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USE READER SERVICE #62

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May 2000



Cover photo:
Ron Shapiro,
Lenexa, Kan.

Cover Story True to its Roots

Lance Schelhammer learned some valuable lessons early on in his career, and he still runs his business accordingly. **46**

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Weather or Not

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20 Years of Lawn & Landscape

What started as a monthly magazine written for 2,500 chemical lawn care professionals in 1980 is now an award-winning business management guide delivered to more than 63,000 professionals in all facets of the landscape industry. **A1**



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SPECIAL REPORT:

Computer Software Buyers' Guide

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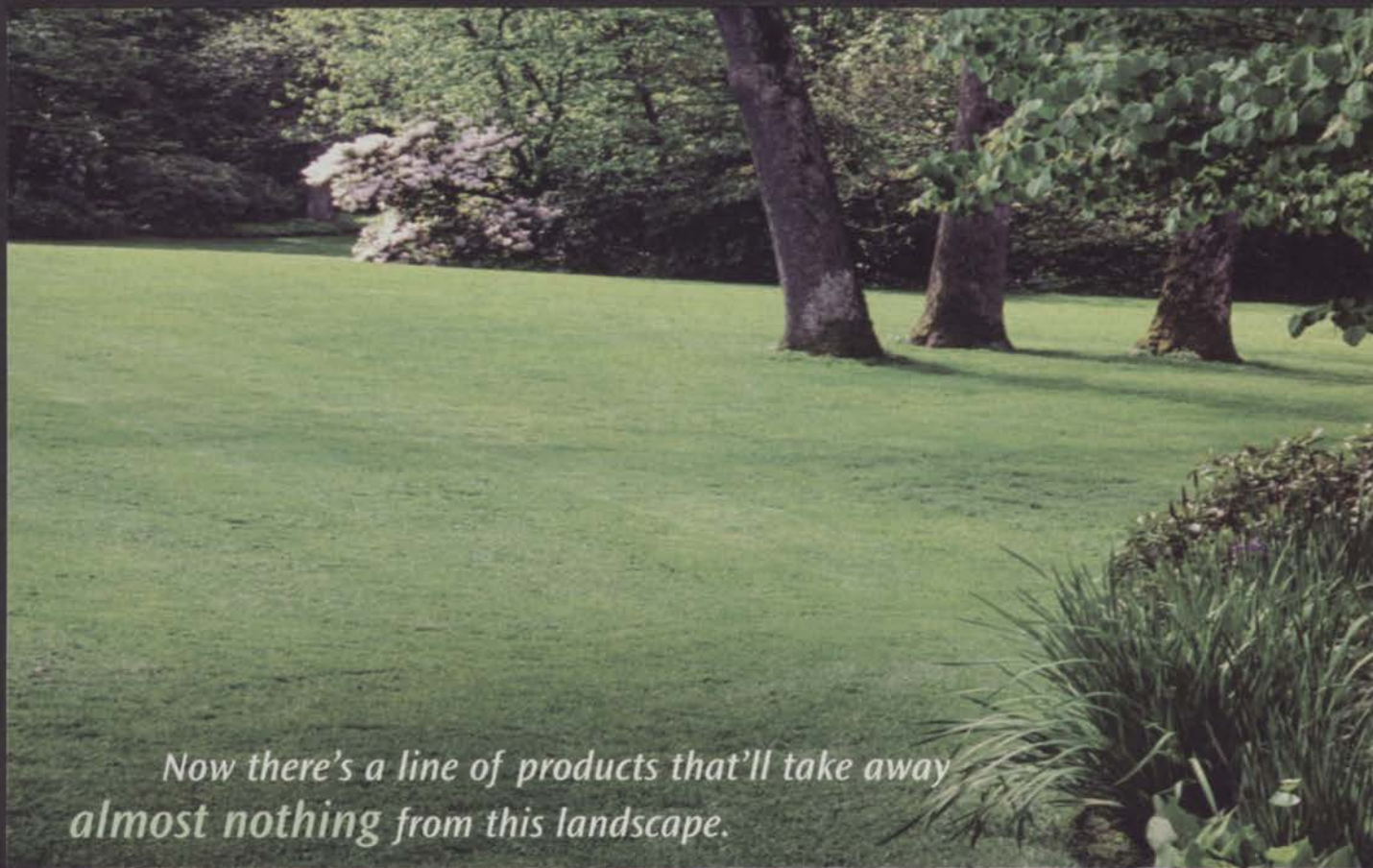
The Benefits of Automation

More landscape contractors are using computer software to improve the way they run their businesses. **C6**

Computer Software Buyers' Guide

Lawn & Landscape presents its second computer software buyers' guide, which lists need-to-know information about business management and visual imaging/landscape design programs. **C10**

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Now there's a line of products that'll take away almost nothing from this landscape.

Apart from the crabgrass at the bottom left, the poison ivy top right, the fire ants dead center and the mole crickets you can't even see yet.

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USE READER SERVICE #88

Publisher's Focus

A Very Happy 20th Birthday

Twenty years ago, the concept of hiring a professional to provide lawn care services for a residential and/or commercial property was novel. But starting with ChemLawn's birth in the 1960s, the lawn care industry quickly positioned itself, from a service perspective, to fill the right need at the right time.

The industry's growth continued with the establishment of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) and *American Lawn Applicator (ALA)* magazine 1979 and 1980, respectively. Both were established to fill the need for technical and educational information in this market.

Richard Foster was one of PLCAA's founders and a driver behind the creation of *Lawn Care Industry* and *Lawn Care Professional* magazines. In 1984, Foster merged *Lawn Care Professional* into *ALA* to form the leading trade magazine serving the technical and business management needs of the dynamic lawn care and lawn maintenance industries.

Through its editorial, *ALA* aided the professional lawn care industry's growth and was instrumental in the full-service evolution that traversed the green industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As a result of the industry's changes, *ALA* became *ALA Lawn & Landscape Maintenance* in November 1988 and then *Lawn & Landscape* in July 1995.

At its inception, *ALA* reached 2,500 readers. Today, *Lawn & Landscape* reaches more than 63,000 industry professionals monthly and is the only vertically focused landscape industry magazine that has remained true to its roots.

Our history follows closely with that of our readers own development. We recognized the evolution of the landscape industry into a full-service market and the potential of the lawn and landscape segment of the green industry.

Since our beginning 20 years ago, others have tried to duplicate our model and our success, but actions speak louder than words. No other magazine has grown its circulation from 2,500 to 63,000. No other magazine has a full-time staff of 11 serving the needs of its readers and advertisers. No other magazine is as active and visible in the industry.

