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USE READER SERVICE #50

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Cover photo

by Arthur Usherson
Atlanta, Ga.
(Taken at Atlanta
Botanical Garden)

Cover Story

18 Thriving on Teamwork

Bill Killmer and Joe Skelton have put the employees in command at Lifescapes, resulting in growth, profitability and opportunities.

Features

28

Lawn & Landscape Takes a Look at Franchising

Many people are willing to trade independence and some profits in order to be part of a bigger proven company.



46

The 50% Solution

Turf renovation can be a profitable service, but a variety of variables dictate the appropriate method.

70

Detaching Yourself from Single-Use Equipment

Mower attachments are growing in use among landscape contractors, but do they make sense for your company?

80

Backflow is Serious Business

The increased use of irrigation systems has generated more attention on the way these systems fit into the rest of the environment.

86

The Evolution of IPM

The definition of Integrated Pest Management is still debated, but its principles are being used by contractors successfully.



92

Industry Roundtable: Contractors Look into the Future

When it comes to anticipating future challenges for contractors, everybody wants to talk about dealing with the labor shortage.

CONTENTS



p. 8

Departments

106

Advertisers' Index

6

Editor's Focus

10

Association News

8

Market Trends

16

Breaking News

10

People

13

Calendar

96

Products

102

Classifieds

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Turf Seed Market Report

Join us as we take an in-depth look at the turf seed industry, and learn everything a contractor needs to know about quality seed. 51



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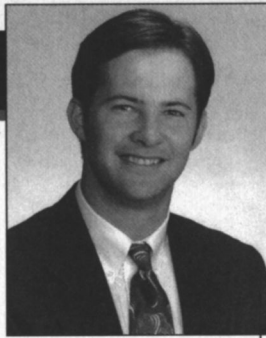
written on it. Truly, this is the way the world is moving.



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Bob West
Editor

W

we spend a lot of our time covering new product developments and how emerging technologies can change the way contractors do their jobs. Manufacturers boast of the productivity savings associated with various tweaks, improvements and, at times, wholesale changes.

In our conversations with contractors about new equipment, it's not rare to encounter companies that recognize the potential for improving productivity by purchasing "cutting edge" equipment, but instead are happy to continue on with the good old reliable machines they've been using for years. Sure, they'll take a look at the new equipment, test it out and see what it costs. But many contractors subscribe to the same opinion as the irrigation contractor who recently explained to us his hesitancy to jump on board the bandwagon about a new irrigation system component this way: "I usually let other contractors test products out for a year or two for me to make sure they work well before I buy them."

It's an understandable position to take, and I speak from experience on this matter. We recently debuted a new service of *Lawn & Landscape* called News Now that allows us to deliver breaking news stories to our readers' computers via e-mail as soon as we learn about them. An unfortunate mistake following a distribution of one such story resulted in a number of our readers being inconvenienced by receiving a couple dozen e-mails not intended for them.

At this point, it would have been easy for us to scrap the entire News Now program and pull our heads back into our comfortable shells from which we produce the printed product in your hands right now (except for those of you reading this at *Lawn & Landscape* Online).

However, the Internet represents an amazing technological explosion for business in general, particularly for the publishing industry. It is our corporate belief that to best serve our customers we must constantly reevaluate how we produce our product and how the available technology can enable us to improve that process.

Inherent in this philosophy is the acceptance that we will occasionally make mistakes or learn lessons the hard way. But as with any business, it is a marathon we are running, not a sprint. What matters is where you finish in the long run. To finish where we want to finish – as the premier provider of information for green industry contractors – we must embrace technology and accept that the best way of running our business today may not still be the best tomorrow. Even if that means making mistakes. I'm sure this is true for green industry contractors as well. LL

Bob West

Lawn & Landscape

EDITORIAL

Cindy Code Group Publisher
e-mail: ccode@gie.net

Bob West Editor
e-mail: bwest@gie.net

Paul Schrimpf Managing Editor
e-mail: pschrimpf@gie.net

GRAPHICS/PRODUCTION

Mark Rook Creative Director
Charlotte Turcotte Art Director
Helen Duerr Production Coordinator
Lori Skala Advertising Production Coordinator

Rosalie Slusher Circulation Manager

ADVERTISING/MARKETING

Maureen Mertz Eastern Sales Manager
1723 South Hill
Milford, Michigan 48381
248/685-2065
Fax: 248/685-2136
e-mail: mmertz@flash.net

Kevin Gilbride Account Manager, Midwest
e-mail: kgilbride@gie.net

Vincent Ricci Account Manager,
West Coast
e-mail: vricci@gie.net

Steve Carpenter Account Manager, Northeast
e-mail: scarpenter@gie.net

Susan Lopriore Market Coordinator

INTERNET

Bill Cox Webmaster
e-mail: bcox@gie.net

Carolyn Antl Internet Editor
e-mail: cantl@gie.net

Sydney Work Internet Editor
e-mail: swork@gie.net

CORPORATE STAFF

Richard J. W. Foster President and CEO
Cindy Code Group Publisher
Christopher W. Foster Director, MIS Department & Internet Communications

Heidi Senecoff Director, Circulation & Database Operations
Jami Childs Director, Production Operations

Cheryl Thomas Manager, Accounting
Fran Franzak Manager, Books & Directories

EDITORIAL & SALES OFFICES

4012 Bridge Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44113
Phone: 216/961-4130
Fax: 216/961-0364
Internet: <http://www.lawnandlandscape.com>
Subscriptions and Classifieds: 216/961-4130

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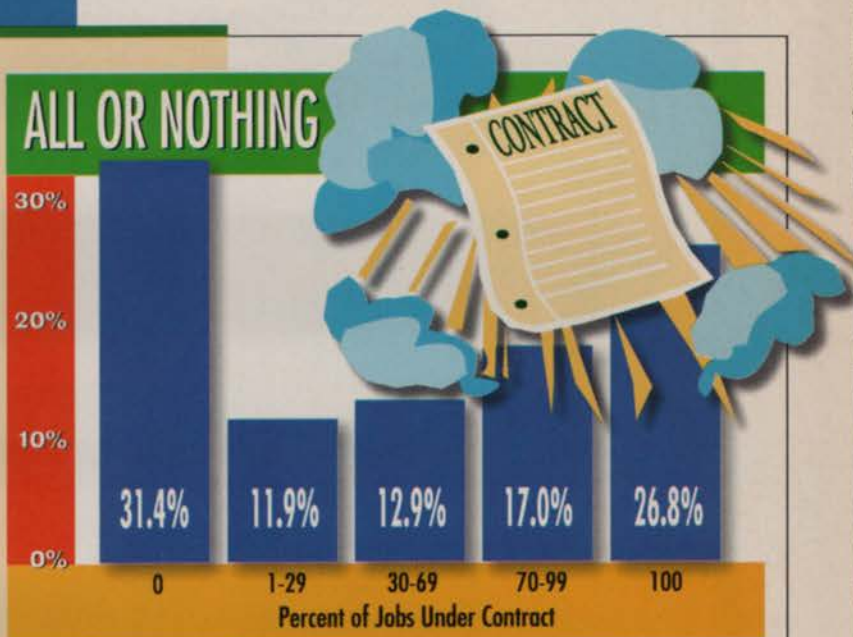
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CASE

CONTRACT INCONSISTENCY

For many lawn care and maintenance contractors, having business under contract brings a sense of security that is invaluable and simplifies business management. For other contractors, contracts represent a needless hassle and are often too complicated to understand.

Apparently, quite a few people belong to each camp. A survey of contractors nationwide conducted for *Lawn & Landscape* found that 31.4 percent of contractors don't use written contracts while 26.8 percent have all of their business under contract. The remaining 41.2 percent was divided fairly equally among the remaining percentile categories.



(Credit: Research USA)

JACOBSEN, RANSOMES MOVE FORWARD

RACINE, WIS. — As the dust settles from Textron's Jan. 30 acquisition of Ransomes, a sizeable manufacturer emerges to take advantage of the combined resources of the two organizations.

The new company is Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products and includes products marketed under the names of Jacobsen, Ransomes, Cushman, Ryan, Bob-Cat, Brouwer, Bunton and Steiner. Peter Wilson, previously the

president of Ransomes, was named president of the new company, and Phil Tralies, Wilson's counterpart at Jacobsen, was appointed president of Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products Americas.

Harold Pinto, senior vice president of sales and marketing, explained that while Ransomes was particularly attractive to Jacobsen because of its market presence in Europe and other areas outside of the U.S., the companies' combined

engineering resources should enable it to bring improved products to market more rapidly. "Ransomes had some pretty innovative technolo-

gies in areas such as electric mowers for the golf market that should really open some new doors for us in the commercial market," Pinto noted, adding that the various product lines will continue to be marketed under their own names.

While some previous manufacturer acquisitions have been driven by one company's interest in a specific product of another company,

Pinto pointed out that this deal was a result of a much larger plan.

"The Bob-Cat line's reputation did help make Ransomes very attractive to Jacobsen, but this deal now makes us market leaders in both commercial and golf sales worldwide, which is the strategy Textron has used all along," Pinto said. "We

want to be number one in all of the markets we play in."

Pinto also agreed with other manufacturers' observations that consolidation among suppliers will continue. "Consolidation is a factor throughout

'Ransomes had some pretty innovative technologies that should really open some new doors for us in the commercial market.' — Harold Pinto

the entire industry, from companies like Environmental Industries and American Golf to the dealers and distributors to the manufacturers who are looking to leverage the benefits of different manufacturing, distribution and engineering resources to grow their role in the market," he noted.

(continued on page 10)



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(continued from page 8)

WEISBURGER PARTNERS UP

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. – B. & D.A. Weisburger Insurance, the insurance agency chosen by the Professional Lawn Care Association of America to offer insurance to its members, has teamed with a new business partner in order to expand its offerings and ability to serve contractors nationwide.

Weisburger will represent Westport Insurance Corp., Kansas City, Kan., for insurance programs in the lawn care and pest control industries. Westport, which is owned by a subsidiary of GE Capital Services, allows Weisburger to expand the coverages it offers to include programs such as environmental claims and spills from vehicles. "We'll be able to offer programs other companies can't," noted Michael Weisburger, president.

PEOPLE

Daniel Ariens assumed responsibilities of president of Ariens. **Peter Ariens** was named president of Stens Power Equipment Parts, Ariens' wholly owned subsidiary. Also, Ariens appointed **Michael Thuecks** vice president of sales for Gravely commercial and Ariens consumer lines while **Paul Chetcuti** was named vice president of international marketing.

Pennington Seed appointed **Russ Nicholson** as national sales manager for the professional turf group. Pennington also announced **Brenda Dossey** will assume responsibilities of western division turfgrass manager. Zeneca Professional Products named **Glen Johnson** as contract sales market lead, **Lee Kozsey**, **Mickey Lovett**, **Greg Reynolds** and **Brian Winkel** as territory sales leads and **Mark Zajac** as senior product service lead. Snapper appointed **Scott Murray** product marketing manager for commercial products. **Owen Towne** joined Griffin L.L.C. as global business director for specialty products.

Weisburger also pointed out that the individuals at B. & D.A. Weisburger will continue to support contractors' needs. "We have 80 years of combined experience writing coverage for people in the pesticide and herbicide business, and that's something we're proud of," he said. "Now, we will write that coverage with Westport as the underwriter."

Further strengthening the deal is the fact that Weisburger will continue to use the Midlands Claim Administrators, Oklahoma City, Okla., as its claim handlers. "Having a stand alone claims organization means there's no bureaucracy involved in the processing of claims," Weisburger explained.

"Contractors insure their businesses to protect them

from financial devastation, and this type of alliance will help us protect them," Weisburger concluded.

SIMA OFF TO GOOD START

PITTSBURGH – The ongoing emphasis on professional-



Daniel Ariens



Russ Nicholson

ASSOCIATION NEWS

Surveys for the **Professional Lawn Care Association of America's** 1998 Operating Efficiency Study are available to all green industry professionals. For more information, call 800/458-3466. PLCAA also announced that Richard Gerson will open its annual conference Nov. 13-17, in Nashville, Tenn., as the opening speaker. Gerson specializes in sales, marketing, customer service, quality improvement and communication skills.

The **Associated Landscape Contractors of America** announced the winners of its Employee and Fleet Safety Contests for 1997. Recognized companies included: Lawn Butler, J.R. Thomas Landscaping, Lawn & Turf Landscaping, Mike Davis Landscape, Southern Landscape Professionals, MBC Landscape, Terracare, Grunder Landscaping, Faddegon's Nursery and Mariani Enterprises.

The **American Nursery & Landscape Association** announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture Horticultural Specialties survey will be enhanced to

include the nation's 100 top producing counties to account for the impact of growers in areas where nursery production is among the top commodities.

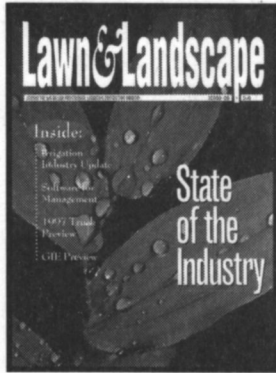
The **Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association** elected the following officers for 1998: Cindy Code, president; Michael Joyce, vice president; Steve Trusty, secretary.

The Professional Landscape Scholarship Fund of the **Wisconsin Landscape Contractors Association** Metro Milwaukee Chapter awarded seven scholarships to students from the Milwaukee Area Technical College.

Approximately \$15,000 of grant funding will be awarded by the **National Foliage Foundation** for foliage research. The deadline for applications is Oct. 1, and proposals should address areas of production, distribution, marketing and utilization of plants. For information, call 800/375-3642.

The **International Society of Arboriculture** released its second series of ArborMaster Training Videos with two, 22-minute long selections for climbers. For more information, call 217/355-9411.

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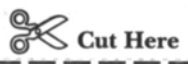
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izing the green industry took another step forward with the first-ever Snow & Ice Symposium, presented by the Snow & Ice Management Association.

The event drew approximately 85 attendees to hear presentations such as, "Pricing and Making a Profit," "Advances in Weather Reporting" and "Subcontracting and Preparing for Ongoing Snowfalls."

John Allin, president of SIMA and owner of Allin Companies, Erie, Pa., said the organization was pleased with the response to the event and expects considerable growth as soon as next year.

Contractors interested in the 1999 Symposium or in joining SIMA should call 814/456-9550.



CALENDAR

To ensure that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 10 to 12 weeks in advance to *Lawn & Landscape*, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113.

JULY 8-9 Understanding Modern Arboriculture, Portsmouth, N.H. Contact: 603/436-4804.

JULY 8-9 Pennsylvania Landscape & Nursery Association Central Pesticide Institute, New Cumberland. Contact: 717/238-1673.

JULY 12 ALCA CLP and CLT Certification exam, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/395-2522.

JULY 12-15 Lawn & Garden Marketing and Distribution Association's 28th Annual Convention, Vancouver, British Columbia. Contact: 215/564-3484.

JULY 16-18 Turfgrass Producers International Summer Convention and Field Days, Tysons Corner, Va. Contact: 847/705-9898.

JULY 20-21 Professional Lawn Care

Association of America Legislative Day on the Hill, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/458-3466.

JULY 25-27 International Lawn, Garden & Outdoor Power Equipment Expo, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 800/558-8767.

JULY 28 Midwest Regional Turf Field Day, West Lafayette, Ind. Contact: 765/494-8039.

JULY 28-30 Penn Allied Nursery Trade Show, Fort Washington, Pa. Contact: 717/238-1673.

AUG. 1-2 Certified Landscape Technician Exterior Exam, Aurora, Colo. Contact: 970/482-4201.

AUG. 2-5 International Society of Arboriculture, Birmingham, England. Contact: 217/355-9411.

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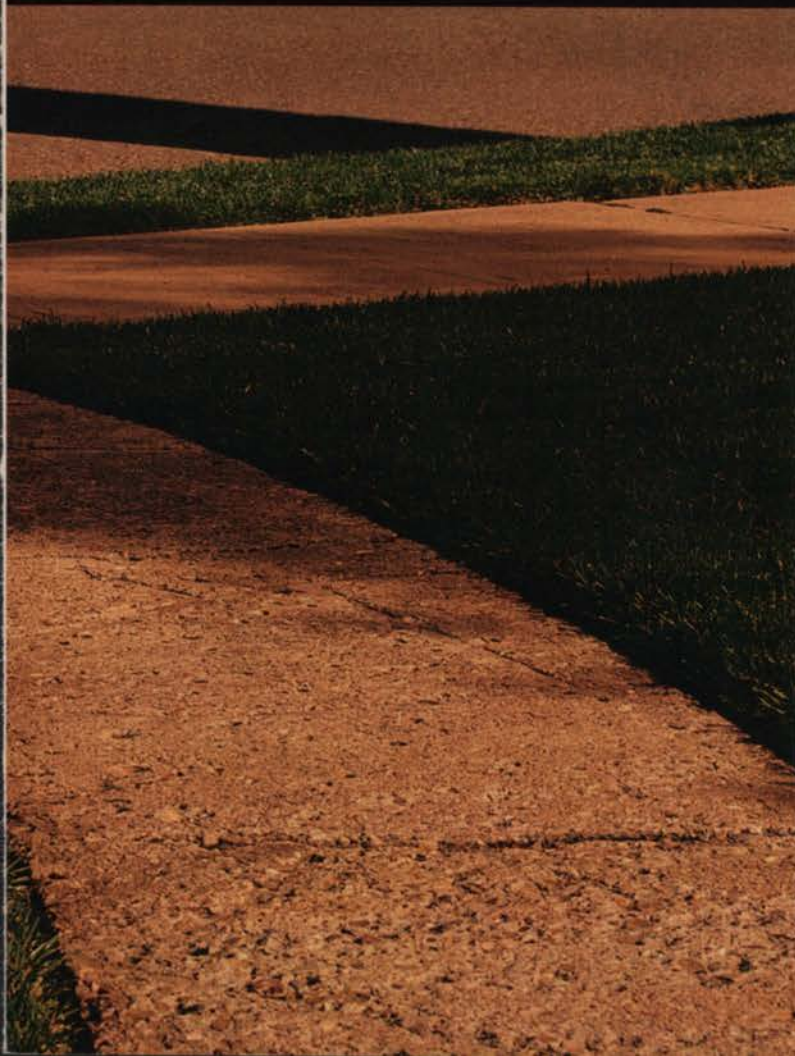


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BRICKMAN JOINS THE BUYING GAME

LONG GROVE, ILL. – After the acquisition announcements by TruGreen-ChemLawn and LandCare USA in February, most of the action has since taken place out of the public's eye as deals are discussed and negotiated.

The Brickman Group has obviously been busy in such discussions, and it has been productive as well, as it recently announced four acquisitions: KT Enterprises, Chantilly, Va.; Kopabianco Landscape, New Haven, Conn.; BMI, Indianapolis, Ind.; and Maryland-based Cannon Landscape Services.

In the deals, Brickman acquired \$15 million worth of

commercial or multi-family landscape maintenance revenues, but elected not to purchase the companies' landscape construction operations.

