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USE READER SERVICE #94

## April 2000



Cover photo:  
Tony Giese,  
Port Orange, Fla.

### Cover Story In Pursuit of Growth

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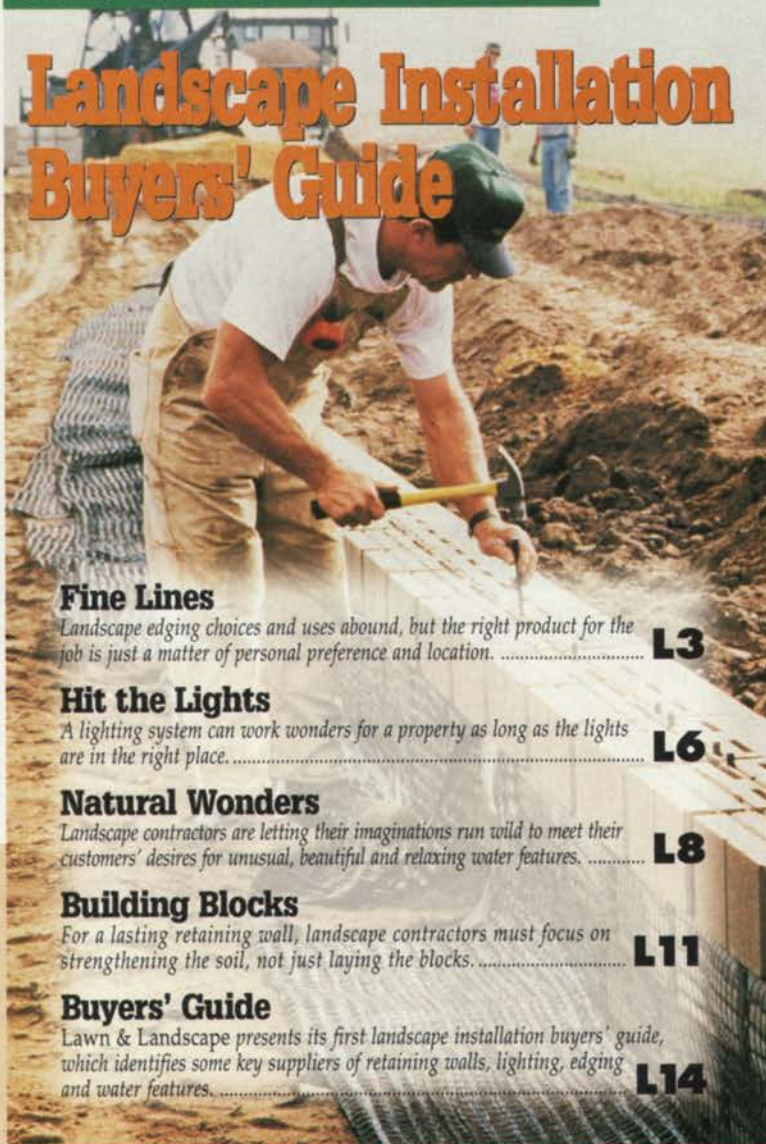
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### SPECIAL REPORT:

## Landscape Installation Buyers' Guide



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Landscape edging choices and uses abound, but the right product for the job is just a matter of personal preference and location. .... **L3**

#### **Hit the Lights**

A lighting system can work wonders for a property as long as the lights are in the right place. .... **L6**

#### **Natural Wonders**

Landscape contractors are letting their imaginations run wild to meet their customers' desires for unusual, beautiful and relaxing water features. .... **L8**

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For a lasting retaining wall, landscape contractors must focus on strengthening the soil, not just laying the blocks. .... **L11**

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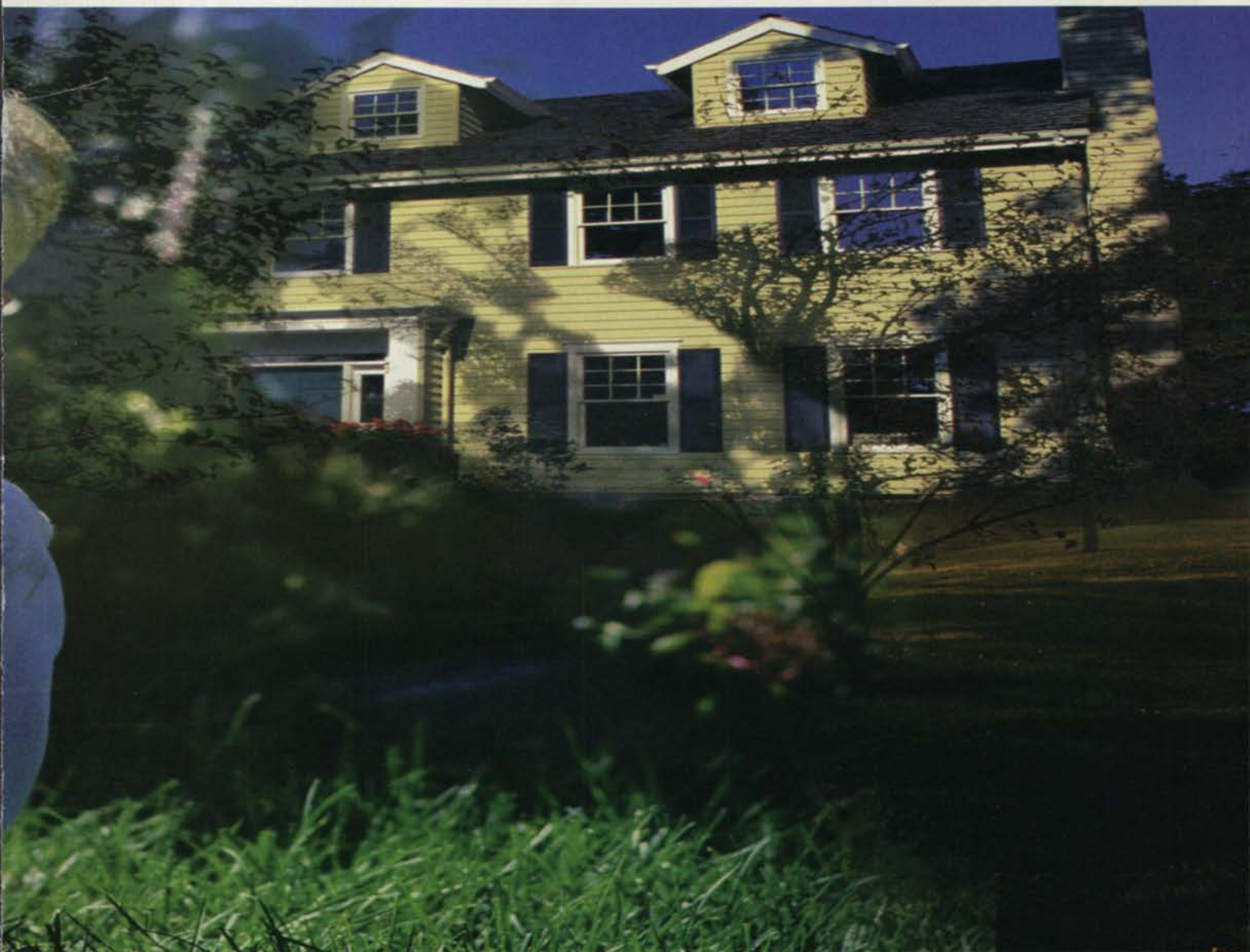
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## The Re-Birth Of A Salesman

*"Action without planning is fatal, but planning without action is futile." – Tracie Van Eimeren*


**D**eveloping a formal sales strategy probably isn't at the top of the "To Do" list for a lot of small, growing landscape companies these days. And re-evaluating the current sales strategy may not be something a lot of larger, established landscape companies think they need to dedicate a great deal of time to.

But as the rapid growth of e-commerce has shown us, today's consumers are interested in quick transactions, requiring as little effort as possible. Contractors who don't develop an awareness of customers' changing needs as consumers and an ability to tailor a sales presentation to meet those needs may find themselves losing out on jobs without understanding why.

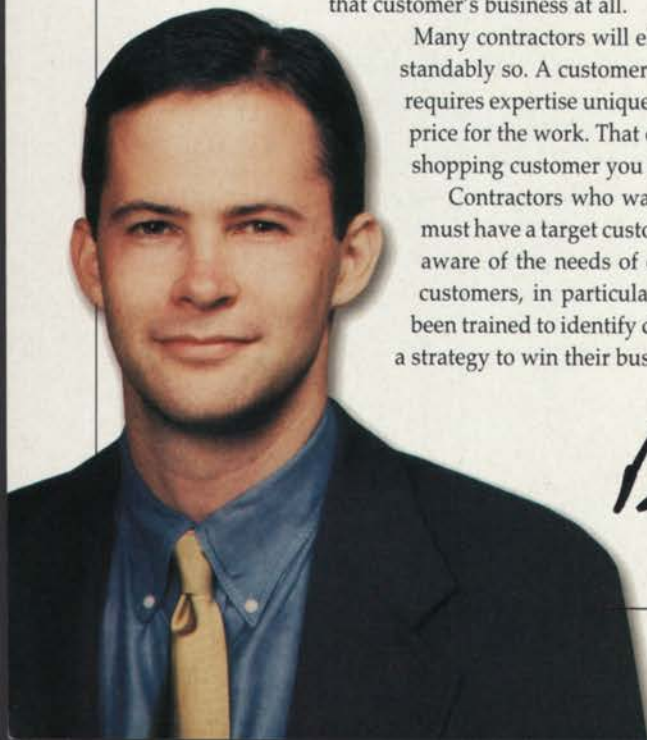
A discussion I recently sat in on focused on the impact today's changing economy is having on the landscape industry, in particular the sales process. As the contractors talked, they clearly agreed on the changes they are seeing in the public's perception of the landscape industry: The proliferation of landscape companies has shifted consumers' overall perception of landscape work down the continuum from being a unique service to being more of a commodity product.

We all know that quality landscape work is anything but a commodity product. So, when faced with a customer who holds this perception, a salesperson has three possible courses of action: don't try to convince the customer otherwise and provide a proposal that makes sense for the customer and the company; make a presentation attempting to show the customer how landscape work differs from a commodity product; or choose not to pursue that customer's business at all.

Many contractors will elect to take that final route and understandably so. A customer who does not believe landscape work requires expertise unique to each project isn't likely to pay a fair price for the work. That customer is more likely to be the price-shopping customer you should strive to avoid.

Contractors who want to effectively market their services must have a target customer in mind for their selling efforts, be aware of the needs of consumers in general and their target customers, in particular, and be sure their salespeople have been trained to identify different customers' needs and develop a strategy to win their business. 

*Bob West*



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# Market Trends

IN THE NEWS

## ServeClick Brings New Wave of E-Commerce

ST. LOUIS, MO. - Unveiling what some call the next wave of e-commerce, Connectria announced the launch of ServeClick, a hosted service and e-commerce portal specifically designed for service-based companies and the first e-commerce system allowing service-oriented companies to schedule services and sales appointments and price services via the Internet.

According to Richard Waidmann, president and chief executive officer of Connectria, an application service provider, software development and network engineering firm, e-commerce to date has been focused exclusively on the online sale and delivery of products - a market expected to grow to more than \$1 trillion by the year 2003. But Waidmann said most consumer services have been left out of the online marketplace even though services represent a larger  
*(continued on page 18)*

April means spring for most of the country, but the Sun Belt has been working non-stop through the winter months.

And climatic predictions for the coming months call for continued drought concerns in that part of the country, which may actually be good news for contractors offering irrigation services. Irrigation installation and maintenance has been one of the more rapidly growing services among landscape contractors. In fact, more than 30 percent of respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* survey offer irrigation services, and, not surprisingly, the majority of these contractors are located in climates known for their warm-weather and general lack of precipitation.

## Irrigation Activity: A CLOSER LOOK



A POSITIVE IMAGE

## Say Cheese!

Lawn care operators will get a chance to show off their best-looking lawns in the Picture Perfect Lawn contest sponsored by *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA).

The contest's purpose is to recognize the best residential, commercial and public service projects in warm-season and cool-season grasses. Besides national recognition, each of the six winners will also receive a \$200 Travel WorldWide Network travel voucher to the 2001 PLCAA Conference and Green Industry Expo in Tampa, Fla.

Winners will be chosen by PLCAA members who view 8-by-10 site photos and vote for the best-looking lawn in each category at the Association's annual dinner Nov. 4 at the GIE Show in Indianapolis, Ind.

"Picture Perfect Lawn is a great way to get recognition for the superior work you do on your accounts - residential, commercial or public service," said Tom Delaney, PLCAA executive vice president. "By entering, lawn care operators have an opportunity to let the world see through photos how their companies beautify the environment."

Lawn care operators interested in entering the contest should call *Lawn & Landscape's* Nicole Wisniewski at 800/456-0707 or PLCAA's Jessica Veronneau at 800/458-3466 for an official entry form and to receive contest rules. The contest deadline is Sept. 30.



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# Market Trends

IN THE NEWS

## Illinois Law Forces Regulation of Irrigation Contractors

CHICAGO, ILL. – New Illinois law HB 539 recently went into effect and allows lawn irrigation contractors to install sprinkler systems in the state. The law also states that only a licensed plumber can install backflow prevention devices and inspect sprinkler heads and risers.

The bill requires lawn irrigation contractors to register annually with the Department of Public Health and pay a registration fee to be set by rules currently being written by the Department of Public Health.

In addition, the bill allows the city of Chicago to provide, by ordinance, for registration of lawn irrigation contractors.

However, the bill preempts home rule, meaning that the state of Illinois has the exclusive power to regulate lawn irrigation contractors.

## Calendar of Events

**APR. 7, 18 & 26** Massachusetts Pesticide Exam, Waltham, Mass. Contact: 617/626-1786.

**APR. 8-9** Certified Landscape Technician Exam, Woodland Hills, Calif. Contact: 800/448-2522.

**APR. 9-11** Equipment & Engine Training Counsel's Annual Meeting, Cleveland, Ohio. Contact: 512/442-1788.

**APR. 13** Massachusetts Certified Arborist Exam, Waltham, Mass. Contact: 508/653-3320.

**APR. 17** Tours of Frelinghuysen and Willowood Arboretum, Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. Contact: 732/932-9271.

**APR. 20** Michigan Forestry and Park Association Course – "Electrical Hazards for Arborists", Grand Rapids, Mich. Contact: 517/482-5530.

**APR. 25** Roadside and Right-of-Way Vegetation Management, Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. Contact: 732/932-9271.

**APR. 29** Massachusetts Arborists Association Arbor Day Celebration, Worcester, Mass. Contact: 508/653-3320.

**MAY 8-12** LSU Agricultural Center Compost Facility Operator Training, Baton Rouge, La. Contact: 225/388-6998.

**MAY 11 & 19** Massachusetts Pesticide Exam, Waltham, Mass. Contact: 617/626-1786.

**MAY 25** Michigan Forestry and Park Association Course – "Young Tree Pruning/Training/Maintenance," Lansing, Mich. Contact: 517/482-5530.

**MAY 26** Massachusetts Pesticide Exam, Cape Cod, Mass. Contact: 617/626-1786.

**JUNE 1** Pruning Trees and Ornamentals, Bridgewater, Mass. Contact: 413/545-0895.

**JUNE 2 & 16** Massachusetts Pesticide Exam, Waltham, Mass. Contact: 617/626-1786.

**JUNE 6** Pruning Trees and Ornamentals, Waltham, Mass. Contact: 413/545-0895.

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## IN THE NEWS

### Truck Industry Reports Strong Market

WILLOUGHBY, OHIO – Sterling Truck Corp., a subsidiary of Freightliner Corp., called the 1999 market the strongest in history for the truck business.

According to the company's statistics, Class 8 truck sales totaled 300,000 units with 260,000 units sold in the United States, 30,000 units sold in Canada and 12,000 units sold in Mexico – a 22 percent total increase over 1998.

The Class 6 and 7 markets are also up with a 23 percent increase from 1998 overall. Class 7 is the larger of the two markets with 130,000 units sold vs. Class 6's 45,000 units.

The numbers in Class 7 follow the trend of customers purchasing more heavier medium-duty trucks in the 30,000- to 33,000-pound range, said Jim Hebe, president and chief executive officer, Freightliner Corp.

(continued on page 18)

**TO ENSURE**  
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**JUNE 8** Scouting for Pests and Problems of Woody Ornamentals in the Landscape, Bridgewater, Mass. Contact: 413/545-0895.

**JUNE 9** Massachusetts Pesticide Exam, Springfield, Mass. Contact: 617/626-1786.

**JUNE 13** Pruning Trees and Ornamentals, Amherst, Mass. Contact: 413/545-0895.

**JUNE 14** Scouting for Pests and Problems of Woody Ornamentals in the Landscape, Pittsfield, Mass. Contact: 413/545-0895.

**JUNE 21** UMASS Turf Research Field Day, S. Deerfield, Mass. Contact: 413/545-3066.

**JUNE 21** Scouting for Pests and Problems of Woody Ornamentals in the Landscape, Amherst, Mass. Contact: 413/545-0895.

**JULY 11-12** Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association Summer Pesticide Institute, Grantville, Pa. Contact: 717/238-1673.

**JULY 11-16** ANLA Annual Convention, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Contact: 202/789-2900.

**JULY 13-16** ALCA Summer Leadership Meeting, San Diego, Calif. Contact: 800/395-2522.

**JULY 14 & 18** Massachusetts Pesticide Exam, Waltham, Mass. Contact: 617/626-1786.

**JULY 15** Michigan Forestry and Park Association Course – Tree ID (Summer), Detroit, Mich. Contact: 517/482-5530.

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could end up costing you even more: If the herbicide you use doesn't provide the best control of crabgrass and other weeds, you could be getting some unexpected calls from unhappy customers.

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stain, so you can apply it with confidence right up to concrete walks and driveways. Your customers won't be seeing any more of those little fringes of crabgrass along the edges of their turf. All they'll see is healthy, happy lawn...and all you'll see is happy customers and a healthy bottom line.

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**USE READER SERVICE #57**

# Market Trends

(continued from page 15)

## CURRENT AFFAIRS

### Activist Group Criticizes EPA, Dursban

NEW YORK, N.Y. — TomPaine.com, an Internet magazine about politics, government and media, criticized the lawn care industry and its products by placing an ad on the editorial page of the Feb. 9 issue of *The New York Times*. The ad denounced Dow AgroSciences' Dursban (chlorpyrifos) and the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) re-evaluation of the product.

"(Dursban is) so common it shows up everywhere. Trace amounts of Dursban and a chemical cousin have even been found in some bagels," the ad read. "Mounting evidence suggests everyday exposure may harm people. Kids are especially vulnerable."

Tim Maniscalco, manager for government and public affairs for Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis, Ind., said that some environ-

### ServeClick (continued from page 12)

share of the U.S. economy than products. "The service industry's lag in offering reliable online service scheduling stems from the extreme complexity in developing accurate time scheduling algorithms for each unique service within each service industry," Waidmann said.

Mark Rocco, vice president and general manager of Steamatic, St. Louis, Mo., a cleaning and restoration firm, has begun testing ServeClick and expects use of the software to increase efficiencies, boost revenues and, ultimately, increase Steamatic's profits.

"Right now, we can't cost-effectively book appointments during non-business hours," Rocco said. "With ServeClick, our customers will be able to visit either our Web site or ServeClick's site to schedule services online whenever the impulse strikes them — we're open for business 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

According to Jackie Engel, Connectria's vice president of marketing and communications, ServeClick can also be integrated with a company's existing Web site, and the companies that don't already have a Web site will become part of ServeClick's Online Service Mall.

mental groups have been offering various stories to different media outlets about a variety of pesticides, including Dursban. "Chlorpyrifos is going through the re-evaluation process and the activists need to chum up the media," he said. "This is all part of that process."

Although Dow AgroSciences didn't respond directly to the ad, the company did release an 11-page statement that addresses each of the ad's concerns one by one.

"Chlorpyrifos products have been on the market for more than 30 years," Dow's state-

(continued on page 21)



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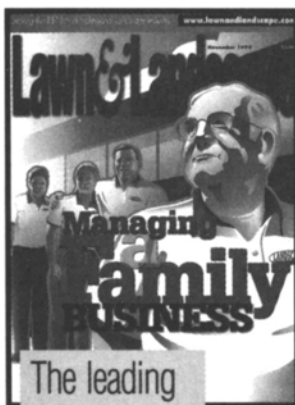
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- 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor
- 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
- 5. Irrigation Contractor
- 6. Landscape Architect
- 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

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- 2. Distributor
- 3. Formulator
- 4. Manufacturer

#### IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

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- 2. School, College, University
- 3. Trade Association, Library
- 4. Others (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. What best describes your title?

- Owner, Pres., Vice Pres., Corp. Officer
- Manager, Director, Supt., Foreman
- Agronomist, Horticulturist
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- Serviceman, Technician, Crew member
- Scientist, Researcher
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- 3. Others (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. What best describes your title?

- Owner, Pres., Vice Pres., Corp. Officer
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- Scientist, Researcher
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(continued from page 18)

ment said. "No insect control product available for use has been more thoroughly studied."

EPA responded to the ad via a letter to the editor in *The New York Times*. Although the letter had not been printed as of press time, EPA has posted the letter on its Web site, [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov).

In its letter, EPA wrote, "The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has taken significant strides to provide the public, especially children, with unprecedented protection from the risks of pesticide exposure. In August 1999, we announced the first tough new measures ever to protect children under FQPA by banning many uses of the most toxic insecticides used on kids' foods. At that time, we also announced a very ambitious schedule for scientifically assessing the risks of all organophosphate insecticides, which include chlorpyrifos, or Dursban. We are on schedule.

"Your readers should know that EPA will finalize its review this spring and propose measures for reducing all exposures and risks, which could including canceling uses of Dursban."

## People

Zeneca announced the following changes: **Lee Bloomcamp** was named turf territory sales representative; **Bill McClellan** was hired as technical manager for professional pest control and turf products; **Jerry Pauley** was appointed to territory sales representative and **Kathy Cantagallo** was named contract technical sales manager.

Ferris Industries appointed **James Wier** to president and chief executive officer.

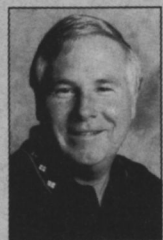
**Tom Taylor** returned to Woods Equipment Co. as marketing manager, agriculture and turf business.

Husqvarna appointed **David Perkins** to director of U.S. power retailers and distributor sales; **Kim Liochty** will head up the hand-held product business unit; **John Bailey** was promoted to business unit manager for lawn and garden products; **Don Roop** will take on the role of business unit manager for accessories; **Anders Berggren** is now managing director of the turf care division and **Ken Taylor** was promoted to the business unit manager for commercial mower products.

Irritrol appointed **Mike Ochoa** to director of sales and marketing.

**Don Gardner** was named development director of the Evergreen Foundation.

**Eric Nelson** was hired as a senior scientist at The Scotts Co.'s Oregon Field.

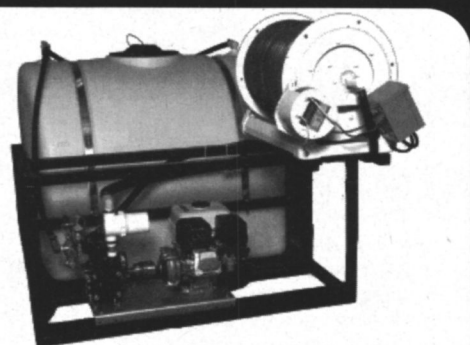


McClellan (top),  
Wier (bottom)



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USE READER SERVICE #16

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# Market Trends

Maniscalco said the only response Dow AgroSciences received regarding the ad were some calls from the company's New York-area customers.

## IN THE NEWS

### ALCA's Holder Celebrates 20 Years

HERNDON, VA. – Debra Holder figured someone might say something about her 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) at the banquet held at the association's Executive Forum. But she was in for a surprise when the members played a slide show commemorating many of the memorable events she has taken part in over the last two decades.

Now she has started off the next 20 years by being promoted to executive vice president of ALCA. "ALCA's tremendous growth reflects how quickly the landscape contracting industry is moving, and at no time in the

*(continued on page 25)*

## Association NEWS

The **New York State Turfgrass Association** presented the Citation of Merit Award to Michael Villani, a professor in the entomology department of Cornell University. The award is given to an individual who has made significant contributions to the green industry. Villani has been serving the turfgrass industry in New York since 1984.

The **American Society of Landscape Architects** announced the resignation of Peter Kirsch from the position of executive vice president and chief executive officer.

The **Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association** announced its officers for 2000: William Barbour, president; Allen Fidler, vice president; Frederick Hansen, secretary-treasurer; J. Christian Snavely, immediate past president.

The **Washington Association of Landscape Professionals** announced the 1999 WALP members of the year. Steve Pagel, Pagel's Landscape Maintenance, Vancouver, British Columbia, is member of the year and Country Green Turf Farms, Olympia, Wash., is associate member of the year.

The **Associated Landscape Contractors of America** elected its new officers. They are: Emily Thompson, president; Drew St. John II, president-elect; Michael Byrne, secretary/treasurer and Steve Glover, immediate past president.



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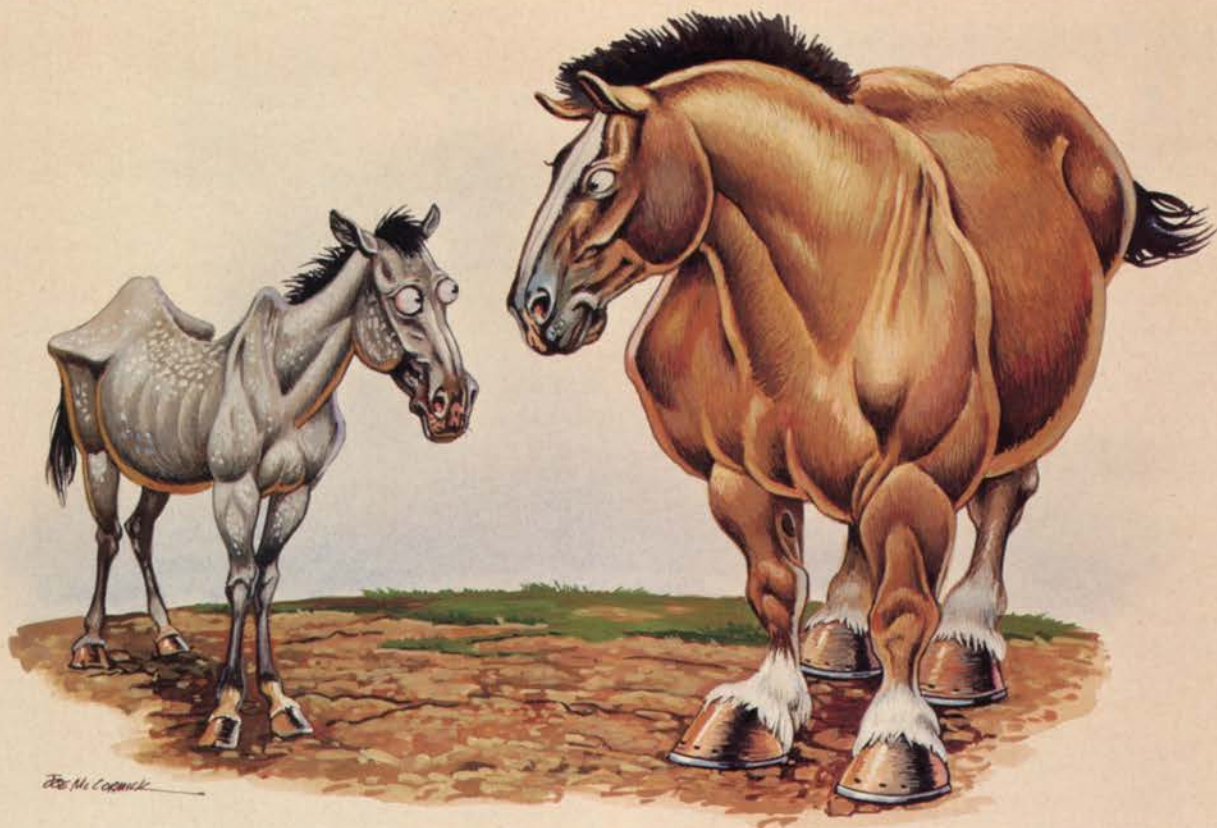
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# Market Trends

## Letters TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

There is a lot of discussion about direct sales using the Internet and whether this approach is appropriate for our industry, such as with your March article, "Industry Debates Internet Sales." Although recent announcements may make it appear that manufacturers are going direct, that may not actually be so. Here is why:

A manufacturer that is selling \$100 million of product using distribution depends on the "added value" the distribution provides, such as warehousing, selling and servicing for the end user. The need for those functions does not go away with a press release and a Web site. No successful manufacturer can replicate the benefits, efficiencies and cost effectiveness of well-managed independent distribution. Making a product without a way of getting that product to market, which includes the key function of selling, would be corporate suicide.

Yes, you can buy a car on the Internet today, but you will still pick that car up at a dealer near you, and the dealer will make a profit on your purchase – maybe even a larger profit than if you bought it from him directly.

I recall an article that evaluated channels of distribution using three factors: velocity, selection and value. Different channels of distribution provide a different mix of tradeoffs with each of these factors. In all cases, the customer's ultimate satisfaction is best served when a channel of distribution meets or exceeds their expectations. Likewise, dissatisfaction results when either the channel misleads customers into believing it will meet their expectations or when the customers cannot differentiate between various distribution channels.

Let's take a quick look at these three measures of distribution.

**Velocity** – This is a measure of delivery time. If you need a car now, you can go to any dealer and buy one now. If, on the other hand, you want certain features, you may have to wait. Obviously, the speedy procurement of a car has some selection tradeoffs.

What about value? The price and service support of the car might be compromised as

our speedy customer does not take time to thoroughly appraise value or comparison shop. Internet purchases may appear to have great velocity due to the purchasing simplicity, and if the desired car is in stock and if shipping is easy, this channel might prove to be a fast way to procure products. But stock levels may vary and larger items might take several days to ship, adding cost and impacting value.

**Selection** – If the customer is purchasing nonspecific products, selection might be relatively unimportant. As the product complexity, including quality, increases from commodity to brand- and model-specific to special order, the selection factor becomes more difficult to satisfy.

Purchase expenses		Amount	Comments
Price	\$1,580		Sales taxes must be paid by you
Shipping	\$95		This assumes truck dock delivery
Unloading	\$75		Trucker charges, if no dock
Set-up	\$50 (2 hours at \$25 per hour)		Considering a good, fast mechanic
<b>TOTAL (landed and setup): \$1,800</b>			

It is also easy to see how selection affects velocity when compromise is not acceptable, since the desired product may not always be available right away. Value goes hand-in-hand with selection as we find our choosy customer not willing to sacrifice quality or switch brands.

The Internet often seems to have a good selection. But even the giant Amazon.com had severe problems this last Christmas with lacking inventory. Internet sites and mail-order catalogs may appear to have a good selection, but they are often accused of displaying window dressing and having no warehousing.

**Value** – The value factor is the most difficult aspect of the equation to quantify. The first element that comes to mind is price. All of the expenses of getting the product and making it perform must be added to price. In the landscape products business, these might include: shipping, unloading, uncrateing, setup and even training. A great example of pricing is the current Turfco Direct offer of a Turfco aerator for

only \$1,580. We need to add price, shipping, unloading and set-up to make this price comparable to buying a like aerator off the floor from a dealer (see chart). These are the easily computed expenses. The difficulty begins when we try to put a value on the other elements, like service and support.

Who will perform the warranty work and what are the conditions of the warranty agreement if a product is purchased direct over the Internet? What is the cost of not having parts readily accessible? What if you want to return the product?

What does two days of downtime cost while you wait for repair parts? For a machine in season, that cost is a lot. One day of downtime could cost contractors hundreds of dollars because the machine will break down and at

the most inopportune time, right? If these service and support elements have no value to you, your choice might be easy.

Regarding value, it's important that contractors focus on the revenue-producing aspects of any product they buy rather than making price paramount. Most seasoned contractors have had more than one experience with the old

adage: "The bitterness of poor value lasts longer than the sweetness of a good price."

So, what does the dealer of the future do to stem the tide of direct selling? Exceed the customer's expectations by adding value. In the end, the contractor who satisfies the customer's needs best wins.

What does the contractor or buyer do when faced with claims of low prices? The same thing he hopes his customer is doing when another contractor uses price to get the business – measure price against value.

*Thomas Walker, president  
Outdoor Equipment Co., a power equipment  
distributor located in Chesterfield Valley, Mo.*

**Lawn & Landscape welcomes  
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.  
They can be sent to:**

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bwest@lawnandlandscape.com*



## On the WEB

Associated Landscape Contractors of America - [www.alca.org](http://www.alca.org)

Turfgrass Producers International - [www.turfgrassprod.org](http://www.turfgrassprod.org)

Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment - [www.pestfacts.org](http://www.pestfacts.org)

Ohio State University Plant Dictionary - [www.hcs.ohio-state.edu/plants.html](http://www.hcs.ohio-state.edu/plants.html)

Almstead Tree Co., New Rochelle, N.Y. - [www.almstead.com](http://www.almstead.com)

United Lawn Maintenance, Millville, N.J. - [www.unitedlawn.com](http://www.unitedlawn.com)

Clintar Groundskeeping Services, Toronto, Canada - [www.clintar.com](http://www.clintar.com)

To announce a new Web site, e-mail [nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com). For additional industry information and news, visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com).

(continued from page 22)

history of this industry have we needed to focus on strategic alliances more than we do now," noted Steve Glover, past president of ALCA. "Debra knows this industry and has proven success in consensus building with key industry organizations. She will be invaluable in establishing and advocating public policy positions for the landscape industry."

### In Business...

The **Davey Tree Expert Co.** acquired **Caldwell Tree Co.**... **Weather-matic** announced **Pipe 'N Heads** as its newest wholesale distributor... **Osram Sylvania** acquired **Motorola Lighting**... **Metallic Power** partnered with **Briggs & Stratton**... **Echo** is expanding its office

warehouse, distribution and manufacturing facility in Lake Zurich, Ill.... **Yazoo Power Equipment** changed its name to **Pug Power** stemming from the company's new management structure and refocused business objective... The **Davey Tree Expert Co.** opened a residential office in Nashville, Tenn.... **Gardners' Guild** received the Achievement Award in large commercial maintenance for Yerba Buena Gardens in San Francisco, Calif.... **Rain Bird** and the **Landscape Architecture Foundation** selected Diane Evans as the recipient of the Rain Bird/LAF scholarship... **Becker Underwood** acquired the Rejex-it Wildlife Management Products division from **PMC Specialties**... **Horizon** purchased **Pro Power Equipment Co.**... **Jacto** backpack sprayers made a string of distribution agreements in the Southeast, West and Midwest regions... **Ball Horticultural Co.** is now an investor in **GrowZone**, a horticultural industry e-business for suppliers... **Labor Finders International** opened nine new branch offices. 

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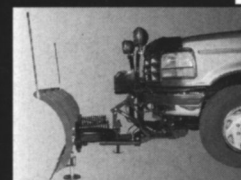
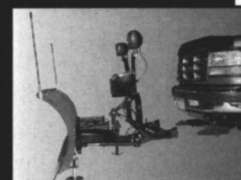


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## BASF Purchases American Cyanamid

# MI

MADISON, N.J., and LUDWIGSHAFEN, Germany – Another major deal in the highly competitive and rapidly consolidating agrochemical industry was announced as German chemical giant BASF AG purchased American Cyanamid, the agricultural division of drug company American Home Products (AHP), Madison, N.J. American Cyanamid also produces common turf pesticides, such as Pendulum, Image and Amdro, and is involved in the RohMid partnership to produce MACH 2.

BASF – Europe's largest chemical manufacturer – will pay AHP \$3.8 billion in cash and will assume some debt. The sale caps a six-week auction of the business, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, that included Bayer, Dow Chemical and DuPont. AHP originally wanted \$3 billion for American Cyanamid, according to the report. In the end, BASF outbid the competing

companies and has now joined agrochemical world leaders Astra-Zeneca, Novartis and Aventis in the continuing industry consolidation trend.

With the American Cyanamid acquisition, BASF claims it is now the fourth-largest agrochemicals group behind Syngenta, Aventis Crop Science and Monsanto. Syngenta is the agribusiness created by the December 1999 merger of Novartis' Crop Protection and Seeds business

and AstraZeneca's Zeneca Agrochemicals business.

The deal could also mark BASF's return to activity in the turf industry. The company slowly shifted its focus from the turf industry over the last decade, but recent product development efforts will reportedly lead to the introduction of new fungicides and herbicides.

Insiders report that American Cyanamid's sale was driven by sagging performance in the company's agricultural products group as a whole, despite strong performance by the specialty turf business. AHP has been looking to sell this portion of its business for some time.

According to a news release, AHP officially put the division up for sale after its failed merger attempt with Warner-Lambert Co., which is being acquired by Pfizer. But pesticide industry experts say American Cyanamid was available for some time.

"The sale of Cyanamid reflects AHP's strategy to focus on pharmaceutical, biopharmaceutical, consumer health care and animal health products businesses," said John Stafford, the chairman, president and CEO of AHP. But, according to Gary Curl, business director for turf, ornamental and pest control products for American Cyanamid, "this acquisition is not a decision that has been pushed forward by Cyanamid management."

BASF's acquisition of Cyanamid is scheduled to be completed by July 1, pending approval from antitrust authorities. Transition teams should be named shortly, Curl said, and future employment and company decisions will move ahead once they are formed.

