

August 2000



IT'S ABOUT

PRODUCTIVITY

TORO

VOLUME 21, No. 8

awn& andscape August 2000

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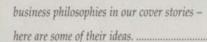
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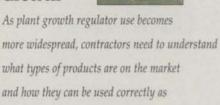
100 Steps to Success

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Regulating Growth

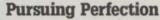


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Managing **Major Equipment**



Large machines require a lot of thought, whether acquiring them, using them or caring for them.

Words of Wisdom

Industry experts offer their top 10 tips for irrigation success.

Business Strategies

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This month's features, plus exclusive online stories, industry databases and more are online at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

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Weekly Features

Plant of the Month – August features Strobilanthes, a plant with clusters of tubular or funnel-shaped, two-lipped flowers, in this online exclusive by Barbara Ellis.

Novartis TechNotes – Secure weekly tips, soil temperatures from around the U.S., bug activity maps, growing degree days and more in this weekly feature.

GreenSearch PeopleSmarts -

"Is Your Company Growing Faster Than Your Managers?" is the topic of this month's GreenSearch feature.

ALCA Driver Safety Toolbox

Talks – Look for tips on dealing with flashing yellow lights and fighting driver fatigue. Find these features at www.lawnandlandscape.com/weeklyindex.asp.

Exclusive Online Features For August:

The green industry's premier Web site introduces the following features in August:

Organic Landscaping – Borrow some basics on implementing an organic landscaping program.

Landscaping At Disneyland - See what goes into managing the park's incredible

outdoor plant displays.

Developing Successful Relationships with Homeowner Associa-

tions – Learn key practices to consider when dealing with homeowner associations.

Contractor Profile - This month's profile will feature a Bakersfield, Calif.

company with more than 40 years of landscape experience.



ONLINE Contents

Check the following links to discover the tools available on Lawn & Landscape Online that will help you grow your business and stay on top of the latest industry news:

Daily News – Catch the latest industry news each day, www.lawnandlandscape.com/news.asp

E-newsletter – Receive breaking industry news in your e-mail inbox. www.lawnandlandscape.com/signup.asp

L&L Online LawnStore – Locate the best resources to help your business grow. www.lawnandlandscape.com/lawnstore.asp

Bulletin Boards – Check with fellow industry professionals about issues affecting your business. www.lawnandlandscape.com/bullframe.asp

Online Marketplace – Obtain contact information and the latest products from industry suppliers. www.lawnandlandscape.com/marketplace.asp

Weekly Poll – Vote on industry-related topics and compare your answers with others. www.lawnandlandscape.com

Events Calendar – Find industry events across the country. www.lawnandlandscape.com/calendar.asp

Please e-mail your comments to shunsberger@iawnandlandscape.com. Enjoy your visit to Lawn & Landscape Online! Lawn & Landscape Online is: Bill Cox, general manager, GIEMedia.Com (bcox@lawnandlandscape.com) and Scott Hunsberger, internet editor (shunsberger@iawnandlandscape.com).

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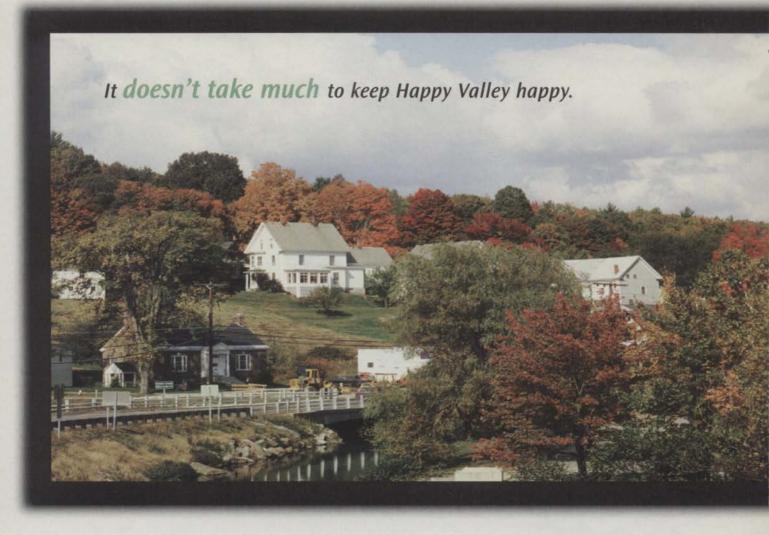


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Editor's Focus

What Will **Be Next?**

"If you're not part of the solution then you're part of the problem." - Martin Luther King Jr.

I've had quite a few conversations over the last month with various lawn care operators, manufacturer representatives, distributors and other industry personnel about the fate that befell chlorpyrifos (marketed by Dow AgroSciences as Dursban).

For those of you who haven't heard by now, Dursban won't be available for lawn care applications under terms of an arrangement between Dow AgroSciences and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In reality, the term "agreement" is a bit of a stretch because the EPA didn't offer many options to Dow AgroSciences.

What concerns me about the developments with Dursban is what this means for the industry going forward. The EPA will likely be emboldened by its success in this instance and the scads of praise it received from various media outlets for "saving children" and "protecting the environment." In fact, just a few days after the Dursban story moved off the front pages of newspapers the EPA attacked atrazine, saying it's likely that the herbicide causes cancer. Now Novartis is scrambling to dispute the EPA's claims about one of its products, just as Dow AgroSciences did to little avail. Other possible victims in waiting include diazinon and malathion.

But, regardless of the manufacturer and the product, one constant remains -a lack of defense from the professional end users. This industry did not come to its own defense as the Dursban issue escalated. Yes, contractors wrote letters to government officials, but with little effect. There was no widespread concern or effort to mobilize the industry into one voice.

> Should we continue with this "it's not my problem" attitude, more pesticides will be lost. A recent survey by the Professional Lawn Care Association of America found that only 24 percent of its members encountered customer concerns or complaints regarding chlorpyrifos, and those likely stemmed from publicity as opposed to unprompted concern.

The industry's enemy isn't the general public. They don't know enough about the products we use to decide whether or not they should worry. We are battling a government agency driven to garner as much popularity and as many votes as possible, and that may come at the expense of small, quiet, non-responsive industries. If that's the case, then we should all start wondering what product we'll lose next.

Boh West

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CLIMATE CONDITIONS

Heat Wave

Most landscape contractors are familiar with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Plant Hardiness Zone Map. By using the map to find the zone in which they live, contractors can determine what plants will winter over and survive.

But cold isn't the only factor determining whether plants will thrive. Particularly during drought, heat can seriously impact plants.

The effects of heat damage are more subtle than those of extreme cold, which will kill a plant instantly. Heat damage first can appear in many different parts of the plant. Flower buds might wither, leaves might droop or become more attractive to insects, chlorophyll might disappear so that leaves appear white or brown, or roots may cease growing. Plant death from heat is slow and lingering. The plant might survive in a stunted or chlorotic state for several years. When dessication reaches a certain degree, growth enzymes deactivate and the plant dies.

The American Horticultural Society (AHS) Heat-Zone Map can help contrac-(continued on page 13) Which of the nation's green acres are landscape contractors responsible for maintaining?

According to a September 1999 Research USA survey conducted by Lawn & Landscape magazine, 33.53 percent of the acres landscape contrac-

MAINTAINED BY LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS	AVERAGE ACRES
Single Family Homes	110 acres
Multi-family Structures	32 acres
Commercial/Industrial Facilities	101 acres
Government/Institutional Facilities	85 acres
TOTAL	328 acres
Acres that Include	134 acres
Chemical Applications	104 acres

Credit: Research USA September 1999

tors maintain are residential, with commercial/industrial facilities not far behind at 30.79 percent.

Brull -

The green surrounding government/institutional facilities occupy 25.91 percent of contractors' time, and only 9.75 percent of the area maintained by contractors are around multi-family structures.

Among those 328 U.S. acres, approximately 40.85 percent are treated with chemical applications.

INDUSTRY NEWS

Pesticide Bans Continue

MARIETTA, Ga. – The U.S. Senate agreed to ban preventive applications of certain pesticides to areas owned or managed by the Department of Defense that may be used by children, including

parks, base housing, recreation centers, playgrounds or daycare facilities.

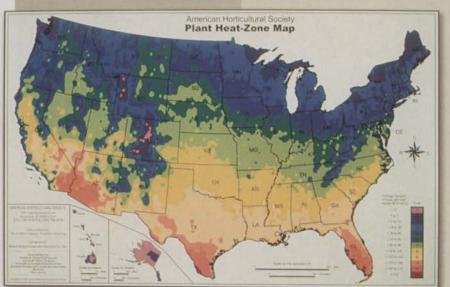
Not naming specific pesticides is a condition of the ban, which was approved by an 84-14 vote and included in an amendment to the FY 2001 Department of Defense appropriations bill (H.R. 4576). Instead, the bill contains a statement that reads banned pesticides include "those containing a known or probably carcinogen or an acute nerve toxin and those of organophosphate, carbamate or organices."

(continued on page 23)

In September, EPA
will welcome
feedback from
industry professionals on how
pesticides should be

limited. Illustra-

tion: Mark Harvey



Credit: American Horticulture Society

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- □ 5. In-house Interior Contractor
- ☐ 6. Grower
- □ 7. Other Contract Services (please describe)

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- □2. Distributor
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(continued from page 10)

tors choose the appropriate plants for their zone based on heat. To use the map, contractors locate their town or city. Twelve map zones indicate the average number of days each year that a region experiences heat days – temperatures over 86 degrees Fahrenheit, the point at which plants begin to suffer physiological heat damage.

The zones range from Zone 1 (less than one heat day) to Zone 12 (more than 210 heat days).

The AHS Plant Heat-Zone Map ratings assume that adequate water is supplied to plant roots all times. Lack of water, even for a brief period in a plant's life, distorts the accuracy of the zone coding.

Other factors, such as lack of oxygen, lack of or excessive light, day length, soil pH and insufficient nutrients, also can cause plant stress and skew the heat zone rating.

For more information on the AHS Heat-Zone Map, call 800/777-7931 or visit www.ahs.org. – AHS (continued on page 16)

Calendar of Events

AUG. 11-12 Walker Mowers Family Reunion, Fort Collins, Colo. Contact: 877/925-5375.

AUG. 12 Ohio Landscapers Association Landscape Facilities Tour, Novelty and Hinckley, Ohio. Contact: 440/717-0002.

AUG. 13-15 Missouri Landscape and Nursery Association/KAN Joint Meeting and Trade Show, Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/369-3115.

AUG. 14-16 Florida Turfgrass Association Conference and Show: Turfgrass 2000, Gainesville, Fla. Contact: 800/882-6721.

AUG. 16 Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association Horticultural Field Day, Midlothian, Va. Contact: 540/382-0943.

AUG. 18-21 Texas Association of Nurserymen Nursery/Landscape Expo, Houston, Texas. Contact: 512/280-5182.

AUG. 19 Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Certified Landscape Technician Exterior Exam, Joliet, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.

AUG. 20 Certified Professional Landscape & Certified Landscape Technician Interior Exams, Houston, Texas. Contact: 800/395-2522.

AUG. 23 Michigan Turfgrass Field Day, Lansing, Mich. Contact: 517/321-1660.

AUG. 25 Certified Landscape Technician Exterior Exam, Wooster, Ohio. Contact: 330/264-3911.

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(continued from page 13)

INDUSTRY NEWS

Growth Initiative Gains Funding

LA COSTA, Calif. — The Interior Growth Initiative Task Force, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) effort to grow the interiorscape industry, received its initial funding in two statements.

First, ALCA pledged to provide the Task Force with \$75,000 a year for the next three vears. Then 11 members of ALCA's Interior Landscape Council and three other contributors made commitments of \$28,533 per year for the next three years.

Before securing the ALCA and individual commitments, Dick Ott, Task Force chairman, outlined a five-year-plan to ensure a successful program. Implementation of the program will not begin until the Task Force secures \$250,000 in annual commitments for a three-year period.

"If we are going to do this, we need to do this right, and that means more than just a

On the 1 = 3

C&S Turf Care Equipment - www.csturfequip.com

JRCO - www.jrcoinc.com

The Ohio Lawn Care Association - www.ohiolawncare.org

Atlantic Landscape Co. - www.lawnboys.com

Westheffer Co. - www.westheffer.com

Green Meadows Landscape Contractors - www.greenmeadowsinc.com

Environmental Design Landscape Contractors - www.envirodesign.on.ca

To announce a new Web site, e-mail nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

one-year effort," Ott noted. "I hope we'll have the funding commitments in place by Jan. 1, 2001, and I fully expect we'll exceed our minimum goal of \$250,000."

The plan calls for extensive public relations efforts, focusing on how plants help business owners, property managers and other potential customers, targeted at the key customer groups identified in the Task Force's April research.

INDUSTRY NEWS

MTD Acquires **Rvobi Outdoor**

CLEVELAND, Ohio - MTD Products announced the acquisition of a manufacturer of commercial and consumer hand-held products in a move to its position in both markets. The acquisition of Ryobi North America (continued on page 18)

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USE READER SERVICE #13

Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

Outdoor Products adds more than 20 new string trimmers, blowers and hedge trimmers to MTD's product line.

MTD declined to comment, but Ryobi's four-cycle engine technology could become valuable as the industry moves toward U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and California Air Resources Board engine emission regulations. The acquisition gives MTD the Ryobi brand name for outdoor products in North, Central and South America.

Association

Combining legislation and lawn care, industry players who attended **Professional Lawn Care Association of America's** 11th annual Legislative Day on the Hill in Washing-

ton, D.C., confronted small business issues and expressed "green" concerns during congressional appointments while networking with other landscape professionals.

"We're training an army the slow way to be mobilized on legislative issues," said Tom Delaney, PLCAA executive vice president. "Day on the Hill is a total educational process for landscape contractors as citizens, people from particular states and people from an industry. They are seeing things on a national, state and local level all together."

Speakers and sessions during the July 24-25 event highlighted hot-button legislation, and attendees generated a proactive, visual impact to build relationships in the political community and spark regulatory change, Delaney said. "Congressman David Hobson [R-Ohio] told attendees the way lobbying is done – not by sending e-mails or form letters," he added. "Legislators hardly pay attention to them." He said a personal appearance is a more effective way to lobby an issue.

Attendees discussed and reacted to comments stemming from pesticide use issues heated by the Regulatory Fairness and Openness Act of 1999 H.R. 1592. Delaney commented that PLCAA members were appalled by the "misinterpretation and misinformation that can be given to the Senate to vote on." Many legislators question the safety of certain pesticide use near children, but these claims are not founded on sound scientific data, Delaney stressed.

Attendees also donated their time and expertise by building on previous landscape enhancements at Arlington Cemetery and lending their talents in tree care and lime application at the Congressional Cemetery, Delaney noted. Despite wet weather conditions, more than 80 participants donated their expertise to the cause, he added.

"Instead of making money," Delaney said, "contractors take this day to donate time, people and equipment." – Kristen Hampshire

INDUSTRY NEWS

LESCO to Sell Kawasaki Brand

CLEVELAND – LESCO announced it will carry Kawasaki hand-held string trimmers, hedge trimmers, backpack blowers and other equipment as its exclusive hand-held power equipment line.

Unlike private labeling ventures in which LESCO places its name on equipment from other manufacturers and uses the green LESCO color, the Kawasaki equipment will retain its name brand and colors at LESCO stores.

LESCO cited the name recognition of Kawasaki as the reason to forgo a private labeling arrangement, according to Pete Thompson, senior equipment product manager for LESCO. "LESCO is known for manufacturing larger pieces of equipment – spreaders, sprayers, walk-behind mowers – and we had been private labeling for the last couple of years from a couple of different companies for our hand-held product line. When we went and looked at it this time, we decided not

CORRECTIONS

The features listed for Lawn Monkey Software's products for the lawn and landscape industry in the Computer Software Buyers' Guide in the May issue of Lawn & Landscape should have included job costing.

Bob Ottley, owner of One Step Tree & Lawncare, will not be changing his company into a Weed Man franchise, as was reported in our July issue, "Weed Man, Big Names Team Up."

CLARIFICATION: In July's article about Dursban insecticide, Mike Shaw, global policy leader for chlorpyrifos for Dow AgroSciences, was reported to have said the Environmental Protection Agency's revised risk assessment results in residual risk of cancer among chlorpyrifos users in and around the home. Shaw made no correlation between chlorpyrifos and cancer.

Chlorpyrifos shows no indication of causing cancer. Animal testing shows that chlorpyrifos is not harmful to DNA. Tests required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for carcinogenic, mutagenic and teratogenic activities were all negative. Chlorpyrifos is not listed by the EPA as a human carcinogen.

to do a private label and look at the brand name recognition that we could pull from a big house like Kawasaki," he said.

"Our customers have relied on Kawasaki engines for their mowers and associate the name with high quality and dependability," said William Foley, chairman, president and chief executive officer of LESCO.

As far as future product lines to add to LESCO stores, Thompson said the company always looks at different brands of equipment. He also said the decision to use a specific name brand of a product or to use a product under a private label is determined on a case-by-case basis.

(continued on page 20)



INDUSTRY NEWS

Davey Acquires Tree Businesses

KENT, OHIO – Keeping with its expansion schedule of an average of two to four acquisitions or consolidations per year, The Davey Tree Expert Co. announced it acquired and combined two Westchester County, N.Y., businesses to form a new Davey facility.

The acquisition of Forester Tree Service and Coffin Tree Service brings Davey back into the Westchester County market after a 25-year absence, according to Gordon Ober, vice president of personnal recruiting and training for Davey.