Scott Brickman, president and CEO, said the company has already begun the process of integrating the different companies into Brickman's 60-plus branches by having them operate under the Brickman name. "These companies are being immersed in our processes, training, policies, and so on, and they will have the benefits of our expertise and sharing of best practices," he explained, contrasting Brickman's plan with the approaches he sees TruGreen-ChemLawn and

The Deal

W

HO: The Brickman Group, Long Grove, Ill.

HAT: The acquisition of the landscape maintenance operations of four different companies: KT Enterprises; Kopabianco; BMI; and Cannon Landscape.

LandCare USA taking. "We didn't buy them just to let them operate as stand-alone operations. What added benefit is there to customers when that happens?"

Brickman explained that these deals are probably just the beginning for his company. "We're pretty confident that we do more maintenance now than any other company in the country," he said, estimating the company's mainte-

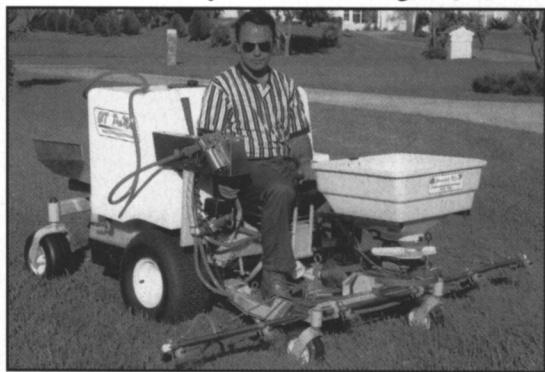
nance revenues at \$130 million for 1998. "But we have just a minute percentage of the total market. We'll be doing some acquisitions in other parts of the country so that we can be a national service provider."

In particular, the company would like to develop a greater presence in the western U.S., with its western-most branch now in Dallas.

– Bob West



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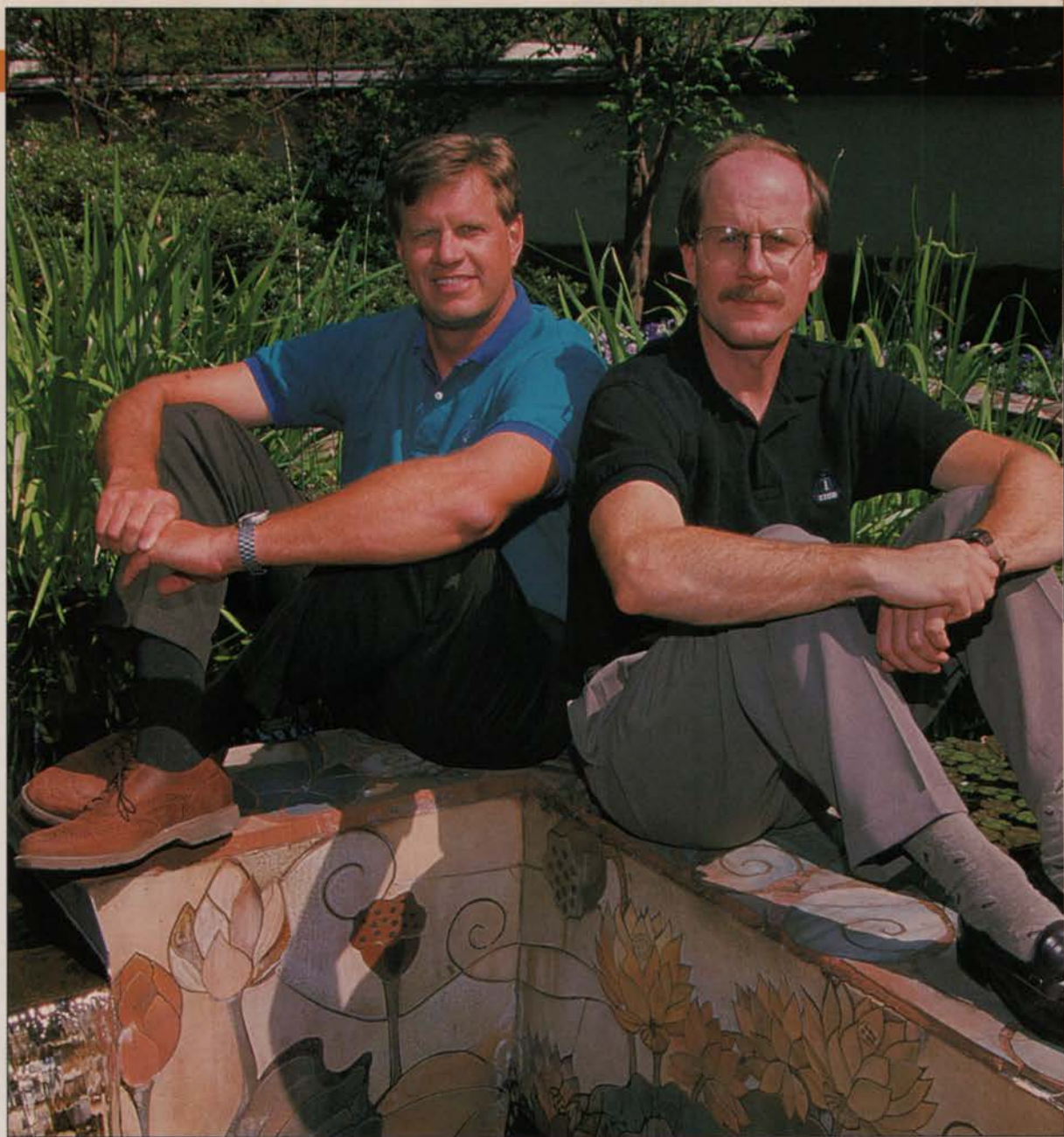


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Bill Killmer and Joe Skelton have put their employees in command at Lifescapes Inc. The result has been growth, profitability and opportunities galore.

By Paul Schrimpf



Thriving *on* Teamwork



W

hen Bill Killmer and Joe Skelton went to college together in the mid-1970s, they never made a pact to someday go into business together. Yet, circumstances put them at the same Atlanta contractor in 1983, when the two friends left their positions to form their own business.

That company, Lifescapes Inc., Canton, Ga., began as a two-person, one-truck design and installation company based in Skelton's two-bedroom apartment. Fifteen years later, the company is performing landscape maintenance out of its headquarters and three branch offices, as well as design and installation for high-end commercial and residential clientele with 1998 sales expected to top \$10 million.


Co-owners Skelton and Killmer grew Lifescapes by taking themselves out of the every day decision making process and developing a strong team of empowered leaders.

LEARNING ON THE FLY. Killmer and Skelton entered the venture with degrees in landscape architecture, but neither had any formal business education. Fortunately, they picked up some tips from Skelton's father, proprietor of a full-service landscape contracting firm for 20 years.

"He was our first adviser and consultant, and he was instrumental in getting us started with our first budgets," recalled Skelton.

Killmer explained, "Joe's father asked us how much volume we were going to do, and we put that number down on a chart of accounts. Then we started listing all of the different costs with that volume, and he showed us that with a modest salary of about \$18,000 we were going to lose money. We had to either cut costs or raise the budget, so we raised the budget."

They lost about \$14,000 the first year and made \$7,000 the second



Joe Skelton, left, and Bill Killmer, co-owners of Lifescapes Inc., have decentralized power within the company, allowing them to explore new business opportunities. Photo: Arthur Usherson, Atlanta, Ga.

Lifescapes Inc.

HEADQUARTERS: Canton, Ga.

BRANCH OFFICES: Doraville, Ga., Fayetteville, Ga., Birmingham, Ala.

OWNERS: Joe Skelton and Bill Killmer

PRIMARY SERVICES: Landscape installation makes up (55 percent), followed by maintenance (40 percent) and irrigation (5 percent). Of the total sales, 75 percent is generated by commercial/industrial clients and 25 percent by residential property work.

NUMBER OF MAINTENANCE SERVICE

CALLS MADE IN 1997: 3,024 residential calls, 4,046 commercial/industrial calls

AVERAGE SQUARE FOOTAGE OF

PROPERTIES MAINTAINED: 35,000 sq. ft. among residential accounts, 90,000 sq. ft among commercial/industrial accounts

EMPLOYEES: 120 year-round, 40 seasonal

1997 SALES: \$9.4 million

1998 SALES PROJECTION: \$10.3 million

Executive Summary:

THE CONCEPT: Developing a team of professionals focused on our customers' satisfaction, delivering quality that exceeds our customers' expectations. These principles and a strong value system have resulted in continual growth opportunities.

FUTURE CHALLENGES: To continue to grow and be prepared to compete with the companies that emerge from the consolidations that began earlier this year.

The Owners

Bill Killmer & Joe Skelton

AGES: Both are 41

BACKGROUNDS: Both graduated with degrees in landscape architecture from The Ohio State University, Columbus. Each held positions within full-service landscape contracting firms before meeting up in Atlanta and forming Lifescapes.

world

year. Finally, Lifescapes was achieving some name recognition and gaining referrals, and its sales topped \$1 million in 1985. Growth continued, and by its fifth year of existence, Lifescapes was one of the top 10 contractors in Atlanta.

After the first year in business, it started becoming apparent to the partners that performing maintenance would mean additional revenues for the company.

Killmer and Skelton called on some industry acquaintances they had in Houston, with whom they struck a strategic alliance. The individuals in Houston acted as consultants, and Killmer and Skelton formed a separate corporation to handle the maintenance called Lifescapes Grounds Management for which Killmer became president.

The consultants visited about every other week for the first two years of the maintenance

Getting Good People

“You need a good recruiting program the same way you need a good marketing program,” surmised Bill Killmer, co-owner, Lifescapes Inc., Atlanta, Ga. “Like marketing, you don’t just decide to do it one year and then look for that to be the hallmark year that you see the return. You have to invest in it.”

Killmer said that Lifescapes tries to promote depth within the ranks of employees by making them multi-skilled. For example, landscape architects often start out working in the field to sensitize them to conditions in the field and to train them to perform field work during crunch times.

“The field time is invaluable,” stressed Killmer. “People are trained so they can handle both jobs and help us keep the job flow going. Eventually, when the time is right – if we have a volume increase, or if another employee leaves – we can dovetail these individuals into the project director or landscape design mode.” – *Paul Schrimpf*

company’s development. Three years into the venture, the company was folded into Lifescapes and became the grounds management division.

Killmer stressed that judicious use of consultants provided tremendous value to the company. “From day one, we employed the services of good accounting people, we hired a good attorney and we went right to

the best consultants we could find and afford at the time,” he said. “Sometimes, we even went beyond what we could afford just to get quality people and services so we could focus on what we do best.”

REINVENTING THE COMPANY. The recession that began in 1989 marked the first year in

(continued on page 24)

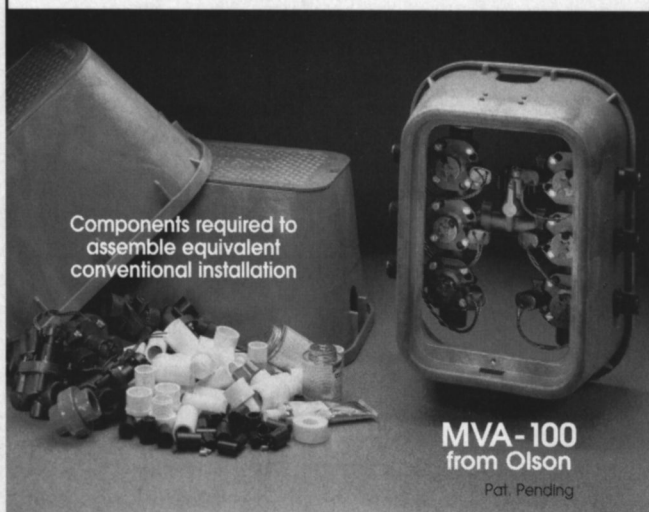
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(continued from page 20)

the company's history that it did not grow. It was a shock to Killmer and Skelton, who were used to buying new trucks and hiring new people each year.

In 1990, the company fell \$500,000 shy



"You need a good recruiting program the same way you need a good marketing program."



of its revenue goal, and again missed the mark in 1991.

"Bill and I were still running our business pretty closely at that time," said Skelton. "And our people started to complain that they didn't think we were doing what was necessary to make this business successful."

This unrest coincided with Skelton's in-

volvement with the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, and more specifically, with the Crystal Ball Committee. This is where the partners first learned about Total Quality Management, the guiding force behind Lifescapes today.

"We had a typical pyramid-style of management," Skelton pointed out. "There were managers, supervisors, workers and laborers. And every-

body was looking upward for Bill and I to solve problems. We said, 'Folks, this business is too big for us to make all of the decisions. We need you to step up and take the lead.'"

"We told them that we'd be the resource, but that we needed them to take the lead," added Killmer. "That was a total change."

The company is broken down into three divisions - landscape maintenance, construction and administrative. Maintenance and construction are headed up by a senior leader, and the administrative area is led by the controller.

Below these individuals are team leaders in various categories, including residential and commercial sales in the design/build department and seasonal color and enhancements in the maintenance department. Team leaders derive information from their teams and report to the senior team leader for each division, who consult with Killmer and Skelton when necessary.

Neither Killmer nor Skelton run regularly scheduled company meetings, deferring to the team leaders to run meetings. The team leaders, working with their employee team, are also responsible for their own budgets, recruiting and hiring, cost control and profit goals.

(continued on page 26)

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(continued from page 24)

REAPING BENEFITS. One of the most important advantages of the new management program is the freedom it has provided Skelton and Killmer to pursue other business opportunities for the company.

"Joe and I have a lot of time to pursue other things, such as ongoing business relationships with our major accounts and staying close to the core of business," said Killmer.

This ability to put aside day-to-day business and chase opportunities led to the creation of branch offices for the maintenance department 2½ years ago.

Each branch was created to be lean and mean, Killmer stressed, to minimize overhead and expenses. The building and property of each branch is leased, and buildings were chosen that required the fewest possible improvements.

Killmer and Skelton are also exploring potential acquisition as a way to expand. About 1½ years ago, the partners purchased

the maintenance portfolio of an Atlanta contractor.

"He had a real strong mix of high-end residential accounts and good commercial clients, and he had a great reputation for quality," Killmer said. "So we spent a lot of time making sure the accounts would be profitable. We went to some of the sites he maintained and did our own estimates, then compared our totals to what he was getting for the work."

On the construction side of the business, Skelton and Killmer have taken advantage of the relationships they've built with national companies by providing construction services anywhere in the country. The division is able to mobilize team leaders and crews to work virtually anywhere in the country and has performed installations as far away as Texas, Louisiana and Virginia.

CRYSTAL BALL. Both Killmer and Skelton feel the heat of recent acquisitions and con-

solidations taking place in the industry, and Skelton said that every business will need to decide whether to sit back or fight back.

"Bill and I are not willing to say that we'll just continue being a \$10-million contracting company and stay in our own little niche," stressed Skelton. "We want to prepare ourselves to compete with those firms. In order to do that we have to continue to grow our business."

"We are going to continue to grow into additional branch offices in Atlanta and other markets in the Southeast, and analyze when the opportunity is right for expansion. We are going to be prepared to be competitive." **LL**

Lifescapes is located at 6644 Hickory Flat Highway, Canton, Ga., 30115. The phone number is 770/345-6644.

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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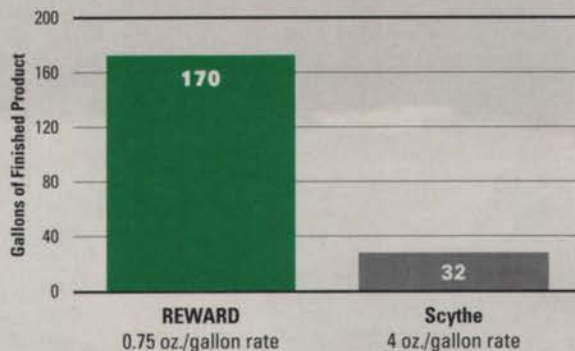


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Lawn & Landscape

Takes
a Look at

Franchising

Many people are willing to trade operating independence and some profits in order to be part of a bigger, proven company. But is franchising for everybody?

By Bob West

D

rive to work some morning without passing a single franchise business. That means generally no fast food restaurants, no hotels, no donut shops, no funeral homes and no muffler stores. For most people, that's an impossible challenge.

It's a challenge that has become increasingly difficult over the last 10 years as franchising has enjoyed tremendous growth across a broad spectrum of business types. In particular, service industries have developed into very attractive franchise opportunities for national companies because of the market to market variations so common among service customers in different areas of the country and franchisees ability to stay on top of the customers in their local market.

"The franchise industry is going through a second boom phase," recognized Mark Siebert, president, Francorp, Olympia Fields, Ill., an organization focused on franchisor consulting. "The recent growth has been unparalleled since the late 1960s."

The numbers would seem to back up Siebert's claim. According to the International Franchise Association, Washington, D.C., a new franchise opens its doors every eight minutes of every business day. Studies by Arthur Anderson & Company and the U.S. Small Business Administration have found success rates of 86 percent for franchise operations after

(continued on page 33)



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Aquascape Design is committed to destroying the myths behind building water features. Water feature construction is often made too complicated by over engineering, over specifying, or improper designing. Chemicals, UV light sterilizers, or large, unsightly biological filter mechanisms are often incorporated to fight the battle against "green water". None of the previous methods are as effective at keeping water clean as placing gravel over the entire pond bottom. Don't take our word for it... *come see it for yourself!*



At Aquascape Design, we build ponds every day. Most of the things we do, you won't find in any water gardening book. Our goal as a business is to use our experiences in the field to help our customers succeed at building and selling water features.

The homeowners we build ponds for in Chicago have the same questions, concerns, and hesitations about ponds all customers

have. We've been successful at creating water gardens that require less maintenance than a similarly-sized patch of lawn. Our books, videos, and manuals are designed to help you grow your water garden business. From August through November we will be criss-crossing the USA, building ponds and hopefully helping you avoid the same costly mistakes that we've made in the past. Retailers and contractors everywhere can benefit from selling water gardens to their customers. We're determined to help you succeed at doing just that. Our free water gardening video will help get you started on the right path with water feature construction. Give us a call today, and together we will work to dispel the many myths still surrounding water gardening.

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In most of today's popular water gardening books and magazines, as well as even some manufacturer's literature, you'll find a mirage of conflicting information about water feature construction. With so much ambiguity and conflicting advice being given on water feature installation it's hard to know what to do.



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is truly as simple as that! When you establish a set procedure and system for your crew, everyone from the head foreman to the last laborer knows what needs to be done next to complete the project on time and on budget. Your salesperson can estimate material and labor time accurately and give the customer a bid on the spot. You also learn from your past failures and increase your future success by seeing what works, what doesn't, and why.