Company officials said the purchase would double BASF's annual sales in crop protection, which totaled \$1.9 billion in 1999. BASF's and Cyanamid's crop protection businesses combined in 1999 for pro forma sales of \$3.6 billion and income of \$450 million.

"Approximately \$250 million in annual synergy effects are expected to be generated by the transaction, with approximately half of the benefits to be achieved in the first full year after the acquisition," according to a BASF release.

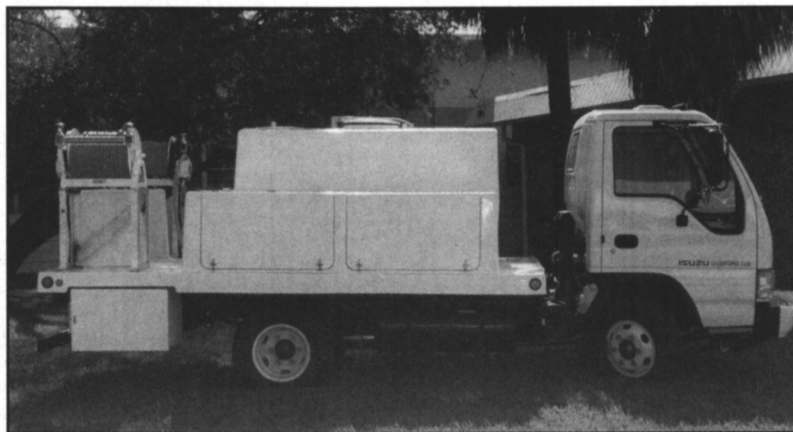
"From a production point of view the two businesses fit well together. BASF is strong in herbicides and fungicides, AHP in insecticides," Merck Finck analyst Michael Butscher stated in a Reuters news release.

Some analysts questioned the high price BASF paid for American Cyanamid and worried about the assumption of debt, but other analysts said the deal is positive because it bolsters BASF's position as one of the world's top agrochemical producers.

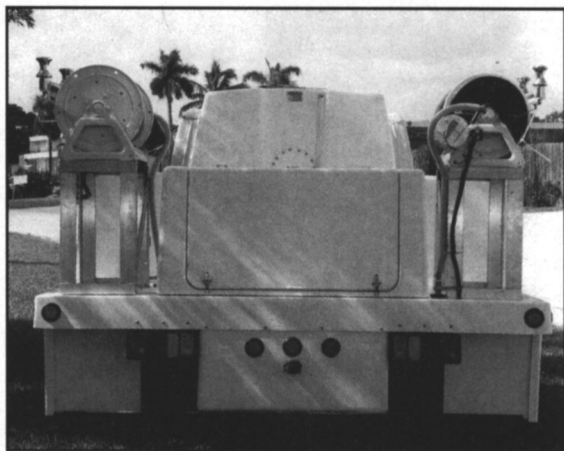
"BASF is buying American Cyanamid at a time when the agricultural economy is down in a trough," Curl said. "But we're expecting that in the next few years as the farm economy rebounds, this will look like a very smart deal." – L&L Staff

The deal **could** also mark a resumption **of activity on** **BASF's part** in the turf industry. Recently, the **company** shifted **its focus** from the turf industry, but **current** **development** efforts hold promising potential.

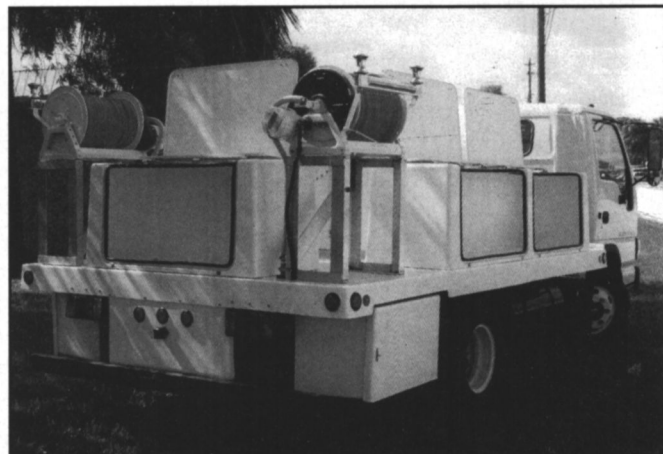
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**USE READER SERVICE #47**

SEASONAL OUTLOOK:

## Mulch Madness

# MM

Mower blade technology has evolved from the Stone Age to the Information Age almost overnight, according to Jack Robertson, co-owner, Trim Rite Lawn Equipment, Kansas City, Mo. Advancements in blade design are helping landscape contractors improve their mulching capabilities and get cleaner cuts.

Mulching, in particular, has had the biggest impact on blade design because landscape contractors don't want to bag grass, said Dale Marcell, product line manager for Frederick Manufacturing, the Kansas City, Mo., company that produces Gator Mulcher blades. Bagging often means more wear and tear on machinery and hauling grass clippings to a compost site, which boosts labor and fuel costs – and wastes time. "Time is money for a contractor," Marcell said. "Hauling the clippings away is too time-consuming, and some landfills won't take clippings anymore."

Currently, there are 3,000 to 4,000 different mower blades on the market, Marcell estimated, which are produced by five or six manufacturers. Mulching blades are commonly used, but on occasion, contractors can't or don't use them. "(Their use) depends on the type of grass, which is determined by what part of the country you're in," Marcell said. "The blades are used more in the Southeast and Northeast and not as much in the Midwest."

**WHY MULCH?** Research has shown that when grass clippings are removed, 20 to 25 percent more fertilizer was needed to maintain comparable color and quality compared to areas where clippings were returned, according to William Pound and John Street, The Ohio State University extension, department of horticulture and crop sciences, Columbus, Ohio. Clippings contain measurable amounts of nitrogen, phos-

*Mulching is having a big impact on mower blade design because landscape contractors don't want to bag grass. Mulching blades, like the one pictured below and on page 32, have teeth to redirect airflow and push grass clippings over the cutting edge again and again.*

*Photo: Frederick Mfg.*



FOR BEST CUT

## Sharpen Your Skills

**F**or a good clean cut, most manufacturers recommend sharpening mower blades each day if they are used all day long.

"Sharpening every day will give you a nice quality of cut and helps the grass blade," said Randy Harris, marketing manager, Toro Co., Bloomington, Minn. "If blades aren't sharpened, they tear, rather than cut, grass. The grass can become infected and is more susceptible to disease."

Sharpening varies by cutter, type of grass and soil conditions, according to Tom Weingartz, buyer, Weingartz Supply, Utica, Mich. "In sandier conditions, you have to sharpen blades more often – about once a week in our area," he said. "(Sharpening) also depends on the type of grass you're cutting. In Florida, the grass is a lot tougher, but here it's a lot finer."

While sharpening blades too frequently won't hurt them, it can mean shortening their lives "because you're removing material," explained Dale Marcell, product line manager, Frederick Manufacturing, Kansas City, Mo.

There's no detriment to replacing blades frequently other than it costs more, Marcell added. "Generally, they should be replaced once every six to eight weeks," he said. "In other cases, they may not wear as fast."

Harris said timing is sometimes hard to call. Blades may wear faster and need to be replaced sooner if they are used in sandier terrain. "Replacing them is purely a function of if the blade is damaged," he said. "Otherwise, when you've worn down the cutting edge, it's pretty evident when they need to be replaced."

phorus and potassium, and if contractors follow proper mowing practices (see "Mowing Guidelines" on page 33), the clippings will not contribute to thatch accumulation.

The advantage of using mulching blades is that they cut clippings into smaller pieces so grass doesn't lie on top of the lawn, said Tom Weingartz, buyer, Weingartz Supply, Utica, Mich. There are many different mulching blade designs, but most are engineered to cut and then re-

*(continued on page 32)*

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USE READER SERVICE #36

# Equipment Notebook

(continued from page 30)

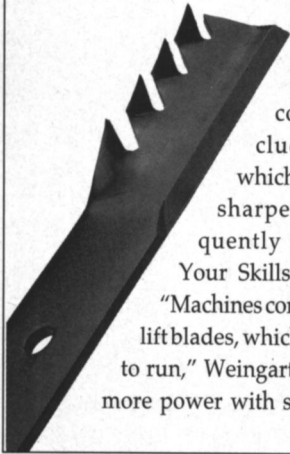
cut the grass, leaving tiny clippings.

"The smaller the clippings are, the quicker they decompose," he said, adding that other factors can impact the rate of clipping decomposition. "When you cut and blow clippings off to the side, they will take a lot longer to decompose. If the grass is wet, it will clump, and then you will have to double cut."

Still, there are drawbacks to mulching clippings. The mulching mower's engine requires more horsepower to handle increased

cutting volume, placing more demand on components, including blades, which may need to be sharpened more frequently (see "Sharpen Your Skills" on page 30).

"Machines come with standard lift blades, which take less power to run," Weingartz said. "You get more power with standard lift, but



better discharge with higher lift blades. There is a tradeoff in performance."

**DESIGN DIFFERENCES.** There are three key differences in mower blade designs, said Randy Harris, marketing manager, Toro Co., Bloomington, Minn. They are the material thickness, the length of the sharpened edge of the blade – the more cutting edge, the better – and the degree of the sail on the back side of the blade. Mulching blades repeatedly hit the grass blades and drop the clippings into the turf, Harris explained.

Gator Mulcher blades, which hit the market in 1994, are a hot trend among contractors. The teeth angle toward the center of the blade to redirect airflow and push the grass clippings over the cutting edge again and again. A new, heavier high lift Gator mulching blade is scheduled for release this spring, according to Marcell.

**MATCHING BLADE TO JOB.** Blade design impacts performance depending on what process contractors perform, Robertson

said. "Different blades were made for different applications," he explained. "The standard blade in tall grass tends to slow you down. You need a high lift."

In the fall and spring, contractors get pickier about which mower blades they use, Weingartz said. Generally, most use mulching blades to pulverize leaves in fall and to mow grass in spring, when it's wetter and grows faster. "In the summer, when the weather is hotter and drier, anything will work," Weingartz said.

Some contractors will use a high lift blade to discharge clippings or to bag them. "The high sail blades can be used in the fall for leaf removal – for final season cleanup and bagging," Harris said. "When you are trying to bag, you are always going to use a high sail."

Some people are using the mulching blades year-round now, Weingartz observed. "They work as well on the grass as they do on the leaves," he said. "You've got the best of both worlds. The blades chop up the grass and blow it out the side."

Gator blades are a little more expensive

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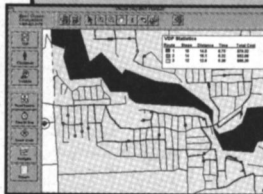
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USE READER SERVICE #25



FOR BEST CUT

## Mowing Guidelines

**M**ow lawns so that no more than one-third of the leaf blade length is removed during any one mowing, according to research by The Ohio State University extension, department of horticulture and crop sciences, Columbus, Ohio. For example, if Kentucky bluegrass is normally mowed at 2 inches, the height should not be allowed to grow beyond 3 inches before it is mowed back to 2 inches.

During periods of active growth, many lawns will require mowing more than once a week to follow this recommendation. Proper mowing frequency is the key to successfully implementing a mulching program.

TURFGRASS SPECIES	MOWING HEIGHTS DURING SPRING AND FALL	SUMMER STRESS PERIODS
Kentucky bluegrass	2.0-2.5 inches	2.5-3.0 inches
Perennial ryegrass	2.0-2.5	2.5-3.0
Fine fescues	2.0-2.5	2.5-3.0
Tall fescue	2.5-3.0	2.5-3.0

Source: The Ohio State University extension, department of horticulture and crop sciences

than other types – “maybe 10 percent more,” Marcell said. Still, Robertson said they out-sold all other blades combined.

**WHAT'S NEXT?** Marcell reported Frederick Manufacturing would be introducing 40 to 60 new blades this year. In his conversations with contractors, he said most request longer-lasting blades, or blades that don't need to be sharpened. “All companies are looking for a blade that lasts longer,” Marcell said. “(Manufacturers) are trying some different design approaches to make them last longer.”

Despite the ballooning popularity of mulching blades, there will continue to be a place for the standard mower blade. Robertson said contractors can use standard blades for real rough cutting and tear them up. “The standard blade will never be phased out,” he said. - *Ali Cybulski*

The author is Associate Editor of *Lawn & Landscape magazine*.



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**USE READER SERVICE #104**

SEASONAL OUTLOOK:

## Think Spring (Start-Ups)

**S**pring has sprung and contractors across the country are scrambling to ready irrigation systems for a new season.

Spring start-ups typically take place right after the last freeze and always present a challenge for contractors.

**GETTING ORGANIZED.** A successful spring start-up requires effective organization and communication. In particular, careful record-keeping throughout the year is essential. Todd Rannals, president, Millard Sprinkler, Omaha, Neb., is careful to write down specific concerns and potential problems about each of his 1,700 accounts throughout the year. Then, right before spring start-up, his staff members review these notes so each account can be given the appropriate treatment, Rannals said.

When winterizing systems each fall, Will Katerberg, president, Grapids Irrigation, Grand Rapids, Mich., advised making a list of potential spring problems. "Make a note so when you go into spring, you have a head start," he said. "This lets you be a little more pro-active."

To stay on top of record-keeping, some contractors use software such as Quick Book or Filemaker to keep organized, up-to-date customer records, while others rely on a trusty office assistant. But regardless of which method you choose, "be as organized as you can," said Mark Fleming, president, Fleming Landscape & Irrigation, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

*To make the most of the often hectic spring start-up season, landscape contractors need to make sure their employees and irrigation equipment are ready for action.*

Along with careful record-keeping, maintaining an open line of communication with clients is critical, but can be difficult. "The hardest part of the job is communicating with customers," Fleming said. With residential accounts, getting in touch with hard-to-reach customers can be especially challenging. Rannals sends out letters ahead of time to ensure that someone will be home if his technicians have questions or require access to a house.

Katerberg has an effective organizational system in place. Using an Excel database, he sends out notices in the fall or winter to set-up spring start-up appointments. This detailed database allows him to keep careful track of his 3,000 accounts from the type of equipment installed, who installed it and when it was installed to locations of shut-offs and turn-ons, he said.

Katerberg also provides technicians with actual diagrams of the irrigation systems – detailing the yard's layout and specific system information. This visual aid for technicians has proven effective, especially for new employees or Hispanic workers with a language barrier. "The diagram reduces the learning curve considerably," Katerberg said.

**SPRING TRAINING.** After the sluggish, inactive winter months, getting employees in gear for spring start-up is an important task. Katerberg has a two-day, in-depth training session for his employees, with a focus on reviewing the company's spring start-up "cookbook," a 30-point checklist of everything that needs to be taken care of during this time. From administrative tasks to technical issues, the checklist leaves no point unaddressed. "It's a reminder so you don't miss anything," said Katerberg, who has relied on this checklist for the past 12 years and updates it as needed.

Mentally preparing employees for spring start-up is another important task. Katerberg sees this as his biggest challenge as a manager. "Employees have got to be ready to go back to work," he warned. "You better be ready for 'Niagara Falls' opening up. There's so much volume, so fast."

Katerberg tries to psychologically prepare his workers for the often insane spring schedule. "We tell our guys to kiss their lives goodbye for about six weeks," he said. Like most contractors, Katerberg has found that there simply aren't enough hours in a day at this time of the year. This often frustrating crunch for time, however, is an unavoidable

*(continued on page 39)*



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# Irrigation Notebook

(continued from page 36)

able part of the job, he said. Reviewing equipment with employees is another key training issue. "It's amazing that a lot of employees know very little about equipment," Fleming said. "We review a lot."

Start-up is a good time to make sure equipment is in order. Fleming makes sure that his trucks are equipped with everything they might need, such as sprinkler heads, risers, or "any parts that are close to ground level," he said.

Prior to spring start-up, Katerberg stocks his trucks with about 150 of the most commonly used items. These parts – such as sprinkler heads, hand tools and repair parts – take care of about 90 percent of what you have to deal with, he pointed out.

**GEARING UP.** With so much to do in such a short period of time, mistakes can be an unfortunate part of spring start-up. One common issue is sloppiness. Oftentimes, technicians just rush through jobs without taking the time to do them right, according to

Katerberg. "People get in too big of a hurry," he said. "They have a 'close enough is good enough' attitude."

Another problem is not following through on a start-up job, according to Fleming. "A lot of contractors will just get the system going and won't come back," he said. "They'll have these systems started up without actually checking to see if something's wrong."

It's most economical to do a thorough check while you're at the job site during start-up, Fleming pointed out. "Do the job right the first time," he said.

Not using the controller to its full ability is another common mistake, according to Joe Morton, owner, Atlas Enterprises, Alexandria, Va. In light of increasingly high-profile water conservation issues, using a controller's

multiprogramming capabilities is especially critical, he said.

System damage – such as valve trouble, cracked pipes, or broken heads – is another issue contractors need to deal with in the spring. Morton sees a lot of damage from snow plows and cars, in particular. "Around driveways and curbs, heads get hit a lot," said Morton, who recommended remedying this by lowering the heads, if possible. Watch out for age-related problems, as well. In older systems, there is usually

a sprinkler or two that is just worn out, Katerberg said. – *Cynthia Greenleaf* **LL**

*The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape*

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USE READER SERVICE #29

# Droughtbusters

**I'm a skilled technician and businessman, but not a great teacher. Where can I find trained irrigation specialists so my company can expand?**

There are few schools that prepare people to be irrigation foremen or designers. A small number of state land grant colleges have four-year degrees in agricultural engineering that people have completed to prepare for their careers in irrigation. Other paths toward irrigation include four-year degrees in horticulture with a minor in irrigation science or a subsequent masters in irrigation science. Such programs require considerable dedication and graduate fewer than a dozen students with majors in irrigation annually.

Two-year community colleges in some areas offer degrees in landscaping that typically include irrigation courses. These schools produce the largest number of graduates each year—approximately 1,500—but the amount of irrigation training is limited. Often, the most valuable training is on the job once a graduate has been hired.

One school in northern Florida recently launched a program that is completely dedicated to irrigation. Lake City Community College, Lake City, Fla., now offers both a one-year certificate and a two-year associate's degree in irrigation. The school also has a landscape program for students to tie landscaping to irriga-

**Should I use sprayheads or rotors for residential lawns? Front lawns in our area average about 1,500 square feet.**

Unless a lawn is narrow or oddly shaped, rotors offer improved uniformity and reliability. Sprayheads have a higher precipitation rate and smaller radius. They do not cover as large an area as a rotor. More heads and laterals will be needed to cover the same area with sprayheads.

Once a lawn's dimensions exceed 30 linear feet, look into rotors. Be aware that running times for rotary sprinklers will need to be longer than sprayheads. You won't be able to put as many

rotors in a zone as sprayheads. Also, larger rotary heads might require 3/4-inch pipe. Rotary heads are generally sturdier and harder to vandalize.

Do not mix sprayheads and rotary heads on the same zone. Also, pay attention to elevation and slope, which will influence application rate compared to the soil's infiltration rate. The higher application rate of sprayheads might not be appropriate for sloped plant beds. **LL**

tion. The school expects to graduate more than 20 irrigation managers each year.

Talk with representatives from your local community college horticulture department and your state university about the type of graduates they produce each year. There may be a way for them to tailor a degree to generate better trained people for your industry.

Of course, on-the-job training support is available from the Irrigation Association (IA).

There are **few schools** that **prepare** people to be **irrigation foremen or designers**. A **small number** of state land grant colleges have **four-year degrees** in **agricultural engineering** that people have **completed** to **prepare** for their **careers in irrigation**.

IA offers more than 20 different courses each year. This training can be backed up with four different types of certification.

Your local irrigation distributor should be able to help you arrange IA-sanctioned training in your area. You can find out more about IA training and certification programs by visiting [www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org).

Bruce Shank is owner of IrriCom, a communications firm specializing in irrigation, turf and landscape in Palmdale, Calif. He can be reached at 661-722-1698 or [irricom1@earthlink.net](mailto:irricom1@earthlink.net)

*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](mailto:irricom1@earthlink.net).*

*For additional information, visit the Irrigation Association's Web site, [www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org), or use its search engine, [www.irri-gate.com](http://www.irri-gate.com).*

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DIMENSION <sup>b</sup>	H	M	H	M	H	M	M	M
TEAM <sup>c</sup>	H	M	M	M	M	M	NR	NR
RONSTAR <sup>d</sup>	M	H	NR	M	M	NR	NR	NR
SURFLAN <sup>e</sup>	H	H	H	M	MH	M	H	H
<b>Level of control:</b>	Medium		Medium-High		High	Not Registered		

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# Nursery Market Report

TREE PRODUCTION:

## Gone to Pot

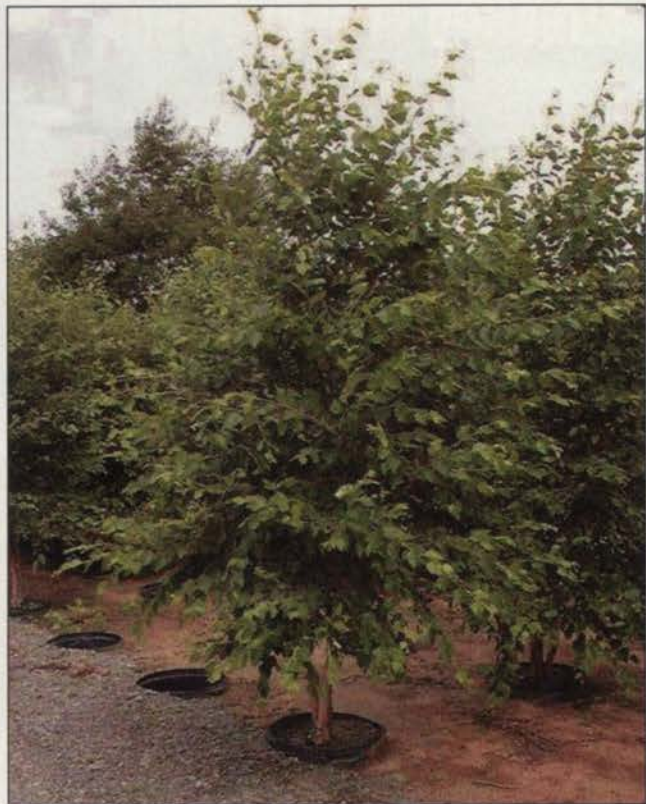
Container-grown trees are increasingly becoming a top choice for growers and landscape contractors. But will this current trend continue and could this be the end of balled-and-burlapped material, or B&B?

The answer to the last question is indisputably "no." Still, there will be less B&B material grown in the future because container-grown trees require less labor, offer improved product consistency and faster turnaround time. Growing large field-grown specimens will continue to be necessary, though, because large container production may be unmanageable in some cases.

Our experience shows that the majority of trees, particularly deciduous ones, thrive in containers in "sockets" in the ground. We achieve a 20 percent increase in growth annually compared with the same species grown under field conditions. This allows a turnaround time of one year from the time of planting until the crop is fully rooted, has acquired a good crown and is ready for sale.

Willoway Nurseries Inc., Avon, Ohio, has found that certain evergreens perform better in containers above the ground rather than inserted in sockets because of the warmer temperatures. But 98 percent of trees prefer the cooler root system the "pot 'n pot" method allows.

**CONVERTING THE LAND.** Willoway has recently expanded its pot 'n pot line to include 45-gallon containers. It is possible to obtain a 2½- to 3-inch caliper tree in this size container. Up to 2-inch caliper can be grown in 25-gallon containers and 1- to 1½-inch caliper in 15-gallon containers. As of Jan. 1, Willoway had a total of 30



*Instead of B&B, more container-grown trees will be grown in the future because they often improve product consistency and speed up turnaround time.*  
Photos: Willoway Nurseries Inc.

acres pot 'n pot production. We plan to add an additional 9,000 containers by fall.

The initial land preparation to convert from field to container production is time consuming, which is why our expansion capabilities are limited. First, the land must be cleared of all remaining field-grown stock and then graded. Trenches are dug in the appropriate width to accommodate the containers.

Irrigation and drainage is installed, followed by the containers, which are used as sockets to hold the newly potted trees. These are spaced evenly along the trench, allowing 40 inches between trees for 7-gallon; 42 inches for 15-gallon; 57 inches for 25-gallon; and 72 inches for 45-gallon containers.

The trenches are then backfilled with gravel and herbicide is applied. Potted trees are inserted in the sockets and drip irrigation is installed in each. Because of the weight of the 45-gallon trees, wires must be attached to the pots for machine lifting later.

**FEEDING PRODUCTIVITY.** Achieving the significant increase in productivity meant fertilizing the container trees through the drip irrigation system once a week and applying a supplement of granular fertilizer in spring. Water is applied using drip irrigation daily.

The interiors of all containers are treated with Lerio  
*(continued on page 44)*



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USE READER SERVICE #37

# Nursery Market Report

(continued from page 42)

Corp.'s Spinout, which stunts the root tip when it comes in contact with the pot, preventing circling roots from developing. Consequently, faster, more successful planting is possible. The roots are all intact – and no

in the containers, the roots grew down to reach water and this problem was alleviated.

We have also encountered difficulties with larger trees moving in windy conditions because they are top heavy. This problem is not unique to container-grown trees, though, and it was solved by staking these trees until their root systems were established.

**BROAD APPEAL.** Growing trees using the pot 'n pot method has been a definite advantage for growers, not only because of the turn-around time, but because growers can guarantee a more consistent product to their customers.

The increase in costs to prepare the land for pot 'n pot are far outweighed by the benefits. The majority of trees can be lifted manually from the sockets, are easier to store before shipping and more manageable at the time of shipping. These factors all result in reduced labor.

Landscape contractors, although reticent at first, have now wholeheartedly jumped on

the container-grown tree bandwagon. They, like garden centers, have found that storage, transportation and handling problems are significantly reduced. They can also purchase trees year round when they need them, rather than worrying about storage and anticipating requirements for installation contracts they hope to receive. With the increase in size of containers, we anticipate being able to fill most landscaper contractors' future needs.

Re-wholesalers and larger landscaping companies that routinely have nursery stock on hand have found that by constructing raised beds of pea gravel they can store container trees with ease. These beds are the depth of the containers and are filled with sockets to simulate the in-ground method. Potted trees can be inserted in the sockets and drip irrigation run to each container as in the field. The pea gravel prevents the soil mix from drying out and keeps the walkways clean and dry – a far cry from mulch storage beds. – Elizabeth Preedy

The author is marketing coordinator, Willoway Nurseries Inc., Avon, Ohio.

## Container-grown trees

are increasingly a

top choice for growers

and landscape contractors.

roots are lost from the digging process – yet the pots are not root bound. This has held true even with such species as Salix alba 'Tristis,' Niobe Willow.

**POT HOLES.** Willoway did encounter some minor problems. Initially, a shallow root system was observed in the larger red maples. By increasing the amount of drainage holes

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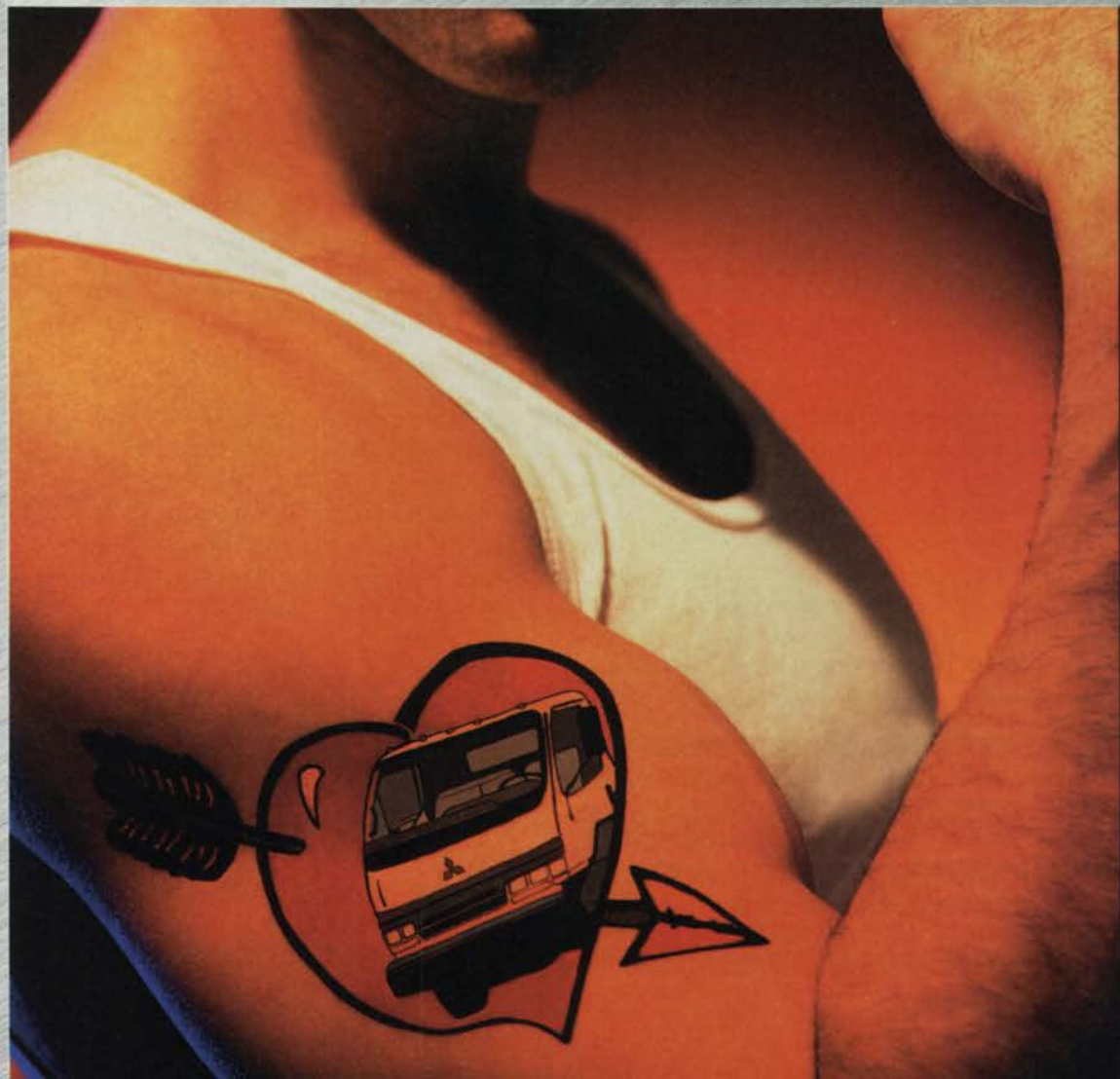
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# In Minor's League

**QUESTION:** What do you think about incentive programs?

**ANSWER:** An incentive program, if done correctly, can be a tremendous asset to a landscape company. But programs can do more harm than good if they are not well thought-out or if they don't have quantifiable measurements.

If you are not currently providing an incentive plan, the steps you go about to initiate one are important. When designing your program, you should involve all the company's shareholders. Building consensus in an entrepreneurial environment is oftentimes overlooked, but is a process that must be given full attention. There is nothing wrong with senior managers giving input on the incentive plan or sharing their opinions on the direction in which to take it, but making sure all parties buy into the program is

**In a perfect world, we could motivate our field workers by dangling the carrot of an annual profit sharing plan in front of their faces.**

important. Ultimately, someone, usually the president, will make the final call.

I have a personal bias where incentives are concerned for field people. As I have mentioned in the past, I think payout needs to be done on a regular basis. Regular could mean weekly or monthly. I always chose to pay monthly because our system accommodated this process, and I thought this timetable was immediate enough.

Remember that paying field people at time intervals that are further apart is difficult. In a perfect world, we could motivate our field workers by dangling the carrot of an annual profit sharing plan in front of their faces. In the real world, that is hard to do. Focusing on monthly rewards is much easier because you can keep that carrot dangling within reach on a regular basis. A monthly payout plan also gives management leverage when performance is not acceptable. Positive changes in performance happen more frequently if rewards for the performance are given regularly.

Tying field staff incentive programs to all the critical aspects of your company's mission is also important. If delivering a top quality product or exceptional customer service is at the top of your company's mission, then these aspects should certainly be tied into your bonus program. Of course, from a production perspective, you must tie in efficiency and meeting or exceeding goals.

The obvious problem with focusing only on production is the fact that your field people will only focus on that aspect and not on quality and/or customer service. The flip side of that equation is that if quality is the only concern, then production may be overlooked. Tie quality, customer service and efficiency to your incentive plan and you will create a quality program.

I like to use the analogy of a finely tuned engine when explaining how a successful company operates: If the oil is changed, the filter is clean, and the spark plugs are new, then the engine runs well. If any one of these aspects is ignored, then the engine will not run well. The same relationship exists in business. If you deliver a quality product and excellent customer service in an efficient manner, then everyone wins. Your employees are compensated for their hard work, the company profits and the customer pays a lower price for your service.

With incentive plans for managers, I think you can have the payout annually with some type of profit- or gain-sharing plan, but you need to keep the criteria in front of your staff on a regular basis. Hold monthly meetings to discuss revenue, quality, customer service and profitability. Also, set goals and monitor those goals.

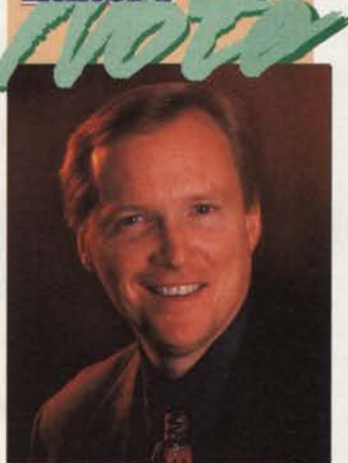
I've tried both team and individual incentive plans and, quite frankly, have not been successful with individual incentives. Having people in various departments on different plans is difficult. My philosophy is either you succeed as a team or you fail as a team.

Needless to say, there are many schools of thought on incentives. The programs I described have worked for me. There are many good books available on incentive programs. The best advice I can give you is make sure your incentive plan is well thought-out, that employees buy into the program and that the plan's focus satisfies your company mission. **LL**

*One of the most popular speakers at the 2000 Lawn & Landscape School of Management was David Minor, founder and former president of Minor's Landscape Services, a \$12-million company in Fort Worth, Texas, that Minor sold to TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1998. In this monthly column, Minor shares his thoughts and suggestions for managing a lawn and landscape business with readers.*

*In addition to serving the industry as a consultant and speaker, Minor is professor and director of The Entrepreneurship Center at The M.J. Neeley School of Business at Texas Christian University. Readers with questions they would like to ask Minor can e-mail them to [bwest@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:bwest@lawnandlandscape.com) or fax them to Lawn & Landscape at 216/961-0364.*

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by Nicole Wisniewski

# In Pursuit of GROWTH

Almost every member of the management team at Austin Management Group in Palm Coast, Fla., is under the age of 30, but don't let their youth fool you. No matter how young they are, Austin Management Group's managers aren't short of professionalism and business savoir-faire, which is what has grown their company into a \$6.5 million venture in just four years.

But enjoying rapid growth wasn't easy. According to Austin Management Group President Edward Schatz Jr., growing quickly was something that couldn't have been done without loyal employees, knowledgeable management and understanding suppliers.

**GETTING STARTED AT A YOUNG AGE.** Schatz's father, Edward Sr., started Tree City, a commercial landscape installation company, in the mid-1970s. At the time, Palm Coast was a slow-growing area.

"Development sped up after my father started the company," Schatz said, explaining how ITT Development Corp. began rapidly developing the county and contracted most of the landscape work needed for these developments to Tree City.

After high school with interests already grounded in landscape and horticulture, Schatz went to Florida State University, Tallahassee, Fla., to obtain his finance and real estate degrees. After graduating in spring 1993, a

poor job market forced Schatz to stay at home and work for his father. "The job market in the corporate sector wasn't nearly as hot as it is today," Schatz remarked. "And I knew I could excel working at my dad's company."

