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USE READER SERVICE #89

June 2000



Cover photo:
Larry McHugh,
Haverhill, Mass.

Cover Story Dawg-Gone Good

Paying close attention to marketing plus valuing technicians equals rapid growth for The Lawn Dawg......

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Turf Seed Buyers' Guide

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USE READER SERVICE #96

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GRANULAR INSECTICIDE

5SC INSECTICIDE

You Better Be a Geek

"I walk slowly, but I never walk backward." – Abraham Lincoln

N

Not many people would associate the landscape industry with technology, and understandably so. Especially in today's age of .com companies, video conferencing and computerized navigation in cars, cutting lawns doesn't scream cutting edge.

I don't think that's a real problem if the general public thinks that way. As an industry, we have bigger public perception battles to fight first – pesticide safety comes to mind – before we worry about convincing the public how technologically savvy we are. But today's contractors better not lose sight of what technology can do for them if they are going to move forward.

I was fortunate enough to write this year's Crystal Ball Report, produced by the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. The subject was "Implementing Technological Change in Your Company," which essentially relates to computerization – a challenge for much of this industry.

Representatives from some of the industry's leading companies spent three days discussing nothing but technology-related issues and how they pertain to the landscape industry. What technology exists today for contractors to use? How can contractors enjoy the greatest benefits from technology? How can contractors know how much to spend on computers and software? What does the Internet mean for our industry?

The discussions were interesting and stimulating, to say the least, and made clear that computerization is an issue every manager and owner should dedicate some time and thought to. One of the reasons why we haven't seen much technology created for the landscape industry until the last few years has been contractors' resistance to implementing it in their businesses. That mentality won't work in today's world where there is greater need for efficiency and productivity.

Technology doesn't have to overwhelm or re-shape your business if you haven't become part of the computer culture. Using computers can be as simple as automating your billing procedure. Once you see the potential of technology, I imagine this will be just a first of many steps. And the key is that this first step will be one moving forward. Because although it may not seem possible, not moving forward is equivalent to moving backward in today's industry.

Bob West

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Market Trends

INDUSTRY NEWS

Lawn & Landscape Wins Editorial, Graphic Awards

BOSTON – Once again, the staff of *Lawn & Landscape* was recognized for continued editorial and graphic excellence at the 11th annual Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA) meeting.

Lawn & Landscape received the following awards in this year's competition: First Place – Single Page Design, Merit Award – State of the Industry Report, Merit Award – The Morrell Group operations profile and Merit Award – Electronic publishing, Web site design.

In addition, a new TOCA award introduced this year recognized the overall best in writing and design from among nearly 200 entries. This placed each writing and design entry, regardless of category and type of piece, in competition against each other. *Lawn & Landscape* was especially honored when its graphic artist, Charlotte Turcotte, received the Best of Design award for her single page editorial design mentioned above.



M

More landscape contractors are using computers to manage their day-to-day businesses. Only 11.3 percent of respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* reader survey reported that they didn't use a computer in their businesses.

The survey also reported that 66.8 percent of contractors have Internet access. Most of these contractors – 76.7 percent – use the Internet for e-mail, while 74.6 percent use it for research; 53.8 percent use it to gather news; 25.1 percent use it to sell or buy items; and 7.2 percent use it to network on bulletin boards and in chat rooms.

Getting HOOKED UP

For what purposes does your company use a computer?

| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| Accounting/billing | 80.9% |
| Word processing | 70.1% |
| Inventory | 29.9% |
| Internet | 53.4% |
| Purchasing | 20.2% |
| Scheduling/routing | 32.0% |
| Design | 30.6% |
| Estimating | 41.6% |
| Other | 4.2% |
| Not used | 11.3% |

FRANCHISE OPPORTUNITY

Making it Real

Tim Hanauer is a big believer in the capabilities of landscape design and imaging software. "Imaging is the greatest thing to happen to residential landscape design in a long time because most clients don't understand how to read a blueprint, and not every designer is a good renderer," noted Hanauer, president of Earth Graphics, a Greensboro, N.C.-based organization looking to franchise landscape design operations with a computer-focused design model.

"Digital imaging is the one approach that makes sense for every landscape designer," said Hanauer, a veteran landscape designer himself. "We've seen an increase of 30 percent in our sales close rate on jobs when we've used imaging as opposed to making proposals without it."

The Earth Graphics system looks to combine imaging capabilities with a modified van to develop a national presence.

"Our model is built around a single goal of providing customers same-day landscape design that starts in the morning when the designers arrive on the property and ends in the afternoon or evening when the designers present designs to clients," Hanauer explained. "To do this, the designer has to have an office on site, and that's why we have the van set up, so the designer can do the work without leaving the property."

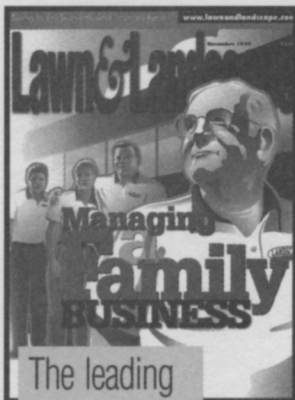
"The design departments are usually cost centers that create a product that will hopefully create revenue down the road," he continued. "We want to help designers make money doing designs."

More information is available at www.earthg.com or by calling 877/327-8441.



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- 6. Landscape Architect
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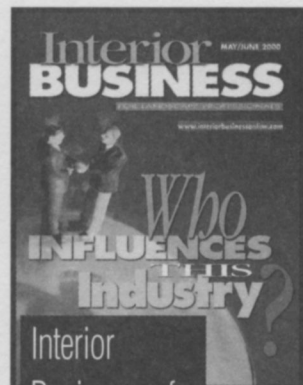
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TURF SEED NEWS

J.R. Simplot/ Former Owner Bid for ABT

HENDERSON, Nev. – Five months after filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, AgriBioTech (ABT) has put itself up for sale, and so far, Kenneth Budd and J.R. Simplot Co. have submitted bids to acquire the company's turf seed assets and Specialty Division, which ABT estimated at a \$65 million value.

While Budd, former president and chief operating officer of ABT, and J.R. Simplot Co., Post Falls, Idaho, submitted separate bids and ABT has recognized those bids, the acquisition process is nowhere near completion. According to Fred Zerza, vice president of public relations, J.R. Simplot Co., competing bids can still be submitted. Once a bid is approved, the purchaser has a legal right to due diligence and can either submit a lower bid or decline the offer.

"Simplot has bid on certain assets of ABT,

Calendar of Events

JUNE 16, JULY 14, 18 Massachusetts Pesticide Exam, Waltham, Mass. Contact: 617/626-1786.

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

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

JUNE 22-23 Certified Landscape Technician Exterior Exam, Raleigh, N.C. Contact: 919/266-1777.

JUNE 22-25 Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's Annual Meeting, Napa, Calif. Contact: 703/549-7600.

JULY 7-8 Tennessee Nurserymen's Association Trade Show, Nashville, Tenn. Contact: 615/476-3951.

JULY 12 Ohio Lawn Care Association Summer Diagnostic Seminar, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/510-5296.

JULY 13-16 American Nursery & Landscape Association Annual Convention, Vancouver, British Columbia. Contact: 202/789-5980.

JULY 19 Metropolitan Detroit Landscape Association Mid-Summer Outdoor Expo, Novi, Mich. Contact: 248/646-4992.

JULY 22-24 International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Expo, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 800/558-8767.

JULY 24-25 PLCAA Legislative Day on the Hill, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/458-3466.

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Market Trends

but we don't characterize it as an agreement in principle because our bid is subject to due diligence and board approval," Zerza said. "And we're not necessarily the exclusive bidder. We have not reached a definitive agreement by any measure, and we won't until due diligence is completed."

In a previous announcement, ABT reported that as a part of the transaction, the purchaser is expected to assume the company's obligations under contracts with

its growers, which includes purchasing existing turf seed inventory in the growers' possession. After this announcement, various purchase packages were submitted to Development Specialists, Inc. (DSI), the bankruptcy reorganization group overseeing ABT's operations. Other companies, whose names were not released, also submitted bids. The exact details of the J.R. Simplot Co. and Budd bids were confidential at presstime and will be made public at a later date,

according to Zerza. DSI reports it will stop taking bids for the company in June.

Reports released about the sale of ABT to J.R. Simplot Co. also quote a \$65 million purchase price, plus the assumption of liabilities. This amount, according to Zerza, is speculative. "Our bid is much lower than that," he said. "The actual amount won't be defined until due diligence is completed."

If J.R. Simplot Co. won the bid, Zerza said ABT's turf and horticulture assets would become part of Simplot Turf & Horticulture, a division of J.R. Simplot Co., and current management would remain in charge of the new addition.

Despite ABT's dramatic failure, Zerza said if the acquisition pans out, J.R. Simplot Co. plans to ease the current financial turmoil seed growers face. "We have no control over what has happened," Zerza said. "But we will do what we can to re-establish stability."

Other seed companies declined to comment about ABT or the outstanding bids made on the company.

(continued on page 16)

On the WEB

Dan's Landscaping & Lawn Care - www.danslandscaping.com

The Lawn Doctor - www.lawndoctor.com

Erosion Control Technologies - www.erosioncontroltech.com

Excel Industries - www.excelhustler.com

Professional Grounds Management Society - www.pgms.org

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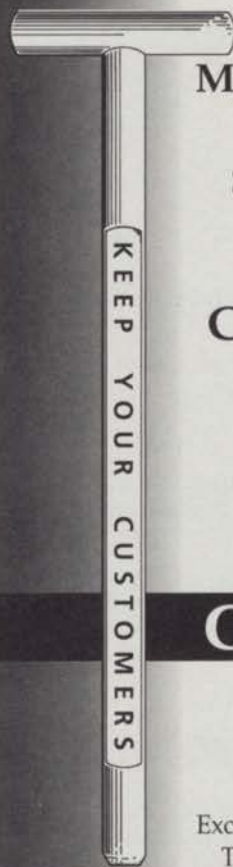
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Market Trends

(continued from page 14)

INDUSTRY NEWS

Consolidation Strikes Again

ALPHARETTA, Ga. – Demonstrating the dynamic state of distribution, McGinnis Farms recently acquired Pipe 'n Heads, the Plano, Texas-based wholesale distributor of irrigation products.

Made through Jenco Wholesale Nurseries, a McGinnis Farms-owned subsidiary, the acquisition further establishes McGinnis as a successful full-line distributor of nursery, landscape and irrigation products. The addition of Pipe 'n Head's 13 sales operations brings the McGinnis Farms distribution network to 44 locations throughout 10 Southeastern and South Central states.

Following the company's Jenco acquisition in late 1999, this move is an opportunity to shore up additional product lines for value-added service and increased buying power, according to Stan Walker, president.

(continued on page 20)

People

Steve Rusconi was named grower services supervisor for Jacklin Seed Co.

Scag Power Equipment announced the following appointments: **John Crowson** to vice president, sales and marketing; **David Sugden** to vice president, product development; **Todd Wanie** to manager, research and development and **Chris Frame** to manager of marketing and strategic technology.

Tim Lacy was named director of customer and facility development and **Dave Heegard** was hired as director of professional sales for Pursell Technologies, Inc.

The American Nursery & Landscape Association named **Sharon Schechtel** assistant director of marketing and membership development and **Erica Piggott** industry relations coordinator.

Wendy Proud was promoted to product manager at Monrovia.

The Drip Store promoted **Glenn Zollner** to vice president of operations.

James Cigler was appointed manager of technical and standards programs at the Portable Power Equipment Manufacturers Association.

Brian Blair was hired as technical sales representative at Growth Products.



Rusconi (top),
Crowson
(bottom)

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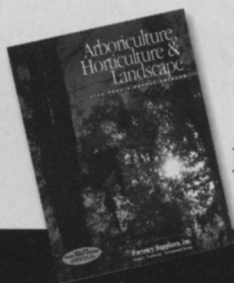


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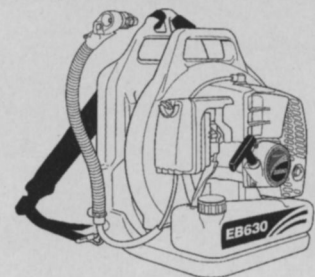
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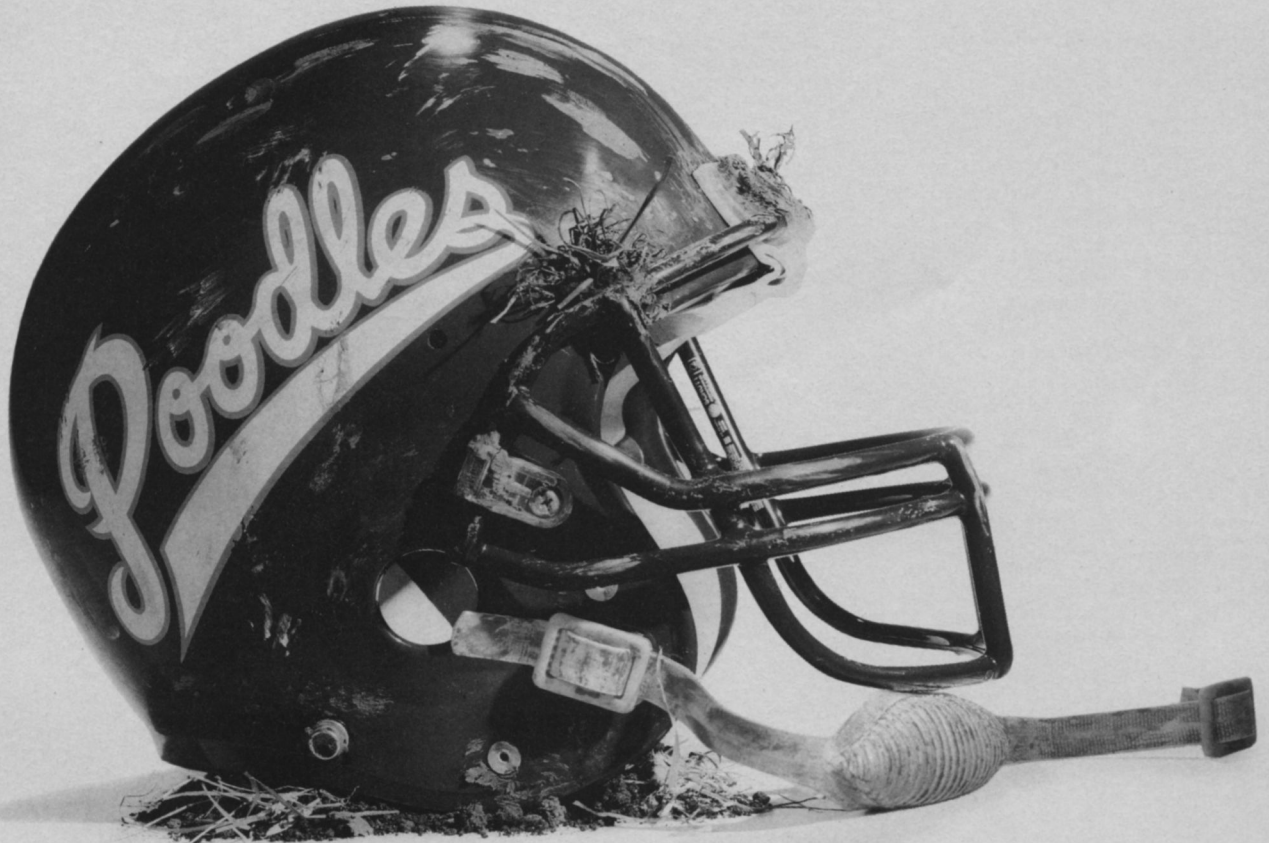
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USE READER SERVICE #104

Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

As part of the deal, Pipe 'n Heads, for the most part, will maintain its company identity. "They have a valuable name and we will retain that," Walker said, noting that Jenco will gradually add nursery and landscape supplies to all of Pipe 'n Head's stores as well as establish new full-service stores.

This acquisition fits into McGinnis Farms' long-term plan to become a full-line national player on the distributor level, Walker said. "This acquisition strengthens our market presence and overall market share," he said, adding that the market trend toward full-line, full-service distributors is one that will clearly continue. "In the long term, the landscape industry will support the full-service, one-stop shop," Walker said. "As industries consolidate, value-added operations will be what will survive."

Looking ahead, Walker said McGinnis Farms will continue to focus on the national level and will consider expansion into other markets, including possibly the West Coast,

(continued on page 25)

Association NEWS

Florida Nurserymen & Growers Association's (FNGA) board of directors proposed a name change to its members. With a two-thirds vote of active and affiliate members at FNGA's annual meeting in June, the group's new name will be the Florida Nursery & Landscape Association, a name intended to more closely reflect the make-up of the industry and the association since its addition of members from the now-dissolved Florida Landscape Designers Association (FLDA).

Ron and Sara Damgaard, owners of Lakewood Landscape Partners, Des Plaines, Ill., donated \$25,000 to and were named founding ambassadors of the **American Landscape Contractors of America** Educational Foundation. A founding ambassador title means that the Damgaards were one of the first 25 people to contribute at this donation level to the foundation, which ALCA launched at its 1998 annual conference.

The **Ohio Lawn Care Association** elected its new officers. Joe Reynolds is president and will continue to serve as a member of the board. Fred Schillinger is vice president; Kim Kellogg is the secretary/treasurer; Mark Grunkemeyer is the immediate past president; Jamie Heydiner, Bill Hoopes and Paul Jacquemin will serve three-year board member terms; and Don Mutters has been re-elected for his second board member term.

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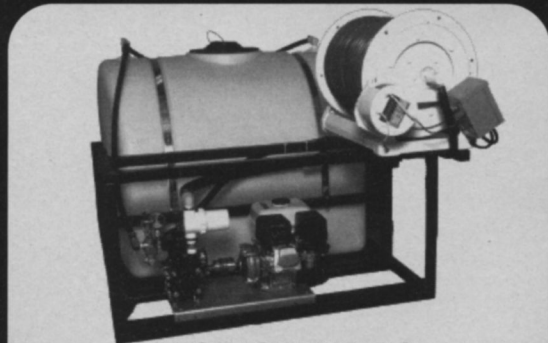
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EXPO 2000

1. To avoid the \$25 on-site registration fee, please complete and return the form attached before July 17. Badges will be mailed to those who send in the form by June 12. If the form is received in the EXPO office after June 12, you may pick up your EXPO 2000 badges at the Kentucky Exposition Center.

2. Photocopy the form as needed for additional room reservations or EXPO registrations, and keep a photocopy of your registration for your files and tax records.

3 Children under 16 at EXPO 2000 must be accompanied by an adult at all times. In the registration area, pick up a free badge for each child. Do not pre-register children.

4. Using the map and rate chart, select a hotel. If you have questions about hotels, call the Louisville Convention and Visitors Bureau, Monday - Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., E.D.T., 800-743-3100. (In Kentucky or outside the U.S. call 502-561-3100.) **Reservations will not be taken over the phone.**

5. Mail to: EXPO 2000, c/o Sellers Expositions, 550 S. Fourth Avenue, Suite 200, Louisville, KY 40202-2504 USA Phone 800-558-8767 or 502-562-1962.

6. For airline discounts, you or your travel agent can call:

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To receive free admission badges by mail, please send in the form on the next page by June 12. If you can't meet that deadline, you can pick up your badge(s) at the show.

Here are the other deadlines you should be aware of:

- To make hotel reservations through the EXPO registration form - June 26.
- To avoid the \$25 on-site registration fee - July 17.