Any pond anywhere can be built using the 20-step assembly process. Our foremen are hitting the road in August to do just that. It's our goal (as the only water feature manufacturer with a full time design build firm) to eliminate our customer's mistakes and increase their successes by using our own experiences in the field. Join us at a **Build A Pond Day Seminar** in a city near you, or visit us in Chicago July 25-26 for our **6th annual Parade of Ponds Water Garden Tour**. Whatever you do, we want you to know that water feature construction is not complicated and should never be difficult to understand. Remember, when you install a water garden you create the need for future landscaping. We want to help you make water features a fun and profitable part of your business. We look forward to meeting all of you and helping you succeed at building and selling water features!

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Any pond anywhere can be built following this process!

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5. **Excavate Pond**
6. **Install liner and underlayment**
7. **Hook up Skimmer**
8. **Rock in pond**
9. **Position Underwater lights**
10. **Wash stones**
11. **Fill pond/ Lunch time**
12. **Build waterfall and stream**
13. **Bring in topsoil**
14. **Build retaining wall**
15. **Tweak waterfall**
16. **Trim liner**
17. **Mulch berm**
18. **Clean up**
19. **Owners manual/ bacteria**
20. **Get Paid!**



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FOR RETAILERS...

There is a big difference between selling bedding plants and explaining to a customer how a biological filter functions. The latter takes a lot more time, energy, and patience! The up side is the more biological filters and ponds you sell, the more bedding plants and other garden accents you will sell to enthusiastic water gardening hobbyists! Currently pond product manufacturers do a great job promoting the virtues of their particular product. Many manufacturers make good products that do what they say. However, educating your customer on how to assemble their products into a complete pond kit is time consuming and difficult at best! Retailers have reported in industry studies that on average it takes an hour and a half to set up a first time water gardener with a complete system. There is a better way! Aquascape Designs has developed a successful program that allows a retailer to "kit together" a pond instantly based on the desired square footage of the water feature. Ponds as large as 180 square feet (or 11 x 16) can be sold complete in 2 easy-to-carry boxes. From biological and mechanical filters, to lights, pump plumbing and liner (20 items in all) everything is boxed complete. There is no longer a need to mix and match components from many different manufacturers hoping to assemble a system that works. If you don't have inventory on hand, Aquascape Designs can drop ship products (UPS directly) to your customer's door! Additionally, the pond kits come with an Owners' Manual, installation instructions, and even a step-by-step video so even the leery can see everything that's involved with designing, locating, and installing a water feature.



As pond builders first and manufacturers second, we've developed many unique and unusual ways to handle typical water gardening problems. Our pumps clogged so we built skimmers to catch the debris before it reached and plugged the pump intake screen. Large tub filters looked ugly so they were incorporated into the base of a waterfall, completely hidden by the excavated soil. Liners didn't look natural and sludge built up on the anaerobic bottom so we introduced gravel which provided an area for beneficial bacteria to live and break down waste before it accumulated. Nothing complicated; everything we did was simple. Yet the results were beautiful! Let your customers in on these little secrets and their maintenance will decrease and their enjoyment will soar! We envision a day when selling water gardens is as fast and simple as selling bedding plants!

Aquascape Designs is a wholesaler and manufacturer. We do not sell products directly to the end user. We have developed an on-line catalog for you to use to start selling pond kits over the World Wide Web. Visit our site at www.propond.com to see how this program works.



HOW-TO VIDEO: Loan, rent, or sell this video to prospective customers. This video allows the customer to see first-hand everything that is involved in water gardening and installing a Pro Pond Kit. Customers educate themselves saving you time and helping you close more sales!

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(continued from page 28)

five years compared to 38 percent independent businesses after six years. In addition, a recent Gallup survey found that approximately 64 percent of franchisees indicated they would be less successful if they went into the same business independently. Other studies, however, have found little conclusive evidence that franchisees enjoy any more success than independent businesses.

This growth has also yielded an expansion in the number of industries served by franchising. Siebert noted that a decade ago, approximately 40 percent of franchises were restaurants. "Today, that number is down to 20 percent, and the number of franchises in service industries has doubled from 12 to 24 percent," he noted.

The number of franchisees in the green industry is also growing, based on information available on six of the companies. From 1994 to 1996, the number of franchises these six companies had operating grew 14.8 percent, from 453 to 520.

What does this mean for the green industry? Clearly, franchises play a major role in the industry, particularly on the lawn care side with players such as Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J., Liqui-Green, Peoria, Ill., and The Weed Man, Mississauga, Ontario. In an increasingly competitive industry, does the franchise model work for everyone? If not, what type of person is most likely to enjoy success as a franchisee, and at what cost?

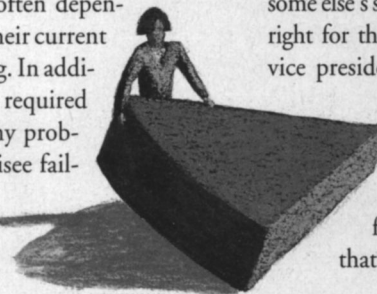
FIT THE MODEL. Franchise companies want to grow their organizations, but their ability to sell franchises is often dependent on the success their current franchisees are having. In addition, franchisors are required by law to disclose any problems, such as franchisee failure or lawsuits, to prospective franchisees in documents called Uni-

form Franchise Offering Circulars. This forces franchisors to be very selective in who they license to operate under their system. Most franchisors, in fact, claim to sell just one franchise for every 100 potential franchisees they talk to.

The key concern for most franchisors is a person's willingness to operate under clearly defined guidelines with less room for innovation or system development than is offered the independent operator.

"For someone who is truly independent and who is not accustomed to working with some else's systems, franchising probably isn't right for them," admitted Barry Matthews, vice president of franchise operations and franchise development, Spring-Green Lawn Care, Plainfield, Ill. "Franchising is right for the person who sees a model for success and wants to mirror that success by following that model."

(continued on page 36)



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franchising

(continued from page 33)

"People who are true entrepreneurs don't tend to make good franchisees because they like tinkering with the rules and are always changing their systems looking for a better way to do business," added Siebert.

Historically, new lawn care franchisees have tended to have little or no previous experience in the industry when awarded a franchise. That seems to be changing, however, as the industry consolidates and becomes more competitive and as increased regulatory pressure adds complicated licensing requirements for individuals to apply pesticide products.

"Five years ago, we were awarding franchises to people just getting started in lawn care," observed Roger Albrecht, director of franchise development, Nitro-Green, At-



A franchisor's brand name can generate powerful market awareness for franchisees.
Photo: Lawn Doctor

lanta, Ga. "But now, 90 percent of our new franchisees were already in the industry."

Albrecht attributed part of this switch to a change in Nitro-Green's marketing of

(continued on page 38)

Players in the Franchise Game

The following companies offer franchises in the professional lawn care and landscape industry. Ten of the 11 companies specialize in fertilization and weed control services while U.S. Lawns focuses on maintenance services.

COMPANY	# OF FRANCHISES	INITIAL FEE	ROYALTY	PHONE
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Lawn Doctor	350	\$18,000-\$40,000	10 percent	800/631-5660
Liqui-Green	27	N/A	N/A	309/243-5815
Naturalawn	42	N/A	N/A	800/989-5444
Nitro-Green	45	\$40,000-\$50,000	7-8 percent	800/982-5296
NutriLawn	38	\$15,000	6 percent	800/396-6096
Scotts Lawn Service	22	\$25,000-\$65,000	6-10 percent	800/783-0981
Spring-Green	105	\$13,000-\$80,000	6-9 percent	800/435-4051
TruGreen-ChemLawn	N/A	N/A	N/A	901/681-2008
U.S. Lawns	24	\$29,000	3-4 percent	800/USLAWNS
Weed Man	135	\$25,000	Charged on production trucks	905/823-8550



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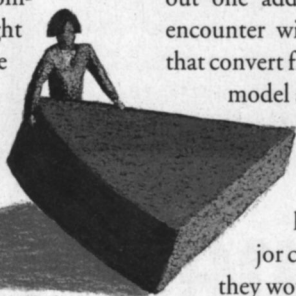


(continued from page 36)

franchises. "The licensing requirements for pesticide use block us from putting so many people to work," he said.

Matthews noted that increased competition within the industry should continue to increase interest in converting to a franchise system for some owner operators. "Some independent operators may decide to try to strengthen their operations by purchasing a franchise and enjoying some of the benefits in areas like computer technology, marketing resources and purchasing power that these larger companies have," he said.

This trend isn't true for all companies, however. "Ninety-eight percent of our franchisees have no previous lawn care experience, and 90 percent have never been in an entrepreneurial role before," noted Ed Reid, franchise sales director, Lawn Doctor.



"We tend to avoid conversions, if possible, because they come into our system with their own beliefs on how to run the business," agreed Michael Kernaghan, vice president, The Weed Man. "If we can work with someone who is business savvy and has administrative skills, we can indoctrinate them into our philosophy and culture without too much second guessing."

Ann Dugan, director of the small business development center at the University of Pittsburgh's Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business, Pittsburgh, Pa., pointed out one additional challenge franchisors encounter with conversions. "Franchisees that convert from the independent operator model are more likely to be unhappy as franchisees because they've been in business for themselves for awhile and they have high expectations of major changes," she said. "Otherwise, they would've remained independent.

"In terms of success, however, I would definitely say the conversion is much more likely to be successful because they already understand the industry," Dugan added.

INSTANT EXPERIENCE. The primary benefit for a new franchisee is the access to the franchisor's operating system, which has been developed through years of field testing in the company's other franchises.

"A good franchise organization provides an operating system that an independent operator would have to develop alone otherwise," recognized Matthews, who noted that such a system includes information on everything from diagnosing turfgrass problems to managing accounts payable.

"Because of our resources as a corporation, we've got access to people who are experts in a variety of areas, and that allows us to handle everything from A-to-Z," agreed Jim Miller, director of franchising, Scotts

(continued on page 40)

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USE READER SERVICE #30

franchising

(continued from page 38)

Lawn Service, Marysville, Ohio. "The independent operator doesn't have nearly as much expertise at his or her disposal."

"We cover everything in our systems, not just what a potential franchisee might first consider, which is how to make a good lawn application," added Matthews, noting that Spring-Green includes newsletters, regional meetings and employee training sessions to deliver this support.

"Being a part of a franchise system puts smaller businesses on a very professional level as far as their image, uniforms, vehicles and product consistency," explained Albrecht. "They appear to be a much larger organization than they are."

"When a franchise opens its doors on day one, it will already have professional marketing pieces and trained personnel in place," agreed Blake Smith, president, Christmas Décor, a Lubbock, Texas-based holiday decorating franchising company marketed heavily to green industry firms. "Think of the difference that can make for a brand new business trying to establish itself in a market. The mistakes a lot of independent contractors make in those first few years can really set their businesses back."

Different franchisors include different support mechanisms within their operating system, depending on the franchisees' needs. For example, some companies have developed proprietary business management software that all of their franchisees use, and others have an Intranet that provides franchisees with access to training materials and other corporate resources via computer.

Franchisees also benefit from franchisee-wide benchmarking derived from their performance reports. "Every month we perform an objective comparison of each franchisee's direct costs, indirect costs, equipment overhead and administrative overhead against all of the other franchisees to see if they're operating the way they should be," explained Tom Oyler, president of the industry's only maintenance franchise organization, U.S. Lawns, Orlando, Fla.

In addition to a proven operating system, franchisees will have the power of a more recognizable brand name.

"Most of the people interested in franchising are people with strengths in areas other than sales, so they are looking for help

(continued on page 42)

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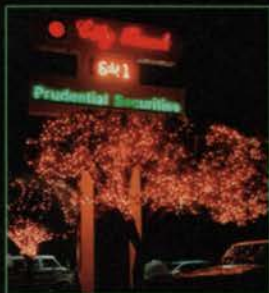
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USE READER SERVICE #35

(continued from page 40)

acquiring customers," noted Miller, who will be able to offer franchisees access to what is arguably the strongest brand name in the industry once Scotts completes the final assimilation and regulation steps from its acquisition of Emerald Green Lawn Care.

"The presence of a strong brand name is the first thing I would look for if I was

interested in becoming a franchisee," asserted Mark Bucher, director of operations, FranData Corp., Washington, D.C., an organization specializing in compiling research on the franchising industry. "If that



brand is lacking with a company, there needs to be other reasons why I would buy from it, such as stronger support."

Lawn Doctor certainly has one of the strongest brands among lawn care companies because of its presence in 35 states and its recognizable green thumb logo. "It would be a real challenge for an independent operator to get the marketing exposure our franchisees have because we're on television and the radio and we're buying direct mail materials at less than 5 cents apiece in color that other companies can't get at that price in black-and-white," acknowledged Reid.

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PAYING THE PRICE. Sacrificing some independence isn't the only price franchisees pay to be part of a larger organization. Initial fees to purchase a franchise range from \$13,000 to \$80,000, and franchisees are required to pay the franchisor royalty fees of approximately 6 to 10 percent of gross revenues. (see sidebar on page 36) The initial fee varies based on the market territory being awarded and the components of the package, which may include computers, vehicles, products and other materials. The royalty fees are generally set up on a sliding scale that is inversely related to the franchisee's revenues so that as revenues increase the royalty percent decreases.

Although the initial fee may seem daunting to prospective franchisees, Reid claimed that it is not a significant revenue source for the franchisors. "Approximately 90 percent of our corporate revenue comes from the royalty fees, so we only make money when our franchisees make money," he pointed out.

"Most franchisees can look to recover their initial investment in three to four years," maintained Kernaghan, "but that's without any plans for aggressive growth or expansion into new territories."

It's that royalty fee, however, that represents a major hurdle to be cleared in prospective franchisees' minds. "We have to get the franchisee out of the mentality of, 'I'm paying this royalty fee, so what have you done for me lately,'" asserted Albrecht. "I can't break that fee down dollar for dollar to show them the actual value for that fee."

"People get involved in a franchise system for two reasons though – the operating

system and the brand name," Albrecht continued. "Down the road, those two things will allow them to be making more money. That's what they're paying for."

While the majority of franchisees pay royalties as a percent of gross sales, The Weed Man assesses its royalties with a flat rate charged per production truck used by the franchisee. "It's much easier for us to count trucks than to audit books, and it's also a motivational tool encouraging our franchisees to get the most productivity out of each truck," explained Kernaghan.

"In the best franchise systems, the in-

creased purchasing power and advantages of being part of a larger organization more than offset any royalties paid," agreed Siebert. "What a prospective franchisee has to ask him or herself is, 'Am I getting value for what I'm paying?' Paying 10 percent in one system can be a better value than paying 4 percent in another based on the support and

resources made available by the franchisor.

"Another way to look at the royalty fee is for a franchisee to figure out how much time and money would be spent to have the same resources and services provided by the franchisor if that franchisee was actually an independent operator," Siebert continued.

(continued on page 106)

Holiday Cash

Instead of looking down at a property all of the time, some contractors have found that looking up at a customer's house can also be profitable, especially when Christmas rolls around.

Christmas Décor, Lubbock, Texas, has sold approximately 130 franchises for holiday decorating in just 19 months, according to Blake Smith, president.

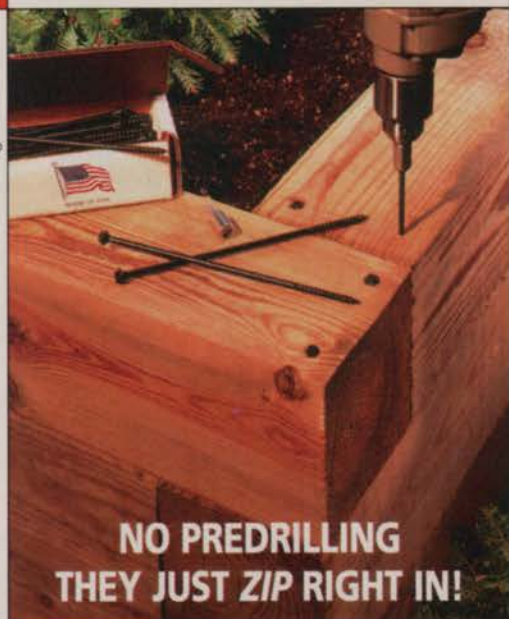
Smith, who also owns and operates a lawn care company, said his experiences starting and growing his lawn care company painted a clear picture of the benefits associated with franchising. "New businesses go through such a dramatic learning curve in the first four or five years," he explained. "With franchising, the franchisor has done all of the learning for you and offers the keys to success.

"Mistakes set a new company back so easily," Smith continued. "Being a part of a franchise system means sharing valuable knowledge across a noncompetitive environment."

Smith is quick to point out that purchasing a franchise is not a free pass to success, however. "Any business still comes down to individual effort, but if I was starting my lawn care company today, knowing what I know now, I would have no problem becoming part of a franchise system." — **Bob West**

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USE READER SERVICE #73



Turf renovation can be a profitable service, but a variety of variables dictate the appropriate method.

By D. Douglas Graham



Although hydroseeding will usually require higher capital expenditures, many contractors appreciate the fact that it is a task that can be performed with minimal labor. Photo: Finn

For Darryl Fair, business manager of Central Sod Farms in Naperville, Ill., there are basically two keys to pricing turf renovation – labor and customer expectation. Operating expenses must also be considered, of course – the cost of consumable materials such as herbicide, fertilizer, sod or seed, the cost of the truck, hydroseeding equipment and other equipment – but whether the project entails work-intensive spot repairs of damaged areas or an overhaul of the entire lawn, the customer's

anticipation will be the same – perfection. And the labor cost involved in satisfying that desire will be a primary factor in deciding how much Fair charges for the job.

"Many variables enter the equation," he said. "Portions of the lawn may have extensive grub or shade damage."

Repairing such common problems can be very time consuming, and Fair recommended sodding as the preferred solution. "Sod is an immediate fix. You just rip out the sick section of lawn and install a healthy one in its place, just like when you're laying carpet," he explained. "The tough part is when you have to repair a bunch of small sections because you wind up duplicating work. A typical lawn may be effected by a whole range of problems, and it's common to stumble on new ones as you're working on the trouble spots previously identified."

Bruce Moore, president, Eastern Land Management, Stamford, Conn., has developed his own formula for pricing turf renovation projects. While labor and customer expectation definitely enter the equation, contractors also have to decide whether the job will be a spot repair or a situation in which the original grass will be eliminated through the use of a non-selective herbicide and completely replaced.

Here, the choice of equipment becomes a critical consideration, according to Moore. Will a core aerator be the most efficient choice, a rototiller or an overseeder? Moore said each option should be measured by its time and cost efficiency. There are also the additional considerations of labor, materi-

(continued on page 48)

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turf renovation

(continued from page 46)

als, the expense involved in hauling away the old sod and dumping it at the local landfill.

"Each piece of equipment is operated differently and has its own set of costs," Moore said. "There are three types of aerators, for example: a spoon type that opens up a small hole in the soil; a core aerator that lifts plugs out of the soil and leaves them on the surface; and a shatter type which makes a slit in the ground and shatters some of the sub-soil structure."

Determining the costs associated with each type of machine, be it for purchasing or renting, is critical to accurate pricing.