*(continued on page 52)*

### AUSTIN MANAGEMENT GROUP

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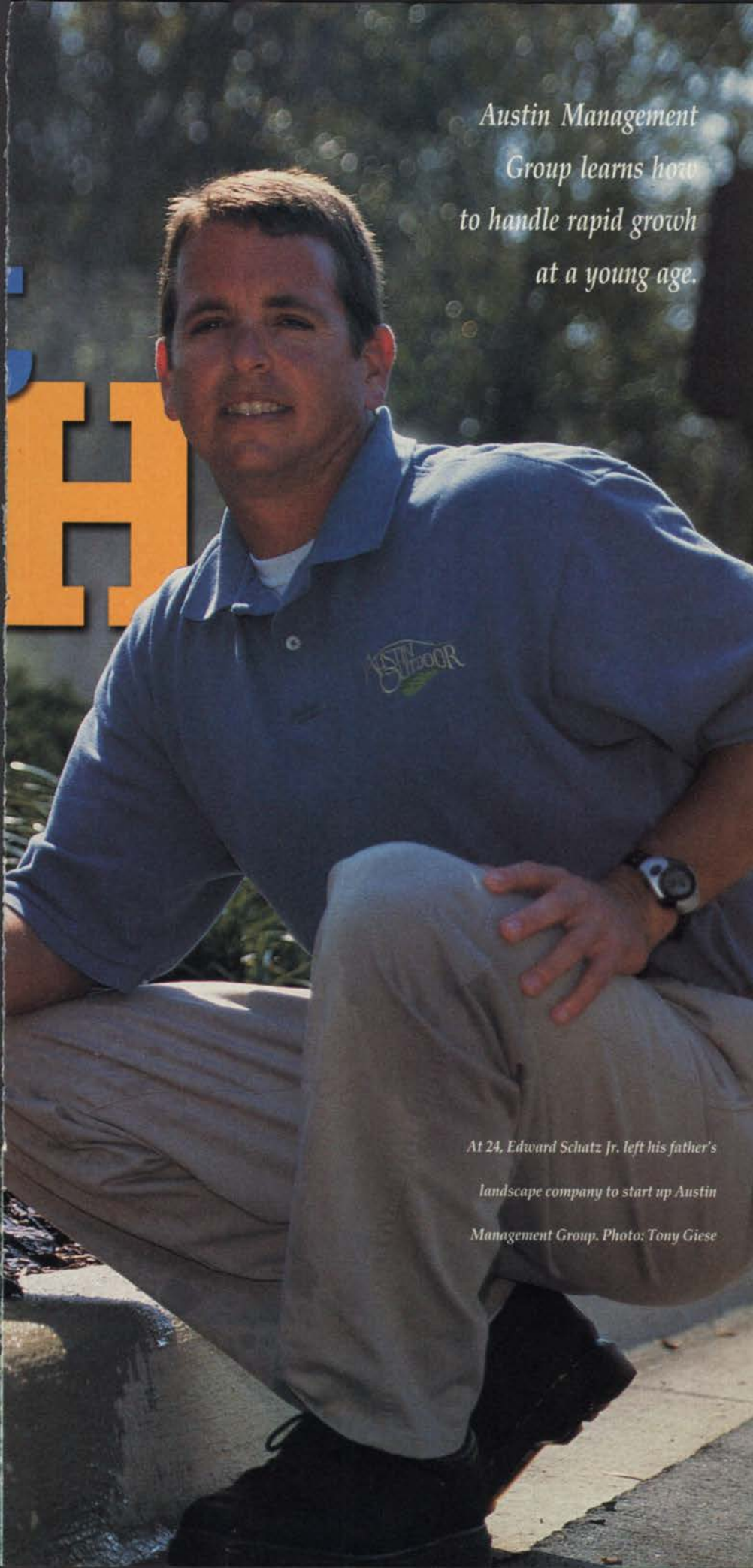
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*Austin Management  
Group learns how  
to handle rapid growth  
at a young age.*

*At 24, Edward Schatz Jr. left his father's  
landscape company to start up Austin  
Management Group. Photo: Tony Giese*

## **AUSTIN MANAGEMENT GROUP**

**HEADQUARTERS:** Palm Coast, Fla.

**FOUNDED:** 1995

**SERVICES:** 65 percent installation,  
15 percent irrigation,  
20 percent maintenance

**1999 REVENUE:** \$6.5 million

**PROJECTED REVENUE FOR 2000:**  
\$8 million

**EMPLOYEES:** 75 year-round,  
80 percent of whom are Hispanic

**CUSTOMERS:** 80 percent commer-  
cial, 20 percent residential

### **THE COMPANY**

**MISSION STATEMENT:** To be  
a leader in the landscape industry  
while providing the highest quality  
service and material to our customers  
and creating an environment where  
our employees can grow and prosper.

**FUTURE CHALLENGE:** Transitioning  
our current installation revenue  
streams into landscape maintenance  
revenue streams within the next three  
to five years while at the same time  
maintaining profit margins and  
employee retention.

### **THE OWNER**

**Edward Schatz Jr., president**

**AGE:** 29

**BACKGROUND:** Schatz developed  
an interest in the landscape industry  
by working for his father, an installa-  
tion contractor. He received his  
degrees in finance and real estate  
from Florida State University.

**At a  
Glance**

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# Cover Story

(continued from page 48)

The time Schatz spent working with his father was cut short, though, because he was eager for a new challenge. In 1995, he decided to branch off and start his own company – Austin Management Group. “My dad’s company was grossing \$1 million in revenue in 1994,” Schatz explained. “My dad

was at a stage in his life where growing his business meant assuming more risk than he was willing to take. At this time, he was also specializing in tract home installation ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 each. I saw an opportunity to reach the clients beyond the specific market my dad serviced.”

Thanks to the well-known Schatz name in the Palm Coast area, Schatz had no problem obtaining a few larger commercial accounts (starting at about \$10,000) within a 70-mile end-to-end service area. Also helpful was the rapid development along the East Coast in central Florida. Overall revenue at the end of Schatz’s first year of business totaled \$750,000.

“I had already built client relationships and had good contacts in the area,” Schatz said. “Dad has his niche – he deals mostly with a few builders of smaller production homes. Our forte is the high-end residential and commercial installation projects ranging from \$50,000 to more than \$1 million.”

**GROWTH THROUGH EXPANSION.** In 1996, Austin Management Group was having a good year. “Our reputation for high-quality landscape installation was strong, and my clients were always asking me if we could take care of the maintenance on their properties, as well,” Schatz said. “Maintenance wasn’t an area I knew much about, so I referred the work to maintenance contractors in the area.”

The problem was that all of the plant material Schatz installed that the client was pleased with originally looked unkempt a few weeks later. “Every time we recommended a maintenance contractor to a client, that favor would come back to bite us later,” Schatz said. This spurred the creation of Austin Environmental, a landscape maintenance company Schatz started as a separate entity from Austin Outdoor, the installation portion of Austin Management Group.

“I really didn’t push the maintenance part of the business that first year because I wasn’t as familiar with it,” Schatz said, pointing out that the 1996 revenue for Austin Environmental Services was only \$157,000.

Schatz financed the maintenance division internally without having to borrow from outside sources. But expanding the working capital for the extra equipment expenses was a difficult task, Schatz admitted.

“When you’re growing at a pace that exceeds 25 percent, cash flow never seems to catch up, so all the money coming in goes out to cover the expansion,” he said. “If you grow 25 percent or less each year, there’s more of an opportunity to build cash reserves. Additionally, our larger installation

(continued on page 54)

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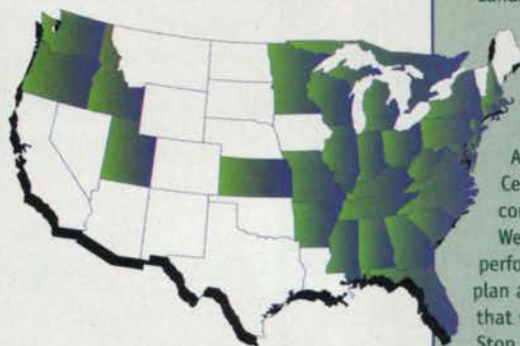


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## Cover Story

(continued from page 52)

contracts (\$1 to \$2 million) generated the money that funded the cash flow requirement of the maintenance division, such as additional crews, which each cost us approximately \$30,000 up front."

Also helpful was the fact that the nurseries and other material suppliers Austin Outdoor purchases from gave Schatz flexible payment terms. "Without our vendors providing us with flexible terms for our installation division purchases, our cash position could have been much worse than it was," Schatz said. "We tried to single source trees and shrubs and, in return, the nursery gave us flexible terms, helping us grow."

In 1997, a similar business expansion took place with the irrigation portion of Austin Outdoor. Schatz realized that many landscape contractors along the East Coast in central Florida didn't offer irrigation installation, a service the company does well.

After a few requests from other area contractors who were interested in subcontract-

- 1 two-person crew, two three-person crews and one four-person crew in maintenance
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- 12 pruners
- 1 spray vehicle

## Operation Set Up

ing their irrigation work to Austin Outdoor, Schatz decided to branch off the irrigation portion of his business to create Austin Irrigation Services. He hired Brian Walker, vice president of the irrigation division, and had Walker focus completely on the irrigation portion of the business. Their first year of business brought in \$170,000 in revenue.

"We were growing at a rapid pace on all fronts," Schatz said, explaining that his landscape installation division revenue exploded to more than \$1 million in 1996 and Austin Management Group's revenue grew to \$2.5 million in 1997.

Schatz built his labor force first before handling additional accounts, which is how he was able to manage the company's rapid growth. "Once we obtained contracts, we found people to fulfill those contracts as quickly as possible," Schatz said.

Also, Schatz said breaking up installation, irrigation and maintenance into sepa-

(continued on page 59)

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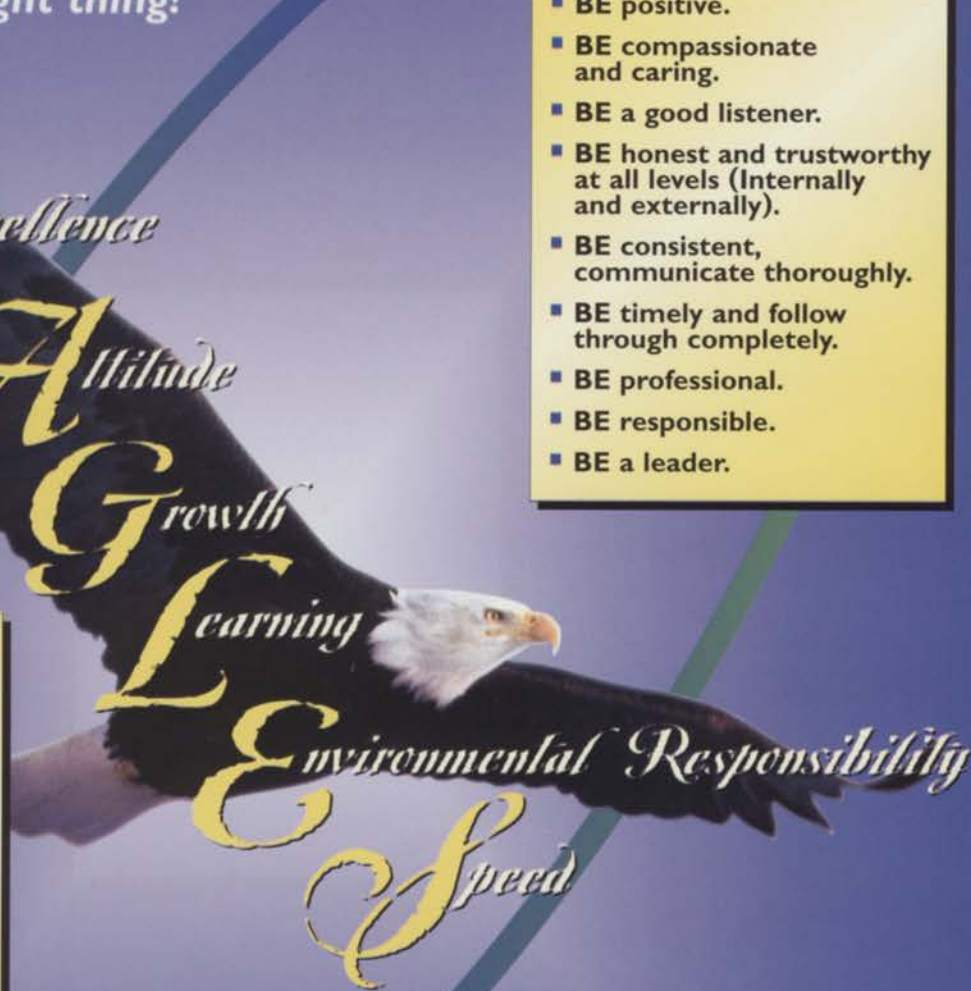
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(continued from page 54)

rate business entities has allowed him to work with his competition at the same time he was competing with them in another area of business. "I felt it was a cleaner way to manage my business because each individual company has its own set of financials, which allows us to extract relevant information and make management decisions more quickly. For example, if labor costs are running high in one company, we have the ability to see and reverse the trend before it becomes a much bigger problem. Also, the separation gives us the ability to break 75 employees down to three groups of 25 to 30 employees."

#### **PUSHING MAINTENANCE GROWTH.**

While Austin Environmental Service's growth was still evident in 1997, it wasn't what it could have been in Schatz's eyes. Austin Irrigation jumped to \$590,000 in 1998, and Schatz knew it was because he had someone knowledgeable in place to rapidly expand that portion of the business. "In late 1998, I decided to find someone who could expand Austin Environmental Services," Schatz said.

Schatz said he learned who some of the best managers in maintenance were from attending landscape association conferences and networking with other contractors. Through networking, he came to know Steve Martin, currently vice president of the maintenance division, because he had a strong maintenance background working for a national landscape company and had been involved with some of the larger commercial properties along Florida's East Coast.

Martin joined Austin Environmental Services in late 1998, and landscape maintenance revenue grew 300 percent from \$325,000 in 1998 to more than \$1 million in 1999. "In the past, our growth pattern was mostly organic in our maintenance company," Martin said. "But once we actually started to pursue growth in that area, it exploded."

Although obtaining good employees once proved to be Austin Management Group's biggest challenge, Schatz now points to the company's 75 employees as its biggest assets. Developing those employees remains a challenge, though, especially since having an 80 percent Hispanic labor force builds in a language and cultural barrier to break through.

While integrating his labor force was difficult at first, Schatz said the key to getting and retaining this labor started with under-

standing the Hispanic culture and realizing employee needs don't revolve entirely around money. Rather, he said, Hispanic employees desire respect, communication and understanding first.

"We have developed an understanding of what makes our employees happy," Schatz

explained, pointing out that the company loses a maximum of three to five employees annually. "Being flexible is a big part of our management style. If one of our Hispanic employees comes to me and says he or she needs to return to Mexico for a short while to take care of some family issues, I have to

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USE READER SERVICE #41

understand that. In return for my understanding, they will usually help the company find a replacement employee or bring in more employees in the future as the company needs them.

"They also handle many of our employee issues on their own," Martin said. "For ex-

ample, if I hire a new worker and assign him to a certain crew, the other crew members will help train and develop the new employee. If the new person isn't working out, the other members of the crew will let management know."

Martin admitted the company is still over-

coming some challenges with educating and training Hispanic employees so he can promote them and give them greater responsibility in the company. "Earlier in the company's growth, I attempted to promote my top Hispanic crew leaders to account managers, a job that included communicating with clients," Schatz remarked. "The communication barrier was too tough to overcome, and the position was not one the employees were comfortable with. The lesson learned was that some employees are more comfortable doing what they do best, such as being a crew leader, rather than moving up to a position where they are constantly communicating with clients.

"Another thing that we learned was how to keep open communication lines among management and employees," Schatz continued. "For example, being actively involved with our Hispanic employees everyday is important. Management hasn't lost touch with the employees handling the edgers and string trimmers. We're out there interacting with them every day. By doing so, I feel like employees aren't placing management on a pedestal where they don't feel they can talk openly with them."

**REFOCUSING FUTURE GROWTH.** After taking the opportunity to network with other landscape contractors on a national scale, Schatz realized that to be successful in the long-term he needed to refocus the company from a primarily installation-oriented business to one that has a greater focus on landscape maintenance. The purpose of doing so being that when the economy's current growth tapers off, the company's revenue base will remain somewhat stable.

"I always thought maintenance was too customer-oriented and too tedious, but after attending a couple of conferences, I realized that from a business standpoint, it was recurring revenue I could count on," Schatz said. "In landscape installation, growth comes in peaks and valleys, whereas landscape maintenance can provide our company with more of a stable revenue base."

Currently, 80 percent of Austin Management Group's \$6.5 million in revenue comes from landscape and irrigation installation. The company's five-year growth plan calls

(continued on page 62)



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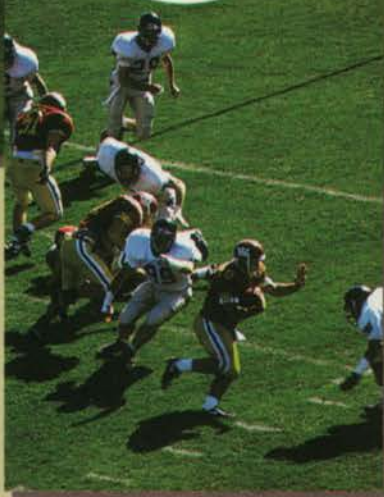


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## Cover Story

(continued from page 60)

for \$12 million in revenue by 2005. According to Austin Management Group goals, 40 to 50 percent of that revenue will come from landscape maintenance.

In order to make this growth possible, the company is building its management base to ensure that employee and client expectations are met, Schatz said. "We just hired two operations managers for Austin Environmental Services early so they can get acclimated to the company and fulfill future contracts instead of waiting until the last minute and risk running a short-handed operation."

Overall, Schatz credits a young, aggressive, knowledgeable team to Austin Management Group's success.

"Any time you educate yourself and focus on your employees, achieving company goals becomes a team effort and can be easily accomplished," Schatz enthused. 

The author is Associate Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

# Growth Timeline

- 1995** • Schatz started Austin Management Group\* (landscape and irrigation installation)  
• End of year revenue: \$750,000
- 1996** • Schatz started Austin Environmental Services (landscape maintenance)  
• End of year revenue for Austin Outdoor (the landscape and irrigation installation division of Austin Management Group): \$1.4 million  
• End of year revenue for Austin Environmental Services: \$157,000
- 1997** • Schatz started Austin Irrigation Services (irrigation installation only)  
• Schatz hired Brian Walker, vice president of the irrigation division  
• End of year revenue for Austin Outdoor (landscape installation only): \$2 million  
• End of year revenue for Austin Environmental Services: \$258,000  
• End of year revenue for Austin Irrigation Services: \$170,000
- 1998** • Steve Martin, vice president of the maintenance division, was hired  
• End of year revenue for Austin Outdoor: \$2.8 million  
• End of year revenue for Austin Environmental Services: \$326,000  
• End of year revenue for Austin Irrigation Services: \$590,000
- 1999** • End of year revenue for Austin Outdoor: \$4.5 million  
• End of year revenue for Austin Environmental Services: \$1 million  
• End of year revenue for Austin Irrigation Services: just under \$1 million

\* Today, Austin Management Group is a combination of Austin Outdoor, Austin Environmental Services and Austin Irrigation Services. The company originally began as Austin Outdoor performing only landscape and irrigation installation before its three main service areas were broken up into separate entities.

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USE READER SERVICE #51

by Bob West

*Controlling weeds in landscape beds is not a fun task, but it doesn't have to be difficult.*

# GETTING

# into

# BEEDS



**I** Imagine you are a homeowner or a property manager for a commercial building, and you're walking toward the front door of your building on a nice early summer day. As you're coming up the front walk, you're admiring the blooming annuals in beds on either side of the door – an eye-catching area you and the rest of your family or your employees walk past at least once every day.

All of a sudden, you notice the impatiens and begonias aren't alone as the only flowering plants in the beds. In fact, the dandelion seems to be in full flower. Or if you're located in a warmer climate, perhaps there is some bermudagrass or sedge trying to "get into bed" with those plants.

At this point, regardless of the type of property these weeds have appeared on, the lawn care operator responsible for the property can expect a phone call from a less-than-happy customer. Many contractors have come to accept that they will receive some of these phone calls ever year because no matter what they do as lawn care professionals, weeds will find their way into landscape beds and customers will notice them.

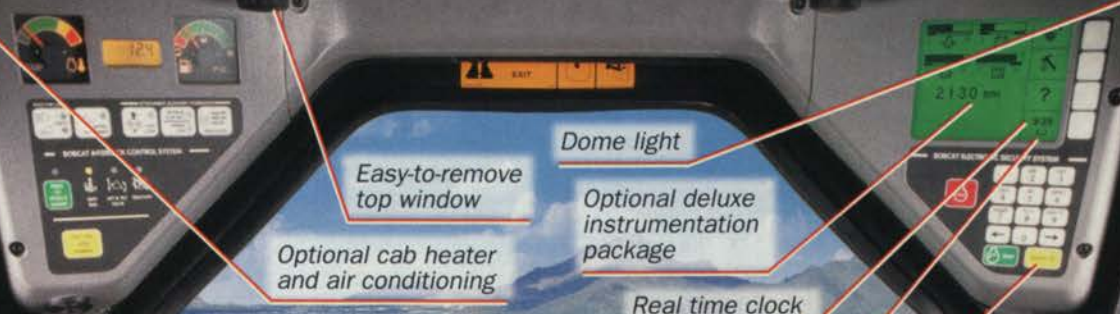
"Weeds can show up in a lawn, but the customers won't always notice them because people don't pay as close attention to turf as they do to beds, and weeds blend in with turf better," related Ken Wentland, production superintendent, Lied's Landscape Design & Development, Sussex, Wis. "But people look at the beds on their property because the beds have the flowers and the shrubs, and the beds tend to be located near entranceways and other high-traffic areas. And people don't want to see weeds in these beds."

The question then becomes what has to be done to keep the weeds out of the beds?

*(continued on page 66)*



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## Weed Control

(continued from page 64)

**STOPPING THE START.** Without question, the best way to stop weeds from growing in a bed is to never let the weed seeds get into the bed. And a little extra preventive effort could go a long way to reducing your curative costs.

"The key to keeping beds clean is getting them under control as soon as possible," according to Sharon Shank, president, Busy Bee Lawn Care, Charlotte, N.C. "If we inherit a contract that has beds with some real weed problems, then we'll pull out the shrubs, haul away the contaminated soil and start with new soil. Customers aren't generally excited about that idea when we tell them our plans, but we explain to them that replacing the entire bed will usually be more cost effective than having us try to get the weeds under control."

"We do everything we can to try to inhibit weed growth in beds," agreed Michael Gaffney, general manager, Landscape Maintenance Group (LMG), Kennesaw, Ga. "We

## Quick TIP

**POSTEMERGENCE products sprayed late in the season may only result in restricting weed growth above ground instead of killing the weed because cooler temperature slows the translocation process.**

put down a granular formulation of a preemergence herbicide early every year, and we look for a product with the broadest weed-control label available."

As with weed control in turf, Gaffney said application timing is critical for success.

"We don't make blanket preemergence applications to all of the properties we manage because the beds shouldn't need as much

preemergence work once you get them under control," he said. "But beds that do get the preemergence application have to receive the application before the weeds start to germinate or else you're just wasting your time and your money."

Wentland echoed Gaffney's and Shank's emphasis on preventive strategies, but he also recognized that putting preemergence herbicides in areas that are supposed to include ornamental plants can be tricky.

"We'll apply some preemergence herbicides to beds in the fall for the next season because the product won't break down that much over the winter, but we plant a lot of bulbs and annuals. We haven't found an herbicide yet that controls the weeds without affecting the ornamentals that we want to grow in the beds," Wentland said. "Having the weeds

(continued on page 68)



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## Weed Control

(continued from page 66)

show up in the spring isn't any good, but customers don't like it when the plants don't show up, either."

Color changeouts that take place throughout a year can also incite weed growth in beds.

"Any time you're planting in a bed you're going to disturb the soil and turn up some

weed seeds, so you have to be ready and watch those areas closely after planting," Wentland noted. "The other tricky area is managing new beds that were installed a year or two ago. A lot of the weed seeds in that soil that was delivered by a landscape installation company or disturbed during

## Quick TIP

**CREW MEMBERS should be able to easily identify weeds in beds because their appearance is so different from the plants that are supposed to be there.**

the planting may take a year or two to germinate, and then the client will blame the maintenance contractor for weeds that the maintenance contractor had no control over."

**UNWANTED GUESTS.** Try as you might, the odds are slim that you'll be able to eliminate all weed problems in beds. An important question then becomes: "How do I get rid of these weeds?"

Just as with weeds that develop in turf, postemergence products are the answer. And just as with turf, proper attention should be given to product selection and application to maximize effectiveness.

"We try to control weeds that are less than 2 inches tall with a nonselective herbicide, and then we'll manually pull the weeds taller than 2 inches," related Shank. "Obviously, the key is not doing anything that will kill the plants in the beds."

When the question of making the application comes up, most contractors favor backpack sprayers, and they also recommend carefully deciding who makes these applications.

"We primarily use backpack sprayers for postemergence applications into beds, but we've also used some other methods, such as long, plastic tubes that dispense the herbicide a few drops at a time so you can control where the pesticide is applied," added Wentland. "Tools like that tube are generally only used in areas where the weed is too close to the plant to spray or pull effectively."

"Each of our maintenance crews carries a backpack sprayer and a non-selective herbicide to spray into beds on a weekly basis, if need be," said Gaffney, adding that problem sites requiring more thorough applications are handled by a dedicated spray technician. "Crews fill out a work order every time they

(continued on page 70)

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## Weed Control

(continued from page 68)

visit each of our maintenance properties, and the back of that form includes an area for them to record any pesticide use that was required so we can track that."

Gaffney also related that the foreman on each crew is responsible for making the postemergence applications while the other crew members handle the mowing and trimming. "I want the most experienced crew person doing the work that calls for the most precision or technical expertise," he said.

Gaffney went on to explain that LMG's backpack sprayers are equipped with adjustable cone-tip nozzles. Anyone using one of the sprayers in a postemergence situation is instructed to use as little pressure as possible with the sprayer and to make sure the beds have been edged with a steel edger before the herbicide applications are made.

"Using less pressure helps avoid the fogging effect that can let the product drift on to the ornamental plants," he pointed out.

The sprayer operators are then instructed

**T**ell people that fighting weeds in landscape beds is a tremendous nuisance for you and your business and not many people will disagree. Once weeds show up in beds they just seem to keep coming back week after week. Options for controlling these problematic plants range from preemergence herbicides to postemergence pesticides to good old hand-pulling – but nothing serves as a guarantee.

One other option that still falls short of a guarantee but has some prevention potential is the use of

landscape fabric in beds. This fabric is a porous sheet of dark, thin cloth designed to be laid across a bed beneath a layer of mulch in order to restrict weed growth.

"Once all of the weeds have been removed from a bed, the fabric is laid over the soil," explained Patrick Blackburn, national sales manager, Fabriscape, Chicago, Ill. "Then mulch or decorative stone can be applied over top of the fabric to hide it."

If they want to install some plants in the bed, contractors can cut holes in the fabric to place the plant into the soil but still keep the surrounding soil covered by the fabric. The porous nature of the fabric allows water to get down to the soil's roots.

Blackburn said that in addition to restricting the growth opportunities for any

## A Simpler Solution



weed seeds that are in the soil beneath the fabric, the fabric also limits the chance of new weed seeds blowing into the bedding and establishing roots.

"There are various types of landscape fabric available, and contractors in warmer climates with thicker, tougher weeds and wild grasses should consider thicker fabrics," Blackburn noted. "And as long as the fabric is kept covered up, it could last for 10 years or more because the biggest enemy of landscape fabric is sunlight."

Contractors have also found uses for the fabric in areas that will be covered with stone and where plantings won't be made. In these cases, the fabric helps keep the stone and soil separate and makes removing the stone from the area much easier. — **Bob West**

to hold the spray wand down toward the ground with the nozzle pointing toward the bed to protect the turf. "Then making the application is just a matter of making sure you don't point the nozzle at the ornamentals," Gaffney explained.

**THE MANUAL APPROACH.** Weed control isn't limited to just pesticide-based strategies, particularly in beds. Of course, there is always the labor-intensive hand-pulling, which can be quite successful so long as the entire root of the weed is removed.

Contractors also reported having success limiting weed growth by establishing effective edges between beds and turf areas or by using use of some material to cover the soil, such as mulch or pine straw.

"I think proper edging is very important, especially when you're trying to keep bermudagrass out of beds," related Shank. "We start off the spring by using a mechanical bed edger that cuts a nice V-shaped edge

## Weed Control

between the bed and the turf, and then we manually edge the turf side of the 'V' every week and fill that area with mulch."

"We want all of our clients to mulch their beds at least once a year to help us control weed growth," explained Gaffney, although the company doesn't have any clauses in its contractors for clients who don't.

Shank also noted that there are times when the best solution for weed control is pulling the weeds out manually, and Wentland said this type of work is what often separates the average contractors from the good contractors.

"There are a lot of contractors who sell based on low price, and they're not going to spend a lot of time caring for areas like beds," he pointed out. "Professional contractors realize the importance of attention to detail, however, so they know how important work like manual weeding can be." **LL**

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

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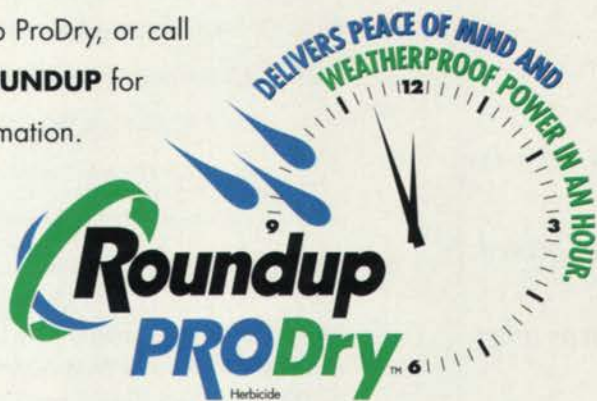
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**USE READER SERVICE #128**

by Bob West

Many lawn care operators prefer to make spot treatments for disease control despite the potential for missing areas of disease incidence. Photo: L&L Staff



# Effective FUNGICIDE Use

*Fungicides may not be needed as often as other pesticides, but disease control is still crucial to an effective lawn care program.*

If a student new to turfgrass management asked any lawn care operator for an explanation of the different types of herbicides, how they worked, what they worked on and the keys to a successful application, he or she would likely learn more than they could imagine. Another lawn care operator could probably give a description of insecticides that was almost as thorough and complete as the discussion on herbicides, although insecticides can be a bit more technically challenging.

But if that student went looking for some information on fungicides, there's a greater chance that he or she would have to ask a few lawn care operators about these disease-control products before finding a knowledgeable source.

The fact is that disease incidence on turf presents fewer challenges to lawn care operators as a whole than weeds or insects do. This means that finding a fungicide expert may take a little longer than finding an herbicide or insecticide expert.

"Weed control is probably the easiest service for a lawn care operator to sell because homeowners know what a dandelion looks like, and they know they don't want that in their yard," related Gray Wirth, market manager for turf and ornamentals, Rohm & Haas, Philadelphia, Pa. "Insect control is probably the next easiest service to sell because once someone has grubs in their yard, they'll never forget that.

"But disease control can be more difficult to sell because homeowners don't know what turf diseases look like, and they will often have a disease in their yard and just think the problem is drought stress or heat stress," Wirth continued. "That is good for lawn care operators because it means disease control represents a great add-on service to sell because the herbicides and insecticides are probably already going down on their customers' properties, but not many of them are getting fungicides as well."

**DISEASE DEMONS.** Turf diseases can be a real concern for many lawn care operators, especially those operating in areas with disease-friendly climates.

*(continued on page 76)*

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USE READER SERVICE #90

## Fungicides

(continued from page 74)

"Two factors work together to create a suitable disease environment," noted Mike Agnew, research and development manager for turf fungicides for Novartis Turf & Ornamental Products, Greensboro, N.C. "There needs to be proper environmental conditions (warm temperature, high humidity, too much water or too much fertilizer) and a suitable host."

"Shaded environments on residential properties are key disease areas because of the high humidity and low wind movement in those areas," added Dr. Joe DiPaola, market manager for turf and ornamental products for Novartis. "And the low light present in the shade results in weaker turf that is more conducive to disease development."

"Turf diseases are more difficult for us to control in this area because we're in an area that is too hot for fescue turf and too cool for bermudagrass or St. Augustinegrass," related Joel Adams, owner, Adams Gardening

Services, Rocky Mount, N.C. "And to get the fescue to grow well in this area we have to be a little bit on the high end in terms of watering and applying nitrogen, which is basi-

The fact is that **disease**

**incidence on turf**

presents **fewer challenges**

to **lawn care operators**

as a whole than **weeds**

or **insects** do.

cally asking for disease trouble."

Understanding the likelihood of disease development due to climatic causes on properties you maintain is only part of the battle.

Veteran lawn care operators are quick to point out that an area attacked by disease once is more likely to be attacked by a disease again in the future.

"We really target the areas where we've had disease problems in the past for preventive applications," noted Adams. "And we know that if we make an application with a systemic product before the first 90-degree day we should receive pretty effective control. If we miss that mark, however, we're going to have problems all year long."

Adams also noted that the costs associated with fungicides and concern about making unnecessary applications limits the number of applications he'll make on properties that haven't had disease problems in the past. "Areas that haven't been problems for us in the past get watched pretty closely, and we'll spray for disease control as soon as we see the first signs of development," he said.

(continued on page 78)



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Phomopsis Canker	
Leptographium Canker	
Dothiorella	
Vermicularia Dieback	
Palm Bud Rot	
Philalophora	
Botryosphaeria Branch Canker	
Verticicladiella	
Pestalotia	
Melanconium Dieback	
Diplodia Tip Blight	
Mimosa Wilt	
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Kabitina Branch Canker	
Atropellis	
Thielaviopsis Decline	
Coryneum Canker	
Ceratocystis Canker	
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**USE READER SERVICE #50**

## Fungicides

(continued from page 76)

# Contact vs. Systemic Approach

**F**ungicides are not cheap products, so lawn care operators making disease-control applications must be certain they are going to get the desired amount of control. One factor that can impact fungicide efficacy is its mode of action. The majority of turf fungicides on the market today are classified either as contact fungicides or systemic fungicides. Here is a summary of the key characteristics of the two:

	<b>CONTACT</b>	<b>SYSTEMIC</b>
How they work:	stop fungus from attacking a plant by coating the exterior of the plant thus creating a protective layer	absorbed by the plant and spread throughout the system to battle fungal establishment from inside the leaf
Residual:	about 10 to 14 days	about 28 days
Knockdown:	quicker than systemic	slower than contact
Application timing:	primarily preventive	preventive or curative
Range of control:	broader spectrum than systemic	more selective than contact
Cost:	contact products cost less but require more applications	systemics cost more but are applied less

While contact and systemic products have traditionally been the primary fungicide categories on the market, a new turf fungicide from Novartis Turf & Ornamental Products, Greensboro, N.C., is considered a mesostemic fungicide. The product, marketed under the name Compass, possesses properties of both contact and systemic fungicides, according to Mike Agnew, research and development manager for turf fungicides for Novartis.

"Compass locks in to the waxy layer of the plant like other systemic products, but it has rain-fast characteristics that extend its residual," Agnew explained. "The product also has a unique characteristic that allows for some surface movement on the plant leaf." — **Bob West**

## Fungicides

A challenge for many lawn care operators, however, is deciding between a preventive or a curative strategy for disease control.

"You are probably going to spend less money and use less product treating an area in a preventive fashion than you would if you adopted a curative approach because diseases can be difficult to eliminate once they get established," observed Agnew. "And curative treatments are tough to make by spot treating because once a fungus gets established in a lawn it is likely to spread. Just because one area of turf isn't showing signs of the disease yet doesn't mean the fungus isn't getting established in that area."

**JOINING THE CULTURE CLUB.** Some lawn care veterans said that fungicides can be used as a last resort in some disease-afflicted areas.

"We'll encounter some red thread and rust every year, and we'll get powdery mildew on our ornamentals," noted John Knoernschild, president, Admirable Landscapes, Portland, Ore. "But we can usually control these problems if we catch them soon enough by applying some extra fertilizer to encourage more turf growth and healthier turf."

Knoernschild's concern with diseases on turf or ornamentals is making sure he doesn't help spread the disease to other properties. "Obviously, you want to prune any infected areas of a tree or shrub so long as doing so won't harm the plant, but then you have to be careful not to let infected leaves lay on the lawn where the disease can get into the turf," he explained. "We make sure we sterilize our pruning shears or mower blades with alcohol after we're done with any property that has disease problems so we don't carry the fungus to the next property."

Lawn care operators should also work with homeowners to help avoid encouraging disease development. "You want to avoid doing anything that would extend the leaf wetness period, which is the time from when the dew first starts forming on the turf at night until all of the moisture has evaporated the next morning," explained Wirth. "A big problem here is irrigating the lawn in the morning when the turf is trying to dry out."

**PRODUCT SELECTION.** While much of the attention surrounding the re-registration  
*(continued on page 82)*



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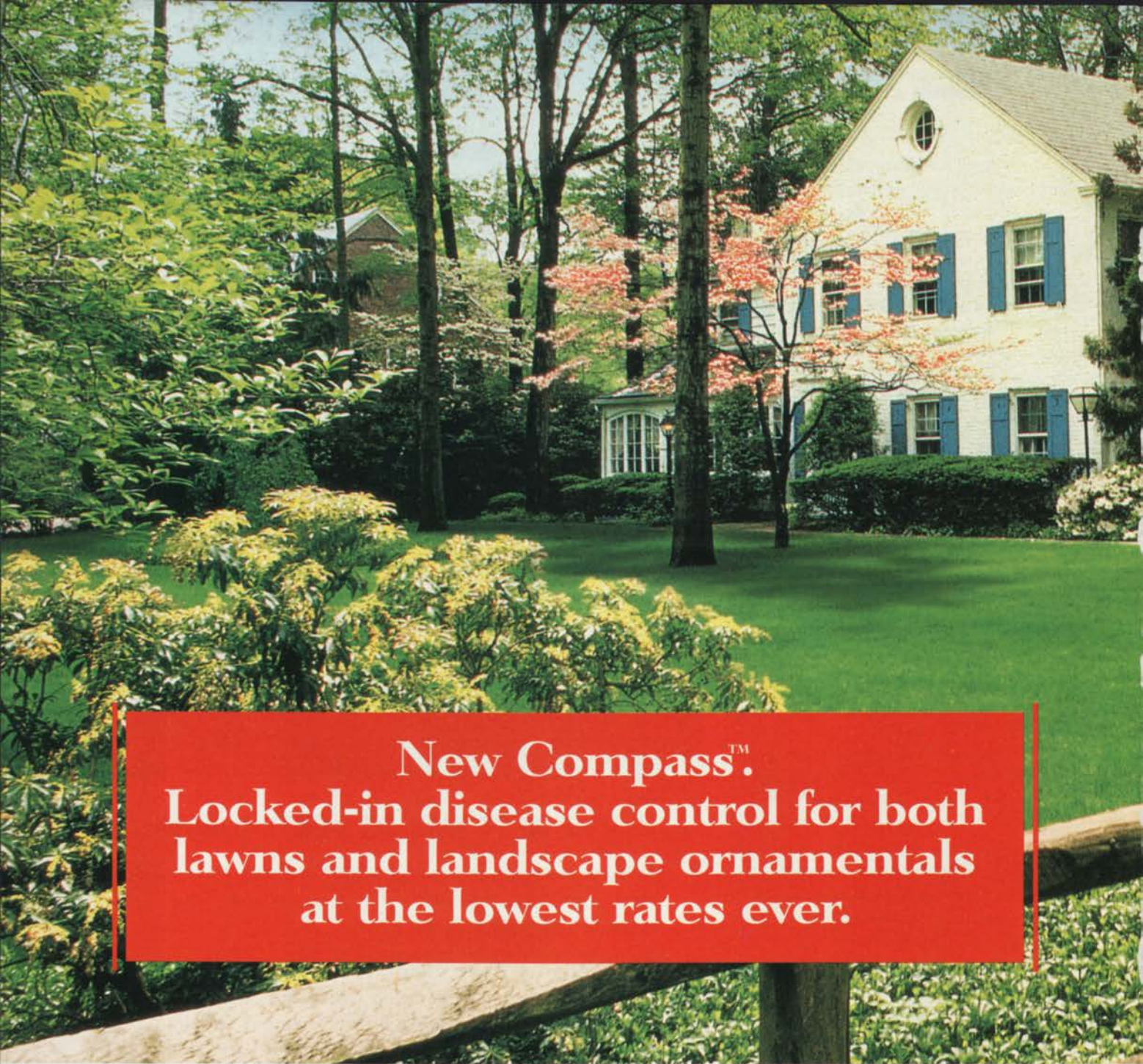
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## Fungicides

(continued from page 79)

of pesticides called for by the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) has focused on the organophosphate insecticides, fungicides have also been impacted.