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| * Holiday Inn Downtown | \$ 99 | \$ 99 | \$ 119 | \$ 119 | \$ 119 |
| * Hyatt Regency | \$ 136 | \$ 136 | \$ 147 | \$ 147 | \$ 147 |
| * The Inn at Jewish | \$ 105 | \$ 105 | \$ 105 | \$ 115 | \$ 115 |
| Quality Inn & Suites | \$ 99 | \$ 99 | \$ 99 | \$ 109 | \$ 109 |
| * Seelbach Hilton Hotel | \$ 128 | \$ 128 | \$ 138 | \$ 148 | \$ 158 |
| B Hampton Inn (New Albany, IN) | \$ 99 | \$ 99 | \$ 99 | \$ 109 | \$ 109 |
| * Holiday Inn Lakeview (Clarksville, IN) | \$ 103 | \$ 103 | \$ 103 | \$ 110 | \$ 110 |
| * Ramada Inn Riverside (Jeffersonville, IN) | \$ 90 | \$ 90 | \$ 90 | \$ 90 | \$ 90 |
| C Amerisuites | \$ 109 | \$ 109 | \$ 109 | \$ 119 | \$ 119 |
| Best Western Brownsboro | \$ 95 | \$ 95 | \$ 95 | \$ 95 | \$ 95 |
| * Breckinridge Inn Hotel | \$ 85 | \$ 85 | \$ 85 | \$ 85 | \$ 85 |
| Comfort Suites | \$ 109 | \$ 109 | \$ 109 | \$ 109 | \$ 109 |
| Courtyard Marriott East | \$ 134 | \$ 134 | \$ 134 | \$ 144 | \$ 144 |
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| D Days Inn East | \$ 73 | \$ 73 | \$ 73 | \$ 83 | \$ 83 |
| Days Inn Southeast | \$ 70 | \$ 70 | \$ 70 | \$ 75 | \$ 75 |
| Fairfield Inn by Marriott East | \$ 85 | \$ 85 | \$ 85 | \$ 85 | \$ 85 |
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| * Holiday Inn Hurstbourne | \$ 99 | \$ 99 | \$ 99 | \$ 99 | \$ 99 |
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| Quality Inn & Suites | \$ 99 | \$ 99 | \$ 99 | \$ 109 | \$ 109 |
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| * Ramada Plaza Hotel (Bishop Ln.) | \$ 109 | \$ 109 | \$ 109 | \$ 109 | \$ 109 |
| * Sleep Inn Airport (Preston) | \$ 85 | \$ 85 | \$ 85 | \$ 85 | \$ 85 |
| * Holiday Inn Southwest | \$ 110 | \$ 110 | \$ 110 | \$ 110 | \$ 110 |

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* Room Type: single (1 bed/1 person), double (1 bed/ 2 people), dbl/dbl (2 beds/ 2 people), Triple (2 beds/ 3 people), quad (2 beds/ 4 people).

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(continued from page 20)

Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions. McGinnis Farms' future growth will likely come from other distributorships and businesses available for acquisition, since this is the company's preferred method of expansion, Walker said, adding that McGinnis has a number of start-ups in the works as well.

INDUSTRY NEWS

VW&R Pursues Turf Industry

AUSTIN, TEXAS - Van Waters & Rogers (VW&R), one of the largest distributors of specialty chemical products for the structural pest control industry, continued its initiative to develop a presence in the turf and ornamental market by acquiring Turf Industries, Dallas, Texas. Turf Industries adds two locations to VW&R's more than 110 locations across the country, and the company has plans for additional acquisitions to further strengthen its position in the turf industry.

John Bolano, vice president of VW&R's

Professional Products & Services, said this acquisition "sets the pace for our growth as a key national distributor to the professional turf and ornamental marketplace."

Frank Gasperini, industry manager, turf and ornamentals for VW&R, acknowledged that the company's plan is to be a key player in the turf industry nationally - beginning with the Sun Belt. "Acquisition is the primary way we've grown our pest control business in the last 20 years, and now we're the leading distributor in the pest control market," he related. "The fact that we're looking for good acquisitions to take us into the turf market isn't a secret, and most of our people with turf

expertise are in Florida and California, so we think that's a logical place to focus initially."

Gasperini noted that the turf industry's growth potential, combined with the limited remaining growth potential for distributors in the pest control industry, made the company's new focus an obvious move. "The turf market is probably four times the size of the pest control industry in terms of distributor sales potential, and our locations are in urban and suburban areas that lawn and landscape companies are located in already," he explained, adding that approximately two-thirds of VW&R's North American locations currently handle some turf business.

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Lawn & Landscape magazine delivers superior, total coverage of the continually evolving professional lawn and landscape contractor market, from in-depth business trends and technical research reports to market analysis and new product introductions. For 20 years, *Lawn & Landscape* has provided industry presidents, business owners and top-level managers the most up-to-date information needed to effectively run their businesses.

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USE READER SERVICE #18

Market Trends

INDUSTRY NEWS

TruGreen-ChemLawn Buys Leisure Lawn

DAYTON, OHIO – TruGreen-ChemLawn continued to distance itself from the rest of the lawn care industry with the acquisition of Leisure Lawn.

Representatives from Leisure Lawn, which was founded in 1970 and marketed itself as the "nation's largest privately held lawn care company," weren't available for comment, but the chemical lawn care company had 1999 revenue of about \$22 million from 11 different markets, including: Cleveland, Ohio; Cincinnati, Ohio; Columbus, Ohio; Chicago, Ill.; Indianapolis, Ind.; St. Louis, Mo.; Detroit, Mich.; Washington, D.C.; and Atlanta, Ga.

Lawn & Landscape also learned that TruGreen-ChemLawn was not the only company interested in acquiring Leisure Lawn. Scotts Lawn Service, Marysville, Ohio, is also believed to have submitted a bid to acquire the company. ■

Letters TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

While GIE Publishers and *ALA* (what is today *Lawn & Landscape*) were getting underway in 1980, my husband was bootstrapping a one-man operation at Marco Island, Fla. What was a 1978 ElCamino, an open bed snowmobile trailer and a couple mowing tractors now is now a three-division company with 45 employees, a fleet of trucks and scores of mowers. It's been a great 20 years, and over time we feel like we've "seen it all."

Of the many obstacles to be overcome by South Florida landscape maintenance providers, the labor shortage looms as the single greatest challenge to growth and prosperity for our company, and we believe this is true for everyone in our industry.

Lawmakers hold us to ever-higher safety standards, place noise abatement and pollution standards on equipment, ask us to restrict our use of water and fertilizer, increase taxes, and then withhold from us our single most important means of production – the immigrant laborers who are so willing, ready and able to help our national economy reach new levels of productivity. Surely lawmakers know that small business enterprise is absolutely essential to the health of our country's economy. What can they be thinking?

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USE READER SERVICE #20

CAMPUS GROUNDS MANAGER MASTERMINDED ESPIONAGE PLOT

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



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

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Irrigation Notebook

DRIP IRRIGATION

Getting Hip to Drip

INT

No new, radical technology, drip irrigation is an effective, beneficial system that dates back to ancient times. Drip was even used in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, where porous containers of water were hung over gardens to slowly drip over a long period of time, according to Kathleen Baldwin, vice president, Olson Irrigation, Santee, Calif.

In modern times, drip irrigation's use in the landscape has been driven primarily by the issue of water conservation. Many contractors and homeowners have turned to drip during a crisis situation, such as a drought, only to find out just how easy, economical and beneficial it can be, Baldwin noted. "Increasingly, drip is almost a household word, especially in areas like California and Florida, where water is an absolute necessity and in short supply," she said.

Drip irrigation is suited to practically any landscape application, according to Kurt Maloney, director of marketing and sales, landscape division, Netafim Irrigation, Fresno, Calif. "There's hardly any area that couldn't be

drip irrigated," he said. From shrub beds and median strips to trees and smaller turf areas, drip is suited for almost every application imaginable, Maloney noted. "You can cover any shape and any area."

Mike Astram, owner, Northern Designs, Milford, Conn., however, wouldn't recommend using drip irrigation on a large turf area. "I wouldn't do a soccer field with it," he said. "If you have a problem, how do you fix it? Drip irrigation would have to be spaced 12 inches

apart with a drip tube every 12 inches," he said, noting that a large-scale application such as this would be too much of a maintenance headache for most landscape contractors.

Drip irrigation is now almost a necessity in commercial applications, Baldwin noted. "Drip is much less intrusive than a conventional irrigation system. You don't even know it's there, and you can irrigate while business is going on as usual," she said. "You're also not as apt to have damage done by people kicking in or breaking off heads."

MANY PROS AND A FEW CONS. Drip irrigation provides many benefits, the most obvious of which is saving water. "The water conservation issue is so big we hardly even mention it," Maloney pointed out. "It's easily understood."

Drip systems make highly efficient use of water, Astram said, who noted that he's a big proponent of drip irrigation with his customers. "With the type of water shortages that we have, we're really trying to push this."

(continued on page 30)

HELPFUL TIPS

The Benefits of Drip

Drip irrigation's numerous advantages include:

- Water conservation
- Healthier plants
- Reduced chance of water-borne disease
- Reduced soil erosion
- Less expensive than a conventional system
- Unlimited operating hours
- Lower liability from runoff and spray

Source: *The Complete Irrigation Workbook*, Larry Keesen

Drip irrigation is now commonly used in such landscape applications as flower beds and under shrubs.

Photo:
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USE READER SERVICE #92

Irrigation Notebook

(continued from page 28)

Since they're installed below ground and don't use sprinklers, drip systems are unaffected by wind or water evaporation issues. Running at low pressure, they also require less water to operate than a conventional system. "You don't need large quantities of water with drip," Agram said.

Baldwin agreed, noting that depending on such variables as soil and weather conditions, water savings with drip can range anywhere from 10 to 60 percent compared to a conventional system.

Another benefit to drip is that, in contrast to a conventional system, the window of time for irrigating is unlimited since contractors don't need to worry about spraying passersby or buildings, Agram pointed out.

Drip irrigation also reduces the chances of weed germination, said Baldwin, who noted that when water is haphazardly distributed out of a sprinkler, seeds are more easily germinated, causing weed growth and possibly spreading water-borne diseases. With drip irrigation, though, "you get pre-

cise control of water," she said, pointing out that less fertilizer may even be required since the water goes right to a plant's roots.

Drip irrigation's most apparent drawback is the fact that it's unapparent – a contractor can't readily tell if a system is functioning properly. "You can't tell from a quick look if a system is working or not," Baldwin said. "Because contractors can't see the water, they often think the landscape is not getting enough."

Agram agreed that this is a particular challenge. "With drip, you don't have a visual confirmation," he said.

Unlike a conventional system that is simple to visually check periodically, with drip, a contractor must diligently monitor the system and soil moisture levels on a regular basis. Otherwise, "a problem is not always obvious until a plant shows signs of stress. You could have a plant wilting before you know something is wrong "

"A lot of people think **drip** is more **expensive**, more **labor intensive** and **higher maintenance** than a **conventional system** but it's not." – **Mike Agram**

Baldwin said. "But usually something will give you a clue."

Above all, she advised landscape contractors to "have a little faith," she said. "Just because you can't see the system working doesn't mean that it's not."

Working with drip does have a few other drawbacks, depending on whom you ask. A drip system often has more components than a conventional system, which some landscape contractors find irksome.

(continued on page 32)

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Irrigation Notebook

(continued from page 30)

"Some contractors just don't want to deal with so many bits and pieces," Baldwin said. "They think it's too much trouble, that there's just too much to keep track of compared to a conventional system."

Being too complicated is a common misperception drip has faced from the landscape industry. Another is the notion that drip is too much of a maintenance hassle or costs too much.

All of these perceptions are generally inaccurate or exaggerated, according to Agram. "A lot of people think drip is more expensive, more labor intensive and higher maintenance than a conventional system, but it's not," he said.

Changing minds about drip, however, is a matter of education and getting accurate information out to the industry, he said.

DRIP TIPS. For a drip system to work properly, there are several considerations to keep in mind. Drip requires low water pressure in order to run and operates at a slower

rate than a conventional system, said Baldwin. With drip, contractors must think in terms of gallons per hour as opposed to gallons per minute, she added. "It's a longer run because the application is slower."

In addition, using clean water is essential, since emitters and other system components can get clogged. Baldwin advised checking components on a fairly regular basis to make sure everything is in working order.


When installing tubing, contractors should put it at least a few inches below grade and cover it with mulch, Agram advised. Otherwise, "anyone working in the bed can catch the tube with a rake," he warned.

Baldwin agreed with the importance of installing a drip irrigation system at the proper level. "If you bury the system, damage isn't a real issue. There's very little that can go wrong," she said. "If you install it

"Increasingly, **drip** is almost a **household word**, especially in areas like **California** and **Florida**, where water is an **absolute necessity** and in **short supply**."

- Kathleen Baldwin

above ground, however, someone can kick out the tubing or a dog running through the bed can pull it up," said Baldwin, speaking from personal experience.

Overall, drip is easy to install, according to several irrigation experts. "There's not a huge learning curve. It takes about an hour to learn," said Baldwin, who noted that she installed her drip system at home without any complications. - Cynthia Greenleaf 

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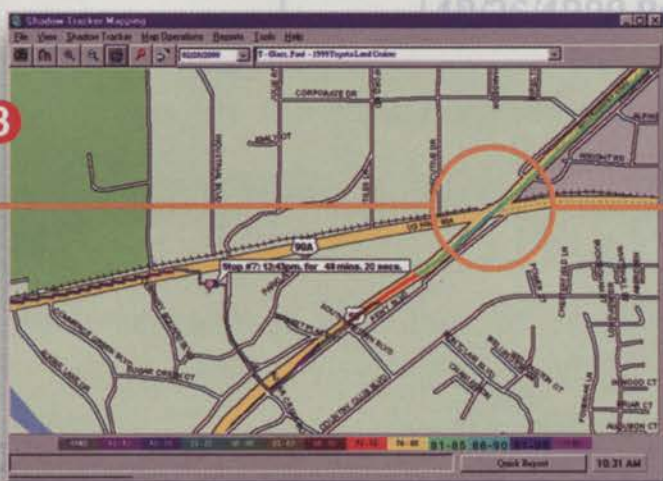
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| 11:19AM | 11:22AM | 00:03 | In Transit | 1.10 |
| 11:22AM | 11:27AM | 00:05 | L-Exxon Gas Station | 0.00 |
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| 11:31AM | 4:14PM | 04:43 | S-Your Company Office | 0.00 |
| 4:14PM | 4:17PM | 00:03 | In Transit | 1.18 |
| 4:17PM | 4:18PM | 00:02 | L-Grand & Hwy 90 | 0.00 |
| 4:19PM | 4:36PM | 00:17 | In Transit | 15.01 |
| 4:36PM | 6:50PM | 02:14 | B-Home, Employee U. | 0.00 |
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USE READER SERVICE #63

In Minor's League

QUESTION: Last month, you spoke about profit margins in the 15 to 20 percent range. Can you give me some advice on how I can get my company to that level?

ANSWER: Believe it or not, profit margins in the 15 to 20 percent range are possible for many companies. Smaller companies regularly achieve this goal, often because of their minimal overhead costs and the fact that the owner frequently fulfills many roles. The best companies consistently achieve this mark by focusing on their accounting systems.

First, tracking the profitability of all your significant service lines is critical. As a rule of thumb, I suggest tracking profit to the bottom line on any service you provide that equals at least 10 percent—or better yet, 5 percent—of your gross revenue.

(continued on page 38)

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

In addition to serving the industry as a consultant and speaker, Minor is professor and director of The Entrepreneurship Center at The M.J.

Neeley School of Business at Texas Christian University. Readers with questions they would like to ask Minor can e-mail them to bwest@lawnandlandscape.com or fax them to Lawn & Landscape at 216/961-0364.



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USE READER SERVICE #128

In Minor's League

(continued from page 34)

Most people in our industry usually only account for their landscape maintenance and installation divisions. There are flaws in this line of thinking. For example, in landscape construction, bid work is generally going to be less profitable than enhancement work. If you have mingled the two, you will never fully comprehend what level of profitability you have in either division. Generally, your

margins are higher in chemical lawn care or landscape maintenance and less in services like irrigation repair. You must know what profit centers are the most productive. Then, focus on promoting the most profitable services and eliminate the services that have less-than-desirable profits.

For example, let's assume that a \$1 million company provides landscape installation and maintenance. This contractor may

also provide chemical applications and irrigation repairs in addition to core maintenance work. In landscape construction, this company may provide installations for new projects as well as landscape enhancements. Further, let's assume that each department does more than \$100,000 in annual revenue. If that is the case, create a financial statement that tracks all direct costs associated with each service. This can easily be done using any accounting software on the market.

Begin by having your field people code labor to a particular service line. Have color-coded work orders to assist your staff. Labor is the most important expense item to control on a financial statement. Track labor to determine profitability. Also, do this for materials in construction and enhancement. For other variable expenses, and general and administrative expenses, allocate the expense on a discretionary basis, a percentage of labor or a percentage of sales basis. Although you risk allocating incorrectly, allocating expenses in some way is better than not allocating at all.

From my experience, contractors who use this comprehensive method of accounting are surprised to find they are not making money with a particular service. But this type of tracking allows them to price properly and control labor costs and other expenses.

A final word on your accounting system — it is absolutely critical that the methodology for accounting all your services is done on the accrual basis as opposed to the cash basis. Most contractors in our industry use a hybrid of the two. Many times they will do the cash-based method for expenses and a combination of the cash and accrual method for booking revenue.

Many times I have heard folks say they are using the accrual method in booking revenue when they are actually using the cash method. Usually, this mistake occurs in landscape maintenance. An example is when revenue is booked as per defined in a contract. For instance, a 12-month, \$12,000 contract is booked at \$1,000 monthly. But the revenue is accruing on a different schedule. In many parts of the country, that revenue on an accrual basis may be \$500 in January and \$1,500 in July. If you don't match your actual accrued sales with accrued expenses, you will never know your profitability.

There are many other ways to ensure profitability, but the best place to start is with proper and detailed accounting systems. **LI**

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USE READER SERVICE #25

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With a healthy job market and a record-low unemployment rate, finding and retaining good employees is a difficult task. For smaller contractors with fewer resources than their larger counterparts, this can be a particularly frustrating challenge.

Part of retaining good employees is making sure the right ones are hired in the first place. "You just have to really work hard to choose the people you want and not just take in people who come to you," said Mark Tarzian, owner, Windemere Landscape Services, Steamboat Springs, Colo. "Bad employees are like a cancer," he observed. "They end up negatively affecting other employees."

CREATING AN APPEALING CULTURE. To find and retain good workers, smaller contractors can play on their strengths and emphasize what sets them apart from larger employers, advised Greg McLaughlin, owner, McLaughlin Landscape, Pendleton, Ore.

McLaughlin, who has anywhere from eight to 14 employees depending on the season, noted that smaller companies, in particular, have the ability to get creative and make an extra effort to let their employees know they're valued. If companies do this, the issue of employee retention is minimized.

For one, smaller contractors need to create a company that employees actually *want* to work at. To differentiate his company from competitors, McLaughlin, for example, gives his employees weekends off, which is an unusual move for a contractor. Having every Saturday and Sunday free gives his employees time to re-energize, and more importantly, allows them to be with their families, McLaughlin said.

In addition to some obvious employee retention incentives like offering competitive pay and generous benefits, contractors should appreciate their employees in ongoing, concrete ways, McLaughlin advised. "Thank them for specific things they're doing well," he said, noting that even the slightest gesture of appreciation can go a

long way. "Encourage your employees and allow them to have flexibility with such issues as scheduling and work responsibilities. Send a message that you really do care about them."

To further create a "feeling of being on a team that cares," McLaughlin said he writes a yearly letter to individual employees to provide encouragement and feedback and also treats his staff to lunch once a month.

Like many successful companies, Belknap Landscape Co., Gilford, N.H., sees its culture reflected in every aspect of the company, even job titles, according to Andrew Morse, operations manager. That's why employees are referred to as "team leaders" and "team members" instead of foremen and laborers. "That terminology is old school," Morse said, adding that these titles help worker morale and create a sense of camaraderie.

Belknap has also demonstrated a commitment to employees by helping them find work in the off-season. When the landscaping season ends, the company helps its workers look for alternate sources of income and provides job recommendations if necessary. This creates worker loyalty and keeps them coming back, Morse said. Otherwise, "when someone leaves in November, there's a chance you might not see them again," he pointed out.

Another way smaller contractors can create a positive work environment is by including their employees as often as possible in any decision-making processes. Allowing them to have a say provides employees with a sense of ownership about their work and instills in them a sense of pride, Morse said.

Belknap, which has about 50 employees, holds annual management training that focuses on creating a positive work environment. During this time, the company brings in a consultant to advise managers about such issues as establishing an appealing company culture and maintaining employee morale. Even for a smaller company watching its bottom line closely, this kind of training is, without question, worth the investment, Morse advised. "It's a matter of 'Can companies afford *not* to do this?'," he said. - Cynthia Greenleaf **LL**

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

by Bob West

THE LAWN DAWG

FOUNDED: 1997

HEADQUARTERS: Nashua, N.H.

BRANCHES: Portland, Maine, and Marlboro, Mass.

SERVICES: All of the company's revenue comes from residential lawn care work.

1999 REVENUE: \$1.037 million

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THE OWNERS

Jim Campanella
Tom Kelly

Despite all of the uncertainties associated with owning your own business, Jim Campanella knows one thing for sure – he doesn't have to worry about being sold again.