Thank you for your support and involvement in our 20-year history. *Lawn & Landscape* is your magazine ... yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Cindy Code

Lawn & Landscape

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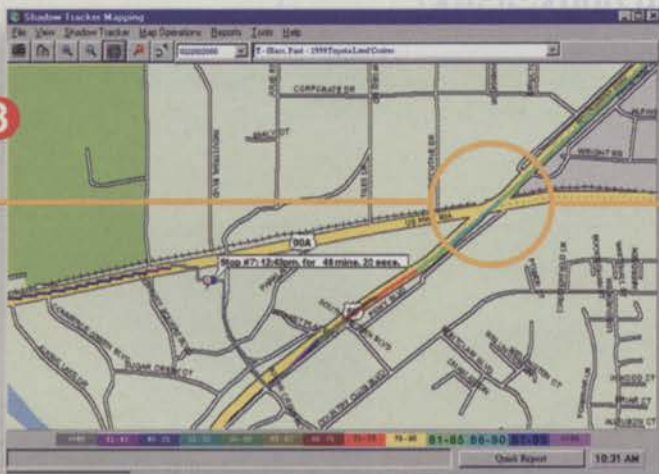
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11:19AM	11:22AM	00:03	In Transit	1.10
11:22AM	11:27AM	00:05	L-Eason Gas Station	0.00
11:28AM	11:31AM	00:03	In Transit	1.10
11:31AM	4:14PM	04:43	S-Your Company Office	0.00
4:14PM	4:17PM	00:03	In Transit	1.18
4:17PM	4:19PM	00:02	L-Grand & Hwy 90	0.00
4:19PM	4:36PM	00:17	In Transit	15.01
4:36PM	6:50PM	02:14	B-Home, Employee U.	0.00
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USE READER SERVICE #63

Market Trends

THE LABOR CRISIS:

When INS Knocks On Your Door

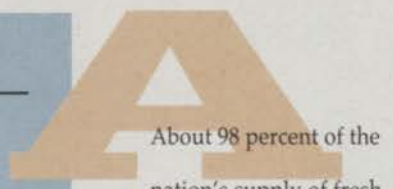
Not all nightmares occur during sleep. Imagine waking up to find your business a target of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

Agricultural and horticultural employers have increasingly come under the watchful eye of INS because of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which is intended to reduce the number of illegal employees in the United States through the I-9 employment eligibility form.

What should a landscape contractor do when INS representatives come knocking at his or her door? Gempler's *How to Avoid an INS Nightmare* guide suggests the following:

- Determine who the investigators

(continued on page 19)



About 98 percent of the nation's supply of fresh water isn't used to water residential or commercial lawns. Where does the majority of water go?

According to a U.S. Geological Survey, nearly 80 percent of U.S. water is being used for agricultural irrigation and domestic, commercial, industrial and thermoelectric power. Six percent is used for industrial purposes and only 4 percent is used for commercial, home, farm and mining use.

Water TRAILS

Agricultural irrigation 39 percent

Electric (generation of power through fossil fuel, nuclear or geothermal energy). The vast majority of this water is returned to the water supply for other uses. 39 percent

Public (water drawn by public and private water suppliers and delivered to multiple users for domestic, commercial, industrial and thermoelectric power uses). 12 percent

Industrial (water used in the processing, washing and cooling in facilities that manufacture products). 6 percent

Farm (water used for livestock, feed lots, dairies, fish farms and other on-farm needs). 1 percent

Home (water used for drinking, food preparation, bathing, washing clothes and dishes, flushing toilets and watering lawns and gardens). 1 percent

Mining (water used to claim naturally occurring material, including petroleum). 1 percent

Commercial (water used for motels, hotels, restaurants, office buildings, other commercial facilities and civilian and military institutions). ... 1 percent

Credit: U.S. Geological Survey

MIDWEST SHORTAGE:

Desperately Seeking Trees

The streets of Chicago, Ill., are greener than ever thanks to Mayor Richard Daley's GreenStreets program, an urban initiative designed to restore deteriorated neighborhoods and enhance public spaces by planting more trees.

While the initiative is beautifying the Chicago area, it is exacerbating the severe nursery stock shortage that area landscape contractors are facing.

"People indicate that Mayor Daley's planting initiatives, which are wonderful for the industry, put a new demand on plant availability," said Pat Cassidy, director, Illinois Landscape Contractors Association, Oak Brook, Ill.

GreenStreets, along with an influx of new and updated municipal landscape ordinances, require larger trees in bigger numbers and more elaborate landscaping in general, said Karen Morby, senior project manager, Church Landscape/TruGreen LandCare, Lake Forest, Ill. As a result, many con-



Several years of bad weather, a Chicago building boom and good economic times are the causes of the Midwest nursery stock shortage.

(continued on page 12)





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USE READER SERVICE #143

Market Trends

(continued from page 10)

tractors are scrambling to find product. "The city of Chicago has taken an enormous amount of trees out of the marketplace," Morby said. "Chicago has 100,000 trees under contract. Every department is doing some kind of improvement."

Morby also mentioned other irritants to the shortage situation, including several years of bad weather, a regional building boom, good economic times and nurseries leaving the Chicago market. To find the product she needs, Morby has had to buy from unfamiliar nurseries that are farther away—even out of state.

Across the board, she said, there are shortages of ornamental trees and shrubs. In particular, 2½- and 3-inch trees are scarce. "The new construction sucks up the mid-sized stuff," she explained. "Most municipalities require 3-inch trees. Then, there are spot shortages on anything you can imagine. Early in the spring, we had trouble finding spirea."

Shade trees is the category that has the greatest shortage right now, and these are the trees that take the longest to produce,

Calendar of Events

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

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

MAY 13 Certified Professional Landscape & Certified Landscape Technician Interior Exams, Northern Virginia (exact location to be determined). Contact: 800/395-2522.

MAY 15 Irrigation Bidding & Estimating course, Amarillo, Texas. Contact: 703/573-3551.

MAY 16 Irrigation Bidding & Estimating course, Odessa, Texas. Contact: 703/573-3551.

MAY 16 Drip in the Landscape course, Kahului, Hawaii. Contact: 703/573-3551.

MAY 17 Drip in the Landscape course, Corpus Christi, Texas. Contact: 703/573-3551.

MAY 19-20 Certified Landscape Technician Exterior Exam, Tacoma, Wash. Contact: 425/385-3333.

MAY 22-23 Landscape Irrigation Course, Kohala Coast, Hawaii. Contact: 703/573-3551.

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

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

MAY 31-JUNE 1 Perennial Field Day, Gainesville, Fla. Contact: 800/933-9638.

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

JUNE 1-3 Equipment Demonstration Exposition, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 888/771-3366.

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

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

JUNE 8, 14, 21 Scouting for Pests and Problems of Woody Ornamentals in the Landscape, various locations, Massachusetts. Contact: 413/545-0895.

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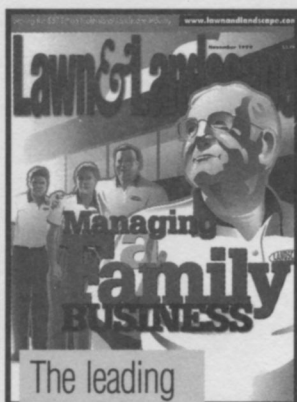
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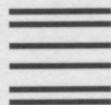


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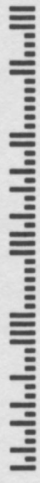


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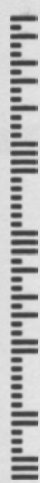


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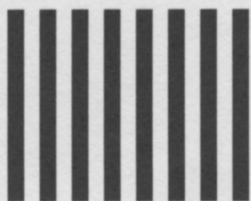
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JUNE 13 Pruning Trees and Ornamentals, Amherst, Mass.
Contact: 413/545-0895.

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

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

JUNE 22-23 Northeast Shade Tree's "Tree Autopsy and Dissection Lab" seminar, Portsmouth, N.H. Contact: 603/436-4804.