"Curalan, Daconil and Chipco 26GT have all had their labels impacted by FQPA, and this means there are fewer options for lawn care professionals to use," noted DiPaola.

Wirth said the spectrum of control offered by a fungicide and its residual are key areas for fungicide buyers to focus on.

"Not all lawn technicians are well trained on disease identification, which can be challenging because a lot of diseases have similar symptoms but different causes," he noted. "So having a product with a broad spectrum of control is important.

"A product's residual is also important unless you are going to be on the property every two weeks or so," he continued.

Wirth said one trend he has seen of late is for more turf managers to tank mix a systemic fungicide with a contact fungicide (see

sidebar, page 78) in order to reap the benefits of both product types.

"The contact product delivers the quick knockdown and broad spectrum of control,

Understanding the  
likelihood of **disease**  
**development** due to  
**climatic causes** on  
**properties** you maintain  
is only **part of the battle.**

and the systemic product extends the length of control delivered by the application," Wirth explained.

And since some golf course superintendents are reportedly encountering instances

of fungicide resistance on the turf they manage, Wirth encourages lawn care operators to consider developing a fungicide program that rotates products.

"Since the industry has lost the use of some products, there is a danger of making too many applications of fungicides with the same mode of action," he explained. "We're seeing the development of fungicide resistance as a result of consistent mode of action use now, and doing this is asking for trouble in the future.

"Lawn care operators need to understand the chemistry involved in the products they use and how those chemistries work, but they also need to understand the different modes of action," Wirth continued. "Products can have different chemistries but the same mode of action, and that can create problems." **LL**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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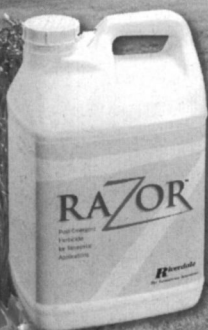
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USE READER SERVICE #55



# Lawn Care OPERATOR *Roundtable*

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# LETTER

from *Aventis*

One of the most common ways businesses fail is by becoming so attached to the way they've operated in the past that they fail to adapt to the changes taking place in the market around them. Embracing the past is easy to do, particularly when you consider the challenges associated with change. But companies that strive to achieve and maintain success, like our newly formed company Aventis Environmental Science, must be willing to change.

Clearly, the individuals who steered AgrEvo and Rhone-Poulenc through the merger that created Aventis Environmental Science – the largest global basic manufacturer of turf and ornamental control products – recognized the need for these organizations to continue growing in order to remain at the forefront of this industry.

As a result of this change, which wasn't an easy process to go through, Aventis Environmental Science is strategically positioned to meet the evolving needs of the lawn care professional in a number of ways.

- At a time when governmental regulations threaten the availability of some protection products, we will identify and develop innovative products that offer improved control and minimal environmental impact from a corporate research and development budget of approximately \$3 billion.
- We offer a complete range of turf and ornamental products through our Chipco Professional Products Group, such as DeltaGard® T&O Insecticides, Ronstar® selective herbicide, ProStar®, and 26GT® fungicides.
- We have adopted the best industry practices of its two parents in order to build a modern, creative and competitive company in the market.

We are committed to being of more value to you and your business in the future. Our willingness to grow and to change is only the most obvious sign of this commitment.

Our sponsorship of a Lawn Care Roundtable and this editorial supplement is another sign of our commitment to learning more about the challenges facing you and your business and then doing the best to share information with you and help you achieve and maintain success in your operation.



*Josh Weeks, vice president of  
the Chipco Professional  
Products Group for Aventis  
Environmental Science*

**W**HEN AVENTIS made the decision to target lawn care and landscape professionals as a key customer, the company also decided that the best way to serve the needs of these dynamic businesspeople was to sit down at a table with them and find out what issues matter. After all, what is the point of being in business if you're not serving the needs of your customers? And how can you be sure of your customers' needs without asking them?

The two-day event touched on a wide range of issues, with hot topics such as the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) and labor drawing considerable attention. The information in the following pages highlights some of the key points of the conversation.

#### **PESTICIDE USE.**

*Don McMahon*—Our use of pesticides was way up last season because of the drought—probably 75 percent from the previous year.

*Ken Wentland*—Our use was way up, as well, and we had some situations where we

*Chris Senske (right) said he would like to see improved insect-control products, particularly for ornamental applications. Dale Elkins (below, right) and John Carson (below, left) talked about different ways lawn and landscape companies could use the Internet successfully. Photos: Jacques Bobrowsky*



What

THEY

Said

*Trends, problems with packaging, environmental sensitivity and areas where manufacturers can improve were just a few of the areas discussed around this table.*

couldn't do all of the available work because of the labor shortage, so we just had to focus on keeping our current customers happy.

**John Buechner** – The climate caused a lot of stress last summer, so I think we'll see a lot of ornamental death and necrosis this season.

**Gary Clayton** – We used last year to take a look at some new products so that we're ready for some products not being available in the future.

**Chris Senske** – We've adopted a strategy of reducing the pounds per acre of pesticides we're using, and the key is selecting products that don't require using as much in order to get the job done. Those products

may cost a little bit more, but they work.

**McMahon** – Training your staff properly and getting them involved in your dedication to reducing pesticide use are important to making it happen. You have to have the technology and the staff to hold up the integrity of such a program because a blanket application is much easier to make, but that won't get you where you want to go.

**John Carson** – We've struggled for years to get data to support integrated

pest management (IPM) programs. We've measured cancellations, we've measured customer perceptions at the front end of our service and showed people that we're making applications in very low numbers. But what you hear in the media drives the movement to reduce pesticide use. And the fact is that the people paying for our services just don't have these concerns, so we're trying to find the balance between customer expectations and 'doing this the right way.'



*Mark Poliak (near right) talked about the challenges of satisfying the need to be environmentally sensitive while still keeping customers satisfied.*

*Meanwhile, Gary Clayton (bottom picture, center) explained that he has used the last year or two to explore options for alternative control products in order to reduce the amount of product applied and prepare for product registration cancellations.*



*"I really see water quality as a bigger issue nationwide than pesticide use. Pesticides may get a lot of adverse publicity, but our customers have told us with their buying decisions that they either care and they think we're doing a good job or they don't care. We have the organic programs to offer, but they just don't sell." – John Thatcher (above)*



# PLEASE

## Have a *Seat*

Twenty industry veterans dealing with lawn care issues on a daily basis accepted the invitation of Aventis to attend a two-day roundtable discussion in West Palm Beach, Fla. The participants were:

**Dale Amstutz**, Northern Lawns, Omaha, Neb.

**Michael Branch**, DuBrow's Nurseries, Livingston, N.J.

**John Buechner**, Lawn Doctor, Marlboro, N.J.

**John Carson**, Ehrlich Green Team, Reading, Pa.

**Gary Clayton**, All Green Corp., Marietta, Ga.

**Dale Elkins**, OneSource Golf & Landscape Services, Tampa, Fla.

**George Gaumer**, Davey Tree, Kent, Ohio

**Dana Irwin**, Scotts Lawn Service, Marysville, Ohio

**Adam Jones**, Massey's Green Up, Maitland, Fla.

**Chuck McIntire**, Turf Pride, Kennesaw, Ga.

**Don McMahon**, The Lawn Co., S. Dennis, Mass.

**Larry Messina**, Lawn Cure of Southern Indiana, Jeffersonville, Ind.

**Darcy Olds**, The Weed Man, Mississauga, Ontario

**Mark Poliak**, The Brickman Group, Long Grove, Ill.

**Chris Senske**, Senske Tree & Lawn Care, Kennewick, Wash.

**Rick Steinau**, Greenlon, Cincinnati, Ohio

**John Thatcher**, TruGreen-ChemLawn, Memphis, Tenn.

**Barry Troutman**, Environmental Care, Calabasas, Ohio

**Brad Welker**, Hillenmeyer Nurseries, Lexington, Ky.

**Ken Wentland**, Lied's Landscape Design & Development, Sussex, Wis.

**McMahon** – A big part of your approach depends on what you think about the materials you're putting out there. Folks who have been around the industry awhile know that we need to take this approach of reducing pesticide use. That means we need additional products and materials, but we also need to balance our route sizes and keep technicians employed for at least three to five years.

**Wentland** – A lot of the new products may cost more, but they also include more active ingredient, which reduces the overall product application.

**Barry Troutman** – We're on a collision course trying to implement IPM. The technology and the tools are out there, but qualifying people to do this

work is a real challenge when we're just hoping we can get them in the door to talk to us. There is going to be added cost in terms of more people and better people, but I don't think there is a whole lot of elasticity out there in terms of what we're charging for our work.

**Buechner** – We could live with the Environmental Protection Agency's definition of IPM, but the states aren't comfortable with it because of the tree-hugging faction of the population that wants pesticides used only as last resorts. I have a real concern that this anti-pesticide concept could be legislated and we could see pesticide use regulated.

**John Thatcher** – I really see water quality as a bigger issue nationwide than

pesticide use. Pesticides may get a lot of adverse publicity, but our customers have told us with their buying decisions that they either care and they think we're doing a good job or they don't care. We have the organic programs to offer, but they just don't sell.

**Dale Amstutz** – People don't buy programs from us, they buy results.

**Adam Jones** – I can't think of one time when a customer asked me what was in a lawn care program.

**McMahon** – Still, we should do whatever we can to reduce the pesticide load on the environment, but you can't do that with 600 to 700 customers per route if you're going to get the work done in a timely fashion, as well.

**Jones** – We're moving toward making more visits to a property and then making fewer inputs on that property because we can stop the problems sooner. We think the more times you have a technician's eyes on the property the better off you are, but too many other companies are using more inputs.

**Carson** – I agree. The work comes down to the person on the property making evaluations and decisions. But there is a mentality of covering your butt with the customer because of the pressure people feel from customers. The result is more

and broader applications made by a technician who can't make any intelligent decisions because he has only been on the property twice in his life.

**Troutman** – I get insulted when someone says I'm not using IPM because you cannot be successful without applying the basic principles that are being called IPM. This industry wasn't built on telling people to plant the wrong grass, apply fertilizer at the wrong time of year or using products that don't work.

**Buechner** – We did ourselves a great disfavor in the past because the industry sold based on applications and not service.

**Clayton** – We've let the perception grow so people think we're making blanket applications to their entire lawn.

**Carson** – This is still re-

ferred to as the chemical lawn care industry, but we're really providing a service, not chemicals.

### THE INTERNET & CUSTOMERS.

**Troutman** – There is a lawn care company now that is selling its service and giving out estimates over the Internet.

**Jones** – I don't know how you can effectively sell this service without visiting the property, but doing this gives customers the perception that company is different.

**Carson** – That's not entirely different than sending out a postcard for people to check a box on.

**Buechner** – We've found that these nonpersonal contact customers don't tend to be good customers, though.

**Dana Irwin** – Our Web site is set up to receive feedback from customers.



*Larry Messina (talking at left) explained that his company has also been able to grow because of the strong economy and the number of new housing developments being built. "Those homeowners in new subdivisions are prime targets for us," he said.*



*Barry Troutman (left) expressed concern that companies aren't able to raise prices enough, which limits their ability to pay technicians high enough wages to attract and retain quality employees.*



**Amstutz** – We have to be aware that the world is heading in this direction. I agree these are not the best customers, but look at gas stations – no one wants to pay by giving money to a person anymore.

**Jones** – All customers want is for you to make life easier for them.

**Dale Elkins** – Collecting e-mail addresses has been great for us, especially with commercial customers, because we can use e-mail to let them know when something has been done on their property. The problem is that then they expect you to be constantly available via e-mail.

**Chuck McIntire** – We offer estimates over our Web site, but we don't do any actual selling. We're probably still getting 50 to 100 times more calls from our Yellow Pages ad than we get from our Web site, but I truly believe our Web site results will grow.

## PRODUCT PRICING.

**Wentland** – The cost of basic pesticides is going up, but the amount of actual product we're buying is going down with the lower-use products.

**Jones** – Our product expenditures are growing right along with our revenues at 18 to 20 percent a year. And we've started doing some athletic turf work, which has increased our cost per 1,000 square feet.

**Larry Messina** – I would say our cost of material as a percent of sales has remained flat. I always look at our growth via customers, and that has grown for two reasons. Obviously, the economy is one reason, but there are also subdivisions going in everywhere, and those are prime targets for us.

**Buechner** – I've found our cost per 1,000 square feet to be flat or even down slightly, but part of that has to do with smaller lawns being installed.

**Michael Branch** – Early identification of problems in the lawns can help control



*Dale Amstutz (above, left) said the lawn care industry has created some of its own problems by focusing on selling customers the end result of a green, weed-free lawn instead of focusing on selling lawn care expertise and quality service. Adam Jones (left) said the answer to reducing pesticide applications may be improved spray equipment that gives technicians the opportunity to apply a variety of products based on the specific problem they encounter on a property.*



your costs because then you're not putting as much product on the ground.

**Jones** – We're looking for alternatives to the organophosphates because we're worried about their future. That means we had to figure out how to fund our new costs when we go from 1.5 ounces to 20 mills per 1,000 square feet and having the technician manage that. We're using injection technology where we can measure the pesticide beforehand so the technicians don't have to measure and mix. That means we have to teach our technicians how to use all of the tools in their toolbox because they'll have a choice of three or four pesticides at any one time.

**Thatcher** – I think a lot of advances

have been made with fungicides because these are premium-priced products that manufacturers pay attention to. There hasn't been as much attention given to herbicides, but fortunately, the public perception seems to be that the only pesticides are insecticides.

**Clayton** – We need to learn more about the new products that do come out because their spectrum of control is so much more narrow.

**Troutman** – Control is important, but manufacturer support is critical. You can buy a generic product for less than a name brand, but you have to consider the support that comes with generic products if you have a problem. □

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USE READER SERVICE #145

**Finale**  
HERBICIDE

by Cynthia Greenleaf

# The Business of BIDDING

**Lawn & Landscape**  
*asked three successful  
contractors to bid  
on a typical  
maintenance contract.  
Here's what happened.*

**L**awn & Landscape's first foray into the often dicey world of maintenance contract pricing yielded some interesting results. We asked three successful landscape contractors from across the country to bid on a typical maintenance contract for a commercial property.

The property consisted of (see contract on opposite page for specific requirements): 19,000 square feet of irrigated turf with level elevation, a 20-car parking lot, a 100-foot-long entranceway, a modest flower bed and a handful of trees typical to the bidder's region. After "bidding," the contractors walked us through their pricing process, providing insights into their respective bidding philosophies.

**ATTENTION TO DETAIL.** When D. Foley Landscape, Walpole, Mass., makes a bid, there is no such thing as too much information. "Never forgo the details," advised John Dinsmore, account manager, D. Foley Landscape. "I want customers to know precisely what they're buying and what they're not buying. Otherwise, customers might over- or under-assume."

Heeding his own wisdom, Dinsmore provided us with a detailed list of tasks to be performed under each required service, in addition to a list of clarifications regarding the property.



## Pricing Contracts

# Landscape Management Agreement

SERVICE	FREQUENCY	CHAPEL VALLEY LANDSCAPE ANNUAL COST	COCAL LANDSCAPE ANNUAL COST	D. FOLEY LANDSCAPE ANNUAL COST
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Turf fertilization	3 applications	\$225	\$308	\$410 for 4 applications plus lime
Turf weed control	2 applications	\$75	\$336	3 applications - included in fertilization
Turf crabgrass control	1 application	\$75	\$147	included in fertilization
Turf core aeration	2 applications	\$400	\$210	\$620
Spring cleanup/mulch	1 application	\$1,200	\$1,578	\$2010 (spring cleanup \$1070 and mulch \$940)
Bed maintenance	28 visits	\$1,000	\$756	included in turf mowing
Tree/shrub pruning	1 full year	\$500	\$448	\$1570 (includes shrubs \$760 and dormant tree pruning \$810)
Tree/shrub spraying	3 applications	\$125	\$756	\$390
Leaf removal	1 (fall season)	\$50	\$84	\$370
Pavement vegetation control	3 applications	\$75	\$100	included in turf mowing
Floral maintenance	18 visits	\$750	\$545	\$630
<b>Contract Total:</b>		<b>\$8,675</b>	<b>\$8,868</b>	<b>\$9,360</b>

(continued on page 94)

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<b>4600</b>	43HP
<b>4700</b>	48HP



USE READER SERVICE #102

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## Pricing Contracts

(continued from page 92)

With any contract, there is always a need to establish *exactly* what the customer is looking for, according to Dinsmore. "Customers all have a picture in their mind's eye, but typically, they haven't conveyed that picture to potential bidders," he said.

The first step in the bidding process is to meet with the customer and look at the property. D. Foley never bids on a job without seeing it first, Dinsmore said. (In our case, he made a kind exception). Our generic contract struck him as a "stupid bid-out process." These are a routine and, ultimately, meaningless formality for many commercial properties, since they already know to whom they're awarding the bid ahead of time, he pointed out. With these kinds of jobs, Dinsmore said he usually doesn't waste his time. He thought the lack of specificity in our maintenance contract was in keeping with those typically written by property or facility managers. "Generally, they can't write

bids," he pointed out.

A good contractor should always estimate on-site, according to Dinsmore. "Our process of going out there and measuring the property is far better than someone just sitting in the cab of his truck, winging it. That's not good estimating," he said. When Dinsmore goes out to a site, he measures thoroughly, "qualifying and quantifying everything," he said.

Dinsmore then takes all his measurements and field notes, fires up the computer and inputs the information into D. Foley's customized estimating program. The program, which is based on a pricing information database the company has built over time, accurately prices the job according to labor, materials, equipment and subcontracting costs. More often than not, "the computer spits out exactly what I was looking for," Dinsmore related. He then takes that

**"Never forgo the *details*,"**

advised John Dinsmore,

account manager, D. Foley.

**"I want *customers* to *know***

**precisely** what they're

**buying** and what they're

**not buying."**

estimate back to the customer. "Once we agree that our estimate matches the spec, we save it, print it and convert it into a proposal," he said.

In the case of our job, which Dinsmore estimated based on one of D. Foley's similar accounts, the company would use a mobile maintenance crew, usually comprised of two

(continued on page 96)

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**USE READER SERVICE #103**

## Pricing Contracts

(continued from page 94)

people to take care of spring cleanup, mowing, bed and floral maintenance, leaf removal and pavement vegetation control. These services are performed on set days every week. The company's lawn care manager then handles turf fertilization, weed and crabgrass control. The manager will do core aeration once in the fall and spring. For fertilization, a granular product is used since it's easy to apply, while liquid fertilizer is used to spot spray, according to Dinsmore.

With some services, such as tree and shrub spraying, mulch installation or street sweeping, D. Foley will use local, qualified subcontractors. In many cases, Dinsmore said, subcontracting is simply more economically feasible for the company.

For example, a street sweeping machine costs around \$100,000, which doesn't make much sense to purchase, given the relatively small volume of sweeping work the company handles, Dinsmore pointed out. With

plant health care, D. Foley also finds it easier and cheaper to hire a professional to do the work. "Because of the additional education, licensing requirements and cost involved, it's a smarter choice for us to subcontract in some cases," Dinsmore said.

**ACCURACY IS EVERYTHING.** Tom Fochtman, owner of CoCal Landscape, Denver, Colo., also prefers to scope out a property before making a bid (although he also made an exception in our case). Otherwise, bidding off of plans tends to produce a higher price, Fochtman said.


"You have to make assumptions to account for unknown factors," he explained. "You have to speculate since things appear that aren't on plans. For example, the parking lot might be different. The irrigation system might be harder to manage than what you think. There might be unknown site furnishings, like picnic tables."

CoCal based its estimate on hours, which is the company's typical bidding strategy. Since his costs are generally split between 92 percent labor and 8 percent materials, Fochtman is more comfortable bidding based on hours, he said. "We always err on the side of hours vs. what the square footage tells us," he pointed out. "If we run a number off of plans, we're more confident on how many hours it will take us. Square footage is too black and white and doesn't take into account specifics. We can look at a slope, for example, and envision how long it will take on a riding mower."

In terms of our fictional maintenance needs, CoCal would use a preemergence herbicide or nonselective postemergence herbicide every week to keep beds and tree wells free of weeds. For insect control on trees and shrubs, the company generally sprays twice to address whatever pest issues the property

(continued on page 98)

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**IT'S ABOUT PRODUCTIVITY**

**USE READER SERVICE #74**

## Pricing Contracts

(continued from page 96)

may have. The second round is just a spot spray "to get whatever comes back," Fochtman said. With fertilization, a granular product is used since it's more effective, in Fochtman's opinion. "Granular goes right into the soil and provides better benefits to the turf root zone," he said. "There's more residual value and the turf gets better color."

CoCal uses a separate, licensed crew for chemical applications. For spring cleanup, the company does a little of everything — snow, sand, pine needle, late leaf and salt debris removal; bed cleaning; and lawn edging. If the grass is dirty, a crew will mow to pick up debris. They'll also treat the beds, turn the soil and start up the irrigation system, Fochtman said. In terms of bed maintenance, crew members will spot spray for broadleaf weeds and pinch back and dead-head flowers.

The size of the mowing crew used depends on the job's location. "If we're work-

ing on a larger project nearby, we'll send a five-person crew. Otherwise, we'll just send a three-man crew," Fochtman said. "We're not going to pay five workers just to ride five miles away."

**KNOW THE CUSTOMER.** Like the other contractors, Chapel Valley Landscape Co., Woodbine, Md., would want to see the property and talk with the customer before making a bid. "So much is accomplished through meeting with customers," said a manager at Chapel Valley. "A lot of questions would be answered by being on site."

Meeting with customers on site is a good way to learn particulars, like pruning preferences, he said. Some prefer closely, hand-pruned shrubs, while others want them left a little looser. "You have to get to know customers and know what their expectations

"If we want to do a job for  
**long-term reasons**, we'll  
go into it with the *understand-*  
*ing* that we'll **prove**  
**ourselves** to the **customers**.  
We're willing to be **flexible**  
if the *relationship* has  
**value.**" — Tom Fochtman,  
CoCal Landscape

are," he said.

For Chapel Valley, pleasing the customer is a top priority and a good way to retain business. "It costs you a lot more money to

(continued on page 100)

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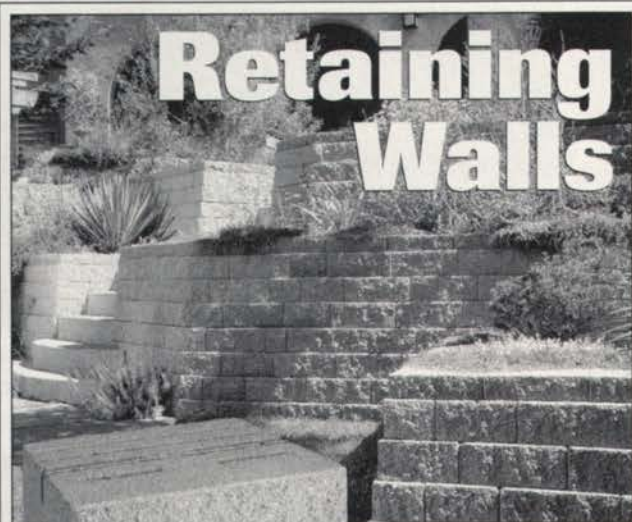
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## Pricing Contracts

(continued from page 98)

find a new customer than to do something extra for an existing customer," the manager pointed out.

Like D. Foley, Chapel Valley uses a bid as just a starting point in the pricing process. "We measure everything and then stand back and look at it. The estimating system is just a

guide," the manager explained. The company has a lot of faith in its initial pricing ability, however. "Our material estimates are very accurate – usually they're right on," he said.

Overall, Chapel Valley said it wouldn't have been interested in our property. As a

higher end service provider, the people it typically deals with are not just interested in price, which is the impression our generic bid gave, according to the manager. "We're more interested in a customer who's educated about landscape and expects a higher level of service," he said. "We're not the cheapest guy in town, anyway."

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**POINTS TO PONDER.** While it didn't impress anyone, our faux maintenance contract raised a lot of key bidding issues and concerns for contractors. The first of which is how does a contractor decide how to bill a job? Chapel Valley prefers using a 12-month contract. "It helps the customer by spreading the cost out throughout the year," the manager said. "This way, it's easier for them to budget and manage their cash. This payment schedule hurts you during the busy times, putting a lot of cash out, but in the winter, you have revenue."

While it prefers a 12-month contract, D. Foley will cater to the customer, offering just about any kind of contract, within reason. "We're here to serve the customer," Dinsmore said. "The contract doesn't matter as much as being able to control our cash flow."

While CoCal offers three levels of service: 7-, 8- or 12-month contracts, Fochtman prefers using a 12-month agreement. Otherwise, doing important tasks such as fall cleanup and true dormant pruning is more difficult, he said. Another advantage, according to Fochtman, is that 12-month jobs are greener "sooner and longer" and extend the growing season. With a 12-month contract, most employees have jobs year-round, which, in turn, reduces training costs and turnover expenses, Fochtman pointed out.

**PURSuing PROFIT.** Another big question our bidding process raised was when do contractors take more or less profit and when do they make price increases? Chapel Valley prices a job according to its annual budget, according to the manager. "In some cases, I may lower a price on a job if it fits in an area and location where I need more work," he said. "In other cases, I may raise the price because I don't need the job as much. You take it job by job." On commercial jobs, Chapel Valley tends to raise its prices 2 to 3 percent annually, according to the manager.

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USE READER SERVICE #64

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**USE READER SERVICE #140**

## Working with Sod

by Nicole Wisniewski

More contractors are offering a sodding service as clients who live fast-paced lifestyles continue to demand lush turf without the wait.

The sod industry is growing for the same reason fast food restaurants are multiplying and online shopping is becoming increasingly popular – sod is quick, easy and instant. “Everybody wants things now,” explained Ed Zuckerman, president and chief executive officer of Delta

Bluegrass Co., Stockton, Calif. “Sod offers the perfect instant gratification for curb appeal.”

While contractors aren’t sodding lawns more than they are seeding them, the numbers are close. According to a *Lawn & Landscape* reader survey, 62 percent of respondents offer seeding as part of their company services and 56 percent offer sodding.



Before sod is installed, contractors should give special consideration to the layout of the land. Photos: Turfgrass Producers International (top) and Delta Bluegrass Co. (bottom).

Not only do more contractors offer sodding as a service, but they are also the major buyers and installers of the product. Douglas Fender, executive director of Turfgrass Producers International Association, Rolling Meadows, Ill., said 80 percent of the sod being grown is sold to contractors. These statistics mean good news for contractors because they have access to most of the top quality sod grown across the United States. But these numbers also show that if any mistakes are being made during sod installation, contractors are usually blamed for them.

Landscape contractors can reduce customer callbacks on sod installation by purchasing quality material, putting more time into soil preparation, perfecting sod installation practices and identifying watering inconsistencies, making sod a more profitable service.

**SOD FOR SALE.** Sod was originally called junegrass, which was the wild grass that grew in the prairie, explained John Perkins, owner of

(continued on page 104)

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USE READER SERVICE #75

## Working with Sod

(continued from page 102)

Perkins Landscape Contractors, Minnetonka, Minn. "This type of sod was born in the early 1940s and 1950s, when people wanted instant curb appeal and had the money to spend on it," he said.

Today, sod is grown in a variety of soils, blends and conditions. But what one contractor

thinks is quality sod, another may not, pointed out Larry Le May, vice president of operations, A-G Sod Farms, Riverside, Calif.

Perkins said he looks for a good blend of seed in the sod he purchases. "I look for a minimum of five different blends of bluegrasses," he explained. "A good blend can

help the turf resist disease later. Contractors should ask the growers what blends of turf they are using. They can also call a local university agronomy department and find out what the region's good blends are."

When purchasing sod, contractors should also look for undesirable rough grasses and weeds, Perkins suggested. "Some weeds in bluegrass are annual and will die, but other weeds are usually easy to spot before the sod is purchased," he said. "Premium quality sod will cost approximately 10 to 15 percent more per square yard or foot."

Part of buying quality sod is making sure it's bought from a reputable sod farm, pointed out Carla Herron, director of marketing and business development, BlueBird International, Denver, Colo. "Contractors should do their homework before purchasing sod," she said. "A reputable farm will have its seed

(continued on page 106)



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USE READER SERVICE #76

## Working with Sod

(continued from page 104)

inspected regardless of whether or not its state makes inspection mandatory."

Also, contractors have to be aware that sod needs to be laid within 24 hours of when it was cut, especially if it was cut in the morning when it was wet from dew, Perkins said.

"I actually prefer to lay sod within six to eight hours after it was cut," he said, explaining that when sod is rolled, any moisture on the sod will mix with the fertilizer and start a chemical reaction that can kill the grass. This process, depending on how wet the grass is, can happen in as few as 12 hours from when the sod was originally cut.

"To avoid dead sod from this chemical reaction, try and purchase rolls that are as fresh as possible," Perkins offered. "When you are purchasing a roll that was already cut that day, try and roll it out to as close to the center as possible and place your hand on it. If the sod roll center looks good and green but is warm, the sod will probably die. We've had to throw sod away because after we had

it cut, rain added moisture to the sod, increasing the chance of chemical reaction and preventing us from being able to lay it quickly."

Sod comes in a variety of sizes. Perkins purchases rolls that are 30 inches wide by 144 feet long.

These larger-sized rolls, however, brought labor problems, Perkins said. Because one 30-inch by 150-foot roll weighs between 800 and 1,000 pounds, and two or three employees can't maneuver it by themselves.

When contractors start using 30- to 42-inch-wide sod rolls, using a machine can reduce the amount of labor needed to lay sod. Machines can be particularly worthwhile on commercial projects where they can lay larger pieces of sod, reducing the number of seams. Otherwise, contractors would have to manually lay many square pieces of sod to cover an area and merge multiple seams.

"Three days after sodding, people are able to play on the field," Perkins pointed out. "Plus, using a machine on larger proper-

ties cuts labor by two-thirds. We can lay 1,000 to 1,200 yards in one hour with three employees and a sod-laying machine. Laying that same amount of sod manually with smaller rolls would take more time and eight to 10 employees."

Machines equipped with sod rollers should have low ground pressure coupled with rubber tracks to prevent turf damage, explained Brad Lemke, product manager, ASV, Grand Rapids, Minn. The machines themselves can cost \$40,000 to \$50,000, but they also perform other tasks like a skid-steer loader, Lemke said. The sod roller attachment can range in price from \$2,000 to \$4,000, he added. Perkins said some sod-rolling machines can cost as little as \$25,000.

While most of the machines on the market today are restricted to larger properties, Lemke said ASV is working on producing a sod-cutting machine that will handle 24- to 30-inch sod rolls for smaller residential areas.

(continued on page 108)

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## Working with Sod

(continued from page 106)

**A HEALTHY BASE.** Fender cites improper soil preparation as one of the greatest reasons for customer callbacks. "Contractors aren't preparing the soil as if they were seeding, but they should," he said. "They till it slightly or throw the sod down without preparation, which doesn't give the sod a good base to grow into. Irrigation also becomes less efficient when the soil isn't properly prepared."

Zuckerman suggested a 12-inch cultivation of the soil to open it up and ensure a healthy root system. Turfroots, he explained, will go down 3 to 4 feet, if possible.

"The top 18 inches of soil are the most important," Zuckerman said. "Sod will grow anywhere. However, opening and loosening up the ground will bring less stress to the plant and help the turfgrass fight disease, not to mention establish a strong root system."

Perkins' soil preparation includes tilling a 6-inch depth of soil, adding a starter fertilizer and then fine grading the soil.

One difficult aspect of introducing sod to a new soil is forcing the merger of different soil types. Perkins said most sod is grown on peat soil and growing sod from peat soil into Midwest clay soil can mean more work.



One benefit of sod is that if it is lush and thick, the sod won't allow weed seeds located in the soil to germinate.  
Photo: Turfgrass Producers International

"Peat soil and clay soil don't marry well," Perkins said. "But finding sod grown in clay soil is difficult. Peat soil will eventually dissolve when installing sod grown in peat soil into clay soil, but this process takes some extra maintenance and care by the homeowner or maintenance contractor."

Besides tilling the soil, using a soil amendment, such as an organic blend of fertilizer, is also good soil preparation, according to Herron.

And contractors shouldn't worry about weed seeds located in the soil getting into sod either, Herron pointed out. "If sod is lush and thick, it won't allow weed seeds to germinate."


**INSTALLATION TIPS.** Installing sod is the most expensive method compared to seeding or hydroseeding, Herron said. "Sodding isn't cost effective for contractors, however, the lawn looks good right after sod is installed and sod takes care of any erosion problems on the site. Sod is good in this way because it is like a sponge, soaking up water and preventing run-off."

Sod installation takes a lot of preplanning, remarked Perkins. Special consideration has to be given to the layout of the land and the site drainage because they dictate how the sod will be installed.

Sod seams should run perpendicular to the site drainage because this pattern will slow the running of water through the sod and discourage erosion along the seams, Perkins pointed out. If there are slopes on the site, sod should run parallel to the slopes.

When merging two pieces of sod together, seams should be butted together. "This is where an extra laborer can be used with the big rolls," Perkins explained. "Someone should follow the roll and pull the seams together with a sharp pick." (For more tips on installing sod, see *The Tricks of the Trade*, left).

The cost of sod may be greater for the contractor and the client—25 cents per square foot for the product and 6 cents per square foot for the labor costs, according to Zuckerman. But many of the steps involved with establishing a new lawn are taken care of at the sod farm, including germination and weed elimination.

"You can't hand a newly seeded lawn over to a client and have it come up weed- and disease-free in a short time," Zuckerman said. "Getting a seeded lawn up to sod level takes about six to seven months." 

The author is Associate Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

**S**odding is simple, but this method of turf establishment can be easier by following a few installation tips:

1. Level the soil approximately 1 inch below any hard surfaces, such as patios, sidewalks and driveways so when the sod is installed, it will be even with the hard surface.
2. Place the pallets of sod across the yard, approximating how much each pallet will cover. This will reduce the time and distance you have to carry each piece.
3. If there's any slope in the yard, begin sodding at the bottom and work your way up the slope to keep the seams and joints tightly together. If the slope is quite steep, run the pieces across the direction of the slope.
4. To make sure you are applying enough water, lift a corner of any piece of sod and insert a screwdriver or other sharp probe into the underlying soil. If the screwdriver is hard to push in or the soil is not moist, keep watering.

— *Turfgrass Producers International*

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USE READER SERVICE #77

# Hydroseeding

by Nicole Wisniewski

A few customer requests drew Charlie Garabedian into the hydroseeding business six years ago.

Garabedian, vice president of Garabedian Landscaping and Hydroseeding, said hydroseeding was only something he had read about before he became the first contractor in Salem, N.H., to offer the service.

"Developing a good hydroseeding service took us a few years of trial and error," Garabedian said, pointing out that his winning hydroseeding recipe required "a little more of this and a little less of that," seed being the ingredient he was always adding a pinch more of.

While hydroseeding replaced Garabedian's seeding service and turned out to be a successful addition to his company, only three other contractors within a 15-mile radius of Salem currently offer their own hydroseeding services. Nationwide, the numbers don't improve. In a *Lawn & Landscape* reader survey, only 15.1 percent of contractors offer hydroseeding. A similar study conducted by Finn Corp., Cincinnati, Ohio,

*With the right ingredients, the right machine to mix them in, a little patience and a lot of water, hydroseeding can be a profitable service.*

resulted in the same number, pointed out Al Schrand, Finn's consumable product manager.

"Hydroseeding is all about taking the basic science of what makes a seed germinate and formulating that into one package – not very different from mixing chemical elements to make a compound," Schrand explained. "The biggest concern with hydroseeding is the result. Contractors aren't real comfortable with their ability to mix a formula that will yield good, quick results."