Campanella's four previous employers in the lawn care industry were all sold while he worked for them, with the last transaction being the sale of Barefoot Grass to TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1996. Tired of such transitions and confident that the sale of the industry's second-largest company to the largest created a tremendous growth opportunity for other companies, Campanella incorporated The Lawn Dawg in January 1997.

Campanella, who had risen to the position of regional manager within Barefoot Grass, was joined by Tom Kelly, one of his branch managers, and the pair started calling on banks for financing. "The message we had for the banks was that consolidation had created a lot of room for growth, and we thought we could make a strong company out of this void," Campanella recalled.

"We had a great business plan and we made some good presentations, but the banks didn't want to touch us because we needed money for payroll and marketing, and those aren't hard assets the bank can use to recover a loan."

Ultimately, Campanella got a phone call from June Boston, a former co-worker he met while working for Lawnmark, which was eventually sold to Barefoot. She provided the financing the company needed.

"We had to make a lot of sacrifices early on, like not taking a salary for the first year," Campanella recalled. "But then a local bank manager we had approached for financing had kept our business plan and came to see us after our first year. She liked our first-year results and gave us an unsecured, open line of credit for enough money to get us started on the second year."

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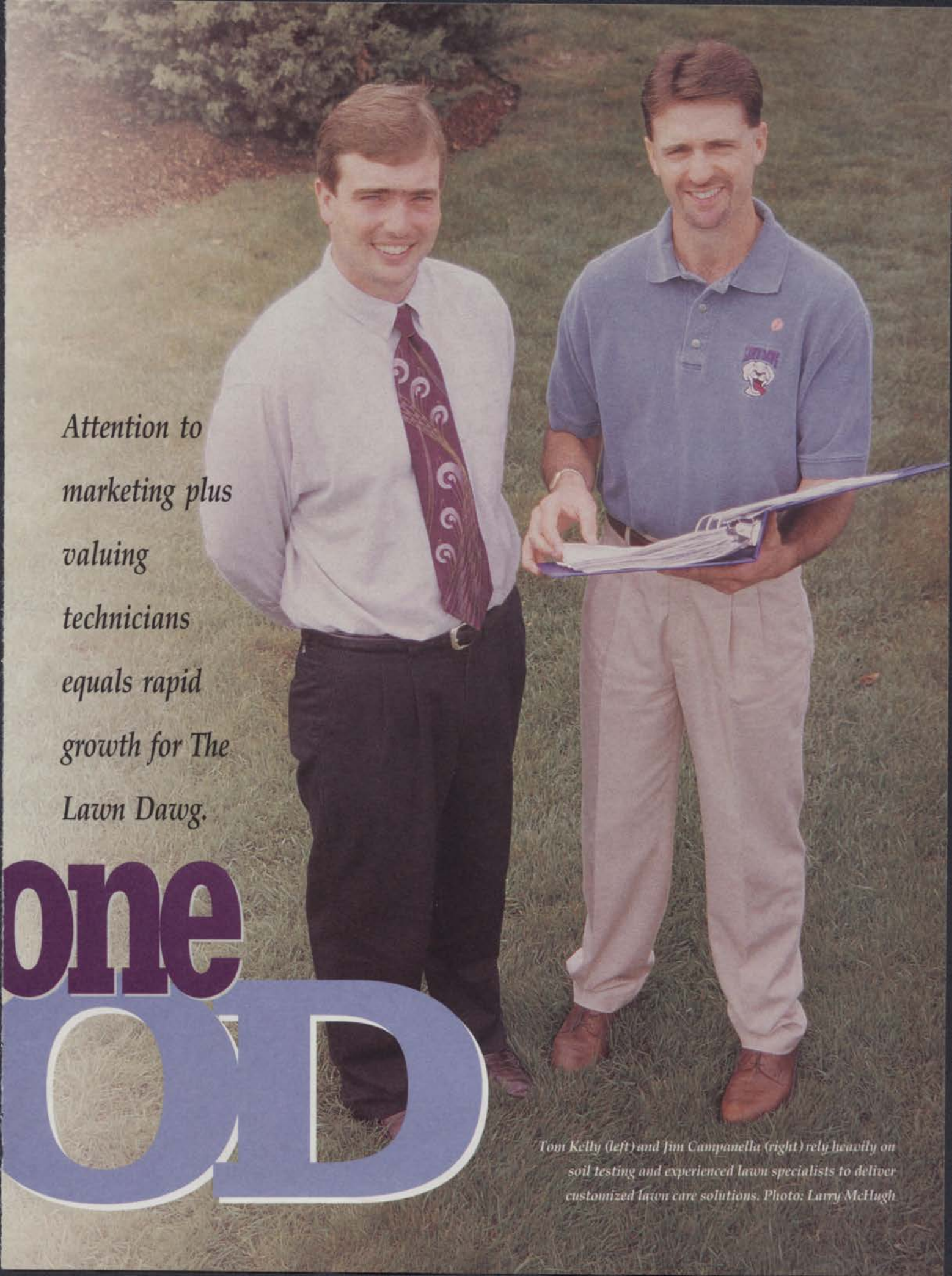
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Tom Kelly (left) and Jim Campanella (right) rely heavily on soil testing and experienced lawn specialists to deliver customized lawn care solutions. Photo: Larry McHugh

DARING & DIFFERENT. Saying you want to create a lawn care company that is different from all of the rest is one thing, but offering customers a seven-application program instead of the traditional five-application approach and guaranteeing to never raise a customer's price is truly different.

"The seven-application program had some successes and failures," Campanella noted. "What we initially wanted to do was make seven visits to the property so we were on the property more often and we could catch problems before they got too severe."

"The theory was that we could predict problems before they happened, but that only works when you've only got 600 customers and you've got three lawn specialists to manage those customers," agreed Kelly, vice president.

"Last year, the drought, the growing number of customers we had and the lack of employees we had made getting the applications done on time a real challenge," noted

Campanella. "We also ran into a lot of grub damage because we had taken a curative-only approach with grubs."

This year, the company will still make seven applications, but it will do so in five visits by adding preventive grub control and a lime application for all customers.

The lime application is clearly important based on the results from more than 5,000 soil tests The Lawn Dawg conducted on customers' properties in the last three years. "We did a test every year for every customer, and we found some pretty consistent results in terms of what the soil in this area needs," Campanella explained. "Now everyone will get a lime application to improve the soil pH, and we've eliminated phosphorous from the fertilization program because the soil doesn't need it."

An additional dynamic to adding preventive grub control for all customers is The Lawn Dawg's guarantee to never raise a customer's price from that customer's first year

with the company. "This year we're adding grub control for everyone and not raising our prices for current customers because loyalty means a lot to us," noted Kelly.

"Yes, this will be more expensive for us, and on the surface the cost increase may appear to take a bite out of our profit," Kelly recognized. "But we'll provide a better service for our customers, which means a lower cancellation rate and a higher referral rate, which means increased route density and higher long-term profitability."

Campanella explained that the no-price-increase promise came from customers complaining that too many companies focus on rewarding new customers instead of long-time customers. "People ask me how we can promise to always charge someone \$25 for a 5,000-square-foot application, but we do raise our prices every year for new customers, and we get more efficient and more profitable on our long-term accounts," he pointed out. "In addition, our cancellation rate is about 11.4 percent, which is lower than I've ever seen, and that has a tremendous impact on profitability because every customer we retain is one less new customer we need to grow."

THE MARKETING MACHINE.

Campanella learned about the importance and art of marketing while working for a number of larger lawn care companies.

"A lot of lawn care companies think they either have to be a large company or they have to be quality focused, and they can't do both," explained Campanella. "We think you can blend the two, so we have taken an aggressive telemarketing approach, and we only make promises that we can keep." (For information on The Lawn Dawg's telemarketing program, see "Telemarketing: Friend or Foe?" *Lawn & Landscape*, January 2000.)

Once The Lawn Dawg picks up new customers, Campanella wants to do everything possible to keep them. "Part of marketing is doing the best job you can to keep your customers happy," he pointed out. "We communicate with our customers in writing with every application, and we ask them to fill out a report card during the season so we know if there are any problems and so they know we are committed to them and their lawns. (To see a copy of The Lawn Dawg's customer report card, check out this article at www.lawnandlandscape.com.)

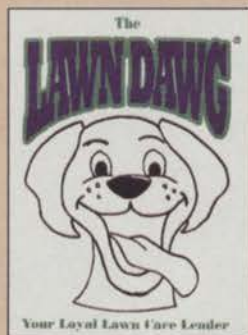
(continued on page 44)

In 1996, when Jim Campanella and Tom Kelly heard the news that TruGreen-ChemLawn bought their employer, Barefoot Grass, they knew that presented them the reason they needed to start their own lawn care company. The night they got the news, the pair met at a Boston-area pub and hashed out the plans for their new company.

One of Campanella's chief goals was to make sure their new company successfully differentiated itself from what he saw as a number of similar companies already doing the same thing in the area. "I figured if we were just going to offer a five-application program and name the company Green This or Green That, we wouldn't be any different," Campanella related. "When I was at Barefoot, some people would call us and then ask us which company they had called because there was no differentiation in the market."

Being different for Campanella started with choosing the company's name, which was inspired by a softball team he played on called The Lawn Dawgs, and its logo. "I asked my 16-year-old nephew to draw me a picture of a happy dog, and his first draft is the logo we're using today," he related. "We changed the spelling of dog so it matched with the spelling of lawn, and we make sure

that logo is prominently displayed on everything we have and everything we send out to customers. Now, people know that dog, and they know us." — Bob West



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USE READER SERVICE #132

Cover Story

(continued from page 42)

"In addition, we have office personnel call each customer before every one of our visits to their property to see if they have any special needs or problems we need to be aware of," he added.

Keeping this responsibility out of the lawn specialists' hands benefits the customers and

the specialists. "Our specialists are very focused on what is most important, which is treating their customers right and delivering a nice-looking lawn," Campanella noted. "We don't want them worrying about getting back to the office in a hurry to make phone calls before going home for the night."

Campanella said he has made a conscious effort to focus his lawn care specialists' responsibilities and to set the tone for customer service by how he treats them. "These are the people who make a company successful because they're the ones interacting with the customers," he explained. "We have to treat them the way we want our customers treated, so we give them plenty of time to do the job and keep distractions away from them."

Campanella also empowers his lawn care specialists to make decisions about the needs of their customers' lawns and set their own productivity schedules. "I don't have any strict production goals other than getting to all of your customers in an acceptable amount of time between treatments because we want them to be specialists and not just applicators," he said. "I don't track their product use on a per-route basis either because only the person on the property can decide how much fertilizer or herbicide needs to be applied."

The company's commitment to its employees is further illustrated by its benefits for lawn care specialists, which include a company vehicle, a gasoline allowance and an IRA plan. "We also pay our specialists a full salary for the entire year even though our season is only from April 1 to mid-November," Campanella added. "We may overpay, but how can you overpay the people who are in the field taking care of your customers?"

The lawn care specialists' job responsibilities do change somewhat in the winter months, which is prime selling season for The Lawn Dawg, although the employees typically only work four-day weeks during this time. "We don't have automatic renewals, so we send all of our customers a renewal notice Dec. 1, and then we're all involved in calling those customers who don't respond to the mailing," Campanella explained. "We're on the phones until Feb. 1, which is when the telemarketing employees start and begin generating new leads, and then the specialists work from noon to 8:30 p.m. following up on leads during the day and making some calls at night. Then they start running their routes again April 1."

Being able to afford year-round salaries when the company isn't generating revenue is a challenge, but Campanella reports that the winter months are typically the company's strongest cash flow period because of pre-

(continued on page 46)

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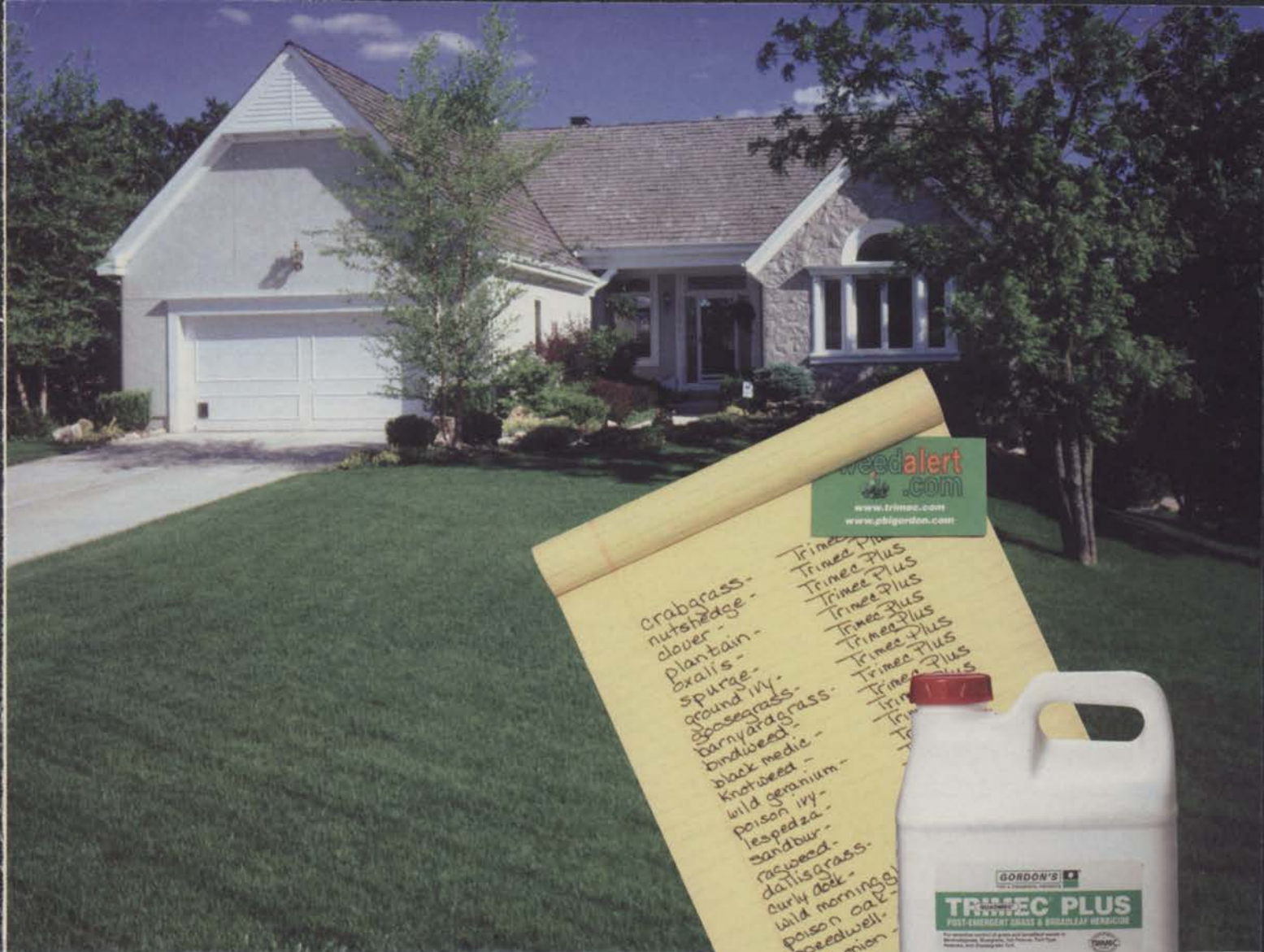
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Cover Story

(continued from page 44)

payment incentives it offers customers. "We offer everyone a 10 percent discount if they pre-pay for their service, and approximately 45 percent of the customers do it," he explained. "Those prepayments are crucial for us because there isn't enough money available in our credit line to pay employee salaries throughout the winter."

GREAT GROWTH. The Lawn Dawg's original business plan called for the company to generate \$800,000 in sales by the end of its third year, but the company and its nine lawn care specialists handled slightly more than \$1 million in sales last year. The growth was good for the company, and Campanella said it had to happen so the company could afford to hire some key employees. These employees live in Marlboro, Mass., and Portland, Maine, so the company opened branches in those locations.

And the company has employed a unique approach to finance its expansion.

"Our new branch managers contribute a certain amount of money upfront to guarantee them a certain percentage of the year-end profits from their branches," Campanella explained, adding that the deal doesn't involve any ownership of the company. "All they have to do during the year is what they know best, which is running a branch, and I'll take care of the finances and accounting. This gives us the best of both worlds because it helps with our capital needs while also increasing the level of commitment from the branch managers."

"Then the managers get to be involved in making sure their investment in the company is successful," Kelly added.

Campanella looks to grow as much as 70 percent this year without new branches as the company moves toward its goal of being New England's largest lawn care company.

"Our original goal was to double in size this year, but we've learned that having experienced and knowledgeable people in the

field is crucial, so we scaled back our goals," he related. "We're not going to grow at the sake of our reputation."

One of the challenges the company must address as it grows is one that is familiar to most owners and managers who start a company by being in the field and then hand off production responsibilities to employees. "When Jim and I started out, we had a small building, a couple of trucks, no salaries and no customers, so the customers we got meant everything to us," Kelly pointed out. "Now that we have more employees, getting them to care as much about the customers as we did can be hard. But we want them to realize that every customer is as important as the next one. That's one of the reasons why we try so hard to keep them focused on making applications during the season - so nothing distracts them from customer service." ■

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Route Management

by Nicole Wisniewski

A Flexible SCHEDULE

Regularly tweaking, developing and restructuring a route management program instead of having one that's set in stone can be more productive and cost effective.

Scott Brown is willing to travel for commercial maintenance jobs, such as Coca-Cola Corp. and CAMCO Property Management, that are 60 miles from his home base in Atlanta, Ga. His route management program is dictated by his sales process and vice versa.

"These high-profile commercial jobs are worth the extra time and expense," enthused Brown, president of Atlanta Lawn. "We schedule jobs that are farther out in a particular way. If we are traveling to an area where we don't have any other work at the time, we immediately go on a sales blitz. We start working that area heavily to accommodate our route. We bid and gain as much work as we can to keep a full day in that area. So far, this approach has worked very well and prevents us from having scattered routes."

Brown's key to routing is approaching the clients he wants and providing them with the right information and references so that he can close those accounts. "Then I am in an area that I would like to be in working on accounts I would like to put my company name on."

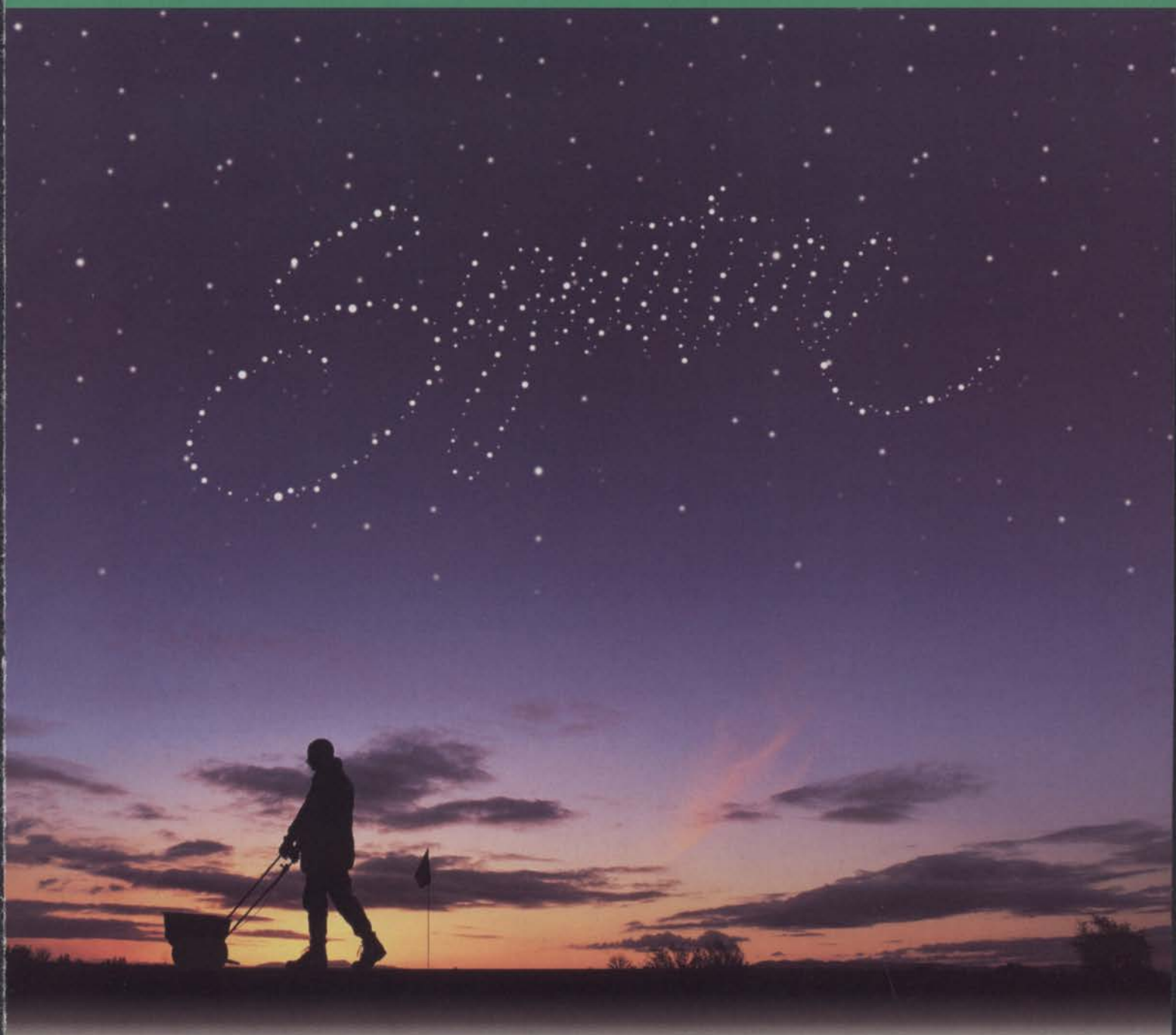
Being selective about potential clients can solve a lot of selling and routing hassles. No route can be serviced or bid in the same exact way and be acceptable for clients who have different needs. "Our system works well for jobs far and near because we are able to be so flexible," he said.

