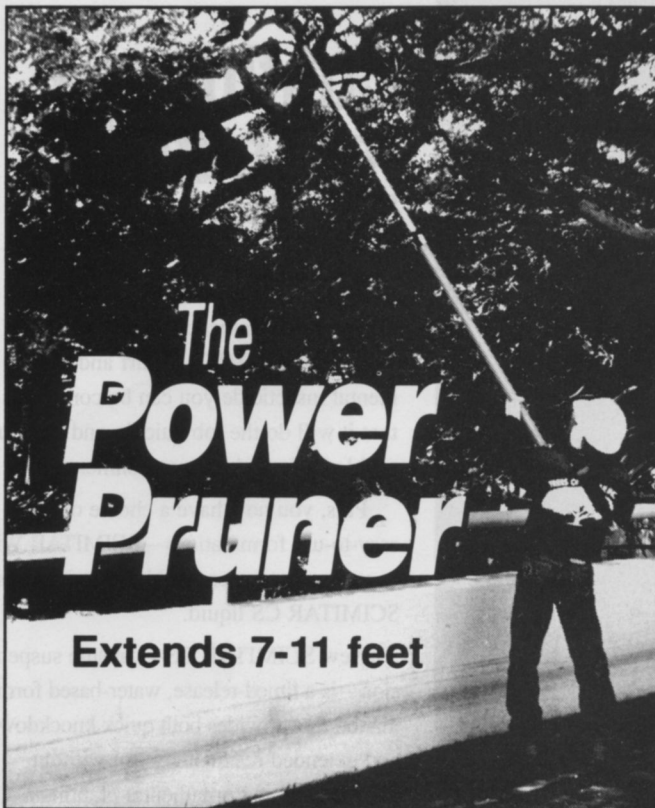


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USE READER SERVICE #31

## Municipal Mowing

(continued from page 48)

form to all CalTran safety regulations. These regulations are contained in a regular book issued by the state and have become more stringent in recent years."

Pacheco explained that any regulations are designed to protect work crews and passers-by. "We use all the standard safety equipment. We post signs and use cones, flag people or both when working on medians. We've added backup flashers and beepers to all our equipment, even mowers."

Many of the regulations are common sense, he pointed out. "The regulations are the same procedures a company would implement anyway as a part of their own internal efforts to work smarter and safer."

Company programs that foster professionalism and safe practices may already meet municipal contract requirements. Clark explained, "Like most companies, we're already stringent about safety. In addition to conforming to all government regulations and holding regular safety meetings, we have a pre-employment drug testing program and do random drug testing. All of our employees wear uniforms so they can be recognized easily. They are required to check in with security when working at government sites, but that is also required at many of our commercial sites."

Bailey echoed that sentiment. "We have a strong safety program and generally follow the same safety procedures for government accounts as we do for commercial accounts of the same category. Any work around the public, be it in parks or in street medians in industrial areas, requires extra attention to safety. If possible, we get to these sites early and get the work done before the public arrives."

**POTENTIAL FOR PROFIT.** Despite exacting standards and sometimes frustrating stipulations, municipal contracts can be rewarding.

Pacheco pointed out that the standard efficiencies of private industry can leave room for profit. He said, "We coordinate scheduling and organize crews to increase productivity. Crews are assigned to specific sites and certain jobs at each site. Everyone knows what must be accomplished at each site, what their job is and how to get it done, so efficiency is greater. We

store equipment at strategic locations to cut travel time."

Clark noted operating similarities. "Our mowing crews keep the same rotation, so they're familiar with the needs of each site. Equipment is stored in secured areas on the larger sites and crews report directly to the site. They work under the supervision of the crew leader. A multisite supervisor will check on each crew daily and any necessary paperwork exchange takes place then."

Bailey noted that a strategy based on efficiency will allow municipal work to be profitable. "Effective business strategies make contract work profitable. We consider the needs of each site and schedule

**'Any work around the public, be it in parks or in street medians, requires extra attention to safety.'**

crews and equipment accordingly. We may store equipment within secure trailers at the larger sites, or in rented storage areas nearby, if storage isn't available on site. These simple adjustments in logistics cut our transport costs and time.

Whether it's commercial or municipal, every contract implies a quality job, Bailey noted. "Once on site, the job is basically the same. We're doing our best to produce a quality product that meets or exceeds the client's expectations, whether we're working with a contract administrator, a company owner or a property manager."

He sees a lot of potential in this developing market, as long as contractors enter the work with a strategy for profitability and quality work. "Handled correctly, municipal contracts are an excellent market for our services. And—it's the most effective, efficient and fiscally sound way for a government entity to go. Our entire industry should push for the privatization of lawn and landscape related work." ■

*The authors are partners in Trusty & Associates, Council Bluffs, Iowa, and are consultants to the horticultural trade.*

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USE READER SERVICE #116

# Prices Dominate Hot Las Vegas Market

*Fast growing Las Vegas is a market dominated by harsh desert growing conditions and hot competition for work. Successful contractors have learned to stay competitive and still offer quality services, but it's not easy.*

By Rod Tyler



THE LAS VEGAS lawn and landscape market is a fast paced, high growth business with several challenges that face all contractors. Issues involving efficient use of water are at the forefront. The market area is basically four major cities that rest in or near the mountains: Las Vegas, Clark County, Henderson and North Las Vegas.

**PRECIOUS WATER.** Joe Fortier, conservation specialist for the Las Vegas Valley Water District, pointed out that as the cost of water increases, so does the awareness for the need to install landscapes properly, with adequate planning for efficient water use.

"We have seen a definite increase in xeriscaping in this area, especially with builder packages where the entire front yard and landscape is included with the purchase price of the home," he said.

Watering bans in most cities span from 12 noon to 7 p.m. "Any watering during these hours can result in a fine of as much as \$1,000 or six months in jail," he added. "We do not hand out a lot of citations, but the issue is becoming more serious each year. Property owners can be cited for allowing water to run off their property and into the street. Perhaps the worse sentence is the possibility of discontinuing water service, the penalty for the most severe infractions."

The "Water Police" make sure local ordinances are enforced. Although this sounds quite inhospitable, it is quite common in southwestern desert cities.

In fact, the cost for water use in Las Vegas compared to other big desert cities like Phoenix or Tucson is extremely reasonable. This is hard to imagine, considering both of the other cities have a lower evapotranspiration rate and Las Vegas has higher winds, which tend to dry things out faster.

The source of most of the water used in the Las Vegas valley comes from Lake Mead, one of the largest

**Lured by Las Vegas' economy, some landscape contractors have found that the market and climate are too tough to handle.**

man-made lakes in the United States. The Hoover Dam on the Colorado River creates the lake and although the water is greatly appreciated by area users, it has a pH of about 7.5 or above, making the alkaline soil conditions only worse.

**SERVICE MIXES.** Due to the limited sources for water, there is growing concern over the amount of environmental discharges into the drainage basin which feeds the Colorado River. A common service provided by many contractors like Terry Davis Landscaping in nearby Henderson, includes irrigation troubleshooting and making sure clients are in compliance with local water-use ordinances.

"Terry is a certified water auditor," said his wife, Denise. "We often work with existing systems to analyze their performance or with property managers who are in need of our services."

The Davis' have a diverse line of services, and the climate has an effect of increasing the summer period, usually from April to September. However, the primary focus for the company is maintenance of commercial properties. Normal work required during this time includes activities like mowing, trimming, edging, fertilizing and irrigation troubleshooting.

"We have seen a lot of firms come here from California and Arizona looking for work because they have heard of the growth rate of Las Vegas," she recalled. "We have been here for 12 years and understand the climate because we have roots in the nursery business for over 40 years. We saw the trend of East Coast people moving here and requesting an East Coast landscape. Unfortunately, the adaptability of most of those plants, unless they are native, is somewhat unpredictable."

With limited plant selection due to heat, cold, wind and at times, lack of water, many landscape projects have moved toward naturalization with rocks, stone, boulders and desert plants, including many native grass species.

In fact, some new commercial

*(continued on page 54)*



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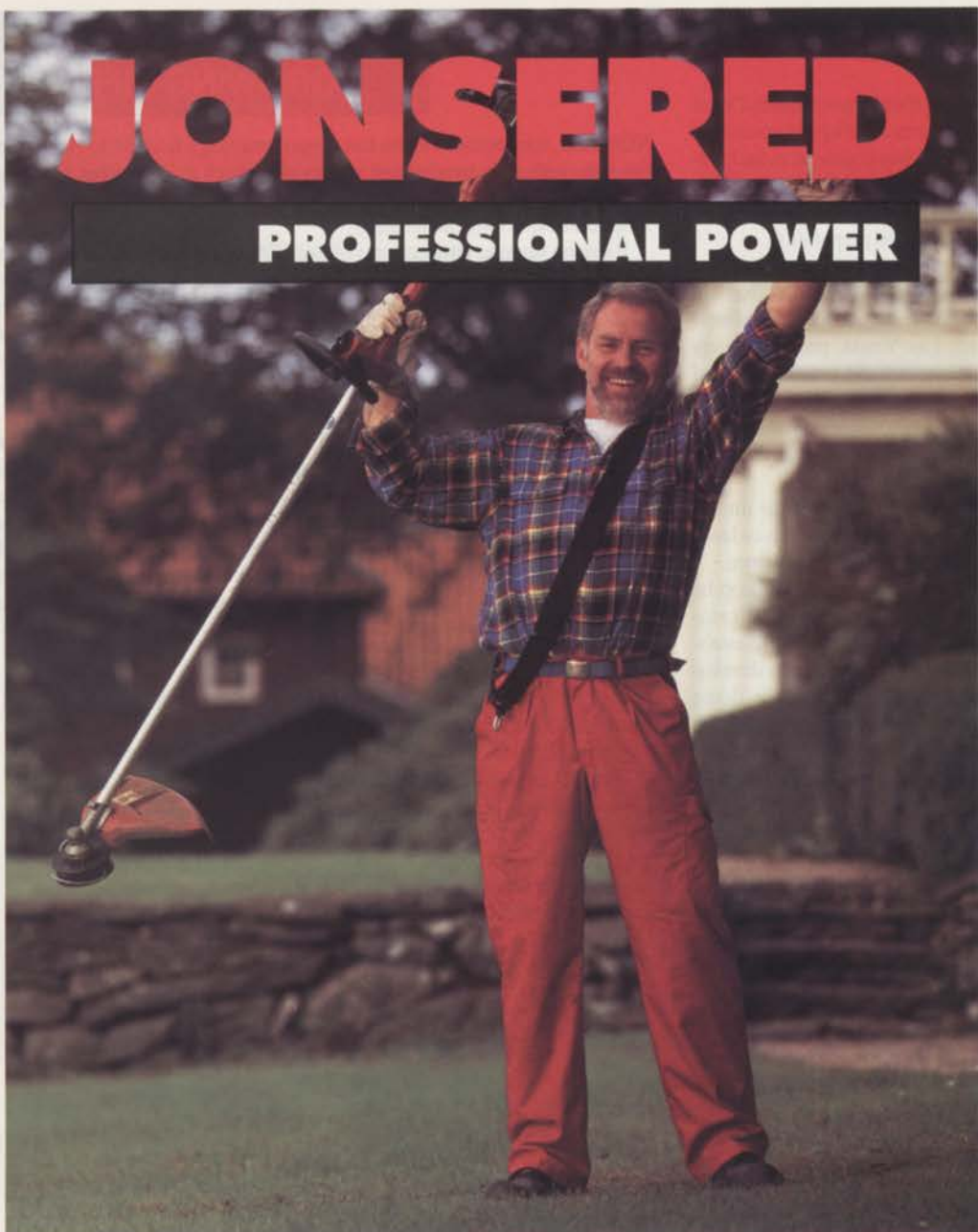
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USE READER SERVICE #101

## Regional Report

(continued from page 52)

developments have adopted local ordinances limiting the amount of turf that may be placed in the landscape to below 25 percent. This option calls for less emphasis on elaborate soil preparation.