But unknown and varying seed germination results aren't long-term hydroseeding hassles, according to contractors who offer the service. These contractors, along with product manufacturers, claim that hydroseeding can be a profitable service.

**THE GREEN STUFF.** Customers who request hydroseeded lawns are either commercial and need erosion control, are builders who want green lawns surrounding their newly built homes in one to two weeks or are residential customers who have seen the

*(continued on page 112)*



*Hydroseeding is an alternative form of establishing new turfgrass, and is done by mixing a few basic ingredients (seed, water, green dye and wood or paper fiber) in a hydroseeding machine and spraying the mixture on to the soil. Photo: Finn Corp.*

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**USE READER SERVICE #42**

## Hydroseeding

(continued from page 110)

process done successfully on a neighbor's lawn, said Bob Jerszyk, president of Bob Jerszyk Landscapes in Millbury, Mass.

Contractors who decide to offer hydroseeding to their customers need to educate themselves first. "Unfortunately, there's no school of hydroseeding," Garabedian explained. "Once contractors decide they want

to add the service to their business, the process is trial and error with advice from manufacturers. I'm comfortable with a certain hydroseeding recipe, but my competition may use a completely different mix."

Hydroseeding is a process of new turf establishment where turf seed is sprayed onto soil in a mixture of water, green dye and



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Power raking and/or hand raking can prepare the soil for the seed (above). Instead of using tackifier on steep hills, Jerszyk uses a curlex or coconut fiber blanket to ensure the mulch will remain in place (bottom). Photo: Bob Jerszyk Landscapes

paper or wood fiber, creating mulch to keep soil warm and moist to encourage faster and more uniform germination. Contractors and manufacturers also add other additives to the mix to encourage seed germination and eliminate excess seeding steps, such as:

- gibberellic acid – a hormone that encourages the cracking of the turfgrass seed
  - soluble fertilizer
  - humic acid – a negatively charged acid that holds positively charged nutrients in the soil
  - liquid lime – to adjust the pH of the soil
  - bacteria – encourages beneficial microbial activity
  - tackifier – a glue-like substance that helps the hydroseeding mix stick to the soil
- "To germinate, a seed needs oxygen, warmth, moisture and good soil," Schrand explained. "If more beneficial products are mixed with the seed then the seed germinates faster."

Jerszyk's hydroseeding recipe is basic: four bales of paper fiber, 30 pounds of seed and 25 pounds of fertilizer to every 500

(continued on page 114)

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## Hydroseeding

(continued from page 112)

gallons of water, seed being the most expensive part – approximately \$2 per pound.

After using this mix for a few years, Jerszyk noticed that hydroseeding subtracts four to five days from the germination period compared to regular drop seeding. Others reported similar results. "Hydroseeding typically reduces the speed of ryegrass seed germination to three days and fescue and bluegrass seed germination to seven to 10 days when compared to drop seeding results, which are two to four times those numbers," said Bob Lisle, president, Easy Lawn, Bridgeville, Del.

A hydroseeded lawn is ready to be mowed in five to seven weeks, as long as the seed is watered often after planting, Jerszyk said.

"The green dye doesn't last long after hydroseeding because the sun bleaches it out and the rain washes it away in less than one week," Jerszyk noted. "What's left is the tan color of the fiber. By the fourth or fifth day, there is a shine to the soil where the seed has



Contractors can add a material similar to glue called tackifier to their hydroseeding mixes so it will stick, particularly in hilly or steep areas where making sure the seed binds to the soil so it has a chance to germinate is important. Photos: Finn Corp.



germinated. On a residential lawn that has been hydroseeded, homeowners should be able to mow every eight to 10 days the first season. However, establishing a good base takes two seasons with a hydroseeded lawn."

**JUST ADD WATER.** Of course, the magic ingredient in hydroseeding is water, which can be a pro or a con to contractors thinking about adding hydroseeding as a service. "Water availability can be a problem for

landscape contractors who want to try hydroseeding," Lisle commented. "To hydroseed, a contractor has to have access to a lot of water all the time."

Jerszyk carries auxiliary pumps and draws the water he needs from lakes or open streams, which is legal in Massachusetts. Buy contractors need to be mindful of state laws when attempting to pull water from public water sources. As a safety precaution, they should

(continued on page 116)

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## Hydroseeding

(continued from page 114)

also use a backflow preventer or make sure there is a space between the tank and pumping hose so if the water stops flowing in one direction, it won't flow back in the opposite direction, possibly contaminating the original water source.

Some areas have fill stations where landscape contractors can load up on water inexpensively, pointed out Ray Badger, president, Turbo Technologies, Beaver Falls, Pa.

"Filling up a 300-gallon tank with water costs us 75 cents and filling up a 500-gallon tank costs \$1.25," Badger said. "Filling up each machine takes us approximately 60 seconds. On smaller sites, we'll just fill our tanks with the customer's garden hose. This costs us nothing, but filling up a 300-gallon tank using this method takes us 25 minutes."

Badger said for a \$200 deposit and a permit from their local water companies, contractors can also get a meter box and a special wrench used for opening fire hydrants to

(continued on page 118)

**S**ome distributors are renting hydroseeding machines to contractors who want to offer hydroseeding but can't afford to buy the equipment.

Jerry Keizer, a sales coordinator at United Rentals - Kubota of Grand Rapids, Mich., rents three \$21,000 jet agitation units for \$250 per day, \$875 per week and \$2,625 per month. Contractors who rent a machine are typically just getting into hydroseeding and want to try the machine before buying it, Keizer said. However, a \$21,000 jet agitation unit purchased on a six-month lease is only \$483 per month. "Most of the contractors who rent the machine use it for two days and the next week they use it for three days, and then they figure that if they rent the machine two days per month, they are already making the payment required to purchase it," Keizer explained.

Renting a 900-gallon jet agitation machine has been successful for Tony Cerbo, president, Cerbo's Nursery, Parsippany, N.J. Cerbo's machine costs approximately \$23,000 and rents for \$400 per day and \$2,000 per week.

"Everyone who has rented a machine from us has made \$2,000 gross profit per acre," claimed Cerbo, who said this profit is typically what convinces contractors to go ahead and purchase hydroseeding machines of their own. Cerbo explained his math calculations: Generally, contractors charge customers 8 cents per square foot times approximately 1 acre (43,560 square feet), which equals \$3,200. A contractor's costs include \$400 for a one-day rental and \$800 for an acre's worth of paper fiber, tackifier, soluble fertilizer, soluble lime and seed. Of course, other costs must be considered, such as labor and overhead, so for a complete hydroseeding pricing analysis visit this article at [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com). — Nicole Wisniewski

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## Hydroseeding

(continued from page 116)

obtain water. "Every few months, we take the meter into the water company, we are given a bill and then we pay for the water we used," Badger said.

Also important is the amount of water contractors transport. Weight restrictions are set forth by the Department of Transportation. "Water weighs 8 pounds per gallon," Jerszyk said. "A 500-gallon tank then holds more than 4,000 pounds. With a typical driver's license, a contractor can only transport up to 26,000 pounds before needing a commercial driver's license. For me, having two 500-gallon tanks is more practical and anyone in my company can drive them."

### IS THE GRASS REALLY GREENER?

Last year, Jerszyk hydroseeded 100 acres of land, and he said hydroseeding is five times more profitable than drop seeding. "Hydroseeding is one forth the price of drop seeding and one-fifth the price of sod," Jerszyk pointed out.

Besides **cost**, the fact that **less labor** is needed to **hydroseed** a lawn rather than to **sod** it is also a reason hydroseeding is a more **attractive** approach to **establishing turf**, especially in an industry where the **labor shortage** is considered **severe**.

Most contractors and manufacturers say cost is the No. 1 advantage of hydroseeding a lawn vs. drop seeding or sodding it.

"The actual installation cost of hydroseeding is only 10 percent of the cost of sodding," Lisle said. "Hydroseeding can be done for 2 cents per square foot. Sodding can be done for 20 cents per square foot, which is 12 to 15 cents per square foot just for the materials before labor costs are included."

Badger's numbers are a little higher. He said the cost to the customer is 6 to 8 cents per square foot for hydroseeding and 27 to

35 cents per square foot for sodding a lawn.

The cost of hydroseeding, drop seeding and sodding to the contractor, however, is half a penny per square foot, 2 to 3 cents per square foot and 17 cents per square foot, respectively, Badger pointed out.

Besides cost, the fact that less labor is needed to hydroseed a lawn rather than to sod it is also a reason hydroseeding is a more attractive approach to establishing turf, especially in an industry where the labor shortage is considered severe.

(continued on page 120)

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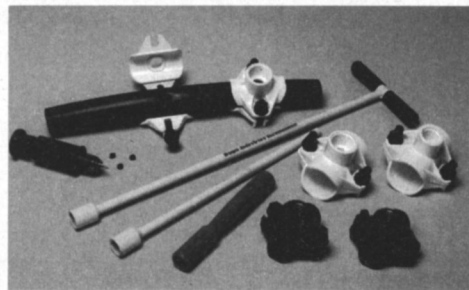


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## Hydroseeding

(continued from page 118)

**T**ackifiers are like glue, according to Lou Santora, sales and technical information, Terra Firma Industries, Rio Rancho, N.M., a hydroseeding contractor and manufacturer of tackifiers. Tackifiers come in many forms:

- A light yellow, floury powder that is not unlike cornstarch, is organic in nature and rewets when watered or after rainfall. This tackifier is used 50 to 75 pounds per acre and is approximately \$2 per pound, Santora said.
- Acrylic co-polymer is a liquid tackifier that does not rewet. This tackifier is typically \$7 per pound, Santora said.
- There are tackifiers that have a poly-acrylimide that puts a charge on the mulch, helping it stick to the soil. This tackifier is used 4 pounds per acre and is approximately \$7 per pound, Santora said.

The main difference between a tackifier that does or doesn't rewet is sticking power, particularly in steep or hilly areas, Santora explained. "A tackifier that doesn't rewet will help the mulch stick to a hillside in the case of rain," he said. "A tackifier that rewets may not do the same on an extreme hill. All types of tackifier will work on flat ground."

Contractors have their reasons for adding or omitting tackifiers from their hydroseeding mixes.

Charlie Garabedian, vice president, Garabedian Landscaping and Hydroseeding, Salem, N.H., said he uses tackifier 99 percent of the time. "Tackifier acts as a lubricant to mix the materials together in the hydroseeding machine and it acts as a glue to keep the mix in place," he said. "We've experienced success using tackifier, even when 10 to 11 inches of rain came the day after hydroseeding."

Santora is an avid user of tackifier, and he said contractors who don't use it in their mixes probably have difficulties keeping seed around areas that are near water sources, such as sprinkler heads. "When we don't use a tackifier, the hydroseeding mulch tends to wash away in really wet areas," Santora explained.

However, Bob Jerszyk, president of Bob Jerszyk Landscapes in Millbury, Mass., recommended against using tackifier because he feels it is unreliable and can be a potential safety risk.

"Sometimes tackifiers hold, sometimes they don't," Jerszyk said. "If I am hydroseeding areas that are steep enough to need a tackifier to make the hydroseeding mulch stick, then I will use a curlex or coconut fiber blanket instead to ensure the mulch isn't going anywhere."

"Also," Jerszyk continued, "when you add tackifier to your mix, the mulch becomes very slippery. The liability for someone falling down a bank doesn't make using tackifier worth the risk." — **Nicole Wisniewski**

# A Sticky Situation



## Hydroseeding

Most contractors use two-man crews to hydroseed. In this setup, typically one person stands at the end of the hose and another person stands 10 feet back to control the hose and make sure it doesn't run over the already hydroseeded area. While most contractors are comfortable using two-man crews, Lou Santora, sales and technical information, Terra Firma Industries, Rio Rancho, N.M., said he uses three-man crews on residential properties.

"Many of our residential clients have stucco walls, lighting fixtures and stone benches in their yards," Santora explained. "We need that extra person to hold a splash board – a 4-foot by 8-foot sheet of masonite – to protect the house and garden accessories from the green dye and glue, which we've found can stain a light-colored house."

Sodding a lawn is typically a more labor-intensive process, consisting of a five- or six-man crew, Jerszyk said. "But sodding provides instant results," he pointed out. "Hydroseeding still takes five to seven weeks before it can be mowed.

"Sodding can also generate a bit more profit than hydroseeding even with the need for additional labor because a different clientele requests the service," Jerszyk continued. "For example, sod is more practical for athletic fields that will be used heavily shortly after installation because getting a good, sturdy base with hydroseeding takes about two seasons."

Jerszyk said sodding is also preferred when establishing turf along a river or near a water source because contractors don't have to worry about possible water contamination with a hydroseeding mulch that contains additional ingredients besides the basics, such as fertilizer or tackifier.

Areas near a water source or steep areas tend to need erosion control, as well, and sod tends to soak up the water like a sponge, preventing soil run-off, where hydroseeding may not work unless additional measures are taken, such as adding tackifier to the mix or using a straw blanket to hold the mix in place so the seed can germinate, Jerszyk said.

**THE GREEN MACHINE.** Despite many contractors' lack of formal education and the limited number of contractors who offer the service, hydroseeding has been around for almost 50 years. Finn Corp. came out with its first models of hydroseeding machines with mechanical agitation in 1953, Schrand said. These machines were equipped with paddles to break up all the added ingredients and work smoothly with wood fibers. Today, more advanced versions are available.

Jet agitation machines, which use jet-propelled water bursts to mix the materials, were introduced 12 to 13 years ago, Lisle said. Jet agitation machines, he added, have been improved and can handle paper and wood fibers.

Machines with jet agitation can cost from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Contractors will pay \$3,000 to \$5,000 more for mechanical agitation machines, Schrand said.

Hydroseeding machines range in size from 300-gallon to 3,000-gallon machines. "A 900-gallon machine can do 3 to 4 acres per day," Lisle said. "The most popular right now is the 600-gallon machine, which can hydroseed 1½ acres per day, because it is a middle-of-the-road machine – not too big or expensive and not too small." **L**


*The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.*

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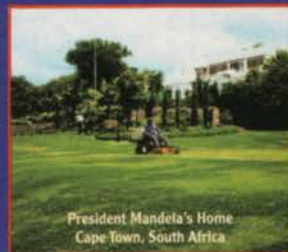


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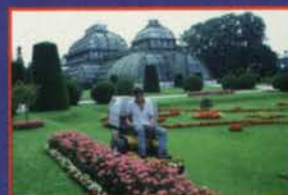
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by Cynthia Greenleaf

# The PRESSURE'S ON

*Proper pressurization is critical to the success of an irrigation system.*

Unlike horseshoes and hand grenades, close isn't good enough when it comes to proper pressurization in irrigation systems. Since irrigation systems are designed to operate within exact specifications, even slightly incorrect pressurization can throw everything off, according to David Zoldoske, director, Center for Irrigation Technology, Fresno, Calif. "Irrigation equipment is designed to operate within certain parameters," he said. "If the pressure is too high or low, the system won't work right."

While improper pressurization presents a problem for contractors and their customers, it also wastes a tremendous amount of water, which is an especially serious offense in drier climates, said Don Thompson, director of sales, Buckner By Storm, Fresno, Calif.

Unfortunately, improper pressurization is a fairly frequent occurrence. "Pressure problems are more common than people would admit," Zoldoske said. Thompson agreed: "People just don't pay as much attention to pressure as they should."



*Pressure problems can undermine the effectiveness of an irrigation system. Here, pop-up spray heads work ineffectively in a low pressure situation.*

**ROOT OF THE PROBLEM.** A range of factors can cause improper pressurization. The water source is one common variable. Depending on whether the irrigation system draws water from a well or a municipal water supply, there can be fluctuations that will seriously affect pressure, according to Steven Silverberg, president, Ecosystems, Old Bridge, N.J. Because of often heavy residential water consumption through such uses as laundering, showering, car washing or dishwashing, there are many areas where municipal water systems are simply overloaded and, this, in turn, will detrimentally affect pressure, said Jeff Carowitz, vice president of marketing, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif.

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*Landscape edging choices and uses abound, but the right product for a job is just a matter of personal preference and location.*

By Ali Cybulski

# Five LINES

**Landscape** edging functions best if it fools the human eye. Because edging is not part of the natural environment, the less that can be seen, the better, according to suppliers and landscape contractors.

Still, contractors fuss over which type of edging to use for a job. The debate continues about which type – plastic, metal or concrete – is most durable, cost effective, safe and easy to install. Mostly, contractors report they choose an edging product based on job site and personal preference.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each type of landscape edging. Despite clashing opinions on the different types, manufacturers and contractors agree that proper installation is the key to success using any product. "Edging is an odd product," said Larry Olson, president, Oly-Ola Sales, Villa Park, Ill. "When edging is installed poorly, it doesn't matter what you use."

**EDGING APPLICATIONS.** Most contractors use landscape edging to divide grass from a planting area, explained Howard Rynberk, president of Valley View, Crestwood, Ill. "I have also seen edging used as a means of holding mulch around the tree base or in gardens," Rynberk said.

Edging's original use was to form flower beds, according to Joe Dragan, executive vice president of Col-Met in Dallas, Texas. Today, landscape edging is also used for restraining pavement, forming concrete and holding patio stone and pavers in place.

Generally, edging should be functional as opposed to simply aesthetic, Olson said. "Edging separates turf from any other mixture, like bark, stone or mulches," he added. "It's a simple barrier."

**PRODUCT BREAKDOWN.** Among landscape contractors, there is no consensus on the best product to use for every application. The decision is personal – and

Edging should be installed low in the ground to separate turf from rock, bank or mulches.

Photo: Valley View



more often – based on location. For example, Olson said concrete edging isn't used in the North as frequently as in the Southwest and Southeast because cold weather makes the product more susceptible to cracking. In Texas and Colorado, Rynberk added, steel edging is used more frequently because the soil is hard and steel goes into the ground easily with a sledgehammer.

Plastic, metal (steel and aluminum) and concrete edging have distinct advantages and disadvantages.

**Plastic, or polyethylene.** Plastic edging may last up to 20 years – as long as steel and longer than concrete, Rynberk said. Poly is also relatively inexpensive. The cost ranges from 30 cents to \$1.10 per foot for certain poly edgings, Olson said.

Poly's biggest advantage is safety. Adults, pets and children won't cut themselves if they fall on plastic edging, Olson said. Pedestrians have a greater risk of injury if they fall on steel edging that is not protected with plastic stripping.

Yet, black plastic edging purchased at chain stores tends to be poor material, especially if installed improperly, Olson said. Power equipment can easily damage the edging. "If you hit black plastic edging with a weed eater, the edging is history," added Robert Pettengill, vice president, Designers Edge, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Occasionally, in low areas, poly edging will frost heave, explained Al Lang, president of Greenleaf Landscapes in Marietta, Ohio. But overall, Lang said he has had success using poly edging. "We've had very few problems, even with material that has been in 12 to 15 years," Lang said.

**Metal.** While the ground may occasionally spit plastic out, it will not reject steel, Dragan said, adding that contractors get 15 to 20 years use out of steel edging. On the other hand, Rynberk said, plastic may last equally as long, but steel may start rusting.

Steel and aluminum edgings are more expensive than plastic, but not as expensive as

## Focus On: LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION

concrete. On average, steel costs \$1.50 to \$4 per foot, depending on size and thickness, Olson reported. Aluminum edging ranges from \$1.20 to \$5 a foot based on size, thickness or color, he added. The costs may vary, though, depending on factors like freight, weather and geography.

Dragan said steel edging makes yard trimming easier. "You can bang against steel edging without hurting it," he said. "Plastic and cement will chip and fall apart."

Still, if a mower hits steel edging, dangerous fragments may go flying, Rynberk said. Also, if contractors handle the edging without wearing gloves, they risk cutting themselves. "And almost always, kids find steel edging," Rynberk added. "It's a liability."

Dragan denied that steel edging is a serious safety hazard to humans and animals. "There have been rare instances of people getting cut," he said. "We offer a final trim cap for the top of the edging. You can jump up and down on it and not get hurt."

Despite potential safety hazards, steel edging

is a best seller in Dallas. "You would be hard-pressed to find a house or business without steel edging," Dragan said.

**Concrete.** Concrete barriers are for people who want to see them, said Tony Cooper, owner and operator of Southern Landscape Curbing in Statesboro, Ga. His machine that lays concrete edging can scribe a brick pattern, and Pettengill said his can form a variety of shapes and colors.

Cooper said concrete edging has good lasting power if concrete sand, instead of masonry, is used to make the mix. "Concrete sand has a fine aggregate that makes the mix stronger," Cooper said. "When I first started, I did masonry sand, and the edging would chip some."

Concrete edging may last four to five years, Rynberk estimated. The edging has a tendency to chip and heave, he added.

Concrete is the most expensive of the three types of edging, and cost hinges on color, texture or region of the country. Pettengill said he charges \$4 a foot for plain concrete edging.

Cooper charges \$3.25 per linear foot and 75 cents more per foot for color.

**KEYS TO INSTALLATION.** Techniques for proper installation vary depending on the type of edging and manufacturer. In addition, contractors have their own tricks of the trade.

According to Rynberk, the trench makes up 85 percent of the labor. "Make sure you dig the trench deep enough," he advised, "and use enough stakes, especially where you are joining two pieces together." The trench should be dug anywhere from 3 to 5 inches deep, depending on the type and size of edging used.

Dig the trench a little deeper than necessary, said Steve Sztapka, owner of Wettlecreek Nursery/Landscape in Morris, Ill. Sztapka also recommends using a level to keep the edging straight.

Equipment is available to dig trenches, but some contractors only use machinery for big jobs—for example, laying 1,000 to 2,000 feet of edging, Rynberk said. The machines can be rented, but in

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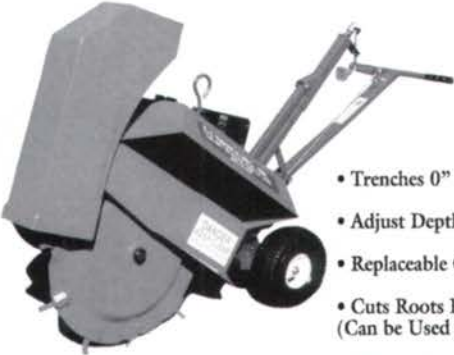
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USE READER SERVICE #153

Poly edging can be long lasting and safe. But if contractors choose inexpensive chain store material or rush through installation, disaster may be likely.

Photo: Oly-Ola Sales, Villa Park, Ill.



most cases, he said contractors are still using the old-fashioned hand and shovel method.

Lang said he uses the trenching machine when he installs poly edging. "You have to make sure the cut is vertical and at least 5 inches deep," he said. "In low areas, where water may collect, we double up on the horizontal pins that are driven through the edging so the product doesn't heave out of the ground."

To form a straight line with edging, dig a proper straight trench, Olson recommended,

and overlap the edging to stop loose connections. Sztapka said by overlapping wherever the connections are, they become even stronger points. Overlapping also eliminates ugly separations in the edging, he added.

According to Col-Met's guide to installing steel edging, contractors should lay out the landscape edging plan on the ground with a tight line for the straight line portions. When planning, allow for an 8-inch loss in each piece's length for the overlap connection.

Then, cut a narrow trench about 3 inches deep along the line where edging will be installed. Shape each section of edging to conform to the trench line and install in the trench by making the overlap connections and tapping the stakes partially into the ground through the full length of the edging plan. Tap down the stakes in succession along the line, a little at a time, and repeat until the stakes are flush with the top of the edging and the edging is

about halfway into the ground. When properly installed, the top of the edging should be about level with the cut grass and barely visible from the grass side of the bed.

To install concrete edging, Cooper uses a sod cutter to cut a strip around flower beds, removes the sod and returns with his machine. He mixes concrete on the trailer and feeds it to the machine, which extrudes the concrete. "I keep the machine level and steer it around the areas the machine needs to go," Cooper said. Although the machine is small, Cooper said in tight areas, some hand work is necessary.

Ultimately, no matter what edging product contractors select, doing the job right is key to lasting power in the landscape. "What we do is simple," Olson said, "not brain surgery or tissue cultures to make new species. There is a right and wrong way to install edging, and it's quite a drag to keep doing it wrong over and over." **LL**

*The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.*

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USE READER SERVICE #167

# Hot the LIGHTS

Less is often more with lighting system design. Sometimes, a subtle, minimalistic lighting arrangement can have a dramatic impact on a landscape.



*A lighting system can work wonders for a property as long as the lights are in the right places.*

by Bob West

*Landscape* lighting can be a tricky business. The popularity of lighting among customers is growing at a rapid rate, which is good, but working with electricity is oftentimes a new challenge for landscape contractors.

Before the first trench is dug or the first bulb illuminated, a lighting system must be designed. And designing an effective landscape lighting system isn't necessarily as simple as popping a light in the ground every 15 or 20 feet.

"Lighting is installed for various reasons — ego, security, safety, aesthetics," observed John Binkele, vice president of business development, FX Luminaire, San Diego, Calif. "The biggest

key to designing a lighting system is finding out what customers want, and that happens by sitting down with them and asking about their expectations and motives for the system and their past experiences with lighting."

**SETTING THE STRATEGY.** The nature of the property to be illuminated will obviously impact the strategy behind the lighting system design. "Visibility is more of an issue on commercial properties than on residential properties because of the number of people on the commercial properties and liability and safety issues," noted Pat Hunsigger, president, Shamrock Landscaping, Renton, Wash. "We tend to do a little more overkill lighting commercial pathways and access areas, and we'll probably focus more on lighting the building so it is visible and we minimize any areas where people could hide."

Hunsigger explained that depending on the building's location, the building might not be the only area of emphasis. "The entryway either to the building or to the property is important on a commercial property," he explained. "Uplighting the trees and company signs is important so the entryway is framed nicely, as well."

Safety is also important for residential jobs, but these customers need to be convinced that a series of path lights from a local do-it-yourself store isn't going to deliver a professional-quality job.

"With residential jobs, we always look at the pathways first and see if there are issues with steps or any areas that could be dangerous in the dark," Hunsigger related. "Then the focus turns toward any specimen plant material or features in the landscape we can light that relay the structure of the yard."

Mike Southard, national sales manager for landscape lighting, Kichler Landscape Lighting, Cleveland, Ohio, recommended that inexperienced contractors get a transformer, a battery and some accent lights and experiment, lighting different areas of friends' homes. "Walk a property and look for interesting features to light,"

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

A design process should always begin with dialogue between the contractor and the customer. After all, the contractor may create the most effective design ever conceived, but there is no way of knowing if that design satisfies the customer's needs without identifying those needs beforehand. The following are some key questions for contractors to ask customers before designing a lighting system along with questions for the designer to ask during a site inspection:

1. What do you like best about your outdoor landscaping?
2. Do you have any favorite plants, statues, walls or any architectural items? Is there a landscape element you like to view on a neighboring property?
3. Do these views change as the seasons change?
4. What do you like least about your landscaped area? What do you hate looking at?
5. What are the main sight lines in your landscaped areas? Curved or winding paths? An open space between trees and shrubs?
6. Where are the "edges" where plant materials changes?
7. Does the architectural style of the house have interesting features?
8. How are you planning to use these areas during the course of the evening?
9. How do you want to be able to control your outdoor lighting?

— Century Rain Aid



Southard encouraged. "I'm a big fan of grazing textured surfaces or placing a light about 6 inches away from a brick wall or a palm tree and shining it directly up. That delivers a much more unique appearance than placing a light 6 feet away from an object and pointing the light directly at it."

Ironically, Mike Mayberry, owner, Regency Landscape Services, Manchester, Mo., said a good lighting design hides the lights. "Hide the lighting fixture behind a plant or in a tree so that what people see is the effect of the light instead of the source of the light," Mayberry suggested. "This eliminates the potential for lights shining directly in people's eyes and can create some dramatic effects with shadows or spotted appearances of light shining through a bush."

Binkele echoed Mayberry's advice and said contractors shouldn't be overly concerned with the aesthetics of a lighting fixture unless they plan to position that fixture in an area where it will be easily viewed. "What matters most with

the fixture is its function and its ability to achieve the designer's goal, whether that be uplighting, downlighting or pathlighting," said Binkele. "The other important features of a fixture are its durability and maintenance requirements. A lamp that lasts 1,000 hours will have to be replaced about every six months, so you want the fixture to be accessible and the light to be easy to replace."

Activating the system using a transformer is another important consideration. "If the transformer only has a timer to turn the lights on and off, then you need to show the customer how to adjust the timer so they can make change as the seasons change," Binkele commented.


A popular alternative to a timer is using a combination of a timer and a photocell that automatically turns on the transformer once it is dark enough outside to need the lights. Then the timer is set to turn the lights off at a certain time so they aren't left on all night long. "We primarily use a combination of a photocell and a timer to operate the system, and we've also installed some

systems with motion sensors so if the lights have gone off and someone walks across the property the lights will go back on," noted Mayberry. "But those sensors can be problematic, so I wouldn't really recommend them."

Southard was quick to emphasize the importance of properly locating the transformer on the property. "Putting the transformer in the wrong location can make the system susceptible to voltage drops," he explained. "So you want to avoid making the runs of wire any longer than necessary, and sometimes that means adding a new outlet somewhere on the house to use."

Another key point with transformers relates to selecting the correct size. Century Rain Aid, Madison Heights, Mich., recommends that after adding up the wattage of lights to be used on a job, divide that number by 0.8 to allow for "leg room" to an extra light to a system later. **LL**

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



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USE READER SERVICE #156

USE READER SERVICE #155

## Focus On: LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION



Landscape contractors are letting their imaginations run wild to meet their customers' desires for unusual, beautiful and relaxing water features.

By Ali Cybulski

# Natural WONDERS

*The trickles* and splashes of clear blue water in a fountain, waterfall or pond help transport homeowners to their own fantasy vacations on a secluded beach or perhaps fishing in a quiet Colorado stream. More often, people are seeking sanctuary from the stress of daily life by enjoying water features in their own backyards. Their increasing awareness of water features and the value they add to property is

allowing landscape contractors to take their designs to a new level.

The healthy U.S. economy and increased interest in ways to reduce stress and improve the quality of life is boosting business for contractors who install ponds. One contractor reported that his pond installation business has doubled in the past three years, and another estimated that in the last four years, installation represented 20

percent of his business.

Pond installation can be a great profit generator. "It is an added niche that not too many people in our market can successfully do," said Terry McNeill, president and landscape architect, Innovative Landscapes, Lubbock, Texas. "Ponds have added a whole new spectrum to the business. (Installation) is an inroad to additional landscaping. There are patio spaces around ponds

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USE READER SERVICE #157

## Focus On: LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION



Water features encompass all aspects of landscaping — aquatic and peripheral plants, character boulders, pavers and patios. The pond, for example, is just one element in a system that includes both hardscapes and softscapes, and tries to mimic the natural environment.

Photos: D.B. Duensing, Algonquin, Ill.

and hardscapes. The trees, shrubs and groundcovers are the icing on the cake.”

Several contractors, including McNeill, Dave Duensing, owner of D.B. Duensing in Algonquin, Ill., and Brent Annis, assistant manager and pond division head at Cross Creek Gardens in Westerville, Ohio, shared their thoughts

on pond installation and design.

**Q:** *What are the benefits of pond installation?*

**Duensing:** Water features allow the free flow of artistic interest and ability to be developed in the whole scope of the landscape. There isn't just one element.

**Annis:** Pond installation is a change of pace. Contractors can be a lot more creative installing ponds and can include every aspect of landscaping — rocks, plants, mulch, pavers and patios.

The profit is obviously the biggest benefit if you know what you're doing and have a good crew. The economy is good, so people can spend more on the things they enjoy. They can see the benefits of ponds for themselves and in the resale value of their homes.

**McNeill:** I think the key benefit is the relaxation you get from the sound of water. Our society is becoming more stressful because we are more work-oriented and seem to have less free time.

**Q:** *Can you describe some of your most recent and unusual work?*

**Duensing:** We finished an indoor pond last February at a corporate office. They built the building around the pond. The pond has game fish, bass, bluegill and catfish. It is indoors in the lobby.

Another project we did in Colorado was at 9,000 feet elevation, and we had to bear-proof it. You protect the rubber from the bears that come to drink water on the property. We used some substantial rocks to cover the rubber and create the edge of the pond and stream. A 180-foot-long stream cascades into waterfalls and goes into an irregularly shaped pond.

In Chicago, we took an area of a yard that was part of the entrance to the property and took it from being boring to very eye-catching. When you develop the water feature properly, you typically don't design it so you can see it all at one moment. As you drive past the feature, you see portions of it and more is revealed. When you're at the house and you look back, there is a whole picture you haven't seen before. The feature is 50-by-60 feet at the bottom of the basin, and we have cascading ponds interconnecting that cascade to a main pond. Most of the smaller ponds are 15 to 25 feet in diameter.

**Annis:** The most unique pond was one we put in at my house. We had a build-a-pond day seminar at my house where we hosted 60 contractors. The pond was 20-by-16 and had two streams and two waterfalls.

In November, we had someone come in and together we designed a pond with one 30-foot stream and another 12-foot stream that drained into

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USE READER SERVICE #158

## Focus On: LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION

an 11-by-16 pond.

Most people who want ponds really get into them. We involve them in the design process. Many need education. Some are only acquainted with the do-it-yourself kits from Home Depot.

McNeill: We did a residential property that sits on a bluff overlooking a lake. We created the waterfall at the top of the property and dropped it

18 feet down into a courtyard environment we created. The feature was a series of three ponds and three waterfalls, with a final fall of 9 feet. That particular feature has 20,000 gallons per hour going over it and we used in excess of 60 tons of stones.

The project took five months to complete. There were five crew members out there at any one time. The feature had monstrous multilevel

retaining walls. This was a fun project and more of a challenge than we are accustomed to.

We just finished a project with a water feature at the entrance of a doctor's office. The feature is the first thing you see as you walk in the door. The plastic surgeon wanted to create an environment to give patients' families a place to sit and relax without being worried about their loved ones. Even on a winter day, they will be able to comfortably sit out there. The pond will be stocked with fish and have a complete night lighting system.

**Q:** *What are some keys to successful installation?*

**Duensing:** The project needs to be done to scale with the site and the elements that surround it. Many times, the feature looks like an afterthought.

Develop focal points. Design the feature to take advantage of the focal points.

Design it so the owner can interact with it to some degree – maybe walk to the edge. The feature should be inviting and safe.

Know how to naturalize the feature. Use the right type, shape and size of stones. Use plants in and out of the water. Try to hide the pond edges.

The liner for the pond is critical. A whole variety is available, but the only way I'd go is with a rubber liner. Rubber will always stay pliable. The biggest critical items, besides the rubber liner, is a skimmer and filter mats. Contractors also need to know that there are now pumps designed for the water garden industry. High-efficiency pumps are designed to run 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Annis:** The keys are educating yourself and your crew and having the same crew do the work every time. The labor shortage is our primary problem. Also, have everything you need at the site.

McNeill: Take the time to install it properly so you don't have a problem later on.

**Q:** *What are some trends in water features?*

**Annis:** Ponds must be clean, clear and look natural. The pond should not be a black plastic tub with a fountain in the middle.

McNeill: The major trend is that you'll see more people doing water features because of their (relaxing) effect. I think you're also going to see more refinements in how they are built. The ways ponds were built 10 years ago is prehistoric compared to how they are built now. Ponds have come a long way. You can enjoy them with little or no maintenance involved. **LL**

*The author is associate editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.*

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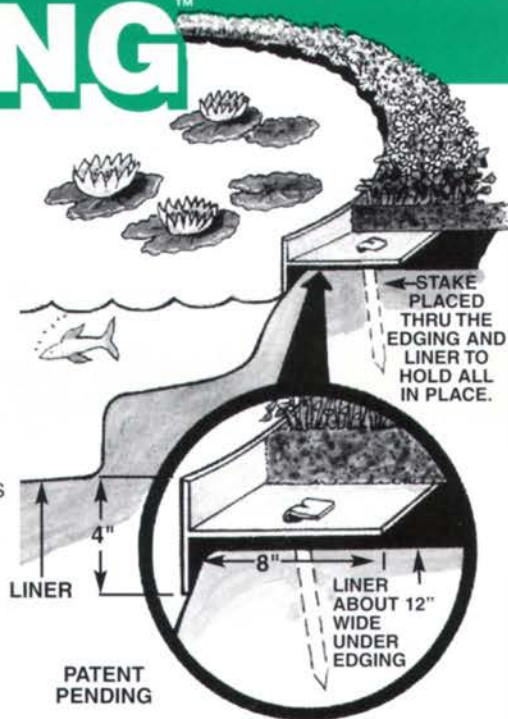
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# Building BLOCKS

For a lasting retaining wall, landscape contractors must focus more on strengthening the soil, not just laying the blocks.

By Ali Cybulski

*Building blocks* are only as good as the work that is done behind them. Too much focus on the facing of a retaining wall and not enough on compaction, drainage and base preparation can easily equal disaster.

"You can get so focused on building up the veneer that you forget about the soil behind it," said Bob Dean, president, ICD, Milwaukee, Wis. "We should not focus on the blocks or the units. The job is to increase the strength of the soil."

Increasing the soil's strength means landscape contractors must focus on compaction of backfill and foundation soils, which is some-

times forgotten, and developing an effective drainage system. Generally, contractors are tackling these installation challenges well, Dean said.

"We're seeing more confidence in installation," he said. "The good contractors are learning to follow the rules. As we follow the rules, we have success with the walls. As we have success with the walls, more contractors use them."



No matter what the retaining wall size is, getting the job done right the first time is essential.