Whether a routing program's focus is selling in specific areas to establish routes, splitting up the service area, factoring in additional rush hour and congested traffic costs, or automating the process, productivity, organization and focus will become easier as long as contractors remain flexible managing their routes.

THE RIGHT APPROACH. Atlanta Lawn's sales/routing program targets specific jobs the company wants to maintain. "We don't just go out and bid on the world," Brown said. "We approach prospects in an area that we want to work in, let them know we truly selected them

(continued on page 52)

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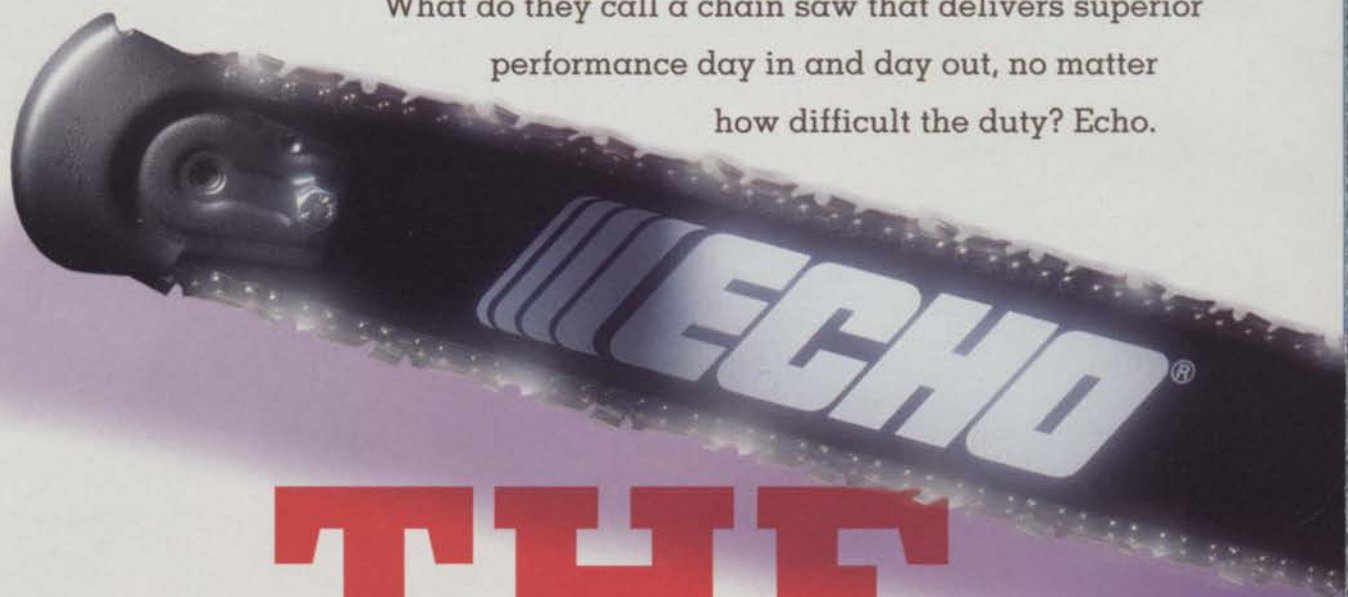
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Route Management

(continued from page 48)

and would be honored to work for them, and then let them consider hiring us. We have had a great closing ratio using this approach. Plus, then we have accounts we have found, instead of them finding us."

The company takes on new customers by having crews in areas like aeration or pruning that can be pulled off their schedules and moved in a split second to a maintenance crew, Brown said. "We operate two full-time, year-round aeration crews, and we schedule them so they can be moved around by usually only scheduling their work no more than two days ahead," he said. "All other customers are on standby or know a general time frame for when they will be aerated. So, when we obtain clients and can't work them into a current route, we pull an aeration crew off for a day or two or until the job can be worked into a maintenance crew or a new route is created."

In addition to the aeration crews, Brown

(continued on page 65)

Unfortunately, the sun doesn't shine every day. Contractors need to cushion their schedules with some extra time so when an unplanned-for rainstorm hits, they can easily reschedule clients.

Bruce Bachand, vice president, Carol King Landscape Maintenance, Orlando, Fla., rarely has to deal with the intrusion of rain into his busy schedule.

"We attempt to get our work done whenever possible - rain or shine," Bachand said. "When rain interferes with our day or cancels our work, we roll the work into the next work day and move all work back until it is made up. Because our crews finish at 4 p.m., we can either stay out later or roll work all the way back to Saturday. The result is an additional expense for overtime, which can be an expensive proposition."

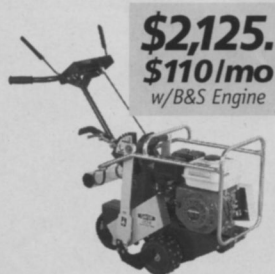
Scott Brown, president, Atlanta Lawn, Atlanta, Ga., has a slightly different approach. He keeps his maintenance crews on a four-day-per-week cycle Monday through Thursday. If rain or extra work isn't a problem, then a crew has three options on Friday: take the day off, do some extra work or go back to any accounts that need some additional attention, such as pruning, bed work or irrigation system repair. These four-day work weeks with two additional Saturdays per month also provide time off for employees' personal needs.

Because Brown doesn't promise his clients a specific day of the week for maintenance, altering the schedule in the event of a storm is easy. "We refuse to dedicate a specific day to any account and we make this known upfront," Brown said. "We do, however, keep the route in order. So, customers are never affected by beginning- or end-of-the-week weather delays."

- Nicole Wisniewski

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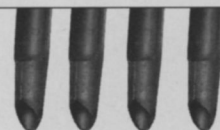
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USE READER SERVICE #153

By Nicole Wisniewski

When landscape contractors are moving, grading or altering soil on clients' properties during installation or renovation, keeping it out of neighboring yards, streets and nearby waterways can be challenging.

Protecting surrounding areas is becoming a principal concern for landscape contractors. Each particle of soil that falls out of place in the landscape can make decontaminating drinking water more expensive and time consuming, according to Jerome Daugherty, research specialist with the Indiana National Department of Resources Division of Soil Conservation, South Bend, Ind. "Soil washing away down a street drainage ditch or sewer system leads to a stream that leads to a river that leads to an ocean," pointed out Daugherty.

As a result, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is requiring states to enforce erosion control locally with the Phase II rule of the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Stormwater program. State stormwater specialists like Larry Osterholz at the Indiana Department of Environment Management have two years from November 1999 (the date the rule was published in EPA's *Federal Register*) to write a state rule.

The Phase I rule of the NPDES Stormwater Program states that anyone who alters a site larger than 5 acres must incorporate erosion control into the installation or renovation. The Phase II rule lowers that limit to 1 acre, affecting more landscape contractors.

Getting caught ignoring erosion control on a site that meets these specifications can be costly. In Indiana, the fine for failing to submit an erosion plan for each site is \$1,500, Osterholz said. If a contractor is caught causing erosion on a site, the fine increases based on the degree of off-site sedimentation and the number of violations and days the violations have occurred. Fines start at as little as \$2,500 and go up from there. Osterholz said the highest fine in Indiana so far has been \$38,000.

As erosion control becomes more of a concern, landscape contractors are becoming aware of the ways to stop soil movement.



Riverbanks can be protected against erosion with a silt fence and straw blanket (above) or with coconut logs planted with aquatic vegetation (below).
Photos: Designs By Nature.



Nonstop soil movement and new legislation are forcing contractors nationwide to take action and stop erosion.

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USE READER SERVICE #150

SEED MARKET Report

EROSION HAPPENS. When water hits the soil, it dislodges the soil. As the water collects and moves downhill, the soil moves with it. This, according to David Millar, president, Red Hen Turf Farm in New Carlisle, Ind., is how erosion takes place. "Soil without roots is easily moved," he said.

Most erosion occurs in the top ½ inch of soil or at the water-soil interface, which is why installing turf can help solve the problem of erosion, explained Roy Nelson, manager of technical services, North American Green, Evansville, Ind. "Turf provides cover for soil to stop raindrop impact and intercepts the forces involved with runoff or flowing water," Nelson said. "Turf roots provide a binder in the soil to help hold it together."

In a research study done at the Texas Transportation Institute, Nelson said a turf and reinforcement net controlled area with a 3:1 slope and sandy soil lost only 8.1 kilograms of soil per 10 square meters compared to the control plot, which lost 27.2 square meters of soil, proving that doing something to control erosion is better than doing nothing at all.

Sodding is one way to stop erosion. "If you want to stop erosion, you have to establish plants that cushion the rain with lots of stems," Millar said. "Sod has thick, thatchy areas that slow down the movement of water. Then, below ground, sod creates a root system through the soil, holding it in place."

Although sod is a live, mature plant with growing momentum that can build a good root system quickly, Millar recommended that sod installations be avoided in June and July because mature grass roots don't grow as quickly during those months.

On any type of ground that has a 30-degree or less slope, seed can also be used to establish a turf area that will guard the site against erosion, advised Bryan Muntz, sales, Barenbrug USA, Tangent, Ore. Hardy, low-maintenance turfgrass varieties, such as tall fescue or chewing fescue, are commonly used for this purpose because of their 1½- to 6-foot root systems. Fine fescues, which have 6-inch to 1½-foot root systems, also work well. "These grasses have low to medium fertility requirements," Muntz said. "Bluegrass and perennial ryegrass need much higher maintenance regimens."

But Millar disagrees that seeding can ef-

fectively prevent erosion. "Seeding doesn't slow things down instantly because a root system will not grow strong enough to stop erosion for at least one year," he said.

Certain grasses, Millar said, such as perennial ryegrass, fine fescue and tall fescue, start growing quickly but are bunch grasses and won't spread out enough for effective erosion control.

"The trick with bunch grasses is to plant them densely, forming a lush fort against erosion," Muntz added. "Mixing legume species with turfgrass also provides a stable barrier."

Other turfgrass varieties, such as Kentucky bluegrass, do spread out but take a long time to get established if they are planted from seed. They are also susceptible to the elements (weather and erosion) in their youth.

Muntz said some turf species, like Kentucky bluegrass, which roots only 3 to 4 inches deep, and Bermudagrass, which takes two seasons to get established, may not be wise choices for stopping erosion.

Sod also has some disadvantages, Muntz offered. "Using sod can be like having someone else raise your children," he said. "Sometimes you don't know what you're getting with possible pests or diseases, and a lot of extra watering is needed in the beginning to get sod established."

Sod is also more expensive, Nelson added. "Seeding a lawn and using a turf reinforcement blanket is one-fourth the cost of sodding," he said.

Erosion control techniques can also differ for warm-season and cool-season grasses. "Warm-season grasses could go dormant in the winter when the danger of erosion is worse because the grasses are thinner," Muntz said. "Overseeding with a cool-season grass can solve this problem."

A LITTLE ADDED SUPPORT. For sites with slopes greater than 30 degrees or to provide instant erosion control instead of waiting for turfgrass to get fully established, contractors use turf reinforcement mats or blankets made with natural or synthetic materials. "These are good if a big wash-out happens along a roadside," pointed out Mike Girvin, president, Designs By Nature, Mishawaka, Ind., adding that 30 percent of his company's work is controlling erosion. "We

SEED MARKET *Report*

would refill the area with dirt, compact the dirt, plant the appropriate seed mixture, cover it with a coconut fiber blanket and let successful vegetation take over and solve the erosion control problem."

Organic mats are made with straw, coconut or a combination of both. Products that contain coconut provide stronger erosion control, Nelson said. Also available are coconut nets, which are thinner and are not likely to control severe erosion. The difference between nets and blankets is that blankets combine two nets with loose fibers in between, providing added protection, Nelson added.

Permanent blankets are made of polyethylene products that don't break down and provide a permanent binding below the soil as the plants grow through them. "But they are very expensive," Girvin said. "Permanent blankets are strictly for areas that need the extra protection."

Turf reinforcement mats, which can be bought in rolls that cover 80 square yards and weigh 40 to 60 pounds, are applied over a newly seeded area after fertilizer and soil amendments, such as lime, have been added. "The blankets are then stapled into place," Nelson said. "Either 6-inch, U-shaped metal staples are used or some contractors use a harder biodegradable stake that is 4 or 6 inches long and is made out of a corn-based polymer. These stakes start to biodegrade in one year and fully biodegrade in three years."

An organic mat will begin to biodegrade approximately 45 days after installation. Natural blankets will fully biodegrade in approximately 36 months. "Temporary mats don't reinforce vegetation once they break down and are predominantly used in less erosive conditions, such as 2:1 or less slopes," Nelson said. "But by the time they break down, the turf has already grown through them and the erosion problem is solved."

GETTING SERIOUS. When slopes get steeper and erosion gets harder to control, sod, seed and erosion control blankets may not be the best methods of controlling soil movement. "Turf isn't the perfect answer for all sites," Millar said.

Turf is a viable alternative to erosion control if it is going to be managed turf, such as on a residential property, explained Girvin. "In heavy wash areas that take a lot of rain

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SEED MARKET *Report*

water, turf doesn't have enough roots to protect the soil," he said.

In what Girvin terms "heavy wash areas," such as retention basins or extreme hillsides, a more serious soil-binding "soft armor" erosion control approach would be to plant bluestem prairie grass or Indian grass root, which root 6 to 12 deep. Girvin used this approach in a retention basin at an office park in Indiana. "We put in a short grass prairie with wild flowers like Butterfly milkweed, native grass and Black-eyed Susan," Girvin said. "Not only are the plants providing effective erosion control, they are also attractive and promote the company's environmental ethics."

Falling more into the "hard armor" erosion control category are coconut logs, which are 12 to 16 inches in diameter and 20 feet long. They can be installed along stream banks and then planted with aquatic vegetation. "Over a three- to five-year period, the plants will bind the log and the soil, and will naturally solve erosion problems," Girvin pointed out.

Stone or concrete retaining walls fall into the hard armor erosion control category. An example of using hard armor control, Girvin described, would be filling a rut along a hillside with softball-sized stones or putting up an interlocking block retaining wall to keep wash-outs from occurring. "Contractors have to pick the appropriate erosion control method according to the site they are working on," he said.

Landscape contractors should not only be aware of the areas that are at high risk for erosion, but they should also be aware of how to control erosion or know someone who they can subcontract that portion of the work to, Girvin stressed.

When erosion control isn't needed on a site, yet contractors are working on a new installation or renovation, they still need to pay attention to surrounding areas they can potentially impact, Girvin said.

"Most contractors know if something they are going to have an adverse affect on the landscape or street around them," Girvin said. "If they are ignoring this, they are not being professionals." **■**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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By Nicole Wisniewski

As Good as New

By first identifying what's harming lawns, contractors can successfully renovate them.

The definition of lawn renovation is often misunderstood. "The most prominent word that comes to mind when talking about turf renovation is restoration," commented Steve White, owner, Second Nature Lawn Care, Nashville, Tenn. "In a renovation, you restore the turf to an earlier, better condition."

Renovation is a complicated process, but contractors can succeed as long as they identify the lawn or soil problem correctly before jumping in with a solution.

IDENTIFY THE CULPRIT. Determining the cause of lawn decline is the first step. This, according to George Hamilton, head of the two-year golf course management program at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Penn., is where contractors make the most mistakes.

"Contractors see that the turf is weak and unacceptable, so they just overseed the area without determining the problem first," Hamilton said. "Simply overseeding won't correct soil problems or improve turf quality."

Most lawns die or thin out for more than just one reason (see *Top 10 Reasons for Renovation* on page S8), pointed out Bob Brophy, director of the lawn products division, Turfco Manufacturing, Minneapolis, Minn. "Most lawns go south because of multiple problems," Brophy said. "Very seldom does one problem, like grubs, affect a lawn. Even a chemical imbalance in the soil isn't powerful enough to destroy a lawn by itself."

Any type of lawn can be a good candidate for renovation, although needs may vary in the North, South and transition zone cli-



Examining a chunk of soil removed with a soil probe can bring attention to below-ground culprits that cause lawn decline.

mates. "Thatch accumulation is a common problem in warm-season turf," White pointed out, mentioning that in Tennessee, lawn assessments begin in midsummer, when most "die back" has occurred for cool-season, turf-type tall fescue. "Fungal diseases, insect problems and poor maintenance practices, including inadequate watering during times of stress and drought, cutting the turf at the wrong height for its type and allowing areas to become trafficked and compact, are most evident during the mid- to late summer months and will usually tell us whether we need to renovate in the fall."

The No. 1 problem in the North is compacted clay soils. "In the process of building homes, the good loam soil is used up or discarded and homeowners are left with clay subsoil, in which turf roots cannot thrive," said Bruce Spangenberg, extension educator in horticulture, University of Illinois, Rockford, Ill.

A vast majority of lawn problems, in general, are soil related, Hamilton said. Examining

soil plugs or conducting soil tests to see what is occurring below ground is a good idea, although only 5 percent of contractors do this, Brophy estimated.

To make sure soil being tested represents the various conditions that may exist on a property, contractors should take several plugs of soil from around the yard and crumble them, Brophy explained. A sample of the crumbled soil should then be sent to a lab for testing.

Examining a chunk of soil removed with a soil probe can also pinpoint soil problems. "You can visually look at the sample and can see where the interface layer drastically changes from good loam soil to heavy clay or if thatch is visible," Spangenberg said.

Checking for soil compaction can be done by pushing a screwdriver into the ground. "If you cannot push a screwdriver into the soil or if it is extremely difficult, then the soil is too compact," Brophy said.

Contractors can tell when a lawn is in

SEED MARKET *Report*

trouble typically by its splotchy, thin, dry or weed-dominant appearance. Other times, a poor lawn can only be identified by walking on it, pointed out Brophy. "If the soil feels spongy under your feet like carpet with a double pad, then most likely there is a thatch problem in that lawn," he said.

Despite common perception, older lawns are not necessarily more likely candidates for renovation, Rector said. "The more important factor is how well the lawns have been maintained," he noted. "Did they receive periodic aeration, thatch removal and weed control as needed? These three items are frequently overlooked as lawn owners typically limit themselves to the basics of irrigation, mowing and fertilization."

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON. Renovation can be performed on many levels depending on the obstacles that are keeping the lawn from growing. "For example, if the lawn is

just a little thin, overseeding with a quality lawn seed in late August or early September may be the answer," Spangenberg said. "De-thatchers or vertical mowers can be used to tear out excess debris prior to overseeding, or slit seeding can be done through grasses and/or weeds killed with a nonselective herbicide."

The level of renovation should be determined by how much desirable turf is left and the soil's condition. "If an established lawn has thin areas that cover 40 to 50 percent of the turf, we recommend our regular renovation, which, besides core aeration, includes a 5- to 6-pound seed rate per 1,000 square feet of hybrid tall fescue," White offered. "This is a replenishing rate and will keep the lawn from becoming too dense."