**IRRIGATION OPTIONS.** Ronald Moore, manager for Turf Master Inc., Las Vegas, provides many services including management of commercial properties, irrigation audits, lawn and ornamental fertilization and installing native desert landscapes.

He is well aware of the impact Las Vegas' geography has on landscape design and maintenance.

The area is as flat as a tabletop, he explained. "Many planned communities work the soil up to establish an artificial grade to develop some drainage patterns. By doing that, they usually require backfill materials to achieve the grade, and this sometimes sacrifices quality. In addition to the high soil pH, the soil-fill mix is in drastic need of organic amendments. We use a lot of organic mulches and gypsum to try to break up the poor soil and add water-holding capacity."

Even though the focus on irriga-

NORMAL temperatures in the Las Vegas area range from 33 to 105 degrees during the entire year, with daily temperature swings of as much as 35 degrees. Many nights hover around freezing but reach daytime highs of 65 degrees, making plant selection and adaptation especially challenging.

Extreme summer temperatures of over 100 degrees, combined with intense winds, give the area an evapotranspiration rate of 85 inches of water per year. With an annual rainfall of only four inches, the 81-inch deficit comes mainly from irrigation.

To complicate matters, the native soil is less than accommodating, often ranging from a pH of 7.5 to 9.0, comprised mainly of soil materials not conducive to long-term moisture storage. Successful contractors have learned to focus on soil amendments, pH adjustments and proper irrigation on a regular basis.

However, the market has dictated that price is still one of the most important factors. As a result, many contractors have been slow to adapt to amendments, which usually add costs to overall job prices.

Local landscape architects are making efforts to write in proper soil amendment procedures, but conformance to specifications is still slow. Many of the companies interviewed reported that the general market in Las Vegas has a reputation of a get-rich-quick area, which predisposes many clients and contractors to a competitive environment predicated solely on price. Consequently, a significant consulting business has developed, to help provide solutions to landscape projects that may have been incorrectly installed the first time around.

tion in the area is quite intense, Moore feels the area is still five to 10 years behind California.

"Drip irrigation is the most efficient system and it is obvious that water here needs to be used wisely," he said. "But even though studies say that as much as a 70 percent savings can be realized on water bills from drip irrigation versus flood irrigation, the industry here is

still dominated by sprinkling systems."

Turf Master offers special programs to help deal with the needs of various plants in the landscape, including dual-program time clocks that separate turf from shrub irrigation, saving valuable water.

Existing landscapes also may need renovation. "In the heat of competition and the movement to establish new homesites, many landscapes are installed without rototilling or amending the native soil," Moore explained. "Some companies simply hydroseed the lawn and walk away and wonder why it never grows quite right."

There is no question that some of these habits have occurred as a result of the enormous growth experienced by the area over the last ten years, but climate also matters.

The 105-degree summer days and 30-mph winds tend to dry out lawns and burn them, sometimes even when irrigation is present. To help those trouble areas have a fighting chance, Turf Master offers a program using about 3.5 cubic yards of compost per 1,000 square feet in their "custom lawn" program.

Interestingly enough, a bulk market for organic materials has not yet emerged in the area, perhaps due to reasonable tip fees at local landfills. However, several bagged products are available, shipped in from outside the area.

If organic products are unavailable, Turf Master uses custom blended topsoils that contain about

the same ratios of organic matter. Either method gives the soil increased water-holding capacity to fight off the enormous evaporation potential of each summer.

Once the soil is prepared correctly, it is imperative that the contractor install an irrigation system capable of meeting the needs of the plants in this demanding climate, said Pete Luna of Ewing Irrigation Products, a local supplier.

"Many of the new track homes are finally installing drip irrigation. Up to this time, however, there have been only about 50 percent drip and 50 percent spray, even though we know that drip is more efficient," he said. The trend toward drip irrigation is evident compared to five years ago when spray systems dominated the area.

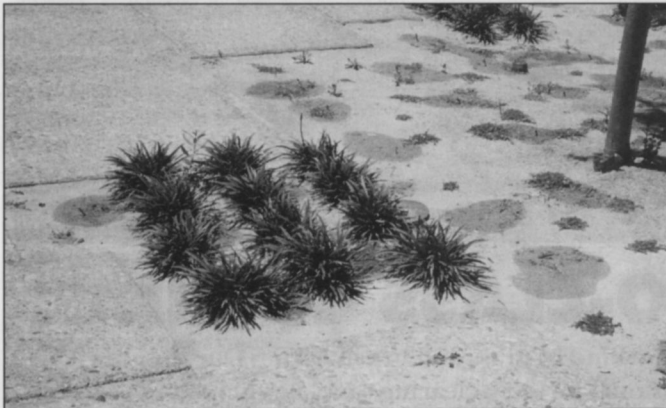
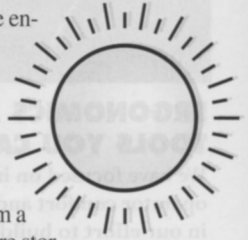
**ISOLATED MARKET.** Ewing has a total of 40 stores in the Southwest. "Since Las Vegas is so isolated and because we are in a valley, it is obvious that successful landscape contractors will tend toward using more organic products in their projects, including mulches," Luna commented.

Many contractors rely on word-of-mouth advertising and prefer to stay away from bid work. Due to the amount of competition and cluster homes, there are not as many high-end landscape accounts in the retail sector, compared to East or West Coast standards.

"This is a pretty shallow market," explained Ken Pfalzgraf of Innova-

(continued on page 56)

## HARSH CLIMATE MAKES GROWING DIFFICULT



Poor soil conditions and intense heat have made xeriscape and irrigation major markets for landscape contractors. Some are using soil amendments for more efficient water use. Photo credit: Olson



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## Regional Report

(continued from page 54)

tive Landscape Concepts, Las Vegas. "Shallow means that it has been difficult for some of the big name companies to get established here because of the price wars and the focus on price only during project consideration."

His company uses natural controls where possible, including beneficial insects, oils, soaps, etc. Pfalzgraf is a certified arborist and lends his services to several other larger companies on a consulting basis. Additionally, the firm retains about 50 high-end residential accounts that are normally acquired through referrals.

"There has been a genuine thirst for education and knowledge from our staff," Pfalzgraf noted, "and we try to encourage increased education and training by working with local programs, including the extension service and the university."

This extends to a more educated client base, he noted. "Over the last few years, it has been interesting to watch the high-end clients start to



prefer the more qualified service providers who have demonstrated results."

Although educational programs are available, Pfalzgraf feels that there is a special niche for programs that focus on the Spanish community, which is a large portion of the workforce.

"We have made a number of efforts to arm Spanish speaking workers with enough knowledge

to satisfy our most demanding clients. This has also improved worker satisfaction and is a good non-pay benefit we offer," he said. "We noticed that the clients who have higher education and increased earning potential are especially interested in quality plant care."

With the fast-paced nature of Las Vegas, it is only a matter of time before the landscape market begins to settle down. As in most markets,

While spray irrigation systems are popular in Las Vegas, drip systems are gaining ground because of their efficient water use. Photo: Olson Irrigation

many consumers will find out through the grapevine that it is better to pay for high quality once than for lower quality several times. Indeed, the "pay me now or pay me later" phrase applies.

Additionally, it is certain that the market for amendments focusing on the efficient use and storage of water should increase in the greater Las Vegas area. Products like compost, mulch, diatomaceous earth or calcined clay materials should all begin to grow in sales to provide more available water to growing plants. With the little rainfall that Las Vegas receives, it should be the objective of each landscaper to use as much of it as possible. ■

*The author is a Certified Professional Agronomist and free-lance writer residing in Medina, Ohio. He is employed by BFI in Oberlin, Ohio.*

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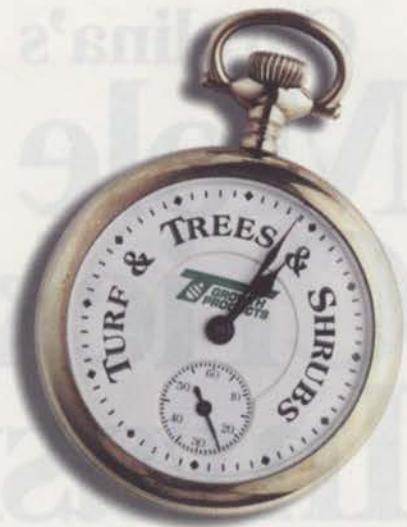
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# Carolina's Mole Cricket Invasion

By C. Bruce Williams  
and Rick L. Brandenburg



Mole cricket nymphs were collected using a soapy water flush technique used to identify 'hot spots.' Photo: Brandenburg

*Editor's note: Although mole crickets have been found in Florida for at least 75 years, their migration northward has accelerated in the last 20 years. They have spread rapidly along the coastlines, then inland. Tawny mole crickets are the most troublesome variety and have a high potential for killing grass. Their rapid expansion into the Carolinas has taken the area by surprise and the author estimates that the tawny mole cricket may already be the number one insect pest in the Southeast, surpassing grubs.*

IN THE PAST 10 years, mole crickets have become the number-one insect pest of home lawns, golf courses, municipal and commercial properties and sod farms along the North Carolina coast. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of pesticides are used annually to control mole cricket populations in turfgrass.

Two species of mole cricket are present as pests along the Southeast coast — the tawny mole cricket (*Scapteriscus vicinus*) and the southern mole cricket (*Scapteriscus borellii*). A third species, the northern

mole cricket (*Neocurtilla hexadactyla*) is usually much less damaging and occurs throughout the state and other parts of the country. The tawny has been a pest in North Carolina for only about seven years, but has become the most damaging species to warm-season turfgrasses grown in coastal Carolina.

As many landscape contractors have discovered, mole cricket eradication is not feasible nor practical with current pest control strategies. However, mole cricket infestations can be safely and environmentally managed and even reduced.

**KNOW THY ENEMY.** Unlike other insects that can be effectively eliminated once a threatening population is observed, mole crickets require specialized control strategies.

The tawny mole cricket feeds almost exclusively on the roots and shoots of grass. Southern mole crickets may feed a little on the roots, but primarily are predators feeding on small creatures that live in the soil. Both species do considerable tunneling. There is only one generation per year. Mole crickets have three developmental stages: the egg, the nymph and the adult.

Damage in winter and early spring will usually be seen as short tunnel mounds. As the soil temperature warms in March and April, tunneling will increase.