Photo: Versa-Lok Retaining Wall Systems

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## Focus On: LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION



A crew works on installing a segmental retaining wall. Photo: Allan Block Corp.

**IT'S A HOLD UP.** Retaining walls are popular because flat property is in short supply, Dean said. "People are building more into hillsides and there is a need to create areas that are not sloped," he said. "That's where walls come in – to allow building on a site where you normally cannot." Contractors also use retaining walls for decorative purposes, Dean added.

Landscape contractors may use retaining walls to prevent erosion or to create planting areas and functional walls that perhaps hold up a driveway or form a raised patio, said Jeff Nelson, marketing and creative manager, Versa-Lok, Oakdale, Minn. "(The wall) doesn't just retain soil, it creates a useable space," he said.

The retaining wall market is divided into three segments, according to Bob Gravier, president, Allan Block Corp., Edina, Minn.

- *Garden walls.* Installed by homeowners, these are mostly light, do-it-yourself projects.

- *Landscape walls.* These walls that go "from knee to nose" involve studying the site and analyzing soil, drainage and structures on the property.

- *Retaining walls.* Their most important function is structure. "The wall must absolutely, positively not fall down," Gravier said. "Its primary function is to retain soils and hold up whatever is above the wall. These walls require engineering and thoughtful, careful review by a professional."

**A MATERIAL WORLD.** A wide variety of construction materials is available for building retaining walls. Boulders and field stones are the most natural and durable, but expensive, Gravier said. While treated wood is less expensive and easier to work with, it lasts only about 15 years, he added. "Treated wood is also an environmental nightmare," he said. "It's essentially a dead tree soaked with chemicals. In many places, if you pull a timber wall out of the landscape because it has rotted, it has to go to a toxic landfill."

Concrete materials range from cast-in-place systems to mortared walls that may require skilled craftsmen to build. "You have to pour footings

below the frost line and place steel reinforcement inside," Gravier explained. "Someone who is skilled in masonry has to stack the bricks. This type of wall is beautiful, but expensive."

Segmental retaining walls can be constructed without mortar and concrete footings. Products differ by shape, color, interlocking mechanism and block type – hollow or filled. "(The segmental system) is a versatile way to build walls," Dean said.

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essential, Gravier said. "Coming back afterwards and repairing a retaining wall is expensive because you are dealing with landscaping, paving and maybe even a house – and you can't get equipment through," he said.

First, establish a level, sound base for the wall, Gravier advised. "We take out soft soils, put crushed stone in and pack it down so it's firm," he said.

Then, contractors may begin stacking blocks, filling in and compacting along the way. "By doing proper compaction, you are dramatically increasing the strength of the soil and the integrity of the wall," Dean said.

Proper compaction of foundation and backfill soil is critical to the long-term performance of retaining wall systems, Nelson agreed. Foundation and backfill materials should be compacted to at least 95 percent of standard Proctor density – the maximum soil density achieved in a laboratory using a standard amount of compaction effort, according to Versa-Lok's retaining wall design and installation guide.

Loose backfill will add pressure on walls, collect water, cause settlement and will not anchor soil reinforcement materials properly. "When the soils settle, the low spot attracts water, the water flows in there and creates a swimming pool effect," Gravier said. "Now you can have a blow out, or the wall can tip over forward or backward."

A proper drainage system within the wall and at the site is key. Wall sites should be graded to avoid water flows, concentrations or pools behind retaining walls. If the wall is not drained, Dean said, the water will decrease the friction resistance of the soil.

Setting up screed rails will help contractors keep the retaining wall level, Nelson said. Some level the wall block by block, which makes the process more difficult, he added.

In addition, geosynthetic soil reinforcement, or geogrids, can help reinforce soil backfill, Gravier explained.

Soil type is another important consideration in retaining wall installation. "Clay is more difficult to build walls into than sandy soils," Gravier said.

Additional training may help contractors boost their installation know-how. For example, the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Auburn University offer soil engineering courses. Also, the National Concrete Masonry Association offers a segmental retaining wall installation guide.

**BACK TO THE FUTURE.** Expect more retaining walls to be installed because they work well and are cost

effective when they are built properly, Dean said. "The industry is really going to continue to grow, but we have to convince the design community that we will build retaining walls to specs," he said.

Some new wall construction materials may debut – more designer blocks and possibly an alternative to chemically treated wood, Gravier forecasted.

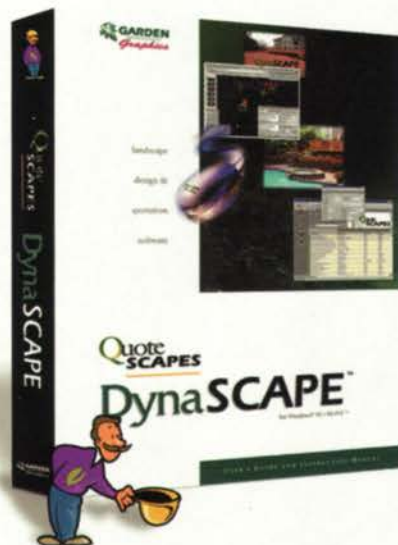
Despite better building blocks, Gravier said

there will be no automation of installation tasks. "The small, modular pieces give you so many advantages over a large panel brought in by a crane," he said. "You are probably still looking at getting out in the dirt every day." **LL**

*The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.*



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# Landscape Installation BUYERS' GUIDE

Lawn & Landscape presents its first Landscape Installation Buyers' Guide, which identifies some key suppliers of materials for installing retaining walls, lighting, edging and water features.

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**Oly-Ola Sales Inc.**  
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800-334-4647  
[www.olyola.com](http://www.olyola.com)

**Permaloc  
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[www.permaloc.com](http://www.permaloc.com)

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Westlake Village, CA 91362  
800-457-0710  
[www.callite.com](http://www.callite.com)

**FX Luminaire**  
6118 Nancy Ridge Dr.  
San Diego, CA 92121  
800-688-1269  
[www.fxli.com](http://www.fxli.com)

**Hadco Inc.**  
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[www.hadcolighting.com](http://www.hadcolighting.com)

**Kichler  
Landscape Lighting**  
7711 E. Pleasant Valley Rd.  
Cleveland, OH 44131  
800-659-9000 ext. 6314  
[www.kichler.com](http://www.kichler.com)

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**ICD Corp.**  
3934 N. Ridgely Circle  
Milwaukee, WI 53211  
800-394-4066  
[www.selecticd.com](http://www.selecticd.com)

**Pave Tech Inc.**  
PO Box 576  
Prior Lake, MN 55372  
800-728-3832  
[www.pavetech.com](http://www.pavetech.com)

**Paveloc Industries Inc.**  
8302 S. Rte. 23  
Marengo, IL 60152  
800-590-2772  
[www.paveloc.com](http://www.paveloc.com)

**Presto Products Co.**  
PO Box 2399, 670 N.  
Perkins St.  
Appleton, WI 54912  
800-548-3424  
[www.prestogeo.com](http://www.prestogeo.com)

**Versa-Lok  
Retaining Wall Systems**  
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[www.versa-lok.com](http://www.versa-lok.com)

### WATER FEATURES

**Aqua Control Inc.**  
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**Aquascape Designs**  
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West Chicago, IL 60185  
630-231-3113  
[www.aquasapedesigns.com](http://www.aquasapedesigns.com)

**Oterbine Barebo Inc.**  
3840 Main Road East  
Emmaus, PA 18049  
800-237-8837

## Landscape Edging

### CURV-RITE INC.

Curv-Rite manufactures aluminum lawn edgings and paver restraints. The aluminum edging is available in four colors and a variety of sizes and thicknesses. All products include a patented telescoping connection, which runs throughout each piece, helping to speed up installation. Curv-Rite also produces Stable Edge paver restraint, a heavy duty paver that can be used for both commercial and residential installation. Stable Edge can flex to a 30-inch diameter for curvilinear projects.

### OLY-OLA SALES INC.

Oly-Ola Sales produces landscape edgings and paver restraints designed for residential or commercial projects. The company offers low-profile or traditional round top edgings in eight styles. Oly-Ola's newest design is Edge-Keeper for water garden pond liners. The edging allows plants or turf to grow up to the pond's edge, or the product can be used for pavers next to the pond.

### PERMALOC ALUMINUM EDGING

Since 1983, Permaloc has offered aluminum landscape edging and restraint systems. Permaloc manufactures commercial and residential grades of landscape edging, including L-shaped, flexible paver restraint; semi-rigid, L-shaped maintenance strip; L-shaped asphalt restraint; and L-shaped athletic surface restraint.

### VALLEY VIEW INDUSTRIES

For more than three decades, Valley View has offered Black Diamond edging to landscape professionals. All Valley View edging

systems are UV-protected and manufactured with high-grade polyethylene. Valley View also manufactures Diamond-Lok paver brick edgings and other landscape products.

## Lighting

### CALIFORNIA LANDSCAPE LIGHTING

California Landscape Lighting is a national distributor of landscape lighting and supplies. Staff members are experienced in all areas of landscape lighting, including design, installation and troubleshooting.

### FX LUMINAIRE

For the past 10 years, FX Luminaire has manufactured architectural-grade exterior lighting components engineered for industry professionals to specify and install. FX Luminaire lighting fixtures and transformers are UL 1838 listed, and components are constructed of 304 stainless steel, 6061 T6 aluminum alloy, copper and brass. FX also applies TGIC powder coat finish to its products.

### HADCO INC.

Hadco is an ISO9001 registered company known for innovative, high-quality lighting products and outstanding service. Hadco offers a complete line of low-voltage and line voltage residential and commercial landscape and underwater lighting products under the brand names NightLife and Bronzelite, and decorative HID and site lighting under the brand name Hadco.

### KICHLER LANDSCAPE LIGHTING

Kichler manufactures a line of professional grade, 12- and 120-volt landscape lighting and accessories.



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Kichler also provides education and training to help contractors add landscape lighting to their design/maintenance businesses.

### POP LIGHT, DIVISION OF AQUA-LAWN INC.

Pop Light's landscape lighting fixtures automatically recede into the ground when they are not in use. Newly redesigned fixtures include the updated PL2000-ML path light and SL3000-DL directional fixtures. The company has also introduced the PL2025-CD path light, which uses a cone-shaped diffuser, and the PL2035-FL fluorescent fixtures. The new fluorescent fixtures are available in path light and directional styles. All fixtures and styles are available in 12- and 120-volt configurations, except the PL2035, which is 12 volt only.

### RUUD LIGHTING INC.

Ruud Lighting's product line includes line- and low-voltage luminaires. Available finishes include black, white and verde, and some models are available in solid brass. The low-voltage line includes choices of path, area and directional luminaires and a variety of MR16, PAR36 and fluorescent lamp choices. Line-voltage offerings include directional and sealed-well lights for incandescent, fluorescent and HID. Exclusive to Ruud Lighting is a selection of outdoor track heads UL-listed for wet locations.

### VISTA PROFESSIONAL OUTDOOR LIGHTING

Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting manufactures low-voltage landscape lighting fixtures, transformers and accessories for landscape architects, electrical contractors, consultants and engineers.

### Retaining Walls

#### ARBORLOCK

Arborlock manufactures a protective collar for trees and palms to aid in bracing. The company's Web site features a video demo of the product.

#### ICD CORP.

ICD's Stonewall Select retaining walls provide the natural look of hewn stone in a stackable, mortar-free wall system. Steps, 90-degree corners and landscape lighting can be incorporated into wall designs. Free downloads,

including CAD details, an installation manual, grid chart and more are available on ICD's Web site.

### PAVE TECH INC.

Pave Tech's Pave Edge paver restraint system is a self-supporting edge restraint system designed exclusively for pavers. The edging is made of a strong PVC compound and is invisible when in place. The Pave Edge system comes in 10-foot-long sections that are both rigid and flexible for straight or curved edges.

### PAVELOC INDUSTRIES INC.

Paveloc Industries manufactures interlocking paving stones and Creta Stone segmental retaining walls. Paving stones are available in 16 standard shapes and 15 standard colors, in addition to custom colors. Creta Stone is a tumbled concrete retaining wall, which creates the appearance of a random pattern, natural stone wall, and is manufactured in three different sizes. The Creta Stone retaining wall is split face on both sides, allowing construction of a free-standing wall. The wall is available in seven standard colors. Paveloc Industries serves distributors and contractors in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Missouri and Iowa.

### PRESTO PRODUCTS CO.

Presto provides solutions to soil stabilization and porous pavement. The Geoblock porous pavement system is a series of interlocking polyethylene paving units designed to provide turf protection and load support for emergency vehicle access lanes, auxiliary parking and other applications. The Geoweb cellular confinement system is an expandable polyethylene, honeycomb-like structure used to confine unstable soils, sands or gravel. The Geoweb system provides solutions to slope and channel protection, load support and earth retention problems.

### VERSA-LOK RETAINING WALL SYSTEMS

Versa-Lok retaining wall systems are installed without mortar and require no concrete footings. Versa-Lok offers design flexibility, and one standard unit is

used to assemble straight and curved walls, corners and steps. Concrete units accommodate geogrid soil reinforcement. Versa-Lok units are environmentally safe and their split face texture complements natural or architectural settings.

### Water features

#### AQUA CONTROL INC.

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#### AQUASCAPE DESIGNS

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#### OTTERBINE BAREBO INC.

Otterbine Barebo has been aerating ponds and lakes for more than 40 years and offers a product line that includes surface spray and sub surface aeration systems, diffused aeration system and water treatment products. Concept2 surface spray aerators are manufactured of stainless steel and thermoplastics.

#### POND SUPPLIES OF AMERICA INC.

Pond Supplies distributes professional pond kits based on the PondSweep skimmer/PuriFalls filtration system. The company's latest catalog, available for free by calling 630-553-0033, includes all the parts necessary for building water gardens. The catalog also includes information on pump and skimmer selection. Pond Supplies has warehouses in Chicago, Ill., Los Angeles, Calif., and Pittsburgh, Pa., and ships nationwide.

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**Gempler's Labor Issues** – "Preparing for INS Contact" and "INS Strategies."

**GreenSearch PeopleSmarts** – "How to Make Your Company's Incentive Plan Work Harder Than You Do."

**ALCA Toolbox Talks** – "Driving Defensively."

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## Irrigation Pressure

(continued from page 122)

Geography also plays a role in proper pressurization. In Rick Pate's case, the relatively flat terrain of central Alabama works in his favor. Without a lot of elevation change, pressurization is not usually a problem in the irrigation systems he works on, said Pate, president, Pate Landscape Co., Montgomery, Ala. This is not usually the situation,

however, and elevation change often has a direct effect on pressure if it is not accounted for in the system's design.

An irrigation system's components and their arrangement can also obviously influence pressure. Too many sprinkler heads in a zone, for example, can lead to uneven distribution, and, in turn, a pressure problem. "You

may have enough water flow to run three sprinklers but try to run four sprinklers and there may be a problem," Thompson pointed out. Taking standard water pressure calculations into account can alleviate these issues (see "Water Pressure Calculations" on page 144), but these aren't always followed.

Overall, the better the system design, "the less these variables will matter in terms of an irrigation system's effectiveness," Pate said. Still, design problems are rampant.

**OFF TO A BAD START.** One of the most frustrating causes of improper pressurization is a poorly designed irrigation system. If a system is flawed to begin with, addressing a pressurization problem can be a real headache, according to Thompson. "Fixing a bad

(continued on page 142)

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**T**here are some obvious warning signs that something is wrong with your irrigation system's pressure. They include:

### LOW PRESSURE

- Reduced radius of coverage
- Large water droplets
- Doughnut-shaped dry area
- Slow rotor rotation speed
- Rotor rotation failure
- Head failure to set and seal

### HIGH PRESSURE

- Reduced radius of coverage
- Floating fine mist
- Dry areas between head patterns
- Fast rotor rotation speed
- Rotor rotation failure
- Leakage at the head

Source: *The Complete Irrigation Workbook*, Larry Keesen

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## Irrigation Pressure

(continued from page 140)

system is very difficult, while fixing a good system is very easy," he observed.

One of the most common design problems is simply not tailoring a system to a customer's specific needs, Silverberg said. Designers need to be careful not to generalize and overlook the specific requirements of a system, such as elevation or water source

issues, Pate added. "What works in one scenario will not work somewhere else," he pointed out. "That's where we see people getting in trouble. Design rules of thumb are good 95 percent of the time - it's the other 5 percent you need to worry about."

When he can avoid working on poorly designed systems, Pate said he tries to do so.

Otherwise, contractors inherit a host of problems, including improper pressurization. Thompson agreed, noting that contrary to an increasingly popular notion, irrigation design isn't a skill learned at the local Home Depot. "If this is the case, the chances of a lousy system are pretty good," he said.

Thompson strongly advised consulting manufacturer catalogs to make sure a system is running to its proper specifications. That alone could take care of a pressurization problem in many cases, he emphasized.

Unfortunately, there is no easy resolution when contractors are dealing with a flawed system. "Once the system is installed, repairs can be very costly," said Silverberg. "Sometimes, the only change is to redo the system." This is a worst-case scenario, however. Usually, minor design flaws, such as an incorrect nozzle size, can be corrected without "too much fanfare," he said.

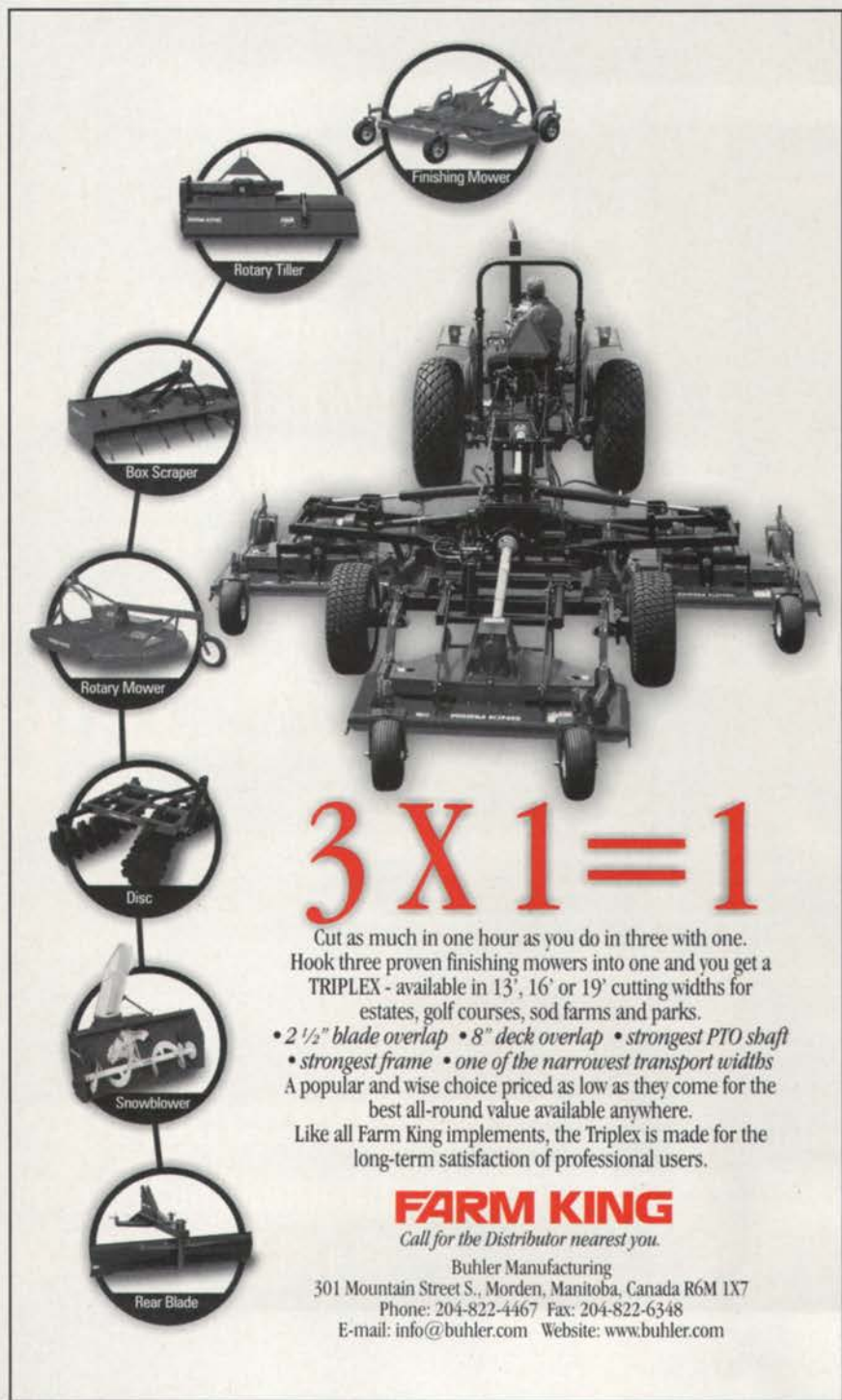
**RECOGNIZING THE PROBLEM.** Improper pressurization is a relatively straightforward problem to identify (see "Telltale Signs" on page 140). Most obviously, with both high and low pressure, a system isn't going to work effectively. In particular, a low-pressure system will often have large droplets of water "gurgling out of its heads," Silverberg said. Also, the heads won't pop up all the way or at all. Low pressure can also result in brown spots as well as soil compaction throughout the irrigated area.

In the case of high pressure, the water will have a tendency to mist and "blow away in the wind," Thompson said. This takes place because the nozzle will put out very tiny droplets of water, producing a poor pattern of coverage likely to evaporate.

When this happens, the radius of effective coverage is greatly reduced. "The water doesn't go as far as you want it to go," Zoldoske said. Needless to say, this ineffective irrigation results in a colossal waste of water in addition to poor irrigation results.

**FIXING THE PROBLEM.** Unless a system is hopelessly flawed, most pressure problems can be resolved after a bit of troubleshooting. Before taking any drastic measures, however, check the system's specifications. "When a technician goes out, he needs to make sure the system is to plan," Thompson

(continued on page 144)



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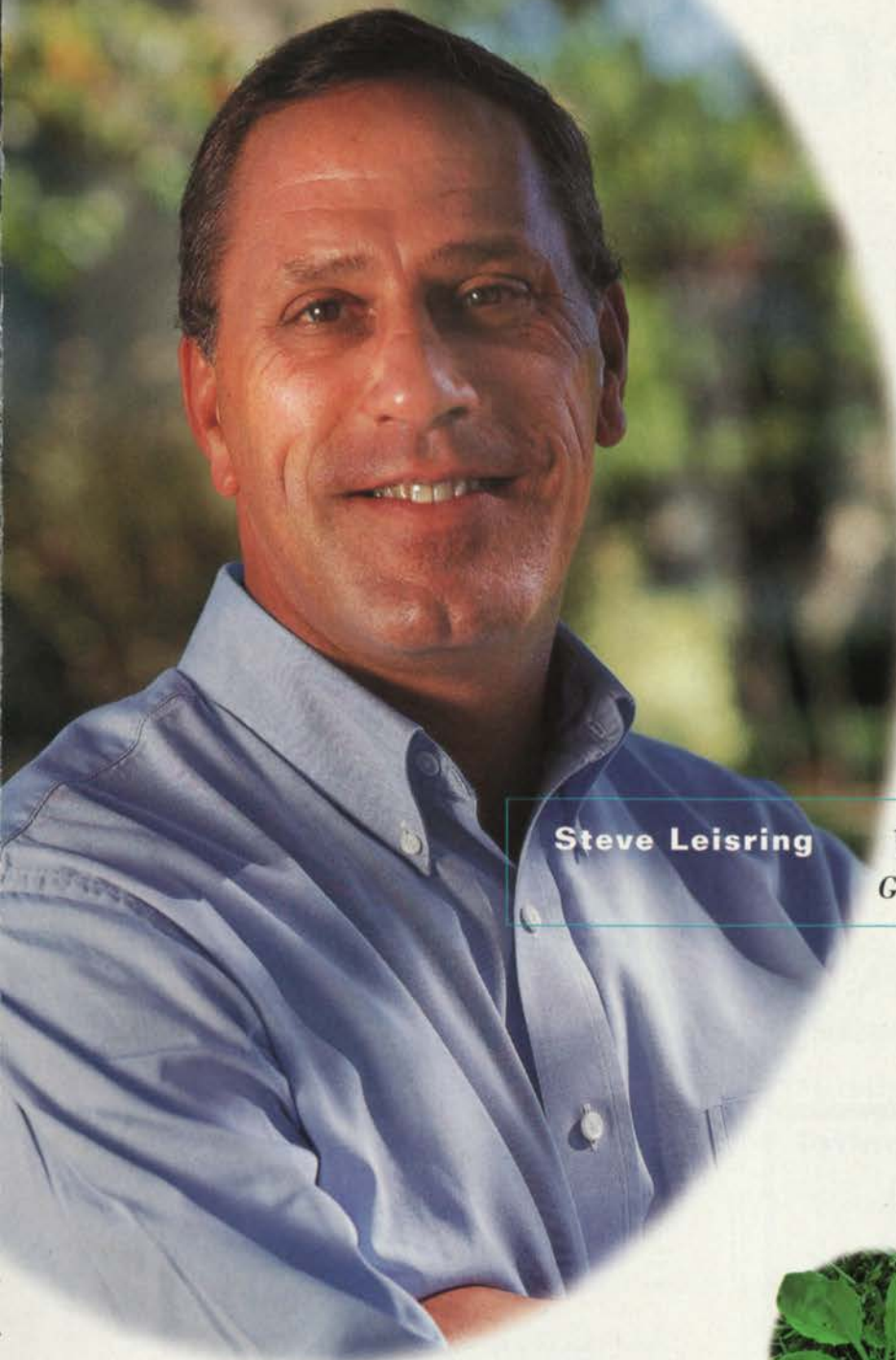
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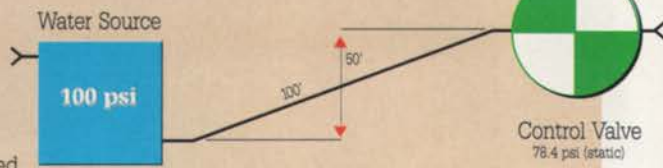
# Irrigation Pressure

(continued from page 142)

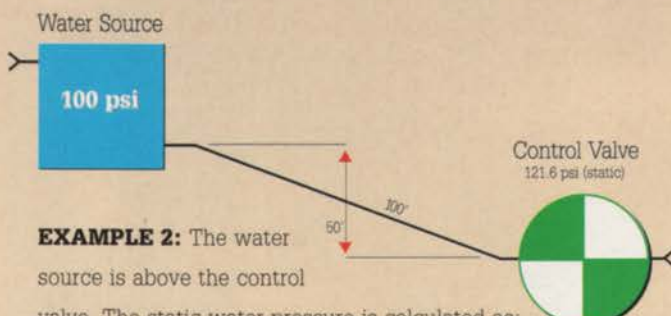
## Water Pressure Calculations

**T**here is no room for inaccuracy in an irrigation system. That's why knowing the standard, "textbook" pressurization formulas is essential. Unfortunately, these aren't as commonly taken into account as they should be, pointed out Don Thompson, director of sales, Buckner By Storm, Fresno, Calif. For contractors working on irrigation systems, "knowing these really makes a difference," he said. "They're absolutely critical to the success of an irrigation system." Here are a few to review:

**EXAMPLE 1:** The water source is below the control valve. The static water pressure is calculated as:  $100 \text{ psi} - (50' \times .433 \text{ psi per foot}) = (100 - 21.6) = 78.4 \text{ psi static}$



**EXAMPLE 2:** The water source is above the control valve. The static water pressure is calculated as:  $100 \text{ psi} + (50' \times .433 \text{ psi per foot}) = (100 + 21.6) = 121.6 \text{ psi static}$



Information courtesy of Buckner By Storm

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## Irrigation Pressure

(continued from page 144)

advised. Test pressure at both the water source and at the sprinkler. "If the system is set for 35 psi, but you're getting 20 psi, then there's a problem," said Thompson, who advised looking at the more obvious potential problems first. Sometimes, correcting pressure is as simple as cleaning dirt out of valves. If you can, "find the easy way out first," Thompson said.

Changing system components, such as the nozzles, for a different screen size is also a common solution to pressure problems.

Generally speaking, in high-pressure situations, pressure-reducing valves should be installed, while in low pressure scenarios, reducing nozzle size is a likely solution.

With a serious pressure problem, a booster pump might be required to correct the problem. Since a booster pump can be expensive and labor intensive, Zoldoske recommended only using one as a last resort measure. **II**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

# Spring Start-Up Tips for Backflow Preventers

- N**o examination of pressurization issues and irrigation systems would be complete without mentioning backflow prevention devices. Here are a few tips to make sure your backflow prevention device is ready to go this spring. Before addressing these, however, check local codes to determine who is authorized to perform maintenance and/or testing of the unit in your area. Some points to keep in mind:
1. When pressurizing the system, open and close the ball valve or shutoffs slowly to prevent damage due to water hammer.
  2. Flush the line on a new installation or when returning a system to service after it has been drained for freeze protection. Remove the check cover(s) and internal check assemblies from the backflow preventer and flow water for several minutes. Flushing the line should eliminate debris that may clog valves in the system.
  3. Inspect internal check components for signs of cracking or wear. Check the seating area for damage or debris. Replace worn or damaged components as needed. See the manufacturer's recommended maintenance procedures.
  4. Reassemble the backflow preventer and repressurize the system. Bleed trapped air from the valve through the test cocks.
  5. Inspect the valve's exterior for damage from freeze, vandalism and wear. If a strainer is present, inspect it, clean out debris. Make any necessary repairs.
  6. Test the backflow preventer to ensure it is operating according to local codes.

— Terry Nelson, marketing associate, CMB Industries, manufacturer of FEBCO Backflow Preventers

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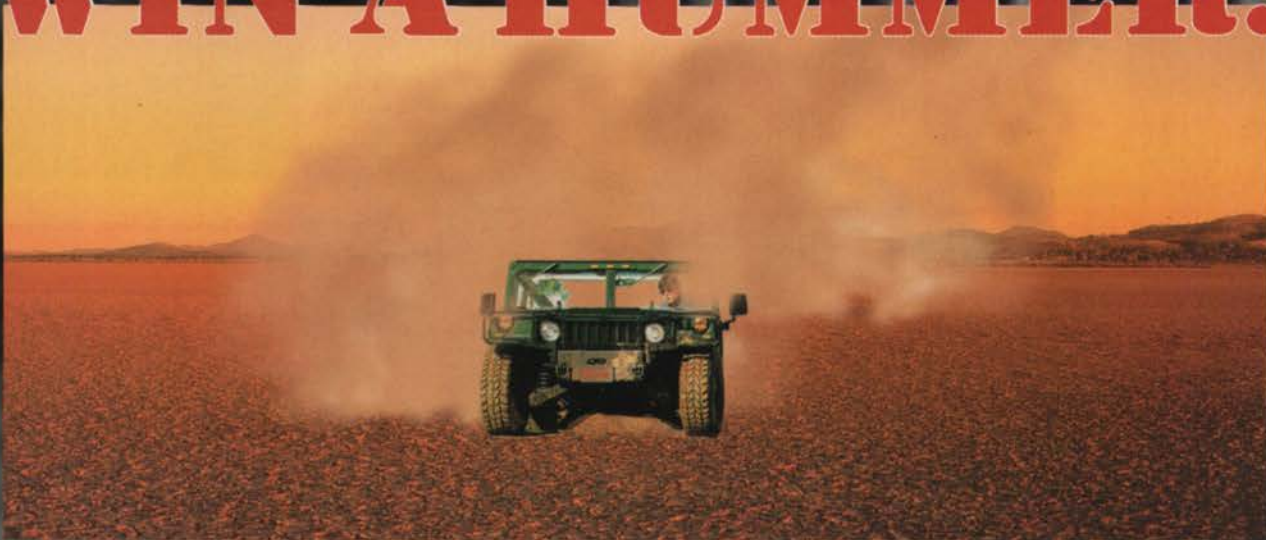
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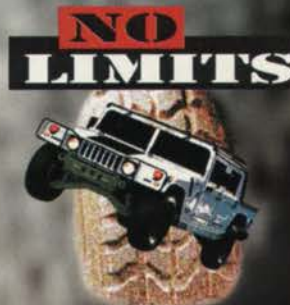


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by Bob West

*Groundmasters' President Mike Rorie views the consolidation trend as a positive influence on his company – driving the business to constantly improve and maintain a competitive edge.  
Photo: Mark Burgess*



# Why THEY Didn't Sell

*A panel of landscape contractors talked about why they didn't sell and how they dealt with the consolidation question internally.*

Consolidation has certainly been one of the hottest topics of discussion within the lawn and landscape industry during the past two years. Articles have been written and meetings have been held, mostly focused around the question of why contractors should sell their businesses or how much they should sell for.

One aspect of the consolidation process that hasn't been addressed much, however, is why some contractors who could sell their businesses for hefty prices tomorrow if they wanted to have elected to remain independent. Five such contractors were the panelists for a session presented at the recent Green Industry Expo in Baltimore, Md., and following is a review of what they had to say.

The panelists were:

- Landon Reeve, president, Chapel Valley Landscape, Woodbine, Md.
- Mike Rorie, president, Groundmasters, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Wayne Richards, chief operating officer, Cagwin & Dorward, Novato, Calif.
- John Gachina, president, Gachina Landscape Management, Menlo Park, Calif.
- David Snodgrass, president, Dennis' 7 Dees Landscape, Portland, Ore.

In talking about his decision not to sell, Snodgrass noted that the forecast for the next few years in the lawn and landscape industry is very positive. And despite the notion that surfaced early in the consolidation craze that contractors had a limited window of oppor-

*(continued on page 150)*



*According to Cagwin & Dorward's Wayne Richards, contractors contemplating selling their businesses should consult an accountant, lawyer or broker for professional advice. Photo: Charlie Kennard*

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# Consolidation

(continued from page 148)

tunity for selling their businesses, more potential buyers have emerged since the summer of 1998 due to the industry's growth.

"There are potential buyers inside and outside of our industry," observed Snodgrass. "We could sell to janitorial companies, facility management companies, other contractors or even financial roll-up groups from outside of the industry."

Snodgrass and the other panel members each acknowledged that they entertained the idea of selling their businesses at some point during the last two years, and each also said they met with representatives from potential buyers. But each of these contractors came away with the same decision – selling was not the best move for them to make.

"My partner and I gathered a lot of information to see why we, as owners, would be interested in selling," Richards noted. "Selling wasn't the right move for us because we're active in the business and selling would really change the culture we've worked to build. Neither one of us wanted that."

Richards also related the decision not to sell to other strategic decisions a company owner makes. "We've all made decisions not to enter certain markets or not to offer certain services because doing so wouldn't fit with our scope of business," he explained. "Businesses have to do what is best for them."

"For me, the decision not to sell came down to desire," Rorie noted. "The idea of being part of a national company and working with a pool of talented individuals was very intriguing, so I kept asking a lot of questions and learning from people who were involved and had sold their businesses."

"But I just don't think you're going to have as much fun at a national company," he added. "We don't have to report to anyone other than me or always worry about the next quarter. Our goal is more than the bottom line."

"The decision not to sell was essentially my children's decision because they will take over the business from me," shared Reeve, who added that dealing with rumors that he would sell the business have been a tremendous challenge. "We have 250 families that depend on us because we employ at least one

member of those families, and we felt that could do better ourselves rather than be dependent on Wall Street."

Reeve also said he believes that an independently owned company benefits from having an owner who is active and present in the business.

"We work in my community, where the employees and I have a vested interest in the quality of life," he noted. "Good companies come about as they are driven by people who live in the same area the company oper-

One aspect of the consolidation process that hasn't been addressed much is why some contractors who could sell their businesses for hefty prices tomorrow if they wanted to have elected to remain independent.

ates. I don't believe outside controllers have the same level of local commitment and can give the same level of service."

It should be noted, however, that while this is one of the more common criticisms of national companies, each company that they acquire and turn into a branch is typically run by a manager who resides locally and has a vested interest in the community.

**THE PEOPLE FACTOR.** A key consideration for any contractor debating selling his or her business to keep in mind is how the subject is handled with employees. While some contractors may elect to say nothing to employees so they don't upset them or make them nervous about a potential sale, sometimes honesty may be the best policy.

"Once we made our decision not to sell, we called together our key personnel and told them everything," recalled Richards. "We explained that our decision was an investment to remain independent and now we needed their support so we could continue to be a successful company."

"That meeting turned out to be a pretty powerful event because we came to them,"

Richards continued. "They have really risen to the occasion."

"Whether you sell is obviously the shareholder's decision, but your key people have gotten you where you are, so I think you want to talk to them at some point," agreed Rorie.

"If you're on the fence, get off of it – one way or the other," stressed Gachina. "Decide what is best for you and then go that route. Otherwise, you're going to confuse your people by vacillating."

**WHAT'S NEXT?** The contractors on the panel each noted that they haven't seen any instance of national companies trying to cut prices or "buy contracts," but a logical question to ask contractors who decide not to sell is how they plan to compete with the emerging national companies.

For Rorie, the answer has been to begin consolidating as well. "We bought two companies in the last two years to grow stronger and expand our market," he explained, noting that he is preparing for what he considers the inevitable arrival of a national player in the Cincinnati market that Groundmasters currently dominates. "But if TruGreen LandCare hits its goal, it will serve about 5 percent of the market. I think there's room for me to work in the other 95 percent."

Rorie also said his business has already improved because of the consolidation trend. "At some point, we'll have a national competitor, but that will probably be a company we're already competing against, only then it will have a new name and owner," he said. "If these companies have advantages, then we'll ultimately learn from them and integrate those ideas into our company and throughout the industry."