JULY 9 Certified Professional Landscape & Certified Landscape Technician Interior Exams, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/395-2522.

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

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, Canada. Contact: 202/789-2900.

JULY 13-16 Associated Landscape Contractors of America Summer Leadership Meeting, San Diego, Calif. Contact: 800/395-2522.

TO ENSURE

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

said Kevin Finley, sales manager, Beaver Creek Nursery, Poplar Grove, Ill. Finley said demand for product is at an unprecedented level, but he doesn't point the finger solely at GreenStreets or municipal landscape ordinances. "That has actually been blown out of proportion a bit," he said.

Actually, fluctuating production and business cycles are to blame, Finley said, adding that many crops he produces can take anywhere from three to seven years to bring to market. "Five or six years ago, there was an oversupply of trees and ornamentals," he said. "At that point, the field was full of product and not quite as much planting was going on."

But times have changed. "Right now, the economy is booming," Finley said. "The trees we planted five years ago are the plants we're bringing to market now. There is nowhere near enough product coming down the pipeline to meet the demand for 1999 probably through 2001 or 2002."

On the bright side, most landscape contractors have been receptive to using substi-

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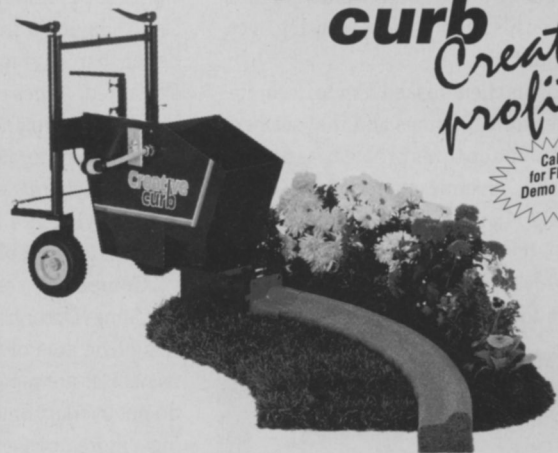
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USE READER SERVICE #12

USE READER SERVICE #13

Market Trends

tutions, he said. "They are good plants, but they might not be as well known," Finley said, adding that substitutions are based strictly on the application. "We want to make sure we're suggesting plants that fit the site and will perform well."

Morby said she has had to request substitutions more frequently, and she doesn't like doing so. "We do everything we can to deliver what's on the plan," she said.

Morby, Finley and Cassidy all agreed they see no immediate end to the nursery stock shortage. "We're going to have some pretty good economic times in terms of building," Morby said. "Two to three years from now, we're still going to have demand. Contractors are hoping that nurseries will be able to meet the demand." — *Ali Cybulski*

NEWS:

Christmas, NiteTime Décor Franchises Growing Strong

About three years into running his growing full-service lawn maintenance business in Lubbock, Texas, Blake Smith wanted to find a way to keep his 10 employees working over the winter months.

A few of his clients asked him to decorate their homes for Christmas and that seemed like a good solution to his problem, as well as an additional revenue source. After three years, Quality Lawn Care was generating 25 percent of its gross revenue by hanging Christmas decorations for its clients.

"But it took many years of learning,"

Smith said. "The holiday season is short. If a landscape contractor isn't organized when planning these jobs, he or she can run into problems."

Over the next four years, Smith perfected this area of his business. Today, the Christmas Décor franchise business Smith started in 1996 is a company with franchises located in 46 U.S. states and Canada.

"As a landscape contractor, if you don't find niches to bring in higher margins, you could wither away and die," he said. "By using the same fixed costs, the same assets and the same personnel, filling a specific niche can increase profits dramatically."

The Christmas Décor franchise business has grown rapidly — from eight original franchises in 1996 to more than 225 in 1999 — because many other landscape contractors share the benefits of being a franchisee, Smith said. "Having a small piece of a large pie is better than having all of a little pie," Smith explained. "These companies are developing a niche business and building strong long-term corporate relationships at the same time, which makes learning the business and growing it a lot easier because of the support team in place."

Competing companies that operate a Christmas Décor franchise do not compete on this niche area of the business because the franchises are separated into territories that do not overlap, Smith said, making networking a more open experience for franchisees.

Weaker areas for Christmas lighting franchise opportunities include California and Arizona because those states don't experience a winter season, but Smith's landscape lighting franchise start-up, NiteTime Décor,

Christmas and NiteTime Décor Owner Blake Smith (left) and Vice President Curtis Hogan (right) are enjoying their companies' rapid growth. Photo: Christmas Décor

On the WEB

International Erosion Control Association — www.ieca.org

International Society of Arboriculture — www.isa-arbor.com

Perficut Lawn & Landscape, Ankeny, Iowa — www.perficut.com

The Groundskeeper, Tucson, Ariz. — www.groundskeeper.com

Gregson-Clark Spraying Equipment — www.gregsonclark.com

The Drip Store — www.dripirrigation.com

TurfFiles Turf Publications from North Carolina State University — www.ces.ncsu.edu/TurfFiles/pubs/index.html

To announce a new Web site, e-mail nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com. For additional industry information and news, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com

may solve that problem. NiteTime Décor is only 10 franchisees away from its 2000 goal of 75 U.S. franchises.

"Landscape lighting is strong 10 months out of the year and weakest when Christmas Décor is strongest," Smith said.

Franchising is popular in the green industry now, Smith said, because it creates a networking opportunity for those involved.

"The core of a good franchising system is shared buying power and shared knowledge," Smith said. "By being committed to improving how other people manage and grow their businesses, I am successful."

For more information on Christmas or NiteTime Décor, call 800/687-9551 or visit www.christmasdecor.net.

NEWS:

Wisconsin Residents Voice 'Pet Peeves'

EAU CLAIRE, WIS. — Wisconsin pet owners who suspect neighbors' lawn care programs sickened their furry friends are turning to a state warning system for protection.

The Landscape Pesticide Advance Notice Registry is designed to provide 12 hours public notice of pesticide spraying. "Then I'll be able to keep the dogs in the house," pointed out Dan Perkins, a college journalism professor who, although he has no proof, claims a pesticide sprayed on a neighbor's lawn last May drifted onto his yard and nearly killed his dog.

(continued on page 18)



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Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

According to registry rules, all Wisconsin commercial lawn care companies are required to check the list and notify registered people located within the nearest block or adjoining blocks of their customers' homes at least 12 hours before spraying pesticides. Contractors can notify people on the list by telephone, mail or by distributing literature at their doorsteps.

According to the registry's last update, there were 43 new names on the list this year and approximately 750 re-applicants from last year's nearly 1,000 people. In 1999, there were 17 complaints about noncompliance with the notification rules.

John Crossmock, president-elect of the Grounds Management Association of Wisconsin, said lawn care contractors are generally interested in making the notification law work. "Making sure we don't create trouble in our communities is in all of our best interests," Crossmock said. "Following that rule is the best business practice a landscape contractor can follow."

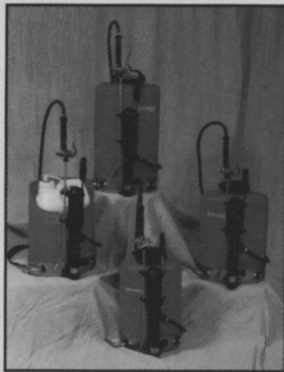
Association NEWS

The **Professional Grounds Management Society** (PGMS) updated its certified grounds manager program. The changes support the original premise of providing a peer review program to evaluate and test the basic competence of a professional grounds manager. The examination process and certification are open to all grounds managers - not just PGMS members. For more information, call 410/584-9754.

