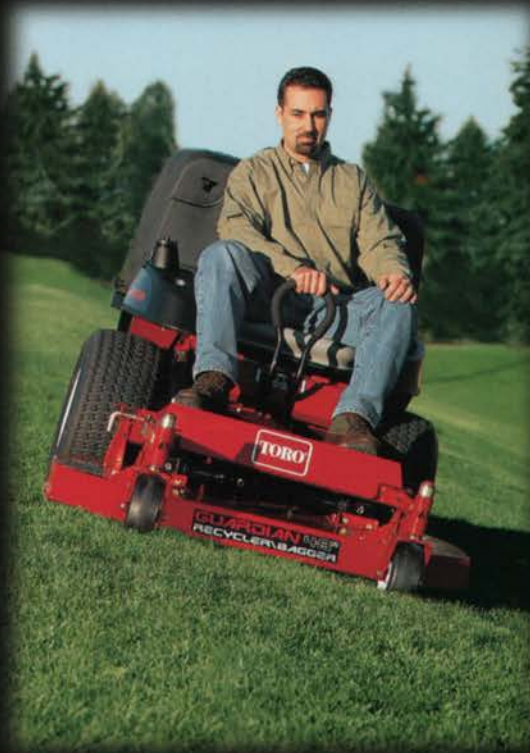




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Cover Photo

by John Meiv,
Birmingham, Mich.



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Bob West
Editor

have to admit that I never expected to quote Rodney King in this space, but after exploring the contractor/dealer relationship this month, I have to wonder, "Why can't we all just get along?"

Ask contractors about the dealers they purchase equipment from and they'll quickly recite a laundry list of the dealers' shortcomings – equipment repairs take too long, prices are too high, they don't always have the necessary parts in stock. And, most dealers will admit, these claims are true *from time to time*.

But, dealers will quickly note, contractors are far from perfect – they have unrealistic expectations for service, they are too price conscious and they don't always pay on time. Most contractors will admit to being guilty to these charges *at some time or another*.

So the battling and criticizing goes on and on.


In some areas, both contractors and dealers have noted improvements made by the "other side" that have improved the relationship, but no one is professing satisfaction with their business partners. And that last word is what makes this situation so confounding – partners.

As professional lawn care and landscape services continue to grow, dealers recognize that contractors are indeed their future if they plan on continuing to sell power equipment. The homeowner market isn't what it was 10 years ago, and there's no telling what it will be 10 years from now. So dealers need contractors.

But, before contractors begin reveling too much in their own self importance, they should consider their own futures in a world without servicing dealers, their sales consultations, their equipment inventories (incomplete though they may be) and all of their other services aiding the contractors' business efforts. Considering such a future shouldn't take long because there wouldn't be much of a future to consider.

Dealers and contractors have to work to understand the realities of each other's business. Contractors continue to struggle to raise prices to a level comparable to other service industries' while their own costs of doing business climb. As a result, contractors cannot afford to overpay for equipment or have equipment not working.

Dealers, meanwhile, are being pushed by manufacturers in their never-ending pursuit of increased sales to order greater quantities of equipment and incur greater interest and inventory costs. Then they keep an inventory of 10,000 parts for equipment repair, and contractors complain when the one part they need isn't in that inventory.

Obviously, contractors and dealers have learned to live with each other over the years, and everyone has benefited from this relationship. But imagine the results to be enjoyed by both groups when they're able to come together and work for mutual success. 

Bob West

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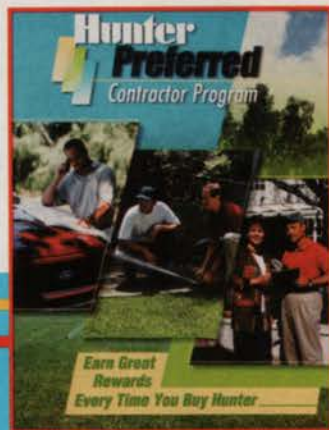
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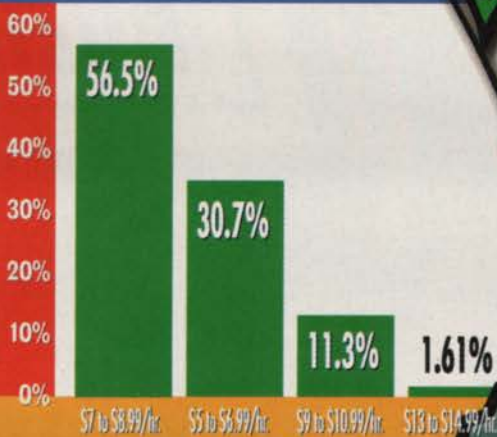
MAKING YOU PAY

As labor becomes harder and harder to find, the price contractors have to pay for it will only go up and up.

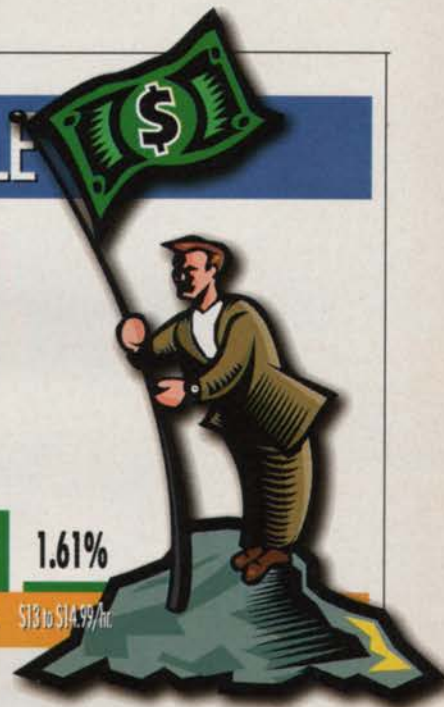
A survey conducted via Lawn & Landscape Online found that better than 56 percent of the respondents are paying their entry-level employees between \$7 and \$8.99 an hour. Slightly more than 30 percent are paying from \$5 to \$6.99 an hour with about 13 percent paying more than \$9 an hour.

These results indicate an increase in wages for entry-level personnel when compared to results from a 1995 *Lawn & Landscape* survey that found contractors paying these employees an average of \$6.59 an hour.

PRICING PEOPLE



(Source: Lawn & Landscape Reader Survey)



AN ONLINE ADVANTAGE

ORLANDO, FLA. – Imagine if your customers could get a lawn care estimate then schedule and order their service without ever having to call the your office. One company is making this a reality through its website.

“If a customer gets online at

midnight and wants service the next morning, we will be there,” explained Joe Rand, marketing director, Middleton Pest Control.

According to Rand, the site is advantageous to a two-income family because they don’t always have time to do

their yard work and they don’t need to take time out of their schedule to be at home for an estimate.

The site’s estimating and scheduling service has only a few steps to follow as it prompts the user through a series of questions and finishes by giving an estimate. The user can then quickly schedule their own appointment.

“The e-commerce section of our website was designed to be fast and easy to use,” remarked Greg Clendenin, president and CEO of Middleton. “With some basic information about the consumer’s home, we can provide an online pest control or lawn care estimate that matches what one of our technicians would provide in a face-to-face meeting. We developed a list of information that was needed in order to provide high quality service without making the process too long and cumbersome for the consumer.”

To handle short-notice appointments, Middleton established a front-line team.

“We changed the structure

“Within the next five years, the consumer may make all of his or her purchases online.”

– Rand

and built flexibility into the organization,” stated Rand. “We have 11 branches and each one has a response team for Internet sales.”

According to Rand, the same pricing structure for face-to-face visits is in effect for the Internet sales.

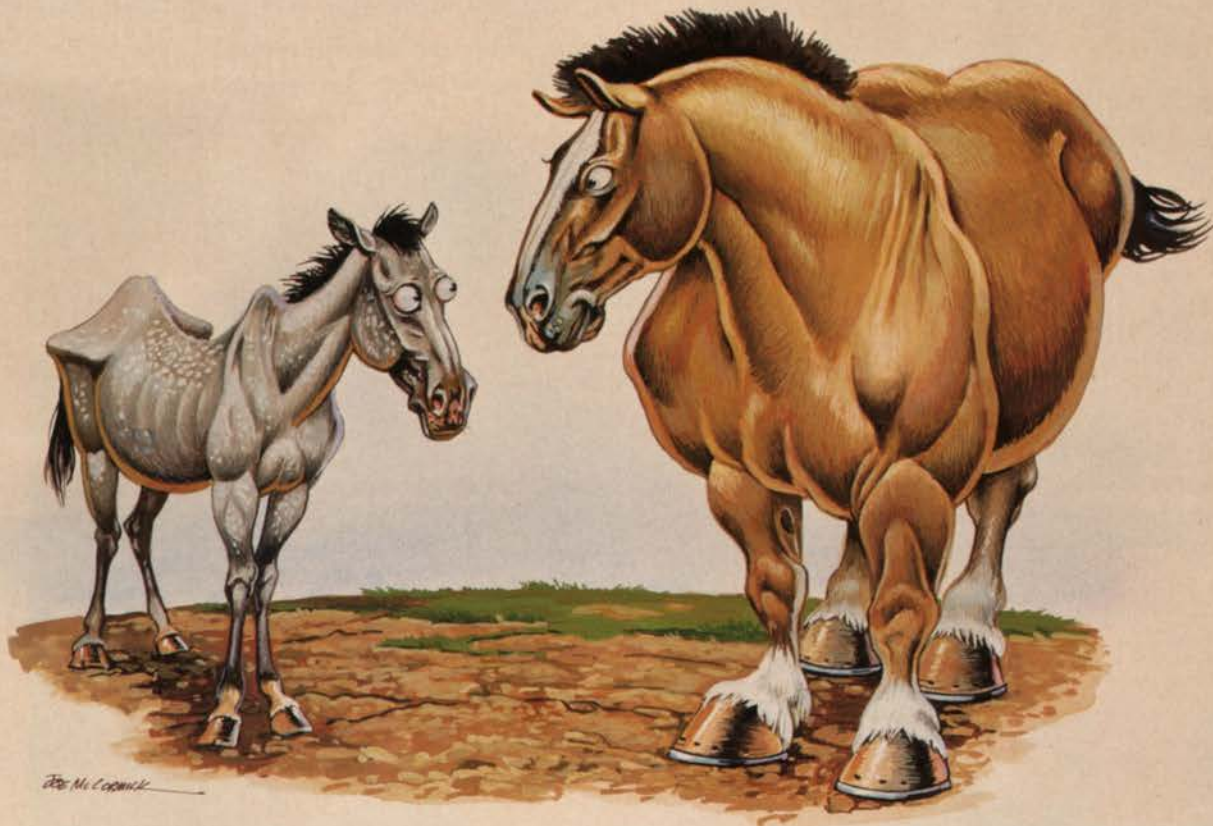
“There is no premium charge,” Rand stressed. “There is even a 5 percent discount for ordering online.”

Middleton enjoys benefits from this service as well. Rand

(continued on page 10)



Middleton Pest Control’s online estimating service enables it to reduce costs, cut unproductive time and schedule technician visits for the next day all via its website.



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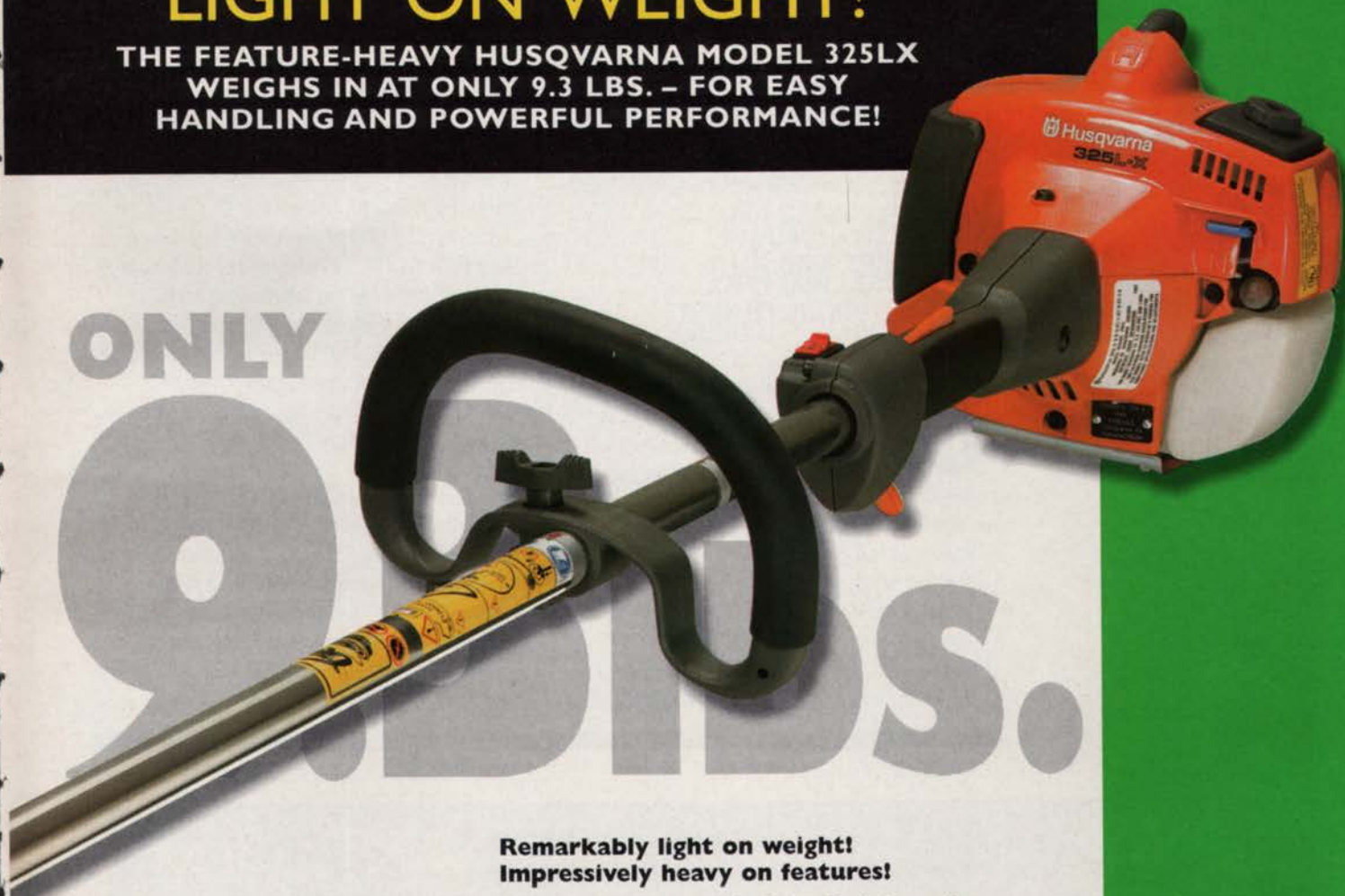
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MARKET TRENDS

(continued from page 6)

explained that it makes the organization more productive because they are not making trips out to properties simply to give estimates.

"We know that the Internet is shaping purchase decisions," Rand pointed out. "We don't expect an immediate response, but within the next five years the consumer may make all of his or her purchases online."

STUDY SHOWS PEST CONTROL TRENDS

PARSIPPANY, N.J. — A survey conducted by The Olson Research Group, on behalf of

(continued on page 12)

BREAKING NEWS

TRUGREEN-CHEMLAWN ANNOUNCES NEW NAME AND LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The landscape maintenance division of TruGreen-ChemLawn and LandCare USA decided after seven months of extensive market research to name their merged company TruGreen LandCare.

In addition, Paul Anderegg, executive vice president/chief operating officer of TruGreen LandCare, said that Bill Murdy will remain president of TruGreen LandCare through the end of June and then leave the company to pursue other interests.

According to the Judy Guido, national director of marketing and sales for TruGreen LandCare, Murdy's

position will not be refilled and Anderegg, along with Dave Slott, TruGreen president and chief operating officer, will split his duties.

The next step for TruGreen LandCare is to establish a visual identity. A new logo will be approved in 30 to 60 days, Anderegg said, pointing out that in certain markets it will take more time to integrate a name change due to customer brand awareness.

"Certain individual company names have remained because of the strong presence they have in the industry," Anderegg said. "But eventually we will move forward with one name recognition."

TruGreen-ChemLawn, the residential and commercial lawn care service, and TruGreen LandCare will operate out of separate offices and TruGreen will continue in its current strategy described by Anderegg as "acquisition mode." TruGreen, Anderegg said, plans to announce five more acquisitions by the end of June and an additional 10 deals by mid-July. — *Nicole Wisniewski*

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MARKET TRENDS

(continued from page 10)

RohMid, showed a shift by turf professionals toward using grub and lepidopteran control products that are applied prior to egg lay or within the first few weeks after egg lay.

This survey of 312 lawn care operators throughout the country found that 10 percent more of these turf professionals intend to use a preventive grub and lepidopteran control product in 1999 than in 1998.

According to Dave Shetlar, Ph.D., extension landscape entomologist at The Ohio State University, the preventive products' effectiveness, convenience and environmental profiles are key factors driving this trend.

CLCA RELEASES WAGE REPORT

SACRAMENTO, CALIF. – The effects of the economic recession that hit the West Coast so hard in the early 1990s are still evident today. The California Landscape Contractor Association's 1999 Wage and Benefit Survey recorded California contractors' average gross annual sales at \$898,338 in 1998, compared to \$1,097,427 in 1991. Contractors learned some valuable lessons during the recession, however, as they have boosted sales per employee a staggering 68 percent in the last seven years – from \$30,827 in 1991 to \$51,661 in 1998.

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 15-16 Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association Summer Field Day, Kearney, Neb. Contact: 816/233-1481.

JULY 19-20 PLCAA's Legislative Day on the Hill and Arlington Renewal & Remembrance Project, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/458-3466.

JULY 19-20 Iowa Nursery & Landscape Association Summer Field Day, Madrid and Ames, Iowa. Contact: 816/233-1481.

JULY 20-23 Turfgrass Producers International Summer Convention and Field Days, East Lansing, Mich. Contact: 800/405-TURF.

JULY 21 Massachusetts Nursery & Landscape Association Summer Meeting and Trade Show, Forest Park, Springfield, Mass. Contact: 413/369-4731.

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JULY 23-27 ANLA Convention, Philadelphia. Contact: 202/789-2900.

JULY 24-27 American Nursery & Landscape Association Annual Convention, Philadelphia, Pa. Contact: 202/789-2900.

JULY 27 Midwest Regional Turf Field Day, West Lafayette, Ind. Contact: 765/494-8039.

JULY 27-29 Penn Allied Nursery Trade Show, Ft. Washington, Pa. Contact: 610/544-5775.

JULY 28-31 96th Annual International Conference of the American Society for Horticultural Science, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: 703/836-4606.

JULY 29-30 Eagle Point Educational Summit, Dubuque, Iowa. Contact: 800/678-6565.

JULY 29-30 Landscape Irrigation Auditor Course, Westerville, Ohio. Contact: 703/573-3551.

JULY 30-AUG. 1 Southern Nurseryman Association Convention, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: 770/973-9026.

JULY 31 Landscape Contractors Association Certified Landscape Technician Test, Derwood, Md. Contact: 301/948-0810.

AUG. 4 ILCA Summer Field Day, Midwest Groundcovers, St. Charles, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.

AUG. 4-5 Indiana Nursery and Landscape Association Summer Meeting

and Tour, Lafayette, Ind. Contact: 317/573-2848.

AUG. 4-6 Landscape Design Short Course For Residential Properties, Course I - Beginning Design, Hudson, Ohio. Contact: 440/717-0004.

AUG. 4-7 Association of Professional Landscape Designers 10th Annual Summer Conference, Washington D.C. Contact: 312/201-0101.

AUG. 6-8 TAN/MISSLARK Conference & Trade Show, Dallas. Contact: 512/280-5182.

AUG. 9-10 MLNA Summer Meeting & Trade Show, Columbia, Mo. Contact: 816/233-1481.

AUG. 10 Nursery Growers' of Lake County Summer Field Day, Madison, Ohio. 440/428-0022.

AUG. 11 New England Nursery Association Summer Meeting & Trade Show, Portsmouth, R.I. Contact: 508/653-3112.

AUG. 12 Michigan Nursery and Landscape Association's Summer Field Day, East Lansing, Mich. Contact: 800/879-6652.

AUG. 13-15 Northeast Organic Farming Association's Summer Conference and Celebration of Rural Life, Amherst, Mass. Contact: 978/355-2853.

AUG. 14 ILCA Certified Landscape Technician Examination, Joliet Junior College, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.

AUG. 18 OTF/OSU Research Field Day, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 740/452-4541.



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USE READER SERVICE #18

LAWN & LANDSCAPE • JULY 1999

MARKET TRENDS

(continued from page 14)

The survey also found that landscape maintenance firms have higher average annual gross sales than landscape construction firms do (\$791,865 to \$678,762) and maintenance firms employ more than twice as many people (25.8 to 11.2).

The average construction laborer with

no experience is being paid \$6.71 an hour, compared to a new maintenance employee at \$6.44 an hour. Hourly wages climb from this point, however, going as high as \$18.72 per hour for a Certified Landscape Technician in construction and \$15.61 for a CLT in maintenance.

(continued on page 18)

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USE READER SERVICE #15

PEOPLE

Carl Burtner was named chief executive officer of Textron Golf, Turf Care And Specialty Products Group and **Peter Wilson** was named president of Textron Fastening Systems Europe.

Pursell Industries promoted **Heidi Hayes Carter** to marketing director.

Susan Flores was named director of sales and marketing for Valley Crest Tree Company.

Stens Power Equipment added two territory managers, **Mike Edwards** and **Jim Miller**.

Mike Eastwood was appointed president of LasTec.

Tom Childers was promoted to eastern regional sales manager for Irritrol Systems.

Moore Landscapes hired **Amy Olson** as landscape architect.

Becker-Underwood announced several changes including: **Dan Foor** to western sales territory manager, **Mike Sherman** to northeast sales territory manager, **Kurt Winkler** to mid-south sales territory manager and **Todd Schnathorst** to midwestern sales territory manager.

Jess Ruyg was named marketing director of Orbit Irrigation Products.

The Associated Landscape Contractors of America elected **Christopher Raimondi** chairman of its Interior Landscape Council.



Carl Burtner



Susan Flores

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MARKET TRENDS

(continued from page 16)

PROGRAM TAKES ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACH

EVERETT, WASH. — In an effort to increase the number of environmentally friendly landscaping companies in the Puget Sound region, The Washington Association of Landscape Professionals, King County and the City of Seattle are developing the first-ever environmental landscape certification test.

According to Peter Dervin, executive director of WALP, the industry needs to be more pro-active in addressing consumer concerns.

Over time, the program is expected to help conserve wa-

ter and reduce water pollution and disposal of grass clippings.

According to Dervin, the test will cover topics such as how turf practices can affect the environment including site assessment, mowing, irrigation, fertilization, weed and pest control and renovating or replacing lawns.

"For example," Dervin pointed out, "site assessment will look at issues regarding drainage and slope."

Dervin added that feedback to the program has been positive because the industry wants to be viewed as pro-active.

IA WINS BATTLE IN ILLINOIS

FAIRFAX, VA. — The Irrigation Association reported passage of Senate Bill 457 by the Illinois House and Senate to amend the controversial Illinois Plumbing License Act. This amendment overturns previous legislation that prohibited irrigation contractors from installing residential and commercial irrigation systems in the state of Illinois.

The state law required that irrigation systems be installed by licensed plumbers, thereby restricting contractors from installing irrigation systems. Now, licensed plumbers are only required to install backflow prevention devices.

seeding may be misreading customers' wants.

According to figures released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Census of Agriculture, turfgrass sod use in the U.S. nearly doubled from 1987 to 1997 — from 184,000 acres to almost 303,000 acres.

Doug Fender, executive director of Turfgrass Producers International, attributed the increased sod use to increases on new home sites as a result

of more new home construction and higher demand for sodded yards, as well as increased use of sod on sports fields, golf courses and erodable sites.

SOD ON THE RISE

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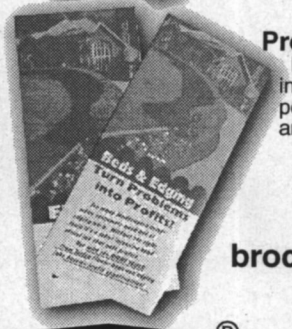
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IN BUSINESS...

Century Rain Aid opened 10 new locations in the Southeast, including five in Florida...**Metko** opened a new manufacturing plant...**The Care of Trees** opened its first office in Chicago...**K-Rain** opened a new, 20,000-square-foot manufacturing facility...**NDS** acquired **Bartron Corp.** and **Agrifim**...**Swingle Tree Company** received the 1998/1999 Colorado Ethics in Business Award...**Orbit Irrigation Products** acquired **The Misti Maid Company**...**Barenbrug North America** acquired **Pro Seed Turf Supply**...**Encore Mfg.** expanded its production facility in Beatrice, Neb.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor,

Good article on risk communication in May 1999 issue of *Lawn & Landscape*. Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) developed by OSHA, are one of the least understood governmental publications. As you accurately pointed out, they are written for pesticides in 'technical grade,' or direct from the manufacturer, usually in a water insoluble form. By the time an applicator purchases the product in 'concentrate' form he is often dealing with a .025 percent solution, which he further dilutes, often resulting in an .0025 percent mixture for application.