"Material expenses also play a big role in pricing," Moore noted. "If you're going to use an herbicide, how many ounces will the job require? If you're going to use seed, you have to multiply pounds of seed by the square footage of the lawn. The same goes for fertilizer and mulch, which you will need if you decide to rototill. Finally, there are the costs that most people don't think about, such as travel time to and from the job."

Moore relies on what he calls the 50 percent rule to determine which course of action he will take. If 50 percent of the lawn is in need of repair, it makes more economic sense to fix the entire lawn, rather than to go through the labor and time it takes to reconstruct it piecemeal. In this respect, turf repair is not terribly different from architectural renovation. From a dollars and cents perspective, it's often smarter to tear down an old building than to coax it back to life with cosmetic changes that make the structure prettier but no sturdier or more livable.

Another advocate of the 50 percent rule is Don Holder, president, Holder Landscape Management Co., Loganville, Ga.

"If we do an estimate and find that 50 percent of the existing turf is not the type of turf the customer wants, then we recommend the use of a nonselective herbicide to kill the existing plants to the roots, keep the weeds from coming back and make the soil amenable to new planting," he explained.

"Next, we rip up the ground with a chisel plow for eight to 10 inches of penetration. We till until the hard soil becomes fluffy, just like the farmers do. Then we sod or hydroseed. Hydroseeding costs about 25 percent more than seeding but it's cheaper than sodding and much less labor intensive."

(continued on page 65)



An in-depth look at trends

in the turf seed industry,

new research and how to

select the perfect seed.

Turf Seed
in the
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USE READER SERVICE #43



Turf Seed: A Closer Look

The turfgrass plant is one of the most important yet overlooked living elements in the landscape. Turf makes incredible contributions in the landscape, from providing a pleasing look to controlling runoff to providing a surface for outdoor activities and relaxation for people at home and at work.

According to research conducted for *Lawn & Landscape* magazine by the independent research firm Research USA, Chicago, Ill., lawn and landscape contractors plan to spend more than \$241 million on turf seed, sod and hydroseeding products in 1998, making this the third-largest category in terms of business expenditures.

Turf's importance to the industry dictates that contractors understand as much as possible about what goes into making a high quality stand of turf – good seed. There is a difference between middle of the road and elite varieties of seed, and this supplement provides the information contractors need to make an educated decision. It also takes a look at the turf seed industry today, and what seed producers are doing to ensure end-users have the strongest, best-looking and most viable seed products to choose from.

Good Times & Fast Change

By Paul Schrimpf

B

y most accounts, the turf seed industry is enjoying some of its best times in the more than a decade.

Sure, producers of turf seed have short-term concerns about the effect El Niño will have on their final sales volume once the spring buying season is over. Much of the Midwest and East experienced one of the warmest winters on record, followed by a generally wet and rainy spring. With so little winter kill and a healthy start to the season, contractors aren't likely to use nearly as much seed for renovations this year as in years past.

"The seed market is a bit slow this spring with all of the rain across the country," admitted Scott Harer, marketing director, Advanta Seeds Pacific, Albany, Ore., "Weather is the predominating factor in the market right now."

However, the majority of seed producers say that demand for turf is good, prices are reasonable and the outlook for the industry is bright. They point to a strong economy, great demand from all segments of the market and the increas-

The turf seed industry is riding the great economic wave while consolidation and acquisitions threaten to change the industry forever.



Prices Changes

ingly positive profile turf seed is receiving as an important economic force.

This respect has manifested itself in a rash of acquisitions, including one by a public corporation trading on the NASDAQ exchange.

MARKET FORCES. The positive economic news that has driven growth in the lawn and landscape contractor market has also driven strong demand in the turf seed market.

"The turf seed market has been rolling along for several years now," noted Steve Tubbs, president, Turf Merchants Inc., Tangent, Ore. "All segments of the industry have enjoyed growth."

"Right now, the seed industry is doing great,"

concluded Art Wick, director of turf research and development, LESCO Inc., Rocky River, Ohio. "Prices are strong, margins are decent, the supply of available product is not overly abundant and prices are up somewhat. Profits are probably in the best shape they've been in the last 15 years."

"There's been strong growth in the golf industry and a renewed interest in landscaping," assessed David

*Photo
courtesy of
the Scotts Co.*

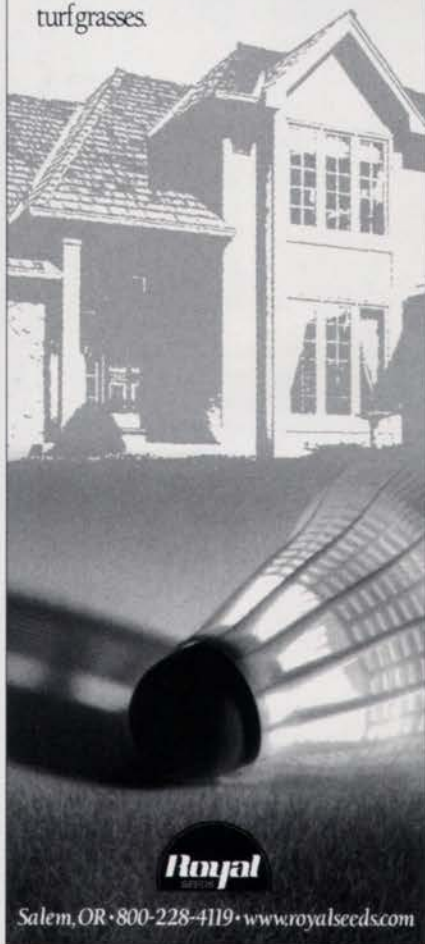
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Lundell, vice president, Fine Lawn Research, Lake Oswego, Ore. "The economy is encouraging more construction, and people in general are interested in the aesthetics of turf. The industry as a whole is healthy."

"I am amazed every year as to how strong the U.S. market is for turfgrasses

and how it continues a healthy growth pattern," explained Ronnie Stapp, senior vice president, seeds divisions, Pennington Seed, Atlanta, Ga.

Producers of turf seed have responded by adding production acres in virtually every species of turfgrass, Stapp noted. "And, so far, the warmer than normal

Seed Distribution: The Local Connection

Finding the variety of tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass you really want is sometimes a challenge, because varieties are not always sold by themselves. Depending on the seed supplier in your area, the variety may be blended with other varieties to create a seed mix that suits your particular growing zone.

The relationship that seed producers and marketers have with distributors varies from company to company and from distributor to distributor. Sometimes the producer delivers straight varieties that the distributor blends, and sometimes the varieties are pre-mixed. Once you've located a distributor for a particular variety of seed, you'll need to talk with it to ensure you get the seed you want.

Seed producers and marketers provide phone numbers that allow contractors to call for the names of their local distributor. Below is a list of these phone numbers:

Advanta Seeds Pacific	800/288-7333
Barenbrug	800/547-4101
Burlingham Seed Co.	800/221-7333
Fine Lawn Research	503/636-2600
Jacklin Seed Co.	800/688-7333
Lebanon	800/233-0628
LESCO Inc.	800/321-5325
Lofts Seed	800/526-3890
Medalist America	800/568-TURF
Pennington Seed Co.	800/285-SEED
Pickseed West	541/926-8886
Royal Seed	800/228-4119
Scotts Co.	800/543-0006
Seed Research of Oregon	800/253-5766
Turf Merchants Inc.	800/421-1735
Turf Seed Inc.	800/247-6910
Zajac Performance Seeds	973/423-1660

USE READER SERVICE #45

Most turf seed producers say that the strong economy has bolstered the market for turf seed in the U. S. Photo: Jacklin Seed



winter and typically rainy weather in the Pacific Northwest this spring has set the turf up to generate a bumper crop of seed this year."

GETTING TOGETHER. By now, news of the ongoing move toward consolidation in the landscape maintenance industry is old hat. But consolidation and acquisition in the seed industry are having an equally significant impact on an industry that has struggled with its fragmented nature for decades.

One major acquisition that occurred early in 1998 involved Jacklin Seed and Medalist America, Post Falls, Idaho, which were purchased by the \$2 billion agricultural giant, J.R. Simplot. The real buzz, however, has centered on AgriBiotech Inc., Las Vegas, Nev.

AgriBiotech, which began its venture into the turf industry in 1995, has spent the last two years negotiating deals to purchase some of the industry's best

known seed labels. From ground zero, the company's revenues have grown to more than \$400 million through the purchase of 19 companies in the industry, including seed producers and marketers and biotechnology companies.

According to AgriBiotech co-founder John Francis, he and partner Johnny Thomas saw the potential for consolidation based on what had happened with agricultural crop seed production, such as corn and cotton. More than two decades ago, these industries experienced a consolidation cycle that created a handful of large competitors out of highly fragmented industries.

"If you look at what we are doing in a five-year time frame, it's what it took 25 years for those two industries to consolidate," noted Francis. "If you look at the cotton seed business, there is one dominate player. If you look at the corn seed business, you probably have three or four dominate players with 75 percent market

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share. We felt that if there was going to be one company that would emerge to that level within our sector, then it would be good for all of the seed businesses within the sector and, ultimately, good for the customer."

The fragmented nature of the seed industry was one reason for AgriBiotech's acquisition activity, but it was also driven by passage of the Plant Variety Protection Act, which allows seed producers to patent varieties of turf that they develop.

With the ability to patent varieties, companies can spend money on research with more confidence that they will receive royalties for the variety they develop. With in advent of highly expensive gene research in turf that is presently being conducted, known as "biotech" research, having this protection is vitally important.

Seed producers observing this industry trend are watching AgriBiotech carefully as a competitor, but are also hoping that its growth in the industry makes a positive difference.

"The hope is that the consolidations will make the industry a more profitable one for all concerned, be they part of a mass consolidation or an independent company," said Tubbs. "There is room for both. An inefficient, young company with low overhead will fulfill a need in the marketplace just as a consolidator with stockholders and demands for earnings will."

"Other industries that are fragmented are getting together, and the seed industry is no exception," noted Mike Robinson, president, Seed Research of Oregon, Corvallis. "AgriBiotech is getting big fast, leaving fewer companies, fewer suppliers and fewer choices in the market."

"I hope that ABT works out," Robinson continued. "Margins are too thin in general, and profits are small. Maybe AgriBiotech can pull prices up for everyone. We need a decent return on investment so we can invest the dollars into our research program. If we continue to get squeezed, we may have to look at cutting the research program." ■

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Gene Technology: Getting High Tech

Contractors know that healthy competition raises the level of the quality of work produced by companies in a given market. This has also been true in the turf seed industry, where the quality of the turf varieties available in the market has steadily increased over the past 10 to 15 years.

Turf seed purchased today at most reputable distributors and dealers across the country is by far superior to the varieties on the market a decade ago, and most of these developments

were realized using traditional breeding methods. The positive appearance characteristics desired by contractors, such as dark green color, fine leaf texture and high density, have been vastly improved, as has the turf's ability to survive in the face of insect and disease attack and heat and drought extremes.

Biotech involves altering the genetic makeup of a plant by adding genes to give the plant a specific positive characteristic.


Traditional breeding continues to produce better varieties of turf today. But now, some seed companies are taking the process deeper into the genetics of the plant and are exploring methods for inserting genetic material into plants that will help them resist disease, insect and drought problems. Once these methods are perfected, the biotech revolution may change the way turf seed is viewed by producers and end-users forever.

TECHNOLOGY QUEST. More than two decades ago, genetic engineering of agricultural crops such as corn and cotton created highly superior plants that resist disease and insect problems and produce greater yields for farmers. In the years that followed, the focus of high-tech genetic research expanded to include one of the green industry's most prolific "crops" — turf.

Agricultural biotechnology, or biotech, involves altering the genetic makeup of a plant by adding genes to give a plant a specific positive characteristic. Some of the characteristics that have been tested include resistance to nonselective herbicides and increased seed yields in Kentucky bluegrasses.

Those optimistic about the potential of biotech research say the initial varieties are as close as three to five years away, while others insist it will be a decade or more before end-users see new varieties on the market. Regardless of the time frame, however, it's clear that seed producers are determined to keep working toward developing the next revolution in turf seed.

"For us, the most optimistic projection we would make would be three years to commercialization, and we think the outside is five years," said John Francis, partner, AgriBiotech, Las Vegas, Nev. Francis said the company is committed to using biotech research to develop new turf varieties and has agreements with companies holding patents on plant genes to test their effectiveness on turf. Other companies see the enormous potential of biotech research, but see it as a much longer term strategy. — *Paul Schrimpf*



Starting *with* Quality Seed

By Paul Schrimpf

Recognizing quality turf seed isn't difficult — you just need to know what to look for.

Let's face it. Renovating turf is extremely hard work. So why would any contractor go through the tedious process of amending, grading, smoothing, seeding and irrigating to develop a new stand of turf and not also carefully consider the characteristics, and even

the genetics, of the seed used?

Unfortunately, it happens all too often. If margins are tight on a construction project, the temptation might be to try to cut some dollars and order seed that saves a few pennies per pound, but in the long run could present a host of other problems.

"Lawn and landscape contractors need to be more aware of what constitutes a better grass variety," stressed Ronnie Stapp, senior vice president, seed divisions, Pennington Seed, Madison, Ga. "It's not just hype — it's better turf quality, better disease resistance and seed quality the contractor can trust."

"Contractors need to know that variety selection should be a significant consideration," said Vicki

Photo
courtesy of
the Scotts Co.

Wallace, communications manager, Lofts Seed, Bound Brook, N.J. "Niche markets hold potential business for contractors who understand varietal differences."

It's certainly true that no two seed varieties are exactly alike, and that seed producers are making substantial investments in research that they hope will lead to new, better varieties of seed. Contractors' challenge is understanding what factors differentiate the many varieties, and what tools are available for comparing two types of seed.

THE FACTORS. Over the years, seed producers and researchers have developed terminology to describe the characteristics of turf seed that varies from variety to variety based on what end-users consider important.

In the 1980s, when seed research was just starting to become highly competitive, the battle for seed supremacy was fought over appearance characteristics. Research looked at characteristics such as early spring green-up, color and the size and shape of the leaf blade.

Appearance characteristics are still a top priority, but over the past decade the emphasis has been on finding a balance between identifying the best looking turf that also provides important maintenance advantages, such as drought and wear tolerance and disease and insect resistance. Seed producers measure all of these factors when making decisions about what turfgrasses will ultimately reach the market.

LABELING AND CERTIFICATION. As product end-users have shown a greater interest in knowing exactly what is in the products they are buying, there has been a greater emphasis placed on the information contained in product labels.

The seed industry is no exception. The label required by law on every bag of turf seed contains a wealth of information about what exactly is in the bag (see sidebar at right).

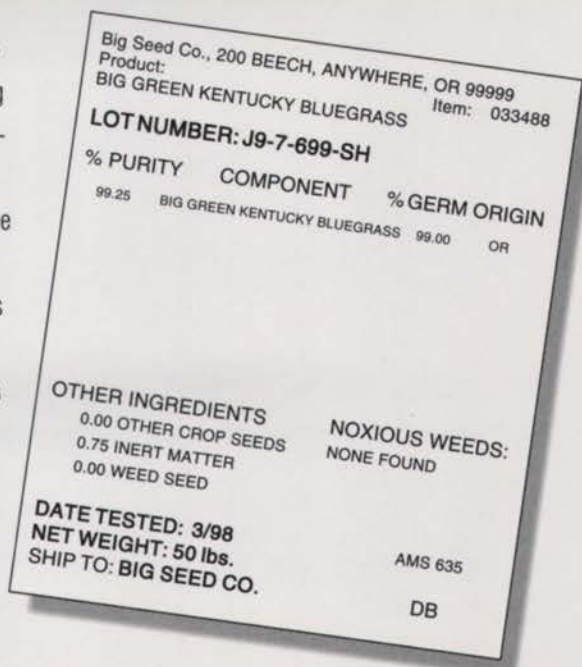
The Seed Label: Know What You

By law, every bag of seed is required to have a white analysis tag attached to it, which provides end-users with essential information about the content and quality of the turf seed they are buying.

Each item on a seed tag relates in some way to the seed in the bag. Below is a review of the parts of the label, and what information they represent:

- "Product" is the species or type of seed that was tested.
- "Lot" refers to the specific lot of seed that has been tested. Each crop from each field will have at least one lot number. This number provides a tracking of the specific varieties, the production field and the components in that particular bag.
- "% Purity" is the number of seeds, expressed as percentages of the whole, found in that variety or mix. In this example, there is only one variety listed – Big Green Kentucky Bluegrass – but any number of pure seed components could be listed depending on the specific blending instructions.

In blends and mixes, each varietal component will have an exact percentage (down to 0.00), based on seed test results. Also, if the blend or mix is made of common or unnamed seed components, this will be presented as Variety Not Stated (VNS). VNS means that the bag contains, for example, a perennial ryegrass, but it isn't known what variety of perennial ryegrass it is. Therefore, the purchaser can't be sure if the seed is high, medium or low quality.



- "% Germination" refers to the percentage of seed that germinated during testing. Four tests of 100 seeds per lot are grown out in growth chambers to determine the percentage.
- "Other Crop Seeds" is the total number of other crop seeds, expressed as a percentage of the tested sample, that have been found during a physical separation of the sample. If an individual crop seed exceeds 5 percent, it must be listed as a pure seed component.

For example, annual ryegrass in a perennial ryegrass lot would be listed as crop seed if it constituted less than 3 percent of the lot. If it exceeded 3 percent, the annual ryegrass would have to be listed as a pure seed component, along with the perennial ryegrass.

On a seed lab examination report, these seeds are identified and expressed as number of actual seeds per sample weight, as well as an estimated number of these

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weed seeds per pound of seed.

- "Inert Matter" is the amount that is dust, stems, soil, chaff, etc. It is expressed as a percentage of the total weight of the seed sample. This is neither viable weed nor viable seed. Some crop and weed seed may be classified as inert but the seeds are broken, damaged by insects or infected with ergot. The higher the inert matter percentage, the less of the actual seed the end user is actually purchasing.

- "Weed Seed" refers to the number of weed seeds identified in a given sample and expressed as a percentage of the whole sample. Although the specific weeds are not identified on the white tag, the Oregon seed lab's report will list the specific weed seeds found in the sample and how many of each weed's were found. This is also expressed as an estimated number of weed seeds per pound.

- "Noxious Weeds" are the weed seeds in a sample that are considered noxious by local law. The end-user should never purchase seed that has anything other than "None" printed on the tag.

- "Origin," "Net Weight" and "Date Tested" are relatively self explanatory. The origin is important because it lets the consumer know exactly where the seed is produced. If the seed was produced in the United States, a state will appear in this space. For seed produced outside the U.S., the original country will appear. Net Weight is the sum of all of the contents, and Date Tested is simply the month and year when the seed was tested. Older seed is less likely to meet the germination standards on the label. — *Paul Schrimpf*

Another level of labeling for seed is certification. This designation indicates that, through rigorous independent testing, a bag of seed is considered genetically pure.

This does not necessarily ensure that the seed is going to perform better, but it is an even higher level of assurance the contractor is getting what he or she is paying for.