"These are two solid companies in a prime tree care market in the Northeast," noted Ober. "The acquisition was a perfect fit."

The new operation will offer tree and lawn care services, including pest management and fertilization. Both owners of the acquired companies and their 15 to 18 employees joined the Davey organization as a result of the deals.

People

Irritrol Systems named Kristina Bergman category manager.

LasTec hired Roger Rew as plant manager.

Timothy Driscoll retired from AgrEvo Environmental Health after serving as president/chief executive officer for several companies in the specialty chemical industry for more than 30 years.

Simplot Turf and Horticulture named **Bill Whitacre** president and successor to **Doyle Jacklin**.

U.S. Lawns, a division of Environmental Industries Inc., promoted

Kenneth Hutcheson to vice president and director of marketing.

Robert McDowell was promoted to executive vice president and chief operating officer of Mitsubishi Fuso Truck of America.

Monrovia appointed **Jim Poorbaugh** to vice president and government and industry relations officer and **Russ Wojcik** to general manager of the southern California nursery.

Karl Warnke and **Willard Holland** were elected to The Davey Tree Expert Co. board of directors.

Growth Products added Randy Oberland as a technical sales representatives.





Whitacre (top),
Driscoll
(bottom)

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STROKE in. (mm)	2.64 (67)	2.64 (67)	2.64 (67)
DISPLACEMENT cu. in. (cc)	34.2 (561)	38.1 (624)	41.1 (674)
POWER (@3600 RPM) hp (kW) Maximum Intermittent Continuous	17.0 (12.7) 15.3 (11.4) 13.6 (10.2)	20.0 (14.9) 18.0 (13.4) 16.0 (11.9)	23.0 (17.2) 20.7 (15.4) 18.4 (13.7)
MAX TORQUE lbs. ft (Nm) @ 2400 RPM	26.0 (35.3)	30.0 (40.7)	32.0 (43.4)
DRY WEIGHT lbs. (kg)	110 (52)	110 (52)	110 (52)
OIL CAPACITY W/FILTER U.S. quarts (litre)	2 (1.9)	2 (1.9)	2 (1.9)
DIMENSIONS in. (mm) Length Width Height	18.6 (472) 17.8 (451) 18.8 (478)	18.6 (472) 17.8 (451) 18.8 (478)	18.6 (472) 17.8 (451) 18.8 (478)
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Pesticide Bans Continue (continued from page 10)

nochlorine class," according to Tom Delaney, executive vice president, Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA). In June, chlorpyrifos, included in the organophosphate class, was voluntarily withdrawn from most uses in and around residences by Dow AgroSciences after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency stated that uses of the chemical exceeded the agency's recommended exposure limits. By banning only preventative use of the listed pesticide classes, this amendment permits their use for emergency purposes, such as an encephalitis outbreak.

Since the House of Representatives version of the bill does not include a similar provision and varies in several other ways, the House and Senate will form a conference committee to reconcile their differences.

PLCAA believes the amendment to the appropriations bill is a poor way to regulate pesticides because of the extensive registra-

tion process that is conducted by the EPA on all pesticides. "The amendment ... greatly undermines the system that has been established to regulate the use of pesticides," PLCAA stated in a form letter to the conference committee members. "If the EPA approves a product for use in areas that may be used by children ... it has determined that is a safe and appropriate use of the product."

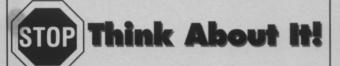
Along with PLCAA, other professionals shared their views on the data EPA used to justify its recent actions. An editorial in *The Detroit News* stated: "EPA Administrator Carol Browner claims that hundreds of children have been poisoned by chlorpyrifos ... But Dr. William Robertson, who has headed the Washington Poison Center for 30 years, says the EPA's action will expose children to greater health hazards. Insect-bit allergies outnumber pesticide poisonings 100 to 1."

In September, EPA plans to hold a meet-

ing to collect feedback from the pesticide industry, academic experts, consumer groups and others on how regulators should limit pesticides linked to health risks. The EPA said that the public hearing aims to help the development of a production cap on active ingredients in certain pesticides.

Industry representatives can submit suggestions to the EPA by August 24 via e-mail to opp-docket+epa.gov. The EPA is soliciting suggestions on the following issues:

- How to apportion chemical production limits to maintain price competition and allow new competitors to enter the market.
- How often manufacturers must report production to verify the limit is not exceeded.
- Whether to use a calendar year or crop year basis for setting 12-month manufacturing limits.
- How exactly to define what should be capped whether to restrict certain pesticides by imposing caps on imports, domestic production or sales of end-use products.



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CONTRACTOR THE EDITOR

To the Editor,

My teeth begin to grind when I read articles about leaf blowers that contain verbiage such as yours about landscape contractors that are not doing their part in the battle to prevent bans (Editor's Focus, February issue, Lawn & Landscape).

I have personally spent, along with other members of my association, many months working on the prevention of bans on leaf blowers in the State of California. The California Landscape Contractors Association has dedicated the last two years to obtaining statewide legislation on leaf blowers. That means taking time – lots of time – away from our businesses to fight an issue that is important to us. Unfortunately, those that seem to portray the voice of the industry are not abreast of the current events that are taking place on a daily basis here in California.

Fighting the battle for the leaf blower is not just a simple issue. There is more politics involved here than I ever thought possible. Those that speculate on this issue often have no idea about what is truly going on.

We have a strong coalition in California, people that perhaps ordinarily wouldn't be on the same page, but have come together to fight for fair legislation on this tool. Whatever the results of our battle may be here, remember it so often determines its fate in other states.

> Barbara D. Alvarez Co-Chair, Legislation Committee, CLCA Pres., Golden State Landscaping, Inc.

Bob West writes: My intent with the February Editor's Focus column was to encourage contractors to get more involved defending the industry against unnecessary legislation. There are obviously a number of individuals and groups, such as Ms. Alvarez and her allies in California, who are committed to supporting the entire industry, and they all deserve our thanks. They also deserve our help.

If you would like to express your opinion in a Letter to the Editor, please send your letter along with your name, title, company name and location to Letter to the Editor, Lawn & Landscape, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113. Or send your letter via e-mail to nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

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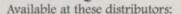
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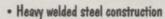


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<u>Equipment Notebook</u>

AERATOR FOCUS

The Underground Story

More than 50 percent of North American lawns are at least 10 years old, according to Shayne Newman, president, Yard Apes, New Milford, Conn.

Due to their age, these lawns can benefit from aeration, which relieves soil compaction and thatch problems. This allows for better air, water and nutrient movement through the soil, resulting in healthier turf, Newman said.

This fact might create the illusion of instant dollar signs in a contractor's eyes, according to Newman. But to successfully add aeration to a service mix, a contractor must understand the types of machines available and the proper way to use them.

AIR POCKETS. Aeration is the practice of creating small, evenly spaced 3-inch deep, ½-inch-wide holes in a lawn, getting air and nutrients into the roots and venting subsurface gases created by decomposing roots. The pulled soil

plugs are dispersed to spread soil nutrients over the turf surface.

"Core aeration benefits a lawn by breaking through the dense thatch and speeding up its decomposition; opening up the soil to permit free movement of water, fertilizer and air; and relieving soil compaction and giving grass roots room to grow," Newman explained.

The best time for aeration service depends on the turfgrass type and location.

Durability is a key trait in an aerator because of the nature of the work, but new machines to the market offer

because of the nature of the work but new machines to the market offer greater maneuverability for more productivity.

Photo: Classen Mfg.

QUICK TIPS

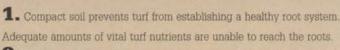
Aeration Advantages











2. Aerators relieve soil compaction by removing cores of turf up to 3 inches in depth.

3. Once the soil is aerated, air exchange improves and the soil can easily absorb water, fertilizer and other nutrients.

4. Aeration promotes deeper root growth for a lush, healthy and drought-resistant lawn. – *BlueBird International*

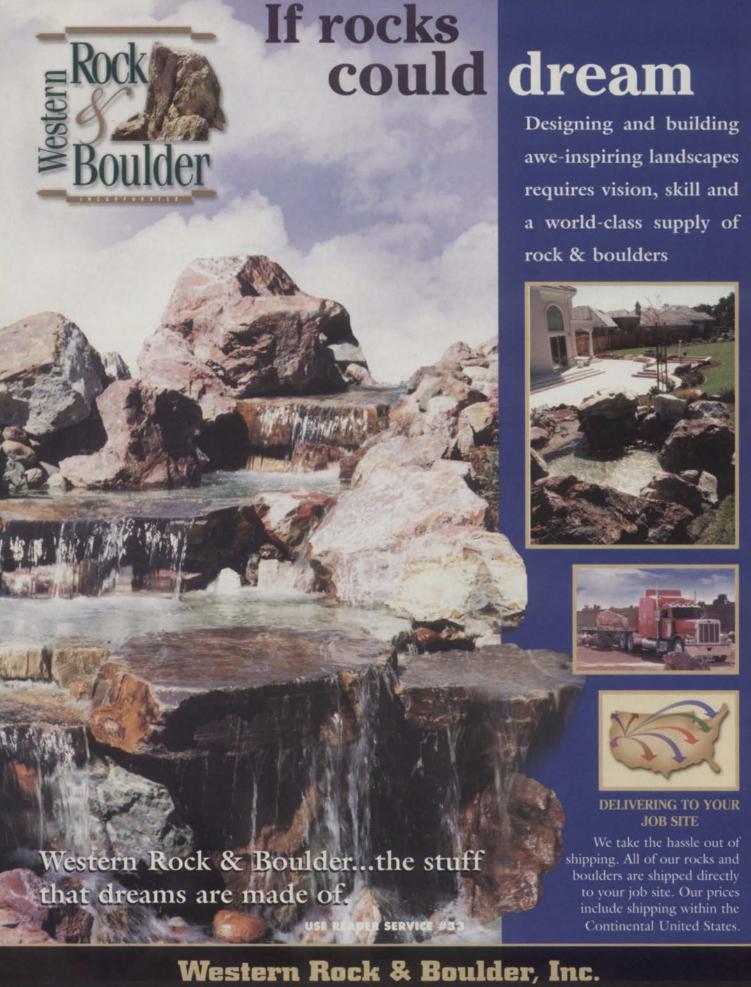
"In spring, aerate before applying preemergent herbicides," said Jim Schweigert, president, JRCO, Minneapolis, Minn. "In fall, aerate before late season fertilization. You can enhance root growth by aerating in conjunction with overseeding. Warm-season grasses are usually aerated in mid-spring to summer, but not until after first spring mowing, during green-up or when dormant."

With cool-season grasses, Bob Brophy, director of the lawn products division, Turfco Manufacturing, Minneapolis, Minn.said aeration is becoming primarily a fall practice. "If you aerate in the spring, the grass is already in its peak growing season, so by the time the soil is loosened up—which takes about two months—it's past its prime growth point," he said. "If you aerate from September to December 1, the holes loosen all winter and then next spring the soil is ready for the turf's prime growth. Plus, aerating in the fall keeps the crews busy during a down period and can extend a contractor's season another 60 days."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE. There are a number of aerators that can loosen soil and break-up thatch. Walk-behind aerators come in two families: rolling or drum aerators, where the tines are fixed to a disk and roll into the ground, and reciprocating or piston aerators, with tines that move up and down at a quick speed making holes in the ground.

According to Brophy, rolling aerators have a key advantage over reciprocating aerators. "When rolling aerators hit obstacles, they bounce over them and don't break because the tines are made out of heavier steel, which amounts to less machine downtime," he said. "Recipro-

(continued on page 30)



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Equipment Notebook

(continued from page 28)

cating aerators have tines that are tubes of steel instead of solid spikes. So they are made of thinner steel and are more susceptible to breaking. The maintenance on a reciprocating aerator will run 10 times more than on a rolling aerator.

"However, with rolling aerators, contractors can't place as many holes per square foot in the turf as they can with reciprocating aerators; the lawn will need two or three passes with a rolling aerator," Brophy continued. "With a reciprocating aerator, only one pass is necessary."

"Some cons of rolling aerators include the fact that they cannot be maneuvered around obstacles without first lifting the tines up out of the ground," noted Rose Mary Becker, sales manager, Classen Manufacturing, Norfolk, Neb. "With reciprocating aerators, however, the unit continues to aerate while steering around corners and obstacles, thereby offering greater productivity."

Walk-behind rolling aerators are typically less expensive than reciprocating aerators, Brophy said, but Newman pointed out that cost shouldn't be the only consideration when purchasing an aerator. "Contractors should look for durability above cost," he said. "Decide what machine you want based not on cost difference but on the one that is built better or will save you time. Any piece of equipment that can do the job in one-half or two-thirds the time is worth the cost."

Carla Herron, director of marketing and business development, BlueBird International, Denver, Colo., said looking for aerator durability and operator comfort means checking out specific areas of the machine. "Height adjustment controls give contractors flexibility," Herron said. "Removable weights can help simplify transport. Freewheeling tines can help an operator maneuver in turns and in other tight areas, which can help increase productivity."

An aerator that accommodates both solid and hollow core tines is also beneficial, noted Peter Whurr, vice president of product management, Textron Golf & Turf, Racine, Wis. "Contractors should look for equipment that

will stand up to the vibration and abuse demanded by the operation," he added.

GETTING ATTACHED. According to Newman, walk-behind aerators are simple to use, but can be labor intensive, especially on larger properties. In addition to his 21inch walk-behind aerator, he uses an aerator attachment on the front of his mower to aerate a 48-inch wide path. "These attachments are great if you have a flat property without gates to get through," he said.

Aerator attachments, available for front or rear mount on a mower, operate off of the power of the mower, Schweigert said. "There are no other engines or belts for upkeep," he said. "Also, the attachment disconnects from the mower with two clevis pins, allowing the operator to proceed with mowing."

Aerator attachments on riding mowers also produce little operator fatigue, Becker added, pointing out that these attachments also have some cons. "They rely 100 percent on weight for adequate tine penetration, they are too wide to fit through gates and are not maneuverable in tight areas."

"Aerator attachments can also affect ease of maneuverability and the process of loading and unloading a trailer - they tend to take up more room," Herron added.

"Also, look for an attachment that aerates while turning," Schweigert said. "Because of the speed of the mower, we find most operators using the aerator will cross-aerate placing up to 12 holes per square foot."

SELLING AERATION AS A SERVICE.

Contractors can sell and price their aeration services profitably by including them in an annual service contract, Herron pointed out. "This keeps customers using one company instead of going to someone who only offers aeration and not a total service package," Herron said.

Newman sells his aeration service with his mowing and fertilization service. "Of the lawns we mow, we were able to sell 60 to 70 percent of those customers an aeration and fertilization service," Newman enthused.

The charge for aeration service should be 21/2 times the cost of mowing service, according to Brophy. "For example, near the Chicago area, contractors are getting \$35 to mow a lawn and \$100 to aerate it because of the additional benefits of aeration," he said. Nicole Wisniewski

QUICK TIPS

Breaking Up

While soil plugs pulled through aeration can be beneficial as they break apart on the turf and spread nutrients to the soil, some customers don't like the look of soil plugs on their lawns. Those customers will request that plugs be broken up to complete their aeration service. "Customers with pools who don't want soil plugs tracked into the pool typically ask for this additional service," stated Bob Brophy, director of the lawn products division, Turfco Manufacturing, Minneapolis, Minn.

According to Brophy, there are three ways contractors can break up soil plugs.

Keystone mat - The least expensive way to break up soil plugs is to let them dry out and then pass over the lawn with a mower equipped with a keystone mat on the back, Brophy said.

Mower - A mower can be used to break up soil plugs as well. But the lawn should be mowed ½-inch lower than normal when this is done, Brophy said. "Another option is you can scalp the lawn ahead of time by mowing it low, aerate and then mow over the area again on the same mower setting," Brophy offered.

Verticut or dethatcher - The most expensive way to break up soil plugs is by using a verticut or dethatching machine with vertical knives to break up the cores. Still, the plugs should be dry when this is done or they will gum up the machine.

While breaking up the soil plugs completes the aeration service for some customers, Brophy suggested contractors charge extra for this service. "The cost of the service should be raised 50 percent for breaking up plugs of soil," Brophy said. "If you charge \$50 to aerate, you should charge \$75 to aerate and break up the soil plugs. This will make up for the extra visit to the property and manhours spent to take care of the soil plugs." - Nicole Wisniewski





"Somehow he knew everything" says awed crew "it was uncanny."



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

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<u>Nursery Market Report</u>

FOR LATE SUMMER SIZZLE

Dahlias Dazzle

Dahlia is a genus of 27 species of herbaceous, tuberous perennials with countless forms in bright colors. 'Cezanne' is canary yellow, and scarlet 'Dahlietta Anna' is compact. Photos: GroLink

Specialties (right), Ball

Horticultural Co. (inset)

Offering long-lasting blooms and brilliant colors, dahlias add drama to a landscape from early summer until frost.

Extensive hybridization has led to countless forms. Heights range from 8 inches to 7 feet, flower sizes are 2 to 12 inches and colors cover the rainbow.

DAHLIA CHOICES. Ball Floraplant offers three new colors in its 'Dahlietta' series. Each plant is crowned with double flowers. 'Dahlietta Mandy's' petals show a contrast of purple with a small, white, tubular floret in the middle and a yellow center in each bloom. 'Mandy' is naturally compact with mildew-sensitive, dark green leaves. 'Dahlietta Anna' features a new scarlet color, and 'Dahlietta Susanne' has pale pink blooms that deepen in color when light intensity increases. Both have compact growth habits.