'End use' MSDS are in development and exist only for a few products. Our policy was to provide MSDS on request only and include an explanation and product label, which generally is much more consumer friendly. Over the last 30 years, I have trained and re-certified thousands of technicians and operators who are rarely aware of this anomaly that has consequences for the uninformed.

By the way, the signal words on pesticide labels (caution, warning, danger) are also extrapolated from technical grade material. Keep up the good work.

Bob Kessler

President, Certified Pest Control Association of Florida (CPCO)

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LAWN & LANDSCAPE • JULY 1999

The Brunners commissioned McHale & McHale Landscape Design to develop a landscape plan for their summer home located in the Shenandoah Mountains of Virginia. The house, built of logs and stone, sits on a 40-acre site overlooking the Shenandoah River.

DESIGN CHALLENGES. Our firm faced many challenges on this project. All of the construction needed to match the existing structures, which were built in the 1790s. Not only did the construction have to appear old, but the new plantings had to look as though they had always been there.

The fact that the house was located 140 miles away in the Shenandoah Mountains made the coordination of the project an exercise in patience and thoroughness. Additionally, finding and obtaining construction materials that matched work completed more than 200 years ago required perseverance and determination. We visited six different quarries before finding one in the hills of West

Virginia that had the same stone as the original walls. Snow and freezing temperatures also tried our patience and caused delays with concrete pours and other masonry work.

DESIGN SOLUTIONS. The scope of work included designing and constructing a swimming pool, pool deck, stone steps, stone retaining walls, screened porch and a summer perennial planting plan.

Since an automatic pool cover was important to the Brunners, the pool shape had to be rectangular. To link the pool patio with the house, we constructed a 10 foot wide set of steps that went through an existing wall that connected the two areas. In order to locate the 20-foot by 40-foot pool, we terraced a hillside with stone walls and planted beds of summer blooming perennials.

PROJECT:	The Brunner Residence
LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR:	McHale & McHale Landscape Design, Upper Marlboro, Md.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:	McHale & McHale Landscape Design, Upper Marlboro, Md.
SIZE OF PROPERTY:	40 acres
MAN HOURS:	2,000
PLANTS INSTALLED:	400 perennials, 20 trees and 40 shrubs
PROJECT COST:	Approximately \$150,000

The pool patio was constructed of broken Tennessee flagstone whose colors worked well with the existing wall stone. The flagstone was set on a concrete base with cement joints not exceeding 1/2 inch width. A 3-foot stone retaining wall was constructed to match an existing wall near the house. Special attention to details became a daily concern to prevent the stonework from appearing too modern.

The plant selection needed to be very simple, yet colorful. Mass plantings of perennials, native shrubs and trees became the focal point of the design. Some of the perennials on the

plant palette included Solidago, Perovskia, Lythrum 'Robert,' Coreopsis 'Moonbeam,' Rudbeckia, Sedum 'Brilliance' and Christmas Fern in a shaded area. The native shrubs included Viburnum, Itea, Rhododendron and Red Twig Dogwoods and added to the natural setting of the garden. Red Buds, Serviceberries and Dogwoods helped to create a transition from the garden to the existing woods.

A 16-foot by 20-foot screened porch was constructed on the northwest side of the farmhouse. We duplicated the pitch of the farmhouse roof and continued the same red tin roof on the house to the screened porch. A 1-foot by 6-foot tongue and groove pine floor carried through from the house on the porch. The framing of the porch is pine and was painted to match the trim on the house. On the ceiling, we exposed the rafters, which were true dimensional 2-inches by 8-inches to emphasize the gabled pitch of the ceiling.

The project was completed by spring to allow the Brunners the summer to enjoy their new 'old garden.'

— Stephen McHale



The author is vice president at McHale & McHale Landscape Design, Upper Marlboro, Md.

The Brunners project presented many design challenges for the architect and contractor, including designing and constructing a swimming pool and a summer perennial planting plan.

Photo: McHale & McHale Landscape Design



ASK THE DROUGHTBUSTERS

Droughtbusters is a question and answer column provided as a service to the landscape industry by the Irrigation Association and Lawn & Landscape Magazine. Please e-mail your questions to irricom1@earthlink.net. You are also invited to visit the Irrigation Association's website, www.irrigation.org or use its search engine, www.irri-gate.com.

Q As an irrigation contractor, I really don't want to carry a laptop computer around to do irrigation audits. Are audits really so complicated to require a computer?

A The best irrigation audits utilize software and hardware to perform calculations and print out reports to present to clients. However, a rudimentary audit is better than no audit at all.

An irrigation audit will reveal problems with uniformity and provide you with the application rate of water so you can figure runtimes more precisely. Poor uniformity results

in dry spots that property owners try to cover up by increasing runtimes. This is the second worst cause of water waste in landscape irrigation. (The first is not adjusting runtimes to seasonal changes in evapotranspiration.)

A simple, yet effective audit starts with a pad of graph paper, straight-sided containers to collect water, and a calculator.

Draw a map of each zone being tested on a separate piece of graph paper. Use a scale that makes sense, such as 4 feet per square on the paper. Mark the location of each sprinkler. Place the collectors in a square pattern in the zone that also fits the layout on your paper.

Activate the zone for 15 minutes and be exact. When finished, measure the depth of water in each collection can and write it next to the can's location on the graph paper.

Back at the office, do the math one zone at a time. Compare the amount of water measured in the containers to each other. Are some numbers significantly different? If they are relatively close to each other, uniformity is where it should be. If they are very similar, you

can multiply the most common depth by four to find out the application rate of the zone per hour. A ballpark evapotranspiration rate for turf in full sun is 1 inch per week during the hottest part of summer.

If there are lower and higher depth readings from the containers, you need to do more to calculate uniformity.

Count number of containers you used for the particular zone. Next, add up the depth of water you recorded for all the containers. For example, 12 containers with roughly a 1/2 inch of water each would total 6 inches. Divide the total by the number of containers to get an average per container.

Next, divide the total number of containers you used in the particular zone by four. If you have 12 collectors, the answer is three. Look at all the data on the page of graph paper and find three cans with the lowest depth of water in them. Total the depth of water in these three and divide by three to get the average of the lowest quarter of containers.

Now you have an average for all of the containers and an average for the three lowest

containers. Divide the average of the lowest quarter of containers by the average of all of the containers. The answer is your distribution uniformity.

You can see that if a lawn needs 1 inch of water per week in the summer and your distribution uniformity is 65 percent, you might have to extend runtimes as much as a 35 percent. Most of the turf doesn't need the over-application, so most of the extra water applied is wasted. It is not uncommon to find systems that appear fine, yet are wasting 30 to 50 percent of the water applied.

Eyeballing a lawn to measure uniformity is not sufficient. Some day you will want to have a computer to run tests on the spot. In the meantime, at least start carrying a pad of graph paper and some empty cans. ■

Bruce Shank is the owner of IrriCOM, a communications firm specializing in irrigation, turf and landscape based in Palmdale, Calif.



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▼ A BALANCING ACT

THIS PAST WINTER brought days of up to 18 inches of snow to Ann Arbor, Mich.

For Mike Kowalski, chief

executive officer, Great Outdoors, a division of Huron Lawn Service, the extra precipitation meant additional profit



By tracking equipment life, keeping ongoing maintenance logs on equipment and reviewing efficiency studies, contractors can be more prepared to budget for their equipment purchases.

for his company. It also meant additional stress on his equipment, especially his snowplowing trucks.

In November, Kowalski had just paid off a 1994 Ford truck. Soon after, the transmission went out – a \$2,200 repair, Kowalski said.

“Now the truck is in the shop again because it needs some front end work done, which will cost another \$2,500,” he added. “If I would have bought a new truck like I usually do after about five years of use, I would have saved on the repairs and downtime.”

According to Kowalski, this is a classic example of how a contractor can lose money when planning and budgeting for equipment purchases. By being prepared – whether it's

by having employees keep ongoing maintenance logs and purchasing equipment on an as-needed basis or tracking long-term trends in equipment life to predict failure before it occurs – and by budgeting sufficiently, landscape contractors can get more profitability out of their equipment.

STARTING OFF RIGHT. Preparing his company for the busy spring, Kowalski starts planning his equipment purchasing in January so he can order new equipment by February.

“We try to figure out our sales goals for each separate division and what equipment we need to reach those goals,” Kowalski explained. “Some of our jobs are pre-sold for the next year so we know in ad-

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vance the type of equipment we'll need based on what we have that's in good condition and how many more crews we may need to add because of growth."

How does Kowalski know he can afford the equipment he's planning on purchasing? He does a simple equation.

"I take the total cost of the equipment plus the financing and predicted maintenance costs over the assumed four-year lifespan and then look at the total," he explained. "I know that to purchase that machine, I have to be able to recoup that cost over the next four years to warrant buying it."

Kowalski's philosophy on equipment life is simple: "I pay close attention," he said. "Mowers tend to last four

years. Trimmers tend to last two years. The longer you hold on to the equipment the more major breakdowns you'll have. After four or five years, a piece of equipment will need new joints and have transmission problems. We try to get new equipment before that happens.

"Also, we always buy new — that way you know what you're getting and you have a warranty," Kowalski added. "Landscape contractors tend to beat their equipment up — that's why we don't buy used."

Buying new, Kowalski advised, also helps the company retain a professional image.

The decision to buy a new piece of equipment usually comes after Kowalski has rented it at least two to three times per month.

"Purchasing equipment will save you money if you're renting it that often," he stressed.

you're paying for the cost to pick up and drop off the equipment. You want to bill for every hour that you can and renting takes away from that."

A regular buyer, Kowalski is trying leasing for the first time this year.

"It seems like we might be better off leasing because we can get a better interest rate — 11½ percent instead of between 9½ and 16 percent to finance," Kowalski explained. "We can also write off the whole payment instead of just a percentage of it."

When purchasing equipment, Kowalski also makes sure to have a backup fleet in case of breakdowns and

.....

'When you rent equipment, you're paying extra to pick it up and drop it off. You want to bill for every hour that you can and renting may be taking away from that.' — Kowalski

.....

"You have to remember that when you're renting, you're not only paying rent, but

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to make room for growth, including an extra mower, trimmer and blower.

"This gives us the opportunity to grow over the year without having to make any additional equipment purchases," he said.

USING RESEARCH. Michael Hornung, president, Valley Green Professional Lawn & Tree Care, St. Cloud, Minn., starts his equipment budgeting earlier than Kowalski – October and November of the previous year. Then he purchases his equipment in November and December.

To help in estimating what he needs, Hornung uses the Professional Lawn Care Association of America's Operating Efficiency Study.

According to PLCAA's 1997 study, the median for return on assets is 9.5 percent and equipment and vehicles comprise 39 percent of total assets.

"We do more business per production unit than the average listed in the study," Hornung said. "But we use it as a guideline to try and achieve a high rate of efficiency."

When it comes to leasing vs. buying, Hornung said the decision is based on what he's using the equipment for.

"If the equipment is going to wear out faster due to additional use, we lease it because I don't want any downtime," Hornung explained. "A lease for a pickup truck gives us about 15,000 miles per year, which is more than enough for a seasonal business. For our

production units, we get 5,000 to 7,000 miles per year."

DAY-BY-DAY. Unlike Kowalski and Hornung, Chris Mason, president, Mason & Co. Landscaping, Gilbert, Az., doesn't plan his equipment budget in advance each year.

"We do it along the way," Mason pointed out. "I keep a daily log with our construction manager of what our needs are. For example, right now we're digging the footing for a retaining wall and it's pretty tough. We could save money by renting a jackhammer. If we rent a piece of equipment and then notice that we're renting it often, then we'll buy it. There's no magic number. I just look at how many times we rent the machine over one or two

month increments and do an adhoc cost justification."

Mason refers to his budgeting method as "needs-based."

"My system is an ongoing planning and budgeting process," he explained. "We try to replace equipment before it costs us money."

Mason saves his daily logs so that he can group them into six-month increments. Then he reviews 12 months' worth of records so he can monitor equipment trends.

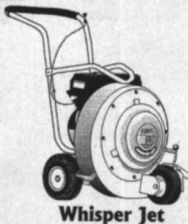
"Tracking trends can help me make some equipment predictions," Mason explained. "But we still need to make our purchases on an ongoing needs basis. Sometimes trends are worthwhile to focus on, sometimes they're not." – Nicole Wisniewski

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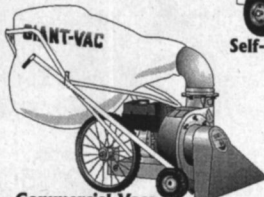
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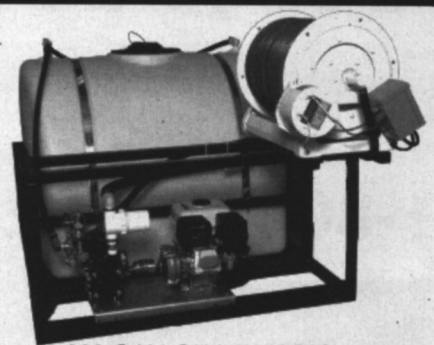
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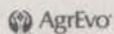
"Somehow he knew every-
thing" says awed crew "it was
uncanny."



Keith Macdonald's work crews at Bridgewater State College campus swear he's a master spy, or psychic. "He knows when we've sprayed off an area with Finale[®] Herbicide without us even telling him," said a crew member "sometimes only 24 hours after the job's done." Keith laughs. "When it gets busy and I can't check with everyone, I simply drive around and see the results. It only takes a day or two for Finale to work. A month later, the area's still clear." But it wasn't always so easy. As assistant facilities director on the Massachusetts campus, Keith used to use the leading systemic herbicide. "It took 2 weeks before I knew I had a take," he says, "drove me crazy." Keith also likes Finale's ability to create perfectly clean edges around beds and baseball fields. "It's the no-creep feature," he says, "the one my crews apply to me."



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226 Skid Steer Loader	1,500 lb/680 kg	54 hp/41 kW	6'5"/1950 mm	5'0"/1525 mm	5,697 lb/2584 kg



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USE READER SERVICE #28

USDA TARGETS ASIAN LONGHORNED BEETLE

The U. S. Department of Agriculture is taking measures to keep the Asian longhorned beetle from spreading to other parts of the country. Efforts to bring the ALB under control include several long-term studies of potential treatment options and a U.S. government ban on all untreated wood packing materials from the ALB's native China.

The ALB has caused the removal of more than 4,000 trees in the state of New York and 700 in Chicago, Ill. At this time, the only means to control

this pest is to destroy the infested tree.


In 1997, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service did preliminary research exploring the use of systemic treatments on ALB using a variety of insecticide products. This preliminary research justified further studies on systemic and surface treatments.

More substantial long-term studies began in 1998 and are ongoing.

They hope studies will identify products that effectively control the spread of

ALB Facts

- The adult ALB can be more than 2 inches long, including its horned-shaped antenna. Its bullet-shaped body is jet black with white spots on its wing covers.
- So far, ALB's have been detected in maples, horsechestnut, poplar, willow, elm, mulberry, black locust and ash.
- By the time an infestation is detected, the damage is already done. The only way to detect ALB infestation is by a visual inspection for old egg niches, exit holes, piles of frass around infested trees or actually spotting the ALB on its host.
- In the larval stage, the ALB bores through the trunk, cutting off the transfer of nutrients throughout the tree. When it fully develops in the spring, the adult ALB chews its way out of the tree, leaving a pencil-sized exit hole.
- The ALB is a quarantined pest in the United States and eradication of infested trees is currently the only control option. Infested trees are cut down at the base, chipped, then burned.

ALB. There are different tests to identify the most successful application rates, timing and methods necessary for control of ALB on different tree species. — Neil Cleveland 

The author is Turf and Ornamental Market Manager for Bayer Corp. Garden & Professional Care, which has donated some Merit® Insecticide for USDA research on ALB control.



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USE READER SERVICE #30

Dealing' with IT

Through 54 years of service, one dealer has garnered a few thoughts about the relationship between contractors and dealers.

By Bob West

Ron Weingartz, standing here in front of the company's Farmington Hills location, recommended contractors buy from dealers committed to commercial customers. Photo: John Meiu



D

dealers and contractors – this industry can't really have one without the other, can it?

Yet the two groups are continually at odds on such core issues in their relationship as what constitutes quality service from dealers and how demanding contractors can be without being too demanding.

One concern commonly vocalized by dealers about this relationship is that contractors rarely understand the issues facing dealers and their businesses and, instead, are so focused on their own needs that they expect dealers to conform to their needs.

Contractors counter with claims that dealers don't adequately service the equipment they sell or that they're only interested in making money off of contractors.

Clearly, disagreements will always arise between contractors and dealers because their businesses are so closely intertwined. But this relationship can be managed and built into a mutually beneficial experience for both parties. And few organizations have mastered the contractor-dealer relationship as well as Weingartz Supply, Utica, Mich., North America's largest outdoor power equipment dealer.

TAUGHT OVER TIME. Weingartz has been in business for 54 years after starting out as a farm and feed supply store serving the agriculture industry around the Detroit area. Eventually, however, the local geography and industry changed and homes and subdivisions appeared where farms once were. Weingartz reacted accordingly and shifted away from feed and fertilizer to a greater concentration on power equipment



Better Buying Behavior

"A lot of contractors are primarily concerned with cost when it comes to purchasing equipment, but we're seeing more contractors focus first on how well the equipment will do the job," remarked Ron Weingartz, Weingartz Supply, Utica, Mich. And that is welcome news to equipment dealers and manufacturers everywhere.

"Contractors are asking questions like, 'How will this mower perform compared to my competitors' mowers?' and 'What mowers offer the highest quality of cut?'" Weingartz noted. "Then the purchasing decision becomes a matter of whether or not the contractor has the volume of work necessary to justify the particular machine."

Weingartz said the shortage of qualified labor has been instrumental in getting contractors to look more closely at higher priced equipment designed to deliver higher performance.

"Everyone is struggling to find good people, so if a machine is 10 percent more productive than what a contractor is currently using, the operator of that machine can earn 10 percent more money for the company each day," Weingartz explained. "If contractors are doing 10 percent more with the same workforce, that starts to make the equipment costs seem pretty insignificant, but contractors didn't understand this when labor was plentiful and new employees could be hired for \$6 an hour." — *Bob West*

and commercial customers.

Today, the company operates three locations in the Detroit area, including its newest location in Cedar Springs that opened in February 1998 and caters exclusively to the commercial client.

"Consumers are still a big part of our business, but we've seen a lot of them switch over to hiring commercial lawn maintenance companies as home-owners lose free time," noted Ron Weingartz, a 22-year veteran of the company and one of seven family members involved in running the operations. "The commercial market is really where we see our future growth.

"The consumer business is still doing well, but we don't see big growth there

because we're not geared for that type of business and sales of products like 21-inch push mowers have been pretty flat for the last eight to 10 years," Weingartz added, estimating that commercial contractors represent 55 percent of the company's overall business.

Weingartz was quick to acknowledge that he understands many of the complaints contractors have regarding dealers. In fact, he saw a number of parallels between contractors' businesses and dealers' businesses.

"Contractors are finding out that they have to get bigger to survive," he noted. "I guess the whole world is volume driven now, and we're in the same situation the

'Now, we realize there's no way we can't keep offering loaner machines because that keeps customers coming back, but it costs us a lot of money to have those machines.' — Weingartz

contractors are where margins are tighter so we have to do more volume.

"Contractors decide they can't live on one truck and one trailer any more, so they offer more services to customers," Weingartz continued. "They're trying to give everything they can to the customer, and we're trying to do the same thing so contractors don't have to go to three or four suppliers to get what they need. That makes life easier for them, and it helps us because taking care of one customer is much easier than acquiring a new one.

"We carry more specialized equipment now with compact tractors, bed edgers, sod cutters, aerification equipment and so on," he added. "Offering more products and better advice helps the contractor and boosts our profitability at the same time."

But he pointed out that contractors' problems with dealers often stem from improperly selecting dealers to purchase from.

"We've always had a strong emphasis on service and we've built our reputation on service and parts support, which are important to contractors," Weingartz explained, pointing to a committed focus on commercial landscape equipment as a key. "We've looked at broadening our focus and getting into irrigation products and other related supplies may make sense down the road, but too many dealers expand their product line to generate cash flow when the business isn't going well. That expanded product line takes the dealer's focus off of power equipment and hurts the level of service offered."

BEHIND THE SCENES SERVICE. To the casual observer, dealers sell equipment and dealers fix equipment. That's why they exist, so serving these two functions shouldn't be overly difficult, right?

Weingartz is quick to point out, however, that tasks such as servicing equipment challenge dealers in many ways.

"We're robbing parts off new machines to repair equipment or sending out new machines as loaners while a contractor's machine is being repaired," Weingartz noted. "But a lot of dealers offering commercial

(continued on page 34)



Ramrod Mini-Skid with Tree Auger

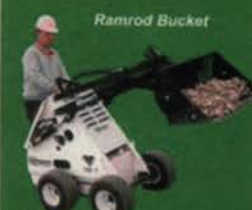
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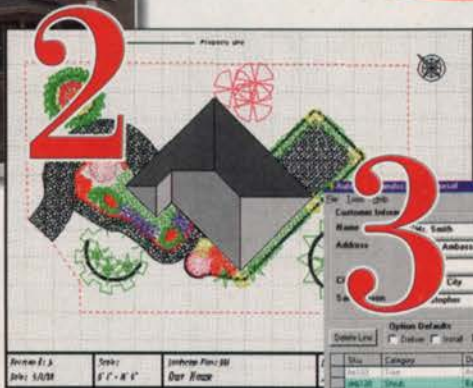
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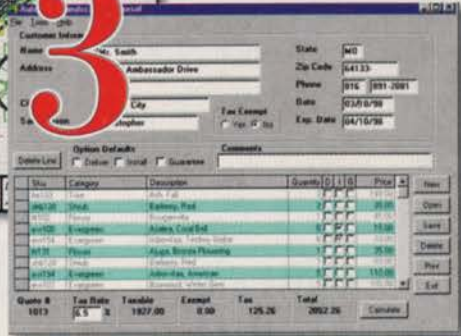


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USE READER SERVICE #32

(continued from page 32)

equipment view their responsibility simply as a matter of selling the equipment and don't commit to inventorying parts and providing service and training.

"We could probably build most of the equipment we carry out of our parts department, and that's a big expense for us to have," he continued. "But we know that contractors cannot afford equipment that isn't working."

Weingartz also recommended contractors build relationships with dealers that believe in long-term commitments to the equipment they carry and the manufacturers they represent.

"Selling the hot new gizmo for a year or two doesn't work because there has to be a commitment on our part to the customer that if he or she buys that equipment and operates it for 10 years that we'll be able to service it for those 10 years," Weingartz said.

But contractors don't always appreciate these aspects of a dealer's commitment to

A Professional Approach

One of the most significant changes to occur in the landscape industry in the last decade has been the emphasis by contractors on professionalizing their businesses, according to Ron Weingartz, Weingartz Supply, Utica, Mich.

"There are always the contractors who are just starting out and learning what it takes to be successful in this business," noted Weingartz, "but more contractors are seeing this as a business that involves more than just cutting grass."

Weingartz said this professional approach has aided the contractor-dealer relationship.

"There used to always be the threats from contractors that they would take their business elsewhere when they got upset, but now it's more of a professional-to-professional relationship," he remarked. "More contractors seem to realize now that they aren't in the league of \$10 mowing services any more so they are critically looking at the accounts to see what they need to do to make money and they are thinking of becoming more full service. As a result, they realize they can charge more for their services when they offer more in terms of being insured, using good equipment, having uniformed employees, and then packaging themselves better to customers." — **Bob West**

servicing their businesses.

"I don't think contractors always realize the cost associated with some of the services we offer," Weingartz noted. "For example, we used to look at our loaner equipment

every year and think there was no way we could continue to offer that service because it was so expensive. Now, we realize there's no way we can't keep offering loaner ma-

(continued on page 36)

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USE READER SERVICE #98

(continued from page 34)

chines because that keeps customers coming back, but it costs us a lot of money to have those machines."

Specifically, Weingartz carries almost 100 pieces of new loaner equipment between its three locations, and that is a fleet comprised primarily of \$8,000 mowers. In addition to nearly \$800,000 worth of equipment, the company must pay for one equipment maintenance technician dedicated solely to loaner equipment at each location.

"And we have to sell the loaner equipment at a loss at the end of each year, which is why it's so important that we profit on the sale of new equipment at the time of the original sale because part of that sale is the lifetime cost of the equipment," Weingartz explained.

To make matters worse, dealers don't necessarily know what condition loaner equipment will return to their shop in.

"We have some customers that we know will return the loaner machine in better shape than it went out in because they

understand our side of the business," Weingartz remarked. "But other contractors think they have the right to beat the machine up, return it with flat tires or bent blades and they won't let us charge them for these costs.

"If contractors understand there's a cost involved for everything we do and they treat us respectfully as business people, then we're better able to keep our costs to them in line," he added.