PASSING THE TEST. One way that turf varieties are judged is through a program called the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program. Funded by the turf industry and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, this program accepts varieties from turf seed producers and distributes them to sites and land-grant universities throughout the country. An explanation of how to use these tests is presented on page S12.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER. In addition to the information one can gather from these sources, a knowledgeable distributor can also shed light on what are the best varieties and blends for a given region of the country. Universities and extension specialists are also great sources of information.

Finally, contractors should avoid the temptation to bite on price if there's a real difference in quality. Buying a premium seed and offering it as such to customers is another way to add profits.

"A quality seed product need not be viewed as an expense," stressed Art Wick, vice president, research and development, LESCO Inc., Rocky River, Ohio. "In many cases, it should be viewed as a value added benefit sold to the customer. Many contractors and hydroseeding customers consider the cost of seed to be a problem — they think that the cheaper

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they can buy seed the better off they are. "They should try a marketing approach," Wick continued, "and provide customers with a menu of choices. If you want a middle of the road lawn, I can give you that, but if you want a quality lawn,

I can use this higher end seed and you'll get an outstanding lawn. Customers will pay more if contractors can provide better quality. Good marketing is not giving away the store, but explaining value and shaping customers' perceptions." **LL**

Interpreting NTEP Results

While it can be helpful in selecting a variety of turf, reading the data from an NTEP report can be a bit tricky. Here are some suggestions:

Turfgrass quality ratings are contained in tables 1-3 in all NTEP progress reports. Turfgrass quality ratings are collected monthly and are an overall visual evaluation of each grass. Quality ratings encompass all of the factors that affect the quality of a turf stand, including genetic color, density, disease and insect injury and heat and drought tolerance.

Table 1 displays data from each test location and an overall average (mean). To best use this table, determine which test locations are the closest geographically to your location. The overall average is then useful to gauge the cultivars' performance over many locations.

Table 2 gives the same turfgrass quality data but presents it for each month collected. Evaluation of this table can lead to a better understanding of the varieties that perform better or worse during particular months or seasons.

Table 3 offers a ranking of quality ratings over each location. This table is useful for quickly determining the performance of cultivars over different locations and regions.

When considering data from any NTEP table, one needs to consider the Least Significant Difference value. The LSD is like a "plus or minus" value that ensures that two varieties with different ratings are actually statistically different. For example, if Variety A has a rating of 6.0 and Variety B rates at 5.7, but the LSD is 0.3, then there is no statistical difference between the varieties.


Call 301/504-5125 for information on obtaining NTEP results, or access them through the internet at <http://hort.unl.edu/ntep>.

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USE READER SERVICE #51

Comfort Zone

KENTUCKY BLUEGRASS

Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) is the best adapted and most versatile species for turfgrass use in Zones 1 and 2 and cooler, northern fringes and higher elevations of Zone 3, the transition zone. The main strengths of Kentucky bluegrass are due to its ability to spread by rhizomes (underground stems). Cutting heights should be maintained above $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch to promote rhizome development.

PERENNIAL RYEGRASS

Perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*) is best adapted to permanent turf use in Zones 1, 2 and the northern half or higher elevations of Zones 3, 4 and 5. The strength of this species is the combination of quick germination and establishment, high wear tolerance and good tolerance to cutting heights as low as $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch with proper management.

FINE FESCUE

Fine fescues include: strong creeping red fescue (*Festuca rubra rubra*) slender creeping fescue (*Festuca rubra trichophylla*), Chewings fescue (*Festuca rubra commutata*), hard fescue (*Festuca ovina longifolia*) and sheeps fescue (*Festuca ovina ovina*). They are well adapted to dry, infertile and shady conditions in Zones 1 and 2 similar to those found in many home landscapes.

TALL FESCUE

Tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*) will provide a very drought tolerant turf where soils are deep in Zones 1, 2, 3 and 4. Since tall fescues are very shade tolerant, they adapt to shady situations in

the northern fringes of Zone 4 as well. Once they are well established, tall fescues provide a very wear tolerant turf.

CREEPING BENTGRASS

Creeping bentgrass (*Agrostis paustris*) is best suited for closely mowed ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch or less) golf turf in Zones 1 and 2, but it also performs well with higher maintenance in Zone 3. It is very cold tolerant and moderately heat tolerant, but creeping bentgrass should not be maintained at heights more than a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch high as it becomes very puffy and susceptible to scalping injury.

BERMUDAGRASS

Bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*) is widely used in Zones 4 and 5. Use of cold tolerant varieties are also recommended for use in Zone 3. Bermudagrass is well adapted to full sun, it is very wear tolerant and it recuperates well from damage because it produces both rhizomes and stolons.

ZOYSIAGRASS

Zoysiagrass (*Zoysia japonica*) is well adapted to Zones 3, 4 and portions of Zone 5. It is one of the most wear tolerant turfgrasses available. Its fertility and moisture requirements are quite low compared to other turfgrasses, and shade tolerance is very good – much better than bermudagrass. Therefore, zoysiagrass fits into many shady situations in the landscape.

An overview of the most common seeded turf varieties and the growing zones of North America.

Turfgrass Growing Zones



Illustration and information provided by Medalist America, Post Falls, Idaho

Zone 1

COOL SEMI-ARID AND NORTHERN COOL HUMID

The best-adapted grasses are Kentucky bluegrasses, fine fescues and creeping bentgrasses. Cold and desiccation potential limit the use of perennial ryegrasses and tall fescues. Some perennial ryes are blended with Kentucky bluegrasses for better wear tolerance or density, but the proportion of Kentucky bluegrass is generally higher. Tall fescues alone, or with a low proportion of Kentucky bluegrass, may be used in the plains and

mountain states in non-irrigated turf cut at 1½ inches. The best time to seed in this region is from early August to mid-September.

Zone 2

COOL HUMID

Cool-season grasses, including Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, tall fescue, fine fescue and creeping bentgrass, are all suitable for a high quality turf. In parts of the zone that feature a warmer winter or consistent snow cover, straight perennial ryegrass, tall fescue or larger proportions of either species may be used in a blend.

Zone 3

TRANSITION ZONE

The potential for extremes in both heat and cold make this a challenging region for turf. Summer heat and humidity are the limiting factors for cool-season grasses in the southeastern reaches of this zone. Best seeding dates for cool-season grasses are late August until early October, and mid-June until mid-July for warm-season grasses. The northern half can be a problem for most warm-season grasses due to a lack of cold hardiness, although zoysiagrass is well adapted with good heat and drought tolerance.

Zone 4

WARM TEMPERATE AND WARM MARINE

Warm-season grasses, such as bermudagrass and zoysiagrass, perform best. Tall fescue is adapted to the cooler semi-arid and/or shady portions of this zone where irrigation is available. Dormant warm-season grasses are overseeded in the early fall with cool-season species to improve winter appearance. Best seeding dates for warm-season grasses in this zone are from mid-May until mid-July.

Zone 5

SUB-TROPICAL AND TROPICAL

Warm-season grasses, such as bermudagrass, predominate. Dormant warm-season grasses are overseeded with cool-season grasses during mid-to late fall to provide a more pleasing look in the winter. Best seeding dates for warm-season grasses are from early May until late July.



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USE READER SERVICE #52

(continued from page 48)

WORKING AROUND THE ACTS OF GOD. The television weather report, with all of its maps and visual aids, is wrong as often as it is right. Sam Farison, president, Farison Lawn Care, Inc., Louisville, Ky., is very familiar with the capricious side of the weather, and estimates his renovation work accordingly.

A larger job permits the use of heavier equipment, such as a tractor with a 72-inch seeder, that can cover more ground more efficiently.

Farison knows that heavy winds, hard rain and other natural phenomena can veto a day's work in minutes. For this reason, Farison builds a fudge factor into his price, basing his pricing not only on the original job, but on subsequent visits he expects he will have to make. Even without the threat of wind and rain induced disaster, a second visit is probable for the simple reason of weed control.

Nature abhors a vacuum, Farison noted, and when the soil is busted up after a renovation, weeds will take advantage of the situation by colonizing the broken turf.

"The problem with renovation is that you have a very narrow window of opportunity for doing the work," Farison explained, adding that the best time for him to seed is from the end of August into early October. "If we're doing a fall renovation, we've got approximately 40 days or so to get the seed in the ground. Because of weather uncertainties and seasonal factors, the later you plant, the greater the likelihood you will come back for a second visit.

"It's probably wise to do some dormant seeding as well," he continued. "If you're strictly doing renovation vs. rehabilitating the entire lawn, then you have to fill in the dead areas fast. People want a quick fix. They want those dead patches to come to life as quickly as possible. We don't do a lot of sodding or hydroseeding, especially for

residential customers. Seeding is slower than sodding, but you can still have good, young grass out there within a season. It's also cheaper than the two alternatives."

Farison uses regular service calls as an opportunity to sell his clients on lawn renovations. A customer may have a mixture of grasses on his lawn creating an undesirable

visual effect that renovation can remedy. Some grasses are more durable than others, Farison noted, or may grow better in certain situations. In some cases, a completely new lawn may be mandated by structural improvements such as swimming pools, decks or other landscaping changes that retard

(continued on page 68)

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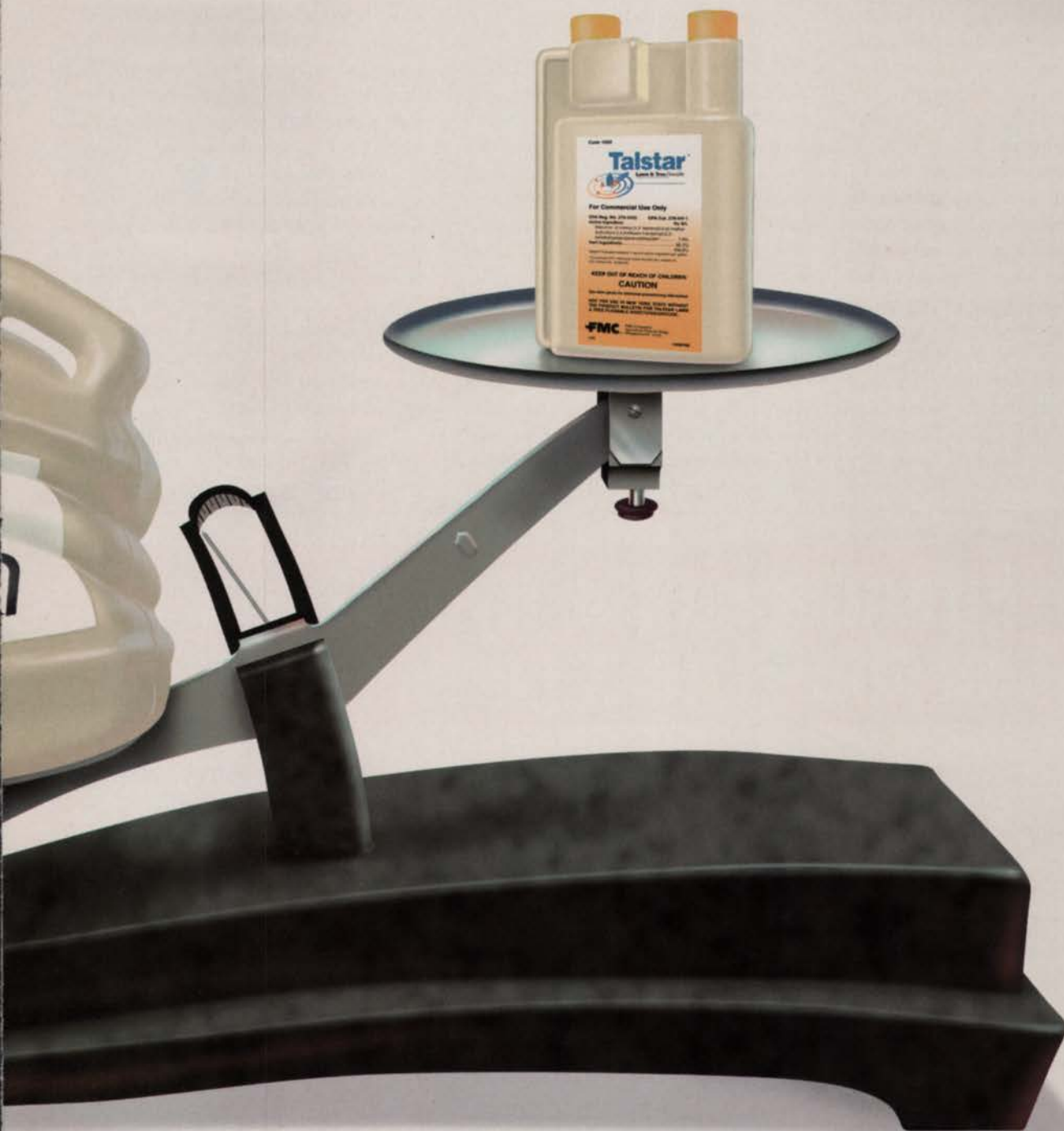
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USE READER SERVICE #57

turf renovation

(continued from page 65)

turf growth. Then there's the problem of uncontrollable weed growth, which to turf is the plant equivalent of cancer.

Other contractors promote renovation services via their reputation. Holder, for example, does no direct advertising. Instead, he lets his people do the advertising. His employees all wear a logoed shirt and drive company vehicles with the company name and phone number displayed on the side. Former customers often recommend his services or allow him to plant signs in their recently rehabilitated lawns, advertising the fact the his company was responsible for the renovation. According to Holder, this kind of customer loyalty is only possible when a contractor brings two things to the table — honesty and a job well done.

"When our customers receive the final bill, they get an itemized list of everything that went into the job, including equipment costs, time involved, materials, labor and a square footage cost for the application of

sod or hydroseeding. The dollar figure you wind up with depends on all of that, plus the square footage of the property. On average, you're talking \$3,500 and up for either new construction or renovation."

WHY HYDROSEED AND WHY NOT? Farison and Fair both noted the higher costs often associated with hydroseeding compared to seeding or sodding. At the same time, they both also pointed out that there are times when hydroseeding is the only viable alternative to more traditional renovation practices. Because of the possibility of runoff and soil erosion, hills can create health problems for an otherwise thriving lawn. Farison hydroseeds in these situations, because other methods simply don't work as well.

Hydroseeding is a uniform method of distributing grass. The seed is literally jetted into the ground by way of pressurized delivery system consisting of a tank and hose. The holding tank not only contains grass

seed, but also fertilizer, mulch, lime or anything else one elects to put in the mix.

Hydroseeding works best when the aim is to grow grass as evenly as possible on slopes or other normally inaccessible areas, Holder noted. Hydroseeding is more susceptible to the effects of wind than seeding, but rain is another matter. According to Fair, a single rain storm can wash away a whole day's hydroseeding.

"Hydroseeding is charged per 1,000 square feet," Fair continued. "The method is very efficient, and since you're talking about a truck with a tank, a sprayer and maybe one operator, it's also very labor friendly. The thing to remember is that hydroseeding is usually much more expensive than seeding. A renovation where hydroseeding is used exclusively can cost a customer around \$5,000."

Brian Tregoe, sales manager, Easy Lawn, Seaford, Del., put the total hydroseeding cost for the contractor at about 2 cents per

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USE READER SERVICE #58

Size Controls Cost

Sam Farison, president, Farison Lawn Care, Lexington, Ky., explained that the costs associated with materials and equipment are determined by what type of equipment is used, which is driven by the size of the area to be renovated. The larger the site is to be renovated, the larger the equipment is that can be used to complete the job. For example, a 72-inch seeder can cover more ground more efficiently.

On the other hand, smaller plots will many times contain more trim work and nooks and crannies, requiring a renovation technician to spend more time on detail work. — *Douglas Graham*

square foot, noting that is the most obvious benefit over sodding.

"Hydroseeding also provides quicker germination than seeding and a higher percentage of germination because the mulch holds the moisture," Tregoe added, while

admitting that renovations are often too small to necessitate hydroseeding.

THE RIGHT STUFF. Holder estimates his lawn renovation equipment investment at well over \$50,000 for a skid steer and a miniature bull dozer with attachments for tilling and raking. Without accessories, the skid steer runs about \$30,000, and accessories can add \$20,000 to that cost. Manpower, another capital expense, may run as high as \$10 per hour.

According to Wally Butman, director of marketing, Finn Corp., Fairfield, Ohio, a landscape tiller and hydroseeding machine should be added to the necessary equipment list as well. He recommends contractors invest in larger machines outright in order to offset the labor costs involved in using a smaller machine.

"An 800-gallon hydroseeder can cover

one half an acre of turf renovation per load," Butman said. "Contractors can cover a bigger area with a larger machine, which means not having to stop an refill the tank mix as often. To work efficiently with equipment and materials, a contractor should know the true costs, including overhead items like gas, fuel, labor, trucking costs, insurance, materials and all of those hidden profit eaters."

Turf renovation is likely to increase in popularity in the years to come, Butman noted, because of increased exposure to the process on the part of consumers and the excellent results that can be achieved.

"The contractors are also doing a much better job of marketing their services," he added. "Like everyone else in business in these competitive, cost-conscious times, they are getting more creative." **LL**

The author is a freelance writer in Columbia, Mo.

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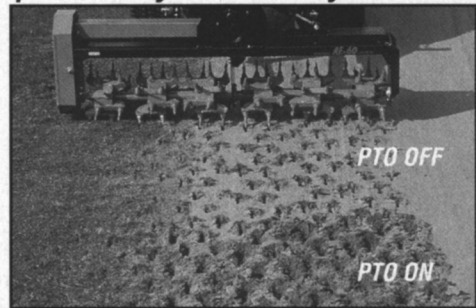


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USE READER SERVICE #60

Detaching Yourself

From Single-Use Equipment



Mower attachments are growing in use among landscape contractors, but does it make sense for your company to use them?

By Dave Clancy



Today's landscape contractor is under constant pressure to provide quality service at an affordable price. Controlling costs is a paramount issue for contractors – extra expenses come directly off of the bottom line. As a means to control these expenses, and improve productivity, many contractors are looking to find additional uses for their equipment.

Mower attachments are one means to double, triple or even quadruple the productivity of the mower itself. With a few simple steps, a mower can become a tiller, grader, snowplow, power broom or edger. For some contractors, a mower can also be used as a backhoe or a loader. However, before running out and buying the latest bells and whistles to attach to a machine, contractors need to understand a few things about the attachment segment of the market.

KNOW YOUR NEED. Just about every power landscape tool is available as a mower attachment from some supplier. In addition to mower manufacturers, which manufacture attachments designed specifically for their equipment, short line suppliers manufacture a variety of attachments designed to fit a multitude of mowers. But endless attachments are not the panacea for a landscape contractor looking to offer a variety of services. Instead, studying one's operation, customer base and scheduling needs is critical to successfully using mower attachments.