GroLink Specialties offers 13 choices in its Gallery series and is developing several new ones. Bicolor choices from the series include 'Art Deco,' which is orange with a deep red heart and 4-inch flowers, and grows to 12 inches.

Other options in the series are named after famous artists. 'Cézanne' is canary yellow with 3-inch flowers and grows to 10 inches. 'Salvador' is light pink with a darker heart, medium pink striped petals, 41/2-inch flowers and grows to 12 inches. 'Vincent' is orange with a darker heart, 3-inch flowers and grows to 10 inches.

PLANTING POINTERS. Follow this advice from North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Raleigh, N.C.

- · Plant in warm, well-drained soils in spring.
- · Select a location that receives at least six hours of
- Incorporate 2 to 4 inches of compost, pine bark or manure and 2 to 4 pounds of 8-8-8 or 10-10-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet before planting.

· Dig a hole 8 to 10 inches deep and wide enough to fit tubers. Refill to a depth of 6 inches. Set the root on its side with eyes facing upward. Cover with 2 to 3 inches of soil and gradually fill in around plants until the surface is level.

DAHLIA CARE. After plants are established, a deep waterwill increase the chance of rotweek, wetting the soil to a

pounds of 5-10-10 or 10-10-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet in July. A second application may be needed on sandy soil or during rainy seasons.

Dahlias' tuberous roots produce multiple shoots. While shoots can be left to grow, thinning produces higher quality flowers. Leave one to four of the strongest shoots.

When plants are about a foot tall and the chosen stalks have grown three or four sets of leaves, pinch out the terminal shoot to encourage branching. This forces lateral shoots at each leaf node to grow and makes plants bushier.

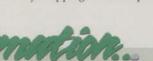
Disbudding increases flower size. When the three buds that form at the end of each branch reach the size of small peas, remove the two side buds. Small-flowering types should not be disbudded.

Dahlias that reach more than 3 feet tall can topple in the wind. Placing a stake in the hole at planting time provides support without damaging tubers.

PESTS AND DISEASES. The most common pests are aphids, spider mites, leafhoppers, thrips and European corn borer. Slugs, snails and earwigs are best controlled by trapping or hand picking. Likely disease problems

include tuber rots, ring spot, vascular wilts, mosaic virus, powdery mildew and botrytis blight. Problems can be reduced by following recommended cultural practices and providing good air circulation. - Ali Cybulski

ing once or twice a week is necessary during warm, dry weather. Watering too early ting tubers. In drought conditions, soak growing plants with at least 1 inch of water each depth of 1 foot. Use a water-soluble fertilizer monthly, or apply 2 to 3



...on specific dahlia cultivars, visit the American Dahlia Society Web site:

www.dahlia.org

For More



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<u>In Minor's League</u>

My insurance is getting out of hand. Can you give

me some advice on reducing these costs?

I will address this question from two angles. One involves the management of your carrier or broker relationship. The other addresses the management of your people in regards to developing a safe workplace.

First, let's talk about getting the best prices for insurance, regardless of your safety record. Most important is the obvious – make sure you are shopping prices from broker to broker, and make sure they get a number of quotes from the insurance carriers they represent. I do not subscribe to changing brokers each year, but shopping prices occasionally is important.

Do not assume that your regular broker can always get the best price for you. Some have more carriers at their disposal as well as more leverage with their carriers than others might have. Also, check to make sure that the broker gets a quote from a carrier who has knowledge of the industry and will understand your needs and risks. Personally, I only changed brokers once in 20 years, but it was a good change and I took advantage of the knowledge my new broker could offer.

Second, and probably most important, is to evaluate the reasons why your premiums are going up. Determine whether your increase is just industry price increases or whether your loss ratio is such that a carrier perceives you as high risk.

Your experience modifier is a good indicator of the latter. If your modifier is on the rise, the frequency and/or severity of your claims is probably too high to justify the risk of writing your business or getting competitive pricing. Should that be the case, your only option is to begin improving your safety record to ensure reduce claims in the future.

The financial benefits of reducing accidents can be significant, but how is this done? The most important aspect is the development of a written safety program.

Awareness in your company about the value of a safe workplace is key. You and your managers must be committed. If your people know you view safety as a priority they, too, will make it theirs.

Other ideas include:

- Develop a safety manual and require employees and hew hires to learn it. Considering giving tests on the information it covers.
- Investigate the accident histories of new employees through some of the services available.
- Do pre-employment drug testing, and consider random drug testing and post-accident drug testing. Make sure you have written policies and procedures that have been reviewed by a good labor attorney.
- Include training for the proper use of equipment, drivers training and the proper use of safety
 equipment. Weekly training meetings led by your
 foreman or a safety manager will keep the topic in
 front of your employees regularly.
- Post signs to motivate your staff about the importance of a safe workplace.

There are also many creative incentive programs being done around the country. Ask your peers what they are doing. I had a lot of luck paying a monthly bonus to our field staff for accident-free months. Our managers were also on annual incentive programs that were clearly affected if our insurance premiums were too high.

Last, there are some very good publications to help you create and manage an excellent safety program. The Associated Landscape Contractors of America, in conjunction with CNA Insurance, has created a management safety resource manual, a supervisor's safety handbook, and various training videos to mention a few. Take advantage of these resources, and remember a little investment of time can reap huge savings.



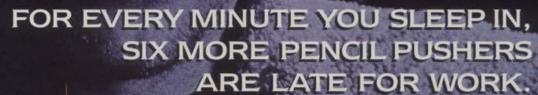


David Minor was founder and former president of Minor's Landscape Services, a \$12-million company in Fort Worth, Texas, that he sold to TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1998.

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 fax them to Lawn & Landscape at 216/961-0364 or e-mail them to bwest@lawnandlandscape.com.



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<u>Minding Your</u> Stepping **Up Service**

Like many savvy, smaller companies staking a claim in the industry, NatureWorks Landscape Services, Walpole, Mass., knows one of the secrets to success is superior customer service. Since the company's incorporation in 1995, Matthew Gramer, president, has adhered to this principle by carefully catering to the every need of NatureWorks' high-end residential clients. Gramer built his company - which currently brings in about \$1 million in annual revenue - around the idea that residential customers are looking for more than just some random guy with a lawn mower to cut their grass.

Gramer's intent has been to set NatureWorks apart from the competition by concentrating on customer service. "We've designed the business around the type of client who values what we provide," he said, noting that his customers pay a premium to have someone accessible during the day or to have short-notice requests accommodated, for example.

Similarly, Arlington Lawncare and Landscape, Erie, Pa., has found success by providing "the little extras" its competitors overlook, according to Richard Arlington III, president. "If the neighborhood kid can do the same job, they're not going to hire us," he pointed out.

Pleasing a customer is not something that many contractors know how to do well, according to Gramer. "A lot of companies are out there mowing the lawn but don't really understand the business of mowing the lawn," he observed. "They don't understand clients' needs."

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER. The key to learning

about client needs is constant feedback, Gramer advised, adding that his company includes a response card in every invoice "to get quick feedback on every little job we do," he said.

Gramer also recommended sending out a welldesigned survey. In particular, ask customers precisely what services they value, what they can do without, what their overall expectations are, and get a sense of how much they are willing to pay for premium services, he suggested.

Similarly, to get to know its customers, Arlington sends out surveys every few months, to gauge customer satisfaction with issues such as bed maintenance, cleanups, employee courtesy and overall service quality. "Find out exactly what the customer wants and what they expect," Arlington said.

SERVICE SECRETS. There are a few obvious places to start when refining a customer service approach, according to Gramer and Arlington. For one, customers like an immediate response. "When that call comes in, how quickly you can tend to it is very important," said Gramer, who even has a small crew devoted to landscape emergencies, such as replacing a dead shrub or filling a last minute order for 20 flats of flowers.

Customers also appreciate speaking with a person on the phone. "Too many companies rely on voicemail and that's garbage," Arlington said. "If you're going to provide good customer service, you need to have someone answering the phone."

Gramer added that having employees who have the ability to immediately access scheduling or billing information is essential.

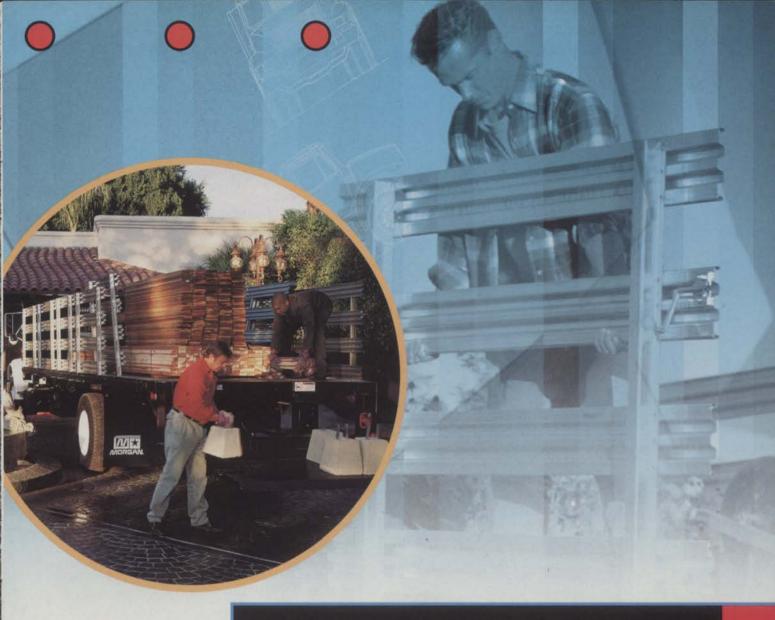
To stay on track financially, NatureWorks has carefully planned its customer service strategies to utilize resources responsibly throughout its stages of growth, Gramer said. Currently, the company is executing about 40 percent of its customer service ideas, and in the future, would like to start a newsletter, an interactive Web site and referral or prepayment incentives tailored to its upscale customer base, such as a subscription to Boston magazine or a bottle of wine, according to Gramer.

Despite the additional expense, NatureWorks' high level of customer service has proven worthwhile and done wonders for the company's referral business. "We want to grow organically through word-of-mouth. We want to be working at the home next door to the one we're working at now," Gramer said, noting that thanks to these referrals, his business has grown 30 to 40 percent annually the past several years. - Cynthia Greenleaf

We want to know what smaller contractors are thinking. Send your comments and ideas for future "Mind Your Business" topics to cgreenleaf@ lawnandlandscape.com

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Cover Story



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EDITOR'S NOTE: When a magazine shows up on your desk with a real person on the cover, you know you're looking at Lawn & Landscape. Since Jerry Faulring looked out at the industry from the first cover profile of ALA / Lawn & Landscape Maintenance in 1988, 99 other profiles followed. In fact, only one company has ever been featured on our cover twice — do you know who it is?

In recognition of hitting the century mark, we thought it was fitting that we revisit these 99 companies and explore many of the thoughts, philosophies, programs and strategies they used to propel them to success. So, thank you to all of these companies for opening their doors to us (and thank you to Environmental Care for opening its doors to us twice, July 1992 and December 1997). – Bob West

ON BIG JOBS...

"On the large scale you have to know how a job should progress." – Andy Wright, Muellermist Lawn Sprinkler Systems, April 1992

"We were also challenged (during the growth years) because we had to go back and try to develop processes for things we used to do by the seat of our pants, such as handling out-of-town installations." — Cindy Peterson, McCaren Designs, Jan. 1998



ON COMMERCIAL WORK...

The commercial work helped balance the company's workload in the off-season since residential jobs tend to be more cyclical. – Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping, June 1994

"Commercial property managers may be willing to blame us for a problem to save themselves, so it's important to keep a paper trail of communication and make sure we know who the decision maker is." – Steve Anderson, Anderson Lawn Care, April 1997

ON COMPETITION...

"The more you do to help your competitors be good contractors, the stronger a market you build for everybody." – Rod Bailey, Evergreen Services, June 1991

"Sometimes we even work for the smaller companies. In exchange for the work, we tell them we won't solicit the customer." – Todd Kennedy, Kennedy Nursery, July 1995

ON CUSTOMER SERVICE...

"You have to provide a service which stands out. It might cut your profits momentarily, but in the long run, it spells success." – Sam Russo, Sam S. Russo Lawn Maintenance, Jan. 1989

Each crew is run by a foreman who is personally introduced to the customers on his route before the season begins. – Dan Pellegrino, J&D Landscape, March 1989

"Make sure what you do is right, and if you don't have the knowledge, find somebody who does." – Bob Kapp, Kapp's Green "Improving the quality of service is the No. 1 objective to make more profit." – Tom Rutherford, TruGreen-ChemLawn, June 1992

When L&L bids on a new job, the customer service representative asks the client what he or she didn't like about the previous company. – L&L Landscape, March 1995

"A customer will jump around within three years if you haven't built a personal connection with him or her." – David Dickson, Swingle Tree & Landscape Care, June 1995

"When we do an application we make sure we talk to that customer before we leave. If they aren't home, we leave an invoice and a note reminding them that if they have any questions they can call us." – Joe Duncan, Ever-Green Turf & Landscape, May 1999

ON EDUCATION...

"If they're not trained, then they're really just weed pullers." – Jim Gibbons, The Mirage, May 1993

"If you're involved in growing a business, associations are a critical avenue for learning. Small businesses tend to think, 'I won't participate while I'm small.' In reality, that the best time for them to learn." – Landon Reeve, Chapel Valley Landscape, Sept. 1994

"I'd like to see more requirements for training by the state. It would improve the quality of the applications." – Sam Farison, Farison Lawn Care, April 1995

"If we're going to have enough growth to provide opportunities for the people in our company, then we managers have to educate ourselves." – Don Jarratt, Ruppert Landscape, May 1995

"The employees pay for the certification

them, gives them a bonus and may give them a raise." - Tom Pruett, LanArc, Aug. 1998

"We've received some good information from people who have 'been there, done that.' Why should we start from ground zero when we don't have to?" – Steve Bednarz, Tovar's Landscape Contractors, March 2000

ON EMPLOYEES...

"We're leaning toward people without previous experience. We're looking for people with good characteristics and who seem responsible so we can train them our way." – Gerry Chauvin, Green Thumb Enterprises, April 1990

Enthusiasm and commitment is reflected by awards adorning the desks and walls of employees. They read "Customer service representative of the month," or "Foreman of the year." – Four Seasons Landscape & Maintenance, Aug. 1990

"Someone may say, 'I want to make more money, how do I do that?' Tell them exactly how they can do that." – Rich Akerman, Northwest Landscape Industries, Oct. 1990

"One important factor for the success of the company was that the employees would be treated as I would want to be treated myself." – Charles Glossop, Green Masters Industries, July 1991

"I'll spend an hour and a half with a first interview, and if I have a good feeling about that person, I will bring him or her back for a second or third time and invite key staff to meet the person." – Rick Christensen, Teufel Nursery, Sept. 1996

"A lot of our competitors view labor as a (continued on page 42) RESTRICTE CHICA

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Cover Story

(continued from page 39)

seasonal expense. That would allow us to capitalize financially, but then you get in a vicious cycle with a soft employee base." – Joe Motz, The Motz Group, Aug. 1997

McGilvray cited three principles that keep good employees around: consistency, respect and an equitable bonus program. – Scott McGilvray, Jensen, May 1998

"Like marketing, you don't just decide to [recruit] one year and then look for that to be the hallmark year that you see the return. You have to invest in it." – Bill Killmer,

return. You have to invest in it." – I Lifescapes, June 1998

MAINTENANCE

THE QUALITY DIFFERENCE

THE QUALITY DIFFE

t." – Bill Killmer,

"That was a key point in our development, when we realized we were spending more time trying to figure out what was the best mower. We should have been spending a lot

of time looking at people issues and trying to improve our hiring and recruiting efforts." – Don Smith, The Morrell Group, Dec. 1999

ON EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES...

"When times are good, you buy a lot of equipment, you invest a lot of money, you get overextended and you have a few people go belly up on you and file for bankruptcy. It could very easily have cost us our business." – John Byrne, Byrne Brothers Landscaping, Jan. 1994

Kujawa has noticed an anomaly concerning contractors' attitudes: "They sell their services one way and buy another. Many sell on value, but they buy on price." – Ron Kujawa, Kujawa Enterprises, July 1996

"One advantage to keeping your fleet indoors is having the ability to ready it much more quickly. Plus, we don't have the depreciation from vandalism, the weather or theft."

– Mike Rorie, Groundmasters, Dec. 1998

"Everyone is struggling to find good people, so if a machine is 10 percent more productive than what a contractor is currently using, the operator of that machine can earn 10 percent more money for the company each day." – Ron Weingartz, Weingartz Supply, July 1999

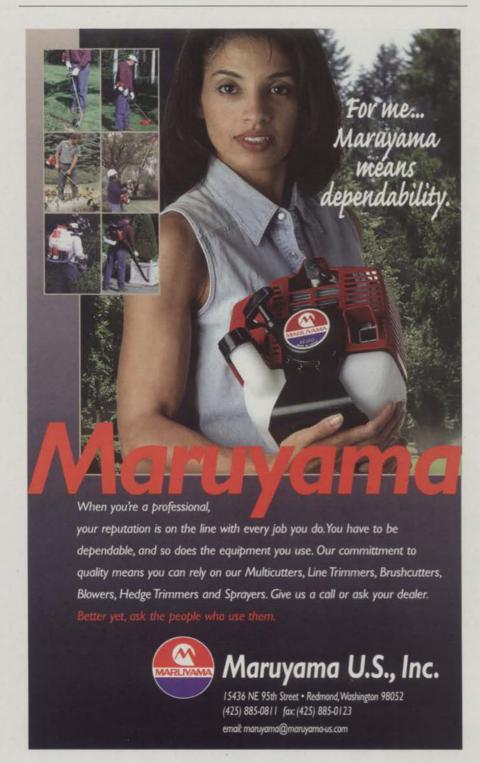
"Without our vendors providing us with flexible terms, our cash position could have been much worse. We tried to single source and, in return, they gave us flexible terms." – Ed Schatz, Austin Outdoors, April 2000

ON FRANCHISING...