But, instead of working to build a business partnership, contractors focus solely on taking care of themselves, according to many dealers.

"Contractors are very demanding customers, and for good reason because there is a lot of pressure on them," Weingartz observed. "But a lot of times we can't seem to do enough for them. For example, we stock more parts than most of our suppliers, but contractors still complain when we don't have the one part that they need.

"And, on top of that, some contractors

seem to think we're making a ton of money because we have a big building and we sell machines for \$8,000," Weingartz added. "They don't realize that we work on slim margins and making a profit is difficult in this business because of the excessive overhead we have to carry. A lot of times all the contractors want is \$500 off on a machine, but discounting like that can be the difference between making money and losing money at the end of the year for us."

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE. The one dynamic that hasn't been addressed in this relationship is the role manufacturers play.

"The manufacturers naturally want us to sell all of their product, but the good aspect in carrying multiple manufacturers' lines is keeping the manufacturers honest and striving to be one step ahead of the competition," Weingartz stressed. "If the manufacturers don't do their job and produce a good

(continued on page 118)

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The Time is NOW



The sale of a new piece of equipment by a dealer to a contractor should be just the start of a mutually beneficial relationship. Photo: John Deere



The economy is good. Unemployment is down. The stock market is up. People are making money. Everyone is happy. Right? Hardly.

Many landscape contractors are concerned with the state of service that equipment dealers supply them. Likewise, many dealers say contractors don't understand their responsibilities. And the lack of understanding and communication between the groups has the potential to cause a serious rift in the industry. And that is one battle no one would win.

"Dealers used to be service oriented, but they have changed over the past few years," lamented Harold Wiggins, president of Twin Rivers Lawncare & Landscaping, Lexington, S.C. "I see dealers being maxed out with all of their sales and success, and they don't have time to service what they sell."

"For instance, I called a dealer on a Wednesday to repair one of my mowers. He said he might be able to fix it by the following Monday," Wiggins recalled. "That is almost a full week without my equipment, and I cannot afford that."

Adding to Wiggins' frustration was driving past that same dealer and seeing a lot full of homeowners' mowers lined up for repair. "Seeing all of those mowers ahead of mine tells me that dealer does not care about the contractor business," Wiggins said. "I need my equipment to make a living. Susie Home-maker does not. And he is placing her equipment ahead of mine."

(continued on page 45)

• Contractors,
• Dealers have
• many
• differences that
• can be put
• aside to enable
• both to make
• money and
• capitalize on a
• strong
• economy.
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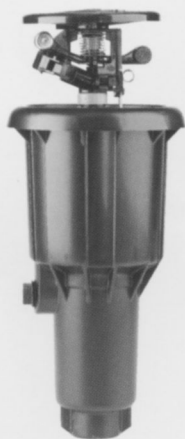


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(continued from page 38)

Wiggins added one more thing: "He will never get my business."

"Sure we serve the general public, but contractors have to take precedence," said Dennis Klei, president, Klei Mower, Cincinnati, Ohio. "We have one guy in the service department that is strictly a commercial mechanic. When commercial equipment comes in, he works on it."

For Klei, that decision is simply a matter of economic sense. "For every commercial mower we sell, that is one less homeowner cutting his own lawn. So we know what direction the industry is heading and we are doing our part to make sure the contractors are successful as they pursue that business," he said.

In Wiggins' case, the unwillingness of the dealer hurt Twin Rivers' business and it hurt the future potential of the dealer's business. Many contractors echo Wiggins' claim that service is the most important thing they can get from their dealers. And many more say they are reducing their dealer network—those providing service will continue to get business.

"Our company survives only because we give good service, and I expect nothing less from my dealers," noted Ron Dodd, operations manager, Wallace Landscape Associates, Kennett Square, Pa. "We deal with about a half dozen dealers, and only those who provide us with good, consistent service."

"As to homeowners' mowers taking precedence over mine, well that doesn't happen with my dealers," Dodd said. "But that was the case with some of the shops I dealt with in the past, which is why I haven't dealt with them again."

IN SEARCH OF. *Landscape contractor looking to settle down with a few good dealers. Tired of playing games with the dealers in the past. Only sincere inquiries need apply.*

Dodd has given many dealers the opportunity to win his business over the past few years, trying an estimated 30 to 35 dealers in that time. "The ones I have settled on are the best of that bunch. The rest either couldn't meet our service requirements or didn't have the right product line."

And, lest his current dealers get comfortable with their status, one warning: "If I could deal with three, that is all I would want to deal with," added Dodd. "It would


be much easier for me."

Working with three dealers and trying to reduce that number further is Ken Roth, president, Vivicon, Tampa, Fla. "We are trying to use fewer dealers simply because it is more convenient to use fewer dealers. The less people you have to deal with, the less hassles you will have," he said.

Roth said his primary dealer provides

loaner equipment to cover the loss on warranty work that takes longer than 24 hours. "We have used the loaner on occasion, but generally his turnaround has been very good," Roth said. "We have had occasions with other dealers where work was not completed in the allotted time, and have been given a variety of excuses why it wasn't done."

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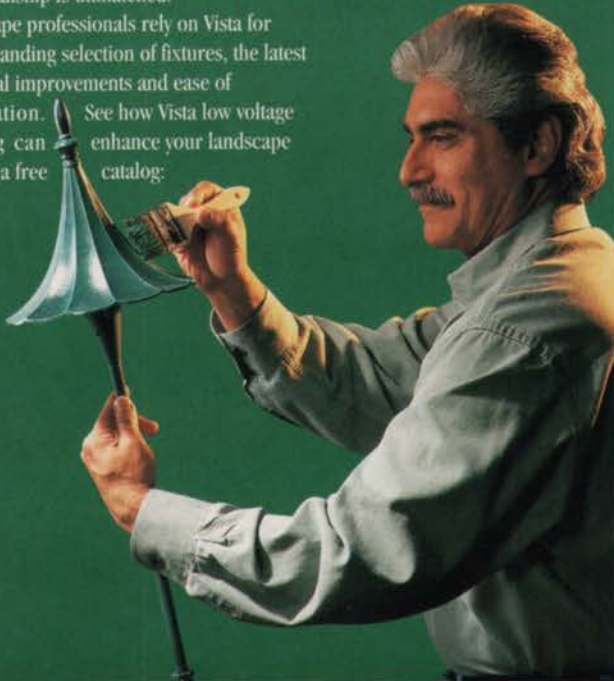


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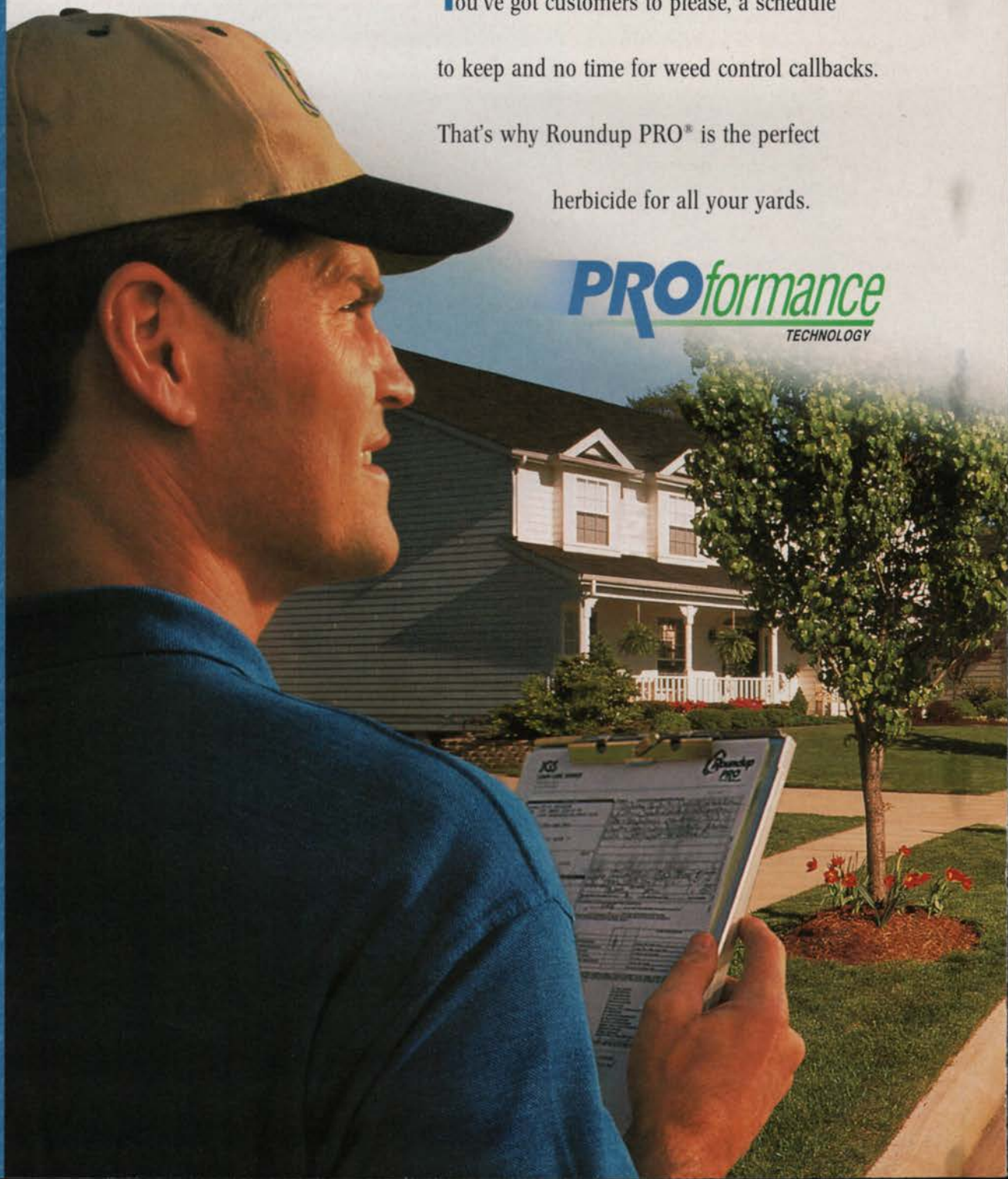
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USE READER SERVICE #37

(continued from page 45)

"We switched dealers, and went somewhere else for service shortly after that," he added.

But Roth is not sour on most dealers. "The dealers who have been here awhile and have been through the economic cycles know the importance of service. The economy is strong now, but if it starts to worsen, it will be the dealers who have continuously provided quality service that will survive. Some of the newer dealers haven't learned that yet," he said.

"Sure they try and attract you on price, but they cannot back that up with service, so they will not last long in a service-oriented business," he added. "They will not have that relationship."

DESPERATELY SEEKING. *Landscape contractor seeks relationship with dealer's mechanics. Must be loyal, understanding, and have the ability to communicate. Must also understand I am still getting over the broken relationship with my*

last mechanic.

Contractors emphasize the need for relationships between themselves and their dealers, not only among managers, but between the contractor and the dealers' mechanics. "Their mechanics learn your company's equipment. They understand your unique problems and needs and are more willing to work with you if they know you," said Blake Smith, president, Quality LawnCare, Lubbock, Texas.

"Unfortunately, when they are gone, you have to start a new relationship with the mechanic who takes his place," he added. "And that is a big concern because there is substantial turnover among mechanics. And much of that is not the dealers' faults, yet they are often blamed for it."

Smith pointed out that just like landscape contracting, repair work is a seasonal business. And in the winters, when revenues are scarce, mechanics often find other means of earning a living. "You can't blame the

mechanics because they need to put food on the table, so they go where there is money to be made," Smith added.

And the difficulty lies during the following season when the dealers must search for new mechanics. And small engine mechanics are not easy to find for several reasons. First of all, in days where school systems are struggling to pay their bills, cutting classes is not just for students anymore. School boards cut classes from the curriculum as they trim teachers. Among the first classes cut are small engine repair classes.

Second, many mechanics profess an interest in working on automobiles rather than lawn mowers. And third, since equipment repair is a seasonal business, it is not always lucrative to go into a career where you will not make money for one-third of the year.

"It is hard to find mechanics, so we try and keep the ones we have," said Richard

(continued on page 50)

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(continued from page 48)

Leonardis, president of Jersey Power Equipment, Clifton, N.J. "We have a standard of not laying people off during the winter because it is so hard to find mechanics.

"The difficulty is that prices keep coming down and margins are being reduced, yet the service demands go up," he added. "We seem to be caught in the middle."

Money is one area where both dealers and contractors constantly battle – not usually over price, but on payments and what is included in the price. Dealers constantly lament that contractors do not understand their margins and believe the dealers should be indebted to the contractors for their business.

"I think the contractor thinks that if he is spending \$3,000 with me, I am making \$1,500. In actuality, I am making about \$250. In my market, there is an oversaturation of dealers, so pricing becomes a factor. And when the contractors

(continued on page 52)

A Common Goal

While dealers and contractors have their differences, they really have very similar goals. Neither one wants equipment sitting around the dealer's shop waiting for repair work, especially warranty work.

"We make very little on warranty work, simply because of the restrictions many manufacturers have on it," said Bill Fisher, president, Progressive Products, Pensacola, Fla. "Some manufacturers are so stringent with the work and their payment program, it actually costs us money.

"It would be much better for us if the contractors maintained their equipment better," he said. "If they kept belts and other minor products on hand where they wouldn't have to make special trips here to get the equipment running again, everyone would be happier."

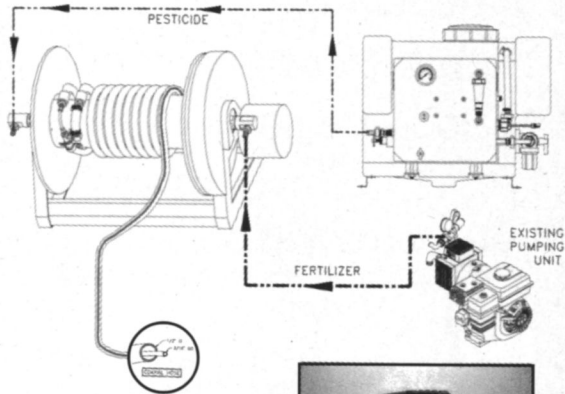
But whose responsibility is it to provide those tips? Ken Roth, president, Vivicon, Tampa, Fla., expressed interest in a dealer-manufacturer repair seminar. "I am not sure if it is taking money out of the dealer's pocket, but it would be nice to have our mechanics get some additional training from those involved in the sale."

Roth said such a program would benefit the dealer as well. "It would enable us to get the maximum performance levels out of our equipment, which would keep us happier," he said.

"Simple maintenance goes a long way," said Fisher. "We constantly see equipment here that has 15 things about to go wrong, and one thing that already has. When a contractor does not follow recommendations, we all suffer." — *Dave Clancy*



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(continued from page 50)

pit dealer against dealer in a battle of pricing, it becomes hard for us to make any profit," Leonardis said.

IT MUST GO BOTH WAYS. *Tired of frugal minded relationships. Tired of giving and giving with no return. Looking for mutual gains.*

Bill Fisher, president of Progressive Prod-

ucts, Pensacola, Fla., said that contractors don't fully understand the overhead involved in his business. "If I sell something for \$2 that I bought for \$1, I didn't make \$1 on the sale. You have to take into account insurance, rent, utilities, taxes, wages and interest. I might walk away with 15 cents on that sale.

"And then we have customers who will drive 20 miles to save \$50 and force us to compete with other dealers on price," he added. "They force our margins way down, then expect us to be able to finance the service they desire after the sale.

"Don't get me wrong, I want to service my customers, but when I have to loan out a piece of equipment because a repair took longer than anticipated, it costs me money," Fisher pointed out. "The manufacturers make no allowances for loaners."

So dealers are in a quandry of their own. How much can they cut prices and still make a decent living? "How far must I go to make a little money? At what point will I begin losing money? And then, how long will I remain in business?" Fisher asked.

One solution, according to Don Hess, president of Wilson's Outdoor Equipment, Raleigh, N.C., is to not cut prices at all. "I do not cut my prices one bit," he said. "Contractors might be able to get a machine cheaper somewhere else, but if I cut prices, I will not be able to afford to provide the service they demand. And we have demonstrated that this philosophy works. We have about 300 commercial accounts here."

Hess said he has even refused to deal with some larger contractors who had pricing structure demands that would have hurt his business. "They wanted us to string out the terms of the sale where we were acting as their finance company. I am not American Express, so I would not do that. The money we would have made on the sale we would have lost in the long run," he said.

And therein lies a big problem in the industry - making money. Everyone believes everyone else is making all of the money. And everyone wants their share. "Everybody says they want me to make a profit, but no one wants me to make it off of them," Hess said. "Contractors must trust me to make a fair profit without gouging them."

MONEY MATTERS, TOO. *Credit problems? We can help.*

Dealers claim that payment is a major issue in their profitability. "Many times it is not bad pay, but slow pay," said Klei. "We

(continued on page 119)



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USE READER SERVICE #45

To check for thatch problems, contractors recommended taking soil samples to measure the thickness of thatch. Photo: Classen Manufacturing



M

oderation in all things' is a familiar expression; and when it comes to thatch, the same principle applies. A small thatch layer in a lawn can be beneficial because it improves a turf's resiliency, but once thatch begins to build up, the disadvantages quickly outweigh the advantages.

"Thatch is an organic material that does not decompose," explained Bob Brophy, president of Turfco, Minneapolis, Minn. "Once a lawn develops a thatch layer it becomes the perfect living environment for bugs and diseases to kill the grass."

These are the exact reasons why it is so

critical that contractors understand how to pro-actively prevent thatch and know what means are available in order to control this lawn menace.

THATCH AWARENESS. The importance of controlling thatch is clear – for the health of the turf. Defined, thatch consists of a tightly intermingled layer of dead or decaying turfgrass tissues derived from stems, roots and leaves just above the soil.

According to Roch Gaussoin, extension turfgrass specialist at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Neb., as thatch accumulates, there is a tendency for root and rhizome growth to occur primarily in the thatch layer rather than in the soil. This results in a weakened,

(continued on page 56)

Knowing when and how to control thatch is key to the health of any lawn.

By Angela Dyer

A Threat to TURF





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thatch

(continued from page 54)

poorly rooted turf that is prone to stress injury and requires increased management.

"The real importance of controlling thatch is ultimately a healthier turf," commented John Chiera, sales director of professional lawn care products at Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products, Racine, Wis. "Controlling thatch makes turf less susceptible to stress caused by wear and tear. A means of control also makes turf less susceptible to disease."

"Controlling thatch offers the ability to allow nutrients, such as air and water, into the soil," noted Jim Doring, product development, JRCO, Minneapolis, Minn.

"Thatch limits the water penetration into the soil and causes problems with the effectiveness of some pesticides," remarked Bob Shearman, integrated turfgrass management specialist, University of Nebraska, Department of Horticulture. Shearman

Physical Properties Profile

	THATCH	SAND	SOIL
Aeration	Good	Good	Fair
Compaction	Resistant	Moderately Resistant	Susceptible
Moisture Retention	Poor	Poor	Good
Nutrient Retention	Poor	Poor	Good

Source: University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension

added that thatch can limit some insecticides' ability to control insects such as grubs.

Once the thatch accumulates to ½ to ¾ inches thick, contractors should dethatch, according to Shearman.

"Turf should have a certain amount of thatch (¼ inch) because it becomes a protective layer from too much traffic and ultraviolet rays," Brophy noted. "For example, thatch protects the nodes on the bluegrass. When thatch gets to be near ½ inch, the lawn can develop problems. If there is 1 inch of thatch, the turf has severe problems."

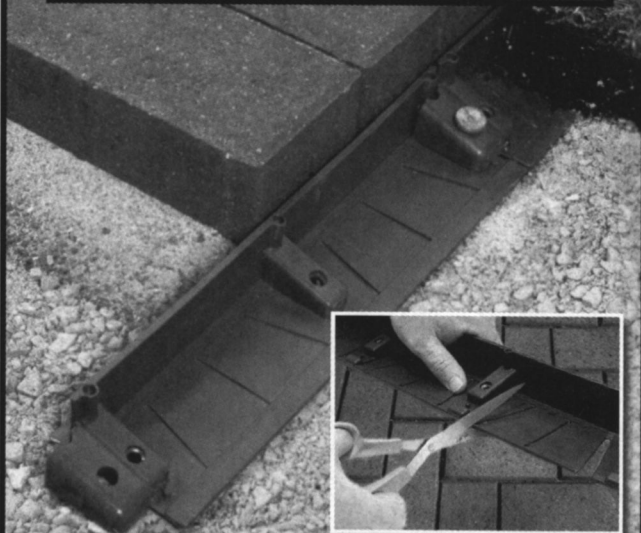
A small thatch layer is also beneficial because it increases the turf's resiliency, improves its wear tolerance and insulates against soil temperature changes, according to Gaussoin.

One way to tell if thatch is becoming a problem is by periodically taking a soil sample. "Contractors can tell by the sight of the grass or they can probe the turf," Chiera mentioned. "Cut a plug of turf out – a 2-inch square down to the root base. Thatch problems can be created with regular watering and fertilization."

Agreeing with Chiera, Ray Christopherson, president of TerraCare, Pardeeville, Wis., also recommended taking a soil sample. "This way a contractor can tell if the thatch is more than ¼ inch thick," he added.

When taking these samples, it is impor-

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tant to measure the accumulation from several different areas in the turf, according to Gaussoin, because thatch is normally not uniformly distributed.

IN CONTROL. The headaches of thatch can be avoided with a few pro-active steps.

According to Bob Shearman, there are four major principles to follow in order to escape thatch problems:

- *Fertilizing* – Practice judicious fertilizer applications and do not overstimulate.
- *Aeration* – This practice takes the root system out of the thatch layer. For cool-season grasses, aerate once each year. For warm-

season grasses, aerate once in late spring when the grass is actively growing. For clay or compacted soil, aerate twice per year.

- *Mowing* – Contractors do not need to worry about leaving clippings on the grass because they are not a factor in thatch accumulation.

- *Watering* – Deep and infrequent waterings stimulate root growth into the soil.

“Aerate, don’t overfeed and don’t over-water,” echoed Chiera. “A certain amount of stress is actually healthy for generating a stronger plant. If contractors don’t over-

(continued on page 60)

Preventive Practices

Thatch accumulation can be minimized by using proper cultural practices and selecting appropriate turfgrass, according to Roch Gaussoin, extension turfgrass specialist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This is not necessarily easy because controlling thatch requires proper management to encourage organic matter decomposition rather than accumulation. Thatch prevention and control cannot just be an occasional practice.

- *Mowing* – Proper mowing frequency and height are the principle cultural practices that can be used to reduce thatching tendency, according to Gaussoin. Mowing frequency should be dictated by the turfgrass growth rate. No more than 1/3 of the leaf blade should be removed with any mowing. If proper mowing frequency is maintained, clippings do not need to be removed because turfgrass leaf clippings contribute very little to thatch buildup. They break down rapidly and recycle nutrients slowly when returned to the turf.

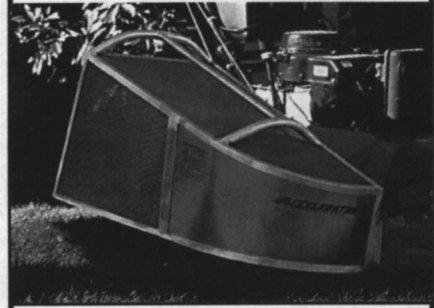
As mowing height increases, thatching tendency increases as well. It is best to cycle mowing height from low in the spring to high in the summer and back to low in the fall. This reduces thatching tendency and minimizes environmental stress and weed encroachment, according to Gaussoin.

- *Fertilizer* – Another key in controlling thatch is the application of fertilizers. They should be applied at rates and in programs that meet, but do not exceed, the nutritional needs of the turf. Excessive nitrogen applications may result in organic matter production rates that exceed breakdown, encouraging thatch accumulation.

- *Irrigation* – Avoid light, frequent irrigations. Instead, irrigating turf deeply and infrequently is best, and water when the turf shows moderate signs of moisture stress.

- *Pesticide* – Lastly, use pesticides only as needed. Thatch can be minimized by avoiding unnecessary use of pesticides. Pesticides may affect desirable microorganism and earthworm populations. Earthworms digest thatch, improve soil aeration and drainage. They also introduce soil and microorganisms into thatch. Pesticides play an important role in thatch control and, where feasible, should be encouraged through proper management. – *Angela Dyer*

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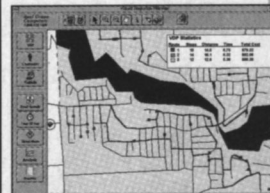
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thatch

(continued from page 57)

water, then the roots will go into the ground looking for water. This will create a stronger root system. I personally recommend aerating once a year and then spot aerate, for example, when an area isn't draining well."

Brophy suggested that contractors have a good growth regulating program. "A high nitrogen treatment gives instant growth, but this rapid growth creates cellulose in stems and causes thatch," he said.

Another preventive measure can be blending cultivars, according to Gaussoin. Mixing cultivars with varying thatching tendencies is recommended to reduce the thatch buildup rate. The blends should be based on cultivars that have superior site adaptation and reduced thatching tendency (see chart).