In late March and early April, the adults begin to fly and mate. Adult males locate preferred sites to lay eggs and dig a small tunnel with a circular opening exposed to the surface, which acts much like a megaphone when they begin their calling. The male produces a soft toad-like call for about an hour after sunset in April and May. The call attracts the females for mating.

Mated females dig down three to 10 inches in the soil and lay a cluster of about 35 eggs in a small chamber. Females will usually construct three to five chambers and lay a total of 100 to 150 eggs, which are round, translucent and white.

Hatching occurs in late May and continues through early July. Eggs require about 20 days to hatch if the soil temperature is warm. The southern mole cricket may continue to

lay eggs throughout the summer and hatch can occur into August and September. Males die after mating and the females die shortly after completing egg laying.

The newly-hatched insects are small, usually about 1/4-inch in length. The mole cricket nymph goes through six to eight skin molts. These molts are similar to a snake shedding its skin as it grows.

Small nymphs have no wings, but the larger nymphs have small wing buds. The nymphs continue to feed and grow through the summer. During July and early August, the grass is often growing aggressively and the nymphs are too small to produce noticeable damage.

**EXTENSIVE DAMAGE.** Mole crickets are most destructive to turfgrass in late August through early October. Individual tunnels may exceed 20 feet in length. Activity is regulated by temperature and soil moisture in ways that are not well understood. However, most feeding does occur at night, especially after rain or irrigation.

By October, most of the nymphs have reached the adult stage. During cold weather the crickets may stay deep (over four feet) in the soil.

The best way to achieve control is by mapping the areas of greatest infestation, because it determines exactly where the mole cricket populations are most abundant.

Mapping is a visual record of mole cricket activity and abundance over an area. This record can be kept on a blueprint, a survey map or a rough drawing. It needs to be reasonably accurate, permanent and readily accessible.

Little evidence of mole crickets is apparent when it's the most effective time for treatment. The best time to treat is when crickets are very young and sensitive to insecticides. A map will help you target those mole cricket "hot spots." Few turf areas require treatment over the entire area.

If you start mapping in the spring, note areas where you see mole cricket damage. As the temperatures warm and activity increases, record those areas that seem to be the worse.

(continued on page 60)

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## Mole Crickets

(continued from page 58)

If damage exceeds tolerable levels, then treatment may be required.

Spring treatment is not recommended, but some population reduction is possible. Unless the area is very isolated, spring treatments will have only a slight impact on reducing the number of adults that come into the area to lay eggs. After egg laying is finished, damage from the adults disappears.

Damage is usually quite minimal or absent from early June to late August, until the nymphs get large enough to cause damage.

**MOLE CRICKET CONTROL.** Mole crickets are one of the most difficult insects to control in the landscape. First, you must map areas of greatest population density. Second, biological or chemical controls must be applied at the correct rate and time of the year.

During summer, a soapy water flush can be an effective tool to monitor cricket egg hatch and the abundance of nymphs in turf areas.

## CONTROL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECREATIONAL AREAS

Treatment*	(Rates per 1,000 sq. ft)	Comments
Baygon, Dursban or Sevin bait	follow label directions	do not water in
Dursban Pro	1 1/2 to 2 1/5 ounce	water in
Orthene 75S	1 to 1 1/2 ounce	do not water in
Trucam 2.5G	1.9 to 3.7 pounds	water in
Mocap 10G	2.25 pounds	water in
Triumph 4E	1 1/2 fluid ounce	water in, do not use on sand or sandy loam soils
Oftanol 5G	1 pound	water in
LESCO Vector MC ( <i>Steinernema riobravis</i> )		follow label directions
BioControl ( <i>Steinernema scapterisci</i> )		follow label directions

\*All product names are trademark protected.

Mix two tablespoons of liquid dishwashing detergent in two gallons of water (lemon-scented detergent seems to work best).

Use the soapy water mixture to soak an area of approximately one square yard. After applying the solution carefully, observe the area for movement. The small nymphs

(1/4 to 3/8 inches) are difficult to see as they emerge from the soil.

Once soil temperatures cool in the fall and crickets become large, the soap drench is less effective and continues to decrease in effectiveness into the spring. Flush counts as high as 25 nymphs per square foot have been recorded in

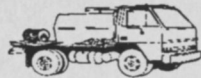
North Carolina the last week of June.

**TREATMENT OPTIONS.** In nearly all situations, a midsummer treatment is the most effective time to apply insecticide. Mole crickets are most susceptible to insecticides when in the early nymph stages. In addition, the soil temperature is warm and conducive to good pesticide efficacy.

The optimal time for chemical pesticide treatment will be from June 24 to July 10. If extremely dry weather exists during this time, wait until rain helps to restore the soil's moisture. The mole crickets will be larger, but treatments applied during very dry conditions are not going to be effective since the mole crickets will be deep in the soil. Adult mole crickets can tunnel very deep (up to four feet!).

No treatment will be 100 percent effective. Treated areas may need treatment again in August and September if initial populations were very high. Each subsequent treatment will be a little less effective since the crickets are larger. Treatments applied in the winter and early

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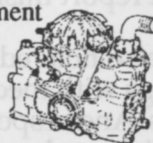
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spring will normally provide poor control.

Make sure the soil is moist before application of any insecticide treatment. All treatments but baits and acephate (Orthene) should be watered in with 1/4 to 1/2 inch of water. Apply treatments late in the day, since crickets are most active at night.

Acephate is particularly susceptible to sunlight and should never be applied in the morning or early afternoon during the summer.

Bait insecticides should not be watered in. Any water applied immediately after bait use will diminish effectiveness. Baits should be applied to moist, but not soggy soil. They have proven marginally effective against adults both in the fall and spring.

Some insecticides call for watering in after treatment to ensure product effectiveness and safety to man or animals. Follow all re-entry restrictions and label directions.

#### NONCHEMICAL CONTROLS.

Great advances have been made in non-chemical control in the past few years and the most promising

## CONTROL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOME LAWNS

Treatment*	(Rates per 1,000 sq. ft.)	Comments
Dursban Pro	1 1/2 to 2 1/5 ounce	water in
Offanol 5G	1 pound	water in
Offanol 2L	3 ounces	water in
Offanol 1.5G	3 1/2 pounds	water in
Orthene 75S	1 to 1 1/2 ounce	do not water in apply in evening
Tempo 2E	1/5 ounce	water in
Triumph 4E	1 1/2 ounce	water in
Turcam 2.5G	1.9 to 3.7 pounds	water in
Diazinon 5G	2 1/2 pounds	water in
LESCO Vector MC ( <i>Steinernema riobravis</i> )		follow label directions
BioControl ( <i>Steinernema scapterisci</i> )		follow label directions

\*All product names are trademark protected.

is the use of insect parasitic nematodes (*Steinernema riobravis* and *Steinernema scapterisci*) that are parasites of the mole cricket.

Living nematodes are applied to soil in the spring using conventional pesticide spray equipment. These microscopic parasitic worms

are applied at the rate of one billion nematodes per acre (about 160 nematodes per square inch!).

Nematodes attack only mole crickets and once inside the insect, release bacteria that are toxic to the mole cricket. The nematodes use the cricket carcass as a nursery from

which millions of additional nematodes are eventually released.

**HOME LAWN OPTIONS.** The best philosophy for lawn infestations is to target a single treatment to the areas of highest infestation during the optimal period.

Most lawns will not require total elimination of the crickets and can tolerate a low population.

Follow all label directions and precautions for pesticide application. Recommendations for the use of chemicals are included as a convenience to the reader. The use of brand names and any mention or listing of commercial products or services does not imply endorsement by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service or this publication, nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned.

*Bruce Williams is area specialized agent, turfgrass, with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service. Rick Brandenburg is extension entomologist at North Carolina State University.*

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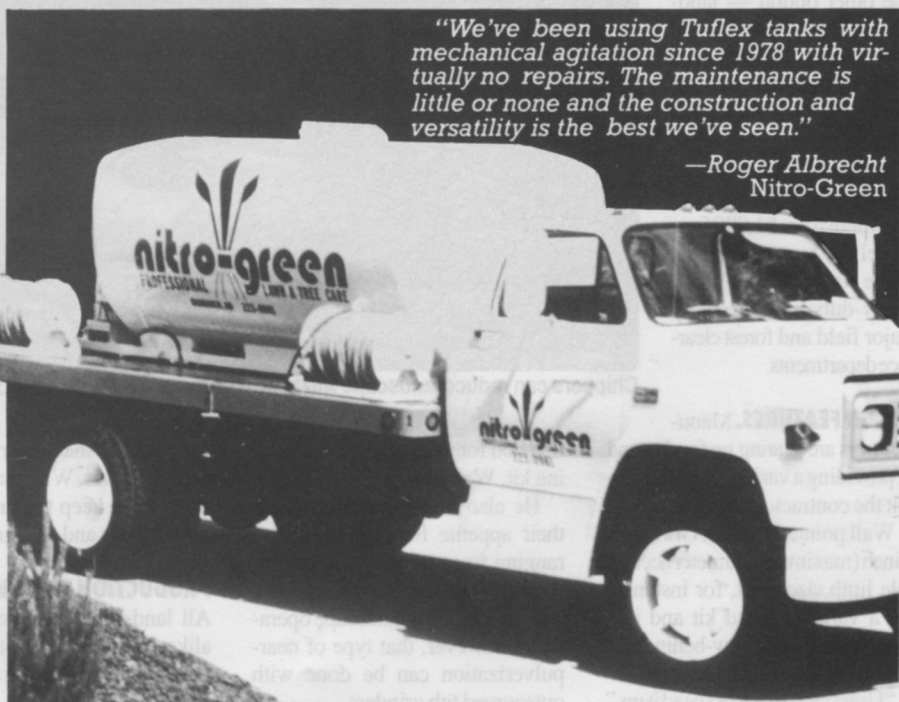
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USE READER SERVICE #35

# Chippers and Shredders

## Help Beat the Landfill Squeeze

*Chippers and shredders are helping landscape contractors turn green waste into dollars. New product designs meet just about any contractor's requirements.*

By Bob Gitlin

MIKE WALL sells specialty products, including wood chippers, for Gravelly International, Brillion, Wis. When asked if sales of his 6-inch wood chipper were increasing to the landscape contractor industry as a result of growing landfill restrictions, he replied, "Absolutely. And it's only going to get better."

Although many landscape contractors "go outside" to a tub grinding company to dispose of wood and other green waste, a growing number are buying their own compost- and mulch-producing machinery. The mulches can be sold on the outside, but most use it for their own horticultural purposes.

In the past, many contractors burned such waste, but those practices are not allowed in most places now. The other option — landfills — will end with the forthcoming federal 1996 deadline that will prevent green waste from going into landfills.

It may be a good idea to consider the investment of anywhere from \$1,000 for a model for occasional use, all the way to \$30,000 for a heavy-duty unit used by major field and forest clearance departments.

**DESIGN FEATURES.** Manufacturers are gearing up for demand by providing a variety of features to suit the contractor's needs.

Wall pointed out that Gravelly's 6-inch (maximum-diameter acceptable limb size) unit, for instance, has a variable-speed kit and is a typical heavy-duty, tow-behind unit with solid-feed roller kits.