"The beauty of the franchising concept is ... it allows customers to maintain personal contact with the company owner, a setup that, if managed correctly, helps the company convey the personality of a mom-and-pop business intertwined with the professionalism of a large corporation." – Tom Oyler, U.S. Lawns, Aug. 1994

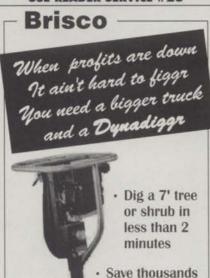
ON GETTING BETTER...

"We're not trying to reinvent the wheel. It's the little changes over time that reap big benefits. And we talk about that constantly. If we did just this one thing, and did it day in and day (continued on page 44)









in labor and

· Save money,

time and

increase

productivity

equipment

Cover Story
(continued from page 42)

out, look at what the end result would be." – Jon Cundiff, Turf's Up Lawn Service, Feb. 1998

"Our success comes from ownership's willingness to let the organization learn from its mistakes so people know that as long as they're putting forth the effort with good common sense, when a mistake does occur, they'll get the opportunity to correct it."

– Kevin Killmer, The Groundskeeper, April 1998

ON GETTING STARTED...

Find a good lawyer, accountant and banker first, and then worry about what services you'll offer. – ProLawn ProScape, March 1990

"If I had it to do over again, I would have majored in business and minored in horticulture." – Melanie Reinhold Sawka, Reinhold & Vidosh, May 1990

"Develop a sales strategy: How you are going to sell your product and how you are going to promote your business. You have to convince potential customers they really need you." – Cynthia Harper, Color Burst, Sept. 1990

"The most important part of our success has been the

partnering approach we've taken with landscape contractors. We approach them and say, 'Let us do one project with you and earn the right to be a credible outsourcing function for you.'" – Scott Fay, Treasure Coast Irrigation, April 1999

"We started between 5 a.m. and 5:30 a.m. every morning. If we didn't have jobs that morning we handed out flyers. We never took a slow day off. If we didn't have work, we went out and created work and leads." – Pieter Rossi, BP Landscapes, Feb. 2000

"The most important decision I ever made in this business was to have a business plan and to stick to that plan as best I could." - Lance Schelhammer, Grass-Roots, May 2000.

ON GROWTH...

"Growing is fine if control and profits are what you use as your formula to guide your growth." – Ben Snyder, Arrowhead Landscaping and Maintenance, May 1989 "As I moved out of operating an aerator and put others in my place, I had to make sure the quality I expected was still there. That's been the biggest challenge." – Greg Schreiner, Aeration Consultants, Sept. 1989

He'd reach [his growth goal] if he gave into the tremendous demand for his services, but that would defeat the purpose of his company's creativeness. — Bob Barnes, Creative Annuals, October 1989.

"The best advice I can give is to be conservative. Don't get carried away with growth and debt." – David Minor, Minor's Landscape Services, June 1990

Erbaugh and Wilkinson agree the top

priority in moving into a new market is a capable, trustworthy branch manager.

- Lawnmark, April 1991

"Somebody once said that when companies move from the idea that more is better to better is more, then they're moving somewhere." – Steve Coffey, Scapes, March 1992

"One of the things that allowed us to grow is to take qualified people and make their span of control larger so they can control more work."

– Bruce Wilson, Environmental Care, July 1992

"We learned that it's very difficult to be profitable when you're not growing. Expenses keep on growing faster than sales." – Ed McGuire, The Lawn Co., Feb. 1997

"Not having a better balance of long-term and short-term funding was the most significant growth obstacle we encountered." – Mike Scian, Scian's Landscaping, Sept. 1999

ON MANAGEMENT...

"The best thing I can do is replace myself with these people [by promoting from within] and give them the opportunity to do better and do more." – Dan Skinner, Landscape Services, Feb. 1993

"When you look at your business as providing for the futures of [your employees'] families vs. just your own, then you treat it different." - Lebo Newman, Redwood Landscaping, July 1993

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Cover Story

pany can run without me." - Skip Gerber, Gerber Landscape Solutions, Jan. 1995

[The consultant] first met with Stephen and Chris to get them to focus totally on the company's direction and to commit to that direction. "It sounds pretty simple, but it's amazing how that doesn't happen with a lot of companies." – Chris Hillenmeyer, Hillenmeyer Nurseries, May 1996

"Everyone wants things to change for the better, on one hand. On the other hand, they are more comfortable with everything remaining the same." – Rick Winnestaffer, WinnScapes, July 2000

ON MANAGING CASH...

"Debt is too big of a risk, so we pay cash every time." In order to do this, GroGreen offers an 8 percent discount for customers who prepay for an upcoming year's service.

– Gary LaScalea, GroGreen, Sept. 1998

ON MARKETING...

Most of [Connelly Landscaping's] new accounts are based on referrals, and new prospects are also culled from their extensive exposure at home and flower shows. – Connelly Landscaping, Aug. 1992

"I believe a good marketing campaign builds upon itself. Most sales are made on the seventh challenge but most salespeople stop trying around the third call." – Tom Lied, Lied's Nursery Co., April 1994

"Big corporations are going through radical changes in their buying habits – cutting the number of suppliers, expecting more from those they keep. That translates into a whole new philosophy of consumer buying." – Doug Cowan, Davey Tree, May 1994

Simple things such as cleaning trucks every day and insisting on clean uniforms every day made a big difference. – Lawn Master, Feb. 1996

"Telemarketing is one of the more successful and easier ways of getting customers. It's controllable like a water faucet and it's predictable." – Roger Albrecht, All Green Corp., Aug. 1996

"We decided we needed more of an identity to differentiate ourselves from the competition." – Bruce Wilson, Environmental Care, Dec. 1997

"Once we have trained people in place and we know we can deliver quality, then we push those services." – Dennis Dougherty, Cagwin & Dorward, March 1999



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"We target young couples who are transferred to the area. They are both working and they want their lawn taken care of right away." – Dick Bare, Arbor-Nomics, Aug. 1999

"I asked my 16-year-old nephew to draw me a picture of a happy dog. We make sure that logo is prominently displayed on everything. People know that dog, and they know us."—Jim Campanella, The Lawn Dawg, June 2000

ON PEST MANAGEMENT...

"We don't want to use any pesticides unless doing so is necessary." – Russ Frith, Lawn Doctor, March 1993

"We moved from a very customized to a program-oriented service." – Chris Senske, Senske Lawn & Tree Care, April 1996.

"The scout does not regularly work on the specific job site they are scouting." – Don Moore, Turf Masters, June 1997

ON PLANNING...

With involvement from [design, build

and maintain] at the conceptual level, problems and opportunities can be identified and addressed, eliminating the need to backtrack at a later stage. – Smallwood Design Group, April 1993

"Every year we meet as a company and we tear the company down and go over every department." – Jon Ewing, Landtrends, Sept. 1997

"We had a pretty thorough business plan. I would encourage any new business to ... outline their goals for the business and a

reach them." – Tom Fochtman, CoCal Landscape, Feb. 1999.



method to

ON PRICING...

themselves in pricing categories. We make a presentation offering three different levels of service." – Jerry Faulring, Hydro Lawn, Nov. 1988

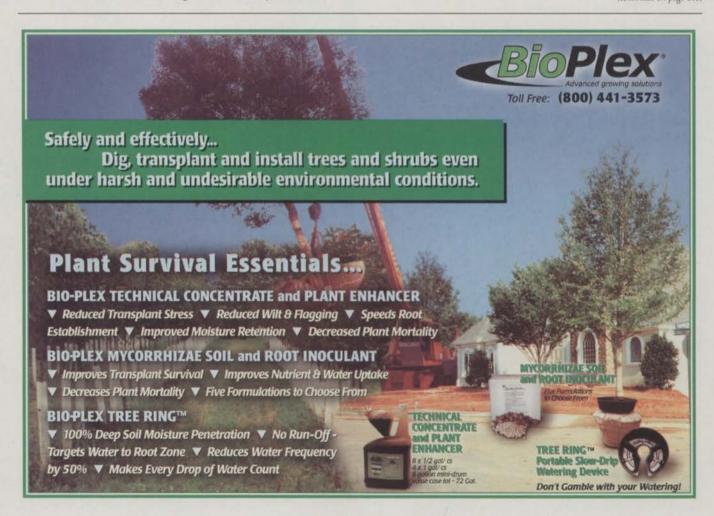
"We offer a prorated price over an eight-month period, which is better for us because we can collect that April through

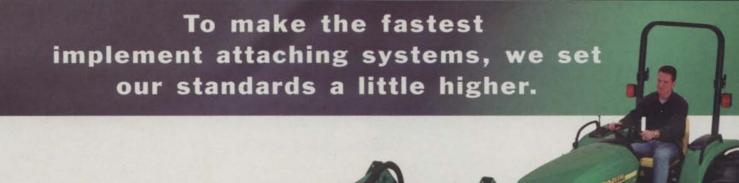
November. Then we can bill just for the services that we perform." – Dave Fuller, Fullcare, July 1989

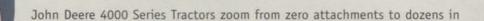
"Quality wins in the end the majority of the time, but you always have those clients who will go for better prices." – Bill Davids, Clarence Davids & Co., May 1991

His most decisive move was to restructure the company's existing accounts toward a pre-

(continued on page 105)







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USE READER SERVICE #93



Using plant growth regulators can reduce landscape contractors' time spent mowing and collecting grass clippings on properties.

The largest turf area Lawnscape Systems has applied a plant growth regulator (PGR) on was Leisure Village, a retirement community in Camarillo, Calif.

The company used a turfgrass growth regulator on all 186 acres of the property for more than one year, according to Richard Wills, vice president of the Ontario, Calif.-based company.

"The product cut the turf's growth rate in half for the entire year," Wills said. "We reduced their clipping yield and dump costs by almost 60 percent. We cut the wear and tear on their equipment – their gas, oil and maintenance dropped a little more than 50 percent – and they were able to reduce their water consumption by about 21 percent."

While all these numbers, Wills explained, were impressive on their own, the real savings were in manpower. "This PGR reduced the need for mowing crews by 26 weeks," Wills said. "Their entire mowing staff had an extra 26 weeks to spend on other maintenance improvements around the property."

The experiment was an overwhelming success, except for an odor issue that existed with the PGR he used, Wills said. "The product had an odor at that time and many people who lived in the retirement community found it offensive, so for a short period of time the applications were stopped until a solution could be found," he explained. "Now that new, odor-free products are on the market, there is a renewed interest in restarting the use of a turf growth regulator on the property."

Just as Wills' experience proved, PGRs are considered management tools for landscape contractors because of their ability to reduce mowing and clippings and save contractors time and labor, according to Jim Davis, northern region manager, Aventis Environmental Science, Montvale, N.J.

(continued on page 50)

As plant growth regulator use becomes more widespread, contractors need to understand what types of products are on the market and how they can be used correctly as beneficial management tools.

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PGRs

(continued from page 48)

"From the chemical standpoint, this is the fastest growing segment in the turf industry," Davis said. "In the last decade, the PGR market has grown four to five times in size from single digit millions to approximately \$25 million."

As PGRs become more widespread in the landscape industry, lawn care company owners must understand the product's purpose, learn about the different types of PGRs on the market and train their employees how to use PGRs properly in the landscape.

THE PURPOSE OF PGRs. Plant growth regulators impact the growth cycle of plants. "Generally, people think of growth retardant activity in connection with PGRs," pointed out Laylah VanBibber, advertising manager, PBI Gordon, Kansas City, Mo. "But there are (continued on page 52)

- · Do make sure plants to be treated are in optimum condition.
- Don't apply PGRs to grass that shows signs of insect infestation or disease. Insect and disease damage will be more obvious in PGR-treated turf.
- Don't apply PGRs to grass in areas subject to concentrated traffic from people, animals or vehicles. The only defense grass has against traffic wear is to grow.
- Don't apply PGRs on scalped grass, or on ornamentals that do not have sufficient leaf tissue for absorption.
- Don't waste your PGR treatment on dormant plants; wait until green-up is complete.
- Do delay initial spring PGR applications in mixed species turf to make sure the slowest recovering species have greened up sufficiently to be sprayed.
- Do make weed control applications prior to or with PGR treatments.
- Do mow grass to be treated with a PGR at a summer mowing setting so that there remains sufficient green and foliage to mask aging grass blades and thatch.
- Do remove strewn grass clippings or tree leaves before applying a PGR to assure contact with grass foliage.
- Do apply PGRs at least eight hours before irrigation or rain is expected.
- · Do read all label directions prior to application.
- Do apply PGRs evenly, skips will result in an uneven appearance; overlaps may cause discoloration.
- Don't make your PGR application when there are high winds that could cause the spray pattern to be uneven.
- · Don't allow a plugged spray tip to create coverage gaps.
- Don't mow turf for at least three days after applying PGRs; mowing will remove PGRs that have not fully translocated.
- Do monitor and adjust irrigation. PGR treated plants require less water during the suppression period; too much water may damage treated plants. – PBI Gordon

PGR Application Dos & Don'ts

The best way to make an impression is not to make one at all.



USE READER SERVICE #125

(continued from page 50)

also growth regulator products used in nursery and floral production that enhance the growth cycle of plants. In the landscape, PGRs are generally used to decrease plant growth, including turfgrass growth regulators that minimize mowing requirements, clippings or eliminate seed heads and orna-

mental growth regulators that reduce trimming labor or clean-up requirements, increase or decrease bloom or decrease fruit-set on shrubs, ground covers or trees."

There are several different types of PGRs, VanBibber explained, and a product's mode of action varies based on the chemistry used to produce it. "Some PGRs are weaker versions of weed control products," VanBibber said. "The herbicidal activity has been lightened so that the plant is just stunted instead of killed. Other types of PGRs interfere with the growth and/or reproductive cycle of the plant. And some PGRs inhibit certain plant hormones, creating smaller, miniature plants."

PGR products that slow the growth of trees and shrubs have limited use in the residential landscape, said Dennis Shepard, research director, Novartis, Overland Park, Kan. "However, the key use of PGRs in the landscape is on turfgrass," he noted.

PGRs for turfgrass developed prior to the 1980s slow turf growth by slowing cell division, according to Shepard. "These products are taken up by the foliage and do a good job of inhibiting seed head production," Shepard said. "PGRs developed in the 1980s slow turf growth by slowing the production of gibberellic acid (GA), a plant hormone that aids cell elongation. These products are taken up by the roots and must be watered into the turf.

"Newer PGRs registered in the mid-1990s slow turf growth by slowing the production of GA1, the primary form of GA in plants that affects cell elongation, while allowing the other forms of plant GA to carry on with their respective plant processes," Shepard continued. "Other newer PGRs slow turf growth by enhancing ethylene production."

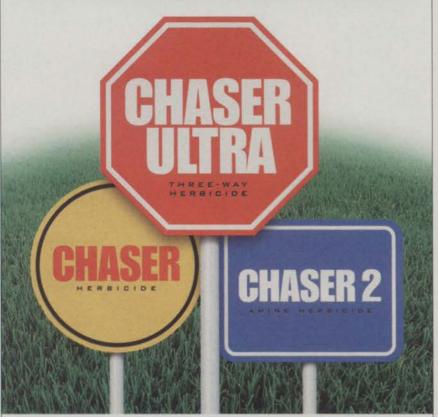
While PGRs affect plants' growth cycles, their long-term use has not been detrimental to plant health, according to Rich Hanrahan, senior technical development manager for the Chipco professional products division of Aventis Environmental Science. "In fact, recent research indicates that the PGR use actually might improve plant vigor and health."

However, VanBibber said long-term effects on plants depend on the PGR and how it is used. "Some PGRs cannot be used in back-to-back applications," she explained. "Other PGRs actually benefit root growth as a result of redirecting energy normally used for top growth. Turfgrasses treated with another type of PGR experience a rebound effect when the growth regulation wears off during which the turf becomes intensely green and increases shoots growing from the base of the stem of the plant."

When applied at label rate, Shepard said the foliar growth of a PGR-treated plant slows

(continued on page 54)

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PGRs

(continued from page 52)

approximately 50 percent for up to four weeks. During this time, the turf is still carrying on photosynthesis and other growth and development processes, while energy is redirected to lateral and below-ground stems and roots. Change promotes growth, so turf will become denser and more tolerant to wear when PGRs are used long term, Shepard pointed out. "The turf also becomes a darker green because chlorophyll is more concentrated," he said.

PGR USE IN LANDSCAPES. Lawn care operators are using PGRs in a few different ways. Wills applies regulators on a daily basis to many sites to prevent trees from fruiting and to slow down shrub growth. Not too long ago, this was the primary use for PGRs, Wills said.

Today, the most common use of PGRs is for turfgrass growth reduction to decrease mowing and clippings during peak growth seasons – April to June and September to October, VanBibber pointed out. When used on turf, PGRs are beneficial to landscape contractors, Davis said, but this depends on the type of job the contractor does. "If contractors are getting paid by the number of times they mow, the last thing they want to do is use a PGR," he said. "Some contractors, however, have a contract to maintain a property and they will spend money on a PGR to make money saving time on one area of a property and taking care of another."