If these pro-active precautions have not been taken, thatch may have accumulated and contractors should know how to con-

Thatching Tendency of Turfgrass

HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
Zoysiagrass	Kentucky bluegrass	Perennial ryegrass
Bermudagrass	Creeping bentgrass	Tall fescue
Creeping red fescue	Hard fescue	Buffalograss
	Chewings fescue	

Source: University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension

trol thatch buildup once it is already present.

"If the thatch is 1 inch or less, contractors need to do proper aeration, which is twice each year," Brophy stated. "This will reduce the buildup eventually. If there is 1½ inches of thatch, the problem will require mechanical removal with a vertical cutting machine."

Vertical cutting machines and power rakes use rigid wire tines or steel blades to lift thatch debris and a small amount of soil to the lawn surface, according to Gaussoin, who recommended that the soil should have some moderate moisture for best results.

Power raking where there is excessive soil moisture tears and pulls the turf from the soil instead of slicing and lifting the thatch debris as desired.

Shearman recommended aeration, which is also known as core cultivation. "This takes the cores

out of the lawn," Shearman said. "Aeration allows the cores to lay on the surface and as the contractors mow, the cores break up."

Core cultivation or aeration can be used to minimize and reduce thatch accumulation, to modify its physical characteristics and remove certain amounts of thatch, according to Gaussoin. However, core cultivation is not as effective as power raking in removing thatch debris, but it is less injurious and disruptive. When the broken-up soil cores are redistributed throughout the thatch, the soil modifies the physical struc-

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thatch

ture of the thatch, thereby making it a better growing medium.

The best times to remove thatch are during periods of active turfgrass growth. Gaussoin recommended this because the removal encourages recovery from injury that may occur during dethatching. Cool-season turfgrasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass, grow best in the spring and fall. Thatch removal in this type of turf is best when done in spring prior to green-up or in the fall after Labor Day.

POINT OF PURCHASE. Last, but not least, is the equipment. Once contractors know the how's, when's and why's of controlling thatch, they just need the equipment to get the job done.

"Contractors need dethatching equipment that is going to offer them a return on

their investment and increase their productivity," Doring said.

"It's important for the equipment to bring the soil up," explained Larry Classen, vice president of Classen Manufacturing, Norfolk, Neb. "Equipment should be heavy enough to get into the dirt and bring up a good portion of soil to examine. A long enough plug to pull a good soil sample is also necessary. For example, a 2¾-inch plug allows contractors to see the soil, thatch and grass."

Shearman explained that an aerator should pull as many cores per square feet as possible. "The more cores the better."

"An aerator should offer a minimum of nine holes per square foot," Brophy added. "You should go across the lawn at least twice to get that amount of holes. You can't have too many holes, but you can definitely have too few." ■

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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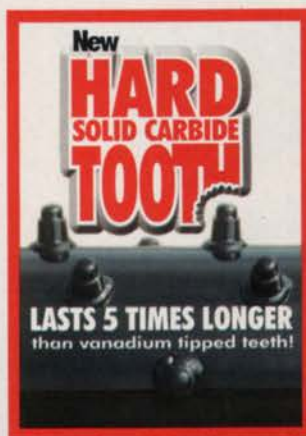
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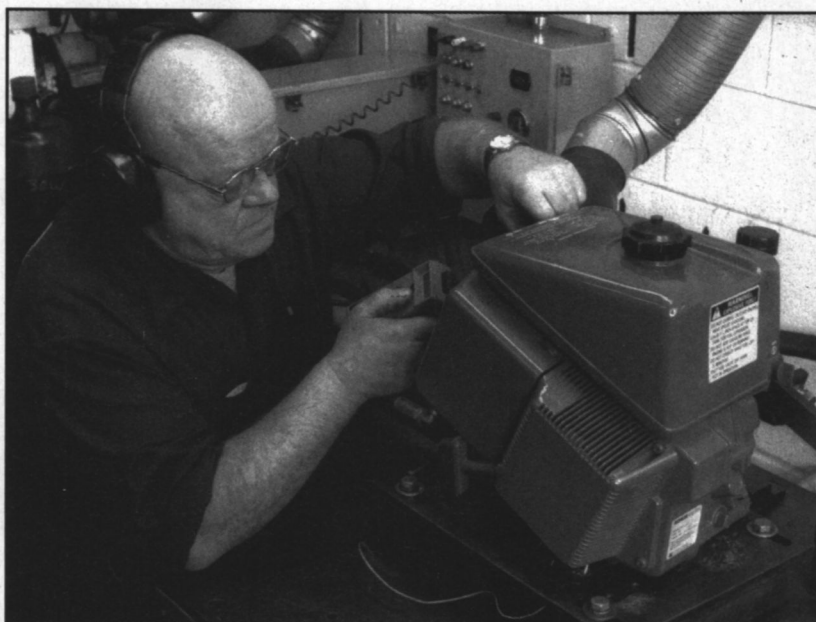
A Little Peace & Quiet

• *New engine developments are based on current and upcoming emissions regulations, requiring less noise and pollution.*

• *By Nicole Wisniewski*

Being a profitable landscape contractor means having equipment that is running and reliable at all times. Whether it's a trimmer, blower, walk-behind or zero-turn riding mower, without a durable engine, the machine isn't going anywhere. "An engine is expected to start every time and deliver the power a contractor expects from that machine," noted Paul Blum, product manager for single cylinder engines, Kohler Co., Kohler, Wis. "It can't break down all of the time. A landscape contractor doesn't have time for that, especially in the spring and summer."

While contractors are looking for more horsepower, lighter weight products, greater durability and extended service intervals, engine manufacturers have to be mindful not only of their interests, but of the regulations required of the new technology and products they produce.

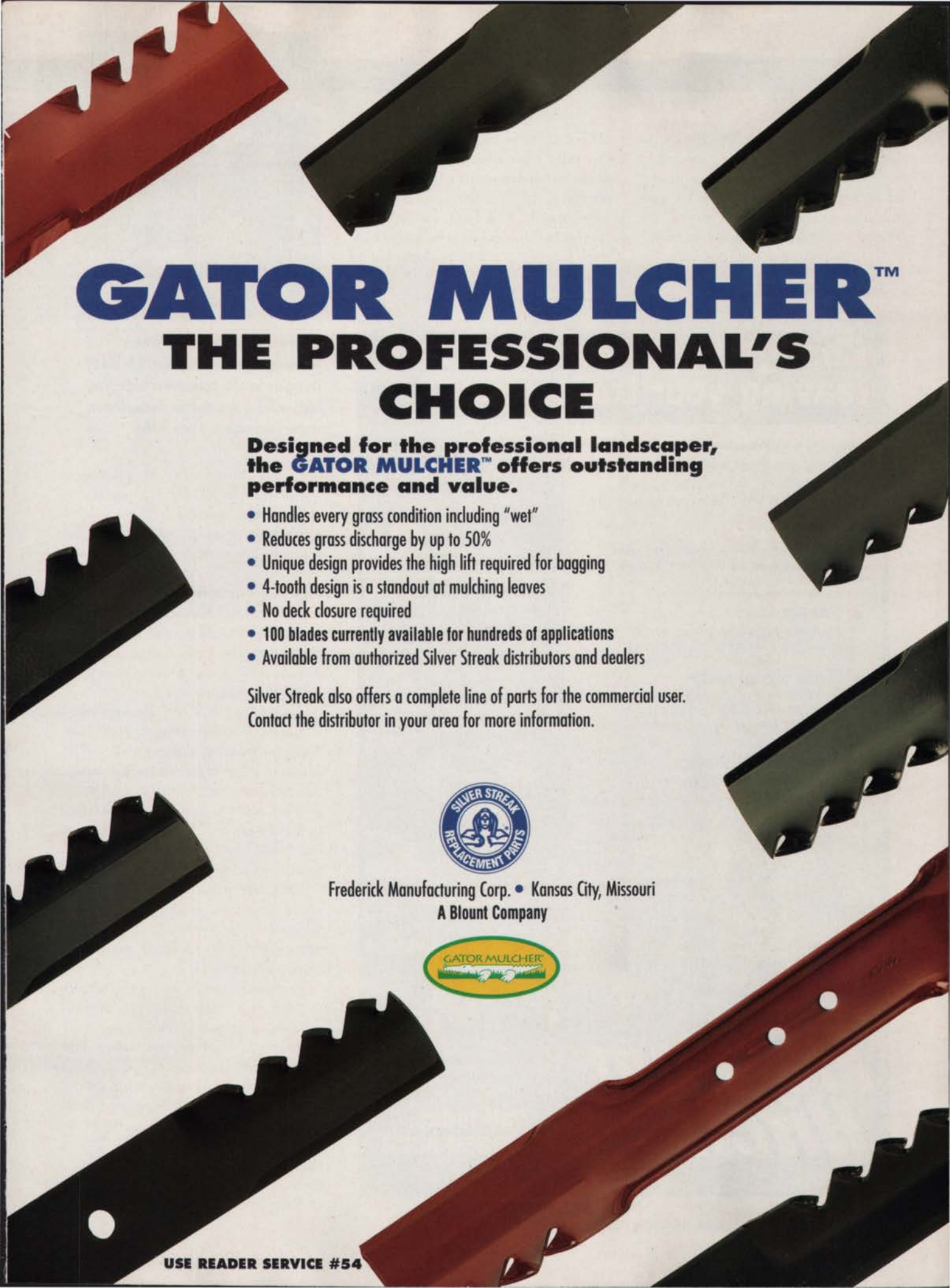


REGULATIONS. "The engine business is a mature market," pointed out Brad Murphy, director of information systems, Robin America, Wood Dale, Ill. "Technology that is being used on smaller engines is being used in larger engines, and small refinements are being made in current engines to meet CARB and EPA emissions regulations."

Currently, all emissions from hand-held products are required to be around 2 percent. California Air Resources Board Tier II and Environmental Protection Agency Phase II requirements, scheduled to go into effect Jan. 1, 2000 and Jan. 1, 2001, respectively, will reduce these emissions another 70 percent, a 40 percent change from CARB Tier I and EPA Phase I regulations. For non-road, spark-ignition, non-hand-held engines

(continued on page 64)

Contractors are looking for more horsepower, lighter weight products and, particularly, extended service intervals in their equipment engines. Photo: Kohler



GATOR MULCHER™

THE PROFESSIONAL'S CHOICE

Designed for the professional landscaper, the **GATOR MULCHER™** offers outstanding performance and value.

- Handles every grass condition including "wet"
- Reduces grass discharge by up to 50%
- Unique design provides the high lift required for bagging
- 4-tooth design is a standout at mulching leaves
- No deck closure required
- 100 blades currently available for hundreds of applications
- Available from authorized Silver Streak distributors and dealers

Silver Streak also offers a complete line of parts for the commercial user. Contact the distributor in your area for more information.



Frederick Manufacturing Corp. • Kansas City, Missouri
A Blount Company



engines

(continued from page 62)

at or below 25 horsepower, typically used in lawnmowers, the standards will result in an estimated 59 percent reduction in emissions of hydrocarbons plus oxides of nitrogen from those achieved under the current EPA Phase I standards, according to the EPA.

"These additional regulations are for engines up to 25 horsepower," Blum ex-

plained. "Engines from 25 horsepower to 1 liter must meet automobile engine standards, which are tougher because of the need for a catalytic muffler to reduce noise."

Blum said CARB Tier II and EPA Phase II should be the final set of emissions standards for awhile. "CARB has backed off of a possible Tier III," he said.



The first thing contractors look at when purchasing engines is horsepower, followed by the choices between twin-cycle or single-cycle, liquid-cooled or air-cooled and overhead-valve or side-valve engines. Photo: Kohler

Change implements without leaving your tractor seat!

The amazing **Freedom Hitch** lets you keep your seat while changing implements on your Category I or II tractor, giving you the freedom to work:

- ▲ **Safer**
reduce smashed fingers and sore backs as well as Workers' Comp and OSHA claims
- ▲ **Faster**
be more productive and spend less time changing implements
- ▲ **More Efficiently**
so efficient in fact, that a Freedom Hitch system can pay for itself in just a few weeks

Here's how it works...

To connect, simply back the tractor section under the implement section and raise as the two units self-align and lock together - **1, 2, 3** - you're ready to go.

To release, push the handle and lower the unit until the sections disengage - **4, 3, 2, 1** - then drive on to the next implement!

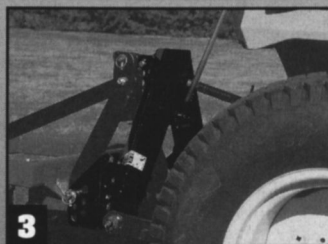
Call today for your **FREE VIDEO** and information on quantity pricing.

DISTRIBUTOR AND DEALER INQUIRIES WELCOME!

Freedom Hitch

Midwest

PATENT PENDING



Manufactured by:
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Ida Grove, IA 51445

Call today:
(800)859-3028

"Other changes in the current wave of regulations may include an in-use test on engines," Blum continued. "Right now, the regulations are applied to engines as they come off of the assembly line. Soon, we may be able to apply these regulations to hours of engine usage in the field and rate the engines to different levels from 125 to 1,000 hours of use, which would be more stringent and cost more. The higher rating an engine manufacturer chooses to apply their product to, the higher the cost."

Earlier this year, CARB also approved a \$25-million incentive program to pay businesses for reducing nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions below mandated levels in heavy-duty trucks and agricultural machinery.

The CARB program, and emissions regulations are causing changes in an industry that hasn't based its designs on emissions regulations before, Murphy said.

"Regulations place engine manufacturers up against a timetable trying to meet these standards," he said. "And these standards are forming landscape contractors' current buying trends."

Regulations are also forcing the industry to improve technologically and environmentally at the same time, added Steve Ditter, product line manager, walk-behind rotary mowers, Tecumseh, Grafton, Wis.

"There are better cooling methods and lower oil consumption on engines today because of the regulations," Ditter said.

PREFERENCES. When it comes to engines, contractors are buying twin-cycle vs. single-cycle, liquid-cooled vs. air-cooled and over-

USE READER SERVICE #55



Lawn & Landscape
July 1999

Commercial
Product
Guide

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Commercial Products

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Reach New Heights of Productivity with the **All-Seasons** Catcher

Online Club

SPEND MORE TIME mowing and less time lifting clippings manually. The All-Seasons catcher lift system enables operators of Scag and Walker mowers to reach new heights of productivity, profit and safety. The system clears 68 inches on D/T models of Walker mowers and now helps Scag owners as well. Versatility – use the clean, fully automatic dumping to dump into a truck, trailer or dumpster, over a fence or make a tall compost pile. The door is timed to open at the



last second and system reaches more than 3 feet into the removal vehicle. Improved power for 1999 –

lift 7 bushels, dump and go in less than 18 seconds. Now available – a 9.5-bushel catcher for the Walker mower that dumps and goes in 28 seconds. Delrin bearings throughout.

Circle 600 on reader service card

A.M. Leonard Offers a Variety of Trade Tools

A.M. LEONARD OFFERS tools that work – tools that feel right in your hand and work as hard as you do – superior craftsmanship – unusual problem solving products – fast delivery –



substantial savings – down to earth guarantees and a huge inventory. Since 1885, A.M. Leonard has provided professional gardeners, landscapers, nurserymen and arborists tools for their trade. Now you can buy direct and save. Request your FREE A.M. Leonard catalog for the tools you need.

Circle 601 on reader service card

Product Guide



Mini Ponds Kits by **Aquascape Designs**

Eliminate Guesswork

FOR PONDS 180 square feet or less, UPS pond kits are ideal. Retailers will also find these beneficial by eliminating the time, difficulty and guesswork of trying to educate a customer on how to assemble a pond kit. The entire kit comes packaged in two easy-to-carry boxes. If you don't want to inventory product, we will ship your order directly to your customer's door! It's as simple as

that. Or you can assemble your own kits by buying only the items you need. Either way, you and

your customers get what is needed, fast and hassle free.

Circle 602 on reader service card



Bededger from **Brown Manufacturing** Defines Landscape Beds

The BEDEDGER is designed especially for defining landscape beds or for



installing plastic or steel edging. Time savings of up to 90 percent over the standard shovel. The Model F-780H BEDEDGER is equipped with steerable rear wheels and an 8 HP Honda Engine. The 8 HP engine provides the extra power needed to trench in the hardest clay soils or at higher altitudes in the western states. The posi-steerable wheels make fancy curves and tree rings much easier. Change rotor blades and trench up to 7 inches deep to install irrigation pipe, cable or electronic dog fence. For dealer and pricing information, contact Brown Manufacturing Corp. at www.brownmfgcorp.com.

Circle 603 on reader service card



Commercial Products

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Snow Products Catalog From **Central Parts Warehouse** is Available

Since 1980, Central Parts Warehouse has provided the snow and ice control industry with quality replacement parts, equipment and



accessories for most major brands of snowplows and salt spreaders. New for this year are Boss and Fisher plows and replacements parts. Central Parts Warehouse features the largest and most comprehensive catalog in the industry with more than 60 pages of equipment and illustrated parts diagrams all at discounted pricing. Reserve your FREE copy of our 1999/2000 Snowplow Replacement Parts Catalog. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.centralparts.com. **Circle 604 on reader service card**

Creative Sales

Provides Full Tree Care with ACECAPS & MEDICAPS

KEEP YOUR CUSTOMERS' trees healthy and insect free and add more green to your bottom line using ACECAPS and MEDICAPS. Truly the industry's lowest cost per unit systemic tree care program available. Implants don't impact the environment, and there are no empty containers to dispose of. ACECAPS contain 97 percent Acephate for season-long, broad spectrum insect control. MEDICAPS are backed by major University research and more than 25 years of commercial success for treating micronutrient deficiencies (Iron, Manganese, Zinc) or a



combination tree food. Results are fast-acting and last for three seasons.

**Circle 605
on reader
service card**

Product Guide



Dawn Industries

Kwikadapt Insert Tees
Make Irrigation
Installation Faster *Online Link*



DAWN INDUSTRIES STRIVES to produce new and innovative

products that make irrigation installation faster, easier and cost efficient.

Dawn Industries kept this in mind while developing the all new Kwikadapt Insert Tee. The Kwikadapt Insert Tee is a one-piece design which connects from Polyethylene pipe to Swing/Funny pipe.

Kwikadapt is designed for one-piece strength and reliability. This one-piece design eliminates problems associated with threaded connections of the conventional Swing-Ell. The barb and spike combination keeps the Kwikadapt in place even under pressure surges.

Circle 606 on reader service card

Dawn Industries

Kwikslip Makes
Irrigation
Installation Easier *Online Link*

AT DAWN Industries, we strive to manufacture products that make irrigation installation easier. Dawn Industries kept this in mind while developing the all new Kwikslip fitting. The Kwikslip is a one-piece design which goes from PVC to swing/funny pipe. Kwikslip is designed for one-piece strength and reliability. A one-piece design eliminates problems associated with the threaded connection of conventional Swing-Ells.

The barb and spike combination keeps the kwikslip in place even



under pressure surges. The Tee also has a gusseted branch for added strength.

A one piece design as well as the combination Spigot/Hub also cuts down on inventory needs.

Circle 607 on reader service card



Commercial Products

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Truly Even Broadcast Spreading From **Earthway Products**



OUR EV-N-SPRED™ line of professional spreaders features hopper capacities of 50 or 100 pounds and three different chassis styles – epoxy powder coated with a nylon bushing axle, epoxy powder coated with greaseable ball bearing axle and stainless steel with greaseable ball bearing axle.

Additional top quality features include a stainless steel shut-off plate with right and left side adjustable throwing ports for fine tuning spreading patterns and a new super duty professional gearbox with a stainless steel axle and a two-year warranty. In addition, the 13-inch by 5-inch turf tires make for easy handling and reduced soil compaction.

Ev-N-Spred™ is the only brand that will truly spread all products evenly.

Circle 608 on reader service card

Fabriscape

Establishes
Vegetation
with
PolyJute
Netting



FABRISCAPE'S
POLYJUTE ero-

sion netting is a flexible open weave geotextile designed to hold seeds and soil in place until vegetation is established. The natural looking, high strength polypropylene mesh protects the soil surface from water and wind erosion while offering partial shade and heat storage to accelerate vegetative development.

PolyJute benefits include its inexpensive cost and environmentally safe properties. Also, this no-hassle erosion netting biodegrades after vegetation has been established. PolyJute is perfect for containing steep slopes and low flow channels.

Circle 609 on reader service card

Product Guide



Uniforms From **G&K Services** Give Professional and Consistent Image

KEEP YOUR crews looking professional and consistent everyday with uniforms. Uniforms promote image, safety, security and teamwork. G&K Services is North America's fastest growing supplier of rental, catalog and direct purchase uniforms, also providing dust products, restroom supplies, floor mats and other accessories. We have developed state-of-the-art laundry technology and processing through a commitment to quality design and controls. The GK Teamware catalog offers complete uniforms and accessories along with personalization options. Uniforms from G&K are

a cost effective way to express professionalism to clients and instill pride in your crews for the work they do.

Circle 610 on reader service card



Galbreath U9 Hook Hoist Offers Versatility

GALBREATH'S U9 Hook Hoist features a 9,000-pound capacity and can be mounted on smaller trucks that do not require a commercial operator's license. The U9 Hook Hoist offers economy and versatility by allowing one truck to perform multiple functions. It is designed to



accommodate either an 84-inch or 120-inch CA chassis and requires minimum truck specifications of a 6,000-pound front axle with power steering and 12,000-pound rear axle. A complete line of containers and equipment platforms are available for a variety of work requirements. The U9 utilizes advanced hooklift technology and carries a two-year warranty on all hydraulic components. Visit our website at <http://www.galbreath-inc.com>.

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Commercial Products

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GMC Sierra Has Unique Styling

MEET THE ALL NEW GMC Sierra. Honest truck styling and meaningful technical innovation are how the 1999 GMC Sierra full-size pickup will set the segment standard into the next century.

The new Sierra, with its unique GMC styling, has been rethought and redesigned from the wheels up with a focus on meeting the



higher demands of the most discriminating customer. Powered by all new, more powerful, yet fuel-efficient engines, GMC has created a truck with more towing and hauling capability, more body strength, more passenger and cargo space and more driver and passenger amenities than ever before. For more information on the GMC Sierra and other GMC trucks, visit www.gmcforwork.com.

Circle 612 on reader service card

Get Ready for Winter With **Hiniker** Plows and Spreaders



COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPERS looking for snow and ice removal business will find the equipment they need at their local Hiniker distributor. Hiniker snowplows use a quick-hitch drive-in mount system to cut hook-up times to a matter of seconds. A 30-inch high curve moldboard, box-section plow frame and reliable compression type springs contribute to the performance and durability of the Hiniker plow. Offer your clients complete snow and ice control with a Hiniker 640 Salt and Sand spreader. The big 8-foot hopper and a spread pattern up to 30 feet wide make quick work of larger areas.

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Lawn & Landscape

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 Other Contract Services
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Product Guide



Hudson Star

Series 1 GreensMower Offers Smooth Cut

Online Link

THE HUDSON STAR Series 1 GreensMower is designed to address the needs of home greens owners, golf course maintenance crews or any location making putting greens available to their customers. The Series 1 GreensMower provides a smooth, consistent cut down to 1/8 inch. The GreensMower comes in a 16 inch cutting width. It's 11 computer balanced cutting blades provide 36 cuts/inch. Rear rollers assure a smooth finish normally found only with high priced commercial mowers. The Hudson-Star GreensMower ships UPS and comes with a 30-day, unconditional satisfaction guarantee. For additional information, visit our website at www.hudsonstar.com.

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Husqvarna 300

Series Trimmers Provide Ergonomic Design



A NEW FAMILY of commercial trimmers offers an unparalleled combination of lightness in weight, ergonomic design, engineering and efficiency advancements. The Model 322C, 322L and 325IX, feature Husqvarna's E-Tech engine, PowerCat™ catalytic muffler and Clean Sweep™ crankshaft design. All are designed with loop handles and a LowVib™ antivibration system to reduce muscle strain and fatigue. Starting at just 8.4 pounds, the 300 series trimmers provide all the features and benefits that commercial users rely on to obtain the best in ergonomic design, emissions and energy efficiency. Visit a Husqvarna Power Retailer to take one for a test drive.

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Commercial Products

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ICD's Stackable Retaining Walls Give a Natural Look



ICD'S STONEWALL SELECT retaining walls provide the natural look of hewn stone in a stackable, mortar-free sys-

tem of unparalleled versatility. Stems, 90-degree corners and landscape lighting can be easily incorporated into wall designs. Provides superior connection to soil reinforcing geogrids for walls to 40 feet high. Free downloads, including CAD details, installation manual, grad chart and brochures are available on our website at www.selecticd.com.

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J.J. Mauget Company New Product & Packaging

Online Link

NOW ARBORISTS can customize their orders with the new 25 unit quarter (pack) flat and combine up to four different products (fertilizers, fungicides, insecticides and antibiotics) per 100 unit flat or 12 different products per 300 unit case. This

way you can treat ALL the problems of your customers' valuable trees with one case of



Mauget capsules. The New Tebuject Fungicide. The J.J. Mauget Company has obtained rights to include Bayer's latest triazole fungicide into its time proven micro-injection system. Tebuject with Tebuconazole is a systemic fungicide that is effective treatment of valuable trees in danger of damage. Visit our website www.mauget.com.