Richards said he believes the challenges the consolidating companies face, in particular TruGreen LandCare because of the number of acquisitions it has made, will benefit his company. "They have a lot of work to do trying to merge all of those companies into one set of standards and values," he explained. "And in many cases they have to get companies that have hated each other to work together. I'm sure they will get this all worked out, but there are additional opportunities available to us in the meantime."

(continued on page 152)

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## Consolidation

(continued from page 150)

Reeve agreed with Richards that opportunities for work have increased because some of his main competition has been sold, but he compared the situation to the honeymoon stage of a marriage. "At some point, you realize that you're actually married, and that's when the challenges begin," he pointed out. "And there will be challenges for us independent companies once these companies complete their integration. They will have advantages in terms of economies of scale, resources, a national presence, access to national customers and their attractiveness to certain employees."

Reeve is not concerned about competing against companies 50 times the size of his. "I strongly believe that we, not our competitors, control our own destiny," he said.

A number of companies in different parts of the country have reported they've been able to hire key personnel after those people left their a company that was sold.

"Some of these people were working for an owner they really enjoyed working for, and now that owner may be gone entirely from the company and that company may not be right for that employee any longer," observed Gachina. "At the same time, however, being part of a national organization has been very good for some of the mid-level managers who have remained with the company."

To strengthen themselves for increased competition, Gachina and several other California contractors who don't compete with each other have formed a networking group that meets regularly to share experiences and ideas and help each other improve.

"Businesses have to be willing and able to change as the markets change, and I think that is an advantage the larger companies don't have over us," he added.

Despite all of the advantages national companies may have over smaller, independent companies, Reeve still sees one other

group in the market that concerns him even more than the TruGreen LandCares of the world do. "My biggest concern remains the small start-up company that doesn't understand the costs of doing business and ends up undercutting the market," he related.

And since the panelists' companies average about \$12 million in annual revenues, they offered advice for companies not nearly as large as theirs. "The secret is having a clientele that you take care of," related Reeve.

"Define your niche and market your company to those customers," added Gachina.

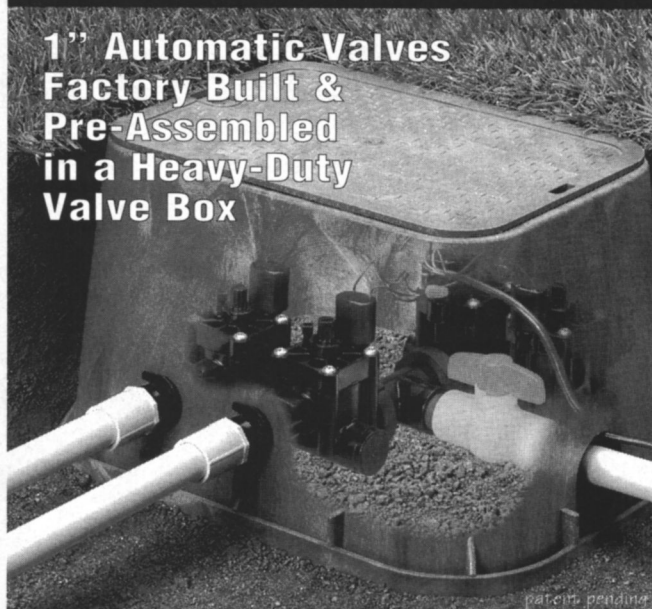
"You can't boost your price without delivering added value," commented Rorie. "See what your market tells you that you can and can't do well, and give them what you can do well and make sure you get paid fairly for it." **LL**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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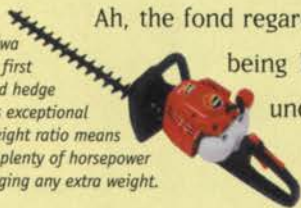
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## Big Names

Craig Ruppert (bottom left) and Chris Davitt (right) are as well respected as any contractors in the landscape industry. They took the stage before a jam-

packed breakfast crowd and shared keys to success they identified in building Ruppert Landscape Co. *Lawn & Landscape* columnist David Minor, (above left) founder of Minor's Landscape Services, Fort Worth, Texas, welcomed attendees to his home state with his presentation, "Strategies for Increasing Your Profitability."



## Making Yourself a Manager

Getting the work is easy – handling the business the rest of the time is tough. That's why no one was surprised to see how many questions the attendees had following presentations on strategic planning by Jim Huston, (left) Smith-Huston, Denver, Colo., and on estimating and bidding by Jerry Gaeta, (above) Vander Kooi & Associates, Mount Pleasant, S.C.



## Dealing with Labor

Multiple speakers addressed the pressing labor issue. Jennifer Thomas (above, right), Spanish Training Services, Evanston, Ill., kicked off the conference dis-



cussing "Managing a Multicultural Workforce." Bill Hoopes (above left), Scotts Lawn Service, Marysville, Ohio, energized attendees with his thoughts on "Motivating Employees." Jack Mattingly, (left) Mattingly & Associates, Atlanta, Ga., explained how attendees can get the most out of their crews. Photos: Chuck Clark.

by Cynthia Greenleaf

*For many landscape contractors, incorporation is the key to increased security, professionalism and peace of mind.*

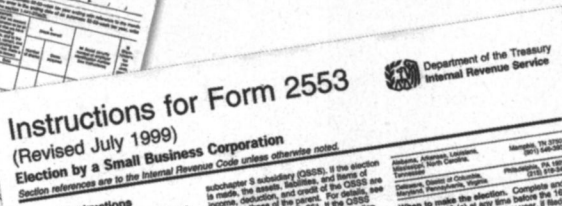
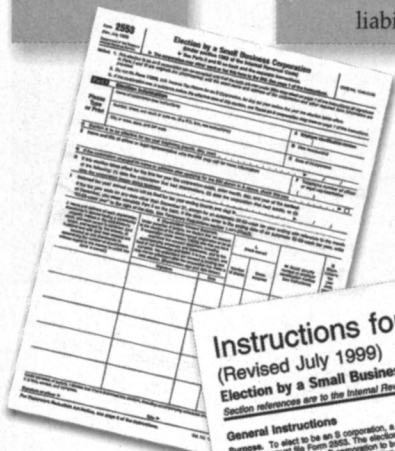
As your business changes, you have to change the business itself. Brian Daly, president, Providence Lawn and Landscape, Inc., Catharpin, Va., knows this well, having grown his operation from a sole proprietorship to a limited liability company to finally, a corporation.

"After a while you begin to realize that there are certain steps you need to take," said Daly, who recognized that as his business expanded, he needed the increased structure and liability protection that being a corporation would provide. "As my personal assets grew, incorporating just made sense," he said. And while incorporation isn't foolproof or fail-proof, it is a "good faith effort" to enhance his business while protecting his assets, Daly said.

**REDUCING RISK.** Such as with Providence Lawn and Landscape's case, limiting liability is probably the single biggest reason why companies incorporate. Because a corporation is a separate legal entity, the personal liability of shareholders is limited to the contributions they make to their corporation, according to Christine Butts, attorney and president, IncorporateUS, an online incorporation service based in Houston, Texas.

This protection from liability is especially important for landscape contractors, she pointed out. Since contractors contend with two enormous risk factors – physical labor and transportation – in the course of daily business, minimizing potential liability nightmares is essential, Butts said.

(continued on page 158)



# The Benefits of Incorporation

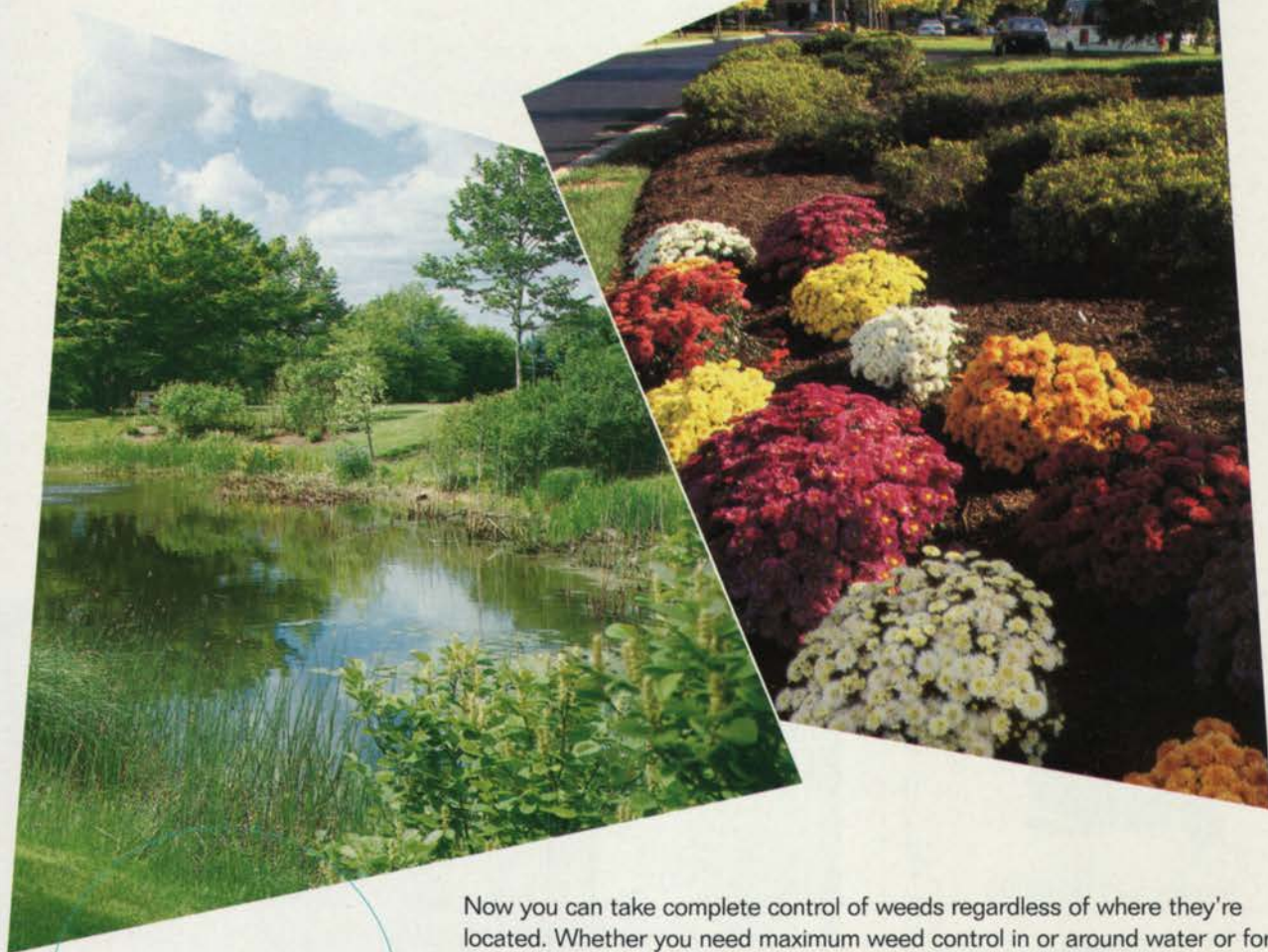
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## Incorporation

(continued from page 156)

Butts, who specializes in asset protection, often advises her contractor clients to protect themselves from these risk factors by incorporating into one or several business entities. By creating several entities within a company – a central business and transportation and labor divisions, for example, “it’s like putting a fortress around each component,” Butts said. As companies expand, they need to seriously consider protecting their assets and incorporation is a good way to do this, she suggested.

Chris Joyce has been thinking about incorporating for the past three years. As president of Joyce Landscaping, Marstons Mills, Mass., Joyce has run his company as a sole proprietorship since its inception. But with his volume up to \$2 million, a rapidly expanding fleet of vehicles and a growing work crew, he knows the time has come to reduce his ever-increasing personal liability. Otherwise, as Joyce’s accountant told him, he is just a “sitting duck.”

(continued on page 160)

**W**hile incorporation is often the business entity of choice for landscape contractors, the limited liability company (LLC) is also a viable option for protecting assets and fostering a professional image. Because they can be taxed as a partnership and offer protection from liability, LLCs are a good option for smaller contractors, according to Christine Butts, attorney and president, IncorporateUS, an online incorporation service, Houston, Texas. With minimal formalities compared to a corporation, the LLC is simple to maintain, Butts said.

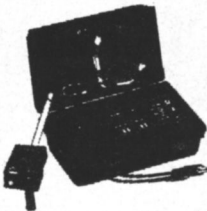
While the LLC can be a good choice, it’s not always taken advantage of, namely because LLCs are a comparatively new business entity option. “More people incorporate because they know more about it and are comfortable with the process,” Butts said. “But in many cases, LLCs give you the same protection with less documentation.” Brian Daly, president, Providence Lawn and Landscape, Inc., Catharpin, Va., organized as a LLC in 1995, when the option was relatively new to the state of Virginia. While his company is now incorporated, being an LLC made sense at the time as a good intermediate step in his company’s growth. “When I was an LLC, we were doing about \$125,000 in business. It fit me fine and was easy to maintain,” said

Daly, who now does about \$1 million in volume and has been incorporated since 1998.

– Cynthia Greenleaf

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## Incorporation

(continued from page 158)

Similarly, separating personal and business assets was increasingly important for Michael Hornung, president, Valley Green Professional Lawn & Tree Care, Inc., St. Cloud, Minn., who began his business in 1990 and incorporated one year later. "My greatest liability is an employee driving down the road in one of our trucks. If they hit and possibly killed someone, I would be held personally liable if the business wasn't incorporated," Hornung said. "Liability wasn't really an issue when the business was just me, but when you start adding employees and vehicles, you increase your exposure and, in turn, your risks."

In order to fully realize the liability protection that incorporation provides, contractors must be careful to diligently observe the formalities of a corporation, Butts warned. This includes using bylaws, holding annual meetings and keeping separate financial records, for example. This also means not using the company's checking account as your personal account, Butts said.

**IMAGE IS EVERYTHING.** Another advantage incorporation provides is presenting a more polished, professional image. When you're vying with bigger operations to land a commercial account, being incorporated can give a contractor an extra edge over the competition, according to Brad Gibson, president, Southern Lawn Services, Inc., Sugar Land, Texas. "Being incorporated makes you look like one of the big guys right off the bat," said Gibson, who observed that incorporation isn't as important in the residential realm, where his competition generally consists of small, pickup truck operations. "With residential jobs, incorporation isn't taken into account as much," he said.

Daly also prefers the heightened level of professionalism and organization incorporation has brought to his company. "Being incorporated is more of a definitive way of doing business," he said. "It adds one more level of sophistication."

Robert Kern, president, Kern Landscap-

ing, Inc., Parma, Ohio, agreed. "People know what they're dealing with - you're not just some fly-by-night company," said Kern, who incorporated just four months ago after realizing that he was paying more taxes by operating as a sole proprietor.

**ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGES.** While Rachel Kelly, vice president, Greenovations, Inc., Baltimore, Md., incorporated in 1995 for legal protection and tax advantages, she also had the future in mind.

With an incorporated business, she didn't need to worry about the fate of her company if she decided to retire. As an incorporated entity, the life of the business would not depend on her involvement. "I wanted to be able to distance myself from the business in the future," she said.

Being incorporated has made Kelly more thoughtful about getting involved in potential business deals. "Offers come up all the

(continued on page 162)

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## Incorporation

(continued from page 160)

time, but when you're incorporated, it's more difficult to say 'yes,'" Kelly said.

Incorporation also offers a way to apportion interest in a business entity. If you have a sole proprietorship, you can't sell, transfer or make a gift of interest in your company, according to Butts. Incorporation, however, allows you to do all of these things, she said. Acting as a "conduit for transferring equity," a corporation can transfer or sell stock, which is particularly important if a business needs to raise capital, Butts pointed out.

Other incorporation advantages include the ability to set up pensions, profit sharing and stock option plans.

Hornung appreciates the structure that incorporation adds to his company, especially in terms of letting his employees know that while he's the boss, he's one of them, too. "With incorporation, the owner is treated like anybody else in the company," Hornung said. "There's not the status issue as much."

## Quick TIP

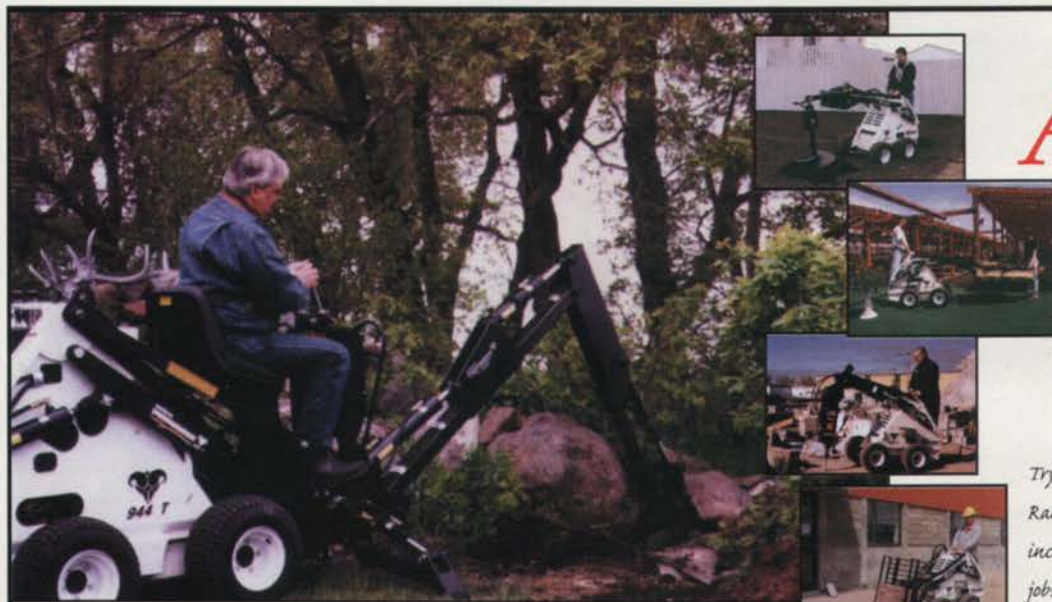
**ONE ADVANTAGE incorporation provides is presenting a polished, professional image. When you're vying with bigger operations to land a commercial account, being incorporated can give a contractor an extra edge over the competition.**

**THINK BEFORE YOU INC.** While incorporation can be beneficial for a business, it's not for everyone. Lanette Bowman, owner, Plant Doctor, Glens Falls, N.Y., has been both incorporated and a sole proprietor, and prefers operating as the latter. After nearly

two decades in the industry, she has found that her customers simply don't care whether she has an "Inc." after her company's name. "Being incorporated is not as important as the quality of product you put out there," she said. "My large clients don't care if I'm incorporated or not. They just care about liability insurance, which you have to have, regardless."

Bowman initially incorporated because of the liability issue. With her primary accounts at area hotels and resorts, she didn't want to risk an unfortunate situation such as a pot falling on someone's head or a pesticide accident, she said. She also thought incorporation would "add something to her profile," but in retrospect, it was an unnecessary expense. In 1993, Bowman sold her incorporated business to her No. 1 competitor and in 1999, started her own operation as a sole

(continued on page 164)



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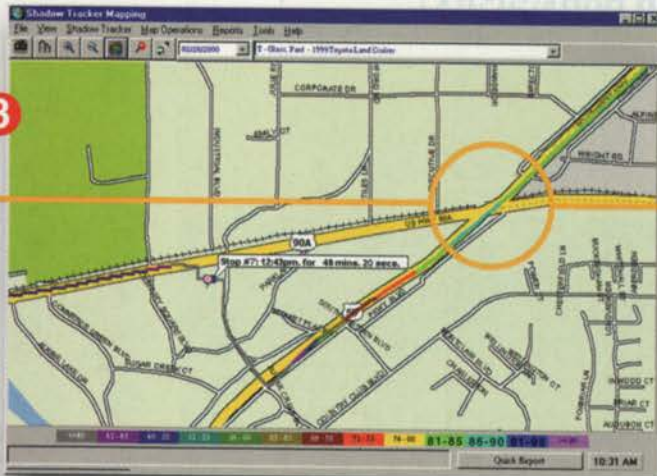
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Start Time	Stop Time	Time Duration	Location Name	Mileage
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6:28AM	11:18AM	04:50	S-Your Company Office	0.00
11:19AM	11:22AM	00:03	In Transit	1.10
11:22AM	11:27AM	00:05	L-Exxon Gas Station	0.00
11:28AM	11:31AM	00:03	In Transit	1.10
11:31AM	4:14PM	04:43	S-Your Company Office	0.00
4:14PM	4:17PM	00:03	In Transit	1.18
4:17PM	4:19PM	00:02	L-Grand & Hwy 90	0.00
4:19PM	4:36PM	00:17	In Transit	15.01
4:36PM	6:50PM	02:14	E-Home, Employee U.	0.00
6:50PM	6:54PM	00:04	In Transit	1.61
6:54PM	6:55PM	00:01	L-Stop Light at 1654 Pine	0.00

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USE READER SERVICE #143

## Incorporation

(continued from page 164)

ness, you will be personally liable for any mishap or accident even if you are incorporated," Butts pointed out.

While incorporation has its advantages, know what kind of business entity ultimately works best for your company, advised Joshua Keller, operations manager, Keller's Turf and Shrub Care, Inc., Independence, Mo. "The business form you operate in must fit your needs. And, as your business grows or personal situation changes, so will your needs," Keller advised.

"Keep in mind that your decision will have an impact on both the amount of tax you and your company will pay, and the risks to which you subject you and your business," he said.

There are distinct advantages and disadvantages to any business entity. (see "Weighing The Options" on page 164) "So, whichever entity you choose, periodically review whether your current form of business is still best for you," Keller offered.

**GETTING STARTED.** Thankfully, incorporating is relatively easy to do and generally affordable. While the cost and time varies from state to state, incorporating can take anywhere from a few days to a month. The process can cost anywhere from \$300 to \$800, depending on whether you do it yourself or through an incorporation service or attorney.

Increasingly, incorporation can be as simple as a few clicks of the keyboard with a range of incorporation services now available on the Internet. Butts started her online company, IncorporateUS ([www.incorporateus.com](http://www.incorporateus.com)), in 1999, after recognizing the opportunity for automating the incorporation process. "I realized that whenever clients came in to incorporate, I took 20 pieces of information and then I didn't do a whole lot," said Butts. "If I could automate the process over the Internet, however, they could get it done a lot more efficiently."

And more inexpensively, too. Butts said the average Internet service incorporation

cost is around \$500, compared to the \$1200 an attorney might charge.

Whether you do it online or through your secretary of state's office, incorporating is a straightforward process that any savvy contractor can accomplish, Butts said. "There's enough information out there to do it yourself," she advised. "An attorney is just going to parrot that knowledge back to you, anyway. The truth is that if you already have a good handle on what you're doing, you can incorporate yourself."

If contractors decide to incorporate, they should know what they're getting into. Butts advised consulting an accountant to get familiar with the tax repercussions and other key issues. Above all, if contractors aren't sure if they should incorporate or aren't willing to do it themselves, consulting an attorney might be wise, she said. **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

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Are you proud of a site you currently maintain? Even if you're no Ansel Adams – take a snapshot of the lush, green grasses you care for. That photo could get you national recognition in the Picture Perfect Lawn Contest sponsored by *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA).

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## Valuing Your Business

by Pamela Jordan

*When you sell your business,  
small multiples can make  
a big difference.*

A general rule of thumb in the landscape industry is that the fair market value of a business ranges from three to six times earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization. That range may not seem like an enormous difference until you actually run the multiplication. In fact, there may be hundreds of thousands of dollars difference depending on where your business rates on the scale buyers use to determine value.

For example, a recent valuation I did for a client with annual revenue of about \$1.5 million showed a price range of \$1.2 to \$2.4 million. In this client's case, I determined the business would be valued at the higher end of the range. Based on my years of brokering and consulting, I'm convinced that a well-run business being sold by a well-informed owner could be priced twice as high as a business that doesn't meet industry criteria – or is being sold by an owner who hasn't done his or her homework.

Though most of us would never consider selling our car or home without some form of independent appraisal or analysis to determine market value, many landscape contractors sell their businesses by merely estimating a price. They may determine a sale price based on what

Something  
of Value





they've heard about other sales or by figuring out how much they need to retire comfortably. Without valuing your business based on important industry and buyer criteria, you could lose thousands of dollars or spend months – even years – negotiating in vain.

**DEFINING A COMPANY'S WORTH.** So, how can a landscape contractor rate his or her business to determine if its value is at the high or low end of that range?

Some criteria depends on an individual buyer's preferences or current operating procedures. For instance, having a compatible mix of services will generally boost your business's value in the buyer's mind. And a large percentage of commercial accounts may appeal to one buyer but not another.

Still, most of the difference in value is based on a series of industry standards and buyer criteria. A buyer's offer is made after a thorough review that determines how your business stacks up. If you're getting ready to

sell your business, knowing how a potential buyer will rate it makes you a much better negotiator. In some cases, landscape business owners may decide they're better off keeping the business, boosting their performance and then selling for top dollar a couple of years down the road.

If your plans to sell are longterm, taking the time to figure out how your business rates now may significantly increase its value when you decide to sell. In the meantime, your bottom line profitability may increase dramatically, depending on how well you're already running your business.

Over the last 20 years, I've developed a list of criteria that buyers consistently review to determine value. From that list, I've created a system that rates individual criterion and then determines a score that indicates how your landscape business rates in the green industry.

• **General financial statement profitability, review and customer base growth.** One

key point often overlooked is that buyers are looking at growth across all lines of business and in total number of customers. Even if revenue is increasing, buyers are leery if one line of business shows decline or your customer base is static or decreasing.

• **Account receivables.** Well-run businesses have relatively low levels of receivables over 90 days, so take a careful look at how well you are actually being paid for the services you provide. Also, note that a significant number of pre-paid accounts can lead to an adjustment in the purchase price.

• **Payroll costs.** An astute buyer will compare your costs to industry averages by both service type and individual employee. Labor is the single most expensive part of doing business in the landscape industry. If your costs are out of line compared to industry standards, a buyer will want to know why. At this time, buyers will also be determining what they are willing to live with after the deal closes.

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## Valuing Your Business

• **Revenue by route.** Again, a careful buyer will look closely at how much revenue each route produces each month. Production per employee is a key factor in the business's value. Buyers will carefully review your pricing of accounts and ask about contracts with pricing guarantees.

• **Employee turnover.** Employees are one of your business's most valuable assets, and employee turnover will be closely scrutinized. In fact, some buyers request payroll

records from recent pay periods and several years prior to determine how many employees have been retained. Shrewd buyers also will expect that all employees have enforceable non-compete contracts.

• **Customer cancellation rates.** If employees are your most valuable assets, customers run a close second. How many customers do you retain annually? How many unserved customers do you have? How many customers are on your books but

haven't had service in months? The growth and stability of your customer base is an important aspect of value.

• **Company vehicle condition.** Another key expense for a potential buyer is maintaining — or replacing — a fleet of worn-out vehicles? Note, however, that payments or lease contracts will normally come out of your side of a final sales figure. Most buyers assume your business without liabilities.

• **Litigation, claims or other liabilities.** Potential buyers will ask for a detailed list of litigation — both pending and threatened — when they are trying to determine the value of your business. Even verbal threats — "I'll take you to court" — should be noted before the actual sale. Full litigation disclosure will certainly be required in the purchase agreement.

• **Ongoing costs.** A business with minimal ongoing costs, like Yellow Pages or other contracted advertising, computers and office equipment maintenance, consulting, etc., is clearly a better buy for most new owners who have contracts with their own providers.

• **Real estate.** Many buyers expect to merge your business into their operations and facilities. They normally do not want to purchase real estate, and leases would be short term. If real estate is purchased or leased, buying the business is a separate transaction.

• **Add-backs.** Costs that will be eliminated after the sale, such as owner's compensation, travel, benefits or vehicles can be "added back" to the bottom line and may make a significant difference in a final offer. The more, the better as long as you can clearly document and track them.

The value of your business — and which end of the range of multiples your business will command in today's market — goes way beyond simple earnings and revenue statements. A well-run business deserves a higher market value, and buyers have consistently shown they are willing to pay a premium for high-quality businesses. Whether you are ready to sell now or plan to wait until later, knowing how a potential buyer will look at your business will help improve its value so you get the best price possible. **LL**

*The author is a consultant specializing in financial analysis, strategic planning and mergers and acquisitions. She also is the author of Level the Field, a workbook written specifically for service industry professionals selling their businesses.*

**L**ast March, Ed Laflamme sold his business, Laflamme Services in Bridgeport, Conn., to LandCare USA. Two days later, the landscape division of TruGreen-ChemLawn and LandCare USA merged to form TruGreen LandCare, and ended the buying competition that gave some contractors unrealistic amounts of money for their businesses.

Even though buyers have become less competitive, selling a business in the green industry still demands incredible organization and constant consultation, according to Laflamme, now branch manager for the New Haven, Conn., offices of TruGreen LandCare.

"When I sold my business, buyers came to me with an offer. Once I had more than one valuation, I came to a consensus and picked the price I thought best fit the true value of my business," Laflamme said. "But my situation was very unique and the market determined my company's value. Today, acquisitions are made more in line with the traditional methods of buying and selling. Buyers are slowing down, catching their breath, getting their systems in order to see how past acquisitions are working out and analyzing the market. They are thinking more strategically."

To receive the best value for their businesses in the future — whether they are interested in selling or not — contractors need to run their businesses every day as if it is for sale, Laflamme suggested. "One day, that contractor is going to give the business to a child or sell it," Laflamme said. "Either way, a contractor will run a more organized and profit-oriented organization by operating as if his or her business were always on the market."

Laflamme offers a few tips:

1. Go to an attorney who deals with buying and selling and find out the criteria needed to sell a business. "You need a specialist for this," Laflamme said. "Using a regular attorney could result in major mistakes later on."
2. Become a more organized business. To sell a business, a contractor will need to provide potential buyers with everything from employee resumes to environmental impact studies on owned or leased properties to profit/loss statements on every job currently contracted for. Keeping all this information in one place and meticulously organized will help to shorten the buying process, Laflamme pointed out.
3. Go to a company that sells businesses and ask for an appraisal. Also ask them for the criteria they are looking for. "This information will put you in touch with the kind of information a buyer looks for in a company," Laflamme said.

"You can also hire a business broker to tell you how you can struc-

ture your company to make it more desirable." — **Nicole Wisniewski**

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*Online Link*

Announcing the FertiGator®, a new, easy-to-program residential fertigation system that allows fully customizable fertilization by individual, in-ground sprinkler system zone. The liquid fertilizer, conveniently located in the homeowner's garage, is injected into the irrigation mainline each time the system operates.

The FertiGator distributes fertilizer evenly and gradually, preventing streaking and burning, increasing water and nutrient absorption, reducing chemical requirements and virtually eliminating runoff to the water supply. Homeowners enjoy healthier, greener lawns without the work and at an affordable price. For more information, call 877/FertiGator (877/337-8442) or visit [www.fertigator.com](http://www.fertigator.com).



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**Lawn & Landscape<sup>®</sup>**

PO BOX 5817  
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# FREE PRODUCT INFORMATION

While using *Lawn & Landscape's* Commercial Product Guide, you may find it helpful to remove the reader service card for easy reference. Once you have completed the card, simply drop it in the mail so you can receive the additional product information you're looking for. If the card is missing, simply call our circulation department at 800/456-0707 with the reader service numbers of the advertisers you would like more information from.



## 1. WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY BUSINESS AT THIS LOCATION?

(Please check only one)

### CONTRACTOR or SERVICES:

- Landscape Contractor (maintenance & installation)
- Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service)
- Lawn Maintenance Contractor
- Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
- Irrigation Contractor
- Landscape Architect
- Other (Contract Services) (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

### IN-HOUSE LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

- In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Company Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

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## 2. WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR TITLE?

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- Owner, Pres., Vice Pres., Corp. Officer
- Manager, Director, Supt., Foreman
- Agronomist, Horticulturist
- Entomologist, Plant Pathologist
- Serviceman, technician
- Scientist, Researcher
- Company, Library copy only
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# Lawn & Landscape

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Easy Lawn .....	5	Reading Body Works .....	10
Fabriscap .....	5	Remote Control Technology .....	11
Feldmann Industries .....	6	Rohm & Haas .....	11
Fertigator .....	6		

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- Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service)
- Lawn Maintenance Contractor
- Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
- Irrigation Contractor
- Landscape Architect
- Other Contract Services (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

#### IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE

- In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Governmental Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Company Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

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G.A.T.E.

## *When Accuracy Counts*

*Online Link*

The CFV Valve – use it when accuracy counts, to save money on supplies and labor, to apply chemicals at label rate calibrations and for quality applications that satisfy your clients.

The CFValve senses the nozzle's back pressure and the pump's varying inlet pressure. The valve automatically modulates the inlet orifice size to maintain constant flow. Pump pressures above the CFValve's preset pressure do not cause fluctuation in flow. If pumping stops or pressure drops below desired levels, the CFValve closes completely.

There is no dripping or wasted solution – there is no over-



application of chemicals using the CFValve.

For more information, call 800/303-2099 or e-mail [admin@gatellc.com](mailto:admin@gatellc.com).

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GMC

## *GMC Sierra Has Unique Styling*

*Online Link*

Meet the new GMC Sierra. Honest truck styling and meaningful technical innovation are the reasons why the 2000 GMC Sierra full-size pickup will set the segment standard into the next century. The Sierra, with its

unique GMC styling, has been designed



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](http://www.gmcforwork.com).

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**CIAL Product Guide**

Visit our Web site: [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com)

J.J. MAUGET

*Online Club*

## *Redgum Lerp Psyllid Controlled Safely*

Millions of Redgum eucalyptus trees in California have a chance to survive defoliation caused by a devastating psyllid, according to results of clinical trials conducted by Dr. Lester Young, entomologist for California State Polytechnic University in Pomona. The data found that J.J. Mauget's micro-injection system is a very effective and practical method of controlling Redgum Lerp Psyllid (RLP), an insect imported from Australia where the trees are native. The Mauget micro-injection system was evaluated because the insect is naturally protected against contact spray insecticides, eucalyptus are very tall trees and the RLP infesting in mass numbers is especially voracious

when feeding on new foliage.

Mauget micro-injection treatments target specific

insects and eliminate drift and ground-water contamination. They can be used as part of an Integrated Pest Management program. For more information, please call 800/873-3779.

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KICHLER LANDSCAPE LIGHTING

## *Leaders in the Lighting Industry Since 1938*

Kichler Landscape Lighting offers a complete line of uniquely styled lighting fixtures – accent, path, deck or pond. Whatever your lighting needs may be, Kichler is

your source. Constructed of durable composites, cast aluminum and solid brass, our fixtures stand up to the elements. You can expect design flexibility, quality and customer service from the leaders in the lighting industry since 1938. For more information, call 216/573-1000 or visit [www.kichler.com](http://www.kichler.com).

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APRIL 2000 **COMMERCE**

MAINLINE OF  
NORTH AMERICA

***Increase Your  
Productivity 1500  
Percent with  
BedShaper***

Bed maintenance is labor intensive. BedShaper will cut your labor costs by 75 percent. BedShaper will cut costs so dramatically that your bids will become aggressively competitive. BedShaper is self-propelled, forward and reverse, with a hydrostatic-drive infinite speed control and edges 100 feet per minute.



BedShaper eliminates hand edging.

BedShaper is built for the rigors of commercial use and reliability and

comes with a choice of three engines: 10.5-hp Briggs, 13-hp Kawasaki or 13-hp Honda. A one-year commercial money back guarantee covers any defect in workmanship.

Call or e-mail us for our free video and dealer information at 740/852-9733 or [mainlinea@hotmail.com](mailto:mainlinea@hotmail.com).

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MAINLINE OF  
NORTH AMERICA

***Trenching Problems  
Solved With the J-3000  
Ground Saw***

Fast & Easy:  
The Ground  
Saw cuts 100  
inches in  
about five min-  
utes, is easily



maneuvered through gates and tight places and can get close to walls. The saw can also cut a perpendicular trench on hills.

Neat & Clean Trench: The J-3000 cuts a 2½-inch wide trench from 0 to 13 inches deep. The Ground Saw cuts through roots, soil, clay, limestone, brick and even asphalt. Vary the depth of your cut on the go with the adjustable hand crank and place the soil next to the trench to speed cleanup and minimize damage to the surrounding area.

The J-3000 is also a stump grinder and a root pruner.

Call or e-mail for your free video and dealer referral at 740/852-9733 or [mainlinea@hotmail.com](mailto:mainlinea@hotmail.com).

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Visit our Web site: [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com)

MCCULLOUGH  
INNOVATIONS

*Online Link*

## *Backfilling is No Longer a Dirty Job*

How many dirty words do you know? We'd bet that backfill is one of them. Backfilling used to be a dirty, expensive job, until McCullough Innovations introduced the McCullough Coverup 1000 Series. These



snappy little units are light weight, easy to use and can cover 60

feet of ditching in less than 60 seconds. For those big commercial jobs, ask about the 1500 Series (for Dingo™ and SiteWorks™ Systems) and 2000 Series (for skid-steer loaders and riding trenchers). For a free brochure or videotape on the complete line of McCullough Coverups, call McCullough Innovations at 800-250-5688, or visit [www.mcculloughcoverup.com](http://www.mcculloughcoverup.com).