Scott Hall, president, Classic Landscape, Frederick, Md., gets paid to mow his clients' properties every week, but he still uses a PGR to control turf.

"Iam not interested in reducing our mowing; our clients pay to see us do the job every week," Hall said. "What interests me is reducing our mowing problems. Wet weather, excessive top growth and clipping problems, which often occur around May or September, can handicap the schedule and interfere with herbicide applications, bedding installations, pruning, trimming and other tasks."

PGRs are considered

management tools for

landscape contractors

because of their ability to

reduce turf mowing and

clippings and save contrac-

tors time and labor.

Other contractors, who still may not sell PGR applications, use PGRs to decrease time spent on a job so they can expand services beyond mowing without having to hire additional employees, VanBibber remarked.

"A straight lawn care company might sell PGRs as ways to control costs, reduce manpower needs, save water or simply to enhance the appearance of properties," Wills

(continued on page 56)





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PGRs

(continued from page 54)

added. "A landscape maintenance company may view PGR use as an internal cost that increases staff productivity, reduces dump fees and equipment costs and acts as a customer retention tool."

Most contractors do not charge clients for PGR applications.

"We may or may not mention the PGR to the client, but we don't charge for it or reduce mowings," Hall said. "PGRs increase our efficiency in getting the job done right."

So for contractors who spend anywhere from \$20 to \$80 per acre on a PGR, depending on the type of product used, how are their costs warranted? Davis said seeing this cost justification might be easier for a fullservice maintenance contractor than a contractor who strictly mows lawns. "If you're spending \$50 or \$80 an acre and you are maintaining a residential facility on a contract, you may absorb the cost or put it in the contract," Davis said. "If maintaining the facility on the contract was \$100,000 last year, that cost certainly won't come under \$100,000 this year. Using a PGR on the property will help you lower your costs. So, if you had \$50,000 in labor costs, now it will be cut to \$30,000 and you only spent \$5,000 on the PGR. Contractors are using this product to save costs, and, therefore, make money."

COST CONCERNS. As Davis mentioned, \$20 to \$80 per acre is a wide cost range for PGRs. The reason for this considerable gap is that "older compounds might be 25 percent of the cost of newer compoundS," he said. "But the residual might be to spray every week vs. four or five weeks. So, some products are more expensive, but those are the ones that tend to have a longer residual."

Because of the wide variety of products on the market, Davis said evaluating the length of control in relation to cost per thousand is important when lawn care operators are evaluating the cost of PGRs. "Don't look at the cost per thousand alone, look at the cost per day of control," he said. "This will give you the true cost of the product. If you buy a cheaper product that has to be sprayed weekly, you are going to have to buy more of that product to do the same job as a newer product that only has to be sprayed every four weeks."

"Turfgrass PGRs have been a little expensive in the past," added Wills, who has used PGRs in one form or another for almost 15 years, "but costs are coming down."

This is why PGR history and product types are important for contractors to research, Davis said.

For example, early turfgrass regulators caused yellowing turf and made turf more susceptible to insect and disease problems, Wills said.

Older compounds typically stressed the plant by stunting its growth. "Older products thinned the plant," Davis explained. (continued on page 111)



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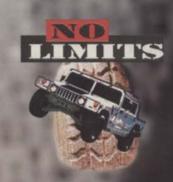
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Ground Covers

by Nicole Wisniewski

Ornamental
ground
covers are
lowmaintenance
turf
alternatives
that
disguise soil
with color
and texture.

There are various ways to cover soil and add dimension to a landscape, whether doing so by using turf, gravel, hardscapes, mulch or landscape plantings. However, making sure vibrant and layered color is seen throughout the seasons is becoming more of a trend in landscape design, pointed out Chris Miracle, landscape architect, LaRosa Landscape, Mequon, Wis. This means traditional ground covers aren't always the solution for a majority of the landscape.

Because of this trend, low, dense-growing ornamental ground covers are becoming more popular. They provide an interesting landscape texture and help contractors solve functional challenges on properties, such as excessively shady areas, steep slopes and unusually small sites. The right ground cover can even satisfy a client's need for a low-maintenance landscape.

"From a design standpoint, ground covers are nice alternatives to turf or excessively mulched areas," Miracle said. "While ground covers require a fair amount of nurturing in the first one or two years after planting, they are low maintenance in the long run and work well under trees or as overplantings for bulbs. They also provide a fair amount of weed control."

After a few years of adequate growth, however, the spreading nature of some ground covers can be considered invasive. Certain ground covers also can require perfect site conditions, ongoing fertility and winter protection to grow, which means they aren't ideal for some clients. **PLANT PICKS.** Many people refer to ground covers as a type of plant, but by definition a ground cover is

actually the use of a particular plant, pointed out Anthony Woodyard, director of academic development, Horticopia, Purcellville, Va. "Most any plant, depending on how it grows, can be used as a ground cover," Woodyard said. "For example, in most contexts, I wouldn't classify a daylily as a ground cover, but used en masse it can work very effectively."

Ground covers with rhizomatous or stoloniferous qualities, meaning their roots spread and propogate quickly, are useful in areas where soil is compact and plants won't grow, Woodyard said.

Ground covers can be used in landscapes solely for aesthetic reasons, such as adding layers, color and texture to a design. "Ground covers add a living floor to an outdoor room," explained Kurt Kluznik, president, Yardmaster, Painesville, Ohio. "Many bloom, such as periwinkle (evergreen ground cover plants with blue flowers), Ajuga (a plant that has square stems and blue, white or rose flowers), sweet woodruff (a low-growing perennial herb with small, white flowers), Liriope (evergreen perennial ground covers with grass-like leaves and spikes of white or lilac-blue flowers) and fragrant honeysuckle. Many ground covers have attractive foliage, like the glossy green leaves of ivy, wintercreeper and periwinkle. Others have colorful foliage like the variegated leaves on (continued on page 60) Ground covers
can be an
aesthetic
addition to a
landscape,
prevent erosion
on a steep slope
or cover rocky
areas where turf
won't thrive.

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(continued from page 58)

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Hosta and St.-John's-wort. Cotoneaster has a weeping effect and prostrate junipers offer a mass of fine needles in various shades of greens and blues."

FUNCTION FACTORS. Ground covers are useful in small backyard gardens left with nominal turf space. "You wouldn't want

BRIC-EDG"

to mow back there," Miracle said.

Many contractors also install ground covers around large trees to protection them from mower damage, Woodyard added. "Instead of mowing turf right up to the trunk of the tree and possibly damaging its root system, ground covers can offer defense by



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etting full coverage from ground covers can be difficult when they aren't installed at the spacing required to achieve that lush look.

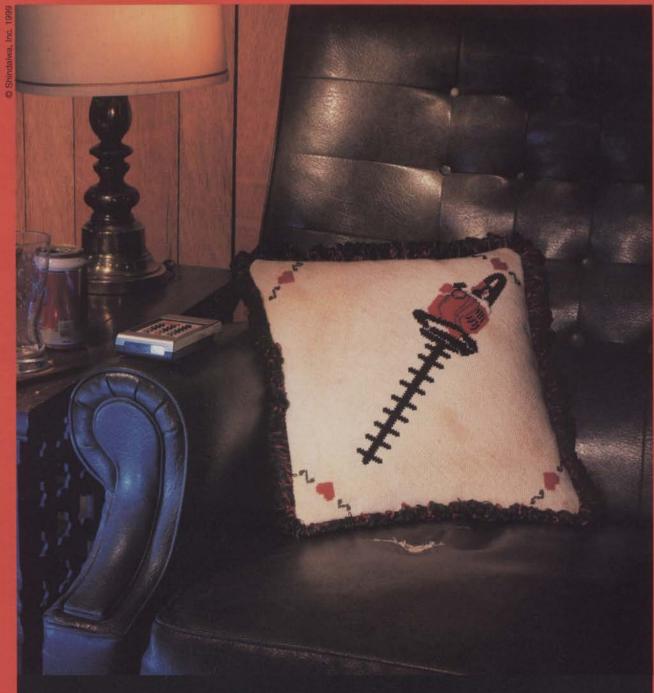
To plant ground covers so they will provide full coverage, contractors first have to determine the square footage of the area that needs to be covered. Then they must consider the plant spacing required by the type of ground cover they are planting.

Once those two steps are complete, contractors should multiply the square footage of the area by the number in the right hand column that coincides with the plant spacing requirements. This, according to Tokar's Nursery, will provide contractors with the approximate number of plants needed to obtain full coverage in an area.

PLANT SPACING	MULTIPLY BY SQUARE FOOTAGE		
6"	4.0		
9"	1.8		
12"	1.0		
15"	.64		
18"	.44		

Source: Tokar's Nursery

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Ground Cover

(continued from page 60)

keeping equipment away from the tree."

Ornamental ground covers also can prevent erosion along stream banks and slopes because the leafy plant greens slow water down instantly and tend to have deep root systems to keep soil stable. Crown vetch is one example of a functional ground cover, Kluznik offered. The plant, which has leaves that divide into many oval leaflets and lavender-pink flower clusters, is too invasive for cultivated areas, but excellent on banks and slopes where erosion control is important, Kluznik said. "Crown vetch roots can go 10 feet deep and thrive in soil conditions unsuitable for anything else," he said.

Turf won't thrive in excessively shady, wet or dry areas, remarked Bruce Hoskins, owner Tokar's Nursery, Canby, Ore. Yet ground covers can flourish in these areas.

But Hoskins warned that not all ground covers are perfect in every situation. "Pachysandra – four or five species of hardy evergreen shrubs – is widely used as a ground cover in shady situations or areas that get a little morning sun," Hoskins explained. "But in afternoon sun or areas that get all-day sun, Pachysandra will turn yellow, not green. Plant ivy, persistant Vinca and St.-John's-wort in areas that get all-day sunshine instead."

For thirsty areas, drought-tolerant ground covers, such as succulents and junipers – durable plants that thrive in many soil varieties – work well, Woodyard remarked.

INSTALLATION INSIGHTS. Even though some ground covers will grow in compact or chemically imbalanced soil, preparation is still critical for proper growth. "Poor soil preparation can turn an intended maintenance problem-solver into a major maintenance headache and an eyesore," Kluznik commented. "Don't save money on the soil preparation. Use a non-selective herbicide and preemergents to control weeds."

Then, the soil should be tilled to a 9- to 12-inch depth. "Drainage issues should also be

dealt with prior to installation," Miracle said.
"If you are trying to evenly blanket an area with ground covers, and drainage problems exist in different variations of the terrain, you could end up with inconsistencies."

However, when planting ground covers on a slope, "working up the soil is not practical," Hoskins said. "You should dig up your planting holes and plant your ground covers in pockets to avoid erosion problems."

Due to the potential for erosion on slopes, even invasive ground covers, which are recommended on steep hills, may need the help of a fiber mat to get rooted.

When planting, contractors shouldn't "skimp on plant spacing," Kluznik said. "The goal is to create a dense monolithic appearance. Excessive gaps can fill with weeds if plants aren't spaced close enough together. Contractors should select plants that have a fighting chance of growing – peat pots are better than rooted cuttings, quarts are better than (continued on page 64)



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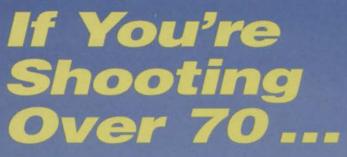


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USE READER SERVICE #98

Ground Cover

(continued from page 62)

peat pots and gallons are even better yet. Size does matter in this instance, but be prepared to pay for big-sizing."

To compensate in an area of compact soil, Woodyard said ground covers can be spaced closer together because they won't get the same degree of growth.

COST CONCERNS. Ground cover installation can cost anywhere from 5 to 20 times more compared to turf costs, according to Kluznik. The reasons for this wide range of cost are that different ground covers cost more than others, and the square footage of the space being planted must be considered because more plants are needed if they are being used to fill an area.

"The cost of ground covers is a function of the area and type of material being used," Woodyard confirmed. "Ornamental ground covers may not be the best choice price-wise compared to turf or other plants, but they may still be the best option. This is where

ood site preparation is essential to succeed in planting a groundcover bed, according to Bruce Hoskins, owner, Tokar's Nursery, Canby, Ore. Hoskins recommended the following steps in planting groundcovers:

- 1. Remove all existing grass, weeds and other vegetation.
- **2.** Work the soil to a depth of 6 to 8 inches, incorporating in additional organic matter (peat moss, compost, etc.) if needed.
- 3. If you are using mulch, apply 1 to 2 inches before planting.
- **4.** Using a trowel, open a planting hole, place the plant in the hole and firm soil around to the level of the crown of the plant. Then fill mulch around the plant.
- 5. Water the plants in when you are finished planting the bed.

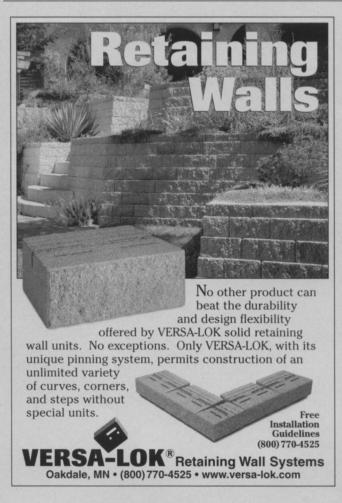
Getting Under the Covers

you have to know your plants. Planting 1,000 square feet of an extravagant ground cover wouldn't be cost effective – it might be more cost effective to plant junipers instead. But for a small area, you may be able to plant the extravagant ground cover."

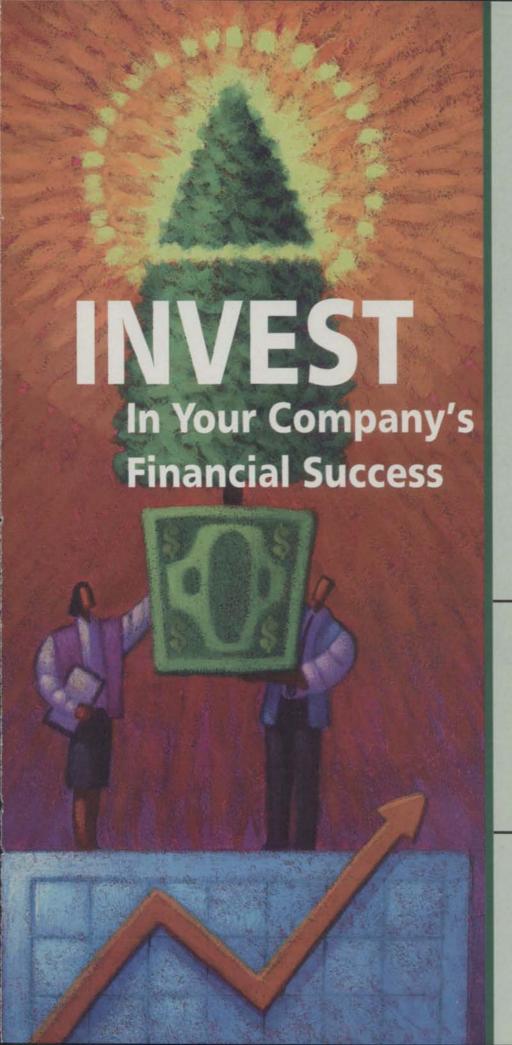
The spreading tendency of the plant also should be taken into consideration when figuring the cost of a job, Woodyard said. "Putting in a large area of spreading juniper may not be cost effective, but filling the same area with English ivy may be cost effective because fewer plants are needed to fill the area," he explained.

But when maintenance is factored in, Kluznik said ground covers can be less expensive in the long run, even though their installation is more expensive.

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.







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SCHEDULE-AT-A-GLANCE

Sunday, October 8

8:30 AM

Business Strategies Golf Tournament
(Buses depart hotel)
5:00 - 7:00 PM

Registration Desk
5:00 - 7:00 PM

Attendee Welcome Center

Monday, October 9

2:45 - 5:00 PM

5:00 - 6:30 PM

7:00 AM Registration Desk 7:30 AM - 9:00 AM General Session Jerry Gaeta, Vander Kooi & Associates 10 Rules for Financial Success 9:10 AM - 10:30 AM General Session George Koziarz, Koziarz & Associates Effective Budgeting Techniques in the Real World General Session 10:50 AM - 12:00 noon Robert West, Sr., West & Co. Organizing Your Business to Take Advantage of Tax Savings Opportunities 12:00 - 1:00 PM Networking Lunch 1:15 PM - 2:30 PM Speaker Roundtable Session

> Sponsor Product Showcase Welcome Reception

Tuesday, October 10

7:00 AM	Registration Desk
7:30 AM - 9:00 AM	General Session
	Robert West, Sr., West & Co.
	Planning for the Financial Future -
	Yours and Your Company's
9:10 - 10:30 AM	General Session
	George Koziarz, Koziarz & Associates
	Structuring Effective Employee
	Compensation Packages
10:50 AM - 12:00 noon	General Session
	John McCarty, KeyBank
	Building Beneficial Banking Relationships
12:00 - 1:15 PM	Lunch On Your Own
1:30 PM - 3:00 PM	General Session
	Pam Jordan, Acquisition Strategies
	How to Properly Value Your Business
3:20 - 4:30 PM	General Session
	Tom Oyler, U.S. Lawns
	Balance Sheet Management:
	Don't Eat Your Seed Corn

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8

8:30 AM

Business Strategies Golf Tournament Golf Club of Illinois (Buses depart hotel promptly at 8:30 AM) Sponsored by Woods Equipment

5:00 - 7:00 PM

Registration Desk

5:00 - 7:00 PM Attendee Welcome Center

Sponsored By Hunter Industries

MONDAY, OCTOBER 9

7:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Registration Desk

7:00 - 8:00 AM

Continental Breakfast

Sponsored By U.S. Lawns

Morning General Session Sponsored By Irritrol

7:30 - 9:00 AM

Opening Session

10 Rules for Financial Success Jerry Gaeta

Vander Kooi & Associates

Every successful business has in place a set of rules for operating at maximum efficiency. These rules allow a company to function consistently and to remain on the right track. These rules are rooted in day-to-day operations and if not properly followed, can have a significant impact on a company's financial well-being. In this valuable session, you'll review 10 valuable rules for financial success. You will learn how to prepare your operations to maximize results and how to manage your company's financial future so it doesn't manage you.