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Product Guide



John Beam Sprayers Provide Extensive Selection

WE HAVE AN IMPRESSIVE lineup of sprayers for lawn and landscape professionals. In fact, John Beam sprayers are more versatile today than ever. We have skid models for utility vehicles and pickups, and a variety of trailer packages and spray booms as options. You can choose from 50, 100 and 200 gallon fiberglass tanks, or you can specify a 200 or 300 gallon stainless tank. 800 gallon (500/300) and 600 gallon (200/400) compartment tanks are available as options. We also have an extensive selection of sprayguns for shrubs, plants and trees, as well as manual and electric



hose reels. www.durand-wayland.com

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Tool Cart from **Kasco** Accommodates Large Hand Tools

Online Link

KASCO Tool Company has a revolutionary development for the lawn and landscape professionals. In fact, anyone engaged in land management should own one. To date, we have not seen a tool organizer for this profession. The KASCO TOOL CART (Part # KA77TC) had a patented pending design. This cart will accommodate from the largest of hand tools such as shovels and rakes to smaller equipment such as gloves, hand trowels, extension cords, etc. With this large storage capacity, the KASCO TOOL CART is built with a heavy-duty steel frame. The tool pouch is made of waterproof canvas material. The entire cart is easily moved on site with 10-inch pneumatic tires. The KASCO TOOL CART retails for \$249 with an introductory special of \$199.



Circle 619 on reader service card



Commercial Products

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Kichler Landscape Lighting Has Unique Lighting Fixtures

KICHLER® LAND- SCAPE LIGHTING

offers a complete
line of uniquely
styled lighting
fixtures - accent,
path, deck, or pond

- whatever your needs, Kichler® is your source.

Constructed of durable composites, cast aluminum and solid brass, our fixtures stand up to the elements. Design flexibility, delivery and customer service - from the leaders in the lighting industry since 1938.

Circle 620 on reader service card



FastenMaster TimberLok by **Olympic Manufacturing Group** Saves Labor

THE FASTENMASTER™ TIMBERLOK™ is designed to make fastening pressure treated lumber faster and easier. Unlike spikes and rebar, there is no need to predrill a pilot hole. Using a standard 1/2-inch drill, the TimberLok just zips right in! That saves you labor, time and money. TimberLok countersinks itself and is removable. Just put the drill in reverse and back it out. It is perfect for building retaining walls, decks, fences, etc.

Available in 4 inch, 6 inch, 8 inch and 10 inch lengths, the TimberLok can be used with all sizes of pressure treated lumber.

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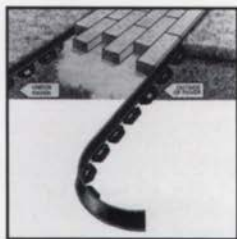


Product Guide



Make Paver Installation Easier and More Profitable with BRIC-EDG from **Oly-Ola**

SALES, the original "L-shaped" paver restraint, has been used worldwide by landscape



professionals since 1989. BRIC-EDG is designed to be used in any brick paver project, whether the project requires a restraint under the

pavers or outside the pavers. Featuring multiple installation methods, BRIC-EDG can be installed two ways - by either placing the brick on top of the edging or positioning BRIC-EDG along the outside edge of the paver. Non-bending steel anchoring stakes secure edging and prevent movement. Constructed of black vinyl, BRIC-EDG has no sharp edges, will not rust or kink, is available in both flexible and rigid sections; 2 inch and 1½ inch depths; 15 feet and 7 ½ feet lengths.

Circle 622 on reader service card

Trac Vac by **Palmer Products** is Fully Mounted

PALMOR PRODUCTS, INC. has been building vacuums for 24



years. Today we offer 20 models ranging from fully mounted to trail-behind units. The model 462 Trac Vac is fully mounted, working as one with the mower, offering excellent maneuverability around trees, flower beds and other obstacles. A 5 HP Briggs & Stratton engine powers the air turbine for maximum air flow and pickup efficiency of grass clippings, leaves and light litter. The spring-loaded top assembly lifts out of the way with a minimum effort, allowing the 44 gallon Rubbermaid® Brute Container to be removed for quick dumping anywhere: trash pile, pickup truck or neighbor's yard!

Circle 623 on reader service card



Commercial Products

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Pave Tech's PAVERSWEEP Offers Labor Savings

PAVERSWEEP is the latest innovation in pavement cleaning from Europe. PAVE TECH is the North American distributor for these cost effective labor saving sweepers. Lightweight, sturdy, collapsible handle, 3.5 HP Honda engine or electric and also inexpensive replacement brushes. One man can sweep over

2000 square feet in 15 minutes. Unique deflector flap windows material for easy pick up. One flip of a lever and you can reverse rotation of the brushes. Visit our website

www.pavetech.com.

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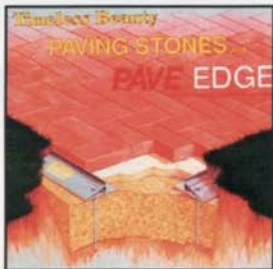


Pave Tech's Pave Edge System: Paver Jobs Easy, Efficient

THE PAVE EDGE paver restraint system from Pave Tech is the only self-supporting edge restraint system

designed exclusively for pavers. Made of a strong PVC compound, it's totally invisible when in place and will not rust, warp or frost heave. Lightweight and simple to install, the Pave Edge system comes in 10 foot long sections that are both rigid and flexible for straight or curved edges.

Circle 625 on reader service card



Product Guide



Black Diamond® Landscape Edging Manufactured by **Valley View Industries**

BLACK DIAMOND from Valley View has been the professional landscaper's choice for over three decades. The quality edging and complete line of accessories provide 100 percent of what you'll need for the most imaginative landscape plans.

All Valley View edging systems are UV protected and manufactured with the highest grade polyethylene. They will not

crack, fade or decompose. Valley View also manufactures Diamond-Lok® Paver Brick

Edgings. Visit

them on the Internet at www.valleyviewind.com.

Circle 626 on reader service card



Landscape Trailers from **Wells Cargo** Offers a Complete Line

WELLS CARGO manufactures a complete line of enclosed, steel-structured utility trailers for the green industry. Over 100 different models are available in both Ball Hitch and 5th Wheel configurations. Body lengths range from 6 feet to 48 feet. Body widths range from 4 feet to 8 feet. The new LS Series offers a complete package of features



specifically designed to meet the needs of the professional landscape and grounds maintenance contractor.

A comprehensive 3-Year Warranty Program backs every Wells Cargo trailers. Our nationwide dealership network and five regional manufacturing facilities stand ready to assist you should the need arise. Visit our web site at www.wellscargo.com.

Circle 627 on reader service card

We'd like to show you the weeds PENDINGULUM® controls. But they never showed up.

The reason they never showed up? Because PENDINGULUM® herbicide is a highly effective preemergent turf herbicide. Compared to the competition, PENDINGULUM demonstrates a higher level of control across a broader spectrum of weed species. With PENDINGULUM, weeds won't ever see the light of day. For the PENDINGULUM herbicide distributor nearest you, call: 1-800-545-9525, Ext. 1676.



PENDINGULUM offers unsurpassed weed control

Herbicide	Crabgrass	Goosegrass	Foxtail	Poa Annua	Oxalis	Spurge	Henbit	Chickweed
PENDINGULUM	■	■	■	●	■	●	■	■
Barricade*	■	●	●	●	▲	●	■	■
Dimension*	■	●	■	●	■	●	●	●
Team ^c	■	●	●	●	●	●	NR	NR
Ronstar ^d	●	■	NR	●	●	NR	NR	NR
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head-valve vs. side-valve, according to engine manufacturers.

While all three of these technologies are being perfected because they are the preferred method when compared to their counterparts, due to reducing engine emissions and noise levels, engine manufacturers are also improving them technologically to increase durability, decrease weight and improve their overall performance.

Liquid-cooled engines are preferred because they run cooler in all weather conditions, according to Andy Somich, territory sales manager, Modern Power Equipment, Wickliffe, Ohio.

"Liquid-cooled engines run cooler, are quieter and last longer than air-cooled engines," Somich explained. "Liquid engines will run cooler through the summer months, while air-cooled engines run based on the weather. If it's a hot, summer day, an air-cooled engine will tend to run hot."

When it comes to twin-cycle vs. single-cycle engines, 60 percent of contractors are buying twin-cycle and the remaining 40 percent are buying single-cycle, and those numbers are increasing in the favor of twin-cycle engines, Somich stated.

"All of the new equipment we get is coming in with twin-cycle engines only," Somich said. "They tend to have more power, run quieter and start easier needing only two fingers and one pull. Single-cycle engines usually take more effort."

And, because there is less carbon build-up in the cylinder heads of overhead-valve engines, they are preferred over side-valve engines, Blum remarked.

"With overhead valves, there is less oil consumption because of the extended length needed between oil change intervals and they run cooler," Blum added.

"Overhead-valve engines also run inherently cleaner than side-valve engines because the combustion chamber is smaller and because the valve is located right over the piston," Murphy added. "The only problem being that overhead-valve engines have more parts, which usually means more maintenance. But engine manufacturers are looking toward more technological designs to reduce the number of parts so that less maintenance will be required. Contractors tend to associate side-valve engines with lower quality machines."

For hand-held equipment, a big debate has always been the choice between two-cycle vs. four-cycle engines, Murphy said.

"Two-cycle engines give a lot of power in a small, lightweight package, but they are inefficient in the way they use fuel," Murphy explained. "In a two-cycle engine, oil is mixed in with the gas for fuel, which leads to

added pollution when the mixture escapes through the combustion chamber without being burned out the exhaust pipe."

But two-cycles can also operate in any position and run at high speeds – 7,000 to 8,000 rpm, Murphy pointed out. Yet, he said, four-cycles, although they run a little slower – 4,000 rpm – can't operate at any angle and are



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a little bigger and heavier, run much more efficiently, releasing less emissions. Currently, engine manufacturers are focusing on improving both designs to create that perfect combination of low emissions and a lightweight, high-speed product.

HORSEPOWER. The first thing contractors look at when purchasing engines, according to Somich, is horsepower.

"You can never have too much horsepower," he said. "When given the choice between a 12-horsepower or 18-horsepower engine, 98 percent of the time contractors will choose the 18-horsepower engine. And there's not too much of a difference in cost as you step up from one horsepower to the next."

Of course, when it comes to lawn mowers, such as a typical walk-behind mower, an engine that is too large won't bolt on to the machine, but otherwise it's easy to apply more horsepower to a machine by buying a

(continued on page 68)

Exploring Electric Energy

Because 1,000 pounds of batteries can only last 80 miles before needing an eight-hour recharge, the viability of electric power in green industry equipment has been nil, according to Dana Lonn, director of advanced turf technology, The Toro Co., Minneapolis, Minn.

Looking for another electric power avenue to pursue, equipment manufacturers, such as The Toro Co., Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products, Racine, Wis., and Asea Brown Boveri, Norwalk, Conn., have partnered with Metallic Power, San Diego, Calif., which is introducing zinc/air fuel cells as another means of electric power. According to Metallic Power, the system consists of zinc/air fuel cells and a zinc regeneration/recycling machine. The fuel cell is similar to a battery but is refueled with zinc pellets rather than being electrically recharged. The zinc pellets are combined with oxygen from the air inside the cell, forming zinc oxide and releasing electricity.

A 4,000-watt zinc/air fuel cell produces power for three hours, Lonn said, and operates at about 5½ horsepower, yet provides the equivalent energy of a 20-horsepower engine.

And, like batteries, Lonn pointed out, zinc/air fuel cells are quieter and produce less heat and zero emissions, meeting current and upcoming California Air Resources Board and Environmental Protection Agency standards.

"Will electric power become commonly used in the green industry?" Lonn asked. "It's not an option with battery technology because there has been little progress. But with fuel cells there is more hope — a better chance. Although there are many technological hurdles we have to get past." — *Nicole Wisniewski*

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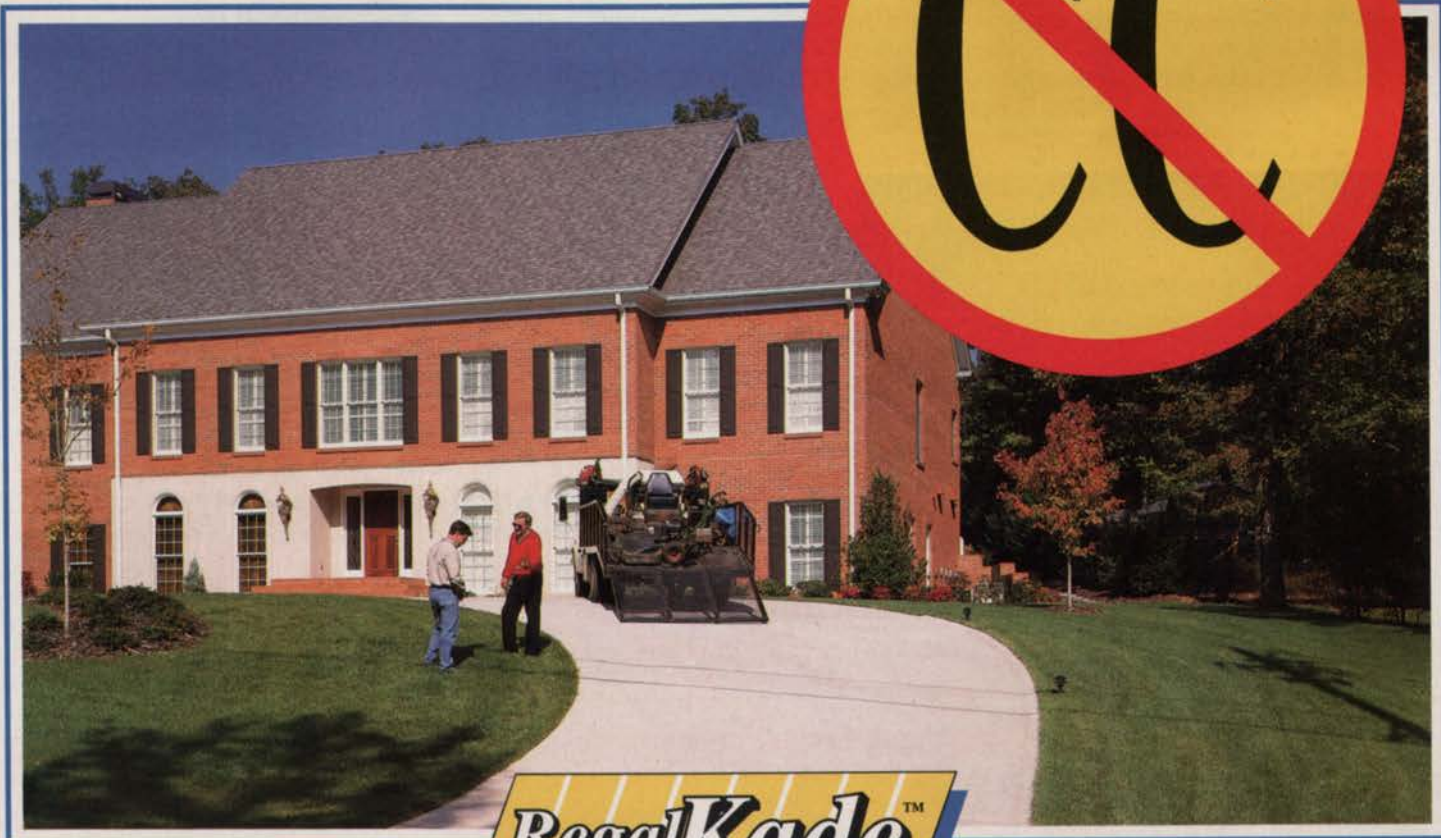
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engines

(continued from page 66)

bigger engine, Somich said. However, most engine manufacturers tend to disagree with the need for more horsepower.

"It's a total waste of money to get higher horsepower unless the original engine was underpowered," Murphy maintained.

Contractors should discard the urge to buy more horsepower and focus on sticking with the horsepower that the equipment originally came with when replacing engines.

"Contractors can overpower an engine to the point where they'll damage the machine. For example, on a zero-turn riding mower, you can overpower the hydraulic pump by applying too much horsepower and cause damage to the machine."

Besides, the greater the horsepower, the greater the cost of the engine, Ditter noted.

"Contractors want an engine with the power they need to do the job," he explained. "Contractors don't want to pay for what they don't need."

Contractors should discard the urge to buy more horsepower and focus on sticking with the horsepower that the equipment originally came with when replacing engines, Ditter said. This can prevent them from hurting their performance with too few horsepower or spending too much money and possibly damaging the machine with too much horsepower.

Other factors contractors have to worry about when replacing engines is whether the engine needs to be replaced with a short block, reworked or whether a whole new engine or new piece of machinery is needed, according to Cameron Litt, product man-

ager for twin-cylinder engines, Kohler Co.

This decision can be made based on the overall condition of the engine and machine, Blum pointed out.

"If there's less than half a season left in the piece of equipment, contractors are probably better off getting a whole new machine," he said, "rather than worry about a new engine."

RELATIONSHIPS. Contractors rely on local dealers to service their equipment.

"Contractors will do routine maintenance," Litt said, "but they usually hire a good mechanic or establish a good relationship with their dealer so they can count on service when they need it."

"Overall, contractors want engine performance without much downtime," Ditter added.

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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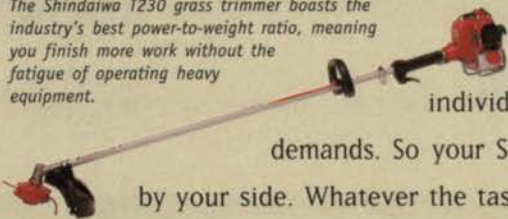
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By Jim
Huston



Tracking jobs by gross profit
margins or by man-hour costs
can help contractors identify
profitable job opportunities.

Photo: Grasshopper

Markets are dynamic. Markets are always changing due to the various forces, which influence them. Contractors tend not to realize or be aware of the subtle and not so subtle changing tides and currents beneath the seemingly tranquil surfaces of the markets in which they operate. The ebb and flow of market forces escape them. Profits and margins erode while market opportunities slip by. Like a blind sailor on the ocean, the chances of reaching port safely are slim at best.

Sailors have tools to help them navigate the waters upon which they sail. In like manner, there are objective, quantifiable reference points available for contractors to help them along their way if they know what to look for. But one must be trained in the art of observation.

Seasoned captains of the sea do not get that way by treading water. They get that way by spending a lot of time monitoring and studying the oceans upon which they sail. Before they become masters of the sea, they are first students of the sea and the forces that influence it. Contractors must do the same. They must know how to study their markets and the hidden signs contained therein. Fortunately, there are tools and training available to teach them how to do so. But these tools and methods must be studied and they must be applied. As contractors study their markets and the jobs being bid, they need to continually ask, "Can I play this game and win? Does this job or market adaptation add to my company's bottom line?"

CHARTING A COURSE. Adapting to the marketplace assumes certain prerequisites. The first prerequisite is that you have a clear vision of what to adapt to. You have a definite "port" in mind, so to speak. This leads to the second prerequisite. The destination must be one worth going to for you and your company. There must be a "payoff" for taking the trip. It might be increased or maintained market share. Or, it might be to realize increased margins due to expansion into a new market. Thirdly, you must have measuring devices and tools to help you stay on course and to navigate the waters safely as you attempt to reach your chosen port of destination.

(continued on page 74)

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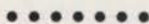
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pricing

(continued from page 70)

An irrigation contractor had a market opportunity to add a lawn maintenance division to his company. We ran the numbers. When we finished, I was convinced that this contractor knew clearly where he wanted to go, that there was a quantifiable



It is imperative that contractors be able to identify direct and indirect costs as well as understand their profit margins in the bidding process.



benefit to his company for doing so and that he would successfully reach his chosen destination. This contractor did his homework. Unfortunately, most don't because they do not know how.

Markets become predisposed. Even

though markets are dynamic, trends can usually be identified within them. One of the objectives of an owner and/or estimator and a good estimating system is to identify these trends. Once identified, they can sharpen your estimating skills. Market predisposition can be seen in certain indicators if observed closely. Unit prices and gross profit margins are two tools that can readily indicate market predisposition.

For instance, let's assume that the going price for installed brick pavers in the residential market in your part of the country is between \$8 to \$10 per square foot. If you tell your potential customer that you are going to charge \$15 per square foot, you had better have a good reason why or be a terrific salesperson. Otherwise, you might as well not waste your time giving that customer a quote for the job. On the other hand, if you can reduce

your costs and make an acceptable profit charging \$6 per square foot, why charge \$6 when the market will allow you to get \$8 or \$10. That's using market predisposition to your advantage.

A commercial landscape installation contractor in New England has tracked his gross profit margins (GPMs – gross profit margin equals net profit margin plus general and administrative overhead costs included in a bid. Put another way, GPM equals sales price minus direct costs) religiously for the last seven years. During the recession of the early 1990s, he knew that if his GPM was more than 18 percent on a job being competitively bid by other contractors that he would have no chance of getting the job. He might as well not waste his time bidding it.

However, he knew that if he was negotiating the job and that it was not being put out to competitive bid, he could put 22 to

(continued on page 76)

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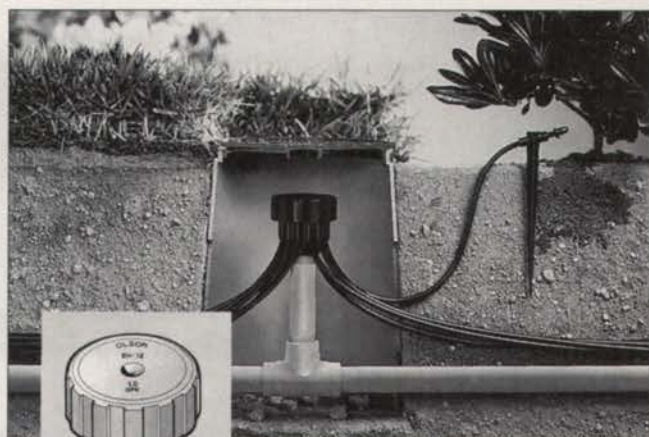
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pricing

(continued from page 74)

25 percent GPM on the job and still get it. Today, this contractor consistently puts 22 to 25 percent GPM on competitively bid jobs and 25 percent to 30 percent on negotiated ones because the market has recovered from the recession of a few years back. This contractor monitors his market by tracking GPM as it reacts to market forces. He then adapts his pricing accordingly.

MAINTENANCE TRENDS. The commercial lawn maintenance market displays some very interesting trends around the country. The primary indicator of its predisposition takes the format of a unit price. It is the man-hour rate. You determine the man-hour rate by dividing the billing price of a job by the total man-hours (including drive, load, unload time, etc.) required to perform it. This number averages \$22 to \$27 around the country. However, some markets realize \$30 to \$35 per man-hour. These markets are usually found in industrial parks near

major metropolitan areas. Certain cities in New England, California and pockets in the Midwest see these types of prices. However, the Southern California market sees its man-hour rate drop to the mid- to low teens (\$13 to \$16 per man-hour). In one area, rates of \$11 to \$12 per man-hour are not uncommon. This is understandable due to intense competition, low labor rates and the ability to spread overhead costs over a 12-month season rather than a nine-month one. GPMs in the lower man-hour markets usually ranges from 20 to 35 percent and from 35 to 45 percent in the higher ones.

Municipal lawn maintenance markets in Southern California have displayed some interesting trends over the last 10 years. At one time, the man-hour rates were consistently hitting the high teens to low 20s. Presently, they are in the low to mid teens. Gross profit margins have fallen as well. This once very lucrative market was realizing 30 to 40 percent GPMs. Now it is lucky

to see these margins hit the low to mid 20s.

Margins and rates have dropped partly due to the economic doldrums of the Southern California economy. However, municipalities have become much wiser in overseeing the contractors performing the work in the field. Partly due to budget constraints, quality control inspectors look for areas where contract specifications and standards are not being met. Deductions are then subtracted from the contractor's monthly billings.

One contractor recently found himself in a "catch-22." He saved a city more than \$100,000 on a rather large contract. To show its appreciation, the city took the \$100,000 savings and went out and hired another inspector to help oversee the contract, which upset the contractor. He worked to improve production, reduce margins, be more competitive, save the city money and keep one inspector happy. Now he had to

(continued on page 78)

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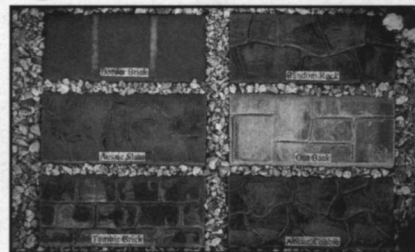
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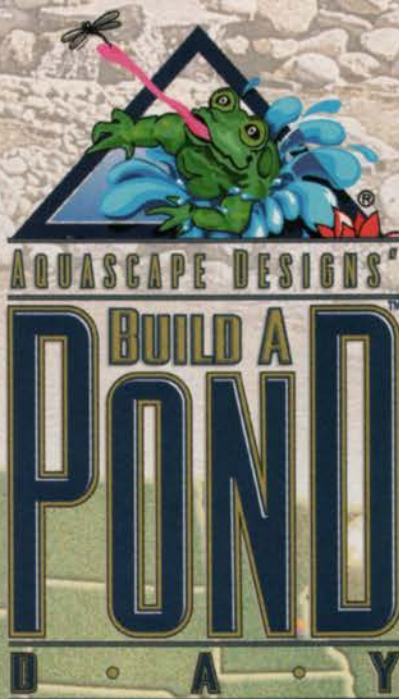
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pricing

(continued from page 76)

keep two inspectors off his back who were trying to save as much money as possible for the city, at his expense.