"We look at all of the available options in mower attachments," recognized
(continued on page 74)

Attachments such as mower-mounted vacuums are particularly valuable because they don't take the mower away from its primary function. Photo: Grasshopper

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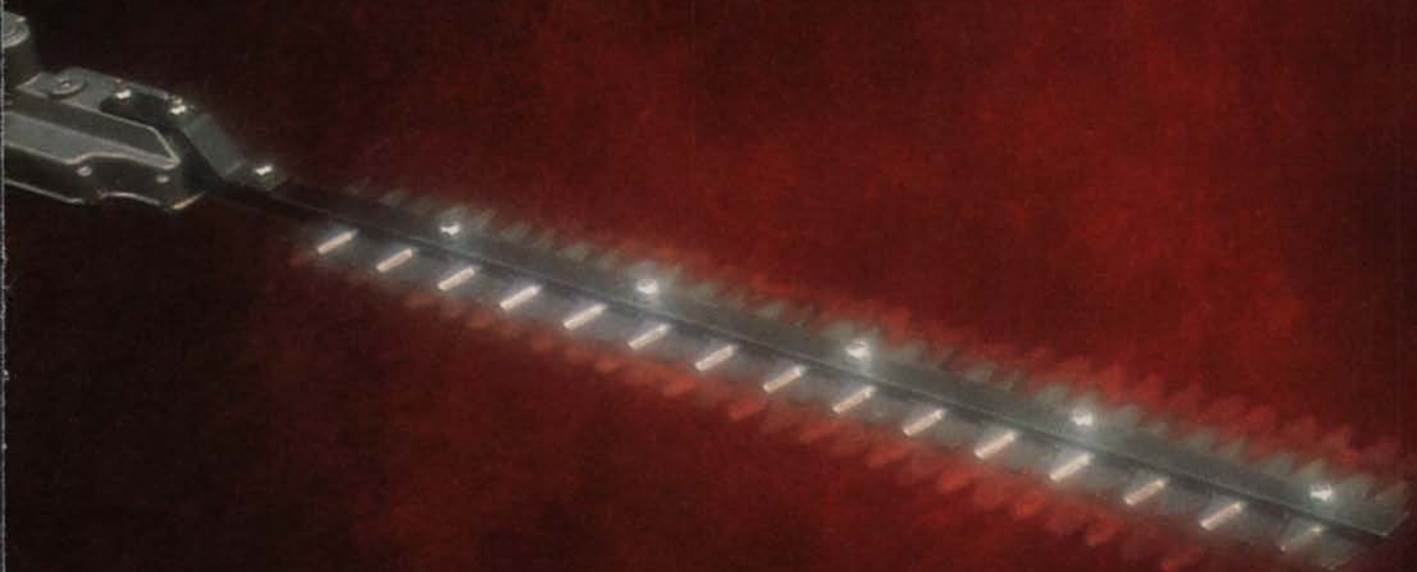


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mower attachments

(continued from page 70)

Dave Klier, of Torre & Bruglio, Pontiac, Mich. "Getting more work done with fewer people is the wave of the future, and if attachments help us do that, they will sell."

Klier said that before adding any attachment to his arsenal, the landscape contractor must look at scheduling. "If you are

going to take a mower and change it into an edger or a fertilizer spreader, you had better be sure you don't need that mower when it's applying fertilizer. Otherwise, you are defeating the purpose of that attachment."

Klier said the only attachment used at Torre & Bruglio is a vacuum attachment

that allows for easier debris and leaf removal in the spring and fall. "This way we can pick the leaves up quickly without having to redouble our efforts."

Productivity is the key to this choice. "One technician is more productive with a riding mower and a vacuum attachment on it than three men are with rakes and brooms," Klier noted. "We've saved a great deal of labor costs that way."

In Klier's case, the attachment decision is simple. Adding a vacuum does not pull the mower away from its intended function – it still cuts the grass, the vacuuming is an additional feature. The same can be said for one of the most popular attachments available today – blowers.

James Haney was a commercial land-

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Advantages of Attachments

Several advantages evolve from the use of attachments:

- **Storage costs.** Especially in the off-season, storage of six tillers, three grader blades and a power broom takes more space than the storage of the attachments.
- **Purchase cost.** Generally speaking, the cost of the attachment is lower than the cost of the corresponding tool.
- **Finance cost.** When financing the equipment, a lower total cost means a lower financed amount and lower interest costs.
- **Insurance cost.** Cost of insuring the third, fourth or fifth dedicated unit is more than storing the corresponding attachments.
- **Maintenance cost.** Instead of maintaining the extra dedicated units, contractors only need to maintain the attachments.
- **Security of backup.** With three snow-blower attachments and five mowers, a company can quickly change mowers in the event of a breakdown.
- **Low-cost entry level.** A contractor might rent a backhoe once or twice a month to add jobs, but by purchasing the attachment, it can pursue more backhoe jobs without incurring additional expense. — **Dave Clancy**

USE READER SERVICE #61

scape contractor for 15 years, looking to save time in his operations. His crews would cut, then blow grass clippings away from walkways and driveways. This extra effort took enough time to cost Haney a few dollars a job.

"We began experimenting with blower attachments that would blow the clippings away as they were being discharged from the mower deck," he explained. "We ended up with a U.S. patent on that concept."

Haney was so successful with his attachment that he sold his landscape business in 1997 to concentrate on manufacturing the units.

"We mount blowers so they can blow at the clippings after they exited the deck and before they hit the ground," Haney added.

Since the blowers are a separate tool, they don't require any additional horsepower from the mower. "The blower has its own five-horsepower engine, and the bracket attachments are very simple," Haney noted.

Randy Ferrari, vice president of operations, Minor's Landscape Services, Fort Worth, Texas, added blower attachments himself to his mowers. "We have made the attachment with a clip assembly for the front of our walk-behind mowers," he noted.

Ferrari said the company has several accounts with wide open spaces, such as one with 17 miles of curbs, that require blowing away the clippings, so the attachment makes sense. "In areas close to buildings, we have to shut it off and go in later with a hand-held blower, but when we are in these wider areas, we can hit almost everything we need to hit with the attachment."

The self-designed blower attachment remains the only attachment in Ferrari's garage, however. "We have looked at other items, but we haven't purchased anything.

"We toyed with edger attachments, but I'm not really thrilled with the results," Ferrari continued. "They seem to dish out the edge a little more than I like, and the edge doesn't seem to be that crisp, so we are sticking with the stick edgers at this point."

THE WHOLE PICTURE. Personal preference is one reason to not select an attachment. Another is the wear and tear on equipment. For instance, snowblowing attachments require mowers to be out in the winter and expose them to salt and sand. "We use the snow brushes on our tractors but not our

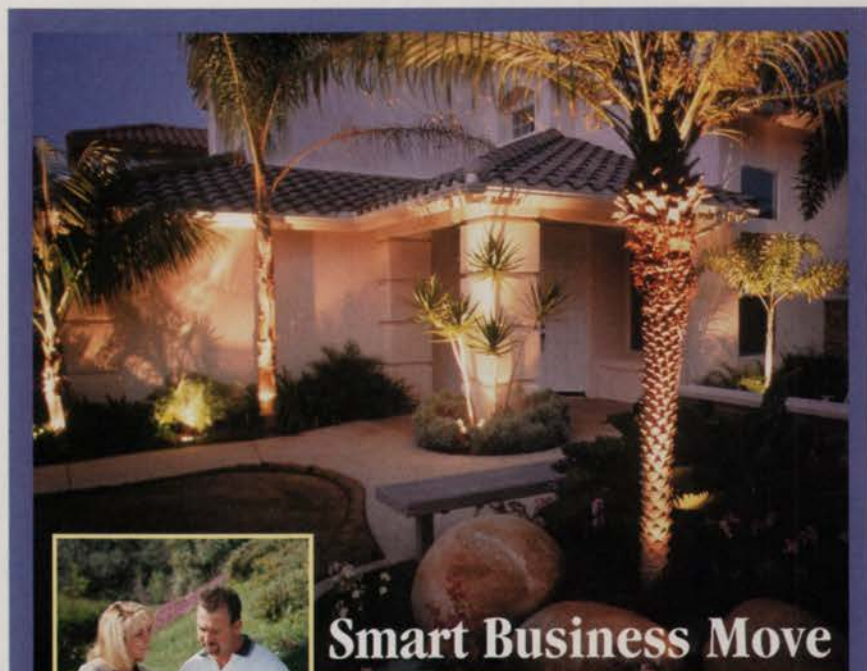
mowers," said Klier. "First of all, we get better traction with the tractor because of the tires involved.

"And then you have to take that mower out into the winter elements, which is not good for the unit," he added. Instead, Torre & Bruglio uses the Michigan winter as a

time for maintenance of its mower fleet.

"Our mechanics go through about 250 units between November and March," he noted. "Putting snowblowers on those would cut into the important maintenance time."

But for John Dinsmore, operations administrator, D. Foley Landscape Inc.,



Smart Business Move

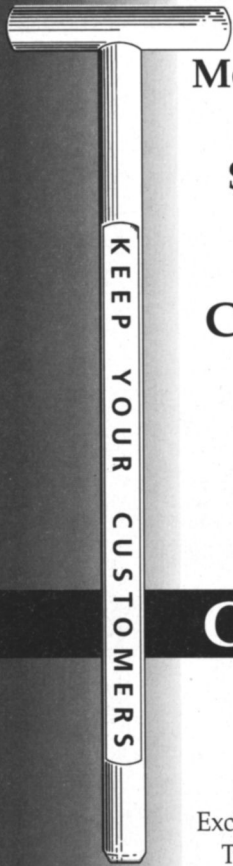
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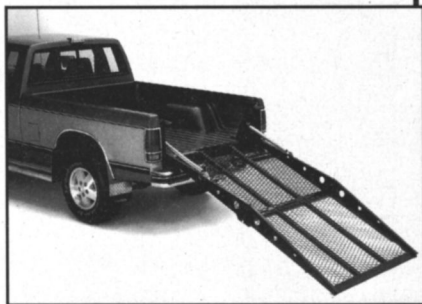
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mower attachments

Walpole, Mass., adding a snowblower attachment to a mower saves the company money.

"We put a snowblower attachment on one mower because one of our accounts had a lot of sidewalks that needed cleaning," he explained. The attachment cost the company about \$2,000 — about the cost of a new snowblower — but it takes less room at the shop to store and allows the company to use the mower 12



Contractors appreciate the fact that attachments generally require less capital expenditures than dedicated units. Photo: The Toro Co.

months out of the year, instead of eight, as it did before.

"We had to buy two tires to increase the mower's traction, but that was it," recalled Dinsmore.

Dinsmore added that he evaluated the risk of salt damage to the mower unit. "The risks were there, but they were not substantial enough to deter us from making that purchase," he recalled.

And Dinsmore noted one other crucial factor working in favor of the purchase. "There was absolutely no conflict in scheduling," he pointed out. "When the snowblower is being used, we are not cutting grass, so there was no concern about overlap."

Scheduling conflicts between an attachment and the power unit are particularly a concern when selecting attachments for use during the same season. A contractor looking to add a backhoe or tiller attachment to the mower cannot dig and cut grass at the same time. So extra attention must be paid to the cost of having a mower out of service during backhoe operation hours.

Tim Robine, senior product specialist, John Deere, Augusta, Ga., recommended contractors pay particular attention to how the implement attaches to the mower, as there are definite benefits to superior attachment systems. "That way a contractor can bring one power unit to the site and attach and detach implements as necessary without wasting too much time."

Robine said removing or adding attachments should take only a few minutes. "Contractors can load and unload dirt, sand and mulch very quickly, then add the blade attachment and grade the site," he commented. "Or they can change to the tiller attachment and do the necessary tilling without having to bring a variety of tools to the site."

"Having one power unit with a wide array of attachments is a major advantage over using multiple dedicated machines for different purposes," agreed Patsy Penner, marketing coordinator, The Grasshopper Co., Moundridge, Kan. "Attachments extend the use of the power unit into additional months of the year allow so it can pay for itself in a shorter amount of time by increasing cash flow."

mower attachments

GETTING HITCHED. There are some downsides to attachments. If a company already owns a tiller, there is little need to purchase a tilling attachment. "We have two power brooms, so there is no value in purchasing an attachment to handle that job," recognized Dinsmore.

Another downside to the attachment question is the requirement of adding an implement hitch to the mower. "If you are just going to buy one attachment, purchasing that implement hitch is costly," asserted Dinsmore. "But if you plan on putting a broom, a tiller, a snowblower, etc., on the mower, that hitch is a valuable item."

Again, scheduling is also a concern. If the attachment takes the mower out of service while it is being used to till, grade or vacuum, what is the cost in lost mowing time?

In some instances, mower maintenance is increased because of the attachment. For example, Bob Walker, president, Walker Mfg., Fort Collins, Colo., said adding a thatcher to his company's mower means additional dust will be kicked into the air during use. "Dethatching can be a pretty dirty job, so the operator must pay attention to the air cleaning unit on the mower," he cautioned.

In addition, while most attachments require no extra power, Walker said dethatching is more strenuous than mowing. "It's not a large requirement, but the dethatcher does take more power to push," he commented. "And the contractor must be aware of that."

However, he added that since thatching is usually done in the early spring before any significant grass growth has commenced, power usually used for cutting is transferred to the thatch operation.

"It is also important to make sure the necessary horsepower is available for attachments," reminded Grasshopper's Penner. "Our units are engineered to work with the power units recommended."

That is the case with most mower manufacturers' attachments since they supply power to both the base mower and the attachment.

.....
"The main advantages for a contractor buying a power unit and attachment from one manufacturer would be the consistency," noted Robine. "The reliability, warranty, parts and service back-up, and, of course, safety are all ingrained when you stick with one manufacturer."

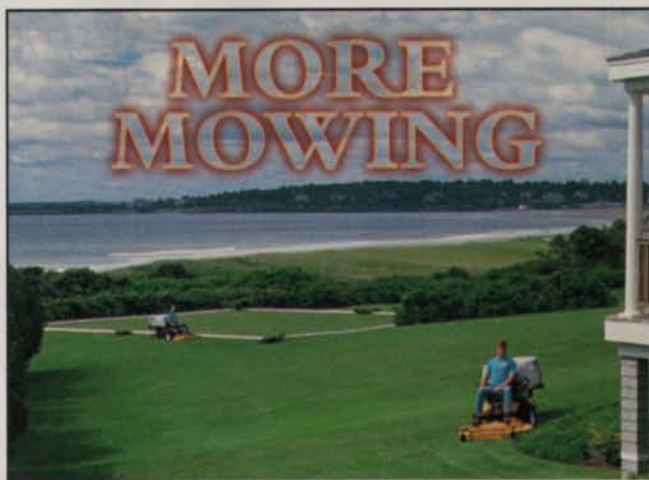
That is not to say there isn't a market and for short line products. A contractor using mowers from several manufacturers might find it easier to deal with a short line supplier that can supply attachments for all of the mowers. Likewise, as the attachment market grows and new attachments are developed, contractors might find that a product the company wants is not available from the mower manufacturer.

Suppliers and contractors agree that attachments are growing in use. While they might not be the cure all for every landscape

application, contractors can increase their productivity by adding one or two attachments to their tool shed. **LL**

The author is president, Clancy Marketing Communications, Westerville, Ohio.

In some instances, mower maintenance is increased because of the attachment.



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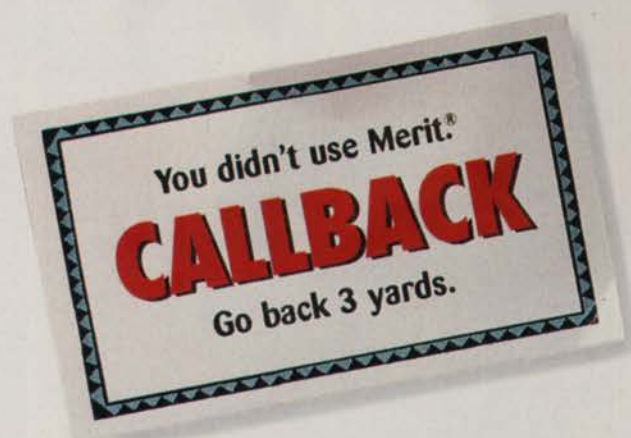
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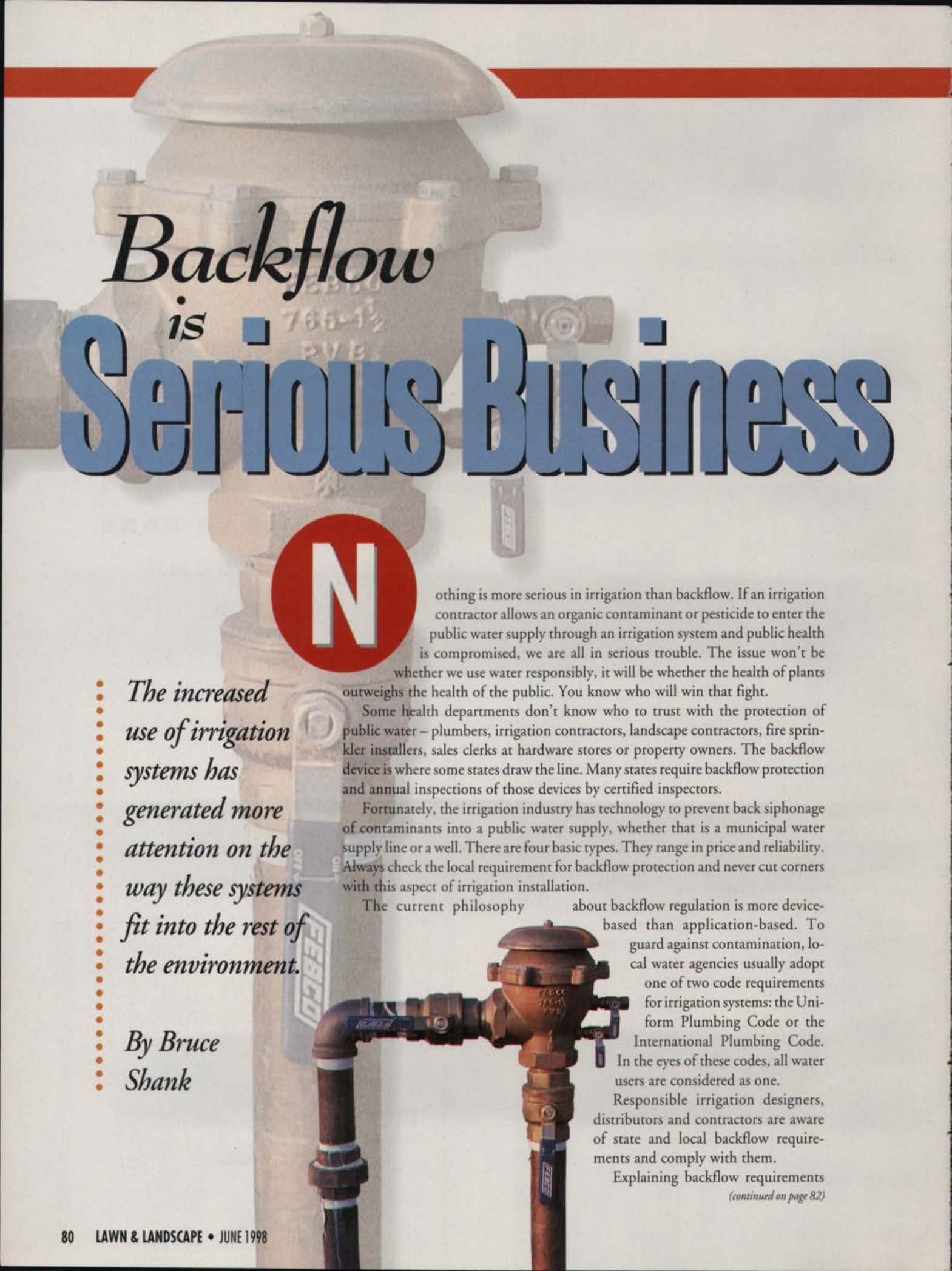
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USE READER SERVICE #56



Backflow is Serious Business

The increased use of irrigation systems has generated more attention on the way these systems fit into the rest of the environment.