The **Professional Lawn Care Association of America** (PLCAA) introduced a three-part video training series for lawn care and grounds maintenance contractors to increase professionalism, safety and efficiency. The series costs \$34 for members and \$50 for non-members. Contractors can order the series at the Green Industry Expo Nov. 5-7 in Indianapolis, Ind. For more information, call 800/458-3466.

The **Florida Nurserymen & Growers Association** (FNGA) increased its industry representation through the addition of members from the **Florida Landscape Designers Association** (FLDA). As of the end of last year, FLDA dissolved its association and its members were assimilated into the landscape division of FNGA. "Welcoming landscape designers into FNGA's landscape division makes eminent sense," said FNGA Executive Vice President Ben Bolusky. "They will add an important dimension to the programs and services FNGA currently provides to Florida's landscape and lawn care professionals." For more information, call 800/375-3642.

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USE READER SERVICE #15

(continued from page 10)


are. Ask to see their credentials. Make sure they really are with INS. If you are suspicious, call the agency to verify their identity.

- Find out why the investigators are there. A "raid," which requires a search warrant, does not require advance notification. An I-9 audit requires three days' advance notice in writing but no search warrant. Some INS agents will present a subpoena in conjunction with an audit, suggesting that you need to comply with it immediately. However, you are entitled to three days advance notice, and INS cannot use a subpoena to shortcut that.

- Stay calm. Be polite. Becoming belligerent will only make matters worse.

- A warrant is a court order giving the agent(s) permission to search your property. Resisting a warrant may be punished by contempt of court.

- Contact your attorney as quickly as possible if faced with an INS raid.

For more information on How to Avoid an INS Nightmare, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com. 

People

Riverdale Chemical announced the following: **Lendel Schutzman** was named regional sales manager; **Mark Phipps** was named northeast regional sales manager; **Jeff Ziehmer** was hired as western regional sales manager and **David Champion** was promoted to sales representative.

Lewis Seed Co. hired **Michael Thomas** as its new manager.

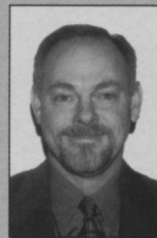
Bruce Rayburn was named vice president of Pipe 'n Heads.

Tony Davidson was named president of Kichler Lighting.

Calloway's Nursery named **Shawn Callarman** and **Chris Newth** store managers, **Jim Martin** assistant store manager and **John Peters** vice president of operations.

Masaru Kobori was appointed to the position of executive vice president - administration for Nissan Diesel America.

Tom Handel was chosen general manager of The Andersons Professional Turf Products Division.



Kobori (top),
Rayburn
(bottom)

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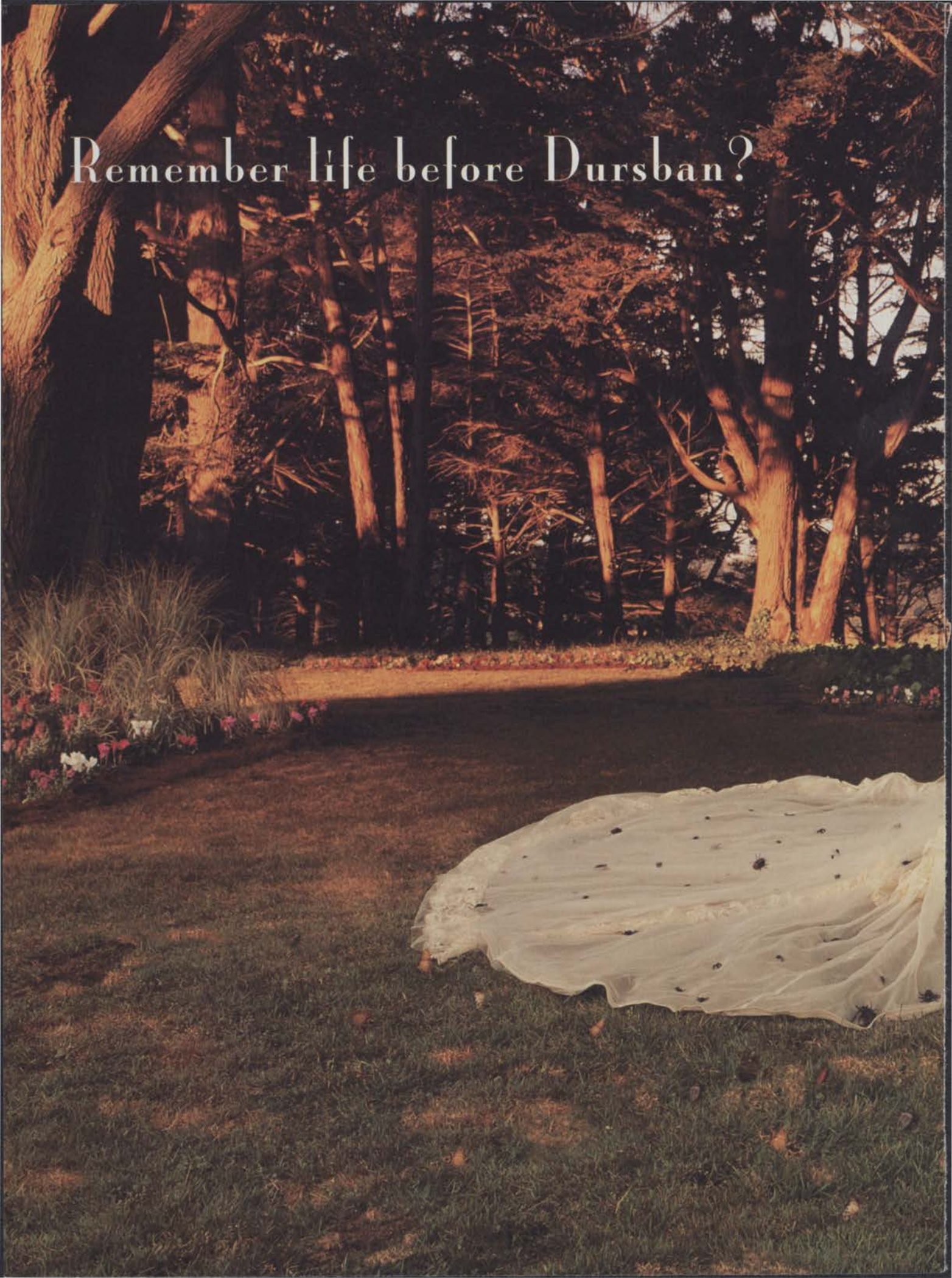
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USE READER SERVICE #81

Mayhem in Massachusetts

As a new bill in the Massachusetts Legislature makes clear, emotions can have a tremendous impact on public policy regarding pesticide use, according to Fred Langley, who follows state issues for Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment, Washington, D.C.

Titled "An Act Protecting Children and Families from Harmful Pesticides," the legislation could end up doing just the opposite if passed into law, Langley said. "The fact is totally lost that pests *have* to be controlled or people get hurt," he argued. "If this bill passes, as it

appears to be headed, pests in schools are likely to increase."