"Users can slow it or speed it up," he said. "The turret top spins around and users can load limbs from all directions."

Design changes in new models include improved towing capabilities, bigger tires and wheels, an

updated tongue and a better lighting kit, Wall said.

He also noted that aside from their appetite for organic matter ranging from prickly pear to oak, such units gladly chew plastic bottles and jugs. In most landscape operations, however, that type of near-pulverization can be done with outsourced tub grinders.

Contractors who buy chippers and shredders should understand standard maintenance requirements. "All of the basic models have a gas or diesel engine," Wall said. "A standard oil change is needed and

users should sharpen or change the cutting knives. With road units, remember to keep the tires full and the bearings and axle greased."

**PRODUCTION REQUIREMENTS.** All landscape operations are not alike, which manufacturers have recognized by offering a variety of styles and capabilities.

"We produce a full line of hand-fed, disc and drum chippers," said Pam Rhoades, advertising coordinator, Bandit Industries, Remus, Ala. "Tree service and landscape contractors are big markets for us.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the hydraulic-feed, disc-style chipper began to replace the conventional drum style."

Improved technology has come to hydraulic feed systems, she noted, as have wider chipper openings. "With better feed systems and wider openings, these chippers save on labor. They can limit the chainsaw work."

Large whole-tree chippers have always been available to land clearers. "The recent trend has been in the development of medium-sized whole-tree chippers that the lawn, landscape and tree contractor might use for general tree work and land clearing," Rhoades said.

She added that such machines can generate decorative chips for mulch. "Many of the users make mulch for flower beds, around trees and other display areas."

Portability is a big factor in using various models for maximum productivity. Many contractors tow chippers behind trucks, going from site to site.

Manufacturers now offer model variations suited to transportation or production needs, according to Jimmy Anderson, product manager at Bush Hog, a Goossen distributor in Selma, Ala. "We

offer three models: a power take-off model for tractors and two engine-drive models on trailers that can go 55 mph. Their axles have torsion bars pressed into them."

Like other makes, his company's shredders accept material up to an inch and a quarter thick, he said. The chippers do pieces as fat as five inches thick.

Typical attachments include a blower that lets users direct the flow of material and a vacuum attachment to pick up leaves.

The EPA landfill squeeze hasn't

(continued on page 66)



Chippers can reduce landscape waste by a factor of 10. Photo credit: Vermeer





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## Chippers and Shredders

(continued from page 62)

had the impact in the South yet that it's had on the East Coast and across the Midwest, said Anderson. "But we know it's coming. We feel that by 1997, it's going to create a major industry for us."

But there was always a good reason for investing in a good wood waste handler, whether it is a chipper, shredder or hybrid chipper/shredder, he added. "They allow the user to stay on the job site longer and eliminate the need to carry all the limbs and brush back to a landfill. They also allow users to turn waste into compost or mulch."

**COMMERCIAL OPTIONS.** "We make chippers and shredders for sale to the professional/commercial market," said Tom Meier, general manager, Steiner Turf Equipment, Dalton, Ohio.

"Durability is the main thing that lawn and landscape maintenance people want," he said. "Chipping is not mowing grass. Chipping presents a hostile application to the



machine. You never know what you're going to find inside a tree."

The technology has caught up with the demands of a stringent industry, he added.

"There were a lot of products out there at one time that called themselves chippers and shredders and they had a lot of service problems. We went through extensive redesign and testing until we got something that could take it," he said.

"On a commercial unit," said Byron Riesen, sales representative with Goossen Industries, Beatrice, Neb., "the materials you use are what distinguishes a commercial unit from a piece of junk. It's heavy-grade steel."

Landscapers use chippers to

Heavy duty models provide long years of productive use. Photo: Steiner

make mulches, he explained.

Shredders are designed to get rid of excess yard debris such as leaves, brush

and grass clippings, and their product generally is compost.

Riesen noted that his company combined both applications into a single hybrid. "It's a diverse machine."

Ed Hribar, national sales manager at Parker Sweeper, Addison, Ill., touted his firm's dual-blade vacuum-power chipper, adding: "We went after the commercial market. The components we use are industrial grade. Transmissions are designed for heavy commercial use. We use 11-gauge steel—the thickest you can put on a piece of equipment. And, the tires are enormous."

He said his company's chipper/shredder vacuum reduces debris

by a ratio of 11 to 1, so that material can be packed in less space to further reduce the amount of landfill area required, labor time and cost.

"It can take the abuse, the loading and unloading off the trailer. At work, it performs all three functions without compromising the performance of any one." Hribar pointed out that this type of machine handles a wide variety of materials.

Ken Van Zee, product specialist with Vermeer Manufacturing, Pella, Iowa, noted that commercial models are more expensive than consumer styles. Typical chippers may run between \$8,000 to \$10,000.

"Users may spend up to \$30,000 for major waste reduction operations. If contractors are going to be feeding 6-inch branches in daily, they may want a 9- or 12-inch size chipper."

Feed systems are a major safety concern on heavily used commercial models, as an operator's arm can be sucked into the chipper's maw and lost.

"There are a few models out there that do not have table feeds," said Van Zee, "but we will only sell a

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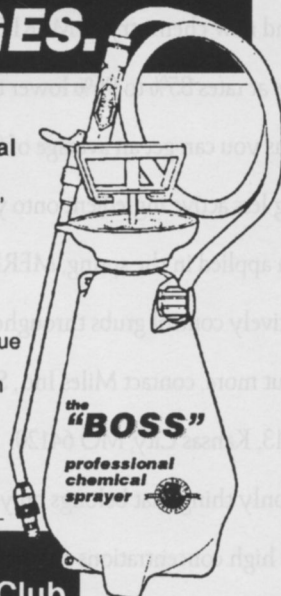
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chipper with a table feed, because of the safety issue. We're very specific about a certain distance so there's no way the operator can touch the hydraulic feed rollers."

#### CONTRACTOR PERSPECTIVE.

Lied's Nursery Co., Sussex, Wis., is an active user of chippers and shredders. Owner Tom Lied explained: "We have arborist, maintenance and landscape divisions. We're constantly developing wood brush and other things on our landscape jobs. We chip those commodities into something we can get rid of easier."

Lied's employees bring the material back to the nursery, where it's used as a "healing-in medium" for a considerable pot growing operation (i.e. vegetation grown in pots) and retail store.

"We also use it for some landscape work, but not often," he said. "Our nursery people use chippers for chipping brush when they prune

in the nursery. The maintenance unit uses chippers for pruning at the clients' homes."

Self-contained units make the process more productive. "We use the bigger commercial chippers in our work," he added. "They have their own engines and are trailered. We move them around to blow into the chipper truck."

When confronted with large land clearing, his crews use the subcontract services of another company. "They have the next step up: fast tree snippers, large immobile field-set chippers, large production tractors and hydraulically operated lifts."

Lied's crews also assemble some brush and a variety of other land-

scape wastes for disposal with a shredder. "We pile it up and bring in a subcontractor with a tub grinder a couple times a year. He'll shred that into mulch, which is used in our nursery as manure for our soils."

Charlie Wepfer, arborist and sales supervisor at L&S Landscape Maintenance, a Lied's division, said his operation got its first chipper in 1988. "We're still using it. It's a slow-feed machine, but it works well. That one accepts up to an 8-inch branch."

The other chipper was bought in 1994, he said. "It's even bigger: a brush chipper with a diesel engine and a heavy-duty fold-up feed table with curbside feed, which keeps the

operator away from oncoming traffic. It chips 12-inch-diameter logs or smaller.

His crews chip everything from shrubs to big logs. The chips are dumped and when the pile grows enough, big tub grinders are hired to come in to grind everything down into compost.

The company uses the compost in its nursery, incorporating it into the field, as well as for a healing-in medium during storage. "We sell some chips as well. When we're storing plants over the winter in bulb and burlap plants, we'll add mulch chips around them to keep them from freezing," Wepfer added.

On the other hand, some larger contractors go outside to tub grinder contractors.

J. Landon Reeve, owner of Chapel Valley Landscaping, Woodbine, Md., said his company has a single chipper. "We've run a shredder mainly for our composting operations. We use our chipper for winter pruning, but we use it probably more than anything to chip up materials for composting."

Recycling is a concern among



Wider feed openings accept large branches and save on labor. Photo credit: Bandit Industries

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landscape contractors in his area, he affirmed. "We compost it, then run it through a shredder, then screen it, and use it as organic soil amendments for a lot of our landscape and maintenance work."

Reeve explained that the materials get mixed in with soil mixes. "When we're planting a tree, we take two-thirds of the existing soil

and one-third composted organic material."

The EPA squeeze is causing entrepreneurs to buy larger machines and go from place to place renting them for the day, Reeve added.

"Our volume comes in six or eight trucks a day. You get this gigantic pile in no time. We have one specific area we compost in. Before

it goes into the pile, we run a screen/shredder to get it down further."

Wood waste, the nursery end of the business, is more likely to need a chipper than is the landscape division, he explained.

"Some of this tree work we subcontract out to arborists with the proper chipping equipment. They're the ones that really use them day to

day. We have a company that does chipping and recomposts materials. They have a 30-yard dumpster, and they haul away all the stumps and big stuff we put in there. We don't mess with the big stuff." ■

*The author is Contributing Editor of Lawn & Landscape Maintenance magazine.*

## PRODUCT ROUNDUP

Little Wonder's Revac uses a six-bladed steel fan to create a powerful vacuum capable of pulling yard waste to 3 1/2-inches in diameter into the chipping element. Operators can chip, shred, vacuum, load and reduce debris at a ratio of 10 to 1 with this portable machine.

**Circle 175 on reader service card**

Bandit Industries introduced its Series XP hand-fed chippers with a new feed wheel design said to provide better feeding with less knife maintenance, increased engine effectiveness and reduced fuel consumption. This design is available on Models 90 through 1250.

**Circle 176 on reader service card**

Five models in Gravelly's Pro Chip series have engines ranging from 18 to 40.5 hp for a variety of commercial chipping tasks. Model 210 has a compact, portable design with a 6-inch intermittent cutting capacity, side feed and a 180-pound flywheel with 10-inch reversible knives.

**Circle 177 on reader service card**

Bushmaster chippers from Befco Inc. features a variable-speed power-feed system with drum-style design for smooth feeding and continuous chipping of material up to six inches in diameter. Model BE6-800 uses a 25-hp engine to reduce materials into usable mulch.

**Circle 178 on reader service card**

Model 1230 brush cutter from Vermeer Mfg. comes with gas or diesel engines ranging from 76 to 102 hp to suit a variety of needs. Design features include an interchangeable hitch, solid-state automatic feed system that controls feed-roller speed and a 1.5-inch thick cutter disk to handle debris up to 12 inches in diameter.

**Circle 179 on reader service card**

Patriot offers the Little Patriot 10-hp chipper-shredder-vac with anti-vibration design, snap-on debris vacuum kit and forked shredding hammers for more efficient operations.

**Circle 180 on reader service card**



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JUNE 1995 • LAWN & LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

# Customer Expectations Define Good Service

*Knowing what customers expect in terms of service is the first step to keeping them happy. Knowing how to provide that profitably will keep you in business for a long time.*

*By Kevin Tanzillo*

**M**aking customers feel good about doing business with you is the ticket to your company's success. That's easy to agree with, but often hard to implement. How do you achieve the kind of service that keeps customers smiling even while they're writing the check to pay your bill?