By Bruce Shank

N

othing is more serious in irrigation than backflow. If an irrigation contractor allows an organic contaminant or pesticide to enter the public water supply through an irrigation system and public health is compromised, we are all in serious trouble. The issue won't be whether we use water responsibly, it will be whether the health of plants outweighs the health of the public. You know who will win that fight.

Some health departments don't know who to trust with the protection of public water – plumbers, irrigation contractors, landscape contractors, fire sprinkler installers, sales clerks at hardware stores or property owners. The backflow device is where some states draw the line. Many states require backflow protection and annual inspections of those devices by certified inspectors.

Fortunately, the irrigation industry has technology to prevent back siphonage of contaminants into a public water supply, whether that is a municipal water supply line or a well. There are four basic types. They range in price and reliability. Always check the local requirement for backflow protection and never cut corners with this aspect of irrigation installation.

The current philosophy about backflow regulation is more device-based than application-based. To guard against contamination, local water agencies usually adopt one of two code requirements for irrigation systems: the Uniform Plumbing Code or the International Plumbing Code.

In the eyes of these codes, all water users are considered as one.

Responsible irrigation designers, distributors and contractors are aware of state and local backflow requirements and comply with them.

Explaining backflow requirements

(continued on page 82)



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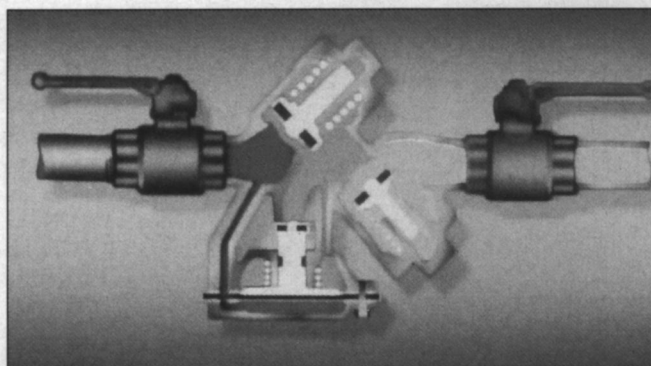
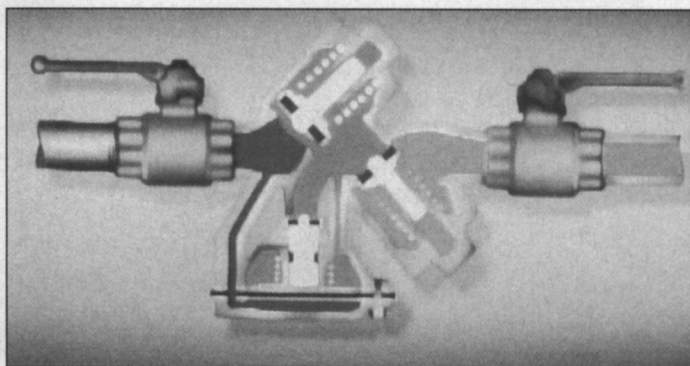


Nitroform®



backflow preventors

(continued from page 80)



(Left) A reduced pressure assembly pressurized in a no-flow condition. Both checks are closed and holding pressure. The relief valve is pressurized to be closed. (Right) A reduced pressure assembly pressurized in a flow condition with both checks open. The relief valve is pressurized to be closed. Photos: Febco

and costs to customers requires a basic knowledge of backflow prevention devices and a specific knowledge of local regulations. In some cases, the additional cost of meeting backflow requirements discourages customers from purchasing the irrigation system they really need or encourages them to have their systems installed without meeting codes.

In locations where codes exist but enforcement doesn't, irrigation contractors could see systems that do not meet codes. When they have to compete against installers who do not meet codes, the situation becomes a matter of ethics and ultimately one of protecting natural resources. To install an irrigation system without meet-

ing recognized standards just to get the business – whether the locality has codes or not – is wrong.

The best way to resolve this problem is to employ individuals knowledgeable about BPD operation and testing. Granted, these devices appear complicated, but information is

(continued on page 84)

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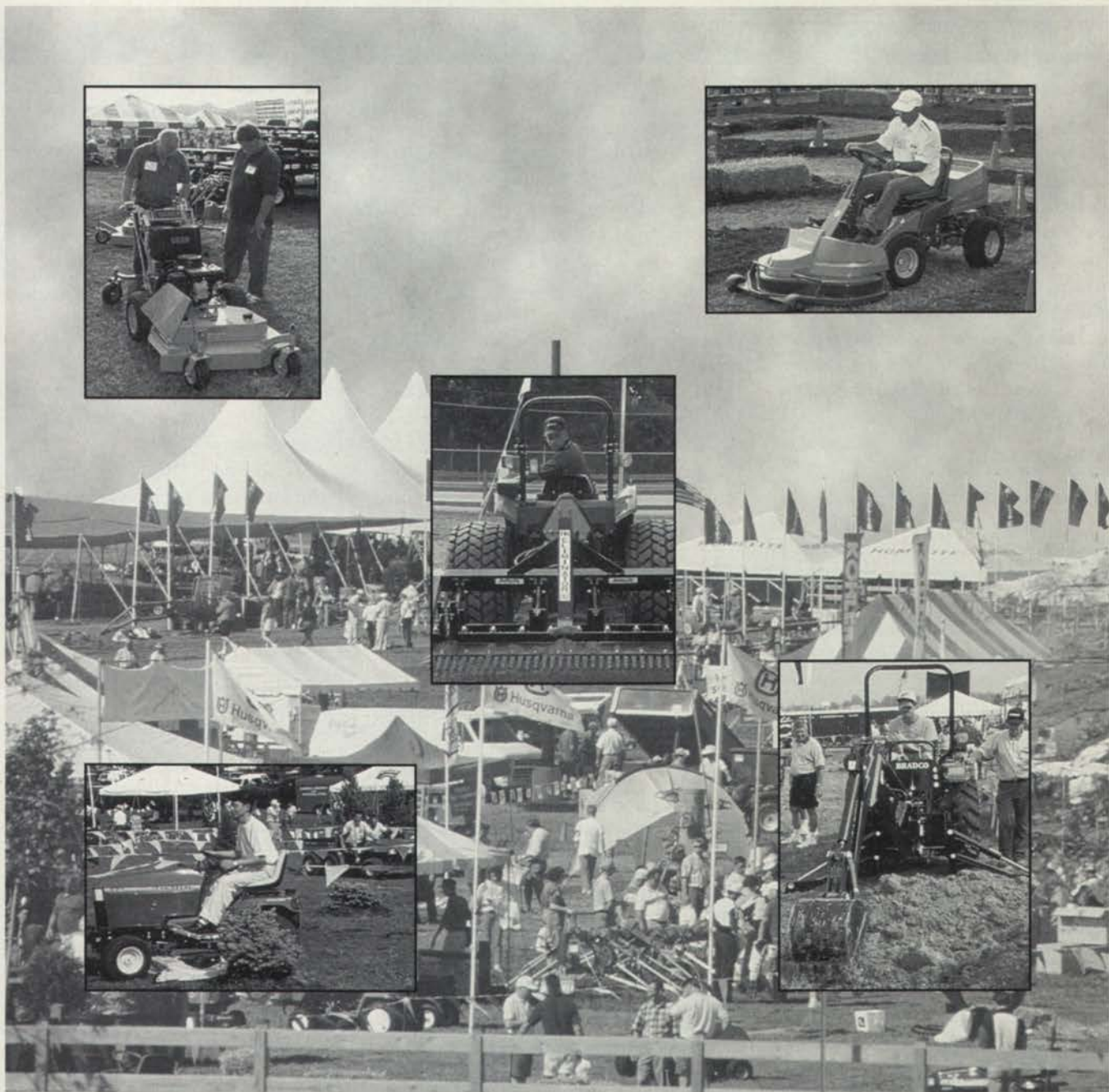
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backflow preventors

(continued from page 82)

available that shows how they operate and includes step-by-step procedures for testing them.

BIG PICTURE LOOK. In addition, how irrigation system components impact BPD performance is especially critical. "Water hammer caused by improper system design or small things, like solenoid malfunctions, can make a backflow device perform improperly," explained Tony Arthur, marketing manager, Watts Regulator, North Andover, Mass. "Checking water filtration upstream of the device can ensure many years of trouble-free service."

Wye strainers, included with some backflow prevention setups, clog easily when debris enters the system during repairs or new construction of the water supply system. Water sources, such as wells and lakes, present a greater chance for debris, which can cause seals to seat incompletely. Regular cleaning of upstream filters is clearly more important with well and lake sources.

A good time to check the operation of the BPD is during system troubleshooting. Unfortunately, in some areas, the irrigation technician is not supposed to touch the BPD. He or she is required to call in a plumber or other certified inspector. Or, if a technician does work on a device, an inspector has to check it before the system can be placed back in operation. By having a certified inspector on staff and stocking service trucks with common seals, springs and testing devices, contractors can greatly improve the maintenance process.

CONTAMINANT OR POLLUTANT? Backflow codes recognize two types of water problems. If a material entering a public water source by backsiphonage constitutes a health hazard, it is termed a contaminant. If the material is not a health hazard, but results in

Contractors need to be aware that greater protection necessitates more pressure to operate the system.

changes in the water that are objectionable to users, such as taste, odor or appearance, it is considered a pollutant.

The American Water Works Association recommends irrigation systems used to apply pesticide products include a reduced pressure principle backflow prevention assembly. This protection comes at a cost, both in the price of the backflow prevention device and the pressure lost. Systems that apply only water to the landscape, according to the AWWA, should contain any of the following: a double check valve assem-



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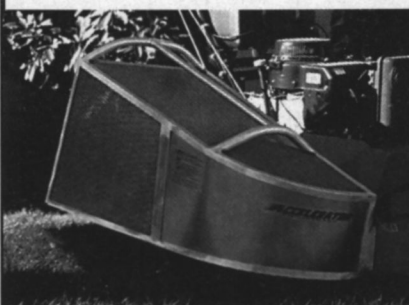
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bly, a pressure vacuum breaker or an atmospheric vacuum breaker.

Therefore, if you add a fertilizer or pesticide injection system to an irrigation system, there is a good chance the BPD will need to be changed.

MORE PROTECTION, LESS PRESSURE. The simplest type of BPD is the atmospheric vacuum breaker. Water flowing in the proper direction pushes the valve up to close an air gap opening. When the water stops flowing or moves in the wrong direction, gravity closes the valve, opening the air gap to relieve backpressure. Not only is this the simplest and least expensive type of BPD, it provides the least friction and pressure loss.

A pressure vacuum breaker is slightly more advanced. A spring, not gravity, closes the valve when flow ceases or backflow occurs. The air gap is also spring loaded and remains closed except during backflow situations. Safety does come at a price, however.

More precautions create more friction and greater pressure loss.

Another option, the double check valve, is essentially two pressure vacuum breakers in a row, but contractors need to be aware that greater protection necessitates more pressure to operate the irrigation system.

The ultimate in backflow protection is the reduced pressure principle assembly. It includes two spring-loaded valves with a spring-loaded relief valve between them.

The worst case scenario for pressure loss is 20 psi. So, if a system requires pressure at the sprinkler head of 45 psi and the local supply is 50 psi, the sprinklers might not deliver the necessary coverage.

If sprinkler heads without check valves are located in low areas of turf treated regularly with pesticides, contractors should design the system for a higher level of protection and, therefore, a greater loss in pressure. Better backflow protection with fewer heads per zone and more zones per control-

ler can solve the problem. When uncertain, contractors should plan for more than atmospheric pressure breakers and include a controller capable of handling extra zones.

Contractors performing a significant amount of irrigation installation should consider training or hiring someone to act as a backflow specialist. (Contact the Foundation for Cross-Connection Control and Hydraulic Research at 213/740-2032 for information). Also, be aware that backflow devices require extra freeze protection and winterizing, and any BPD in a public location should be protected with an enclosure.

The more seriously contractors take backflow protection, the less likely they are to be restricted by regulations in the future. An enormous amount of security is worth a relatively small amount of training. **LL**

The author is owner of IrriCOM, which serves as the communications arm of the Irrigation Association.

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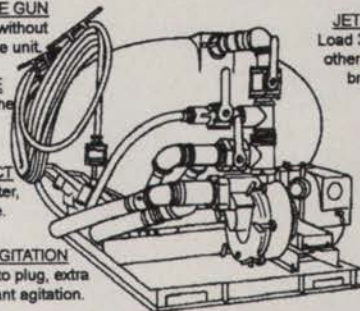
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The definition of Integrated Pest Management is still debated, but its principles are being used by contractors successfully.

By Paul Schrimpf

"Integrated pest management programs use a range of methods and disciplines to assure stable and economical crop production while minimizing risks to humans, animals, plants and the environment. IPM weighs costs, benefits and impacts on health and the environment, and thus identifies the most suitable ways to control pests. Options include prevention, monitoring, mechanical trapping devices, natural predators, biological pesticides and, if appropriate, chemical pesticides."—U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Integrated Pest Management is a concept that was developed in the agriculture industry in the 1950s and 1960s in response to outcries about the overuse of organochlorine pesticides such as DDT and chlordane. Rocked by the accusations contained in Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, the agriculture industry developed IPM principles to better manage pest populations while reducing the use of pesticides.

In the early 1980s, when the lawn care industry was growing exponentially, it too came under attack from environmental groups indicting the control products used by the green industry. This initiated the beginnings of the IPM movement in the "urban" landscape.

Today, "official" definitions of IPM in the urban landscape are often clouded by complex, tedious explanations. For contractors who use IPM today, the term simply means using all of the pest management tools at their disposal.

(continued on page 88)



One of the most critical aspects of creating an integrated pest management program is having well trained technicians in the field. Photo: Davey Tree.

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(continued from page 86)

STRATEGIES THAT WORK. There are plenty of success stories related to IPM, and companies interviewed for this article said one of the big advantages is that it sets their companies apart from their competitors.

"Some larger companies are still paying technicians based on the number of treatments they produce per day," said Gary LaScalea, president, GroGreen, Plano, Texas. "We look at each customer individually, taking into consideration the needs of the site and recommending a program."

"My view is, if you don't look at IPM as a professional lawn care contractor," he urged, "then it hurts the entire industry."

Companies vary to the degree to which they employ IPM principles, but they all have some factors in common. First and foremost, successful IPM programs require a well-trained front-line work force.

"You need to have a trained employee, and this requirement has led to us keeping employees year-round for the last 10 years,"

IPM In The Real World

.....
Would you describe your pest and disease control program as a form of Integrated Pest Management?

That's the question we asked a number of our readers in an anonymous fax survey for *Lawn & Landscape* magazine. While not scientific, it provided some interesting insight into which IPM concepts contractors use and how IPM fits into the landscape contractor's program of maintenance.

First of all, every respondent said that they consider their program to be IPM-oriented. However, most indicated that their customers do not really understand what IPM is all about. One respondent said he believes that three-fourths of his customers understand IPM principles, but the rest of the responses fell between 10 percent and 40 percent.

We also asked the respondents to describe how their programs conform to the principles of IPM, and here is a sample of their responses:

☛ "We do not do blanket pesticide applications, except for grassy weed control in the spring. All other insecticide, fungicide and herbicide applications are spot-treated on an as-needed basis. The decision whether to apply is dependent on pest populations and counts, active disease and the

stressed Bob Ottley, president, One Step Lawn and Tree Care, North Chili, N.Y. "By the time you get somebody trained to

identify those pests and know what product to use, how to use it and when to use it, you can't run the risk of losing them.

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presence of broadleaf weeds. We don't do trapping or similar types of monitoring, and we don't use much in the way of biological controls."

"We only treat when pests are active or when we know the property has had a history of problems with a pest."

"Our program consists of good, sound cultural practices on all properties, including proper techniques with fertilizing, soil testing, liming, pruning, aerating, cutting heights, sharp blades, consistency, etc. We determine specific problem areas and diseases — we treat only those areas as needed. We also install disease resistant and sustainable plant material, endophytic turf seed. Pesticides are a last resort."

"A very loose form. Our company tried a strong IPM program from 1987 to 1990. The market simply didn't allow it. Customers are all for the theory until they have a problem and it becomes our fault. We were simply losing too many customers to 'guaranteed' grub and weed control. IPM is a sound concept, but not in the current lawn care market."

"We attempt to educate our customers about mowing, watering, aeration and turf seed selection. When we are on the site, if we see that there is something they need to do, i.e., raise the cutting height or modify the watering habits, we leave recommendations plus third party information such as cooperative extension bulletins."

"Treatments are scheduled only when a significant level of infestation occurs. Then only the effected species is treated. Preventive treatments are only scheduled on problems that have always recurred when not treated preventively." — Paul Schrimpf

"Our training is really ongoing," Ottley continued. "We send technicians to seminars, but even then it takes new people a

couple of years to get to the point that they have really something and understand what they are doing."

integrated pest management

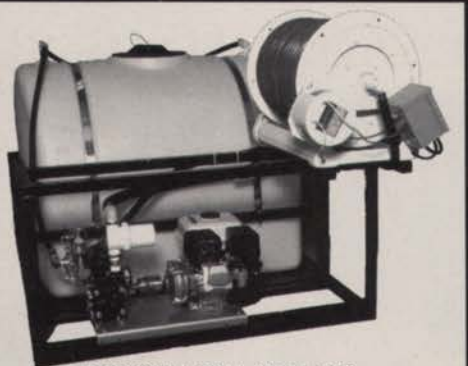
"We try to hire someone with a minimum of a two-year degree in horticulture so they at least have the basics," revealed Laurie Broccolo, president, Broccolo Lawn & Tree Care, Rochester, N.Y. "Also, they must have pesticide certification when we hire them or they have to get it in a month."

"We also hold weekly meetings throughout the season so everybody is together on the discussion of what we're doing," explained Broccolo.

One of the most difficult training exercises Broccolo goes through with technicians is getting them to make decisions about whether a lawn needs to be fertilized. "They may need to consider the soil in the area," she said. "If the turf looks good and the ground is sandy, the technician may want to fertilize to keep it looking good. Another customer may have a clay soil and not require fertilizer. As long as the technician can justify the decision to the customer and the results are there, that's alright."