These are the types of situations and realities of business reflected in market forces that influence margins and drive prices up and down and to which the contractor must adapt daily.

I consistently see residential landscape installation work realizing 30 to 40 percent GPMs throughout North America. An East Coast contractor had an installation division, which did both commercial and residential work. However, profits were very slim at the end of the year. Upon reviewing several completed jobs, we found that the

GPM bid on these jobs was rarely more than 27 percent. This was OK for commercial work but it was too low for residential work.

The designer/estimator admitted that he could have raised the GPM on the residential bids 5 percent to 10 percent and still have won the jobs had he been aware of that market's predisposition and had he used an estimating system which clearly identified the GPM to him during the bidding process. He underbid his residential jobs and left money on the table because he did not pay attention to market forces and trends.

It is imperative that contractors be able to identify direct and indirect costs as well as profit margins in the bidding process. Doing so will help you identify the market trends mentioned above. It will also help you identify what I call a bidding envelope or range (e.g., 25 to 35 percent GPM) within which you can safely bid.

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Moving Prices Up

Business owners facing fierce competition can never predict whether a price increase will send an established client searching for a cheaper rate. Some owners have annual price increases and others base their increases on their costs. Bill Cox, president of Lawn Management Company, Houston, Texas, said he has had a lot of success with timing his price increases to coincide with a federal minimum wage increase or price increases in the oil market.

"It's just accepted then that everyone's prices are going up," he remarked about the effects of those economic influences. Cox emphasized that he keeps a good relationship with his 125 clients and lets them know of new prices well in advance through contacting them by telephone and by letter.

If a particular customer has a problem with the increase, Cox said, he tries to compromise.

USE READER SERVICE #70

also need to know how low you can go with the GPM and not hurt yourself. Looking at how high you can go is the easy part. If you are too high, the market will tell you to take your price and get lost. How low to bid is much more of a challenge. As a general rule, you want to bid above your break-even point, which is the total of your direct costs plus the general and administrative overhead to be recovered on a job. Rarely do you want to bid below the break-even profit on a job.

CONCLUSION. Adapting to the marketplace requires that you be able to measure it. It is necessary to have the right tools and methods in order to do so. Once you have the right tools and methodology, you can measure and adapt to just about any marketplace. However, the critical question to ask is, "Can you play this game and win? Does this job add to your bottom line and does it fit into your bidding envelope?"

Seasoned captains of the sea are not rudderless victims of the waves. They consistently reach their chosen destinations because they have mastered the tools of their trade and have adapted them to each course they navigate. Contractors who employ similar tactics not only have the ability to adapt more easily to their markets today, but they

ensure that they will be able to sail into the markets of tomorrow as seasoned profitable contractors. **LL**

The author is president of Smith Huston, Inc. which specializes in construction and services management consulting to the Green Industry. He can be reached at 800/451-5588.

THE ULTIMATE WHEELBARROW



"They'll say: 'The timing is not right for us.' So we'll wait six months or so before raising their price," he explained. "We realize some customers' budgets can't go up when we want the prices to go up."

With more than 1,000 clients, Gary Moss, president of Moss Landscaping, Houston, Texas, said he notifies his customers about 30 to 60 days before a scheduled price increase is going to take place. Moss echoed Cox in that he, too, negotiates his prices if a customer objects too strongly to the increase.

Each customer has an annual contract for services with the company and yearly price increases are based on that contract, Moss explained. Prices are based on the bottom line, and increases have generally ranged from about 5 to 10 percent each year. They are typically based on the higher workers' salaries and costs for supplies and equipment his company has to pay, he remarked, adding that he rarely offers customers these explanations for his price increases unless they want to know.

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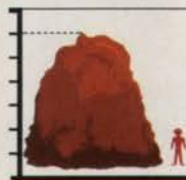
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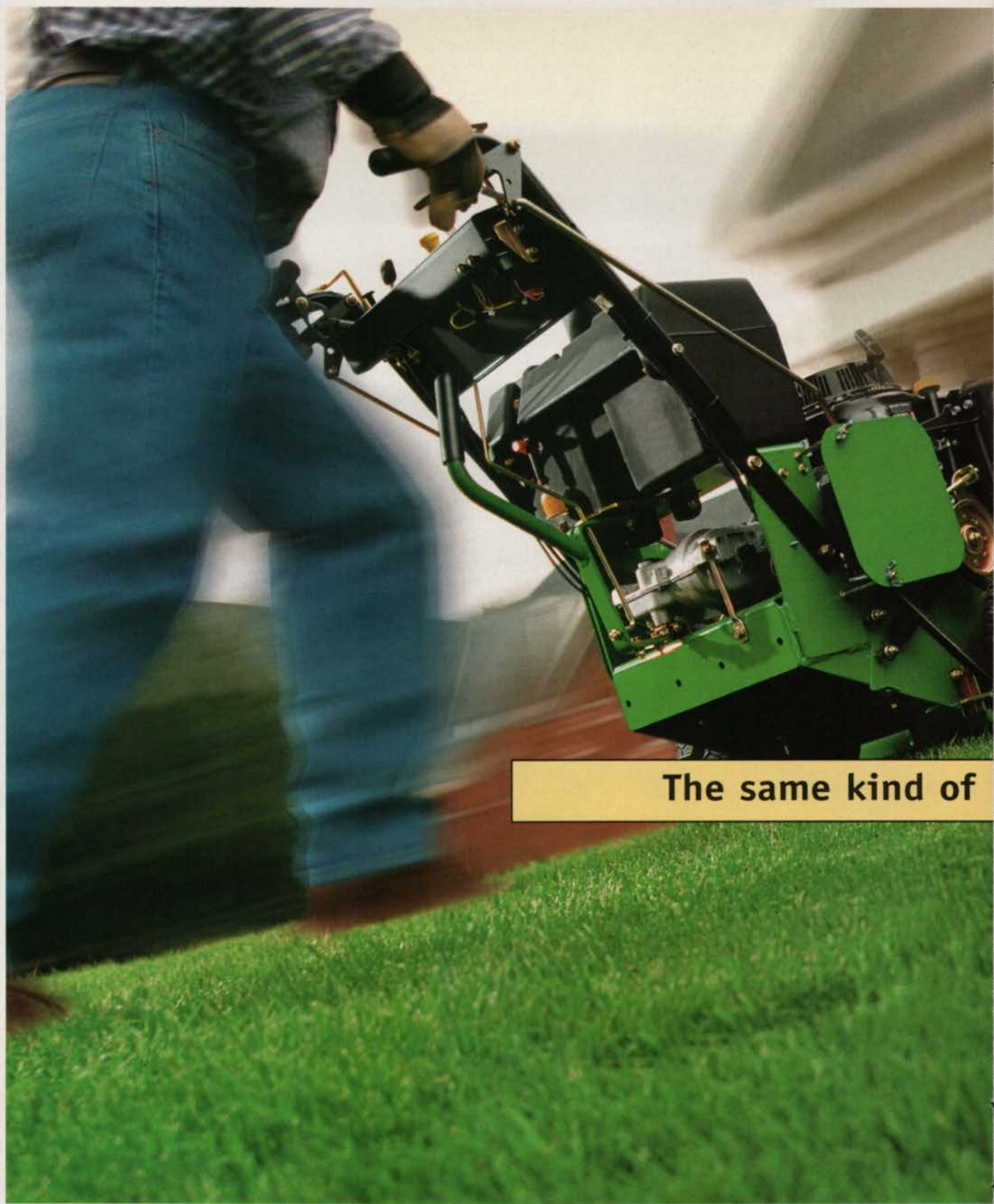
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A SIMPLE Plan

Preparation is the key to a successful landscape renovation.

*By Nicole
Wisniewski*

A contractor must incorporate an already existing array of plant materials into a landscape renovation project, while at the same time bringing other materials in to create a new look. Photos: Gachina Landscape Management



To make a home for Red River hogs, Congo buffaloes and turtles, Moore Landscapes had its hands full incorporating a jungle theme into the new African habitat section soon to open up at the Brookfield Zoo, Brookfield, Ill.

The zoo wanted to keep most of the existing 30-inch diameter, sensitive oak trees and ash trees in the area, while at the same time adding 20-inch diameter canopy trees, understory plant material and shrubs, noted Audrey Thompson, sales and marketing, Moore Landscapes, Glenview, Ill.

"After all, it has to look like an African jungle," Thompson said, pointing out some of the design challenges. "It's a trick getting around the already large trees to install additional trees with rootballs that are 100 inches wide. Also, we don't have full access to the zoo all of the time because it's open to the public daily. This project required a lot of preplanning."

Preparation is required before any landscape installation. But for a landscape renovation, a project that takes a little more thought and a lot more customer communication and sensitivity to existing plant material, planning is everything.

TIMING. With a landscape renovation, a landscape contractor doesn't start out with a blank canvas. Instead, there is an existing array of plant materials that need to be incorporated, preserved, supplemented or deleted from the landscape, while at the same time bringing other materials in to create a customer's desired landscape look.

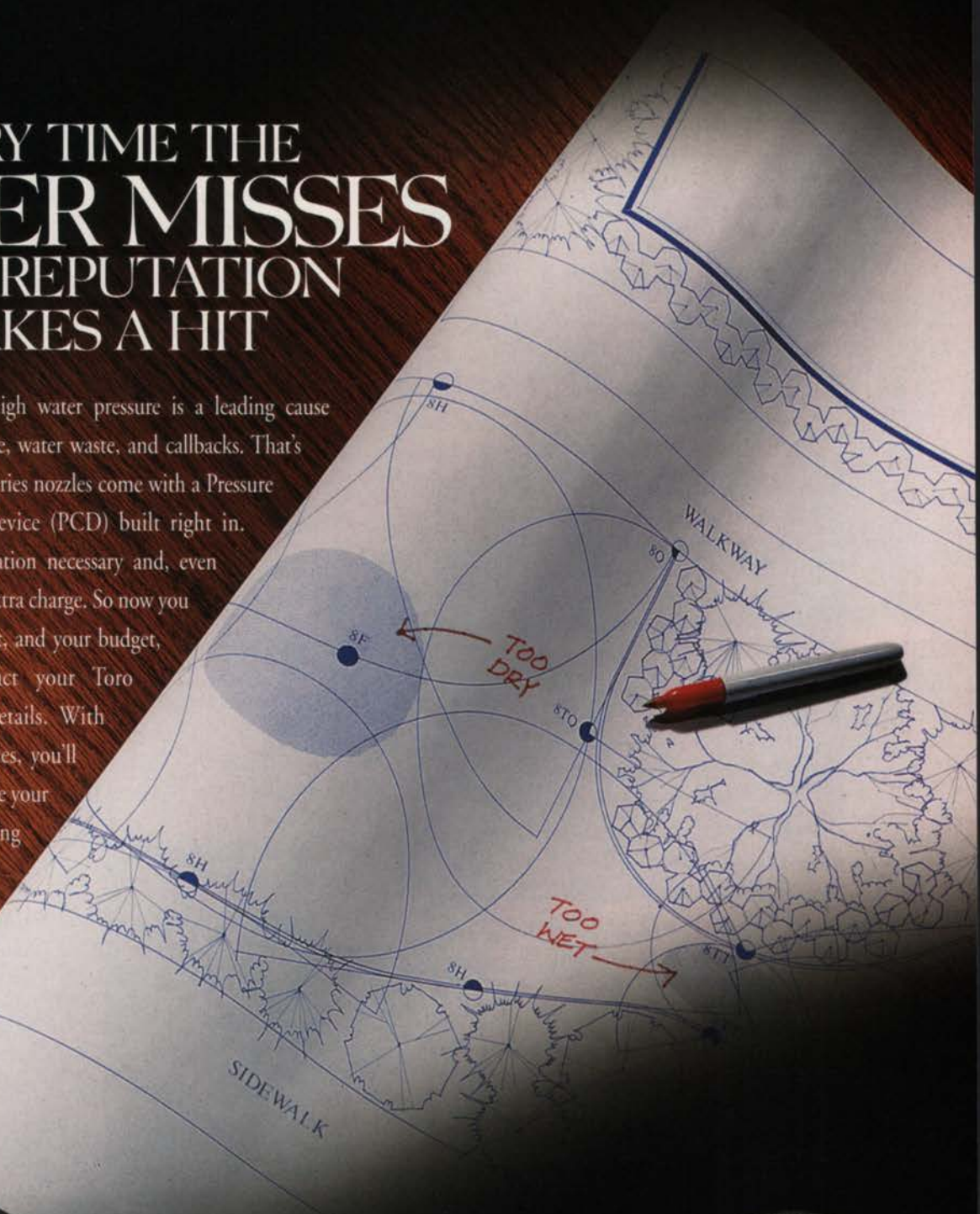
"Renovation is all about redoing the existing landscape to make the new fit in with the old," said Dee Sanders, enhancement department manager, Gachina Landscape Management, Menlo Park, Calif.

A landscape renovation is called for when plants have become old, overgrown and infested with diseases or pests—usually every seven to 10 years, according to Jody Gibson, operations

(continued on page 84)

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USE READER SERVICE #73

renovation

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Regardless of the money saved on plant materials for the customer, a landscape renovation usually costs about 25 percent more than a landscape installation because of the demolition involved.
Photos: Lease Landscaping



manager, N.L.C.I. Landscaping, Medina, Ohio.

"A landscape in need of renovation looks woody with material that has grown over home windows and gutters," Gibson described.

However, the true deciding factor, pointed out Kevin McHale, president, McHale & McHale Landscape Design, Upper Marlboro, Md., is how much maintenance the property has received since installation or its last landscape renovation.

"Rapidly growing shrubs, perennials and trees could become weed infested or overgrown based on whether they were taken care of with water and proper nutrients," McHale said. "If they weren't properly maintained, a landscape renovation could be needed after only two to three years. With proper maintenance, a landscape can last 10 to 12 years."

"Even with upkeep and maintenance, a 10- to 12-year-old landscape can need some renovation, depending on the original design," Sanders added.

And sometimes, customers ask for a landscape renovation just because their current landscape isn't pleasing anymore, according to Thompson.

"Many renovation projects involve adding a lot of desired perennial color," Thompson said. "Even commercial customers, who usually ask for annuals, are requesting perennial beds instead because it gives them the same amount of color for a lower cost."

To be worthwhile and profitable for landscape contractors, a landscape renovation project should cost customers approximately 10 to 20 percent of their home cost.

SELLING RENOVATION. A landscape renovation can be very extensive or very simple, according to Sanders. "It can range from a \$100 to a \$300,000 project," he said.

(continued on page 86)

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USE READER SERVICE #74

renovation

(continued from page 84)

"Even though sometimes you're saving money on plant materials, a landscape renovation costs about 25 percent more than a landscape installation because of the demolition involved," Gibson explained. "But you bring in 5 to 10 percent more profit because you put in more work."

To be worthwhile and profitable to a landscape contractor, a landscape renovation should cost customers 10 to 20 percent of the cost of their home, Gibson said.

"If they have a \$200,000 home, then the landscape renovation, ideally, should cost \$40,000," Gibson stated. "If it is only budgeted for \$10,000, we'll try and push it to \$20,000 so it's at least 10 percent. We can do this by suggesting additional landscaping, irrigation or paving work."

But cost can fluctuate based on the site, McHale warned.

"The cost and expected profit of a landscape renovation are site specific," McHale

(continued on page 88)

Clearing the Land

When trying to open up an area to make room for new plantings, steering clear of mature tree roots and valuable top soil nutrients can be tricky, especially when using machinery, such as a sod cutter, according to Kevin McHale, president, McHale & McHale Landscape Designs, Upper Marlboro, Md.

Instead, McHale suggested using a non-selective herbicide to clear out an area during a landscape renovation.

"If the area isn't too close to a tree's roots, we'll spray a non-selective herbicide and then till it in," McHale explained. "We'll do that on the first day of the project and then wait two days before we plant in that area again to

avoid residual effects from the herbicide."

A non-selective herbicide treatment can solve the problem of removing everything from an area without causing any major damage, especially in heavy weed areas when it is important to get rid of all of the material that grew in that area, added Audrey Thompson, sales & marketing, Moore Landscapes, Glenview, Ill.

"You can't just strip back the sod bed," Thompson pointed out, "and risk extra maintenance later on when weeds begin to grow in the new bed."

But instead of waiting two days after spraying an herbicide, Thompson waits seven to 10 days, the latter being the ideal.

"We only use a non-selective herbicide if we're not already ripping up the whole area and we need to make sure all of the material in that one section is cleared," Thompson said. —*Nicole Wisniewski*

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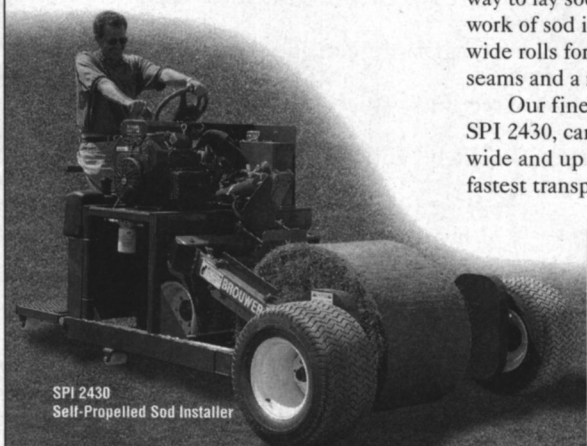
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(continued from page 86)

said. "Last summer, we did a \$600,000 renovation on a project that three years prior was just a \$20,000 installation."

Because of the extra planning involved and the extra cost associated with a landscape renovation, landscape contractors have different views on whether renovation is easier to sell to customers than landscape installation.

"A landscape renovation is more of a want vs. a need so I think landscape installations are much easier to sell," Gibson remarked.

"But the customer can see the improvement with a landscape renovation," Sanders countered. "And add-on sales, such as irrigation and installation, make landscape renovation a much easier sell."

Landscape renovations can be suggested by the customer or by the landscape contractor, Sanders said.

"Sometimes they inquire about renovation or sometimes we suggest it," he ex-

plained. "How renovation is sold depends on how much attention our customers are paying to their landscapes."

Before and after photographs are a key landscape renovation selling tool that Gibson doesn't leave the office without.

"Sometimes customers have to see it to believe it," he said.

COMMUNICATING CHANGES. A landscape renovation project is only successful when customers get exactly what they are expecting, Gibson asserted.

"You can't remove 20-foot trees and replace them with 3- to 4-foot material without letting the customer know what the expected visual is," Gibson said. "If we tear out a huge tree in front of the house, we have to think of everything, including the possibility of a faded spot left on the house from where the tree shaded it beforehand so the customers know what to expect and are prepared for it."

Communication with the customer is important during a renovation because each change can effect the look of the entire landscape, Thompson pointed out.

"You have to let the customer know exactly what's going to happen at each stage so they know that changing one thing may mean we have to change all of the other aspects of the landscape at the same time," Thompson said. "This is where planning is key again. With a renovation, a contractor can't discuss just one area. You have to look at the whole site as an overall plan."

There is also a difference between renovating a commercial landscape vs. a residential landscape, Thompson said.

"Usually, a commercial renovation is done on a larger scale and is easier to get access to," she said. "Renovation is also done with a more long-term viability in mind because of follow-up maintenance and higher impact with additional traffic on

(continued on page 90)



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renovation

(continued from page 88)

the property. On a residential renovation, there is more emotion attached to the plant material on the site and how the new plant material being installed will effect it.

"Renovation preparation also takes more time with a homeowner because there is more discussion involved beforehand," Sanders added.

INVOLVING THE TURF. Although turf, as long as it is planted in a well-maintained and aerated soil base, typically lasts up to 10 years, turf renovation is almost always necessary when a landscape renovation takes place, regardless of time, Thompson said.

"We always budget it in," she explained, "because there are always sections that need

The customer usually doesn't overreact to an additional cost for turf renovation as long as the cost is included in the landscape renovation budget beforehand.
— Gibson

to be cut out, replaced or re-sodded because they were disturbed during renovation, although we try to keep that to a minimum."

The customer usually doesn't overreact to an additional cost for turf renovation as long as the cost is included in the budget beforehand, Gibson said.

"We always put in 'X amount for turf repair costs,'" he noted, "just in case we need to bring a larger machine into the landscape that will disturb some of the turf."

Ways to avoid tearing up the turf include using different machinery that is less harmful to the turf, doing most of the work by hand or setting down plywood over certain areas of the turf before bringing machinery in.

"If we need to get a skid-steer loader in the yard, we'll put plywood across the area so that the machine's weight is distributed and doesn't make track marks in the yard or ruts from moving the machine back and forth," Gibson commented. "If we use plywood, the grass is just smashed a little and we can easily fluff that up with a leaf rake after we're finished."

Diane Lease, president, Lease Landscaping, Grand Rapids, Minn., uses a soft-tracked crawler instead of a skid-steer loader because it doesn't cause as much turf damage.

Minor turf damage, whether it's caused by renovation, disease or insects, can be repaired early on using a slitseeder, a machine that cuts grooves down into the soil and then drops the seeds in, making peat moss or straw unnecessary, according to Gibson. **!**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1998

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The T&O Service Tech magazine has continued to grow since its debut three years ago. As a result of that growth and the overwhelming positive feedback the magazine generates with each issue, its publication frequency will increase to bimonthly in 1999.

Beginning with our January/February issue, readers will receive T&O Service Tech magazine every other month.

"Our hats go off to our readers," revealed Cindy Lunde, group publisher of T&O Service Tech and Lawn & Landscape magazines. "When we introduced T&O Service Tech magazine to the industry in 1995, people scoffed at the notion of a publication written specifically for technicians, but our readers have made it clear to us that this is a valuable product that they can't get on in continue their own education and training. It is because of this reader support that we are increasing our publication schedule in 1999."

In addition, Cindy announced that Bob West, who has served as editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine since August 1997, (see T&O on page 4)

Technician of the Year

T&O Service Tech magazine is proud to present our Technician of the Year program, an award designed to honor the best and brightest professionals, dedication and community service in the green industry. Turn to page 12 to meet our first ever Technician of the Year. After reading about their accomplishments and commitment to the industry, nominate a technician for the 1999 Technician of the Year award on page 8.

community program suggests half-throttle blower use

WINGTON, PENN.—A program was initiated in a small Pennsylvania community that had reported that landscape contractors built their full throttle use of gas-powered blowers.

LINK Landscape Services and Neighbors & Kids, promotes the use of gas-powered blowers at half-throttle within 150 feet of residential areas. The program, after a one-year discovery process by its founders and Abington residents Mary and George Wrigley, is backed by three local landscape contractors, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and Kids, Lake Zurich, Ill.

The Wrigleys' and other community members' original intention was to ban the use of blowers in their community, according to Mary Wrigley, but (see LINK on page 7)

Mail for: T&O Enterprises, Inc. Dept. 494

T&O Reader Poll

Please take a moment to answer our T&O Service Tech Reader Poll. This issue we want to know whether or not you think green industry technicians are fairly paid for their work. To respond, copy this page and fax it with your answer to Nicole Wiatrowski at 216-961-0364, or e-mail your response to wiatrowski@tandoe.com.

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• *A few adjustments in lawn care programs may keep turf healthy during a drought period.*

• *By Angela Dyer*

A

lack of water during the hot summer months can be stressful to lawns and landscapes, but once this deficiency of moisture progresses to a drought state, certain measures have to be taken to protect a homeowner's turf.

Defined, a drought is the reduction of water or moisture availability on a temporary basis that is significant in relation to the norm. According to the University of California Extension, Riverside, Calif., a drought is considered agricultural in impact and is influenced by human activity, the presence of irrigation systems, moisture retention capacity of the soil and the timing of the rainfall.

There are many aspects to lawn care during a drought, including possible changes in mowing height and frequency, as well as irrigation, fertilization and pesticide application practices. Contractors should be aware of these and know what they should be doing or changing in terms of their lawn care program.

SMART SOLUTIONS. The obvious answer to combating drought stress is to apply water to lawns.

(continued on page 94)

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drought

(continued from page 92)

"Deep, infrequent watering to the depth of the root system is the ideal situation," noted Bruce Spangenberg, extension educator, horticulture at the University of Illinois Extension, Rockford, Ill. "This should be done when lawns show the first signs of drought stress, such as wilting, darkening color and footprints that remain after walking across the lawn."

Spangenberg added that once cool-season turfgrasses have gone dormant – stopped actively growing and turned off-color – it's best to leave them in that condition rather than watering heavily to cause the grass to green-up again.