The situation is a complicated one. There is both a ballot initiative from a public interest group and a legislative bill on the table that call to reduce or completely eliminate pesticide use in or near schools. Even if the bill, which is currently in the House Ways and Means Committee, is shot down by the legislature, the initiative will still appear on the ballot in November. So, however the situation turns out, Massachusetts stands to face a loss of pesticide use in schools and, ultimately, a triumph of emotionalism over sound science, according to Langley.

(continued on page 24)



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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."

Pest control everyone can feel good about.

Environmental Forum

(continued from page 22)

Of particular concern are the bill's outlandish stipulations, Langley said. These include not allowing for preventative pesticide applications, true integrated pest management practices, new pest management technologies or methods of delivery. The bill also limits pesticide use for aesthetic purposes and imposes stiff fines for noncompliance.

"Massachusetts may be the first state to go beyond EPA," Langley said. "That's the bottom line."

As with many issues, pest control is one that needs to be proactively approached, with applicators doing their part to educate the public, Langley urged.

"This is a challenge all of us need to take a look at," he said, noting that the pest control industry must work to inform the public and dispel misconceptions and misinformation about pesticide use. "When these activist groups come in unchallenged, it makes it easier for them to impose their will on the community," he pointed out.

Massachusetts isn't the only state currently scrutinizing pesticide use. According to Langley, there are similar bills pending in 10 other states, including California, Florida, Pennsylvania, Wyoming, Hawaii, Minnesota, New York and Vermont.

WEST COAST UPDATE. In California, legislation is currently moving through the state assembly that would provide a counterattack to total leaf blower bans. The legislation, Assembly Bill 1609, would make it more difficult for cities to completely ban blowers and would overturn existing bans, according to Larry Rohlfes, governmental affairs manager, California Landscape Contractors Association, which is a co-sponsor of the bill.

Aimed to override Los Angeles' blower ban, in particular, the legislation proposes banning all but the quietest leaf blowers throughout California. Under the bill, only blowers 65 dBA or lower (at 50 feet per the American National Standard Institute) would be permitted. The bill's overall

objective is to prevent the further spread of total blower bans, according to Rohlfes. "If this bill were to pass, all previously passed blower bans would be retroactively overturned, with the exception of Santa Barbara, Calif., which banned blowers with a ballot initiative," he said. "That one would stick and all the rest would go."

In addition, as new blower technology becomes available, the bill would allow local governments to lower the maximum dBA level permitted.

With powerful opposition in the California Senate, however, the bill's passage is going to be difficult, Rohlfes predicted, noting that the bill is currently at an impasse in the senate's environmental committee.

A compromise bill might be a possibility, with the original legislation amended to include a mandatory blower label requirement, Rohlfes said. "We could end up with a bill that didn't go as far as the original. If that happens, however, we wouldn't want to water it down too much," he warned.

— Cynthia Greenleaf

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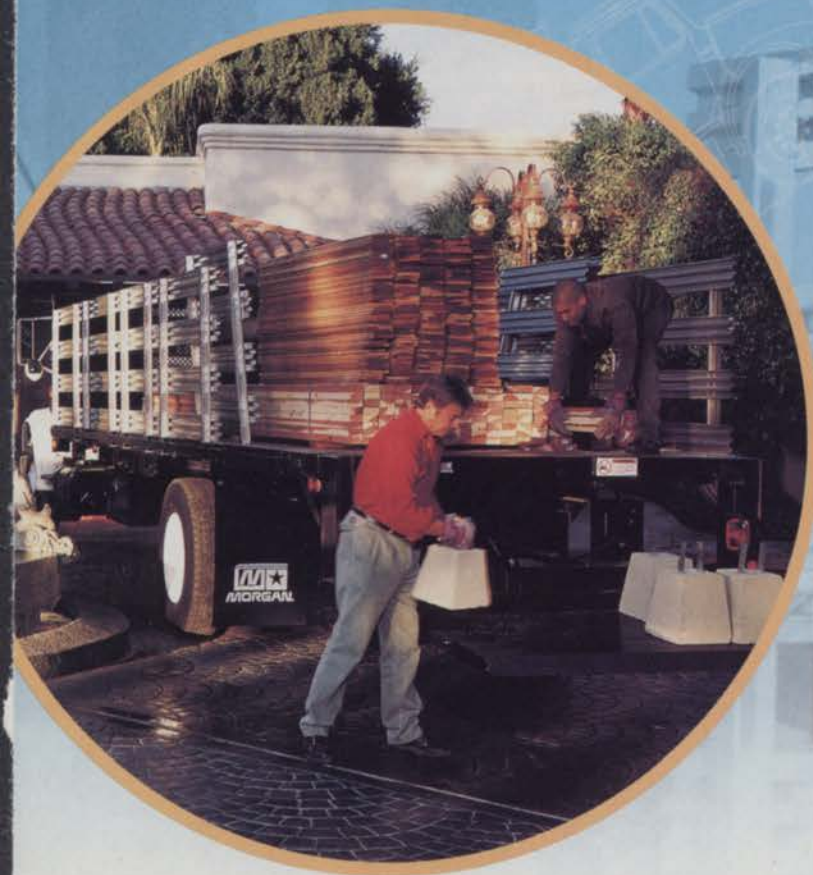
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USE READER SERVICE #83

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Nursery Market Report

TREND ALERT:

Dream Themes

People love themes. They choose themes to decorate their homes—Victorian, Mediterranean, Southwestern, French country or perhaps contemporary. They throw theme parties, visit theme parks and take theme cruises. With themes, the options are endless.

Themes are catching on in the nursery industry, as well. More growers are producing and assembling plant collections by theme, and landscape professionals report increased requests to design and build theme gardens. Shade, hummingbird, butterfly and herb gardens are just a few hot ideas.

"Bird and butterfly gardens are really popular right now," explained Damon Scott, landscape designer at

Nurseries are offering theme collections of plants to help contractors build the gardens of their clients' dreams—from butterfly to hummingbird or even around-the-world themes.

Photos: Monrovia



Ireland-Gannon Associates, Long Island, N.Y. Scott recently installed a bird garden for the winners of an *Audubon* magazine garden makeover contest. Working in cooperation with Martin Viette Nursery on Long Island, Scott designed and installed the garden for the winners.

"We're getting quite a few requests for herb gardens, cut flower gardens, rose gardens and even bulb gardens," Scott added. He and other contractors agree that today's

(continued on page 30)

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(continued from page 26)

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USE READER SERVICE #20

MARKET TREND:

Cottage Garden Resurrection

A revival is happening in landscape design and the evidence – cottage gardens – surrounds us. In rural areas, cottage gardens never left. But now cottage gardens are popping up in new neighborhoods with modern homes.

Included in this revival is the old-fashioned picket fence. The fence may be white or natural and serves many purposes. Sure, the fence may keep your client's dog in the yard, but it is also a design element in the garden and a support structure for vines, like coral honeysuckle, clematis cypress and moonvine.

In addition to vines, you will find antique roses, like 'Zephirine Drouhin,' 'Madame Isaac Pereire' or 'Yellow Lady Banks,' on these fences. Although these old standards are enjoying a surge in popularity, David Austin's English roses, like 'Abraham Darby,' 'Evelyn' and 'Graham Thomas,' are draping these fences with fragrance and elegance.