**Circle 616 on reader service card**

READING BODY WORKS

## *Keep Your Tools and Equipment Organized*

Reading offers a complete line of steel and aluminum toolboxes. Designed for years of dependable use, Reading toolboxes feature heavy gauge steel and aluminum construction and lock securely for total tool protection. Reading also offers ladder racks and cab guards. Keep your tools and equipment organized and protected from moisture and theft with Reading toolboxes. For

more information on Reading toolboxes and accessories, con-



tact Reading at 800/458-2226 or visit its Web site at [www.readingbody.com](http://www.readingbody.com).

**Circle 617 on reader service card**

APRIL 2000 **COMMER**



**Online Link**

Look for this symbol on our Web site for direct online links.

## REMOTE CONTROL TECHNOLOGY

### *Specializing in Universal Remote Controls and Connectors*

**Online Link**

Remote Control Technology, Inc. manufactures a wide range of economical, high quality remote control products for the turf irrigation industry. We specialize in universal remote controls and connectors for all models of residential and commercial controllers. In addition, we have custom receiver cards that do not require hard-wire connections. Receiver cards are available for the Rain Bird ESP MC, LX and SAT; Irritrol Dial & MC and Superior Sterling series controllers. The Sidekick FM and TRC Commander remote controls operate any 24 VAC irrigation system and are backed by three-year warranties.



For more information, call 800/275-8558, e-mail [sales@remotecontroltech.com](mailto:sales@remotecontroltech.com) or visit [www.remotecontroltech.com](http://www.remotecontroltech.com).

**Circle 618 on reader service card**

## ROHM & HAAS

**Online Link**

### *Eagle Fungicide Controls Turfgrass Diseases*

Eagle, one of the best systemic fungicides available for turf and ornamentals, now is labeled for edible fruit trees.



Eagle controls important turf diseases, such as brown patch and spring dead spot, as well as ornamental diseases, such as powdery mildew, scab, rust and leaf spot.

Eagle has been tested on popular landscape ornamental plants and is labeled for use on more than 100 species, including crabapples, dogwoods, roses, apples, apricots, cherries, peaches, plums and grapes. Now, one cost-effective product controls disease on turf, ornamentals and backyard fruit trees.

For more information, see your local distributor or call Rohm & Haas directly at 800/987-0467.

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**CIAL Product Guide**

# Hit more ringers.



**Crabgrass**



**Oxalis**



**Goosegrass**



**Spurge**

When it comes to preventing the broadleaf and grassy weeds that most often plague your customers' turfgrasses, PRE-M® preemergent herbicide is right on target. Why pay more for other products when, time after time, university trials prove that PRE-M offers you better overall performance combined with unmatched value?

Superior performance made PRE-M the leading\* preemergent herbicide. Superior value widens

the gap. PRE-M is everything you'd expect from LESCO®, the leading supplier in the professional turf care industry.

Ask your LESCO professional or call 1-800-321-5325 to learn how you can earn generous rebates for your PRE-M purchases. Get behind the leading edge.

**LESCO®**

**PRE-M®**  
The Leading Edge.

\*Source: Kline & Company report, US Acre Treatments by Turf Management. Always read and follow label directions. ©1999 PRE-M® and LESCO® are registered trademarks of LESCO, Inc.

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# Lawn & Landscape

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Title \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Company \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

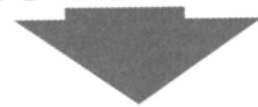
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4	28	52	76	100	124	148	172	196	220	244
5	29	53	77	101	125	149	173	197	221	245
6	30	54	78	102	126	150	174	198	222	246
7	31	55	79	103	127	151	175	199	223	247
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9	33	57	81	105	129	153	177	201	225	249
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11	35	59	83	107	131	155	179	203	227	251
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14	38	62	86	110	134	158	182	206	230	254
15	39	63	87	111	135	159	183	207	231	255
16	40	64	88	112	136	160	184	208	232	256
17	41	65	89	113	137	161	185	209	233	257
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
23	47	71	95	119	143	167	191	215	239	263
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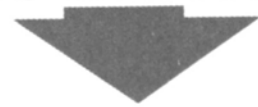
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5	29	53	77	101	125	149	173	197	221	245
6	30	54	78	102	126	150	174	198	222	246
7	31	55	79	103	127	151	175	199	223	247
8	32	56	80	104	128	152	176	200	224	248
9	33	57	81	105	129	153	177	201	225	249
10	34	58	82	106	130	154	178	202	226	250
11	35	59	83	107	131	155	179	203	227	251
12	36	60	84	108	132	156	180	204	228	252
13	37	61	85	109	133	157	181	205	229	253
14	38	62	86	110	134	158	182	206	230	254
15	39	63	87	111	135	159	183	207	231	255
16	40	64	88	112	136	160	184	208	232	256
17	41	65	89	113	137	161	185	209	233	257
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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## Oly-Ola Pond Liner Edging

- Holds liners in ponds and water gardens permanently in place
- Provides a natural-looking border
- Allows plant materials or turf to grow up to the pond edge
- Constructed of black vinyl
- 'T' shape allows root growth in the 2 inches of soil on top of the edging and liner
- Steel anchoring stakes hold the liner in place

Circle 201 on reader service card

## John Deere M-Series ZTraks

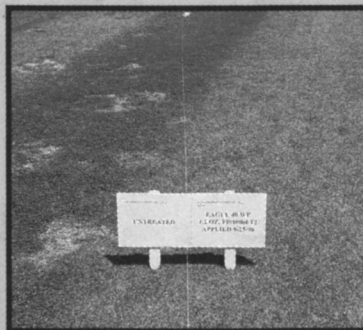
- Available in three models: 22-hp M653, 25-hp M655 and 25-hp M665
- 10-gallon, top-draw fuel tanks
- Hydrostatic drive system with dual variable displacement pumps and wheel motors



- Mowing speeds up to 9 mph
- Dual-level, hydraulically dampened operator controls
- Mowing decks stamped from single sheets of 7-gauge steel
- Baffling system allows grass to stand up before being cut
- Cutting widths range from 54 to 60 inches
- Cutting height can be adjusted from 1.5 inches to 5 inches in half-inch increments

Circle 203 on reader service card

## Rohm & Haas Eagle Fungicide



- Effective against spring dead spot on Bermudagrass
- Use 1.2 ounces per 1,000 square feet before the first killing frost for the best preventive action

Circle 204 on reader service card

## Featherlite 4926 Utility Trailer

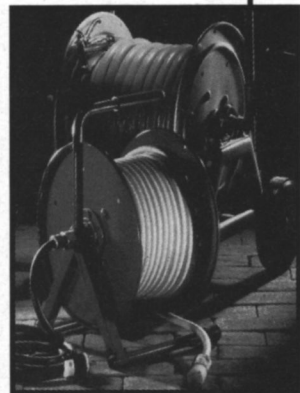
- Features an all-aluminum frame, a 3/4-inch plywood floor, cable-assist rear ramp and new "aerodyne" nose
- Standard white aluminum side sheets are suitable for graphics
- Optional buck-riveted, black side sheets, six-ply radial tires, roof vent cranks and 18-inch ramp extension
- Available in two sizes: 8 feet, 6 inches by 20 feet or 8 feet, 6 inches by 24 feet

Circle 206 on reader service card

## Hannay Reels Catalog

- Provides complete information and updated specifications for its popular hose and cable reels
- Highlights portable cable storage wheels and steel hand trucks

Circle 202 on reader service card



## Hustler StumpCut'R

- For Hustler front-mounted turf tractors, including the 3000 and 4000 series
- Zero-turn maneuverability
- Power-plants come in 23-, 28- and 38-hp diesels or 54-hp gas



- PTO-powered, 15-inch-diameter cutting wheel can cut stumps from up to 23 inches aboveground to 14 inches below-ground
- Small, hydraulically operated dozer blade can be used for chip removal and to backfill stumps

Circle 205 on reader service card

## Orbit Controller

- Control Star Series irrigation controller improvements include large liquid crystal display, screwless valve wire terminals and external primary wiring capacity
- More stations and 4-, 6-, 8- or 12-valve capacity

Circle 207 on reader service card

# Products

## Stihl Power Tools Professional Series

• FS 75, FS 80 and FS 85 grass trimmers, HT 70 and HT 75 pole pruners, HL 75 and HL



75K hedge trimmers and FH 75 power scythe  
 • 25.4-cc engine with swirl combustion chamber  
 • Equipment has shock-absorbing handles and fuel pump primer  
 • 1.3-hp engine

Circle 208 on reader service card

## Encore Prowler Series

• Hydrostatic riding mowers  
 • 52- and 72-inch Mid Cuts and 72-inch Front Cut  
 • New options include Briggs Daihatsu 26.5-hp diesel and 31-hp gas-powered engines and 5-hp grass collection system  
 Circle 209 on reader service card



## Motorola Radius SP21 Portable Radio

• Two-way, compact radio is designed to deliver immediate group communication  
 • Talking range extends up to 5 miles

• Available in VHF or UHF models  
 • 25 kHz or 12.5 kHz frequencies  
 • Sound compression technology to reduce background noise  
 • Can be programmed to a specific group of radios to eliminate unwanted transmissions and keep lines clear  
 • Voice-operated transmission  
 Circle 210 on reader service card

## Goossen LAWN MAKER Total Mix Hydro

MULCHING.....SPRIGGING.....SEEDING

*The right machine for seeding, mulching and fertilizing*



New from Goossen Industries is the LawnMaker Total Mix Hydro mulching machine.

This unique product provides a one-step fast and efficient method for seeding, mulching and fertilizing areas where lush green turf is desired.

The LawnMaker features a full-length mechanical rotor shaft for quick and thorough

mixing of ingredients. Material is disbursed with a slurry pump which minimizes clogging and allows coarse materials, such as wood or paper mulch to be easily distributed.

The LawnMaker's mixing tank is made of 12-gauge steel plate and both the inside of the tank and the agitator shaft are coated with catalyzed epoxy resin to reduce corrosion.

For more information call:  
**800-228-6542**

In Nebraska: 402-228-4226  
 Fax: 402-223-2245  
 Website: www.goossen.com

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## EXPAND YOUR BUSINESS by offering the COMPLETE line of FABRISCAPE Fabrics & Erosion Control Products

### PERFECT FOR

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Bulk Rolls 3-15' Wide



**FABRIC FOR YOUR EVERY NEED!**



Available  
 3' x 25' - 3' x 50' - 3' x 100'  
 4' x 50' - 4' x 100' - 6' x 50'

### Landscape Fabrics

Weed Control • Woven Ground Covers  
 Filter Fabric • Paver/Patio Underliner • Soil Separators

### Erosion Control

Burlap • Jute • FabriJute™ Erosion Control Netting • Silt Fence

### Construction

Road / Driveway / Recreation Park Underliners & Fences

### Accessories

Plastic & Steel Securing Pins • Knives • Fabriscape Drainage System

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4800 S. CENTRAL AVE., CHICAGO, IL 60638

(708) 728-7180 • 1-800-992-0550 • FAX: (708) 728-0482

USE READER SERVICE #117

USE READER SERVICE #119

## Earth & Turf MultiSpread

- Spreads a variety of compost and topdressing materials
- Features a 42-inch gate width to fit through small openings



- 15-cubic-foot hopper spreads topdressing material by moving it to the rear of the topdresser using a heavy rubber belt
  - Adjustable spring tines and finely adjusted thrower paddles help break up material for an even spread pattern of up to 66 inches
  - Can be used for large and small turf areas
- Circle 211 on reader service card**

## Nelson SoloRain Wireless Controllers

- 8034 and 8040 models allow radio communication without the need to hardwire an irrigation system
  - Communication is accomplished using the 8081 radio programmer plus
  - 8034 combines the 8030 remote programmable actuator and the 8040 radio cap in a single unit
  - Designed to function with most irrigation valves by using an adaptor kit
  - Waterproof, battery-operated single station control module
- Circle 212 on reader service card**

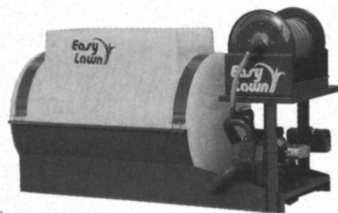
## Bobcat Ejector Bucket

- Skid-steer loader attachment uses hydraulics to push material out of the bucket
- Ideal for unloading difficult-to-dump materials, like mud, wet snow or waste



- Designed for Bobcat 751, 753, 763, 773, 863 and 873 skid-steer loaders
  - Ejector bucket in 62-, 68- and 74-inch widths
- Circle 213 on reader service card**

### HYDRO SEEDING SYSTEMS



Model shown: HD3503

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- Longest Warranty
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Model shown:  
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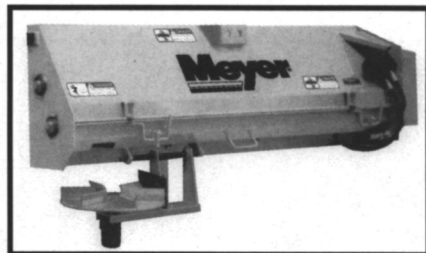
# Products

## American Cyanamid Co. Fire Ant Bait

- California State Environmental Protection Agency has granted registration for use of AMDRO Pro by turfgrass professionals
- Effectively controls fire ants by killing the queen
- Active ingredient is hydramethylnon

Circle 214 on reader service card

## Meyer Replaceable Tailgate Spreader



- Replaces the tailgate on the dump body to allow free flow of ice control material
- Designed for one-person operation and maintenance

Circle 216 on reader service card

## Club Car XRT 272 Utility Vehicle

- 11-hp, 351-cc engine allows the vehicle to haul up to 1,200 pounds
- Optional all-terrain tires
- Four-wheel hydraulic brakes
- Independent front suspension and semi-independent rear suspension
- Operator-selected differential lock provides



- extra traction as needed
  - Aluminum I-beam construction
- Circle 215 on reader service card

## K-Rain 'The Edge' Nozzle

- Fully adjustable from 15 to 360 degrees at distances adjustable from 10 to 15 feet
- Male thread
- Compatible with K-Rain, Toro or HIT female spray bodies

Circle 217 on reader service card

## Kawasaki FH Engine Series

- 15-, 17-, 19-, 21- and 23-hp engines
- Cast-iron cylinders
- Full, pressurized lubrication system
- Top access oil fill and dipstick

## Typar TreeCircle

- Polypropylene fabric helps prevent weed growth
  - Creates a circle of mulch around newly planted or existing trees and shrubs
  - Precut in a 36-inch diameter circle
  - Porosity prevents mildew smell
- Circle 218 on reader service card

- Low tone muffler to minimize noise
  - Includes pulse-type fuel pump and in-line fuel filter
  - Crank shaft holding by bearing both top and bottom
  - Rotating grass screen
  - Models also include twin-barrel carburetors and separated chokes and throttles
- Circle 219 on reader service card

## It's Your Other Best Friend

- ✓ Heavy welded steel construction
- ✓ Large platform with extra foot space
- ✓ 7 day return policy
- ✓ 1 year warranty



- ✓ Easy to attach and detach
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## MulchMaker Model 10

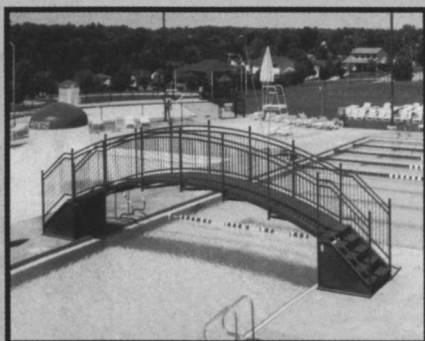
- Designed for regrinding oversized wood chips immediately after primary grinding or screening
- 110-hp diesel engine
- Trailer-mounted and portable
- Can be filled using a front-end loader
- Air compressor and 50-foot hose reel
- Hammermill grinder with 2½-inch thick hammers
- Bolt-on, replaceable wear tips
- 2¼-inch cubic yard in-feed hopper
- 13-foot product stacking conveyor
- Two-axle trailer with ball hitch and dual electric brakes

Circle 220 on reader service card

## MB&I Bridges

- Custom-designed pedestrian and light vehicular bridges
- Clear spans from 10 to 220 feet with multiple span designs available
- Construction materials include self-weathering and painted steel and wood decking

Circle 223 on reader service card



## Millcreek Core Plug Aerators

- Models are available in three-point hitch, front-mount/three-point hitch and tow-behind styles
- Independently mounted spoon wheels
- Protector shield for increased safety during operation and storage
- Weight rack allows control of core depth of up to 4 inches
- Teflon-coated, oil-filled bearings require no greasing
- Temper-hardened spoons for longer life
- 1½-inch square bar forms the main frame

Circle 221 on reader service card



## Thomas T-155 Mini Excavator

- Maximum digging depth of 8 feet, 6 inches
- Powered by 17-hp diesel engine
- Hydraulic, pilot-operated joystick controls
- Selector valve allows operator to switch between ISO or SAE control patterns
- Safety lock system prevents unintentional operation of the joysticks
- Standard features include a 16-inch bucket, four-post canopy, auxiliary hydraulics with breaker piping and a boom and excavator lighting package

Circle 224 on reader service card

## New Holland Mid-Mount Loader for TN Tractors

- Model 32LA fits all New Holland TND tractors
- Model 33LA fits all New Holland TNS tractors
- Mid-mount design allows complete turning
- Dedicated left-hand shuttle lever
- 60-degree dump angle
- Mechanical self-leveling and four-bar linkage are options
- A full range of attachments are available, including 60- to 84-inch pin-on or optional quick attach buckets and pallet forks

Circle 222 on reader service card



## NeoTech Vehicle Tracking System

- On-board computer mounts in any vehicle and automatically collects data without any driver input
- Standard features include trip logging, rpm and idle monitoring, driving habits monitoring and unauthorized usage
- Monitors up to eight accessories
- Allows upgrades to optional modules, such as short range radio data transfer, global positioning system location data, real-time monitoring through a CDPD modem and detailed accident recording

Circle 225 on reader service card

## Eagle Point Training CD

- LANDCADD terrain modeling CBT demonstrates the creation of actual terrain models for use in conceptual design
- Modules surfacing modeling, site and landscape design

Circle 226 on reader service card

# Products

## ExMark Lazer Z HP

- 52-inch mower
  - Small footprint
  - Zero-turn maneuverability
  - High-lift blades and flow-control baffles
  - Operator is able to view tires from a seated position
  - Instant-Adjust system allows changes to cutting height from the operator's seat
- Circle 227 on reader service card**



## Bandit Industries Model 254

- New machine is a 14-inch addition to the Brush Bandit chipper line
  - Hydraulic-feed, disc-style chipper
  - 287-square-inch chipper opening
  - 360-degree swivel discharge spout and hand crank swivel discharge spout
  - A variety of gas and diesel engines up to 135 hp
  - Available with three knife pockets
- Circle 228 on reader service card**



## Bush Hog Pluggers

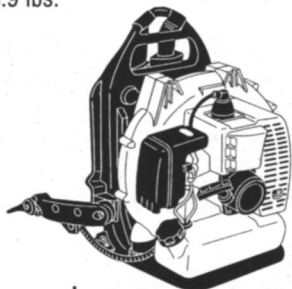
- Promote root growth by reducing the amount of soil compaction
- Deep weight rack and paired hubs that turn independently

- A-frame, 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-inch diameter shaft, greasable sleeves and independent acting <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-inch spoons perform in a variety of soil conditions
  - Units fit tractors up to 60 hp and are available in 48-, 60- and 72-inch widths
  - Optional slicing knives are available
- Circle 229 on reader service card**



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## SCS Inc. Turfmaker 425

- Machine for hydromulching, hydrosprigging and hydroseeding
  - Mixes and sprays up to 1,700 gallons of thick slurry per hour to produce sod-quality turf
  - Seed germination is possible in a couple weeks because of the "incubator" environment
  - Pumps through 300 feet of hose while projecting the mulch slurry an additional 100 feet from the end of the hose
  - Can fill itself at the job site
  - Auxiliary water tank can fill continuously with two garden hoses and supply enough water for three or four tank loads per hour
  - Mounts on a flat-bed truck or a utility trailer
  - 13-hp motor and double rotary gear pump
- Circle 230 on reader service card**

## Salsco Inc. 355/2000 Slicer Seeder

- One level lowers and activates cutters and turns seed on
  - Operates in a 25-inch radius
  - Performs on tight curves and on inclines up to 40 degrees
- Circle 231 on reader service card**



## Kichler Landscape Lighting Products

- K-15019 PZ is oriental style, finished in patina bronze with satin, etched glass panels and solid brass construction. The light measures 27 inches high, 6 1/2 inches wide, and takes an 18.5-watt bulb, which is supplied with fixture.
  - K-15030 OZ has an adjustable crescent fixture with a 360-degree rotating head, standing 26 1/2 inches tall. It is supplied with a 24.4-watt bulb, and the fixture can be used for any application, from path lighting to wall washing.
- Circle 232 on reader service card**



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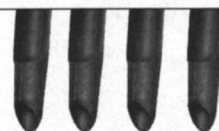
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# Product Profile

## Effectively Managing Information

For Bob Slingluff, president, Yardmaster of Columbus, Columbus, Ohio, finding a reliable time tracking system has always been a major management challenge. Without a good system in place, Slingluff has had trouble with everything from employees complaining about incorrect paychecks to customers questioning the accuracy of their invoices. Multiple processing of information was also a big frustration and waste of time. "When you get information in, such as time sheets, you enter that into your payroll system," Slingluff said. "And then you have to enter costing hours and billing information, separately."

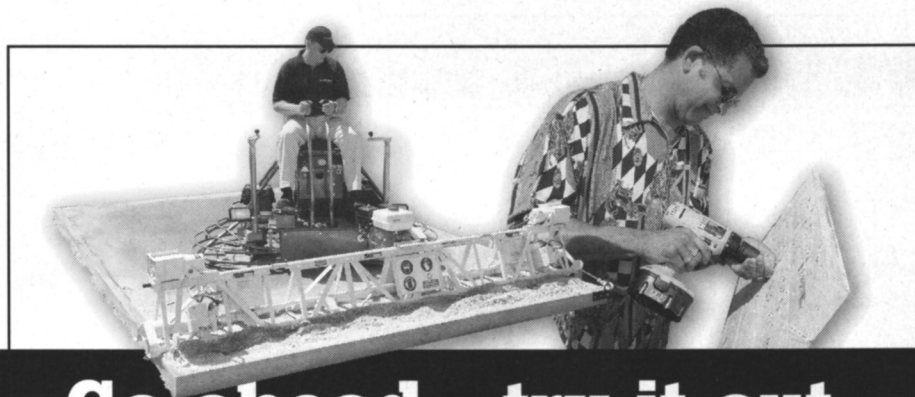
With his new system, however, these frustrations have

**"You don't have a crew member looking at a piece of paper trying to interpret what the salesperson meant when he bid the job."**

quickly become a thing of the past. Slingluff has been using Minnow, a field data collection software program designed to run on a Palm Pilot (or Visor, a Palm Pilot clone) hand-held computer. Minnow downloads scheduling and estimating information from a main computer that a landscape crew can use at a job site to keep track of the day's tasks. The system is also used in-house for sales and administrative purposes.

Minnow was developed by and is sold through Include Software Corp., Laurel, Md. Minnow costs \$999 for an unlimited amount of users. Equipment and other related Asset software packages for accounting, estimating, scheduling, inventory and payroll purposes are sold separately.

**ATTENTION TO DETAIL.** Minnow allows greater accuracy, which Slingluff said, is a welcome change from his old system. Leaving no facet of the job unaccounted for, the system tracks start and stop times for each task by crew member, job and day; travel time and other indirect time. The hand-held computer is then brought back to the main computer, where the information is uploaded, automatically updating the schedule,



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# Product Profile

time card and billing modules. During peak season, when Slingluff oversees approximately 18 four-person crews going to 200 sites per week, this system is simply indispensable, he said.

The software's attention to detail makes for a more effective job and, in turn, better production management, Slingluff said. "If you've got six separate edgings on a job, it's a lot easier to make sure you get the edgings done than it was in the past, because they don't just disappear into the system," he said.

"If you schedule them and they don't get done, then you know that immediately. It doesn't slip through the cracks."

Minnow also saves time on estimations. "You're doing everything within one system so that you're not reinterpreting things constantly," Slingluff said. "Nothing gets lost in the translation."

Slingluff also likes the estimating system's consistency and ability to accommodate detailed information. "When I do the estimate it's the same as when another salesperson does the estimate," he pointed out. "We can be more objective with this system than when we send somebody out with just a piece of paper and a pencil."

**USER FRIENDLY.** The Minnow system is easy for Slingluff's crew to use and has a substantially reduced margin of error. "Now the crew doesn't have to write down anything or keep track of many pieces of paper, which can be lost or destroyed," Slingluff said. "There was a lot to keep track of with the manual system that they just don't have to do anymore. Now, all the crew leader needs to be able to do is push the right button at the right time."

The only concern is being diligent about entering information into the system, Slingluff warned. "You just have to be disciplined about updating the system or the whole process is undermined," he said.

Slingluff's sales staff is also finding Minnow efficient and easy to use, especially since the software helps maintain accuracy from the initial sale to the finished job. "After making a sale, the salesperson goes back in the system and makes adjustments so that the contract matches what was actually sold - the original estimate," Slingluff said. "The consistency is there so you don't have a crew

member looking at a piece of paper trying to interpret what the salesperson meant when he bid the job."

Minnow has substantially reduced Yardmaster's administrative costs. "We've lost two people who we aren't replacing because, as a whole, we are spending a lot

less time processing paperwork," Slingluff said. "Dealing with paperwork was a full-time job for an employee using the old method. Now it can all be done at one time." - Cynthia Greenleaf

Circle 200 on reader service card

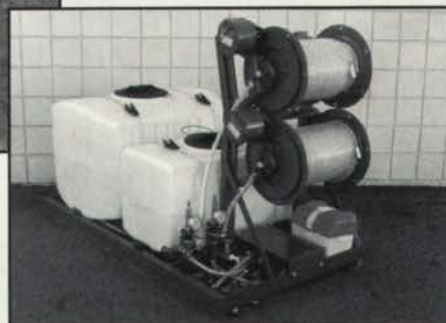


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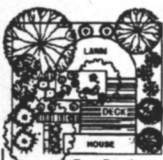
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CoCal is more inclined to give a price break to a long-term, multiproperty customer. "We're more likely to negotiate and work with them," Fochtman said. The company will also take less of a profit if it wants to land an attractive account that has long-term potential, he added. "If we want to get in with somebody, we tell them 'Just give us one job. We'll prove to you that we're better,'" he said. "We look at this as an investment - a selling expense. If we want a job for long-term reasons, we'll go into it with the understanding that we'll prove ourselves to the customers. We're willing to be flexible if the relationship has value."

In terms of price increases, CoCal generally raises its prices 3 to 5 percent every other year. "We do not increase a job two years in a row. If you do this, by the fourth year, the price is inflated and you'll lose the job," Fochtman warned. When making increases, the company tends to keep its base maintenance costs lower while raising the prices of extra services, he said.

D. Foley will take less net profit if the company needs to fill out its sales for the year, Dinsmore said. For instance, to pass up a job with a small profit percentage for another, bigger opportunity that may never occur would be foolish, Dinsmore said. "Even though I only made a minor profit, the smaller job employed people, recovered overhead and took care of direct and indirect costs."

When pricing a job, contractors need to keep an eye on their bottom lines. Misunderstanding the definition of profit is a common mistake with contractors, according to Dinsmore. "They're often landscapers first and businesspeople second," he cautioned. "They don't understand that there's a break even point."

D. Foley tends to raise its prices on commercial jobs a maximum of 2 percent annually. Customers are usually understanding about this, Dinsmore said. "Chances are, they're incurring the same (financial pressures) on their end." In his experience, Dinsmore said that good estimating can rule out substantial price increases later on. "If we can nail an estimate, then, we go up only a few percentage points. Otherwise, something's going on that was in your control and you didn't control it." ■

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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## How We Do It

# In-House Training at the Groundskeeper

The Groundskeeper in Tucson, Ariz., has always stressed employee training. We formalized our training goals by creating Groundskeeper University, or GKU. Through GKU, we developed an in-house training program with one mission: To make learning part of the fabric of our company.

Our first step was to form a training team. We selected team members from a pool of current supervisors, all with strong field experience. Their mission was an ambitious one: To provide a company-wide learning system that addressed all formal and informal needs in a manner that could be reproduced, inherited and institutionalized, and to foster learning throughout the company.

From aeration and de-thatching to pruning, the training team carefully documented, photographed and organized the step-by-step details of how to complete each task. Team members developed test questions on each topic as a baseline for what each crew member needs to know how to function "the Groundskeeper way." They also developed coaching points as tools for crew leaders and supervisors to use to monitor and maintain quality standards in the field.

After the documentation process was complete, they selected a computer software program to put the training information into a permanent format that would enhance learning company-wide. Combining text and photos, each of the original 19 topics the training team



*The Groundkeeper's training team selected important company functions, such as proper planting, and documented the steps necessary to complete each task so they could use the materials as training tools. Photos: The Groundskeeper*

targeted became a separate training manual and course. Encouraged by their success, we've applied the same concept to other categories, such as computers, construction, maintenance, equipment safety and human resources topics. More than 60 documented training programs have been distributed to our branches to date, with more in development.

The next phase of development was to address the bilingual needs of our labor force. Using Groundskeeper staffmembers and outside consultants, we translated our training materials into Spanish. As each translation was ready, we asked native Spanish-speaking employees to help make audio recordings.

When the first group of training materials was ready, we transferred them onto CDs to distribute to each of our seven branches. Each branch has a dedicated training computer. With the CDs, supervisors bring in their crews for training sessions, usually held before or after work for 30 minutes twice a week.

A short test given at the end of each training session serves as a paper trail for tracking the process. The test makes its way into each employee's work file and can be used in performance evaluations.

We had to hire additional staff members to fulfill our training mission. The costs included hiring a trainer, purchasing computer hardware and software — plus a lot of technical assistance from our staff and plenty of time spent pulling the program together.

We are now attempting to quantify the return on our investment, but such things defy measurement. To implement a training program to this extent, a company needs a whatever-it-takes attitude and an unshakable belief that training is important to the company and to raising industry standards.

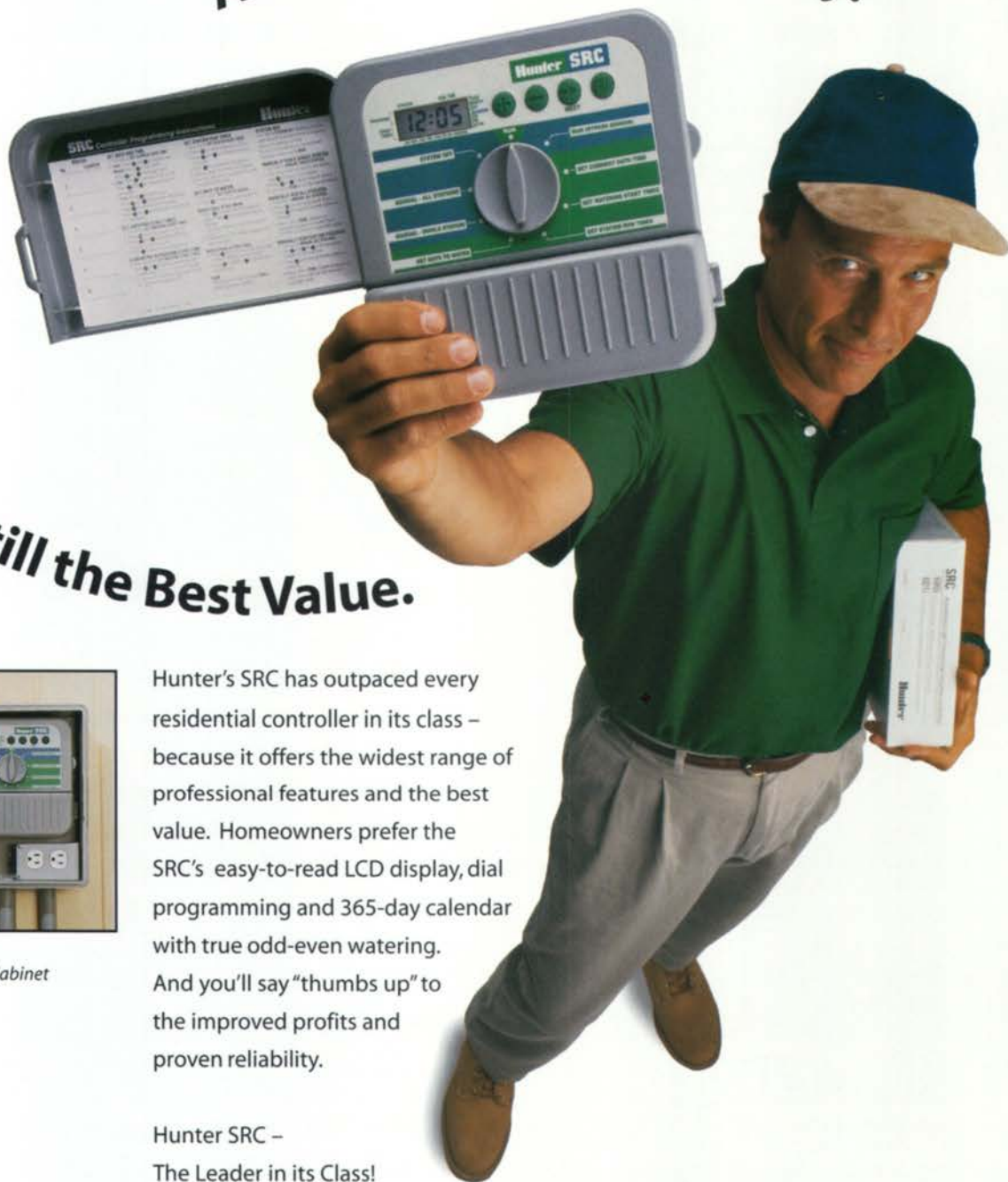
GKU will continue to build on a strong learning foundation. Existing training materials, the *101 Series*, are entry level. Intermediate and advanced training are planned to continue company-wide learning in all areas. More than 100 additional topics have been identified, including health and safety issues, goal setting and time management, as well as additional horticultural topics. — Connie Brown

*The author is with the people and organization development division at The Groundskeeper in Tucson, Ariz.*

## FIVE Keys to Success

- 1. Form a training team of current managers and supervisors who have strong field experience.**
- 2. Document, photograph and organize the step-by-step details of each training topic.**
- 3. Put the training information into a permanent format to enhance learning company-wide.**
- 4. Customize the training to recognize the bilingual needs of Spanish employees.**
- 5. Reward employees for completing training sessions.**

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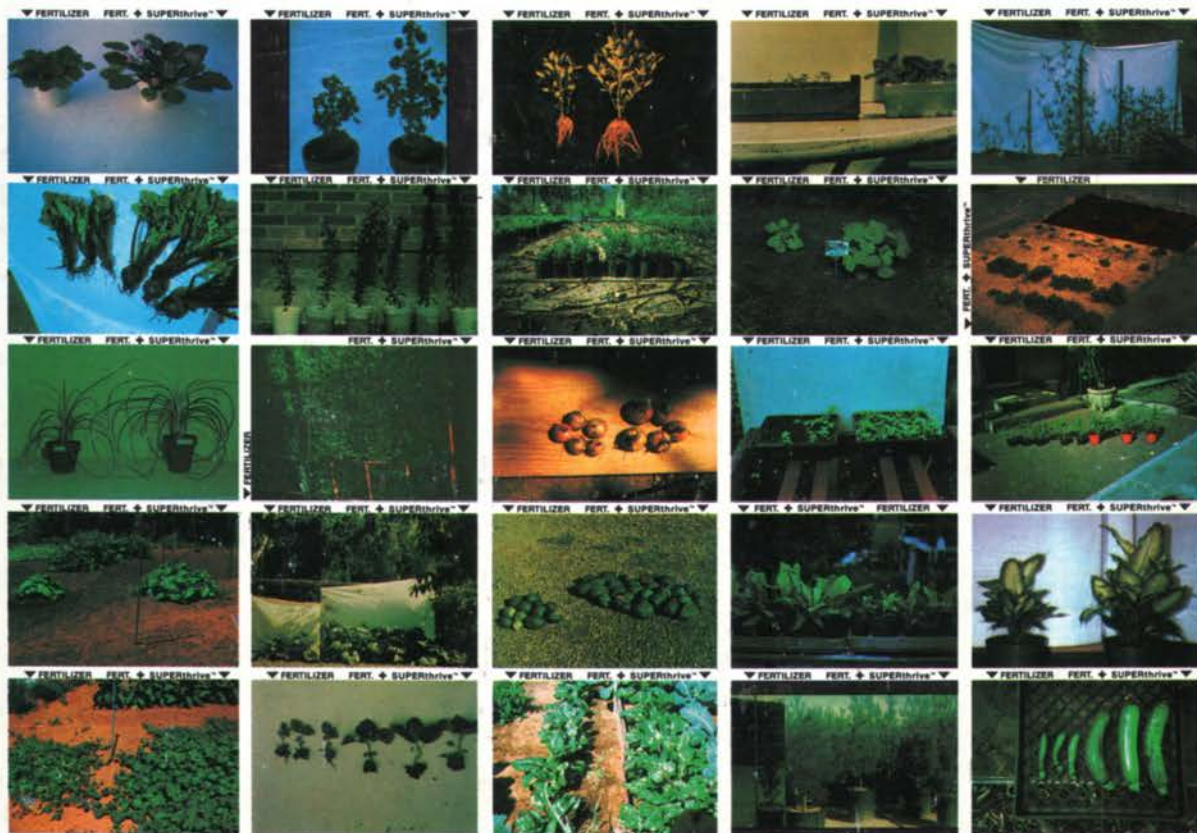
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