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LAWN & LANDSCAPE • JUNE 1998

89

"Technicians need to be comfortable about their own expertise, and realize that is what the customer is paying for – a consultant and a true horticulturist," Broccolo concluded. "They are making a decision and managing that property."

"We train technicians to determine how significant a problem is and to recognize when it needs to be treated," said David Hansen, vice president, Environmental Care, Calabasas, Calif. "For instance, if there's an aphid problem on an ash tree that is planted over a parking lot where cars are parked and honeydew is dripping, it may be a problem that should be treated. If it's in the back of a lot surrounded by turf, there's no call for treatment."

Another important factor for IPM is diversity in the number of products and approaches that are provided for technicians to use in the field. Keeping a versatile and well-stocked truck provides flexibility.

"We purchased customized units that

have separate tanks for tree and lawn care, fertilizer and an injection unit for weed control," explained Broccolo. "We carry a couple of different products for the tree tanks. We also have a flat top to stack granular fertilizers – some are straight fertilizer, and some have preemergence. This allows the technician to make a variety of decisions based on the condition of the property."

Ottley has found combination spreader/sprayer units very useful in the field. "If we want to use a granular product, we can spread the granular product and turn on the sprayers when we need them," he explained.

Knowing when and what to apply is a matter of history and scouting, he added. "Even the preemergence crabgrass control we do is based on where crabgrass infested lawns last year," said Ottley. "For long-time customers, we track infestations so those areas are always treated, then we hit the hot spots, such as the edges of driveways, sidewalks, direct sunny areas, weak areas of the

lawn and the southern exposure of hills."

"We use a more rational approach to pest control than in years past," stressed Hansen. "If the pest is not causing a safety problem, is not going to kill the plant and is not an eyesore, leave it alone."

The method chosen to apply a pesticide can also be viewed as a part of IPM, especially in the care of trees and ornamentals. "We've been successful with soil injecting some products, so we don't have to spray around buildings or windows where people are coming in and out," Hanson explained. "Customers are as against the indiscriminate use of these products as we are, and I think it puts us in a position of being seen as more environmentally friendly as a company." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Next month, Lawn & Landscape will take a look at the future of IPM.

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Contractors Look into the Future

When it comes to anticipating future challenges for contractors, everybody wants to talk about the labor shortage.

By Bob West



(Above) Bill Gordon, Signature Landscape, listens as one of his colleagues talks about the challenges and benefits of utilizing a Hispanic workforce. Photos: Bill Webster



How bad is the labor problem for lawn care and landscape contractors? More than 50 percent of respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* industry survey cited a lack of labor as the greatest limitation on their ability to grow their businesses.

This dearth of capable employees has forced contractors to look toward an array of possible solutions or ways

to maximize the productivity they achieve with the employees they can find. Equipment manufacturers have already offered a great deal of help with the development of machines like zero-turn radius mowers and reduced vibration hand-held trimmers.

Husqvarna Forest & Garden Co., Charlotte, N.C., explored this issue extensively with the 15 contractors it hosted at the second industry roundtable, sponsored by Husqvarna and *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

Following are excerpts of the conversations:

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF A HISPANIC WORKFORCE:

"I'm concerned that the general public doesn't see the need for immigrant labor because it's tired of immigration stories. If we have to start calling in social security numbers we're in trouble." — *Bill Gordon, Signature Landscape*

"As an industry, we have to do a better job of showing the legislators the need for this work force." — *Mark Arrimour, Penninck Arrimour*

"We have to demonstrate to the INS that there aren't other people out there willing to do these jobs." — *Jack Hasbrouck, The Groundskeeper*



(Left) A number of contractors, along with representatives of Husqvarna and *Lawn & Landscape* magazine, discuss the workforce of the future. (Above left) *Lawn & Landscape*'s Cindy Code and KEI's Chris Kujawa discuss effective training techniques. (Above right) Frank Mills, Hillenmeyer Nurseries, takes a moment to browse through Husqvarna's model store.



(continued on page 94)

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industry roundtable

(continued from page 92)

"You have to make sure you can set up crews so they can communicate with their own crew members." — *David Harting, Nanak's Landscaping*

"It's very important to the other Hispanics that their crew leader be Hispanic, but there has to be someone who can communicate with the client as well." — *Hasbrouck*

"A lot of times Hispanic laborers from different countries and cultures won't always get along with each other." — *Tim Lynott, Chapel Valley Landscape Co.*

"You also have to think about what Hispanic laborers will do if your market means business is seasonal. Will they come back after the winter?" — *Michael Byrne, Byrne Brothers Landscape*

"Our biggest challenge is understanding the necessary papers to make sure they're legal workers and what is good or bad paperwork." — *Gordon*

"We've started paying for English language classes for our Hispanics." — *Harting*

"We have an interpreter who serves as the Hispanic laborers' liaison to management, looks out for them and communicates between the groups." — *Mike Rorie, Groundmasters*

"Not being able to understand what the laborers are saying is dangerous because you can have a bad apple and not know it." — *Gordon*

"The second generation of Hispanic laborers developing now is not as good of laborers." — *Larry Neuhoff, Landtrends*

KEY FACTORS IN PREVENTING TURNOVER:

"Developing a fun culture to work in to go along with providing satisfying work opportunities is important." — *Phil Lundy, Northwest Landscape Industries*

"The number one thing is salary, obviously. The number two thing is to provide consistent hours, which means for 52 weeks

.....

'Equipment will look a lot different than it does now with entirely new product concepts and categories.' — *Gordon*


.....

a year for us. The criteria is the same for all of our laborers because they live paycheck to paycheck." — *Peter Bowman, Four Seasons*

IMPROVING LANDSCAPE CURRICULUM:

"Instructors need to get out in the field and see what is real, and students need more internships." — *Gordon*

"Students have to have leadership and communication skills that aren't associated with the industry education." — *Hasbrouck*



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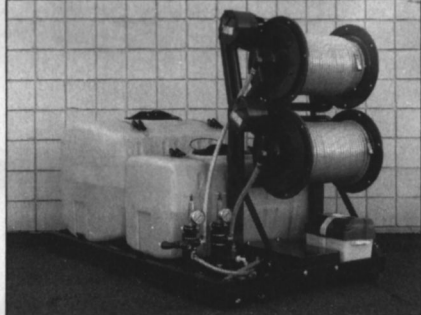
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"Too many students think a formal education grants them more than it does. They don't place enough value on interpersonal skills." – *Rorie*

CREATING VALUABLE EMPLOYEE HANDBOOKS:

"The only time they are used now is when there's a discipline problem." – *Arrimour*

"One thing you could do is review important policies in the handbook, like the drug and alcohol policy, three times a year." – *Chris Kujawa, Kujawa Enterprises*

"The use of some graphics and pictures can help make it more interesting to look at." – *Michael Currin, Greenscapes*

"We hired a human resources consultant to customize our handbook to our company. Now we use it for everything we do, and we've eliminated the grey areas of different policies." – *Chuck Richardson, Gator Landscaping*

"We use our handbook as a hiring tool and give it to prospective employees to take

home and look over. Then we go over the high points in the orientation." – *Bowman*

"A handbook can be used to talk about the company's history and culture and how it got to where it is today. We miss an opportunity to do that by focusing instead on the legalese." – *Kujawa*

GREEN INDUSTRY WORKFORCE OF NEXT CENTURY:

"Equipment will look a lot different than it does now with entirely new concepts and categories." – *Gordon*

"We'll see companies go the Wal-Mart route of being low cost operators with cheap labor before they'll invest in the new equipment. Cheap labor is the core commodity for too many companies." – *Rorie*

"Eventually, we'll see a decrease of employee-related costs as a percentage of revenues." – *Hasbrouck*

"Companies need to get better at developing work processes so they don't have to

worry as much about what the labor is doing." – *Steve Wood, Husqvarna*

"There will be a change in turf's genetics so they're more disease resistant and don't have to be mowed as often." – *Currin*

"We'll see the more innovative companies start taking care of maintenance through the design of the landscape rather than with manual labor." – *Rorie*

"With so many government regulations and personnel issues, equipment will be the key. We have to eliminate people because they won't necessarily always be there." – *Lynott*

"The equipment side of the industry has unlimited potential for change, but we haven't brought the right resources together. I think manufacturers have missed the opportunity to partner with groups and take advantage of R&D ideas to create entirely new equipment categories." – *Currin* **LL**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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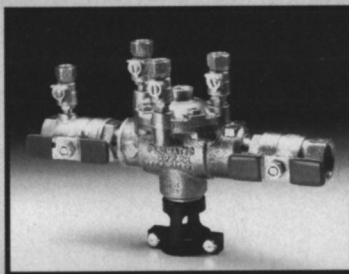
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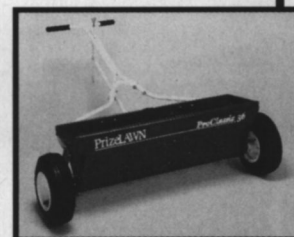
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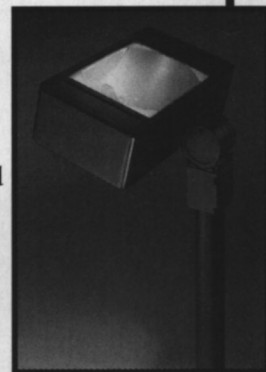
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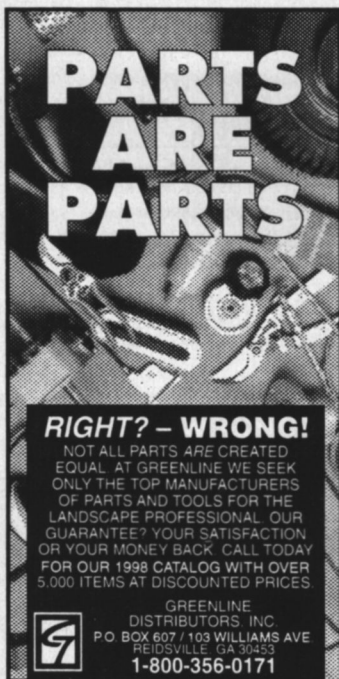
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(continued from page 43)

Dugan agreed that prospective franchisees should take a long, hard look at the value they would receive in return for royalty payments.

"An accounting system is helpful to have, but that can also be provided by hiring a bookkeeper," she explained. "An 8 to 10 percent royalty is a lot of money, and there needs to be value returned for it that the business couldn't get otherwise."

"The assembling of net worth is the piece of the puzzle that a lot of potential franchisees don't think about when they're looking at purchasing a territory," Oyler noted. "If I decide to sell my business, I want to find another vehicle where my money will compound as rapidly as it did in my company. Franchising lets the owner operator retain those returns and build net worth inside the company."

Kernaghan cautioned that not all franchise systems offer the same investment potential. "Different franchisors position themselves differently - some are income replacement setups, and some help owners build equity as the franchisee puts effort into the company," he explained.

AN INSIDE PERSPECTIVE. Jack MacArthur knows all about being a franchisee, having owned a Lawn Doctor operation in East Brunswick, N.J., for 16 years. Previously, he had spent 20 years in real estate.

He didn't try to paint a picture of franchising as the perfect solution. "Putting together weekly, monthly and yearly reports are a challenge, and all of the Ts have to be crossed and the Is dotted," he noted.

But MacArthur had little trouble identifying the benefits of being a franchisee. "The marketing support was so much more extensive than a local entrepreneur could afford," he commented. "I also had all of the technical support I needed, and the benefit of using the experiences of another franchise in some other market when I was faced with a similar decision."

While the benefits of the franchise business model are obvious for someone such as MacArthur, who knew little to nothing about lawn care when he started, Wayne Meade was already performing lawn care services for his clients when he purchased a Spring-Green franchise in Midlotian, Va. "We started out in maintenance, and we

still have a separate mowing company," Meade explained. "When we had the opportunity to buy the franchise, we saw that we could get some support and marketing power that we couldn't afford on our own. We also believe that being associated with a national franchisor brings a lot more stability and security than being independent."

As for the royalties? Meade admits they are difficult to accept at times, and he is concerned about how valuable they'll be to his company as he becomes even more experienced. "The challenge will be after I've had the franchise for 10 or 15 years and I've figured out how everything works," he admitted. "I think it's going to get harder and harder to pay that royalty then."

MacArthur, however, said he never lost sight of the value he received for his royalty payments. "That royalty fee is where our equipment came from, where our marketing efforts came from and where our support came from," he pointed out. "Yes, it's money, but we wouldn't have had that name recognition or all of the customers we had without it."

FRANCHISING THE FUTURE. While all of the individuals interviewed for this article have an obvious stake in the success of franchising, they were generally in agreement that it will represent an increasingly attractive option for the independent contractor to consider, especially as consolidation continues.

"Franchising basically provides a tuck-in strategy to the marketplace," noted Oyler. "Some owners choose not to be acquired and decide instead to compete. In doing so, they face a large challenge because these large organizations are going to grow their businesses through acquisition and direct marketing. Their strategy will be to take business away from smaller companies."

"Our franchise model is based on the philosophy that the owner operators, which are the backbone of this industry, can run their businesses more effectively than corporate giants can," continued Oyler. "A lot of customers want high touch service from their service providers, and big companies can't always provide that as well as smaller companies or franchisees."

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

AD INDEX

ADVERTISER	PG#	RS#
AA-Tach	16	15
Accelerator Industries	84	69
AgrEvo	4,5,21	10,19
American Isuzu	41	35
Aquascape Designs	29,30,31,32	24
Arcoa Industries	13	13
Bayer	78,79	56
B. & D.A. Weisburger	39	30
Border Magic	95	83
BPDI	84	68
Brisco	48	41
Brouwer Turf		
Equipment	82	67
Burlingham	S7	46
Case	7	NONE
Christmas Décor	40	34
Christmas Vision	33	26
CLC Labs	76	64
C&S Turfcare	20,94	18,81
Corona Clipper	89	77
Creative Curb	94	80
Dawn Industries	90	79
Deere & Co.	44,45	73
Dodge Truck	22,23	
Dow Agrosiences	14,15,34,35	
Easy Lawn	S11,69	48,59
Echo	72,73	32
E.F. Burlingham		
& Co.	36,55	27
Fabriscape	95	82
Ferris	101	88
Finn	68	58
First Products	69	60
Flowtronex	26	23
FMC	66,67	57
Frontrunner		
Technologies	9	11
Grasshopper	71	90
Gregson-Clark	33	25
Jacklin Seed	S16	52
Kubota	37	28
Lawn & Landscape School		
of Management	91	93
Lawn & Landscape		
Training Videos	93	94
Lawn Power &		
Equipment	16,48	14,40
Lofts Seed	S2	43
Longhorn	99	86
Marsan Turf &		
Irrigation	85	74
Metko	76	63
Mow-Blow	13	12
Nitro-Green	38	29
Nu-Gro	81	66
Oldham Chemical	89	76
Olson Irrigation	20	17
Olympic Fasteners	43	37
Oly-Ola Sales	42	36
OPEI	83	91
Palmer Products	24	20
Pennington Seed	S13	51
Pennsylvania Nursery &		
Landscape Association	17	16
Perma Green	40	31
Real Green Computers	48	42
Reinco	48,S7	39,47
RohMid	*87	44
Royal Seed	S6	45
SavaLawn	104	21
Scotts/Emerald Green	99	84
Screen Machine	40	33
Selbro	99	85
Shindaiwa	25	22
Southern Nurserymen's		
Association	100	87
Southwest LE	90	78
Spring-Green	84	70
TAN/MISSLARK	65	53
Toro Landscape		
Contractor Group	2	50
Tree Tech	88	75
Tufflex	74	61
Turbo Technologies	85	72
UHS	47	38
U.S. Lawns	107	89
Vista Lighting	75	62
Vitamin Institute	108	71
Walker Mfg.	77	65
Zajac Seed	S12	49
Zeneca Professional		
Products	27	55

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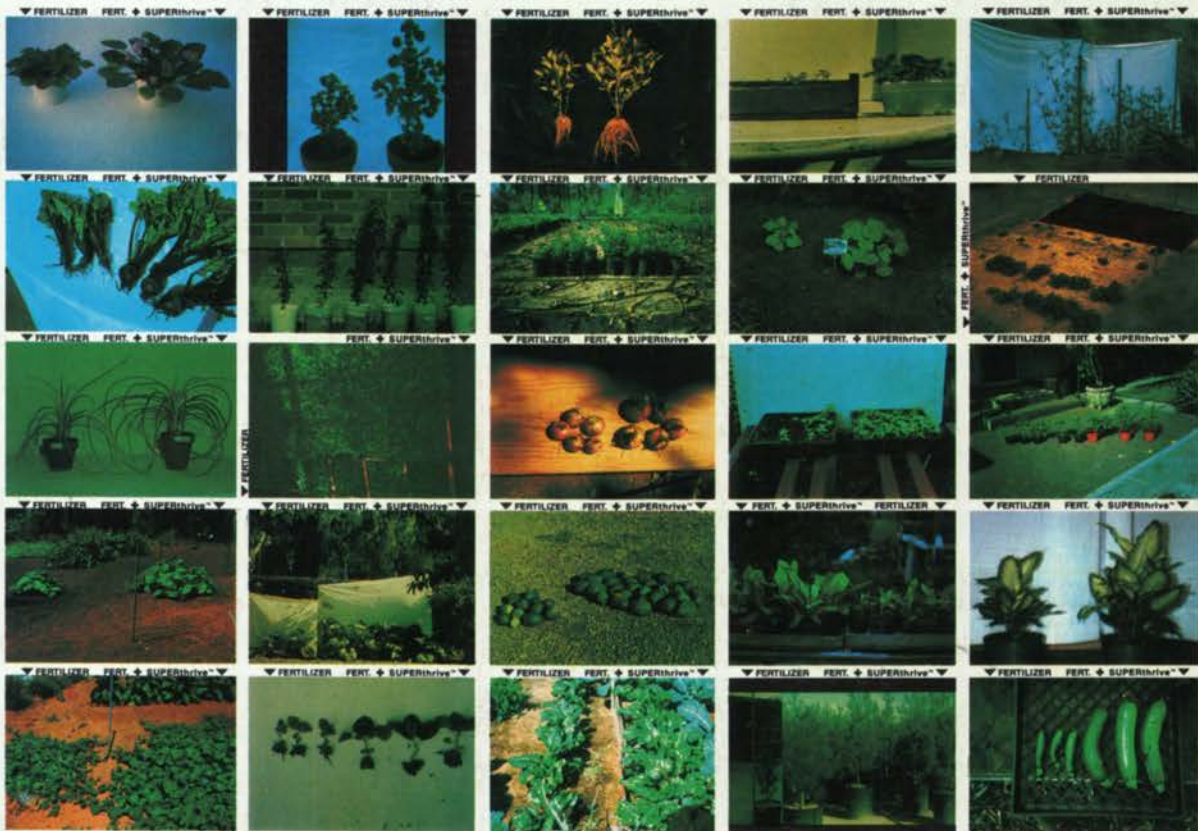
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