Good customer service is "exceeding customer expectations," said Kristin Anderson, co-author of several books in the *Knock Your Socks Off Service* series and principal of Performance Research Associates in Minneapolis.

"What is it that your customer thinks ought to happen during the service transaction?" Anderson asked. "It is not enough just to satisfy that. You need to constantly look for opportunities to go above and beyond and surprise your customer with the quality of the relationship."

Dan Standley, owner of Dan's Landscaping and Lawn Care Inc. in Terrytown, La., agreed, but with a qualifier. For him, good customer service "is to profitably and consistently give customers more than they expect."

"A lot of people can consistently give them more than they expect — but they're not making money," said Standley, whose full-service landscape management and design-build company has been in business 14 years. "I stress to my people that the customer is not always right, but you don't let them know that. You have to make every customer contact a good one."

For Ed Sinnott, president of Clearwater Landscaping Co. in Sun Valley, Idaho, top service is achieved by simply "listening to the client."

Sinnott, whose residential landscape construction and maintenance company has been in business 20 years, recalled how a survey came back with a very negative rating from one client.

Successful service means exceeding customers' expectations and still making a profit in day-to-day operations.



## SIX STEPS TO SERVICE RECOVERY

Consultant and author Kristin Anderson identified six steps to service recovery.

**1. Apologize and acknowledge your mistake.** "Many of us are tempted to first try to educate a customer. But you can't educate the irate and irrational."

**2. Listen.** Ask questions and find out why the customer is upset.

**3. Fix the problem.**

**4. Offer an atonement.** "It isn't enough to bring the customer back to where they thought they should

have been in the first place. You need a gesture that says you want to make it up to them. You are asking to start over and rebuild the partnership."

**5. Keep your promises.** "But be careful about the promises you make in this problem-solving process, because the customer will read the fine print. If you aren't specific about when things will happen, the customer will make up a schedule."

**6. Follow up.** "Go back to the customer and say here is what we

have done and how do you feel about this now? A lot of times we don't go back because we think we know what they'll say and we don't need to hear it. Well, you do, and they need an opportunity to say it.

"With some customers, you may expect to have them chew on your arm for the next 14 years. If you decide their business is valuable enough, that's fine."

Anderson this fall releases the latest book in a series, titled *Knock Your Socks Off Answers: Solving Customer Nightmares and Soothing Nightmare Customers*.

"It blew us away because any time I was on the site, the place looked good. We asked him why he rated us so negatively and he said it was because we never talked to him and asked how things were.

"You can provide good customer service, but it still can be negative if you aren't doing it within the customer's context. In this case, the customer just wanted to talk to the foreman. As soon as we started talking to him — and it was really just shooting the breeze — we got a good rating. We changed nothing technically," he explained.

**MANAGING EXPECTATIONS.** "Contractors worry that they will become victims of their customers' unrealistic and irrational expectations. But you can manage and shape those expectations," Anderson noted. "First, you have to know what your customer thinks ought to happen and then begin managing so it comes into line with what you actually will do."

The process takes time but is a necessary step to understanding the customer's viewpoint, she said. "We suggest you enter into joint discovery with your customers, where you find out what they already know about working with a lawn service or landscape company. Then, starting at their level of expertise, you help them discover what working with you will be like, how long it takes to create sketches, order trees, install them, etc."

She also warned against service short cuts. "One of the rules of thumb is to underpromise and overdeliver, but that can be misconstrued as 'let me cut myself huge amounts of slack time in the schedule, therefore I will have wonderful opportunities to surprise my customer.' You can't really afford to do that because you are in a competitive bidding situation."

The temptation to make it easy to fulfill a customer's expectations can backfire in terms of getting other business, Anderson cautioned. "If you are cutting yourself slack, bidding a one-week job at 2 1/2 to three weeks, you are creating two weeks worth of market opportunity for someone else."

She urged contractors to take credit for those times when they exceed a customer's expectations. "If you pick up trash and other companies don't, make sure your customer knows that."

"You can do that by pointing it out on a site walk-through with your client or in newsletters or other correspondence you send to clients," she added.

**INTERNAL ATTITUDE.** You expect a customer-comes-first attitude from the top people in any company. But how can contractors instill a devotion to service in their front-line troops?

"We do leadership training through Dale Carnegie, in a classroom-type atmosphere. That has been our major focus for 18 months," said Paul Drummond, director of business development for Smallwood Design Group in Naples, Fla.

"Everybody from foreman on up, at great expense, goes through this 12-week program. We are now ready for our second year of training, focusing on customer service," he said.

Drummond noted that the training's importance has been in the "sense of empowerment" that it gives employees and in its emphasis on results rather than tasks.

"Every employee is empowered to make decisions right there in front of the customer," Drummond explained, noting that the decisions are kept within certain cost boundaries. "If a customer indicates that we weren't performing a certain function of a contract correctly, then our service becomes performing that aspect of the contract."

Foremen and supervisors who receive leadership training convey what they learn to crew members through team meetings. Drummond said there are also in-house seminars and training, based on training videotapes produced by the Associated Landscape Contractors of America.

"We do a lot of customer service training,"





noted Sinnott. "We train all employees in customer service and all foremen get a level-two customer service training. Employees get it when they are hired and it is renewed every year.

"We teach them to listen, because most people want to be heard," he explained. "They learn to take responsibility for their actions."

**EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION.** Sinnott said employees are recognized monthly for outstanding customer service, customer surveys are posted so employees can see how they're doing and individuals are singled out for specific pats on the back.

"We stress in training that it is a lot easier to work for someone who is happy and pleasant and wants you there than for someone who is peering through the window and who is mad at you," Sinnott said.

He noted that dedication to customer service at Clearwater is becoming part of the company's culture. "It is part of being here. You just absorb it. I don't think it is something you can hire for; it is something that gets ingrained into people. I explain to everyone who works here that there are a lot of people doing landscaping and mowing lawns, but the reason people hire us is customer satisfaction."

"We stress quality in our employee manual and in our meetings (attended by supervisors and team leaders)," said Eric Moore, executive vice president at Moore Landscapes in Glenview, Ill.

"We talk a lot about, and act on, the issue of total quality and how the customer doesn't just judge us on the job we do, but how we perform the job. That involves the appearance of crews, the management, the total package," he explained.

"It is primarily our supervisors and team leaders who deal with the customer," Moore added, "so it is not as critical that we train our team members to be as customer-driven. But it is still important. Everyone must be a salesperson in one form or another."

"We have monthly training sessions at the office and we use ALCA training videotapes," said Standley. "We also do role playing. I'll play the role of a client and let them play it out. If I don't like the way they handled it, we'll talk about it."

Employee training is an ongoing process with reinforcement and rewards, he noted. "We do breakfast roundtable meetings to discuss how we can better take care of our clients. We also reward good customer service. We give pins, or unexpected cash bonuses, or coupons for dinner for two. If I see the crews doing a good job, I'll buy them lunch."

He gives his crews authority — up to \$75 worth — to fix any unhappy customer situation rather than delay a solution by having to ask someone else.

"It lets them have some authority and strengthens the bond with the client," he stressed. "Time is of the essence. If people are mad, they want you to listen and to fix it right away."

**AUTHORITY COUNTS.** Giving on-site people the authority to fix problems fits with the recommendations of customer service consultant Anderson.

"Great customer service happens at the moment the customer is experiencing it," she said. "With an on-site contact person, the customers feel that if they see the crew there and need something, there is someone they can go to. The client needs someone they can talk to. You can't partner with a company, you partner with individuals who, at that moment in time, represent the company."

The confidence to give authority depends on the quality of employee. In competitive job markets, finding quality employees may depend on pay and other rewards. "We study companies that succeed through customer service and find that they tend to pay five to 10 percent above the industry average," Anderson continued.

"But they keep their employees not so much because of the money but because of the work environment they create. They acknowledge and reward individual employee accomplishments. They give employees a sense of ownership and pride for the work they do. They select people who seek that feedback."

When it comes to hiring, finding people who will fit the customer-oriented philosophy of the company is a challenge. Anderson said this is one time when nepotism really can work.

"If you can get a core of people

**Providing great customer service is often part of the successful company's culture. Credit: Clean Cut**



## BUSINESS MANAGEMENT: PART 6

who have pride in the job they do, invite them to assist you in finding new employees. As long as they feel proud of the organization, they will want to pull in people who will build it up, not bring it down.

She continued, "I know some landscape companies who hire many siblings and cousins from the same families for seasonal labor. There are concerns about that, of course, but if you have employees who are deeply committed, you can reward them for bringing in additional deeply committed people."

Drummond and Standley noted that their companies test for drugs and that discourages some people from even applying for jobs.

"It's the best thing I ever did," Standley recalled. "Absenteeism and tardiness went out the door. Employee morale skyrocketed. People who do drugs or alcohol do not apply at my company. We draw from a higher-caliber worker and that has really helped us."

In addition to a no-drugs hiring policy, Drummond's company uses talent indexes to reveal strengths and weaknesses of potential new employees.

"We have been doing this for two years," he explained. "Our turnover has been reduced and the employees we hire fit the vision of the organization. We were hiring warm bodies for years; now we can be more selective and hire the right people."

**GETTING FEEDBACK.** They say you can't manage what you can't measure, and customer surveys are an excellent way to get feedback. All of the contractors interviewed for this article use them in some form.

"To find out what our customers want, we do customer surveys twice a season," said Moore. "They rate us on site appearance, workmanship, crew professionalism and more."

He continued, "We try to follow up with a meeting or phone call. We find that if we do initiate discussion, some people will open up and tell us the good, the bad and the ugly. We've learned a lot that way."

**CAREFUL GUARANTEES.** Guarantees—if used at all—must be used carefully, said Anderson. They must be realistic, clearly written and easy for customers to invoke. "Guarantee only what you can control," Anderson advised, and don't punish an employee if one of their customers invokes the guarantee.