Top 10 Reasons for Renovation

1. Thatch accumulation – Excessive thatch can result in increased insect, disease and drought problems
2. Weeds have infested the lawn
3. Disease damage
4. Insect damage
5. Excessive use, which can lead to soil compaction
6. Poor maintenance
7. Winter/drought injury
8. Soil compaction
9. Poor drainage
10. Turfgrasses planted are not suited to the area's growing conditions – Pam Charbonneau

"If, however, the lawn has thin and bare areas and has declined rapidly over the year, we will recommend a full renovation where the seed rate is 8 to 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet," White continued. "In addition, we do core aeration and power raking. The process can also mean using a nonselective herbicide on existing turf and starting over."

Lawn problems should always be alleviated starting with those beneath the surface

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and working upward, Rector pointed out, meaning soil compaction should be addressed before seeding.

"Aeration is probably the most important thing that can be done to a lawn to fix soil compaction problems," White said. "Overseeding results can be directly proportional to soil compaction, so I would recommend the compaction be alleviated first. We typically include aeration with our seeding/renovation programs in the fall because it helps establish a seedbed prior to laying seed."

"There is no such thing as overaerating," Brophy agreed. "One hole should be placed every 6 inches because you want many cores of soil on top to create a good organic layer."

The amount of dead or dying debris, such as thatch, located on the surface can also determine the level of renovation required, Brophy said. "When you stir up 1/2 inch of debris, it doubles in size and becomes 1 inch, which is a serious debris problem," he explained. "A debris level more than 3/8- to 1/2-inch needs to be removed."

Debris or thatch can be removed manually with rakes, dethatchers or overseeders that run on empty seed or with a sod cutter to strip the thatch layer, Brophy said.

When a complete renovation is in order, difficult to control weeds or grasses are typically the main culprits. "In this case, a contractor would need to spray everything out with a nonselective herbicide to give the newly seeded turf a chance to establish without weed competition," Rector said. "The most important key to a successful renovation is weed control. Too frequently, contractors do not allow an appropriate amount of time (approximately one week) for the herbicides to work effectively. One application of an herbicide rarely eliminates all of the problems. Areas can be inadvertently missed during application or a particular weed might need a second shot to be put down. Another problem can be weeds that are not controlled because they are dormant within the soil. Bermudagrass and nutsedge are just a couple of the frequent escapees from the weed control process."

FASTER THAN THE SPEED OF GERMINATION. Results vary depending on the level of renovation required. "A late fall renovation might not yield results until the

following spring, whereas a late summer renovation might yield results in the fall," Rector pointed out.

"Renovation isn't a long-term project, but a labor-intensive one," White added. "Without proper fertilization and weed control after renovation, the lawn will decline rap-

idly. We will not accept a renovation job unless the homeowner or a landscape contractor is going to care for the site properly after we are finished." **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Route Management

(continued from page 52)

said the company is going to implement a pruning crew that will prune full time. "The pruning crew will also be able to pull a small trailer behind its stake body truck with machinery for touch ups or kicking off new maintenance accounts while they are in a specific area," Brown said. "The point of an effective route maintenance program is to save time by going from point A to point B and not doubling back over yourself or missing an area altogether, and I think having these specific crews in place helps us do that efficiently."

"Sometimes you get all caught up in the Yellow Pages syndrome and waste time with clients that don't fit your niche." – Standley

To be successful in this approach, Brown said all employees at Atlanta Lawn are cross-trained in maintenance and lawn care.

Also helpful is properly allocating travel time. Drive time is always estimated into Atlanta Lawn's jobs because the customer needs to share in that cost, Brown pointed out. "We include the estimated annual drive time in all bids,

breaking it out over 12 months, so each month we are billing toward the drive time needed," Brown said. "For example, crew No. 1 has to drive with three men 30 minutes to the job. That's 90 total minutes of man-hours just riding. We apply that to the job time in the proposal and include it one way. We cover the costs back to the shop but charge the customer for a one-way travel. We pay half, they pay half."

RUSH HOUR. Sometimes regular travel time becomes excessive in high-traffic areas. Due to an increase in growth and traffic congestion in Carol King Landscape Maintenance's service area, "windshield time" continues to increase, cutting productivity and profits for the Orlando, Fla., company, even though it only services a 35-mile radius area from its home office, said Vice President Bruce Bachand.

"We combat this problem in several ways: targeting and selling more work in areas closest to our base of operations, selling larger jobs that cut travel time and pursuing good opportunities close to profitable existing customers to create complete work days for a route or routes in certain areas," Bachand said. "This cuts down on account manager travel and crew travel. We also have created more site/groundskeeper jobs. This allows employees to report directly to a job, eliminating company travel for all but the account manager visits."

Sometimes because of problems with rush hour or congested traffic, adding extra travel cost to a bid can recover lost time and productivity. "All our jobs are bid with a certain amount of 'windshield time' included," Bachand explained. "Currently, we are creating routes with 20 to 25 percent of the work day allocated to travel. If a prospective job is in an outlying area and we are interested in the job, we bid in enough man-hours to cover travel expenses from our office to the site. If this client, however, is associated with or referred from a long-term existing customer, we estimate the travel time from that existing customer."

Carol Kings' jobs are generally scheduled from the closest to the farthest away within the geographic area that a crew works in on a

Walker around the world...

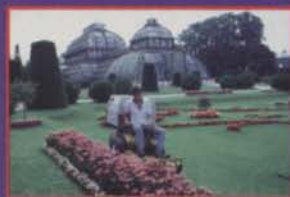
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Route Management

particular day, unless individual circumstances prevent this. "Generally, customers must fit into our schedules," Bachand said. "We honor requests for no machines running before a certain hour in the morning by performing only detail functions until the agreed upon hour arrives or holding the job until later in the day."

Because the company services all of its contracts 52 weeks per year in Central Florida, routes run every week of the year with fixed labor and equipment budgets. "Job costing is made easier because the daily routes are created and designed with a specific amount of income in mind," Bachand added. "If the daily route is completed as

expected, it will earn the planned income."

Also, because of traffic congestion in the area, Carol King has gone "past the period when we took on customers regardless of their location," Bachand commented. "We regularly turn down maintenance work outside our service area. And we occasionally turn down or mark up work inside our service area if it doesn't fit our existing routes."

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THE SERVICE AREA SPLITS. W.L.M. Work-A-Holics Landscape Management, Naples, Fla., doesn't turn down customers unless it has to. "As long as our clients' desires are feasible, we'll try to accommodate them," President Cullen Walker said, who described his company as 74 percent residential and 26 percent commercial. "We interview our customers just like we do our employees to find out what they are looking for. Homeowners want their service on Thursday or Friday. These clients are usually our high-end residential customers who want their properties to look nice for the weekend. We do try to schedule accounts in one area on a specific day. If they are a new account in a new area, then we can try to build up that area to a half-day or whole day. If the whole street is on Monday and a client wants Wednesday, we explain our schedule to them and see if we can schedule the job on Monday. But, ultimately, we do what we can to accommodate the customer."

To do this successfully, Walker split up his service area in three parts and dispatched dedicated crews to each section. The company's service area extends 25 miles from the center in all directions, and each of the three areas covers approximately 50 miles of space, Walker explained.

To provide management in these three areas, Walker promoted his three top employees to supervisors in charge of scheduling one section each. The south section has the most high-end accounts, and by having a supervisor dedicated to that section, clients in that area get as much interaction as possible, Walker enthused. "These high-end accounts that need extra care sometimes aren't the cheapest way to go, but they are our niche market," he said.

Walker said his route management system works because there is no "stand-around" time, and each crew knows its area and can get around faster covering a smaller space.

"We see each of our 190 customers weekly, so there's no time to waste," Walker said. "Our crew members come in at 6:45 a.m. and are out the door by 7 a.m. to get to their jobs on schedule."

AUTOMATION ASSISTANCE. Sometimes, simplifying a route management program means installing computer software to do to job. In Dan Standley's case, managing routes with computer software was well worth the 60 to 70 percent time saved from doing the paperwork by hand for his company, which focuses on commercial accounts.

Standley, president, Dan's Landscaping & Lawn Care, Terrytown, La., explained how his automated system works: "I meet with the crew supervisors weekly to see who can handle the new jobs," he said. "Every night we have staff meetings with the crews so they know where they need to go in the morning. Each crew has a set schedule that we map out, and I meet with the foreman monthly to review that. Our crews keep track of arrival and departure times to and from properties and everything that was performed. Daily, or sometimes weekly, our office manager types all this necessary information into our routing system, including specifics about the job, the crew working on it, directions to the job, what needs to be done there next and any special instructions, such as locking the gate in the backyard to keep the dog from getting out. If we don't finish the job one day, it pops up on our schedule the next day so that we don't forget it. If I want specific information on an account, I can pull it up on the computer anytime. If a visit was missed, this is recorded in the system, and I know about it."

Standley said adjusting to an automated routing system took about six months, and he said the company still does some manual scheduling. "Our software program has a map built in, but the program doesn't know the proper breakout of our area and isn't always totally accurate, so we do our own mapping," Standley pointed out.

The key to pricing Dan's Landscaping & Lawn Care's service is evaluating the man-hours that will be involved based on the square footage of the property to be maintained and the amount of work or materials, such as bags of fertilizer or mulch, that need to be used. "All these factors blend together to come up with a

final figure," he said. "The trick is making sure you don't forget anything."

Automation isn't the only thing that smoothes out Standley's system. "We use the 80-20 principle, which states that 80 percent of our business comes from 20 percent of our clients," he said. We resell to customers who know us. Sometimes you can get all

caught up in the Yellow Pages syndrome and waste drive and sales time with clients who don't even pre-qualify to fit your niche. The clients I currently have are ready to say 'Yes' - I just need to write them a proposal." ■

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

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USE READER SERVICE #32

by Nicole Wisniewski

The new trends toward prescription fertilization and improving soil pH are keeping lawns, trees and shrubs growing green.

What the DOCTOR Ordered

Every contractor's fertilization program is different based on location and the type of materials being used.

For example, Chris Senske, president, Senske Lawn & Tree Care, Kennewick, Wash., has a fertilization program that consists of granular and liquid applications. "In our arid climate markets, we start early in the season with a blend of soluble and controlled-release fertilizer coated with a preemergent," Senske explained. "That is followed up with liquid applications of fertilizer, herbicides and insecticides as needed during the mid-season. The mid-season fertilizer is a slow-release type mixed with a balanced blend of soluble nutrients and micronutrients. At the end of the season, we return to a granular application.

"In our rainy climate markets, we do the opposite," Senske continued. "We start the season with fertilizer and nutrients that control moss as a side benefit in a liquid blend. Then we move on in the mid-season to granular applications, ending the season with lime."

Across the country in Long Island, N.Y., Jon Henry Gladwish, president, Organic Lawn, uses liquid and granular organic fertilizers from March to December. "Each lawn gets at least one liquid seaweed application for micronutrients

and growth hormones and at least four granular applications of nutrient sources like kelp meal, compost, rock minerals, composted poultry manure, dairy whey and corn gluten," Gladwish commented. "I concentrate on getting the soil into the best possible condition, and I make sure all my new accounts are soil tested."

Programs like Senske's and Gladwish's work – no matter how different their approaches – because of the extensive research each contractor does to make sure his program meets his market's needs. This, in addition to following recent trends, doing more with fewer applications and improving the condition and health of the soil, can make a fertilization program work successfully.

A WORKING PROGRAM. To establish a fertilization program that works, Ray Buckwalter, product manager, Lebanon Turf Products, Lebanon, Penn., claimed that contractors have to determine what arena they intend to play in. "Fertilization programs come in two basic flavors: customized and generic," Buckwalter said. "Generic programs have a limited menu and the quality is mediocre, but the lower price points make it an acceptable compromise for many customers. Generic programs offer simplicity to the contractor, but are by definition undifferentiated. Any savings derived from simplicity and economies of scale can be quickly eroded as you face more pricing pressure from your competition.

"Ideally," Buckwalter continued, "programs are de-
(continued on page 70)



All fertilization programs are structured around plants' growth cycles. A truly successful program will take this into account and provide the necessary nutrients at the optimum times, especially during severe turf or climate conditions, such as heavy rain.



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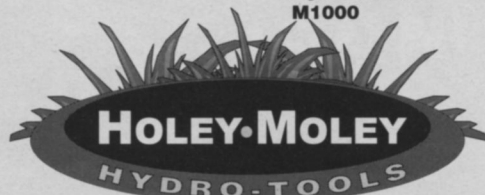
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Fertilization

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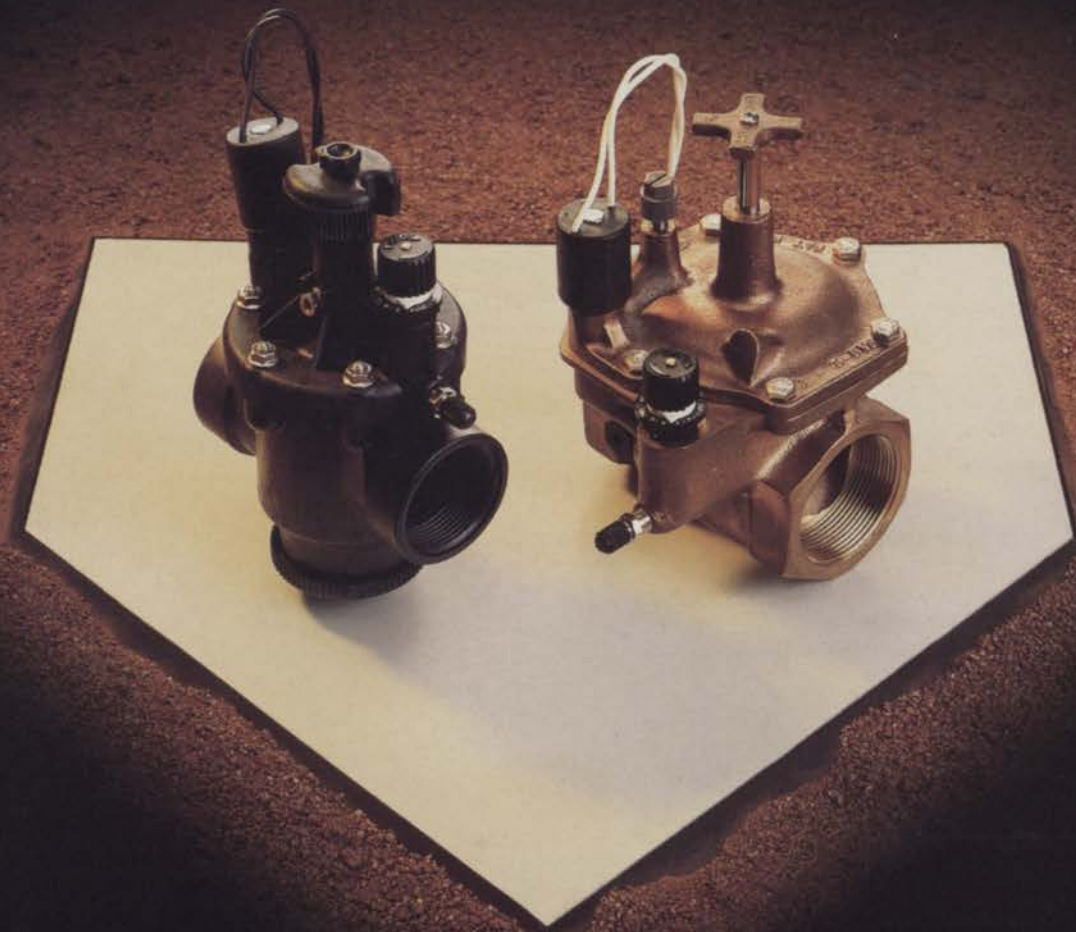
veloped on a customer-by-customer basis. The critical step in this process is to assess the client's expectations. This includes assessing how the client wants to use the turf area, how much money he or she expects to spend and what maintenance he or she intends to perform. For any program to be successful, there needs to be a set of well-defined goals that balance the agronomic results and costs."

In Senske's program, making sure the lawn is green yet doesn't grow so fast that the customer becomes frustrated with excessive growth is important, Senske said. "Even more important in most of our markets is weed control," he added. "Our customers tell us that making a lawn green is not what they struggle with. They have problems keeping the lawn free of weeds like spurge, oxalis, clover, violets, thistles and plantain. We would rather spend time fine tuning how the fertilizer enhances the herbicide program than worrying about whether we delivered the exact prescription treatment of nutrients."

A fertilization program that meets the changing needs of the turf doesn't have to be sophisticated, noted Bob Staib, a consultant with NuGro Technologies, Grand Rapids, Mich. "Remember that cool-season grasses require two-thirds of the total nitrogen for the year from mid-August through November and one-third of the total nitrogen needed from April 1 through mid-August," he said. "For warm-season turf, the solution is flip-flopped. The emphasis is in the spring and early summer. A successful fertilization program should also take advantage of aeration to incorporate a fertilizer that stimulates roots and microbial activity."

All good fertility programs are designed around the natural growth cycle of the plants being fed, Buckwalter mentioned. "As plants go through different growth stages, their needs change," he said. "A good fertility program takes this into account and provides the necessary nutrients at the optimum times. Changing weather patterns and maintenance practices alter this seasonal cycle. One of the biggest influences is water. When rainfall exceeds normal levels, grasses produce more shoot growth, and this extra production requires more nitrogen to maintain color and shoot density. In a drought, growth slows or stops so less nitrogen is needed. Temperature, wind, mowing frequency, mowing

(continued on page 72)



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USE READER SERVICE #137

Fertilization

(continued from page 70)

height and many other factors can affect growth. In most cases, minor adjustments in timing and rates are all that is needed to keep everything in balance. In extreme cases, adding or omitting applications can be prudent."

TREE & SHRUB NEEDS. In landscape settings, trees and shrubs and non-turf groundcovers need fertility just like the lawn, Buckwalter pointed out. "The natural mechanisms of nutrient cycling that feed forest trees are interrupted because we don't allow leaf litter to accumulate and decompose," he said. "Since most ornamentals have larger root systems than turf, they have access to larger volumes of soil and store more carbohydrates. For this reason, they generally don't need to be fed as often. Mature trees can be fed once per season in the fall, while smaller ornamentals, flowering trees and shrubs usually benefit from a spring and fall feeding."

Senske's tree and shrub fertilization program works almost exactly as Buckwalter suggested and takes place in the spring and fall. "We want to make sure that we don't fertilize in the summer and early fall seasons so that the trees do not force tender growth that could be frost damaged," he explained.

At Hendricksen the Care of Trees, Wheeling, Ill., the tree and shrub fertilization program is tailored to each site. The company, which focuses on tree and shrub care only, provides fertilization needs by prescription. "We don't take prescription fertilization to the limit some people think it should be taken to, but we do minimize our use of phosphorous and potassium and use low levels of nitrogen," explained Rex Bastian, vice president of technical services. "With trees, judgement calls cannot be made. A suitable program for one tree may be different for another tree."

Over his past 11 years with the Care of Trees, Bastian has also noticed an increase in the amount of slow-release nitrogen sources being used in the company's tree fertilization program. "Eighty-five percent of the nitrogen in the materials we use is now of a slow-release kind," Bastian said. "Fast-release nitrogen sources tend to be more leachable, and by minimizing those materials you minimize leaching that occurs as a result."