"Breaking dormancy actually drains reserves within the plant, and if conditions remain dry and the weather is hot, the plant is not likely to replace those reserves," he commented. "In a typical summer, lawns go dormant and resume active growth when conditions improve. The downside of dormancy is the appearance of the lawn and the



A lawn should have deep and infrequent waterings to the depth of the root system as soon as the grass shows the first signs of drought stress, such as wilting.

Photo: University of Georgia

risk of problems arising on the inactive lawn, such as weed invasions."

Gil Landry, turfgrass management specialist at the University of Georgia, Athens, Ga., explained that good irrigation practices should be followed during a drought. "Irrigate long enough to saturate the soil," he stated. "Also, the customers should know what they should be doing for the lawn."

How much water is enough to keep the turf alive? Spangenberg recommended applying 1/4 to 1/2 inch every two to four weeks.

"This should be enough to maintain moisture in the stems and roots so the turf

can survive and resume growing when conditions improve," Spangenberg commented.

Dan Evans, president and owner of LaGrange Landscape, LaGrange, Ga., explained that most of the properties he services have some type of irrigation system so he doesn't have to worry too much about changing his mowing techniques during a drought.

"We go by the situation," Evans said. "If we get to a non-irrigated site and it doesn't need to be mowed, then we won't do anything to the property."

Agreeing with Evans, Bill Gordon, presi-

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dent of Signature Landscape, Olathe, Kan., remarked that for non-irrigated turfs, he might need to adjust his mowing schedule and only spot mow on properties.

"This might mean that I only cut grass in shaded areas, for example," Gordon added.

Similarly Michael Walter, vice president of construction at AAA Landscape, Tucson, Ariz., said there are a good deal of irrigation systems installed in the lawns in his area. Then, he typically just needs to adjust the irrigation schedule.

Gordon said that if fewer mowings are needed because of a drought, the schedule can always be shifted around. He may mow a few more times in the fall and spring in order to get all of the cuttings in.

"Contractors have to make sure they raise the mowing height on the mower," Landry echoed. "This gives the grass more leaf area and it helps produce a deeper rooting system."

Gordon added that he also cuts the grass

high during the summer. "We might set the deck at 3½ or 3¾ inches," he said.

A FORMULA FOR PROTECTION. In addition to changing water needs, drought-stressed turf may also have different fertilizer needs.

"Avoid applying excess nitrogen fertilizer during hot, dry conditions," Spangenberg suggested. "Grasses will respond by putting out excessive growth when they should be going dormant. Wait until the early September period for fertilizing most lawns, rather than summer. Then use fertilizers that provide adequate potassium in addition to nitrogen."

Landry explained a few pro-active steps that can be taken in terms of the fertilization program. This can only happen, however, if the contractor is fortunate enough to suspect drought conditions.

"When fertilizing prior to the stress period, contractors should put down additional potassium and reduce the nitrogen

rate by 25 to 50 percent," Landry noted. "This allows the plant to become hardened to drought conditions. Too much nitrogen will encourage leaf growth and result in a rapid decline when the drought occurs."

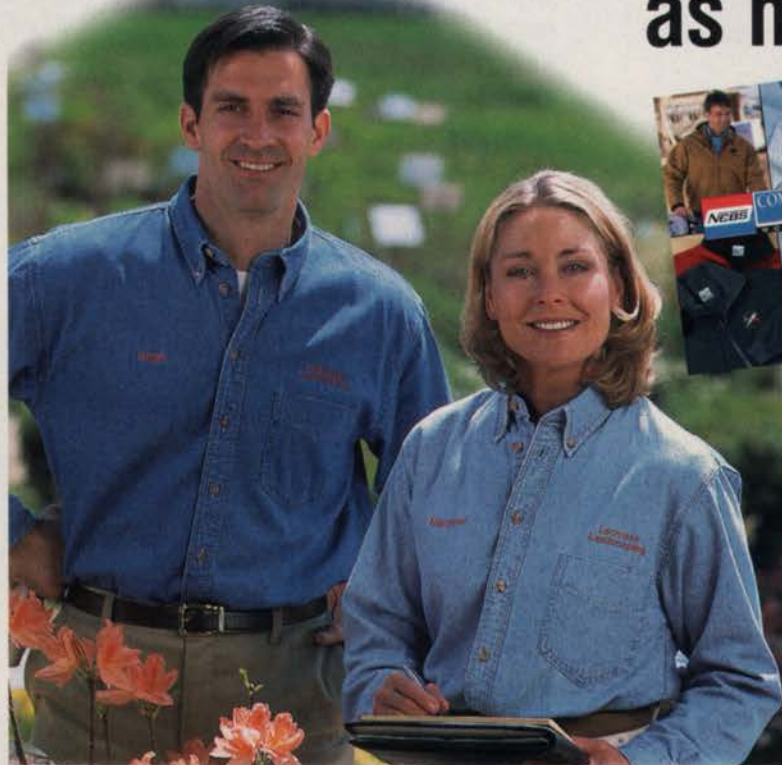
Making changes in weed control practices is a possibility for Evans during a drought. "In a drought, we might have to stop spraying because if anything is stressed, a weed control product will only cause added stress," he remarked.

Besides fertilizer adaptations, another tip can also help protect turf.

"Whenever possible, limit any type of traffic on the lawn," Spangenberg commented. "Drought stress will occur faster on turf stands with poor conditions underneath. Soil compaction, clay fill, high pH and poor conditions for root growth becomes evident under stress conditions."

WORKING ADJUSTMENTS. While there aren't many visible benefits of a drought, contrac-

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drought

tors may be able to generate some added revenue with re-installations or turf renovations.

Walter explained that his workload only becomes more maintenance intensive during a drought.

"An important maintenance key at this time is to check the irrigation system on a weekly basis," Walter noted.

Gordon, however, stressed that the possible revenue benefits do not make up for the tough conditions.

"Our main struggle during a drought is with the irrigation service," Gordon echoed. "When there is a drought, everyone is using their systems more and this can cause more service problems. We have to make sure all of the systems are working properly. Contractors also have to keep the system in balance. For example, don't drown the shrubs while keeping the turf alive." **U**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Management Methods

The University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences recommended several water management methods that should be practiced during a drought period.

PRACTICES FOR TURF:

- **Irrigation**—Irrigate turf only after about 30 percent of the turf starts to wilt. Signs of wilting include footprints that remain in the grass, a bluish-gray appearance and a large proportion of leaf blades that are folded in half length-wise.
- **Cutting height**—Raise the cutting height of turf. This promotes deeper rooting and maintains turf quality longer.
- **Mowing frequency**—Mow less frequently. Mowing stresses the grass plant by increasing respiration and reducing root growth.
- **Mower blade**—Use a sharp blade when mowing. This produces a cleaner cut that heals more quickly and loses less water.

PRACTICES FOR PLANTS, SHRUBS AND TREES:

- **Mulch**—Add mulch to beds to reduce evaporation from soil and to moderate soil temperature, reducing stress on roots.
- **Irrigation methods**—If possible, don't use overhead sprinklers for shrub and flower beds; hand irrigate, flood irrigate or use trickle irrigation. Greater water loss can occur with overhead irrigation.
- **Irrigation frequency**—Irrigate trees and shrubs after they start to wilt. Many trees and shrubs can survive without irrigation, providing they are well-established and irrigated prior to drought.
- **Shade**—Move container plants to shaded areas so their water needs will be reduced.

— *University of Florida*



Leader of the Pack

A major key to finding and hiring good employees is to build the company into an image that is attractive to prospective workers. Photo: Scott Sweiter

Being an effective leader is instrumental in the green industry professional's role as a manager.

By Angela Dyer

A

good leader is more than a boss who passes out a holiday bonus at the end of the year. To be an effective leader, you must demonstrate and model what you expect to see in others.

Bill Hoopes, director of training and development at Scott's Lawn Service, Marysville, Ohio, explained the principles of effective leadership in a seminar at the Lawn & Landscape School of Management. He illustrated these ideas by describing the requirements of effective leaders, who are involved in the recruiting and hiring phase and continue to lead as long as they are interacting with employees.

BE A FEARLESS LEADER. In order to practice effective leadership, there are six requirements that must be met, according to Hoopes:

- Have a leadership philosophy. This is an understanding of what drives human motivation.
 - Have an accurate assessment of the positive and negative elements of your working environment.
 - Identify a "leadership style" that will work now and in the future.
 - Have a commitment to balancing people and task relationships.
 - Use major power sources intelligently.
 - Have a detailed human resource strategy that impacts all daily operations.
- "If you are going to be an effective leader, you must understand human motivation," Hoopes stressed, commenting on the first requirement of effective leadership.

Human motivation is driven by basic needs described by psychologist Abraham Maslow as a "hierarchy of needs," according to Hoopes. This idea was later taken a step further and applied to the business world. This principle explained that there are two different management styles.

"A theory X manager believes that people don't want to work. They expect very little and they care very little," Hoopes said. "Theory Y managers believe that people like to work."

The theory X and Y idea later evolved into a theory called "situational leadership." According to Hoopes, this type of leadership states that sometimes a manager needs to be a theory X manager and sometimes he or she needs to be a theory Y manager, depend-



ing on the situation.

Hoopes explained that to be an effective manager in today's world, it is necessary to understand that neither of these styles, alone, will work in the present-day labor environment. Now, managers have to balance the two management styles in order to be effective leaders.

"Learn to balance your concern for people and tasks equally," Hoopes recommended. "The reason is that if you just worry about the numbers these days, your employees will quit."

MANAGEMENT POWER. Being a leader also means utilizing your management power effectively. According to Hoopes, there are three major sources of management power, which include personality, knowledge and role.

Personality is the sum and substance of your interaction and your impact on other people. This includes how managers communicate with others and also the degree to

which they respect people.

"Personality is the strongest and most important source of power," Hoopes noted. "This is the least used form of power, but it should be the most used."

Hoopes explained that knowledge is the second strongest form of management power. "Managers should use personality the most and back it up with knowledge," he said.

Role is the third most important because this is a manager's organizational power. "Role is the least effective but most often used form of power," Hoopes said. "In the world we live in, we can sometimes get tense and forget about personality. That's when we say, 'I'm the boss and this is the way it's going to be.' If you don't learn to use more than role power, sooner or later you'll be working alone. People don't have to work in a stressful environment these days."



THE HIRING FACTOR. Being an effective leader starts before the first employee is hired. Hoopes defined four activities that should help a leader locate, hire and keep that perfect employee:

- Discovering
- Attracting and hiring
- Training and nurturing
- Building mutual beneficial

relationships

"Discovering means that a manager never stops looking for the one right person," Hoopes remarked. "One way to do this is to have a recruiting message printed on business cards. Then when you're out and you see a hard worker who you think might like to switch fields, you can hand them your card and use it as a recruiting tool."

Hoopes encouraged leaders to be better people magnets. This is the basis for attracting and hiring. It's crucial to be clear about

(continued on page 100)

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(continued from page 98)

the business philosophy, the principles the company stands for, and then build the company's image so that it is attractive to someone looking for a job.

Training and nurturing, the third activity, means simply that if a worker is not competent and content he or she will quit. "To nurture means that you start with someone at the bottom and take them slowly to a level of proficiency," Hoopes added.

Lastly, managers need to build mutually beneficial relationships with their employees. According to Hoopes, people take jobs because it appears the job will give them what they want, but they stay only if the work environment ends up being what they thought it would be.

Hiring can be a difficult area of leadership but Hoopes offered this advice: "Never stop searching for the right employee." ■

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Motivation Accommodation

To be an effective leader is to understand human motivation. Motivation is based on specific needs, starting with the most basic needs for food, shelter and security, but it also includes more individual needs for fairness and a positive work environment. By understanding and using these motivators, it can be easier to manage employees and offer them benefits that may satisfy some of their needs, according to Bill Hoopes, director of training and development at Scott's Lawn Service, Marysville, Ohio.

A practical application of these principles in the workplace includes:

1. Providing a welcoming, comfortable start-up period
2. Giving the employee challenging, but not overwhelming tasks and goals
3. Making them feel accountable
4. Allowing them to feel pride
5. Rewarding employees
6. Treating them fairly and honestly
7. Giving them room and opportunity to grow

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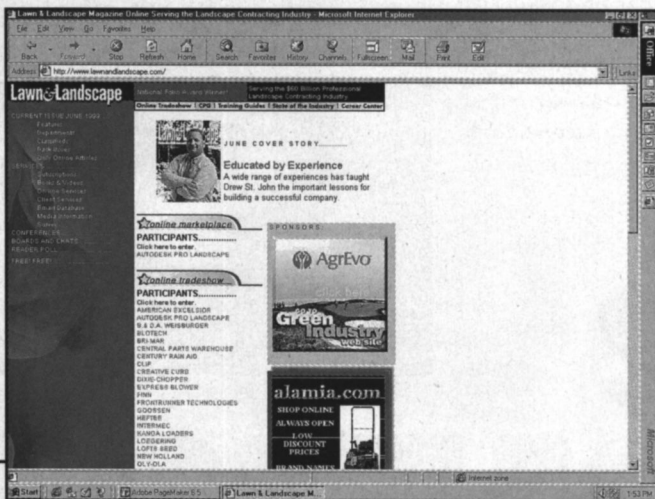
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hen a landscape or lawn care contractor gets started in the landscape industry, the idea of finding and defining the type of insurance coverage needed can be daunting. And, as important as insurance is to the contractors, finding useful "non-commercial" information on basic coverage may not be as easy as you think.

Taking that into consideration, *Lawn & Landscape* presents this, part one in a three-part series, to sort through the details of insurance.

THE BASICS. Hindsight, as they say, is 20/20, but contractors that can pro-actively prepare for risks their business may face can save themselves from damaging costs and the type of recovery red tape that has an adverse effect on the bottom line.

Once contractors have a good idea of the risks facing their company, they can decide how much of that uncertainty they are willing to take on and how much they will hold a prospective insurance company accountable for. In essence, insurance allows companies to pass the risk of financial uncertainty to someone else for a defined premium. The risk the contractor retains is the deductible, and the risk the insurance company assumes, most often, is the limit of the liability above the deductible. Choose a higher deductible and you retain more risk with a lower premium. Conversely, the lower the deductible, the higher the premium.

A good idea before getting started is to create a list of the following information to take to an agent for an insurance search: any current business insurance policies (if applicable); updated payroll and sales records; current profit and loss sales records; loss information from the current year and three years prior; OSHA log (if applicable); current listing of vehicles, safety programs, procedures and safety meeting records; and general information on the company.

WHY INSURANCE? Why do companies need insurance? This might seem like an obvious query, but it's a good place to start.

Gregory Botson, president of Botson-Skuggen Insurance, Avon, Ohio, laid the answer out in black and white: "Prevent being sued and not having financial responsibilities. If contractors

Keeping insurance updated regularly is critical to make sure that all equipment is covered even as a company continues to grow. Photo: John Roberts

Part 1 of 3:

Understanding insurance can be a challenge.

By Will Nepper



Making

Sense

OF

Insurance

Basic Insurance Terms

AGENT— The negotiating representative of the insurer, servicing or effecting insurance contracts.

BLANKET COVERAGE— A policy that covers a stated location and any number of other unstated or nonscheduled locations as well.

BROKER— A solicitor of insurance who does not represent insurance companies as an agent, but instead places orders for coverage with companies designated by the insured or with companies of his own choosing.

CARRIER— The company that provides the insurance.

CLAIM— A demand for payment under an insurance contract or bond. Also, the estimated or actual amount of loss.

COVERAGE— A guarantee against specific losses provided under the terms of an insurance policy.

EXPOSURE— The state of being subject to the possibility of loss or the extent of risk.

POLICYHOLDER— The entity in whose name the insurance policy is written.

RATE— The cost of insurance per unit used as a means or base for the determination of premiums.

RISK— A person or thing insured.

— *Courtesy of CNA Commercial Insurance, Chicago, Ill.*

don't have insurance and they get sued, it's coming out of their business."

Taking an "it won't happen to me" approach is a dangerous attitude when dealing with insurance.

"There is more litigation going on than ever before. Consumers of all businesses have an entitlement mentality, which basically means — 'If something goes wrong, it's not my fault. Who's going to pay?'" explained Michael Weisburger, president of B. & D.A. Weisburger Insurance, White Plains, N.Y.

INDUSTRY SPECIFIC. There are distinctions to be made between lawn care companies and landscape contractors concerning the questions to ask a potential insurance provider or broker. But, according to Mike

Lezynski, vice president of commercial lines with Acordia East, Morristown, N.J., there are some basic considerations that apply to both businesses.

"Both types of businesses require property and equipment coverage, general liability, automobile, workers' compensation and excess liability or umbrella liability," Lezynski explained.

Weisburger added that there are potential employer practice exposures applying to both types of business. He said contractors should consider things like sexual harassment and wrongful termination when writing their policy.

Where business specific exposures and risks are concerned, Botson explained some considerations exclusive to landscape contractors.

"The extent of a policy depends on the size of the business," he said. "The three basic types of coverage are commercial vehicle insurance, general liability insurance and coverage for tools and equipment."

"If a contractor is putting in trees, plants and shrubs, he or she needs installation coverage," said Lezynski. "If it's strictly a maintenance company, its general liability exposure is minimal. But if it is doing a lot of landscape construction work, it is doing work that will impact the terrain, and this could impact the stability of a house that sits close by. So contractors have a little bit more liability there, and I would council that company accordingly."

Contractors that have architects or engineers on staff doing design work for themselves or other contractors should have professional liability coverage, according to Mike Prokop, vice president of marketing, CNA Commercial Insurance, Chicago, Ill.

When constructing a policy for a lawn care company, contractors are, in many cases, bringing pesticide products into the equation, and this will have a significant impact on the type of coverage contractors seek.



CE

"The exposures lawn care contractors would be most concerned about, other than standard insurance, would be ones protecting the contractor for issues involving pollution, environmental clean up or relating to the equipment," Weisburger explained.

"Companies that are state certified for fertilization or herbicide and pesticide use should have a specific endorsement or coverage for the use of pesticide," Botson said.

Weisburger noted there is also a distinction between companies using restricted use pesticides vs. non-restricted pesticides.

"It appears that many of the lawn care

(continued from page 102)

operators still are not using restricted use pesticides," Weisburger remarked. "Therefore, it's all over-the-counter products they are using, and they feel that there is a significantly lower hazard or risk. I'm not sure that I agree with that in light of consumer awareness today."

Lezynski believes that companies also need pollution coverage for their chemicals while in transit and during application.

"If a truck was ever involved in an accident and some of the pesticides got on the ground, the company needs to clean them up," Lezynski said. "If the pesticides get into the stream or water flow, then you have a bigger problem. The policy definitely needs to consider pollution liabilities."

"There are three types of pollution coverage overall," added Prokop. "In addition to pollution insurance for transporting pesticides, contractors should have coverage for any storage facilities they have on their property that contain pesticides and for coverage at the job site in case any of the pesticides end up in the water system."

CONSIDERING SEASONALITY. Of course, not all green industry companies are doing business in the southern portion of the country, and therefore many do not serve customers year round. This might seem to pose a coverage dilemma, but the consensus seems to be that insurance coverage should extend through the year, no matter how many months a business is out of season.

"Companies will not write a policy just for the couple of months that the business is in season," Botson noted. "A company should have coverage for all 12 months."

"There is a basic level of coverage required all year long for a business because you never know when you are going to be sued," Weisburger explained. "You don't know when the claim is going to arise."

Lezynski added that even when a company is covered year round, the seasonal specifications of the business could still have an effect on insurance.

"The key coverage, such as general liability and workers' compensation, are rated according to the company's payroll," Lezynski said. "The premium is determined by what the payroll is. So, in a sense, those policies quickly respond to the seasonality of the business."

How Much is Enough?

Once contractors understand exposures and can intelligently deduce what needs to be covered and when to should buy coverage the next logical question is how much insurance should they buy?

"Get advice from the broker to determine the amount of coverage," Lezynski advised. "A contractor just starting in the business is not going to know much about insurance. They are going to need to rely on someone who can properly advise them on how much coverage they need and what coverage they need."

Prokop agreed on the importance of the independent agent who sells the insurance.

"The agents get their commissions from the insurance companies, and it is the agent's job to evaluate the needs of their clients and give them good advice regarding what coverage they need based on their specific operations," Prokop explained. "Companies should probably be in contact with their agent on a quarterly basis to update their coverage for equipment purchases or losses and any changes in operations. Making sure this communication happens is the agent's job, but it's the contractor's responsibility because they are the ones ultimately responsible if a problem arises."

"In our experience, 95 percent or more of our insured clients are buying at least \$500,000 in liability coverage, and the majority are buying \$1 million or more," observed Weisburger.

Botson pointed out that the size of the company should, at least partially, dictate the amount of coverage that would work best for it.

"If the company is brought into a lawsuit, how much does it have at stake financially? Look at whether or not you are dealing with large jobs from corporations vs. working for individuals. If someone gets hurt or a building burns down, there will be a larger claim with a corporation as a client than with an individual," Botson said.

"The amount of coverage companies need depends on exactly what the company is doing and its revenues," Lezynski explains. "But no company should go without a minimum of a \$1 million umbrella limit, in addition to the other liability limits."

Prokop said a rough rule of thumb is that a company's insurance generally costs between 3 and 5 percent of its annual gross sales, although he quickly pointed out that a number of variables can influence that.

"Companies with higher or lower loss histories than normal would obviously see costs go up or down accordingly," he noted. — *Will Nepper*

However, if a company is seasonal in nature, there are things to consider that may lighten the load when money is tight.

"With respect to automobile coverage," Lezynski commented, "one way that companies can reduce their insurance costs is to specifically take those vehicles off of the road and turn in their license plates for a couple of months. That's probably not something that a lot of companies will do, but they can delete auto coverage for vehicles if the license plates are turned in during off

season. But you can't just request insurance companies to eliminate those vehicles for a three- or four-month period."

Lezynski said he doesn't believe the industry is as seasonal as it once was, pointing to increases in the popularity of services like snow removal and Christmas decoration installation. But he suggested businesses that remain seasonal should consider the times of year they are making payments on their coverage.

"An insurance program starts out the first

day a company gets into business. That's the effective date of coverage. If a company chose a bad day to get into business, it might have a renewal that is at a time of year when it doesn't have revenue coming in," Lezynski explained. "It is important to recognize you can move the insurance renewal dates to a time when there is more money coming in so you're in a better position to pay the premium.

"Companies can also structure payment terms to mirror the seasonality," Lezynski continued. "You don't want to pay for insurance when you don't have money coming in, so why not pay it all in the months that you do have money coming in?"

CHOOSING A PROVIDER. Understandably, insurance companies want your business. But if you know how to shop you can save yourself headaches by selecting a provider best equipped to adhere to your needs.

A good place to begin, according to

Weisburger, is trade magazines.

"See who advertises in trade magazines and speak to those companies," he advised. "If those companies can't help you because you're too small or you're part time, then they should be in a position to refer you to people who can."

Weisburger also suggested looking for insurance providers who are committed to the industry. He cited trade shows as a good place to find visible industry providers.

"A provider needs to know the exposures and be able to talk the language of a lawn care operator or a landscape contractor," he explained.

Once you have found someone who works within the industry, Botson advised that you check their credentials.

"Look at how many landscape contractors they insure and how long they have been working with contractors in general," he said. "A lot of the same contractors have the same exposures. The more professional

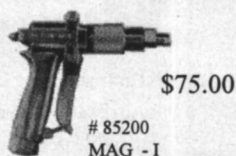
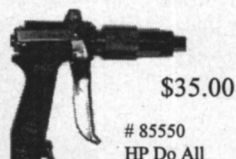
designations an insurance company has, the better educated it will be."

According to Lezynski, checking out an insurance broker's claim service capacity is also a good idea.

"Claim service is critical," he said. "Find out if that company has a claim department in-house. If it is only relying on the insurance company to administer claims, that is not good. It should have a claim department that will advocate a client's position."