While many successful contractors guarantee plant materials for a year on installations and the life of a maintenance contract, their internal (and unwritten) guarantee is for complete customer satisfaction. ■

*The author is a free-lance writer based in Norwalk, Ohio.*

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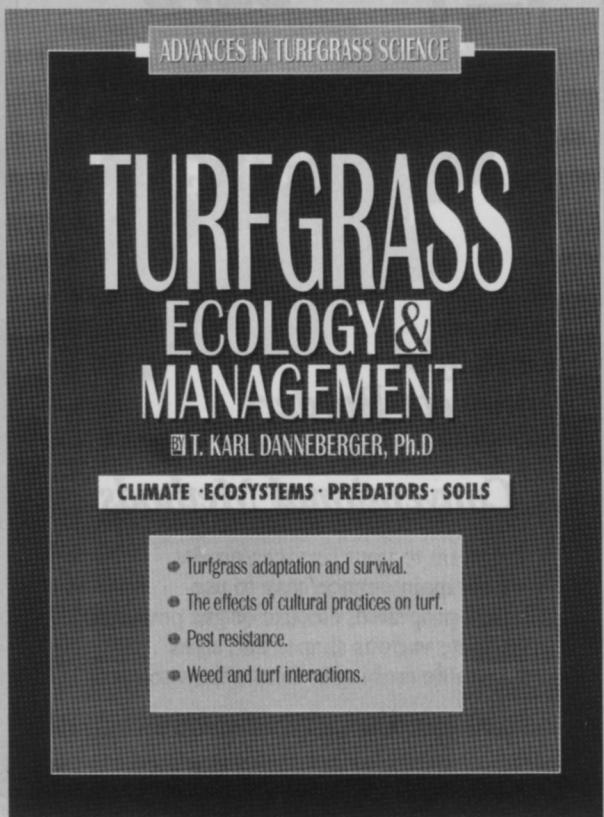
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# People

**KEITH ALM** was appointed president and chief operating officer of Garden Way. He will have total operating responsibility for the company's lawn and garden business. Garden Way also announced a restructuring of its product management and research department, which included the appointments of **Gregory Best** to director of product management and research; **Kevin Connolly**, **Brian Miller** and **Paul Denimarck** as product managers; and **Denis Bedard** and **Thomas Klein** to the new positions of associate product managers.

**Suzy Davis** joined the customer service team of Angelica Nurseries Inc., to represent Angelica's full line of plants.

Snapper appointed **James Drummond** to vice president, sales and marketing. He brings more than 20 years of experience in sales and distribution to the position. **Jeffrey Jackson** was named corporate controller of Snapper Power Equipment. He previously served as corporate assistant controller.

**John Brannen** was appointed president and chief executive officer of Organic Solutions. He formerly served as president of Brannen's Inc. for five years.

**Bruce Collins** was named president of



Drummond



Engler

Mustang Manufacturing. He will be responsible for operating results, planning and development. **Donald Kalkman** was appointed chairman of the board and chief executive officer, to oversee long-term planning and direction.

Power King Products named **Darrel Woods** to its sales and marketing department, as Midwest regional sales manager. In addition, **Larry Seiler** joined as Northeast regional sales manager.

**Steven Key** was named regional sales manager for Wesbar Corp. in western and southern United States and western Canada.

IntAgra Inc. appointed **Mike Engler** president and chief executive officer. He will as-

sume full responsibility for expanding the company's milk replacer, animal health and gardening products markets.

**Scott Wanzor** is the new Southeast territory manager for Aquatrols. He brings more than 18 years of experience in the turf and ornamental industry.

**Terry Kippley** was promoted to national account manager for the Agrisorbents Products Group, a division of Oil-Dri Corporation of America. He will manage national accounts in the crop protection, feed, lawn care and processing industries.

Recent management changes at ARCT Inc. include the promotion of **Richard Abbott** to chairman of the board and chief executive officer; **Elizabeth Buchanan** to president and chief operating officer; and **Jeff Saltzman** to executive vice president. **Jay Abercrombie**, vice president, will take over the biological services department.

**Donald Dungen** has been appointed national market manager for Buckner Irrigation's residential and commercial irrigation products division.

**Jay Inglis** joined O.A. Newton & Son Co. and will be responsible for turf irrigation sales and design.



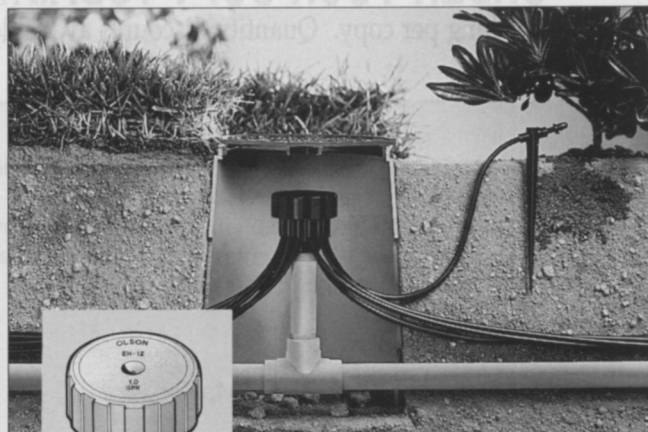
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# Products

RECYCLER KITS for **Toro's** ProLine riding mowers are said to be capable of reducing mowing time by as much as one third. The riding mowers offer the option of a 44- or 52-inch high-capacity, side-discharge deck



with kit for productive and flexible mowing operations.

**Circle 126 on reader service card**

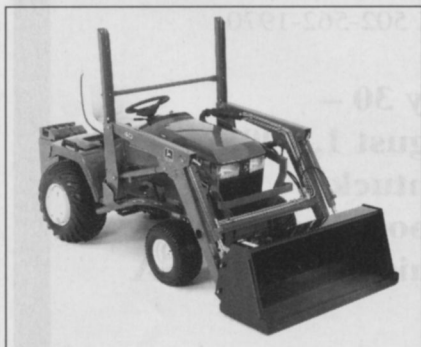
Pro Series Database for CD ROM from **Green Thumb Software** provides detailed cultural information on over 2,000 plants.



Program is compatible with Microsoft Windows™ and offers photographic images, audio plant pronunciation guide and reporting functions. Other features include searches, customized reports and pricing functions and growing data.

**Circle 127 on reader service card**

**John Deere's** 40 Loader fits the 425, 445 and 455 two-wheel steer tractors to provide a 6.2-cubic-foot loading capacity. Once the mounting brackets are installed, mounting can be done in less than five minutes without tools. Bucket measures 48 inches wide to



## PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Landmaster dump bodies by **Stahl** give landscape contractors practical and flexible use for a variety of production tasks. The dump bed is V-shaped to enhance material flow and minimize sticking. Tailgate has an adjustable material chute to control the spread of materials and is hinged at top and bottom for versatility.

Contractors can store materials and long tools in several lockable horizontal storage compartments built with rubber door seals. The curbside horizontal door has cable stops to hold the door in a 90-degree open position, to double as a work table. Other features include rust-resistant body and choice of sizes from 2.5 to 4.4 cubic yards of dump volume.

**Circle 125 on reader service card**



handle a variety of landscape jobs.

Tractors are powered by either 20- or 22-hp engines and have hydrostatic steering and transmission.

**Circle 128 on reader service card**

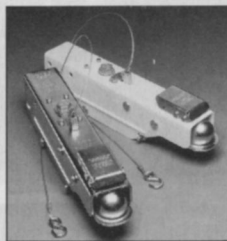
**NaturTech Composting Systems** introduced its enclosed container compost process that uses a centralized mixer, oxygen and temperature controls, computerized process control and monitoring, modular biofilters for odor control and either aeration pipe or perforated floors for easy cleanup. Processing facilities can be sized from one to 12 tons per day. System is based on the segregation of source-separated compost from mixed-waste feedstock and does not need leachate ponds.

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**Melroe's** Model 763 Bobcat skid-steer loader features a long wheelbase and a rated operating capacity of 1,500 pounds. It is powered by a 46-hp transversely mounted diesel engine and has a maximum lift height of 114 inches.



This and other models in the C Series require the operator to be safely situated in the cab before it can be operated. Other features include self-lubricating axle bearings, heavy-duty tires and easy access to internal parts for maintenance.

**Circle 131 on reader service card**

Spirit Pro portable FM two-way job-site radios from **Motorola** operate on two channels for added flexibility. The radios are powered by rechargeable batteries, weigh only 12 ounces and fit easily into a pocket or on a belt.

Users can choose frequency combinations to easily coordinate several operations at a site. Options include headsets, remote speaker microphone and earpieces.

**Circle 132 on reader service card**

Twin-Blade Mulch X™ mulching conversion kit from **Blue Sky Engineering** has an adapter that allows it to fit 90 percent of all walk-behind lawnmowers.

Its self-cleaning, airflow design extends mulching efficiency. Kit is said to offer 90 percent more cutting edge, allows mulch to be discharged under the deck or bagged and is easy to install.

**Circle 133 on reader service card**

(continued on page 78)



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**Products**

(continued from page 76)

Turbo TeeJet™ nozzle from **Spraying Systems Co.** creates a unique path for liquid flow within the tip that is said to maximize drift control and spray pattern quality. The unusual design produces larger droplets that are less likely to drift, but also a uniform spray pattern and slower liquid velocity for greater control. Pressure range from 15 to 90 psi gives operators flexibility in the field. Nozzle fits in standard flat spray nozzle caps and threaded caps and comes in capacities from 0.1 to 0.5 gpm.

**Circle 134 on reader service card**

Birchmeier® backpack sprayers, parts and accessories from **ITB Company** range from 2.64- to 5.28-gallon sizes for liquid applications. Each model is designed to suit particular lawn and landscape needs, such as the Dusty-5, which handles powder applications, and the K-145 Micronizer,



which uses a Ferrari engine to power either liquid or powder applications.

**Circle 135 on reader service card**

Design tools from **Versa-Lok®** Retaining Wall Systems give users a quick way to



plan construction and solve landscape design problems. Scale model units demonstrate the advantages of mortarless construction and installation techniques. Drafting templates help designers plan curves, corners and angles in several scales.

**Circle 136 on reader service card**

Respond® concentrated wetting agent from **United Horticultural Supply** is formulated for use on all types of turfgrass. Tests have shown its ability to alleviate poor water infiltration in turf affected by dry patch,

drought stress and compaction. It can also be used in areas where standing water develops.

**Circle 137 on reader service card**

Three fountain aerators from **Aquamaster Fountains and Aerators** provide a choice of spray patterns to enhance pools and ponds. New patterns include high flow, low height; wide geyser; and crystal geyser. All aerators are designed as floating fountains.

**Circle 138 on reader service card**

Bac-Vac™ nine-bushel collection system from **Excel** fits on Models 2500 and 2700 mowers. High-speed blower mounts on either the 52- or 60-inch side-discharge deck to produce nearly 10,000 cfm of air flow for high-capacity vacuuming. Hopper is made of fiberglass, has a sight window for operator use and can be installed quickly.