9:10 - 10:30 AM

General Session

Effective Budgeting Techniques In the Real World George Koziarz

Koziarz & Associates

Effective budgeting is a critical skill for any lawn and landscape contractor looking to keep a company moving forward. An accurate budget helps managers properly forecast labor and material costs, develop realistic sales numbers, determine compensation packages, maintain positive cash flow year round and build a foundation for future growth. In this information packed session, you'll review the steps required to effectively prepare a budget for your company or business division. You'll learn how to identify weak spots on a balance sheet and what steps to take to turn those areas into positives.

10:30 - 10:50 AM

Refreshment Break

10:50 - 12:00 noon

General Session

Organizing Your Business to Take Advantage of Tax Savings Opportunities Bob West, Sr.

West & Company

The success of your business will require you to pay several forms of tax. Three of those taxes – payroll taxes, income taxes, and estate taxes – can be effectively reduced with timely and continual tax planning. The opportunity for such tax planning begins with selecting the best form of organization for your business and exists throughout each year as you continue to decide how to withdraw the income that your business is generating. You have options and effective tax planning requires that you understand those options. Should you be incorporated? What is the difference between a limited liability company and a corporation or a partnership? How can you withdraw earnings from your business so as to minimize your payroll tax and income tax liabilities? This program will discuss questions such as these and will also present some simple ideas for designing a financial reporting system for your business that can provide you with the information you need to make these decisions.

12:00 - 1:00 PM

Contractor Networking Lunch Sponsored By Aventis

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1:15 - 2:30 PM Speaker Roundtable Session

Join the speaker faculty of Business Strategies 2000 for a series of informal roundtables designed to answer your important financial management questions. This is a great opportunity to tap into the expertise of our speaker faculty and network with other contractors.

Sponsored By Century Rain Aid

2:45 - 5:00 PM

Sponsor Product Showcase

Kick the tires, look under the hood and fire up the engine at the Business Strategies Sponsor Product Showcase. Join fellow attendees and take a look at the latest equipment, product and service offerings from the sponsor partners of Business Strategies.

3:00 - 3:30 PM

Refreshment Break

Sponsored By Ewing Irrigation

5:00 - 6:30 PM

Welcome Reception

Sponsored By John Deere, Aquascape Designs and Lawn & Landscape magazine

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9

7:00 - 4:00 PM

Registration Desk

7:00 - 8:00 AM

Continental Breakfast

Sponsored By Super Lawn Trucks

Morning General Session Sponsored By Shindaiwa

7:30 - 9:00 AM

General Session

Planning for the Financial Future – Yours and Your Company's Bob West, Sr.

West & Company

You will devote much of your adult life to the task of building a business—a source of financial security for your family. But, without effective planning, at your death, much of that financial security may go to the government and not to your family. This program will explain, in simple terms, how the federal estate tax is computed as well as some steps that you might take now to significantly reduce the amount of *your* assets that will pass to the government. You will learn why all of your assets should NOT be owned "jointly" with your spouse, and how you might use trusts to properly structure your estate. This program will discuss "living trusts" and how the relatively simple task of creating a family limited partnership might save your family hundreds of thousands of dollars in estate and income taxes.

9:10 - 10:30 AM

General Session

Structuring Effective Employee Compensation Packages George Koziarz

Koziarz & Associates

In today's tight labor market, comprehensive and innovative compensation packages are a selling point for retaining current or attracting new employees. Companies in all areas of business are becoming more creative in the compensation packages they offer employees. And while most compensation programs are still geared toward providing employees with additional income, items such as health care benefits, flex time, day care and tuition reimbursement are rapidly appearing as a standard part of employee compensation packages. All of these items carry with them a price tag that employers must fit into the company budget. In this session, learn how to determine the best methods for structuring compensation programs that benefit your employees and stay in line with your budget.

10:30 - 10:50 AM

Refreshment Break
Sponsored By John Deere

10:50 - 12:00 noon

General Session

Building Beneficial Banking Relationships John McCarty

KeyBank

Establishing a strong relationship with a bank is essential for any business hoping to expand its operations and its revenue base. Whether seeking financing to purchase new equipment or build a new company headquarters or looking for capital to acquire another company, you need a banking partner who knows your business. But how do you establish such a relationship? This session will take the mystery out of how to build a beneficial relationship with your banking partner. Learn the steps you need to take before approaching your banking partner to properly position your company's financial status. And discover what services a bank can offer you to help drive your company's growth.

12:00 - 1:15 PM

Lunch On Your Own

Afternoon General Session Sponsored By Echo

1:30 - 3:00 PM

How To Properly Value Your Business

Pamela Jordan

Acquisition Strategies

Whether you're in the market to buy or sell, determining the true worth of your business is paramount to your success. In this helpful, hands-on session, you'll be presented with the tools to work through the process of valuing your business. If you're exploring acquisition, discover what resources you bring to the table. If you're selling, learn how to accurately present your business's potential to possible buyers and how to negotiate for the best price. No matter what your business goals, you can't afford to miss this informative and practical session.

3:00 - 3:20 PM

Refreshment Break

3:20 - 4:30 PM

Closing Session

Balance Sheet Management: Don't Eat Your Seed Corn

Tom Oyler

U.S. Lawns

Solid financial management and close control of the balance sheet are at the top of the list of challenges experienced by business owners. In dealing with these elements, owners must make decisions daily which impact both the short-term and long-term growth of a company. For advice on making the right choices for your business, join us as we examine the three phases of business development (the Growth stage, the Maintenance stage, and the Mature stage) and the owner behavior that guarantees a bountiful return.

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Conference Registration Form

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(Please print or type. Form may be photocopied for additional registrants; one form per person) First Name_ Last Name First Name On Badge___ Title_ Company_ Address State Zip Code _Fax_ E-mail Address Payment Information Check Enclosed (payable to GIE Media) Bill My: ___ VISA ___ MasterCard ___ American Express ___ Discover _Expiration Date__ Card Number Billing Address Name On Card_ _Signature_ Please Note: Registrations will not be processed until payment information is received. All faxed and phone registrations MUST include credit card information. Check must be drawn in U.S. dollars and drawn from a U.S. Bank. There will be a \$25 fee for returned checks. Emergency Contact Information Relation Phone Number Registration Information Number Total **Educational Sessions** Full Conference Registration\$195 Special Events .\$80 Golf Outing..... TOTAL

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By Fax: Complete form and fax, with credit card information, to 216/961-0364

On-Line: At www.lawnandlandscapeconferences.com

Confirmations

All registrations postmarked by September 22, 2000 will be acknowledged by mail.

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Amount	

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Lawn & Landscape has arranged for special discount airfares for the attendees of the Business Strategies Conference. To take advantage of these discounts please contact AAA Business Travel at 800/999-0038 between the hours of 8:00 AM – 5:30 PM EST.

Hotel Information

A block of rooms has been reserved for Business Strategies Conference attendees at the Wyndham Northwest Chicago. Attendees should make their reservations directly with the hotel on or before **September 14, 2000** to receive the special conference room rate of **\$118** per night (single/double). Please ask for the Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies conference rate. For reservations call the Wyndham Northwest Chicago at **630/773-4000** or **800/996-3426**.

Airport Transportation

Shuttle service is available from O'Hare International from My Chauffeur Limousine Service. Reservations are required and can be made by calling 800/244-6200. Rates are \$18 per person, each way. Prices are subject to change without notice.

Cancellation/Substitution/ Refund Policy

All cancellations must be made in writing. A full refund will be accepted if postmarked by September 22, 2000. Those received seven to 14 days before the conference are subject to a \$50 cancellation fee. No refund less than seven days before conference. Attendees can notify Lawn & Landscape at any time that another individual will attend the conference or social events in their place.

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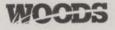








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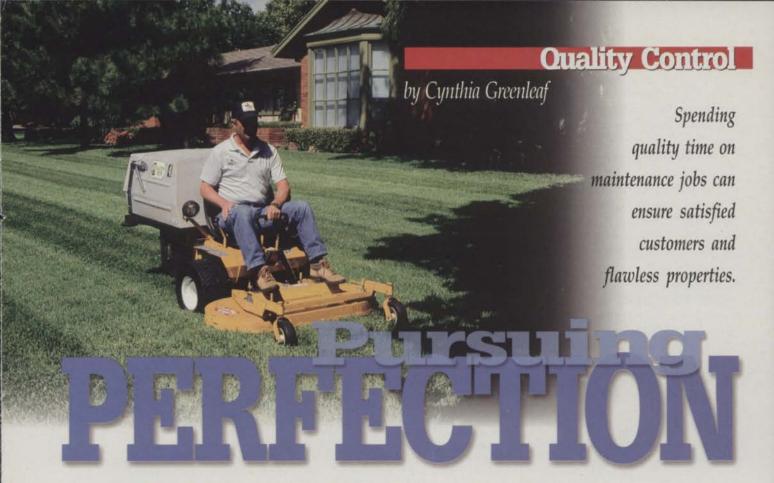


ешіпе









Since time is always money, as the cliché goes, ensuring high quality on a maintenance job every time can be a real challenge for contractors. With constant pressure to get as much done as quickly as possible, quality often competes with quantity on a daily basis. Contractors are always walking this fine line, according to Michael Malleck, owner and area manager, Clintar Groundskeeping Services, London, Ontario. "Quality control is a balancing act," he observed.

QUALITY DEFINED. Before quality control can be ensured in a maintenance program, the concept of "quality" must clearly be defined. Defining quality for your employees and finding out how customers determine a quality job is essential. For Carl Rantzow, owner, Selkirk Lawn & Landscape, Spokane, Wash., a good job has three key components. "Quality is a job that meets my customer's expectations, my expectations and, at the same time, is profitable," he observed, adding that quality control is always a proactive, rather than reactive, measure.

Micheaux Brandau, president, Timely Lawn Care, Baltimore, Md., sees quality as an aesthetic issue. For Brandau, a quality job is one that "makes a good first impression and looks pleasing to the eye, where everything looks top notch and nothing is out of place."

George Moore, president, Green Acres Services, Saint George, S.C., agreed. A quality job has "good curb appeal with a well-groomed lawn, weedless beds and healthy and thriving plants," he described.

To make sure customer expectations are being met, however, contractors should know exactly how their customers define quality. "Get customer expectations first," advised Pat Strohman, general manager, CLS Landscape Management, Chino, Calif. "Our expectations matter, but our clients may have different expectations."

Get to know customers' likes and dislikes. Lambert Landscaping Company, Dallas, Texas, for example, employs full-time "garden managers" whose only responsibility is to serve as customer advocates, making sure their every desire and need is addressed, according to Sue Allen, Lambert's training and recruiting coordinator. These managers visit their assigned properties on a regular basis and get to know absolutely everything the client wants—from how the shrubs should be pruned to where the flower pots should be placed, Allen said. While having garden managers on staff is an additional expense, this extra

Quality Control

management layer is well worth it for Lambert, helping the company provide a consistent level of quality service to its high-end residential clients, she noted.

And lastly, always keep an open line of communication with customers to make sure they're satisfied with their service. "Keep in constant contact with the customer," advised Brandau, who said he's always trying to "get into his customers' heads" so he can serve them better. "If you don't, your competition will."

CREW CONSIDERATIONS. Properly training employees is a critical aspect of quality control. Lambert Landscaping, for one, has an ongoing training program that includes weekly classroom sessions on maintaining quality as well as in-the-field, handson training on clients' properties, according to Allen. The company tries to instill a sense of ownership into employees, conveying to them that "this is your garden and the quality of the product you're producing is one

you should be proud of," she related.

Since Akehurst Landscape Service, Joppa, Md., has a number of Hispanic employees, the company often will use visual aids such as pictures or equipment demonstrations to make sure the staff understands how to do the best job possible. The company also will

"If you expect and you don't

inspect, then don't expect."

- George Moore

provide one-on-one, on-site instruction if certain employees need extra guidance. "We'll go out to a job and work with the individual to get the problem area corrected," said Brian Akehurst, the company's vice president and grounds maintenance division manager.

As part of his training approach, Rantzow relies on written protocol (see "Setting Standards" on page 72) for all the services his company offers – from mowing and refuse removal to weeding and bed maintenance. This series of quality control guidelines, which are short, easy to understand and outline service goals, serve as "an anchor to hold employees accountable," Rantzow said. He noted that the slower winter months are the

> perfect time to put together these checklists and review them with staff members.

> Maintaining ongoing communication with employees is another essential quality control tool. Having staff meetings on a regular basis is a

good way to do this, many contractors have found. Selkirk Lawn and Landscape has informal gatherings once a week to keep an open line of communication with staff and discuss areas that need improvement. During these meetings, Rantzow relies on a written agenda, filled with notes made throughout the week identifying problem areas he encountered during property inspections. He

(continued on page 72)



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USE READER SERVICE #45

Quality Control

(continued from page 70)

even leaves voicemails to himself to make sure even the smallest quality control issue isn't overlooked, he admitted.

Similarly, during weekly Thursday morning meetings, CLS Landscape Management addresses quality issues that have surfaced throughout the past week that foremen and management have made note of, according to Strohman.

These meetings don't always have to happen at the office. Since weekly gatherings sometimes can be tough to schedule, Malleck relies on "bumper chats" between jobs to let his crew members know what they're doing right and what needs improvement, he said.

aving set service guidelines is vital for maintaining a high level of quality on maintenance jobs, according to Carl Rantzow, president, Selkirk Lawn and Landscape, Spokane, Wash. As part of his management approach, he uses checklists to keep track of all tasks to be addressed on a property. He also uses them as a reference, to make sure employees are consistently doing a quality job. To convey his company's dedication to quality, Rantzow gives these guidelines to all employees the minute they walk through the door, he said.

Selkirk's official mowing and bed maintenance protocol, for example, details each service's goals, individual tasks to accomplish and additional points to consider. Some of these specifications include:

- · Control the height of the grass
- · Give the yard a manicured look
- · Vacuum leaves and debris off the yard
- · Clean off concrete surfaces
- · Monitor select landscapes for irrigation problems
- · Keep the beds looking neat and clean
- · Control weeds
- Do preventive plant maintenance to reduce chances of insects and disease
- · Alert customer to any plant problems
- · Keep trash picked up and keep sidewalks blow off
- · Fix problems on property before the customer does



Quality Control

ENSURING THE BEST. Beyond effective employee training, contractors have a range of innovative, ongoing ways to control maintenance job quality. In addition to having a crew strictly devoted to detail work such as weeding and watering, Akehurst, for example, has a full-time troubleshooter on staff to take care of any quality control emergencies that might surface. With the title of "enhance-

Maintaining ongoing

communication with

employees is an

essential quality

control tool.

ment supervisor," he keeps the company's high-end residential customers happy and in turn, saves the company money by keeping foremen and crew members on their production schedule. "Every once in a while, a crew member might run over a sprinkler head and our

enhancement supervisor will go back to fix it," said Akehurst, adding that the fact that the troubleshooter is a "people person" helps smooth out any problems that might occur. "We can get the biggest complaint and he can handle it."

Frequent property inspections are another invaluable quality control tool. Moore learned this from his years of experience. "If you expect and you don't inspect, then don't expect," he advised, noting that he constantly conveys this point to his management team.

Akehurst also realizes how vital inspections are and often will use other crews to inspect maintenance jobs, to bring "another set of eyes" to the property, he said. "Someone not on the job can often more readily pick out problem areas, since maintenance guys can get into the routine and not notice things."

Maintenance crews also are carefully supervised, "to make sure every thing is being done the way it's supposed to be done," Akehurst said. Supervisors are sure to let crew members know where the higher priority areas are. "When we're behind the eight ball, we try to impress the importance of high visibility areas, like making sure entranceways are picture perfect," he noted.

Inspection frequency depends on the property size. Larger jobs might be inspected weekly, while smaller ones might be evaluated every other week or just once a month – it all depends, Akehurst said. "If there's a day we're caught up, supervisors might take a foreman out and drive through the job and point out problems," he noted, adding that they periodically walk through jobs with property managers to ensure that expectations are being met.

And rather than just doing a drive-by inspection, Brandau advised contractors to get a good, up-front look at a property. Otherwise, unpleasant surprises can lurk in the background. "Some jobs can look great from far away. But you get close up and notice that someone scalped the lawn," he said.

Rantzow agreed with the importance of walking a property during an inspection. "A drive-by isn't as good as when you get out on the property. You're always really surprised at how much you see when you're out there," he said.

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



P.O. Box 82474 Rochester, Michigan 48308-2474

USE READER SERVICE #46



Major Equipment

by Bob West

Large
machines
require a lot
of thought,
whether
acquiring
them, using
them or caring
for them.