"If slow-release nitrogen is used, more can be applied at once without loss to volatilization and leaching," Buckwalter added. "This

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Fertilization Strategies

A fertilization program needs to adapt to meet the demands of changing turf conditions. Ray Buckwalter, product manager, Lebanon Turf Products, Lebanon, Penn., offered these suggestions. (N=nitrogen, P=potassium, K=phosphorous)

| EFFECT OF NUTRIENT DEMAND/FERTILIZATION STRATEGY | | |
|---|--|---|
| CONDITION | STRATEGY | EXPLANATION |
| Above average rainfall or irrigation | Increase N and K | Increased shoot growth requires more N. Loss of soluble N & K to leaching, use controlled-release sources when possible to reduce loss. |
| Drought | Reduce N, increase K prior to and during recovery | Less growth reduces demand for N. Potassium plays a key role in heat and moisture stress tolerance but should be applied before or after actual drought conditions not when soil moisture is inadequate. |
| Soils with high percolation and infiltration rates (sandy). | Use Water Insoluble N (WIN) and/or Controlled-release N, and controlled-release K if possible. | Water-soluble nutrients (N&K) will be lost to leaching & volatilization. Frequent light applications (spoon feeding) can help but are labor intensive. Using quality controlled-release sources will reduce loss and improve quality. |
| New seeding | Increase P | Although many soils have adequate or high P, availability can be limiting because it is relatively immobile. Seedlings without extensive root development need supplemental P until established |
| Over-seeding | Increase P and use moderate N | New seedlings need supplemental P and existing turf needs N. Excess N can cause flush growth in existing turf reducing establishment of new seed. Growth regulators can be used to help release the new seedlings from competition. |
| Extended season with early spring warm up | More N, P, & K will be needed | Longer growing season results in more shoot and root growth and increased demand for nutrients. The best time to apply increased nitrogen to cool-season turf is during the fall, warm-season turf benefits most in summer. |
| High traffic areas | Increase fertility, particularly N and K | High traffic areas need to repair and regenerate more leaf tissue due to wear. This requires higher nitrogen. Potassium is also important to improve cell structure and increase wear tolerance. Address compacted soils! |
| Shade areas | Reduce N and other nutrients as well | Lack of light, not nitrogen, becomes the limiting factor to photosynthesis and growth. Less growth reduces the need for all nutrients, particularly nitrogen. Excessive nitrogen can result in thin lush growth. |
| Leaf spot activity (Helminthosporium vagans ssp.) | Reduce N, especially soluble N, while pathogen is active or likely to be active. | Lush growth makes plants more susceptible to fungal invasion and can severely increase severity. Use controlled release N during recovery to encourage development of new healthy leaf tissue. |
| Red thread (Corticium ssp.) Dollar spot | Increase N with balanced complete fertilizer 4:1:2 or similar ratio. | These diseases are more severe on turf that is nutrient deficient. Stimulating leaf growth and removing diseased or damaged tissue by mowing can improve appearance and reduce symptom expression. |



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FIRST TO START. LAST TO QUIT.

Fertilization

(continued from page 72)

increases material costs but reduces labor."

Usually the greatest need for fertilization of trees and shrubs comes after stress has been placed on the plants and brings unhealthy conditions to the customer's attention. "Unfortunately, this is usually too late," said Richard Pete, president, Planet Green, Charlotte, Vt. "Compaction, water percolation and soil structure are all critical to tree and shrub health, which is why a healthy balanced fungal-based microbial population can do wonders for trees and shrubs."

When access to the soil around a tree is obstructed or if adding organic matter to the soil won't make a big enough change to nourish a tree, other methods of fertilization have to be used. "Trunk injection is used when a tree is in such rough shape that maybe it doesn't have time to wait for a different approach," Bastian explained. "Trunk injections do wound trees, though. Some people don't believe in wounding a tree any further when fertilizing it. Too many

people think that if a tree is dying, all they have to do is fertilize it and it will be fine. Fertilization isn't a cure. Just because you maintain proper nutrition, doesn't mean the tree won't come down with a disease. Every tree is different and can't be treated the same."

PUMP UP THE SOIL. As Bastian and Pete pointed out with trees, one of the most important factors for the long-term health of the turf is the condition of the soil. "Most contractors would like to be able to save the client money while still growing profits. By managing soil health, contractors can experience cost savings over time in reduced maintenance costs, use of less pesticides and healthier turf," Pete said.

Plants require approximately 16 nutrients for optimum growth, according to Kenny Bailey, agricultural extension agent, North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension. Often, Bailey said the soil doesn't hold enough of these nutrients in the quantities

needed for desirable growth and production.

"Soil testing is the only way that you will know what nutrients are in the soil," Bailey stressed. "If you have sufficient amounts of elements, such as phosphorus, then there is no need to apply phosphorus. The only way that you will know this is by testing the soil."

Based on what looking into soil conditions can do for a fertilization program, Buckwalter said the extra \$5 to \$10 spent on a soil test is worth the time and cost. "The information a soil test provides about pH, buffer capacity, soil texture, phosphorus and potassium can save many times the test cost in materials and improved results," he said.

Gladwish charges his clients \$45 to conduct a soil test on their properties and considers the cost justifiable in terms of how it structures his fertilization program. "Soil testing is possibly the best bargain that I offer," Gladwish said. "Some clients utilize me for the soil test only. Through the soil test,

(continued on page 76)

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Fertilization

(continued from page 74)

I can customize each individual fertilization program. After getting the test results, the lab's recommendations and my review of the test, clients realize that the fee for the test was money well spent."

The only thing a soil test cannot do, according to Buckwalter, is provide quantitative information on available soil nitrogen.

"To assess the need for nitrogen, the contractor must consider many other factors, such as the type of grass and the type of soil, the fertilization history and the mowing and irrigation practices." **LL**

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



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Every contractor in the industry has a problem with tight labor markets. So, the fact that fertilizer combination products have gained popularity because they save labor by providing two applications in one and eliminate the need for large scale spraying equipment because they are granular is no surprise, pointed out Ray Buckwalter, product manager, Lebanon Turf Products, Lebanon, Pa.

The biggest use for fertilizer combination products is the application of fertilizer and preemergent crabgrass controls. "This is an excellent fit since preemergents are usually applied to the entire turf area," Buckwalter remarked. "New chemistry and formulations are making fertilizer with postemergent weed control and preventative grub infestation products also work well. These combinations can be valuable tools in the total maintenance program and offer advantages of granular fertilizers with control products that would traditionally be sprayed. With the multitude of products available, contractors can almost always find a product that matches the correct fertilization needs with the desired control product."

Approximately 50 percent of contractors are using fertilizer combination products, said Bob Staib, a consultant with NuGro Technologies, Grand Rapids, Mich. "They are approximately 20 percent more expensive than fertilizer products alone, but the convenience factor and labor savings overcome that cost."

While fertilizer combination products provide time savings, liquid or straight granular products are still best suited for some applications, including where spot treatment is needed or foliar contact is essential, Buckwalter said. "And many herbicides and fungicides are still best applied as liquid formulations."

On the organic side, most pesticides are separate from fertilization materials, pointed out Jon Henry Gladwish, president, Organic Lawn, Long Island, N.Y. "However, many good organic materials have numerous disease suppression qualities similar to composts," he said.

— Nicole Wisniewski

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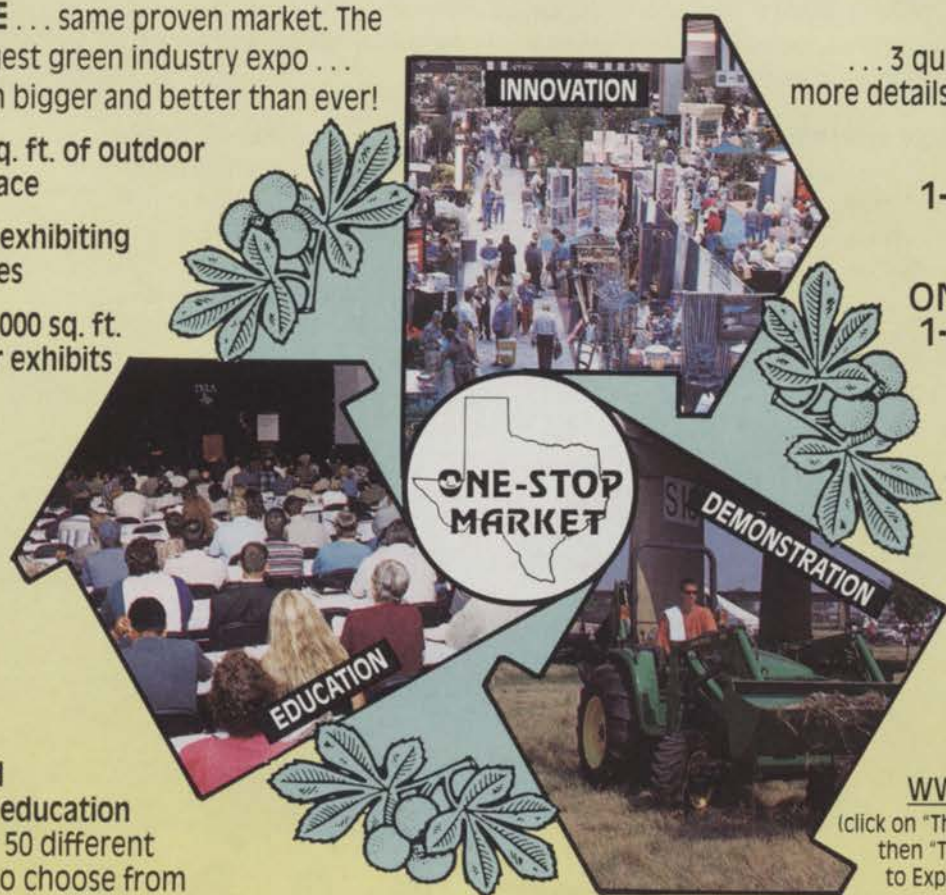
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USE READER SERVICE #108

Landscape Design

by Bob West

Paying attention to the basics and incorporating the hot trends will often yield the best projects.

The creation of a new landscape is commonly compared to a painter's work on a canvas or a sculptor's work with clay. The charge given to the landscape designer or architect is to take either an empty lot or an already existing landscape and create a setting that delivers the desired combination of function and beauty.

Everyone involved in a landscape design or installation would love to be able to step back at the completion of every job, take in the entire finished project and say, "Wow." Of course, achieving such dramatic impact isn't always possible, based upon the scope of the project or the limitations that the job site may present. But every job represents an opportunity for a contractor to achieve more than just functional success and, instead, create function that is surrounded by beauty.

To best find out how to achieve this desired combination, we invited some award-winning landscape companies from around the country to share their tips and suggestions for creating landscape design success.

FIRST THINGS FIRST. There exists a common misconception that the most beautiful landscapes are the best or most successful ones, but that's far from true. "There are two keys to a successful landscape design, and the first one is really pragmatic," noted Char Crowley, project director, The Pattie Group, Cleveland, Ohio. "Did the project solve a problem or meet the customer's need? Maybe there was a drainage issue that had to be addressed or a view into a neighbor's yard had to be closed off or a flat piece of grass had to be turned into a garden. Whatever the goal, the first question a designer should ask him or herself is whether or not they accomplished the big problem-solving parameter of the job."

(continued on page 80)

Oftentimes a focal point element can work well with a pathway to attract people into the landscape. Photo: Environmental Care



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Landscape Design

(continued from page 78)

Once that question has been answered, aesthetics come into play. For Crowley, the seamlessness or flow of a finished landscape is critical to success.

"Do the different elements of the landscape flow into one another, and does the landscape overall flow from the house into the yard?" she asked, adding that such flow is hard to define or put into objective terms. "But when the project is finished the customer should be able to walk out their sliding glass door on to a patio that flows into a garden that flows down to a pool."

A key concern for George Pellettieri, president, Pellettieri Associates, Warner, N.H., is how people enjoy the landscape as they're approaching it, leaving it or moving within it. "We think the experience of going to or leaving a place is very important, whether that's a residential location or a commercial property," he explained. "For example, we are always looking to see what it is that you experi-

ence as you approach a property. How does the pathway or roadway direct your attention, and then what can we do to capture your attention as you approach the property?"

Being aware of the focus of approaching guests may mean figuring out a way to direct their attention away from a certain area or use the landscape design to surprise them.

"If you're walking down a path, we may build the path so you have to turn around a large boulder or plant mass, and as you come around the corner your sight line is directed toward a sculpture or some other focal point that will surprise you," Pellettieri explained. "Then you may go past that area and turn another corner and be directed toward a bridge over a stream."

Pellettieri said the same effect could be achieved for people approaching an area by car, and doing so in this case may involve incorporating some of the currently existing landscape elements. "How you set the drive-

way or the entrance to the property is critical to the visitors' experience," he noted, explaining that the impression visitors receive as they approach a property heightens the importance of entranceways for commercial properties. "Look for elements like a structure on the property or an apple orchard or something else that will stand out and catch people's attention."

With new installations, Pellettieri said the landscape designer is ideally involved in the project early enough to interact with the architect so the structure and the landscape can work together.

"The focal points are the key, so we want to be involved with the other design professionals so we can have this same kind of focus from within the house," Pellettieri explained. "That way a client can walk through a doorway into a new room and the window is located in such a way to focus their view on a particular feature in the landscape."

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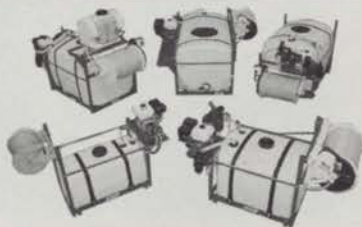
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Conversations with landscape designers about the challenges of landscape design work always start in the same place - customer communication.

"The key by far is listening to the client and taking the time to really not just ask them what they want but learn and understand how they're going to use the space," noted Michael Becker, co-owner, Estate Gardeners, Omaha, Neb. "Are they going to entertain? Do they want the landscape for status? Are they preparing to sell the house soon? Do they have kids that will be playing in the yard?"

Some design firms have gone so far as to formalize a checklist of common customer questions they require any designer or salesperson to answer before they can even start working on a design or quoting a price. Other firms are quick to note that communicating with the customers doesn't necessarily mean always letting them have the final say.

"Sometimes you need to draw a line in the sand with the client and tell them what will work best in a certain situation because they often want one of this and one of that and one of these," explained Char Crowley, project director, The Pattie Group, Cleveland, Ohio. "You have to balance what will work with what the client wants because the clients don't usually look at the long term and what will work best." - **Bob West**

A Quest for Communication

FOCUS, FOCUS, FOCUS. Crowley echoed Pellettieri's emphasis on the effective use of focal points in the landscape, explaining how using such elements correctly can make the landscape seem more three dimensional to people.

"Aside from the pragmatic issues we

talked about, the success of the job comes down to creating a focal point," she emphasized. "What you use is usually based on the style of house or garden you're working with. Some people like architectural ruins. I have some clients that like to use modern art and outdoor art like a metal wind sculpture



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Landscape Design

or a pretty birdbath to create the focal point.

"But the key to the focal point is that its presence should tell visitors they have arrived in an area that is a room of its own," continued Crowley. "A focal point and the surrounding plantings should work just like a fireplace in a family room or a grand-father clock in a foyer tells you that you've entered a particular room, and then the surrounding furniture creates the overall atmosphere for the room."

Crowley said that an overhead trellis, a large gazebo or a bench placed at the end of a walkway could all create a yearning for someone to walk through a landscape and get to that structure. "When I'm designing a landscape, I want to use some structure that people will see and then walk toward," she explained. "And this structure, let's say it's a bench, should be placed away from the house so people have to actually walk through the landscape to get to it instead of being able to

just open a door from the house and immediately be there."

Other commonly used focal points are water features and beds of perennial color. "There are a lot of fads coming in and out over time, and perennials, beds and borders seem to be what people are interested in right now," observed Michael Becker, co-owner, Estate Gardeners, Omaha, Neb. "The key then becomes keeping your finger on the pulse of the market so you know what is desirable and what is overused."

Becker said he regularly sees a new plant become popular in the Omaha market, and then there will be entire beds all over the area filled with just that plant within a few months time.

When she works with perennial or annual beds, Crowley limits the plant selection. "I think the impact of these plants can be maximized by massing like kinds of plants so that when they are in bloom there is a

mass of color that really stands out from the street or from inside the house," she explained. "An entire drift of the same color azaleas is much more effective than a polka-dot effect with a lot of different colors."

"The other way to get the most out of these plantings is to avoid the routine plant material," she continued. "For us in Cleveland, there is a lot of uncommon material that is perfectly hardy and blooms at a different time than the azaleas and rhododendrons, and that will help the property stand out from others."

"Water features are also popular and will vary in size, but they are also expensive and very high end, so we won't include them in a design unless they are specifically asked for and there is at least \$10,000 in the budget just for the water feature," Becker added. "Water features are a challenge, and there's nothing worse than a poorly done water feature."

Other landscape elements Becker likes to

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incorporate for focal points include architecture in the landscape, such as a freestanding pergola, architectural salvage or a freestanding decorative fence panel. "Architecture in the landscape is great, and the fence panels work well to block a view or create a sense of a room," he said.

BUDGETARY BLUES. Of course, the ultimate limitation on what can be accomplished on a project is almost always the customer's budget, and that's a key piece of information for designers to be aware of.

"One of our first questions when entering into a design contract is what dollar amount we're designing to," related Becker. "People aren't always happy about divulging their budget, but you have to reassure them that they have to let you know so you can plan their landscape accordingly."

"Overdesigning a site is very easy to do, so part of our initial interview with the client is a very serious discussion about their budget," agreed Crowley. "We want to be clear about what they want to invest so we can figure out how to maximize the effect of those dollars."

Becker said he takes into account the client's budget and their goals with the landscape to plan the project. "If they want curb appeal, then we'll focus first on the front of the house," he explained. "If they want to entertain, then we'll see what we can do with a patio and some beds behind the house instead."

In general, Becker thinks landscape beds offer the best opportunity for designers to achieve the strongest impact on tight budgets. "The first thing you want to do on a job is establish good beds with clean lines and then plant some trees," he recommended. "I think a good bed with a clean line is more attractive than a poorly established bed with a couple of spindly shrubs in it."

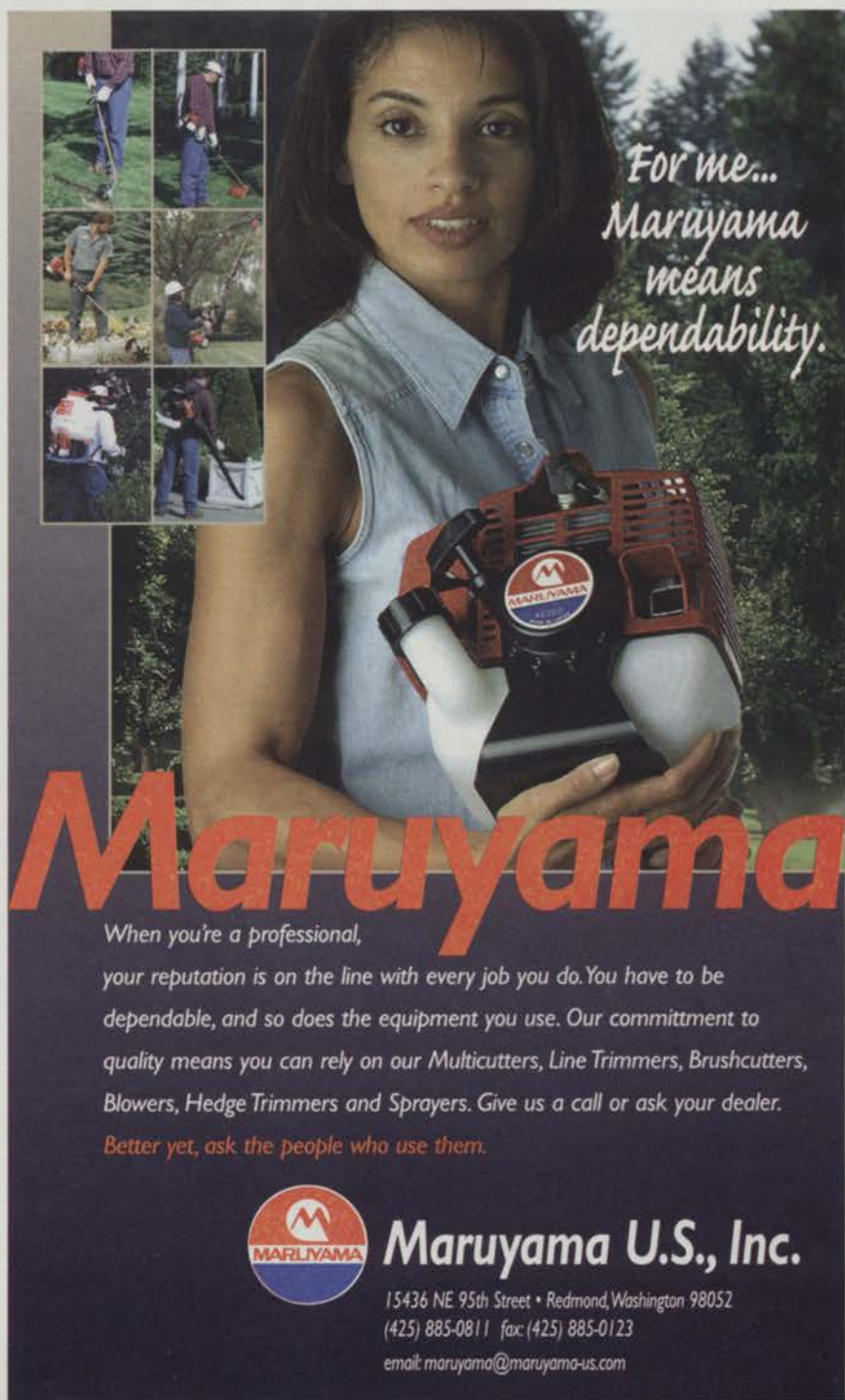
While Crowley agreed that managing the foundation planting correctly is important, she said this part of the project requires additional customer communication. "The hardest part of phasing in a project is the first year when the nuts and bolts are taken care of because there really isn't any pizzazz added to the property," she observed.