**Circle 139 on reader service card**



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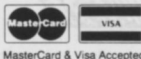
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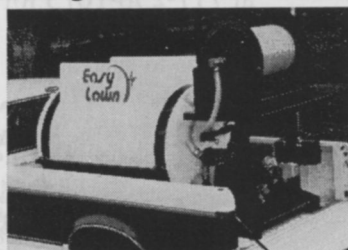


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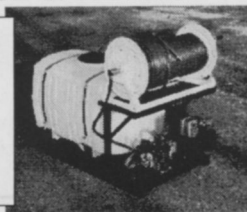
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- Manager, Director, Supt., Foreman
- Agronomist, Horticulturist
- Entomologist, Plant Pathologist
- Serviceman, Technician
- Scientist, Researcher
- Company, Library copy only
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Based on overall dollar volume, estimate what percentage of your business is derived from:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ % Mowing
- \_\_\_\_\_ % Tree Care
- \_\_\_\_\_ % Fertilizer
- \_\_\_\_\_ % Seed
- \_\_\_\_\_ % Pesticide Applications
- \_\_\_\_\_ % Irrigation Installation
- \_\_\_\_\_ % Irrigation Maintenance

**5. How many people does your business employ (including yourself)?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Year-round
- \_\_\_\_\_ Seasonal

**6. What is your annual purchasing budget for:**

- \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Pesticides
- \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Equipment

**7. In peak season, how many crews do you operate in the field for:**

1	21	41	61	81	101	121	141	161	181
2	22	42	62	82	102	122	142	162	182
3	23	43	63	83	103	123	143	163	183
4	24	44	64	84	104	124	144	164	184
5	25	45	65	85	105	125	145	165	185
6	26	46	66	86	106	126	146	166	186
7	27	47	67	87	107	127	147	167	187
8	28	48	68	88	108	128	148	168	188
9	29	49	69	89	109	129	149	169	189
10	30	50	70	90	110	130	150	170	190
11	31	51	71	91	111	131	151	171	191
12	32	52	72	92	112	132	152	172	192
13	33	53	73	93	113	133	153	173	193
14	34	54	74	94	114	134	154	174	194
15	35	55	75	95	115	135	155	175	195
16	36	56	76	96	116	136	156	176	196
17	37	57	77	97	117	137	157	177	197
18	38	58	78	98	118	138	158	178	198
19	39	59	79	99	119	139	159	179	199
20	40	60	80	100	120	140	160	180	200

- \_\_\_\_\_ Installation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Maintenance
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pesticide Application

**8. What is your approximate annual sales volume?**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

**IMPORTANT:** All information must be provided for processing.

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**Circle 140 on reader service card**

Add-It automatic proportioning fertilizer injectors from **Strong Injectors** are designed for subsurface and conventional sprinkler irrigation systems. The preset units range from as small as one pint to as large as 30 gallons of capacity to fit landscape fertilizer requirements. Injectors accept any liquid fertilizer and can be used with totally water-soluble dry fertilizers when preblended with water.

**Circle 141 on reader service card**

**Turfco's** aerator is rated at 26,000 square feet per hour, which is said to be enough to handle 10 average lawns per day. Its 3/4-inch tines penetrate 2 3/4-inch deep into the turf. Design features include side guards for protection, wide drum and long handle to reduce operator fatigue, and easy access to chain and belt drives for service.

**Circle 142 on reader service card**

Electric start engines ranging from 12.5 to 18 hp enhance **Scag's** Model SW belt-drive walk-behind mowers. Each model also



includes the E-Z Grip™ controls designed to minimize hand force required for operation. Design features include an electric blade-engagement clutch, two power belts and an optional traction component. Models range from 32- to 72-inch decks.

**Circle 143 on reader service card**

(continued on page 89)



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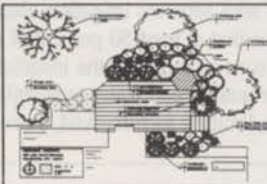
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# Product Profile

## IRRIGATION DEVICE CUTS TRANSPLANT LOSSES

DURING THE PAST two years, horticulturists at the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign have cut tree transplant loss in half, significantly reduced berm runoff and increased associated labor efficiency by 650 percent. According to Jim Smith, university horticulturist, the key to these successes is that the department changed the way it manages its watering program.

Campus grounds crews now wrap newly transplanted 2 1/2- to 5-inch trees with Tregators, portable irrigation devices manufactured by Spectrum Products, Raleigh, N.C. The devices are designed to deliver proper water rates when in-ground irrigation systems are unavailable.

While many landscape management teams have installed permanent, low-volume systems with separate irrigation control zones to ensure that at least 50 percent of each tree's root zone is irrigated, the installation cost, water quality and water availability can become limiting factors. And, as commercial



Portable drip irrigators zip together for fast installation around young or mature trees. Photo credit: Spectrum Products

tree maintenance costs in the United States push beyond \$1 billion per year, property owners and landscape contractors have tightened their focus on ways to reduce labor, limit runoff, comply with environmental mandates and increase tree survivability.

**THE DRIP OPTION.** Drip irrigation is one option that has become increasingly popular for

tree establishment. Maintenance costs are higher when drip is compared to conventional systems because supervisors must inspect each sprinkler and emitter rather than monitor performance from a centrally located irrigation controller.

Managers also must walk the line to make sure pedestrian traffic hasn't dislodged any drip line. Design is critical, with precise details, such as low shrubs receiving one emitter while small trees receive three.

Subsurface in-line emitters eliminate many of the maintenance concerns caused by drip tubing. Instead, occasional problems with breaks in lines, low pressure or uneven flow rates can create concerns. Managers also cite concerns about root intrusion and question the efficiency of emitters in densely planted areas.

The difficulty with any permanent system is to meet requirements during establishment and also handle the later needs of enlarged, maturing trees that may require one to three

(continued on page 84)



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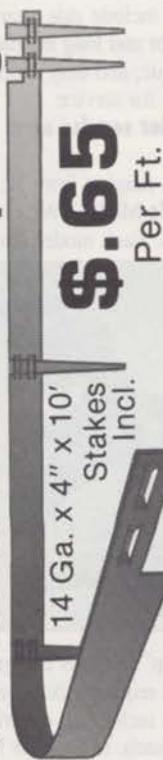
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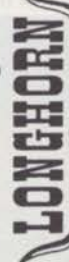
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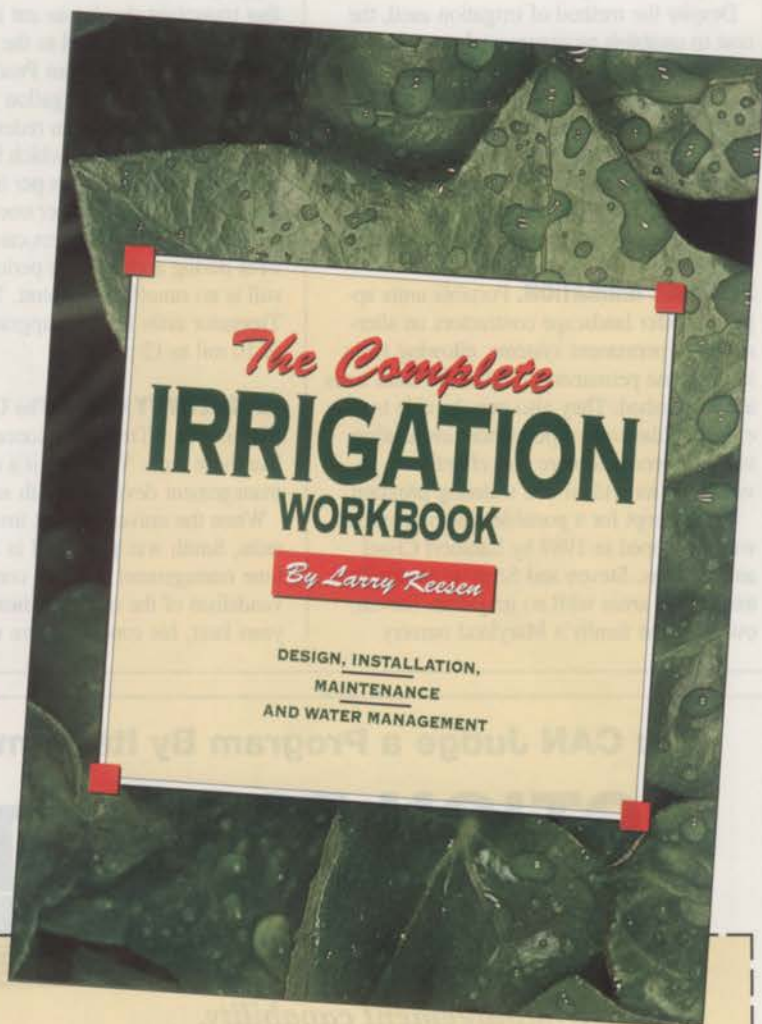
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## Product Profile

(continued from page 82)

more emitters per tree. Thus, landscape managers face scheduling, upgrade and maintenance questions at some point in the life of each permanent system.

Despite the method of irrigation used, the cost to establish an ornamental program — including labor, equipment costs, and in some cases, replacement of 30 percent — can be significant. Some professional landscape contractors estimate those costs at more than \$250 a tree and some contractors estimate they average at least \$25 a tree per watering, without taking into account tree replacement guarantees.

**PORTABLE IRRIGATION.** Portable units appear to offer landscape contractors an alternative to permanent systems, allowing them to postpone permanent installations until trees are established. They also may be able to eliminate the cost of permanent installation where it becomes more cost effective to invest in an individual tree watering program.

The concept for a portable watering system was developed in 1989 by Lambert Cissel and his sons, Steven and Scott, to minimize tree loss in areas with no irrigation. Steven, owner of the family's Maryland nursery

which grows 20,000 large-specimen trees for sale, couldn't spade trees efficiently in the mid-summer clay soil.

The original homemade units, made of Tyvek®, reduced a labor-intensive three-day waiting period for digging to an easy daily digging schedule. Soon, the Cissels noticed that transplant shock was cut in half. The product was introduced to the industry in the early 1990s by Spectrum Products.

Now, the 20- and 50-gallon woven polyethylene units have been redesigned to improve drip-time range, which has been shortened from 8 to 32 hours per tree to a current range of 1 to 16 hours per tree.

"The benefit is that users can water more trees during a given time period, yet there still is no runoff," said Scott. The green Tregator units have an upgraded thickness of 10 mil to 12 mil.

**PRODUCTIVITY GAINS.** The University of Illinois was a Tregator pioneer. "We really like these units. We think it's a great time management device," Smith said.

When the university first investigated the units, Smith was interested in maximizing time management and was concerned about vandalism of the units and heat buildup. Two years later, his concerns were unfounded.

"People are not vandalizing them," Smith noted. "And while we were concerned that they would build up heat, we found that the water temperature didn't climb at all. In fact, it works almost like a mulch around the tree, providing a cooling effect right around the base of the tree.

"The big benefit has been for the superintendents — they can actually see which trees have been watered and which have not."

The units also shave actual watering time, Smith added. "We can water 100 trees a day with the device, whereas if we needle them, we can do only about 15 to 16 trees a day." He estimated it takes him one to two minutes to fill up 50 gallons and that employees would spend about 30 minutes to needle a tree.

"We plant about 500 trees a year — 250 in the spring and 250 in the fall. Many of these trees are planted up on a berm. We like Tregators for berms because water loss is minimized.

The ease of use contributes to productivity, he said. "These things are very easy to use. We put three units together for our five-inch trees and just zip them up."

Smith indicated the units can reduce losses. "During establishment, we've really cut our losses. We used to lose three to four percent. Now, we're down to one percent." ■

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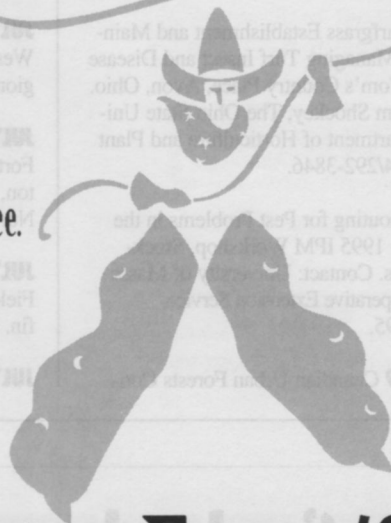
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# Calendar

**JUNE 23 -25** Plantec International Trade Fair for Horticulture, Frankfurt, Germany. Contact: Messe Frankfurt Service, 404/984-8023.