The vast majority of landscape work is labor intensive. But very rarely can landscape employees be found in the field without some piece of equipment in their hands. And, quite often, putting that piece of equipment in the field requires a major investment by a landscape company.

How does that piece of equipment – that trencher or tractor or skid-steer loader – end up in the field? What is the best way for companies to select and pay for these big-ticket items? After all, contractors can easily spend in excess of \$20,000 on some machines today. And many manufacturers have done a great job of increasing the versatility and functionality of their machines in order to help contractors become less dependent on hand labor, but that doesn't make the machines any more affordable. Instead, contractors now need the machine and three or four attachments to get the most value for their purchasing dollar.

Contractors who have gone down this road, however, seem to be in some agreement as to the best paths to take to get to the final destination. Owning is better than renting. Buying is preferred over leasing. New is preferred over used. And, above all else, equipment is preferred over employees.

what's mine is mine. Obviously, there are many advantages associated with owning a machine as opposed to renting it from a local dealer or rental yard. Owning a machine means that piece of equipment is almost always available when you need it. Owning a machine also means not spending a lot of time driving back and forth to pick up (continued on page 76)



To buy or to rent, that is the question for most landscape contractors faced with equipment needs. Photo: CNH

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Major Equipment

(continued from page 74)

or drop off a rental. But owning a piece of major equipment also usually means spending a lot of money to acquire it, whereas renting requires less capital.

"We buy everything because we get a better deal buying vs. renting," explained Mary Ann McKnight, general manager, Clearwater/Summit Group, Spokane, Wash. "Then we resell all of our equipment when each piece gets to a certain point in terms of hours of use. For example, we sell skidsteers at 1,500 hours, but we'll try to get more out of our backhoes before selling them.

"Add-on work is where you find yourself renting more because buying a machine is less beneficial," noted Richard Raley, president, Ultimate Landscapes by Interra, Gambrills, Md. "The rule of thumb for us to buy a machine is that we have to have the work contracted first that will keep that machine busy after we buy it. For example, you may have one piece of equipment, like a trencher, and then you find that it is getting

used so much that scheduling its use is a challenge. We've had situations where we've had to rent as many as three trenchers at a time to keep the crews moving, so then we know we probably need to buy at least one more trencher."

"My controller does a cost analysis based on the usable hours for a piece of equipment," explained Michael Sweeney, president, Sweeney Landscaping, Stamford, Conn. "We want to know how much out of a 40-hour work week or how many hours out of a whole year that machine is going to be used. If the machine is going to be used enough,

then buying will be more affordable than renting."

"Renting is normally done to fill an occasional need for us," related Kris Parker, owner, K.P. Landscape Design & Installation, Layton, Utah. "When we get to the

Are contractors better off

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paying more but

eventually owning

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ing less via a lease that

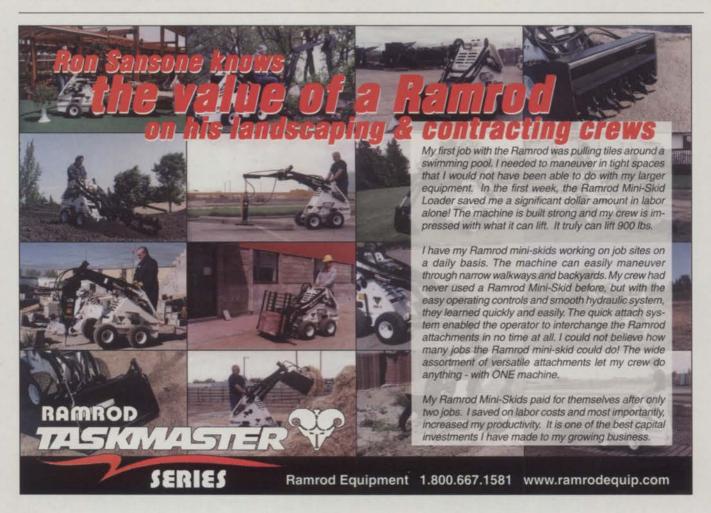
ultimately leaves them

with nothing at the

end of the deal?

point that we can set up a full crew and equip that crew with enough work to use a machine, we'll buy a new machine."

Sweeney also noted that buying equipment can pay off indirectly in methods than (continued on page 78)





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11:22AM	11:27AM	00:05	L-Exxon Gas Station	0.00	
11:28AM	11:31AM	00:03	Sa Trivola	1.10	
11/Struet	4:14PM	04:43	S-Your Company Office	927	
4:14PM	4:17PM	00:03	In Transit	1.18	
4:1/x.m	#-10PM	00:02	L-Grand & Hwy 90	5,00	
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USE READER SERVICE #63

Major Equipment

(continued from page 76)

an you envision this scenario? A machine is rented with increasing regularity to the point where the decision is made to purchase one. The purchase will cost in excess of \$20,000. A few weeks are spent demonstrating different models and haggling over price. Finally, terms are agreed upon and the plunge is taken: the machine is bought.

Oh, by the way, you'll need a new trailer to get the machine from job to job as well, right?

Are you going to go through the entire process all over again for the trailer, or would you rather just take the most affordable model available from whoever just sold you the machine that got you into this mess in the first place? "Too often, trailers end up just being packaged into the purchase of some other machine like a skid steer or a tractor because the buyer is out of patience and has already spent a lot of money," according to Chris Anderson, sales manager, Foster Trailers, Waynesborough, Pa. "You never get a chance to demo a trailer, so you don't learn about poor towing characteristics until you own it. There is a vast difference in quality and price points from manufacturer to manufacturer when it comes to trailers, so this decision shouldn't be made quickly."

Anderson said trailers for most major equipment should have 18 feet of loadable space and a gross vehicle weight of approximately 12,000 pounds, which allows for about 9,500 pounds of actual payload.

"Many contractors buy their first trailer without understanding the significant safety issues associated with them, and they don't realize that one of the biggest liabilities a landscape company can assume is to send a truck trailing a skid steer or some other large machine on the road," Anderson pointed out. "There are also unique maintenance requirements for trailers, like torquing the wheels' lug nuts and servicing the trailer's breaks more frequently."

Anderson also noted that there is a correct way to load a machine on a trailer. "You want the load to be balanced slightly in front of the axles and wheels," he said. "If you think of a trailer as a seesaw and the axles and wheels are the fulcrum then you'll see that more of the length of that fulcrum is forward of the axles." – Bob West

Putting the Back End First





Major Equipment

(continued from page 78)

many contractors don't notice. "We warehouse bulk mulch, so we need to be able to load our own trucks," he explained. "We use our skid steers to do that, and we end up using those machines probably 80 percent of the year. Hands down, that makes them a cost-effective purchase. Then, instead of buying wholesalebark mulch from warehouse and paying \$20 per yard, we buy mulch in 100-yard tractors and pay \$10 per yard. We couldn't do that if we didn't own our machines."

Raley said he often will rent a piece of equipment or a couple of models of the same machine before making a purchase in order to test the various products. But he prefers to avoid renting machines for an extended period of time, if possible.

"If we're going to rent a machine for one week each month, then we might as well buy the equipment because the rental fee is practically as much as the monthly payment," Parker agreed.

TO LEASE OR NOT TO LEASE.

Cars, boats or skid-steer loaders, the question remains the same. Are contractors better off buying the product and paying more but eventually owning the equipment, or are they better served by spending less via a lease that ultimately leaves them with nothing at the end of the deal?

"We always buy our machines, although I don't necessarily know why,"
Raley admitted. "We have competitors who we know prefer to lease and that may not tie up their credit like buying can, but we like to buy equipment and then we'll run it until it's decrepit."

Parker, however, is more open minded about leasing equipment. "We lease, but that's more for tax purposes," he explained. "We'll set up a lease for anywhere from a three- to five-year period, and then we can write the lease off whereas if we buy the equipment, we have to depreciate it."

Owning a machine means

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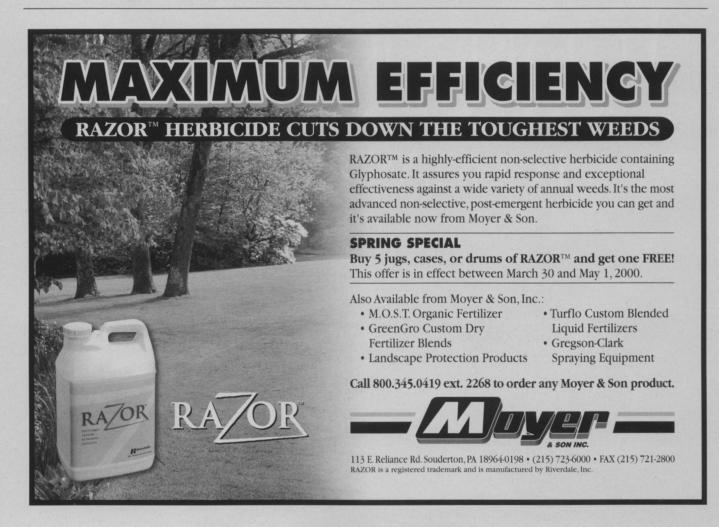
lot of time **driving** back

and forth to pick the

machine up or drop it off.

Parker also noted that most of his leases include a buy-out clause that gives him the option to purchase the machine once the lease is complete, for an agreed upon price, which he said is typically \$1.

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.





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USE READER SERVICE #132

Irrigation Industry experts offer their top 10 tips for irrigation success.

by Cynthia Greenleaf

From technical advice to just plain common sense, here are a few bits of irrigation wisdom from those in the know.

EXCEED CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATIONS. Go above and beyond what your customers expect from you, advised Scott Fay, president, Treasure Coast Irrigation, Hobe Sound, Fla. In everything from the proposal and installation to service and follow-up communications, the customer should get more than they expect, according to Fay. "If we do this from the start all the way through, the benefits are huge."

During the proposal process, for example, Treasure Coast shows potential residential customers actual irrigation system components, such as controllers and sprinkler heads. This way, customers can learn exactly how a system works and know precisely what they're paying for.

Otherwise, "the system just goes below the ground and the customer never actually gets to see it," Fay said. "With irrigation, there are a lot of terms that a homeowner doesn't understand," he added, pointing out that informed customers take a pride of ownership in their systems. Along the same lines, on commercial jobs, Treasure Coast will use a more technical approach to selling a system, such as demonstrating the latest system components to a potential client.

Another way to exceed customer expectations is to provide a top-notch installation in a highly efficient manner. "Anyone can deliver quality if given enough time," Fay said. "The real value is if you can do it in a few hours."

the whole picture when selling an irrigation system, so the customer realizes the value of their investment, according to Joe Goetz, president, Goetz Landscape and Irrigation, Centerville, Minn. "A system isn't just the components but (continued on page 84)

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USE READER SERVICE #36

Irrigation

(continued from page 82)

how it's put in and serviced," he noted. "Contractors need to emphasize this overall value to customers so they can keep their prices up, make a good living for themselves and in turn, help keep the irrigation industry at a professional level."

With "weekend warriors" attempting irrigation on the rise, contractors must keep the proverbial bar raised and not give in to pressure from those undercutting prices, Goetz advised.

Dave Daniell, vice president, Heads Up Landscape Contractors, Albuquerque, N.M., agreed. "Establish your own standard of quality of materials and workmanship and don't compromise them just to be the low bidder," he urged.

USE A HIGH QUALITY DESIGN. A

design's quality can determine the success or failure of a system, according to Scott Hall, president, Classic Landscaping, Woodsboro, Md. Hall advised to always have a design done by a professional. While a certified irrigation designer is not always necessary, "use someone who is experienced and who knows what irrigation needs to do in the field," Hall said. "In the design process, we stick with people we've used before, who are reliable and know what they're doing."

Not sure if you've got a good plan? Common design flaws to look for include inconsistent coverage, improper zoning, head selection and pipe size, to name a few, Hall said.

ALWAYS EVALUATE AN EXISTING IRRIGATION SYSTEM. This is critical, according to Randy Newhard, president, New Way Landscape and Tree Services, San Diego, Calif. "Whenever we get a new job with an existing system, we do an evaluation," he said. "We look at every head, turn on every valve and tell the customer 'Here's where your system stands' and any improvements that need to be done."

The company includes this "official" as-

sessment in the customer's contract. While this evaluation is an enormous expense for New Way, it often saves the company future maintenance headaches while informing the customer about the state of their system, Newhard said.

efficiency is paramount in irrigation. Irrigation scheduling, in particular, can help achieve this necessary accuracy, according to Newhard. He generates an irrigation schedule using a computer program for all of his clients. Based on such variables as flow rate, evapotranspiration rate, range of plant material, and sun or shade exposure, the schedule tells exactly how much water the property needs. This schedule provides valuable guidance, especially for a new account. "It gives you something to come out of the gate with," Newhard said, noting that as time goes on, the schedule is adjusted when necessary.

(continued on page 86)

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USE READER SERVICE #99

(continued from page 84)

Based on the irrigation schedule, Newhard also comes up with a water budget, "which tells the customer exactly how many gallons of water they can anticipate using," he said, adding that this degree of meticulousness has saved impressive quantities of water and money. Newhard saved one client who had been using the wrong water meter about \$60,000, he recalled.

DO THE JOB RIGHT THE FIRST TIME.

With constant time constraints, the pressure to get an installation done quickly can prove harmful to a system's quality and ultimately, a contractor's reputation, Daniell noted. "If you feel you don't have time now, when will you have the time to fix it the second time?" he asked.

In Daniell's experience, the most common

mistakes caused by rushing through a job include improperly flushed lines, which can result in clogged nozzles or emitters, and settling around heads from not compacting and tapping the soil properly, Daniell said.

Other frequent errors include using the wrong size nozzle or incorrectly setting up the timer, both of which can result in "dry spots and mad customers," he warned.

Daniell pointed out that the issue of quality control is an ongoing one. "This never goes away," he observed, adding that he frequently sits down with his crew to talk about maintaining quality.

"You need to send a strong message that it's important to take extra time," he said, noting that he often asks employees to put themselves in the customer's place and do a job that they themselves would be willing to pay for, since "customers are spending good money and entrusting us with their business."

FIX DAMAGE IMMEDIATELY. Promptly repairing system damage is of prime importance, according to Hall. Otherwise, "you're wasting water and resources," he said, adding that damage, such as a broken head, can cause soil erosion and kill plant material. To stay on top of all maintenance matters, systems should be inspected frequently to ensure everything is in working order, Hall advised.

He said that his company inspects its commercial sites at least once a week, "to make sure nothing's wrong," and always has its irrigation subcontractor on-call to address any emergency maintenance issues.

ONLY WORK WITH THE BEST. Contractors should try mightily to use the best, most reliable subcontractors possible, according to Eric Cross, president, Duke's Landscape Management, Hackettstown, N.J. "We look for a subcontractor that isn't overbooked," he said. "There are a lot of guys out there taking on too much work."

To find a good prospect, "We ask them point blank: 'We have 10 properties. Can you service these systems? What can you guarantee as far as response time?" Cross said. He also recommended asking around to see if a potential subcontractor has a good reputation. "Talk to suppliers and clients they've

(continued on page 88)

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Circle 230 on reader service card

Irrigation

(continued from page 86)

worked with, to make sure they're responsive," he said. "Do a complete check-out."

While many agreements are still sealed with a handshake, working under contract with subcontractors can be a smart business move. As is a "can be terminated with cause" clause, which can function as a safety net,

pletely on subcontractors for their irrigation work, setting up a clear line of communication is essential.

You need to be able to call a subcontractor and get an immediate response, according to Bill Davids, president, Clarence Davids & Company, Matteson, Ill. "A lot of subcon-

NETWORK TO GROW. Acquiring new irrigation accounts is often a matter of networking, according to Fay, who notes that his company, Treasure Coast Irrigation, has grown by 65 percent in the past 4½ years because of this. "As we build relationships, the work just comes in," he said. "People work with people they like."

Fay advises networking with leaders in the green industry and beyond. He has befriended property managers, bankers, lawyers and even people at his local chamber of commerce, he said.

In addition, contractors should be visible in their local community in a variety of ways. Donations to local causes, sponsoring a local sports team or volunteering are good places to start. This community visibility does wonders for a company's image and increases business, Fay noted.

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

"Anyone can deliver quality if given enough

time. The real value is if you can do it

in a few hours." - Scott Fay

just in case, Cross noted. "If you need to make a change, you can't have a '30-day termination' clause. You're the one who's responsible and you need to have control of the situation."

COMMUNICATE WITH SUBS. Since many landscape contractors depend com-

tractors are small and always in the field with no office personnel," he observed. "We changed subs for that very reason." Davids' method for establishing good communication includes talking frequently to his subs, even in the off-season, "to let them know what's happening at the office," he said, noting that a good rapport can help negotiate better pricing.