The classic wooden bench is also appearing in today's cottage garden. For your client, a bench is not only a thing of beauty, but also the perfect spot for a cup of coffee or a place to take a brief rest.

Cottage gardens are like snowflakes – no two are alike. The common threads among them are flowers that drape over fences, plants that create tall, spiky textures and numerous perennials. For example, the old-fashioned larkspur is popular again, with its tall stature, wispy foliage, bright, delicate flowers and perennial-like performance. The new angelonias, though not quite as tall, are also finding great favor because they bloom for months and return after a mild winter.

Perennial salvias are a staple in cottage gardens for their tall, spiky textures. Salvias like 'Victoria Blue,' meadow and blue anise sages; and indigo spires are hard to beat in the cottage garden or as a perennial border.

Tall, round flowers are also important. 'Goldsturm' Black-eyed Susan, 'Bravado' purple coneflower and 'Alaska' shasta daisy are some of my favorites. Use these flowers to tower above other favorite annuals or perennials.

One mix that is superb next to a white picket fence or just about anywhere in the garden uses the delicate, daisy-like flowers of the Sonata cosmos in magenta, pink and white, which are born at the top of feathery foliage.

The cottage garden will surely draw attention if you select the right combination of plants. Now is the time to get your soil prepared, lay out your design and create the cottage garden of your client's dreams. – Norman Winter

The author is a horticulturist with Mississippi State University's Extension Service. You can e-mail him questions or comments at normanw@ext.msstate.edu.

(continued on page 39)



The classic wooden bench is an integral part of the cottage garden. Photo: Norman Winter

MAY 2000

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20th

ANNIVERSARY

Lawn & Landscape



The
Times
Have
Changed



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Joshua H. Weeks

Aventis Environmental Science Uses its Professional Leadership Position to Benefit Lawn & Landscape Professionals

When the parent companies of AgrEvo and Rhone-Poulenc came together in December 1999 to create Aventis Environmental Science, the strength of their combined turf and ornamental product line was obvious.

The company has complemented this product portfolio with a well-positioned and talented sales and technical staff that is firmly dedicated to servicing lawn and landscape professionals nationwide. This combination of products and knowledge has positioned Aventis Environmental Science as the largest manufacturer of turf and ornamental pest control products worldwide.

The company's products for the lawn and landscape, turf and ornamental and golf markets will be managed under the Chipco Professional Products group, which is now under the leadership of Vice President Joshua H. Weeks.

"In our role as this industry's global leader, we have made the requirements of lawn care and landscape professionals our highest priority," said Weeks. "Lawn and landscape professionals who have used AgrEvo and Rhone-Poulenc products should feel confident that they will benefit from this merger.

"One immediate benefit of our restructuring is a significant research and development budget that will allow Aventis to continue to develop products that raise the bar in this industry to better meet contractors' needs," Weeks added.

According to Weeks, the Aventis S.A. corporate research and development budget is estimated at \$3 billion annually. "The portion of the Aventis S.A. resources that is earmarked for Aventis Environmental Science will, no doubt, provide an outstanding foundation for long-term growth in the lawn and landscape market," said Weeks.


The Aventis Environmental Science product line includes:

- 26GT® Fungicide, manufactured to provide preventive and curative activity against dollar spot and brown patch;
- Acclaim Extra® Herbicide, a systemic herbicide for post-emergent treatment of crabgrass and other annual and perennial grasses in turf;
- Banol® Fungicide, a multi-site mode-of-action fungicide providing preventive and curative activity against Pythium;

- Chipco® Signature Fungicide, a fungicide that serves as a foundation for any summer stress complex program;
- DeltaGard® T&O 5 SC Insecticide & DeltaGard® T&O Granule Insecticide, two low-dose and low-odor insecticide products that control more than 50 turf-endangering insects;
- Finale® Herbicide, a non-selective post-emergence herbicide that controls a broad spectrum of emerged annual and perennial grasses and broadleaf weeds;
- Prograss Herbicide, a selective post-emergence herbicide for the control of *Poa annua* and other annual grasses and broadleaf weeds;
- ProStar® Fungicide, a fungicide for the control of brown patch and fairy ring;
- Proxy® Plant Growth Regulator, for use in managing cool-season turf; and
- Ronstar® Herbicide, an herbicide for commercial use that controls more than 25 broadleaf and grassy weeds, including crabgrass.

New products that are anticipated to be available in the next 12 months include Chipco® Triton™ Fungicide, with the active ingredient triticonazole. Chipco Triton will not only control brown patch and dollar spot, but also powdery mildew, rust, summer patch, take-all patch and anthracnose. Chipco Triton has also demonstrated little or none of the characteristic triazole damage on cool-season turf.

Aventis/Chipco Professional Products also plans to offer a fire ant control product, containing the active ingredient fipronil. Fipronil will be available in a ready-to-use granule that can be broadcast with any standard fertilizer spreader. Fipronil, which calls for smaller quantity applications than many organophosphate products currently used to control fire ants, will begin to control fire ants immediately, with 80-90 percent control achieved within four to six weeks of application. Fipronil has also been proven to provide 90 percent or better control for up to 12 months.

For information on the complete line of products available from the Chipco Professional Products division of Aventis Environmental Science, call 800/843-1702. 

The Times Have Changed



This issue marks the 20th anniversary of Lawn & Landscape's first issue. To celebrate, we invited some industry veterans to share their thoughts on the key changes that have taken place during this time.

The very first issue of *Lawn & Landscape* didn't even bear that title. In our early years, we were actually known as *American Lawn Applicator* (ALA), and approximately 2,500 lawn care operators nationwide read the opening editorial from Steve Brown. Amazingly enough, many of the words from that editorial resonate loudly today.

"On one hand we see the continued growth and maturity of many chemical lawn care companies. There are constant refinements of techniques and equipment. New materials which promise to solve many of the old problems are introduced regularly. Educational programs and professional associations have raised standards and contributed to a widespread "professional" attitude toward this business. And, most importantly, the American homeowner continues to perceive the value of our existence.

"However, there is the other hand to reckon with. The opposing forces of inflation and recession put a tremendous strain on the economy. The costs of money, chemicals, labor and fuel climb to an unbelievable rate. The disappearance of chemicals such as Silvex reduces our effectiveness. Governmental regulations ... complicate and frustrate. Chemical companies talk about the fast approaching day when they won't be able to afford to develop new pesticides for our market. Construction of new homes has slowed to a crawl. And, finally, lawn care people have begun to question whether our increased costs can be passed along indefinitely to a consumer who, pressed from all sides, may have some difficult choices."

Aside from the slowdown of new home construction and economic ills, our industry can relate well to all of these issues, and we've uncovered some new ones of our own such as the painful labor shortage and the effects of consolidation.

To help us discuss what the last 20 years have meant to the landscape industry, we asked four industry veterans to share their thoughts.



RON KUJAWA,

Kujawa Enterprises

Ron Kujawa's career in the landscape industry dates back to 1969, and he takes obvious delight setting the record straight when he encounters someone who has misperceptions about landscape companies.

"Significant progress has really been made over the last two decades to professionalize this industry, and that is probably the most significant thing that has happened in that time," he said. "But I think there is still a long way to go before the general public recognizes and appreciates the contributions of our industry."