"Work with an insurance broker or company that understands your business and your risks," Weisburger adds. "Choose an insurance company that is financially strong. Don't choose your insurance company on price alone. There needs to be a combination of quality coverage, competitive price and working with folks that know your business." **LL**

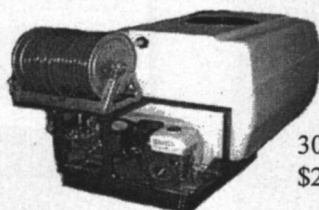
The author is Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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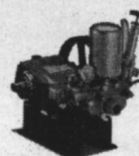
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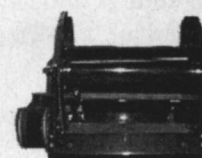
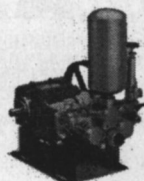
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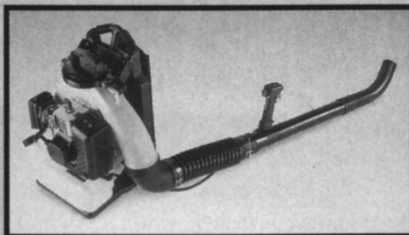
NEW PRODUCTS

Ecologic RainBrain Rain Sensor

- Turns off automated systems in the event of rain or freezing temperatures
- Contains fiber disks encased in a plastic container that swell when wet, depressing a switch after significant rainfall
- Wired to the common wire of the sprinkler system, the sensor then disables normal sprinkler operation until the disks dry enough to release pressure on the switch

McCullough Backpack Blower

- Model BP4300
- Gas-powered
- Features a 43cc Mitsubishi Industrial engine capable of moving 644 cubic feet per minute



- For fast clean-ups
 - Part of the ProMac line of outdoor power equipment
- Circle 201 on reader service card**

Gehl AVANTAGE Mini Skid-Steer Loader

- Choose from different skid-steer or articulated-steering styles
 - Machine comes as narrow as 32 inches
 - 4-wheel drive
 - Available with 14-hp diesel, 20-hp gas or 20-hp diesel engines
 - Flat-faced dripless auxiliary hydraulic couplers and a quick-attach system
 - Attachments include buckets, pallet forks, earth augers, trenchers, hydraulic hammers, mower decks and
- Circle 203 on reader service card**

Woods M-Series Mow'n Machine

- Available in two models: the M2250, featuring a 22-hp engine and 50-inch deck, and the M2560, with a 25-hp engine and a 60-inch deck
- Adjustable suspension seat
- Ergonomically designed single-handed steering
- Extended-life spindles guaranteed not to need replacement for two years
- Equipped with Tungsten carbide-coated blades

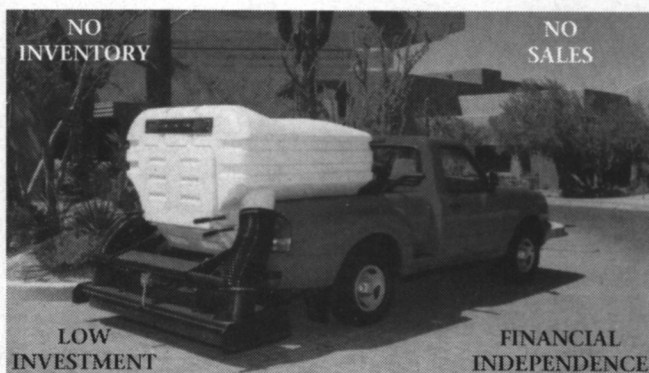
Textron Bob-Cat Midsize Mowers

- Includes gear drive, hydrostatic drive and variable speed mowers with



- Kohler engines
 - 9-gallon fuel capacity
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- Range of tools include right side dump buckets, angle brooms, a pick-up sweeper unit and 51-inch-wide Class II rated pallet forks with 44-inch long tines for compact wheel loaders
- All buckets accept Ground Engaging Tool (GET) options, including seven bolt-on teeth or a one-piece bolt-on cutting edge
- Designed to fit Caterpillar's QuickLock

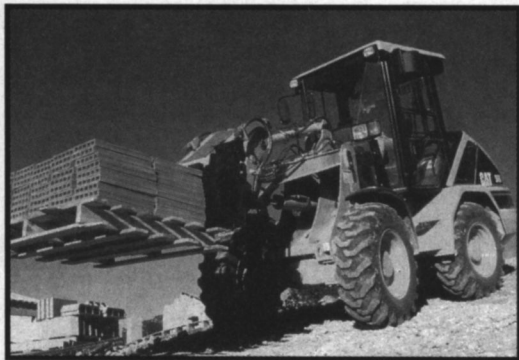
LESCO Viper

- Mid-mount, zero-turning radius mower
- A compact 78-inch package
- Powered by the 23-hp Kawasaki twin-cylinder engine
- Includes a front axle
- Comes in a choice of 54-inch or 60-inch anti-scalping floating formed deck
- Single lever cutting height adjustment from 1.5 inches to 5.5 inches
- Twin 5-gallon gas tanks
- Large rear drive tires
- Provides a top forward speed of 8.6 mph and reverse of 4.3 mph



Circle 205 on reader service card

- hydraulic coupler for tool changes
- A full line of buckets for narrow trenching in tight quarters, truck loading, general excavating, trenching, slope-cutting, grading and finishing work are available for the mini hydraulic excavators
 - All tools can be operated with biodegradable oils and are equipped with Caterpillar XT hoses
- Circle 206 on reader service card



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- Hydraulically driven
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- 2-D/3-D application for

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- Allows the user to place trees, shrubs and hedgerows
- Use existing plants or new plants and assign prices

- Quote menu calculates volumes of planting areas in cubic yards based on the supplied depth

Circle 208 on reader service card

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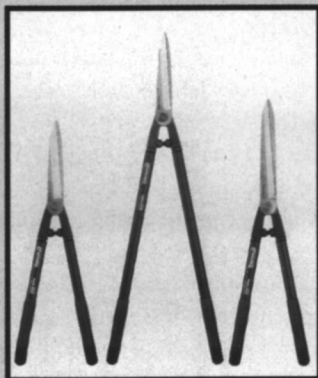
- Landscape fabric that retains warmth and moisture and acts as an insect barrier
- Keeps soil and air temperatures underneath 3 to 7 degrees Fahrenheit higher
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- 0.6 ounces per square yard
- 100 percent polyester, spunbonded fabric
- Porous enough to allow sunlight, air and water to pass through

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Corona Hedge Shears

- AH 6900 Professional Series
- Available in three models: 10½-inch tapered shear, 8½-inch serrated shear and an 8½-inch serrated shear with extra-long handles
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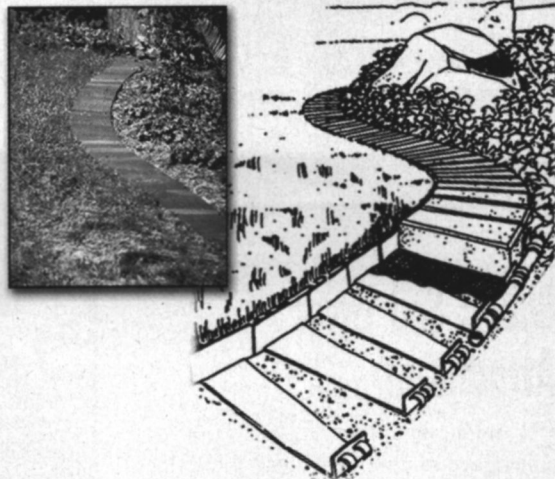
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15	39	63	87	111	135	159	183	207	231	255
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18	42	66	90	114	138	162	186	210	234	258
19	43	67	91	115	139	163	187	211	235	259
20	44	68	92	116	140	164	188	212	236	260
21	45	69	93	117	141	165	189	213	237	261
22	46	70	94	118	142	166	190	214	238	262
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- Circle 211 on reader service card**

Featherlite Trailer

- Standard model trailer
- The 4926 features an all aluminum frame
- Has a 3/4-inch plywood floor
- Deluxe camper door
- Cable-assist rear ramp
- An aerodyne nose provides for easy towing and increased fuel mileage

Circle 212 on reader service card

Triton SL8 Trailer

- For side loading and unloading of equipment
- All aluminum design
- Removable back rail
- 80-inch width for towing visibility
- Quick release pins on ramps
- EZ-Lube grease system
- Four-cord rubber torsion axle

Circle 213 on reader service card

PROLAWN EAGLE Spray Boom

- Aerodynamic drift control
- Attachment to both riding and walk-behind lawn care equipment
- Low volume spray
- Comes with non-corrosive shrouds

Circle 214 on reader service card

Exmark Lazer Z EFI

- Electronic fuel injection mower
- Features an Electronic Control Unit (ECU)
- No-choke start

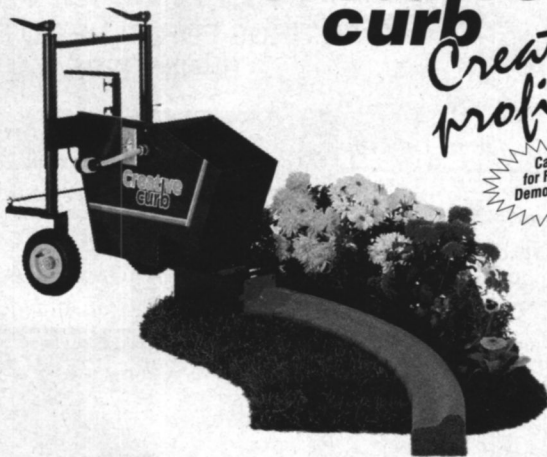
- 26-hp mower has reduced emissions
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USE READER SERVICE #96

USE READER SERVICE #97

NEW PRODUCTS

Rain Bird Landscape Dripline

- An addition to the Xerigation family of low-volume drip irrigation equipment
- For irrigating densely-planted, non-grass areas and shrub rows
- Dripline constructed with

- a new tubing design for clog-resistance
- Patented Advanced Drip Inline technology with a cylindrical design that creates a greater filtration surface area, more consistent flow, clog-resistance and allows the tubing to operate under higher pressures
 - Choice of 12-, 18- and 24-

- inch emitter spacing and 100- or 500-foot coil lengths
- Pressure range of 8 to 60 psi
 - Dripline uses 16mm insert fittings and 600 series compression fittings
 - Emitters are welded securely to the inside of the tubing
 - Available with a choice of 0.6 or 0.9 gph flows
- Circle 216 on reader service card**

Hoffco Earth Drill

- Model PH490E
 - Equipped with a 49.2 cc, 2-hp Tecumseh engine
 - Meets CARB and EPA requirements
 - 18:1 ratio power train
 - Equipped with heavy-duty ball bearings at input and output load points and needle bearings at intermediate load points
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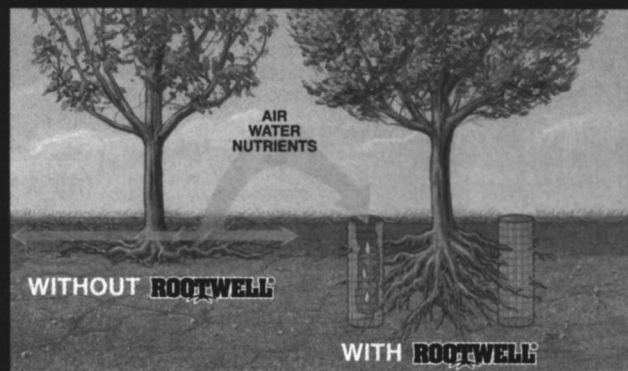


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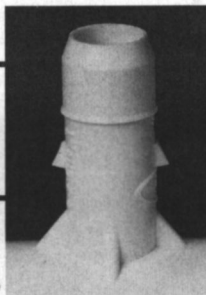
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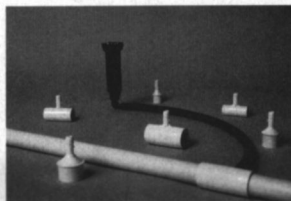
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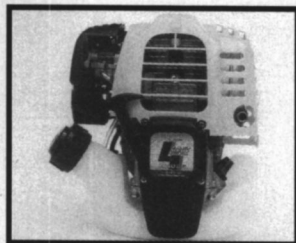
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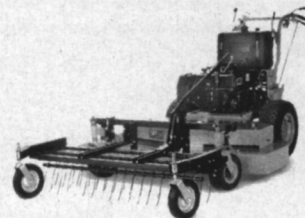
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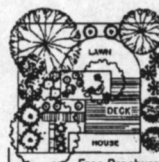
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Minimum annual salary is \$34,200. Excellent benefits package. Review of applications begins July 15, 1999. Send cover letter, resume, and list of three references to CMSU, ADM 190, Warrensburg, MO 64093. FAX: 660/543-4200 AA/EEO/ADA.

LAWN CARE MANAGER

EPM, Inc., an established 20-year lawn care company serving Raleigh, N.C., is growing rapidly. We need experienced lawn care professionals for leadership positions. Compensation package includes negotiable salary, company vehicle, profit sharing, stock options, and four weeks paid vacation. Interested professionals should fax their resume to 919/467-5335, or mail to EPM, Inc., 240 James Jackson Ave., Cary, NC 27513, Attn: Craig Imber.

(continued from page 36)

REGIONAL OPERATIONS MANAGER



REGIONAL MANAGER CALIFORNIA BASED INTERIOR/EXTERIOR LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Dallas-based MALLSCAPES is seeking qualified individual for regional operations manager to be based in Southern California. College degreed. California licensed pesticide applicator. Oversee managers located in California, Las Vegas, NV and Tucson, AZ. Travel required approximately 60 percent of the time. Must be willing to commit to travel. Experience in exterior and interior preferred but not required. Candidate will be someone who has been in industry at least five years and ready for additional challenges. Installations. Seasonal Color. Interior/Exterior Maintenance. Good people skills. Contact: John Rowland, President, MALLSCAPES, INC., 10580 Newkirk St., Suite 304, Dallas, TX 75220. Fax: 972-401-3355. Phone: 800-875-6255. E-mail jnrow@worldnet.att.net Looking to fill position immediately.

LANDSCAPE OPPORTUNITIES

Heyser Landscaping, Inc., a Division of Omni Facility Resources, Inc., the fastest growing Service Company in the industry, has career opportunities in the following positions.

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER

As manager of this region, we are seeking a goal-oriented individual in sales for commercial grounds maintenance and landscaping clientele. Additional responsibilities will include, but are not limited to marketing, contract execution, plus quality control. Qualified candidates should possess a minimum of two years experience in the landscape industry, along with strong interpersonal communication, and organizational skills.

LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION OPERATIONS MANAGER

As manager of this division your responsibilities will include, but are not limited to, scheduling crews and equipment, ordering plant material, and interfacing with landscape architects and clients. Qualified candidates should be self-motivated with a minimum of two years experience in all phases of exterior landscape construction. In addition, a strong commitment to quality, with the desire to join a fast growing commercial landscaping company.

Salary commensurate with experience, plus bonus, plus vehicle, along with a full corporate benefits package. Please forward resume to: Heyser Landscaping, Inc., 400 N. Park Ave., Norristown, PA 19403, fax 610/630-1288, or phone 610/539-6090 Attn: HR Director.

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Positions Available:

*Operations Manager - Landscape Designer -
Landscape Sales Staff - Crew Foreman*

OPERATIONS MANAGER

\$8 million S.F. Bay Area Plant Service Company has an immediate opening for an Operations Manager for Landscape Division Branch Offices: San Francisco, Sacramento, and Mt. View. Candidate must have three to five years of hands-on field experience as supervisor, able to manage route crews and substitutes. Troubleshoot complete range of commercial maintenance activity. Budgeting, quality control, training, safety, and bottom line. We offer generous salary and all fringe benefits, plus ESOP retirement. Mail, fax or e-mail resume to:

Decorative Plant Service, Inc.
1150 Phelps Street, San Francisco, CA 94124
Attn: Dena Ramos, HR Manager
Fax: 415/826-2157 E-mail: dena@decorative.com

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machine, then we have someone else's product we can push. Plus, carrying multiple lines lets us give contractors options as to what machine makes the most sense for them to use."

But manufacturers pushing dealers to purchase more equipment boosts dealers' overhead costs and simultaneously increases the pressure on them to sell more equipment at a profitable price.

"Manufacturers want a bigger piece of the pie, which means we buy more and more equipment and carry more and more interest costs on unsold equipment," Weingartz explained.

And while the consolidation of manufacturers can help dealers by bringing improved products to the market, it can also threaten dealers' ability to carry certain lines of equipment.

"I think the consolidation of manufacturers is good for the industry because it often combines engineering talent with increased capital resources, but it can be scary for dealers because we can end up being left without a product line," he said. "It's also scary to think about consumer manufacturers buying commercial equipment companies, because the two businesses are entirely different and need to be run by people who understand what the commercial contractor needs."

As a result of the softer market for consumer equipment discussed earlier, Weingartz noted that he has observed some equipment manufacturers increase their focus on commercial equipment, which has led to dramatic improvements in equipment over the last 10 years.

"There aren't nearly as many problems with new machines today as there were 10 years ago when we used to see new machines back in the shop in their first year of use all of the time," Weingartz recalled. "I also don't think contractors encounter anywhere near the amount of downtime they had 10 years ago because the equipment today is so much better engineered." **LL**

Weingartz Supply is located at 46061 Van Dyke, Utica, Mich. Phone: 810/731-7240. Internet: <http://www.weingartz.com>

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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*Denotes regional advertising

dealer/contractor

(continued from page 52)

wait for 90 or 120 days while our creditors are pounding on our doors. That hurts us and our capabilities."

Klei said several bounced checks to his business several years ago have forced his company to stop accepting checks as payment. "We have set up a credit company where customers can get credit. Our credit company handles the billing, which solved that problem for us," he said. "But once again we have to pay for that service."

"It seems I am in court every other month trying to collect on bad checks," said Leonardis. "That takes time away from the business, money from our profits, and forces us to cover those costs somehow."

"We get hit on financing," added Fisher. "Financing costs us 2 to 4 percent. And credit cards take 1.5 percent off of the top. That is another cut into our margins."

TIME FOR A COMMITMENT. *Equipment dealer seeking landscape contractors for long term relationship. Must be financially secure.*

Hess said he believes his role is to be a partner with his customers. "I want contractors to make a profit - no, I demand it," he emphasized. "If I see his business practices will not yield profitability, I don't want him as a customer. He might make money short term, but I am looking for long-term relationships with my customers."

"Once I develop that relationship, price ceases to be an issue. They call me up and say they want a product in one hour and I need to get it ready," he said.

That philosophy has served contractor Thomas Dunn, owner Dunn Lawn & Land, St. Louis, Mo., well. "We have been using our dealers for about five years now, and they do what they can to meet our needs. They provide us with personal attention that tells me they are interested in our success," Dunn said.

"I am a big believer in that relationship," he added. "If they help us succeed, they will succeed as well."

But, he cautioned, "I still expect service. If they are carrying a particular product line, they had better have any necessary parts in stock when I need them."

Dunn's dealer experience is more the norm than the exception. He has weeded out the dealers unwilling or unable to provide the service he requires. And, as long as his current dealer base continues to provide the service and support he desires, they can look forward to years of mutually beneficial business.

And, for all of the complaints about dealers and contractors misunderstanding each other's businesses, there is a willingness to work things through. "We are fighting each other and we shouldn't be," said Fisher. "That is all there is to it." **LL**

The author is a freelance writer based in Westerville, Ohio.

EMPLOYEE LEASING AT TURFPRIDE



IN TODAY'S LAWN and landscape environment of consolidation, many companies have chosen to do some internal consolidation of their own. This is happening through employee leasing.

An employee leasing firm joins companies of varying sizes (and varying industries) together to receive many services that may not be available or affordable for small companies.

As many of you probably have too, when I was initially contacted by an employee leasing company, I did not give them a chance due to my ignorance in the process. I wanted my employees (and myself) to work for my company and not for someone else.

Then a former business associate of mine sat me down one day to discuss the business that he was now involved in. You can imagine my horror when he started discussing employee leasing. I replied all in one breath, "I've seen it already, wasn't interested and thanks but no thanks."

However, he made me realize that the additional costs that I would be paying him to wear all my hats were quickly offset with the savings that he provided me in two areas alone – health insurance (for a program with better benefits) and workers' compensation (a no deposit plan with a lower experience rating). That in itself was great. But the real savings of an employee leasing com-

pany have been found in all of the additional benefits that my employees and my company have received at very little additional cost to the company. These were benefits like a dental plan, a cafeteria plan that offered employees additional insurance opportunities, a 401K retirement plan, drug testing, safety training and representation on any unemployment or government hearing.

In addition to providing our paychecks and all of these other services, the employee leasing company I chose also files and pays my taxes with the state and federal agencies and monitors claims and any other paperwork like COBRA, OSHA, EEOC, ADA, etc. The employee leasing company stands accountable to pay any penalties if these situations are not done right.

Now, I can concentrate on growing a business without having to keep employee files or worrying about workers'

compensation audits or health insurance claims. I can easily have a potential employee drug screened prior to employment or a present employee tested after an accident. I don't have to monitor and administrate child support payments or garnishments for my employees. I don't even have to monitor sick leave or vacation time – my employee leasing company provides all of this.

It has also provided my employees with a credit union membership, direct deposits for their paychecks and employee handbooks. And I have retained control of the recruitment and hiring and firing of my employees. I still determine wages, do employee evaluations and administer disciplinary notices when necessary. Even

though my employees (and myself) work for the leasing company, it is only obvious by the names on our checks and our W-2 forms.

So, is employee leasing right for everyone? Probably not, but I would suggest that you sit down and evaluate this opportunity. And I also recommend that you shop these services around.

Most leasing companies that I have been familiar with charge a percentage of your gross payroll for their charge. For example, if your payroll is \$20,000 a month and their fee was 2 percent, you would pay \$400 per month. The bigger the company, the more negotiating power you have with this fee. It usually ranges between 1 and 3 percent.

Making the decision to lease my employees has given me the opportunity to focus on the issues that I want to spend my time on instead of all the non-desirable issues that used to constantly demand my time. – *Chuck McIntire* **LL**

The author is president of TurfPride, Kennesaw, Ga.

5 Keys to Success

Employee Leasing

1. Don't let paperwork or a regulatory crisis determine where you spend all of your time.
2. Accept that you may not be able to wear all the hats in the company.
3. Evaluate the opportunity a leasing company offers.
4. Shop around for services.
5. Grow your business without keeping employee files.

Catch the rising star in the
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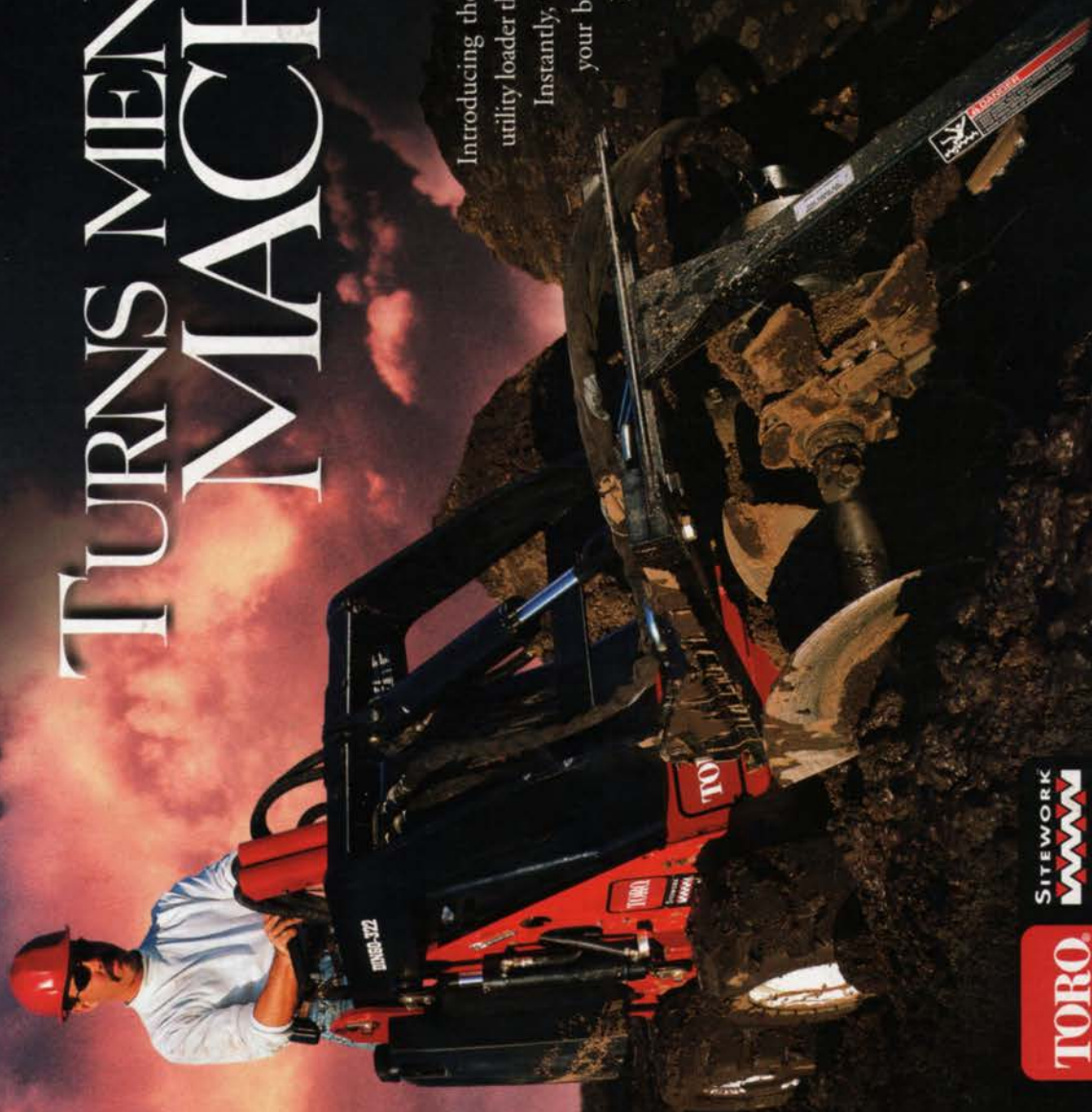
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