Becker said this approach also lends itself well to phasing in a master plan over the span of a few years to accommodate a client's

budget. "Phasing the project in this way can work well because we can focus on one area at a time, such as getting the foundation plantings in one year and the irrigation system in another year," he noted, adding that 95 percent of Estate Gardeners' projects are installed in phases over multiple years. "Oth-

erwise money can be wasted by having to transplant plants or renovate the irrigation system because it wasn't installed to accommodate the final plans." **LL**


The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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by Ali Cybulski

For successful installation of landscape lighting, contractors must learn the proper techniques, plan ahead and use high quality fixtures.

LET There Be LIGHT

Landscape lighting adds sparkle to the night, illuminating architectural structures and plant life that once were lost in the darkness. By thoughtfully manipulating each beam of light, contractors can add high drama or subtle glow to a residential or commercial property.

"Lighting enhances a complete (landscape) job," said Kevin Lipscomb, president, Outdoor Décor, San Antonio, Texas. "It gives you satisfaction when the property looks as good in the evening as it does during the day."

Lighting prolongs the hours a client can enjoy the landscape and extends the living areas of a home to the outdoors, noted Thomas Meis, designer/technical services, Nightscaping, Redlands, Calif. "Most people are gone during the day at work, yet they have spent thousands of dollars on installing beautiful landscapes," he said. "Lighting allows them to enjoy what they have spent their hard-earned cash on."

Lighting also adds value to a property, Meis said. "A home with a well-designed, functional lighting system will sell much faster," he said. "Lighting can make the home a showplace."

Landscape lighting should thrill customers and exceed their expectations. For the best results, contractors must carefully plan installation, be aware of pitfalls and focus on continuing education.

PLAN AHEAD. Interview the customer to discover the purpose and desired result of the lighting system. Common purposes are
(continued on page 86)



Proper installation of landscape lighting often means seeing the effect of light rather than the fixture. Photo: Sylvania

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Lighting Installation

(continued from page 84)

safety, security and aesthetics, according to John Binkele, vice president, business development, FX Luminaire, San Diego, Calif.

An interview will help the contractor set himself up as the expert and advise the client properly, said Jerry Ewell, sales manager, Superior Irrigation & Landscape Co., San Mateo, Calif. He suggested asking what the customer's lifestyle is like, offering a couple sample questions. What time of day does the customer use the yard, and is the customer viewing the yard from inside the home?

Consider in advance which landscape elements will be illuminated and which will be eliminated, advised Binkele. "Do a thorough site analysis," he said. "What are your lighting opportunities?" This includes everything from architectural structures to flowering trees, shrubs or landscape beds.

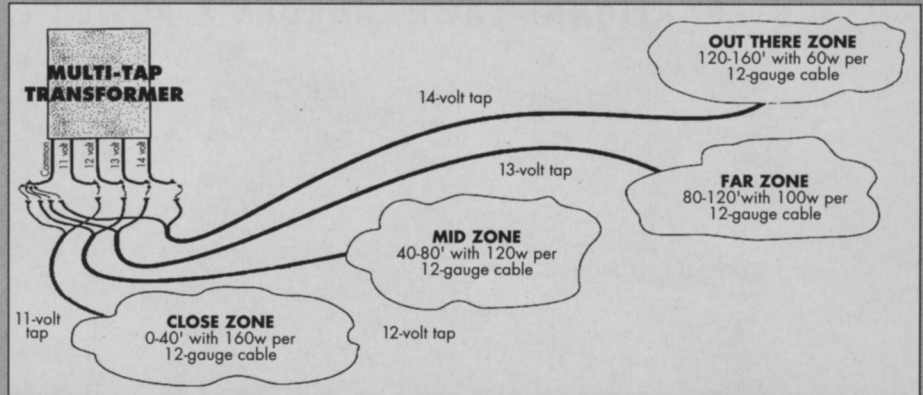
Lipscomb will set up portable lights at a property before he starts a project to demonstrate the possible end result. "Every house

Provide all fixtures with 10.5 to 11.5 volts with all lamps installed and operating, advised John Binkele, vice president, business development, FX Luminaire, San Diego, Calif. To stay within this 1-volt differential, group fixtures into distance zones from the

transformer, and do not overload the cable with excessive wattage. If possible, center feed the zone because this will provide more even voltage to each fixture.

Here are general guidelines for handling cabling and voltage drop:

1. Group fixtures into distance zones from



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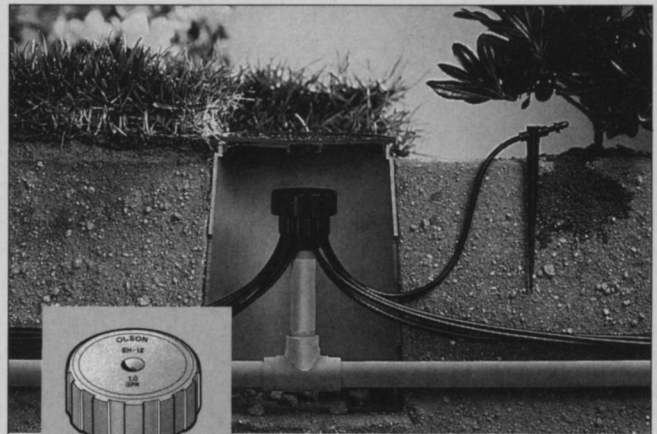
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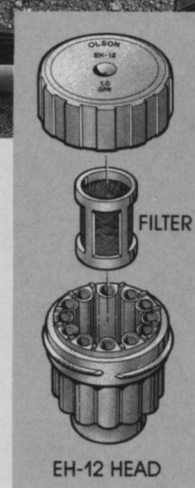
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the transformer – 0 to 40 feet, 40 to 80 feet, 80 to 120 feet and 120 to 160 feet. Don't have a fixture is 10 feet away from the transformer on the same cable run as a fixture that is 100 feet away. Try to center load your runs as much as possible to minimize the voltage differential between the first and last light – a 1-volt difference is optimum, while 2 volts is too much.

2. Run a separate cable to each zone. All the lights can be in the 40- to 80-foot zone, but you still must run separate cables to reduce the load per cable, which will minimize voltage loss. Typically, a 300-watt transformer has three separate cable runs with about 80 to 120 watts on each cable. A 600-watt transformer has about five separate runs with 80 to 120 watts on each cable.

3. Using the transformer and a volt meter, you can then select the transformer voltage tap – 11, 12, 13 or 14 volt – that provides each fixture about 10.5 to 11.5 volts.

Source: *FX Luminaire*

age Drop

and every tree and shrub is different," he said. "You can't just place lighting anywhere."

Generally, he said the fixture shouldn't be seen, just the lighting effect. "If you see the fixture, you have done something wrong," Lipscomb said.

Ultimately, the lighting system should achieve an understated, balanced level of light while highlighting a few key focal points, Binkele said.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE. Here are some common problems and ways contractors manage them.

Voltage drop. The No. 1 mistake contractors make with low-voltage lighting is undervolting a system, which results in dim lights, Meis said. Installing a balanced landscape lighting system means selecting the proper cable size and managing the run's load and length (See "How to Handle Cabling and Voltage Drop," pages 86-87). "Most people will try to install all the fixtures on one cable run and are surprised when that doesn't work. Then they get frustrated and curse the low-voltage system as not being bright enough," he said.

All cable runs should be designed to operate between 10.5 to 12 volts, Meis said. Systems less than 10.5 volts will be dim, while systems more than 12 volts will be much brighter, but lamp life is significantly reduced.

Calculating voltage properly between 10.5 and 12 volts is critical. The proper formula to figure voltage drop, Meis explained, is: length of cable run times the number of watts on the run divided by a cable constant equals 1.5 or less. Cable constants are 7,500 for No. 12 wire, 11,920 for No. 10 wire and 18,960 for No. 8 wire. The cable constants are preformu-

lated for use in the formula, Meis reported.

"Designing a cable run following the parameters of this calculation will work every time," Meis said. "The only ways to solve voltage drop is to either reduce the length of the cable run, increase the wire size, decrease the number of watts on that cable run or all three."

Using a multi-tap transformer can also solve

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Lighting Installation

voltage drop problems. These transformers, Meis explained, provide several different hook-up "taps," which will provide greater output voltages than the standard 12 and a greater voltage drop than the standard 1.5. "For example, if you start with 14 volts and need to end up with 10.5 volts, you now have a 3.5 volt drop

allowance rather than 1.5," Meis said. "But be careful when you're using a multi-tap. Since you are starting out with more than 12 volts, there is the possibility of having more than 12 volts at your closer fixtures. They will burn brighter than the others and will burn out much more quickly."

Binkele emphasized that the transformer must be designated UL 1838, meaning the product is listed specifically for the purpose of low-voltage lighting. Also, he said, look for a transformer that has a stainless steel cabinet, which won't rust, and a large terminal block, removable door, plenty of knockouts, multi-taps and a modular timer with a photocell that can be easily replaced or added. Finally, multi-taps should not exceed 15 volts on the secondary side, all 120-volt parts should be covered and out of harm's way, and the resettable circuit breaker should not exceed 25 amps.

Glare. Shield the light bulb and do not shine the light where it will hit someone's eyes, Meis said. "A glaring bulb will attract a person's attention and will also wash the surrounding areas in darkness," he said. "You will actually have a worse effect."

Other problems. Burying wires and keeping timers, switches and connections out of sight can prove challenging. "They must be in an area where they won't be conspicuous," Lipscomb said.

Wiring must be buried deep enough, Lipscomb added. "Ideally, 3 to 4 inches deep would be plenty, at least in our area," he said. "In cooler climates, you have to lay wire below the frost line so there is no heaving."

Lamp selection for the proper effect is also important, Meis said. "You will not get much of an effect on a 40-foot tall tree from a 12-watt, bayonet-based bulb - like your car's back-up lights," he said. "The proper lamp would be something of a higher wattage with a directional beam, possibly a medium spot or a wider flood, depending on the canopy spread of the tree."

Meis also stressed the importance of a clean, professional installation. Bury and hide cables, make clean, tight, waterproof splices, and strip wires taking care not to remove too many of the little strands off them (this creates voltage drop).

QUALITY PRODUCT IS KEY. A little bit extra spent on durable, quality materials will save money on repairs and replacement in the future. Generally, brass, copper and stainless steel are the most durable construction materials, Meis said. "Regular steel and composites will deteriorate over time, and aluminum will also take some damage," he added. "Plastic is extremely durable and long-lived but not very

(continued on page 109)

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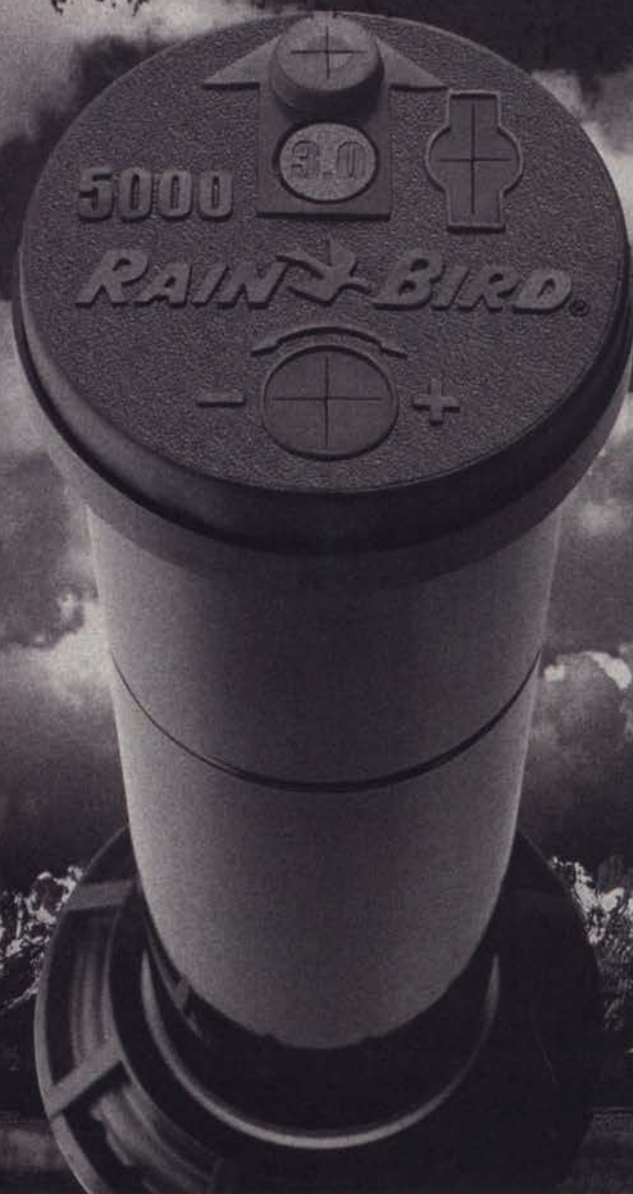


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Equipment Notebook

GRANULAR SPREADERS

Spreader Savvy

A staple in every contractor's arsenal of tools, the granular spreader is an integral piece of lawn care equipment. These versatile machines are used in a wealth of ways - from applying herbicides and fertilizers to spreading such items as salt, sand, mulch, seed and soil amendments. Most anything can be applied with a spreader, according to Dan Haizlett, national marketing manager, Spyker Spreaders, North Manchester, Ind.

When selecting a spreader, a contractor should look for one that's durable and able to withstand rigorous use. Some spreaders have hollow axles, nylon gears and bolted frames, which are less-than-desirable features that reduce longevity, Haizlett pointed out.

Jeff Kendall, director of sales and marketing, EarthWay

A granular spreader needs to be sturdy, given the use and abuse it takes on a daily basis. Metal gears, a welded frame and large, easy rolling tires are essential features.

Photo: PLCAA



Products, Rocky Gorge, Ind., added: "You don't want a spreader that's going to be disposable. You want the best quality possible."

Contractors should look for spreaders made of solid stainless steel, which minimizes rusting and corrosion problems, he advised.

MAINTENANCE CONCERNS. Calibration is one of the most important maintenance concerns with granular spreaders. To save money and make a profit, a spreader must be precise, and proper calibration is the only way to

(continued on page 92)

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Equipment Notebook

(continued from page 90)

ensure this accuracy, noted Tom Jessen, owner, Perma-Green Supreme, Crown Point, Ind. "What you're risking is money vs. the time necessary to do a proper calibration. If proper calibration isn't done, you're looking at increased callbacks, service calls, even lost customers," he said. "That's far more expensive in the long run."

Generally, every time contractors apply a new product, they should recalibrate their spreader. Even if the same products are used for an extended period of time, a spreader should still be calibrated regularly since parts can get loose or misaligned, throwing the application rates off, Jessen pointed out.

To figure out exactly how accurately a spreader is operating, Jessen advised taking a machine with a 5-pound hopper, for example, on a measured property, making an application and recalculating how many pounds went down. "If the target was to spread 5 pounds of fertilizer on a 10,000-square-foot lawn, you shouldn't have any fertilizer left," Jessen said. "Doing this is the only way to know if the machine is putting out exactly what you want."

In addition to diligent calibration, spreaders should be cleaned daily, to eliminate build-up and keep the spreader in working order. Haizlett advised washing the machine with warm water and soap. "It's just like cleaning a car," he said, adding that a product like WD-40 can be rubbed over metal surfaces to maintain them.

To avoid rusting, make sure to thoroughly dry off the machine after washing. "Tip it back so it drains," Kendall said.

Jessen, though, advised against using water to wash off a spreader unless the water can be collected to avoid soil contamination. For cleaning, he suggested using compressed air from an air hose and then sweeping up the residue and throwing it back into the hopper.

Other spreader maintenance concerns include greasing moving parts with light gear oil weekly. Routine maintenance such as this is vital and will reduce repair costs over time, according to Kendall.

SPEEDY SPREADERS. Whether they're sit-down, stand-up or a combination approach, motorized granular spreaders are an increasingly popular option for contractors. A motorized spreader's benefits include being able to get a job done much faster than with a conventional spreader. Jessen, for example, said his company's motorized spreader works about three times faster than a push spreader.

Generally, motorized spreaders can operate anywhere from 0 to 4 mph, according to Kendall. If the spreader moves any faster, it can throw the fertilizer too far afield and reduce its effectiveness, he noted. And motorized spreaders are generally more consistent than a conventional spreader, since operator fatigue is not a factor, according to Kendall.

A motorized spreader operates at a constant speed—around 4 mph or so—providing a steady application rate, which saves money and increases profit, Kendall said.

The main drawback to a motorized spreader is its price, which can be several times the cost of a conventional model. A motorized spreader, however, can eventually pay for itself if used enough, Kendall pointed out. EarthWay's motorized spreader for example, costs around \$1,400 compared to the \$400 or so that a push model costs. "But contractors are saving about 25 percent in material that they're spreading and keeping good labor," he observed.

—Cynthia Greenleaf



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We have been marketing the spade for a while and now we have a mini-spade that attaches to mini skid loaders. The price of the mini-spade is \$875.00.

Due to enormous response our production costs enable us to pass our savings on to you! We are now offering the spade for \$975.00 plus shipping.

For more information or to order call:

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USE READER SERVICE #55

Products

Meyer Products Hydraulic Lift Covers

- Designed to keep moisture out while still allowing access to couplers and



electrical attachments

- Available for all Meyer hydraulic units (E-60, E-60H, E-47 and E-47H)
- Come standard with MD II snowplow mounting system
- Manufactured from weather-proof, heavy-duty polymer

Circle 202 on reader service card

IT'S IN THE BAG!

Stress Relief For Your Turf

VigaROOT™

Heat stress, drought stress, salt stress, insect and disease pressure all take their toll on your turf. VigaROOT is a NEW turfgrass management tool designed to help reduce stress and stimulate root growth through enhanced water and nutrient uptake.

VigaROOT's dry formulation combines humic acid, seaweed and yucca extracts, beneficial bacteria, and fully chelated iron, zinc and manganese. VigaROOT is packaged in a pre-measured foil bag to provide easy use and ensure longer shelf life and stability. This means no settling or "bowling balls," and the fully chelated micronutrients guarantee outstanding tank mix flexibility.

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Caterpillar Skid-Steer Loaders

- 228 and 248 have load-sensing variable displacement hydraulic pumps that can send 100 percent of engine power to hydro-mechanical tools to help improve productivity



- Integral quick coupler allows operator to change work tools
- 4-cylinder diesel engine powers each model
- 228 has a 54-hp engine and 248 has a 74-hp engine
- Pilot-operated joystick controls
- New work tools for 228 and 248 include PC6 and PC9 cold planers, SG18 stump grinder, T15 trencher and A26 auger
- Standard work tools include material handling arm, utility forks in two widths, utility grapple forks in two widths, utility grapple buckets in two widths, angle blades in two sizes and SG16 stump grinder

Circle 203 on reader service card

USE READER SERVICE #56

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

COMING SOON!

Association Central – Your one-stop source for industry associations will feature contacts, events, news and membership information.

T&O Pesticide Labels and Material Safety Data Sheets – Get the latest updated labels and MSDS sheets for the products you use every day.

Online Education Centers – Learn more about industry practices and find materials to train your crew in this exclusive training center on Lawn & Landscape Online.



Weekly Features

Plant Of The Month – The characteristics of the tropical plant Canna and a few of its cultivars will be detailed in this online only feature by author Barbara Ellis.

GreenSearch PeopleSmarts – Find "A Short Course On How To Interview People" in June's PeopleSmarts.

ALCA Driver Safety Toolbox Talks – "Emergency Warning Devices" for vehicles will be discussed.

LIVE ONLINE Discussion

Join featured guest Jim Paluch, green industry consultant, and the Lawn &



Landscape staff for a live online discussion covering "The Power of a Mission Statement." Log on Tues., June 20, 2000, at 7 p.m. to take part in this online discussion.