**JUNE 27-29** Practical Approaches for Effective Erosion and Sediment Control, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Contact: International Erosion Control Association, 800/455-4322.

**JUNE 28** Modern Arboriculture: The Science Behind the Treatment, Sequoia Convention Center, Buena Park, Calif. Contact: Ted Stamen & Associates, 909/656-3431.

**JULY 11** Turfgrass Establishment and Maintenance — Managing Turf Insect and Disease Problems, Tom's Country Place, Avon, Ohio. Contact: Tom Shockey, The Ohio State University Department of Horticulture and Plant Science; 614/292-3846.

**JULY 12** Scouting for Pest Problems in the Landscape - 1995 IPM Workshop, Stockbridge, Mass. Contact: University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension Service, 413/545-0895.

**JULY 16-19** Canadian Urban Forests Con-

ference, Windsor, Ontario. Contact: Canadian Forestry Association, 519/255-6270.

**JULY 18-22** Groundskeepers Management Academy Workshop, Millington, Tenn. Contact: GMA, 800/227-9381.

**JULY 19-20** Midwest Grounds Management Conference, Illinois State University, Normal, Ill. Cosponsored by the Midwest Association of Physical Plant Administrators and the Professional Grounds Management Society. Contact: Mike O'Grady, 309/438-2032.

**JULY 24** Midwest Regional Turf Field Day, West Lafayette, Ind. Contact: Midwest Regional Turf Foundation, 317/494-8039.

**JULY 25-27** Penn Allied Nursery Trade Show, Fort Washington Expo Center, Fort Washington, Pa. Contact: Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association, 717/238-1673.

**JULY 26** University of Georgia Turfgrass Field Day, Georgia Experiment Station, Griffin. Contact: Gil Landry; 404/228-7300.

**JULY 26-28** Florida Nurserymen and Grow-

ers Association and the Associated Landscape Contractors of America Conference, Hyatt Orlando, Orlando, Fla. Contact: Lynne Rue, FNGA, 407/345-8137.

**JULY 26-28** Turfgrass Producers International Summer Convention and Field Day, Omaha, Neb. Contact: TPI, 708/705-9898.

**JULY 26-29** American Association of Nurserymen Conference, Minneapolis Convention Center. Contact: AAN, 1250 I St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005; 202/789-2900.

**JULY 30 - AUG. 1** International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Expo, Kentucky Exposition Center, Louisville. Contact: EXPO 95, 800/502/473-1992.

**AUG. 4-6** Southern Nurserymen's Association Trade Show, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta. Contact: SNA, 404/973-9026.

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND REFERENCES CALL T.D. MORLAND/HBMC, 608/832-6401.

## Products

(continued from page 81)

AutumnMate 720 high-volume leaf disposal system from **Highway Equipment** uses a brush, roller blade and conveyor system to pick up leaves and feed them into an auger for movement into an impeller/blower. Leaves then move through a chute into the back of a truck towing the unit. This system is maneuverable and has a maximum pickup width of nine feet.

**Circle 144 on reader service card**

Echo 720 flowable chlorothalonil fungicide from **Sostram Corp.** offers a concentrated formulation for disease control on turf and ornamental plants. It features six pounds of active ingredient per gallon and is labeled for use on dollar spot, large brown patch, dichcon-dra (California only), fusarium, copper spot, stem rust of bluegrass, anthracnose and several other diseases.

**Circle 145 on reader service card**

Enlarged Power Pruner circle saw accessory blade from **Technic Tool Corp.** measures 6 1/2 inches to allow cutting of branches up to 2 - 1/4 inches in diameter. Blade also has an



improved guard that lets users cut using both sides of the blade (for instance, using the top of the blade to cut a branch rather than turning it over to make the cut).

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Protect hands and controls on walk-behind mowers from contact with fences, trees, buildings and other obstacles by installing **Trimmertrap's** Model BB-1 bar bumpers. Heavy-duty steel bumpers adapt to most walk-behind models in minutes and come with necessary mounting hardware.

**Circle 147 on reader service card**

**Charles Machine Works** offers the Sub-site® electronic locating and tracking system for buried service lines. Model 75R receiver and 75T transmitter use digital signal processing technology and operate on standard C and D cell batteries. Portable units have LCD display, three detection modes and an identification feature that can discern the target utility line where multiple lines are present.

**Circle 148 on reader service card**

## COMING NEXT MONTH

The July issue of Lawn & Landscape Maintenance magazine takes a look at power equipment. Upcoming articles include:

- Power Equipment Legislation. A review of pending legislation and regulations.
- Designing a Safety Plan. Successful plans incorporate safe equipment handling.
- Choosing Replacement Engines. Productivity and cost are major issues.
- Backflow Prevention Basics. A look at the latest developments.
- EXPO '95 Preview. Commercial products are coming on strong at EXPO 95.

**Cover Story**

(continued from page 29)

explained. "But some departments didn't make more profit for the company and the managers didn't receive anything. In retrospect, we realized that the system didn't address personal improvement or behavior, only numbers."

This year, the managers will have altered goals based on the same system of rewards. "At Swingle, we're driven to find ways to change our service offerings to be different from the others," he said. "We want to be new and different, so we want to encourage the generation of ideas to come from our managers on things like making the customer feel special or better ways to handle performance reviews."

Both Tolkacz and Dickson realize that good leadership involves a responsibility to help managers become independent and grow. "We want to teach our managers about the business aspects, that the green industry is a sophisticated business," Tolkacz noted. "The difficulty is in knowing when to pull back and give them freedom."

Swingle encourages its employees to become active in industry associations at the local and national level. "Association participation has always been a big thing here," he noted, pointing out that four managers currently sit on association boards of directors and oth-

ers have served in major leadership roles. "It's a big commitment, a lot of work and a lot of money, but we see the value of these groups."

One outgrowth of well-coordinated management is the development of an "employee sharing" program, which gives Swingle's seasonal employees work in the slow winter months. Tolkacz explained that the company was able to "lend" several of its employees to another company for Christmas lighting.

"We have licensed, dependable people who want to have full-time careers." The lighting company pays Swingle's "borrowed" employees for the short time it uses their services.

"We'd love to expand this concept," Tolkacz said. "We'd love to find someone doing seasonal catalog sales that we can work with this coming winter."

**NEW CHALLENGES.** Dickson explained his views of customer expectations and management responses in a recent interview:

**Q.** How do you stand out in your customers' minds as different from the competition?

**A.** They know we are reliable. They can call and get a quality service, and we will not try to sell extra services to them. We meet their expectations.

**Q.** What do customers value and expect in your services?

**A.** People in our industry have to

understand how the public perceives them and which services are regarded as commodities or as value-added services. We also have to know how to create value for the customer who thinks it's only a commodity.

For instance, many customers think they can do their own lawn care. But most can't prune their trees, so with that kind of work, we have a better chance of educating them to the value of the work.

We have two options in lawn care: we can either say we'll fertilize the lawn like everyone else only we'll be \$4 cheaper, or we'll build a one-on-one rapport with the customer. That was Barefoot Grass' secret. They made that connection with the customer. It starts with something as simple as a handwritten note to the customer on the service call.

**Q.** How exactly do you "stay ahead of the pack?"

**A.** I see it as using every state-of-the-art method to stay ahead. We think it's better to try something and be the first to find out if it works. For instance, we study a lot of products before they come on the marketplace and try to be involved in beta programs. We use our time and money to be involved with something new.

**Q.** Where do you get guidance on developing new management programs?

**A.** I look at all types of manage-

ment systems and ideas, then try to integrate them. I get a lot of information from a business round table called TEC—The Executive Committee. It's a for-profit business that has groups across the country.

In my group, there are 14 owners of diverse companies. We meet monthly and bring in a speaker who addresses a management concern and develops new concepts. We solve problems together and have a lot in common even though our companies are different, because we are working in the world of people.

One of the ideas we got from this group was the idea of rewarding risk. Department heads are accountable for profits. It will help get rid of mediocrity—no one will be paid for tenure. We want risk takers.

**Q.** What future plans does Swingle have?

**A.** We'd like to expand into a wider geographical area. Right now, we cover only about 50 percent of the greater Denver area. Of course, this would be controlled growth, structured to allow us to maintain the quality of our services. ■

*The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape Maintenance magazine.*

Swingle Tree & Landscape Care is located at 8585 East Warren Avenue, Denver, CO 80231. Telephone is 303/337-6200.

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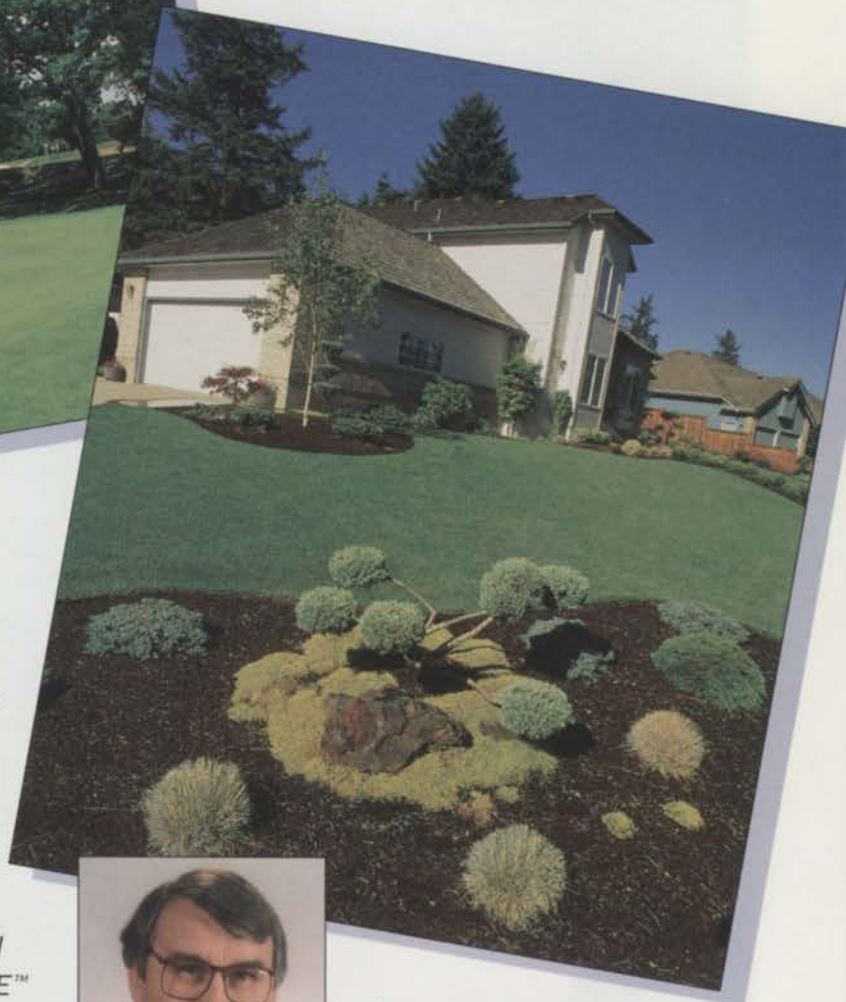
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