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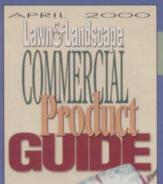
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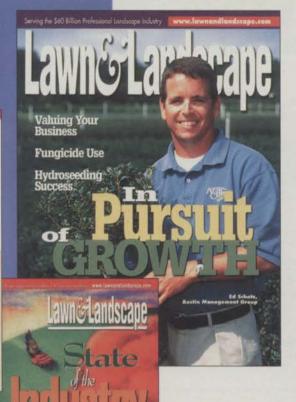
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Front-Mounted JRCO Hooker Aerator

- Features new design with cast iron heads and one-piece greaseable tine/rotor bearing
- Fits commercial zero-turn and riding mowers
- Aerates 66,000 square feet per hour at 5 mph
- 5-inch by 6-inch hole pattern with 6 holes per square feet, up to 3-inch hole depth
- Heat-treated tines pull up loose plugs of soil without hard core plugs
- 38 inches wide with six floating heads, machine can aerate while turning
- No subsurface soil compaction around or at bottom of holes allowing for better water and air filtration
- Electric lift raises caster heads for transporting and

quick attaching to JRCO mounting bar with two clevis pins

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- · Lectro-Life* immersion priming allows for full rust protection
- · Top-coated with high-gloss, black urethane paint
- · Available in lengths from 8 feet to 24 feet in smooth steel, deckplate steel or wood floor
- · Choose from regular duty, heavy duty or extra heavy duty platforms
- Features reinforced steel girder understructure, one-piece roll-formed side and end platform rails with reinforced stake pockets
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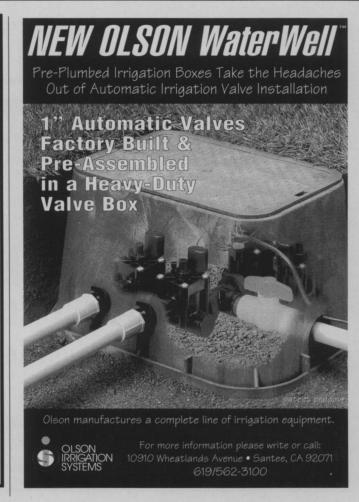


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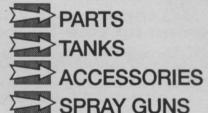
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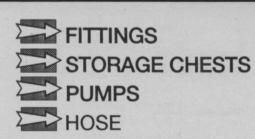




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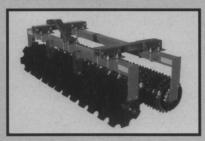
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mulch in place so cover won't blow or wash away

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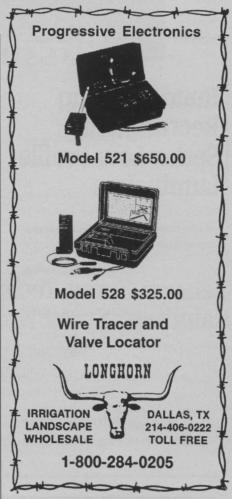
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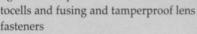
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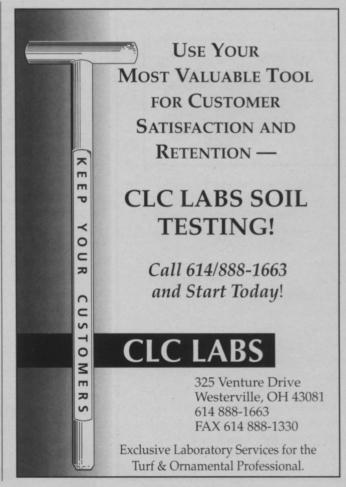


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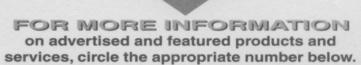
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PO BOX 5817 CLEVELAND, OH 44101-0817 payment system and to use a ... preemergent broadleaf herbicide that would enable him to avoid costly callbacks. – *Shrub & Turf, Feb.* 1995

"If we can hit our sales projections and control our costs for labor, then everything else should fall into place. I haven't seen too many jobs that go over budget on material purchases. It's always the labor costs the cause the problems." – Drew St. John, St. John & Associates, June 1999

ON REGULATION...

"We were probably like many other companies, just waiting to see what was going to happen and feeling like we couldn't influence regulation. Now, we've decided to get involved and try to help the situation." – Pat Norton, Barefoot Grass, Jan. 1990

"I have to be willing to put money into a state or national fund and take my own time to fight these battles." – Neal DeAngelo, Lawn Specialties, Aug. 1991

"What you can do, as an industry, is put forth a platform; an effective operating tenet which most responsible companies are practicing already." – David Siegfried, ChemLawn, Sept. 1991

ON ROUTES...

Crews can be at any of their accounts in about 20 minutes. – Clean Cut, Feb. 1991

Reech said the system of using one foreman and a crew sets up unneeded animosity, and that properly trained, equal individuals are happier and more productive workers. – *Couhig Enviornmental, Aug. 1995*

"We feel it's more productive with less people under a foreman and also more flexible for different kinds of work." – Georgia Fisher, Southern Tree & Landscape, May 1997

ON SAFETY...

Safety glasses are required for using trimmers, blowers and edgers. It's a dismissable offense not to wear the proper uniform." – Mark McClanahan, Thornton Gardens, Dec. 1996

The training coordinator is responsible for bringing in vendors to train employees on products and processes and to coordinate courses in safety, first aid, CPR and defensive driving. – ISS Landscape Management Services, Jan. 1997

ON SALES...

"We did learn you don't want to hang

that much [work] with one company." – Buel Messer, Messer Landscape, Jan. 1993

"I also want to emphasize that no matter who you are going to call on, first impressions always last. If your attitude is not there, you better forget it." – Cathy Thrash, Inner Gardens Landscape, Aug. 1993

Bevil specified a three-year contract, basing annual costs on the hour unit price per worker, per site, rather than a fixed sum. – Conoco Worldwide Headquarters, Feb. 1994

"I'm offering the same thing that some of the larger companies offer – the only difference I can offer you is the personal contact and the responsiveness to your needs." – Dale Amstutz, Northern Lawns, March 1994

"We've always marketed to interior designers." – Jeffrey Zindel, Livingreen Interiors, Sept. 1995

When choosing work, Maxwell-Miller first considers the level of professionalism on the other side of the fence. "Our first choice is negotiated work with clients and architects that we have a good relationship with." – Thom Maxwell-Miller, Ecosystems Imagery, March 1996

"The question of management becomes one from a sales standpoint – 'How much can we afford to sell and service and do it well?"" – Bob Slingluff, Yardmaster, March 1997

"Our customers sign up for one year at a time and have to be re-signed up each winter. This approach holds our feet to the fire in terms of doing the job and gives us tremendous feedback when customers don't renew." – Bob Ottley, One Step Tree & Lawncare, Jan. 1999

"Before we take any job, we look at it and ask ourselves three questions: 'Can we perform quality work on that job? Do we have the personnel to do the job? Does the client's schedule fit our schedule?'" – Tony DeSantis, DeSantis Landscapes, Jan. 2000

ON SERVICES...

"I got to thinking how ridiculous it was that we didn't offer maintenance services. Even if we didn't make money on it, it would prevent the spin-off of those accounts." – Ron Hutt, Green Scape, Feb. 1990

"The more diversified you are with commercial accounts, the more likely you'll be that one call they want to make." – Lou Wierichs, ServiceMaster Lawn Care, Jan. 1992

ON SLOW TIMES...

"We have tried to get a backlog of projects to take us as far into next year as possible." – Mark Yahn, Ground Control, Jan. 1991

"I knew that I couldn't go out and grow the business right away after taking over. The main thing I focused on was developing a strong relationship with the clients I had." — Sandra Weaver, Albuquerque Grounds Maintenance, Jan. 1996

ON TRACKING...

Monthly records are sent to a CPA, and monthly gross income and per man-hour expenses are tracked internally. That way, the company knows its net income on a monthly basis per man-hour. – *Greater Texas Landscape*, Sept. 1992

Each technician works alone and uses a card system that contains all the information from previous visits to a client. Notes on problems or treatments, customers' requests and other information are recorded for easy reference. – *J.C. Ehrlich, June 1996*

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USE READER SERVICE #78

Product Profile

FOCUS ON PRIMO

Hassle-Free Grass

ProGrass, a lawn care company based in Wilsonville, Ore., has found a way to capitalize on its residential customers' dislike of frequent lawn mowing. The company has incorporated a turf growth regulator, Primo, from Novartis Crop Protection, Turf and Ornamental Products, Greensboro, N.C., into its premium residential lawn care program, "SupremeCare." The product has yielded excellent results since the program began earlier this year, according to Al Borgen, branch operations manager, ProGrass.

GET WITH THE PROGRAM. The SupremeCare program uses a turf growth regulator in combination with a slow-release fertilizer and a herbicide to provide residential customers with attractive, low maintenance lawns, Borgen said.

As part of the program, Primo is applied approximately every five or six weeks in the spring, since lawn growth

slows down on its own during the summer in the Pacific Northwest, Borgen said. He added that the company is still waiting to determine if applications will be needed in the fall.

Just as its premise promises, a turf growth regulator slows grass growth, reducing the need to mow and minimizing the amount of clippings to dispose. This appeals to residential cus-

tomers tired of mowing their seemingly ever-sprouting lawns, Borgen observed. Displeasure with these high maintenance requirements has been one of ProGrass's biggest complaints from residential lawn care customers, he said. With a turf growth regulator, however, mowing is substantially reduced, he predicted. "It's much less cumbersome and less of a hassle to mow."

With such slogans as "Twice the growing, half the mowing," and "A lawn care program that cuts your mowing and your lawn clippings in half," the SupremeCare program is a marketer's dream and has received positive response from residential customers, Borgen commented. "We've only had two complaints from customers saying that their lawn is growing too fast," he said. The majority, however, are pleased with the results.

In fact, since the program's launch early this year, residential customers have signed up for the program in droves, according to Borgen, who added that ProGrass is one of the few companies currently using a turf growth regulator in a residential lawn care program.

While Primo effectively slows turf growth, it also improves a lawn's overall quality and appearance, Borgen pointed out. "It allows the plant to take in more chlorophyll," he observed. "The lawns look better."

A turf growth regulator also promises to conserve water. "We're hoping that the need to use less water will be one of the benefits we can talk about," he said, pointing out the misconception that the Pacific Northwest always gets enough rain. Summers there are actually dryer than in the Midwest, he said.

USE WITH CARE. Generally, using Primo successfully is "just a matter of reading the label carefully," Borgen said, warning that the product can have a phytotoxic effect on certain grass varieties.

Borgen advised against using a turf growth regulator on what he termed a "Heinz 57" lawn – a patchwork comprised of many different grass varieties. If a product like Primo is used in this case, "you get a lot of different reactions and a mottled look," Borgen said. Conversely, a lawn with consistent grass coverage would be the best candidate for a turf growth regulator, he pointed out.

At about \$340 a gallon, the cost is one of the product's possible drawbacks. Thus far, however, customers don't seem to mind paying more to mow their lawns less.

Borgen hopes that, ultimately, the turf growth regulator's benefits on the turf and for customers will outweigh its drawbacks. In the long run, "(Primo) will probably be worth it," he predicted. – Cynthia Greenleaf

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When applying turf growth regulators, proper spray calibration is critical to ensure an accurate, even application.

Photo: Novartis

ProGrass'

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"These older products are fine on areas where aesthetics aren't important, such as near airports and warehouses.

"Newer PGR products, however, combine growth reduction with stress conditioning to increase root growth and enhance the plant," Davis continued. "After all, most landscape contractors are getting paid to mow green grass."

ACCURATE APPLICATION. While roadsides and other low-maintenance turf areas can stand a higher application rate while sacrificing some aesthetics, residential turf cannot. "Some PGRs can be used to hold top growth for up to eight weeks at a high rate, but at this rate, the turf will have some discoloration," VanBibber said. "Some PGRs are very rate sensitive and the rate of product used affects the rate of growth control."

Tom Watchke, turfgrass science professor, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pa., recommended that iron be used with PGR applications to prevent discoloration.

"Landscape contractors have found it

valuable to slow growth with lower rates during peak growth seasons to allow more flexibility in scheduling, especially during periods of heavy rain when mowing is not possible," VanBibber explained.

Also, the length of control varies based on what type of grass is being treated. Some PGRs work better with certain turf types, such as bluegrass or ryegrass. Other products might work better on a transition zone or warmseason grass like Bermudagrass. Contractors need to evaluate their needs and then choose a product that works the best to meet those needs, Davis said.

"Warm-season grasses require such high rates, which can make the product too expensive for broadcast treatments," VanBibber said. "As a result, many landscape contractors use the product primarily on perimeters and along curbs and sidewalks to avoid laborintensive edging and trimming in both coolseason and warm-season grasses."

Landscape contractors need to remember that PGR applications inhibit plants' ability to outgrow the effects of insect damage, disease and wear from traffic. So, other product applications mightbe worthwhile to use when applying PGRs.

"Turfgrass areas treated with PGRs, especially at higher rates, should be monitored closely for disease and insects," VanBibber commented. "Also, weeds, which are not controlled by turf PGRs, are a greater concern in PGR-treated turfgrass areas during the regulation period. An herbicide treatment is always recommended in conjunction with the use of PGR products."

Some manufacturers recommend that PGRs only be used on high-quality turf so contractors are paying for a product they can get the most benefit from without having to battle other concerns, such as poor turf or other disease and weed stresses. "PGRs are not magic bullets for turf," Shepard said. "They are landscape tools that should be used in conjunction with other cultural practices in lawn maintenance."

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

How We Do It

Creating a Web Site at Allentuck Landscaping

Creating a Web site sounded easy after all, everyone has one these days, and there are many design programs readily available to help. We looked at a few of these programs and quickly realized that we did not have the expertise to create a professional Web site that would properly represent

Allentuck Landscaping Co. in the way we wanted.

The first step to creating a Web site was examining why we wanted one and what we wanted it to accomplish. Before creating a Web site, understanding your company's assets and whom you are trying to reach is important. The purpose of our Web site is to present our company to current and prospective clients and employees. The goal became simple: To attract customers and, hopefully, recruit quality employees.

Once people tuned into our site, we wanted to "wow" them. We also wanted to display our services and quality in a format that would make people want to contact us. We knew we could write the information, and we had many pictures that would show off our work, but we didn't know how to put it all together in a creative, polished format.

We found an experienced web designer, and we traded a landscape design for the site design work.

We wanted the site to be educational, attractive and fun. We believed that people would be more inclined to pursue



our landscape services or employment with us if our site gave them positive feelings.

Entering our Web site (www.allentucklandscaping.com), there is an introduction to our company and its history, our mission statement and company values. There are also "buttons" to access information on a par-

ticular service, such as commercial maintenance, commercial installation, residential services, etc. Each section briefly describes services available and features pictures of properties we designed, installed or maintained. Such pictures and graphics are mandatory on our Web site - how else can existing or potential clients see what we can accomplish?

Our Web site has links to the local weather, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America and the Landscape Contractors Association. We also have links to the local Chamber of Commerce and the Corporate Volunteer Council. The commercial maintenance section even features a falling snow graphic to emphasize our snow removal service. An employment application and a direct e-mail for customer comments is available for anyone to use.

Publicizing the site's launch is the key to its success. We sent press releases to local newspapers, newsletters and landscape magazines. We included announcement cards with invoices and our promotional materials, and the Web site address is included as we print new letterhead, business cards and truck signage.

So far, we have received some good feedback, but it's too soon to tell whether the site has brought us customers.

We are sure that it will be a sales tool and a morale booster for our employees. We recently displayed

the site at a company meeting and our employees felt good about seeing themselves in the pictures and seeing their accomplishments.

Our Web site is good, but we realize we can't get lazy when it comes to updating the site and keeping it fresh. We also plan to add information about and photos of the volunteer work we have done and seasonal landscape articles to our Web site soon. - Louise Allentuck

The author is business manager of Allentuck Landscaping, Gaithersburg, Md.



- 1. Examine why a Web site is important and what you want to accomplish by creating one.
- 2. Make sure you can provide visual and written information about your company to support the site
- 3. For a professional look, find a Web site designer you can
- 4. Publicize your Web site.

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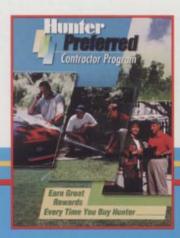
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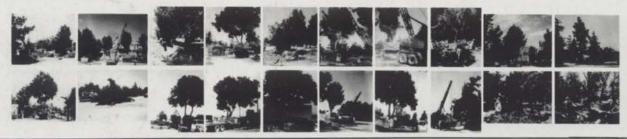


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- BIGGEST TRANSPORTATION OF LANDSCAPE MATERIALS, CALIFORNIA TO FLORIDA, TO PLANT Disney World.
 NO LOSS.
- KEPT ALL PALM SPRINGS DESERT GOLF COURSE'S GREENS PERFECT, SUMMER WHEN ALL OTHER COURSES WITH BENT GRASS GREENS IN AREA LOST 6 TO 14 GREENS.
- HIGHLY COST-EFFECTIVE EARLIER, INCREASED YIELD ABOVE THE BEST FROM SEED, TRANSPLANTING, DRIP IRRIGATION, SPRAYING YOUNG CROP PLANTS: Recent EXAMPLE: ONE GALLON ON DRIP RAISED 25 ACRES OF GRAPE TONNAGE 26%, SWEETER, LARGER — WHILE EACH NEARBY GROWER LOST HALF OF CROP TO SHATTERING STORMS. — California



◄ 38 EXTRA INCHES **GROWTH ABOVE** FERTILIZERS-ALONE. SEVEN MONTHLY USES. Tucson, Arizona, City Parks.



◀ TREE-SAVING RECORD OF 1/2 CEN-TURY. California Polytechnic State University, Cal. Capitol, Cal Tech, U. of Cal., Cal. State U.



SAVED GIANT CACTUS TREES authorized moved to desert botanic garden, Reported planted all famous and "world's big-gest" Nevada hotels. Pushes back Africa desert.

TIP LANDSCAPE

- Point with pride to ALL your jobs.
 Build demand for you.
- Protect and save essentially 100% of all plant material.
- Predict healthy, active, uniform and beautiful "super-normal" plants.