Kujawa spoke of one instance where he recommended a landscape company to a general contractor and that contractor was

amazed to learn that the landscape company had greater bonding capacity. "There are still a lot of people who consider many of the service industries as lesser industries compared to some of the more high-tech industries out there," he pointed out. "This has been a general, incremental evolution with computerization, new equipment, certification and other products. And I think we're going to see more focus within schools on educating people for industries that involve working with your hands because there is such a need for those employees right now."

And, as many industry observers have commented before, the development of national landscape companies like LandCare USA, now part of TruGreen LandCare, can go a long way to legitimize this industry in the eyes of financial professionals. "We are producing companies that show that this is a viable and growing industry and not just a bunch of mom-and-pop companies," he remarked. "Although we know what this industry is like, the general public doesn't see this. I think as more companies grow and become regional and national companies, the facility and property managers will recognize our sophistication and talents."

All of this should be good news for independent contractors curious about the next 20 years. "I think the people who choose to remain private businesses will become much better business people in the next five to 10 years because they will have to rise to the challenge that consolidation has presented,"

Kujawa related. "Part of that will probably include contractors becoming a little choosier in terms

of what clients they want to take on and what type of services they want to offer because they'll have to make sure they allocate their financial resources where they can get the most return."

Kujawa was also quick to point out the improvements in power equipment that have occurred in the last two decades and the benefits from these changes to contractors. "Again, we're seeing a continual evolutionary improvement instead of a radical breakthrough that changes the industry," he noted. "The mowers of 20 years ago were 18- to 20-horsepower with air-cooled gasoline engines, and now we've got more horsepower and water-cooled diesel engines that run better and last longer."

"Then the industry developed the front-mount mowers and the zero-turn machines, which boosted productivity for the operators," Kujawa continued. "The machines we use are also much more durable today and they can use so many more attachments to do so much more work."



LARRY MESSINA,

Lawn Cure of Southern Indiana

The lawn care industry has undoubtedly seen its fair share of change over the last 20 years, although not all of the motivation came from within the industry. Larry Messina started his company 23 years ago, and he is very aware of how little his business today resembles the company that he initially created.

"Lawn care companies have really diversified," he noted. "We all

A magazine's identity is often established by its cover, which indicates that our identity has evolved over the last two decades. Technical issues were the focus when our first issue (bottom left) arrived on the scene. Later, our coverage shifted to focus on business management issues, such as government contracts (fourth from left), industry profiles (fourth from right, page A5) and major news stories, like the merger of TruGreen and ChemLawn (second from right, page A5).



got started in the industry with a tank and a spray truck and we made four lawn care applications each year, but no one is doing just that today. We have branched off into industrial weed control, which was about 26 percent of our revenue last year, and we now offer tree and shrub care, aeration and perimeter pest control.

"One lesson I've learned over these 20 years is that if you're not staying on top of the trends in the industry and what's going on with the new technologies, you'll end up going by the wayside," he continued. "All of these add-on services might seem like pretty small incremental improvements, but they do affect the bottom line and cumulatively, the effect can be significant."

In addition to developing an appreciation for the profitability benefits of maximizing revenue per customer, Messina said lawn care operators have also benefited from advances in the products they work with in order to diversify in this manner.

"I didn't even know what an aerator was when I started this company, but these manufacturers were smart enough to see an emerging industry and they developed the equipment we needed to be successful," he explained. "Another example is the riding spreaders that let operators spray and spread at the same time and improve productivity by as much as double."

Of course, significant change in the lawn care industry has focused around the pesticides lawn care operators apply on a daily basis. "I think the whole theory of integrated pest management (IPM) has perked lawn care operators' interest and now we see that

Timeline 1980 to 2000

MAY 1980

- First issue of *American Lawn Applicator* published – 2,500 readers

APRIL 1988

- ALA survey shows average starting wage for landscape employee was \$4.61/hour

NOVEMBER 1988

- *American Lawn Applicator* becomes *ALA Lawn & Landscape Maintenance*
- Jerry Faulring becomes our first cover profile

NOVEMBER 1990

- First-ever Green Industry Expo is held

NOVEMBER 1995

- *Lawn & Landscape Maintenance* becomes *Lawn & Landscape*
- TruGreen-ChemLawn Buys Barefoot Grass

APRIL 1997

- Introduction of *Lawn & Landscape School of Management*

NOVEMBER 1997

- Introduction of *Lawn & Landscape Online*

FEBRUARY 1998

- *Lawn & Landscape* breaks the story of acquisitions by LandCare USA and TruGreen-ChemLawn

NOVEMBER 1998

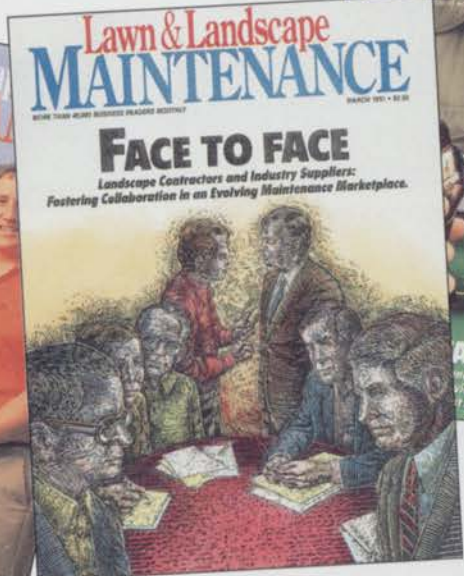
- *Lawn & Landscape* breaks the story of the merger of LandCare USA and TruGreen-ChemLawn
- *Lawn & Landscape* wins *Folio*: magazine's National Editorial Excellence Award

OCTOBER 1999

- *Lawn & Landscape* survey shows average wage for landscape maintenance employee is \$7.28/hour

SEPTEMBER 2000

- *Lawn & Landscape* will publish its 100th cover profile feature story.



20th ANNIVERSARY

Lawn & Landscape

we need to be smarter, not only from a bottom-line standpoint but for the sake of the environment as well," Messina noted, adding that he's applying considerably less pesticides on a per-acre basis today than he was two decades ago. "We used to go out and make a blanket application of an insecticide on our third application for all of our properties. We would never do that today. In fact, today we only apply insecticides on an as-needed basis."



GARY THORNTON,

Slice Technologies

There may not be a better symbol of the impact technology has had on the landscape industry than Gary Thornton, who got started in the landscape industry in 1961 with the development of Thornton Land-

scape, which later became part of his father's company, Thornton Gardens.

Then, in 1999, Thornton sold the company to focus more on his other business, Slice Technologies, which produces computer software for the landscape industry.

"I think we bought our first computer in 1979, and we were probably one of the first landscape companies to do so," Thornton pointed out. "Everything used to be done in a 'by-the-seat-of-the-pants' fashion. Accounting and job costing programs for service industries didn't exist and just having a chart of accounts was a big deal. We're still far behind other industries for the routine and mundane parts of operating a business, but I think we'll see continued computerization of this industry until the computer becomes the hub for all written and verbal communication."

But that's not to say Thornton hasn't seen other important changes take place during the last two decades. "The other major change that has taken place, and it might have occurred because of computers, education, the economy, magazines like yours and associations, has been the development of professionalism in the industry," he related. "We used to be a mom-and-pop operation. We are now a much more legitimate business.

"Years ago, the real businesses were the oddities in our industry, but now you have to be a real business or you won't last long," he continued. "That was a drastic change,

and it was a change that was absolutely mandatory. If that sense of professionalism didn't develop, there wouldn't have been any consolidation over the last few years and landscape contractors would all still have that pickup-truck mentality."