Exclusive Online Only Features For June:

Find the following June features only on the industry's premier web site:

E-commerce In The Industry – Buying online, selling services, quoting, marketing – you name it – will all be covered as this growing trend infiltrates the green industry.

Turf As An Environmental Filter – We'll get to the root of the benefits that turf provides to our environment.

Mowing Heights During the Summer – Learn about the best mowing practices as the summer temperatures dry out turf and the scorching sun causes burnout and browning.

Contractor Profile – Once again we'll profile an industry professional offering unique and innovative services.

ONLINE Contents

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

Daily News – Catch the latest industry news each day.
<http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/news.asp>

E-newsletter – Get breaking industry news delivered to your computer.
<http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/signup.asp>

L&L Online LawnStore – Find the best resources to help your business grow.
<http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/lawnstore.asp>

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

Online Marketplace – Find contact information and the latest products from industry suppliers. <http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/marketplace.asp>

Weekly Poll – Vote on industry-related topics and compare your answers with others.
<http://www.lawnandlandscape.com>



Please e-mail your comments to shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com. Enjoy your visit to Lawn & Landscape Online! Lawn & Landscape Online is: Bill Cox, general manager, billcox@lawnandlandscape.com; Scott Hunsberger, internet editor (shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com); Carolyn Antl, web design lead (cantl@lawnandlandscape.com).

Products

Hustler Hydro Walk-behind Mowers

- Line now includes a 54-inch, side-discharge deck

- Frame and deck construction of reinforced, welded steel with formed doublers at key wear points
- Mulch kit and deck-mounted catcher are available for the 54-inch deck
- Includes H-Bar Steering for simple motorcycle-style controls

Circle 204 on reader service card

Howard Price Turf Truckster

- Maverick 6x4 truckster with six-wheel, independent suspension
- Powered by 20-hp engine
- Inboard wet brakes and differential lock
- Top speed of 19 mph
- Variable speed transmission with rubber-mounted engine and transmission
- Load capacity of 1,400 pounds

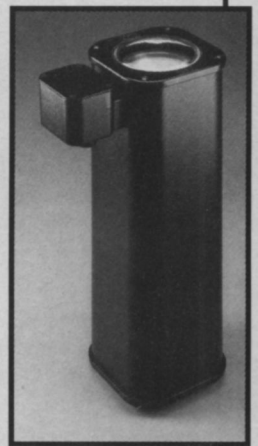
Circle 205 on reader service card



Ruud Lighting DU Series

- Sealed well lights are specification-grade luminaires
- Choose from halogen (MR and PAR) or HID (metal halide, high-pressure sodium and MH-PAR) models to uplift commercial or residential nightscapes
- UL-listed for wet locations
- Available in 12V and 120V models
- Finished to prevent excessive fading, peeling or corroding
- Accessories include glare shields, linear grates, louvers and color filters to help tailor luminaires to each application

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Products

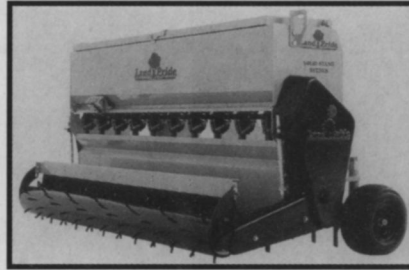
SweepEx Truck Broom Attachment

- TPB-900S 90-inch Pro-Broom Truck Mount
- Attaches to most brand-name snowplows
- Constructed of 10-gauge, hot-rolled, pickled steel
- Broom's hitch replaces the mold board of a standard snowplow and utilizes the existing quadrant, A-frame and hydraulics
- Broom has eight poly brush rows for effective sweeping of countless materials and surfaces
- Built with no moving parts to eliminate the need to lubricate and clean sprockets and bearings
- Comes standard with edge markers and mounting hardware

Circle 207 on reader service card

Land Pride Soil Pulverizers

- SPS2048 and SPS3072 with seedbox
- Available in 48- and 72-inch widths
- Reversible, 1/2-inch thick scarifier teeth



- Fluted seed cups meter the desired amount of seed in a broadcast pattern
- Full-width pulverizing roller finishes the job by packing the soil down to encourage seed to soil contact
- Down pressure springs keep the roller in constant contact with the soil

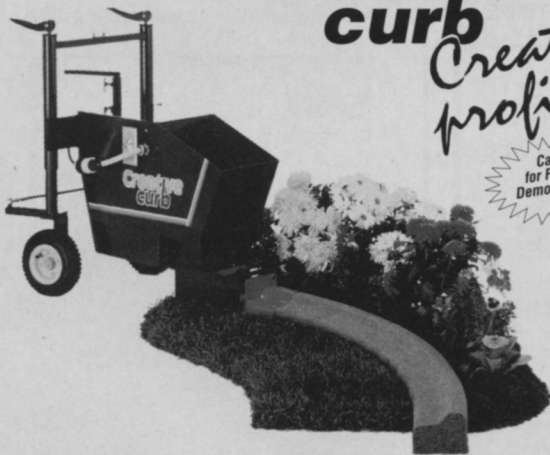
- Leveling H-beam redistributes freshly loosened soil for an even seedbed
 - Ground-driven seed cups can be shut off when pulverizing only
 - Designed for 20- to 50-hp tractors
 - Features heat-treated steel spikes with replaceable wear sleeves
 - Lid with seed splash guard, roller cleaning brush and pneumatic gauge wheels
- Circle 208 on reader service card

Swinger 3000 Wheel Loader

- Lifts 3,000 pounds
 - Dump height of 105.5 inches
 - Breakout force of 8,500 pounds
 - 80-hp diesel engine
 - Accepts most skid-steer attachments
- Circle 209 on reader service card

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Products

Bri-Mar Utility Trailer SU 508

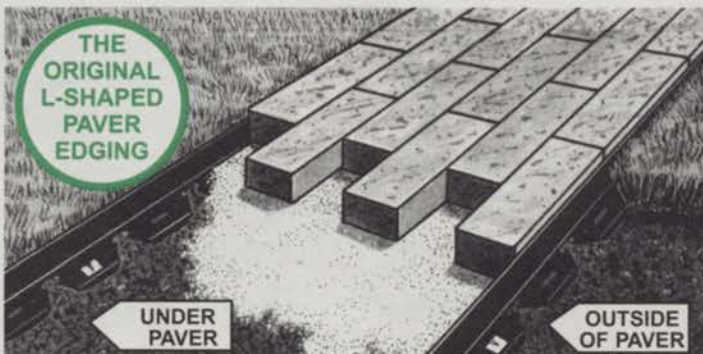
- Nonhydraulic trailer has 16-inch steel sides
- 5- by 8-foot trailer offers a gross weight capability of up 2,950 pounds
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- Optional drive-on landscape gate
- 16-inch tailgate

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Komatsu D87E-2 Crawler Dozer

- 52,885-pound dozer features 230-hp diesel engine
- Two-speed, geared steering module
- Available with a 9.2-cubic yard semi-U blade

Circle 211 on reader service card

H Series Case Dozers

- Five new machines include 550H, 650H, 750H, 850H and 1150H, which range from 67 to 119 hp
- Feature a redesigned transmission



- Three track choices – long track, wide track and low ground pressure
- All are equipped with Case lubricated or extended life tracks for working in abrasive conditions
- Three blade sizes – wide, intermediate and narrow – are designed with a flush-mounted cutting edge and adjustable blade pitch

Circle 212 on reader service card

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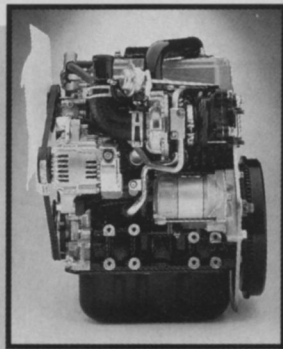
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Products

Briggs & Stratton Daihatsu 950DT Powerplant

- Turbocharged, 31-hp diesel engine
 - Matches power and torque output of 950cc gasoline-powered engine
 - Features a waste gate to limit manifold pressure and avoid overcharging
 - Cooling jacket protects the bearing from heat soak when the engine is shutdown after operating at heavy load
 - Optional liquid-cooler option
- Circle 213 on reader service card**



Reading Crane Body

- Model CM8-134ADW for use as a field service truck
- Weathertight exterior storage compartments and an open cargo area



- Supports a maximum 8,000-pound capacity
 - Stainless-steel, T-handle, rivet-on locks secure the compartments
 - Rubber wheel-well fenderettes protect body
- Circle 215 on reader service card**

Monroe Mounted Spray System

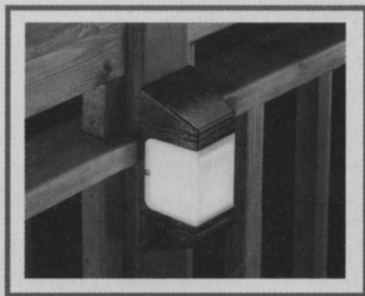
- Multi-use pickup system for applying both vegetation liquids and snow and ice

removal chemicals

- 10.4 gpm
 - Features a powder-coated steel platform with either a 210-, 325- or 450-gallon tank and 10-nozzle spray bar
- Circle 214 on reader service card**

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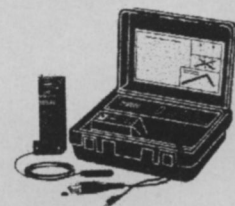
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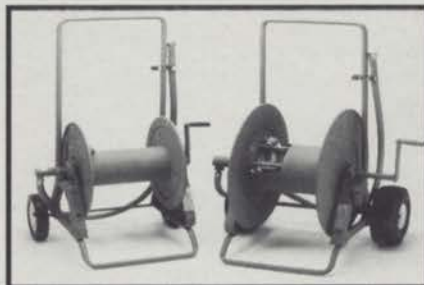
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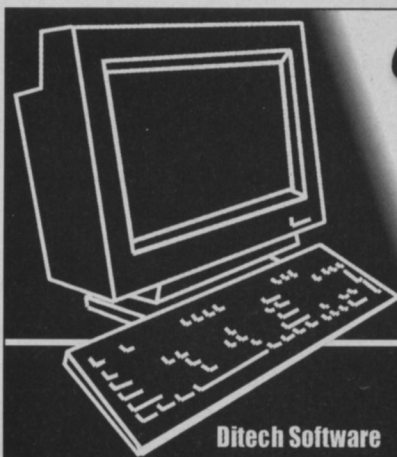
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| Florists Mutual | 17 | 91 | Toro Irrigation | 71 137 |
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| Horticopia | 25 | 18 | UHS | 49 134 |
| Hunter Industries | 29 | 92 | Unique Lighting | 92 53 |
| Hydrosseed Innovations | 26 | 20 | Vista Lighting | 87 50 |
| Irritrol | 38,79 | 25,109 | Vitamin Institute | 112 94 |
| J.J. Mauget | 37,69 | 130,136 | Walker | 65 30 |
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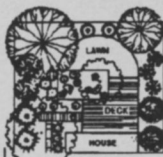
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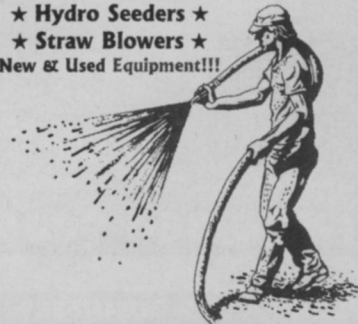
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Lighting Installation

(continued from page 88)

professional for fixtures such as path lighting and directional spots."

Using poor quality product from a mass merchandiser could doom a system to failure. Lipscomb said he gets a lot of calls to fix systems other contractors installed using these store kits.

Binkle stressed the importance of buying, specifying and installing products that are UL 1838 listed. "UL 1838 is the safety and quality standard for low-voltage lighting components," he said. "UL 1838 is specifically designed to address all the issues of the outdoor environment."

BE SAFE. Poor quality product can be hazardous, Meis said. "The contractor has a great amount of liability," he said. "You are working with electricity, so give it the proper respect."

Make sure fuses protect the transformer's low-voltage side, Meis advised. "Transform-

ers without secondary side protection do not always blow the fuse when there is a problem," he said. "This can cause enormous damage from fires."

Safety is especially important in water feature installation. Generally, most city or county codes do not allow any low-voltage fixtures closer than 8 to 10 feet from the edge of swimming pools or spas, Meis said. Fountains and ponds are not included in those regulations unless humans use the water.

Make sure fixtures and the transformer are rated for underwater use, Meis advised, noting that home center kits are generally not safe for use in or near water.


Lipscomb said he has faced few - if any - installation safety hazards. His biggest safety concern is when crew members have to climb in tall trees to install downlighting.

Other hazards, Meis added, are the same as any construction process. "Be careful with what you do and how you do it," he said. "Many lighting contractors install fixtures in trees or under eaves of houses. Make sure you have a

good, solid extension ladder, the proper climbing equipment and harnesses. We nearly lost one of our best contractors a few years ago when he fell 40 feet from a tree."

CONTINUING EDUCATION. Training, which many manufacturers offer, is critical to proper lighting installation. Products are only as good as the installation. "From the consumer's standpoint, a poorly installed lighting job equals a bad product," Binkle said.

A basic electrical course may be helpful, but it is not necessary, Meis said. "Trial and error is a big part of learning," he said. "It usually takes four to five installations to really get a feel for this, and it takes years to really perfect a system that works for you."

Lipscomb observed that installation is not always as difficult as others make it out to be. "Installation is simple if simple procedures are followed," he said. 

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

How We Do It

An ESOP at Gardeners' Guild

In this age of consolidation in the landscape industry, creating and implementing an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) could be considered "bucking the trend." That's what we did at Gardeners' Guild, San Rafael, Calif.

To become an employee-owned company, Linda Novy, founder, president and chief executive officer, had to have a willingness to do so. Founded in 1972, the company grew from a one-truck operation to nearly 100 employees and \$5 million in revenue by 2000. Seeing Gardeners' Guild become a perpetual company – one that would continue to operate after her retirement – was always Novy's goal. In the mid-1990s, after considering the pros and cons of the many exit strategies available to a sole owner, Novy determined that the best alternative for a smooth transition in ownership for both herself and the employees was an ESOP. The program benefits the company owner by carrying forward the same mission and core values the current team embraces and rewards the existing employee base with ownership and an incentive to stay with the company. In an ESOP, the owner also receives lump sum tax advantages and avoids the capital gains tax.

The process of becoming employee-owned began in 1997, and soon after Novy determined the company would need an experienced team to lead it through this transition.

The first step was securing the services of a qualified, experienced ESOP attorney. Having an attorney to orchestrate all of the intricacies associated with an ESOP was imperative. Next, both buyer and seller needed to agree on a valuation company to conduct a fair market value appraisal of Gardeners' Guild to determine the sale price.

To ensure an accurate valuation of the company's stock, the valuation company required 10 years of financial history and five years of financial forecasts, along with other information about the company's operations. Key staff members were interviewed about company philosophies, goals, hiring practices, clients – everything about who we were and how we operated. Not only did gathering this information produce a very thor-

FIVE Benefits of ESOP

1. After one year of service, employees become owners of the company without spending a single dollar of their own money.
2. The employees now have a stake in the company they work for.
3. When employees become owners of the company, they are presented with an owner's manual and receive a portion of every future stock allocation.
4. Decision-making opportunities have been created for the employee-owners.
5. Monthly "business raps" are available to all employees and focus on training employees to understand the company's financial goals, actual performance and what they can do on a daily basis to improve profitability.

ough and professional valuation of our company, it provided us with a financial plan for the next five years.

Lastly, we secured the services of an ESOP administrator to handle the annual reporting of stock values to all of our future employee-owners.

Once this team was in place, the real work began. Not only did we have a business to continue running, but we also needed to invest time and resources in assembling the ESOP. This included creating a formal plan, submitting the plan to the IRS for approval, negotiating the initial stock purchase transaction, securing financing with a lender and providing ongoing communication and status updates to all future Gardeners' Guild owners.

The initial transaction was completed Dec. 23, 1998, and the employees of Gardeners' Guild became 40 percent owners. In addition, the stock purchase agreement allowed additional purchases over the next five to seven years, permitting the employees to own 100 percent of the company's stock in the future. Today, 100 percent of the eligible employees are in the ESOP.

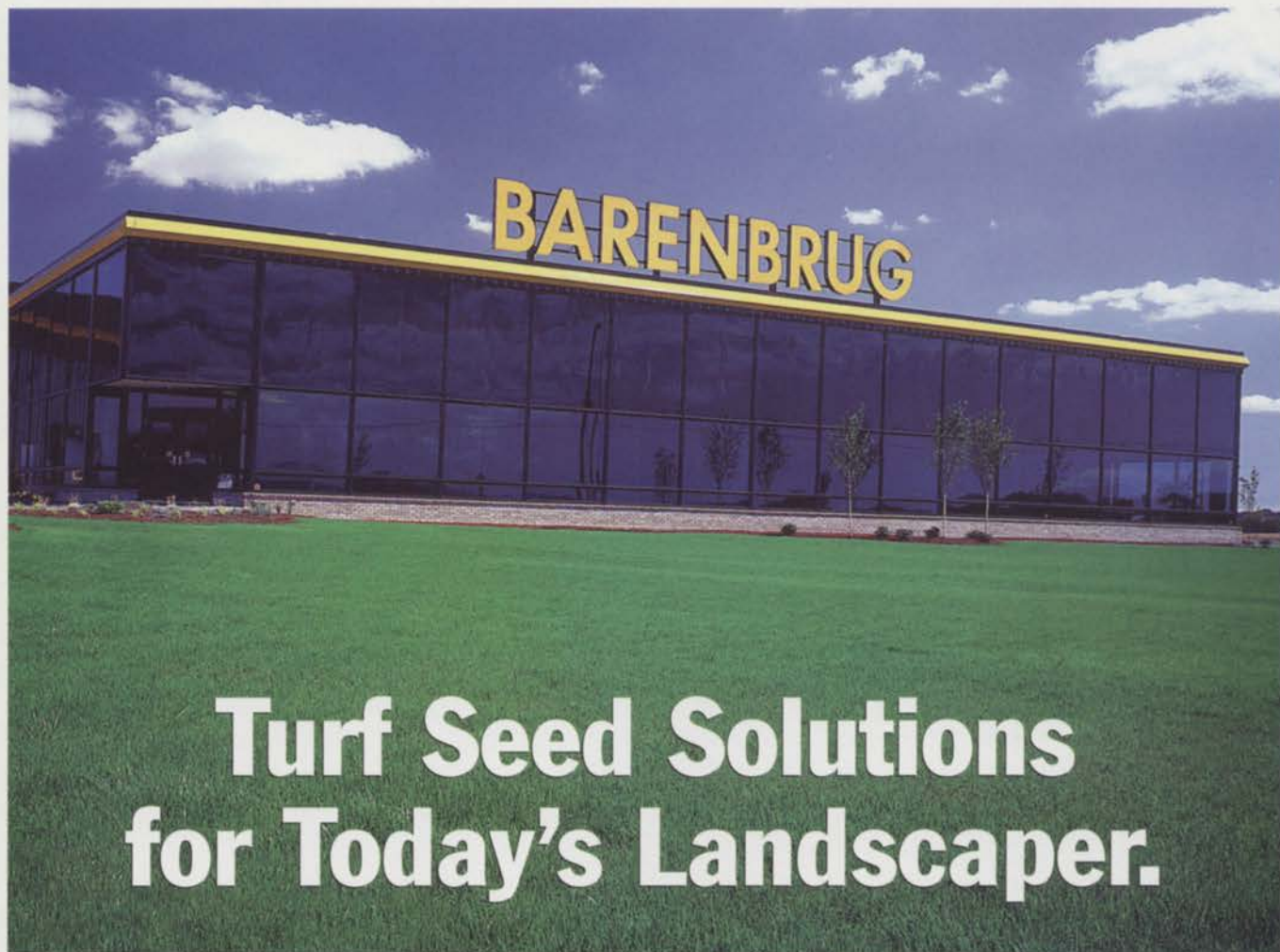
The creation of the ESOP has forced Gardeners' Guild to operate differently. Although it's a great benefit to the employees, the ESOP does not happen without a considerable amount of time and expense. The program has heightened our collective focus, made us budget in more detail, plan more proactively, invest more in employee-owner training and improve our cash flow management.

All in all, the transition to an ESOP requires Gardeners' Guild to continually improve in all the various areas of business because the employee-owners are demanding it.

– Michael Davidson

The author is chief financial officer of Gardeners' Guild, San Rafael, Calif.





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