Another change Thornton observed and was also able to benefit from was what he termed "the growth of design/build projects."

"There always used to be some design/build jobs, but they didn't represent the dollar volume or prestigious projects that they do today," he recalled. "Today's design/build work is mind boggling, especially when you look at what is going on in subdivisions with lakes, walkways, lighting, irrigation, street trees, entranceways – the whole project."

Thornton said this development of design/build work has been one of the drivers behind the increased diversification of the industry. "Irrigation wasn't even thought of on most projects in Ohio 20 years ago because supplemental irrigation really isn't necessary for plants to live here," he related. "But as we began to work with more national customers, such as McDonald's or Midas Muffler, they expected irrigation to be on all of their properties. And more customers began appreciating the marketing value of a nice-looking property. Burned out lawns weren't acceptable in the summer anymore."

And what do the next 20 years hold?

"I think the biggest changes we'll see in the future will have to do with mowing,

The last decade has featured continued changes in our logo as well as our cover focus, especially as profiles of leading industry firms became staples of our issues. Davey Tree (second from left), Cough Environmental Services (fourth from left) and Kujawa Enterprises (sixth from left) were just a few of the nearly 100 companies to grace our covers since we began with profiles in 1988.



which is probably the dumbest thing we do on a weekly basis because it's so labor intensive and time consuming," Thornton explained. "We need to come up with a better way to make turf look good without mowing it every week.

"This could come from a difference in equipment design if we can eliminate the need for a mower operator. This could come from genetics with the development of a turfgrass that doesn't have to be mowed, or it could come from a change in design philosophies with less use of turf," he added. "But when you think about how many hours and dollars are spent chopping the tops off of blades of grass, the numbers are mind boggling. There is enough expense there that someone will eventually find a way to produce savings."



BOB OTTLEY,

One Step Tree & Lawn Care

From start to finish and back again. That's the idea behind a cycle, and that's exactly what Bob Ottley said he sees the lawn care industry in the midst of right now in terms of the companies that comprise the industry.

"When we all started out 20 years ago, we were a bunch of little landscape or lawn care companies, and the people who decided to stick with the industry, join associations and turn themselves into real professionals are still around, for the most part," Ottley observed. "Of course, we lost a number of these folks through the consolidation in the industry, and we ended up with one mega-company and some

fairly large regional green industry companies that have thrived.

"Now, what I think we're seeing everywhere, is a number of new companies coming into the industry again," he continued. "I don't know whether these people are former lawn care owners, former lawn care employees or just new entrepreneurs entering the industry for the first time, but I think we're seeing a real resurgence in the number of these new companies."

Ottley said that while he would still classify the lawn care industry as a young industry, he thinks the completion of this business cycle indicates the industry has at least matured to some degree. And he isn't concerned that having one company so much larger than the rest of the industry creates a problem. Instead, he is confident that the growth of TruGreen-ChemLawn has been good for other lawn care companies.

"First of all, there are a lot of people out there that don't want to do business with the largest, national company in an industry," Ottley related. "Instead, they would rather work with a more local interest, and then the older companies who are established in a market look attractive to these customers because these companies have stability and credibility in the market.

"But I think TruGreen-ChemLawn has come along and taught so many customers

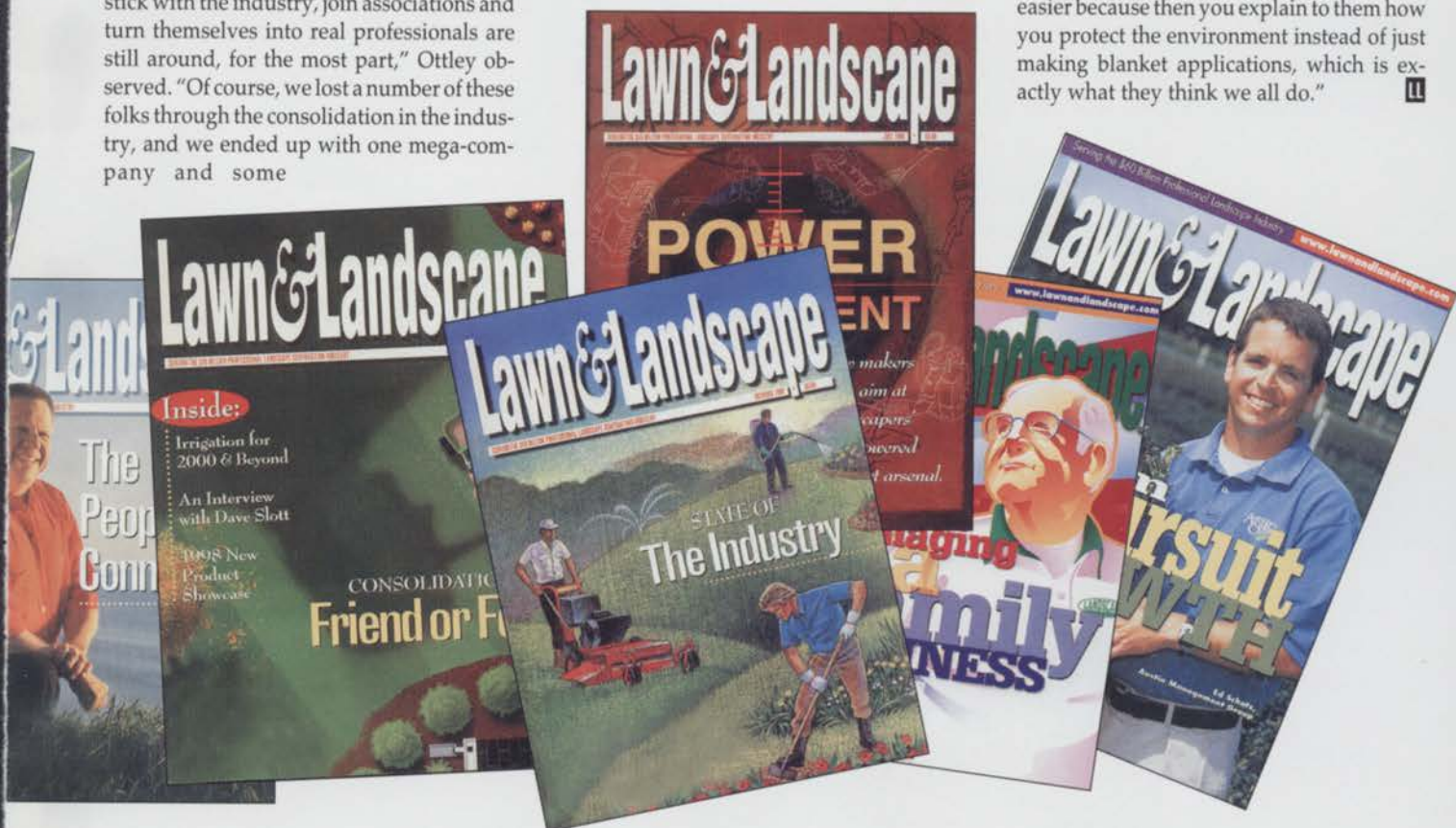
through their direct mail and telemarketing exactly why they need to have their lawn taken care of by a professional lawn care company, and that helps us all."

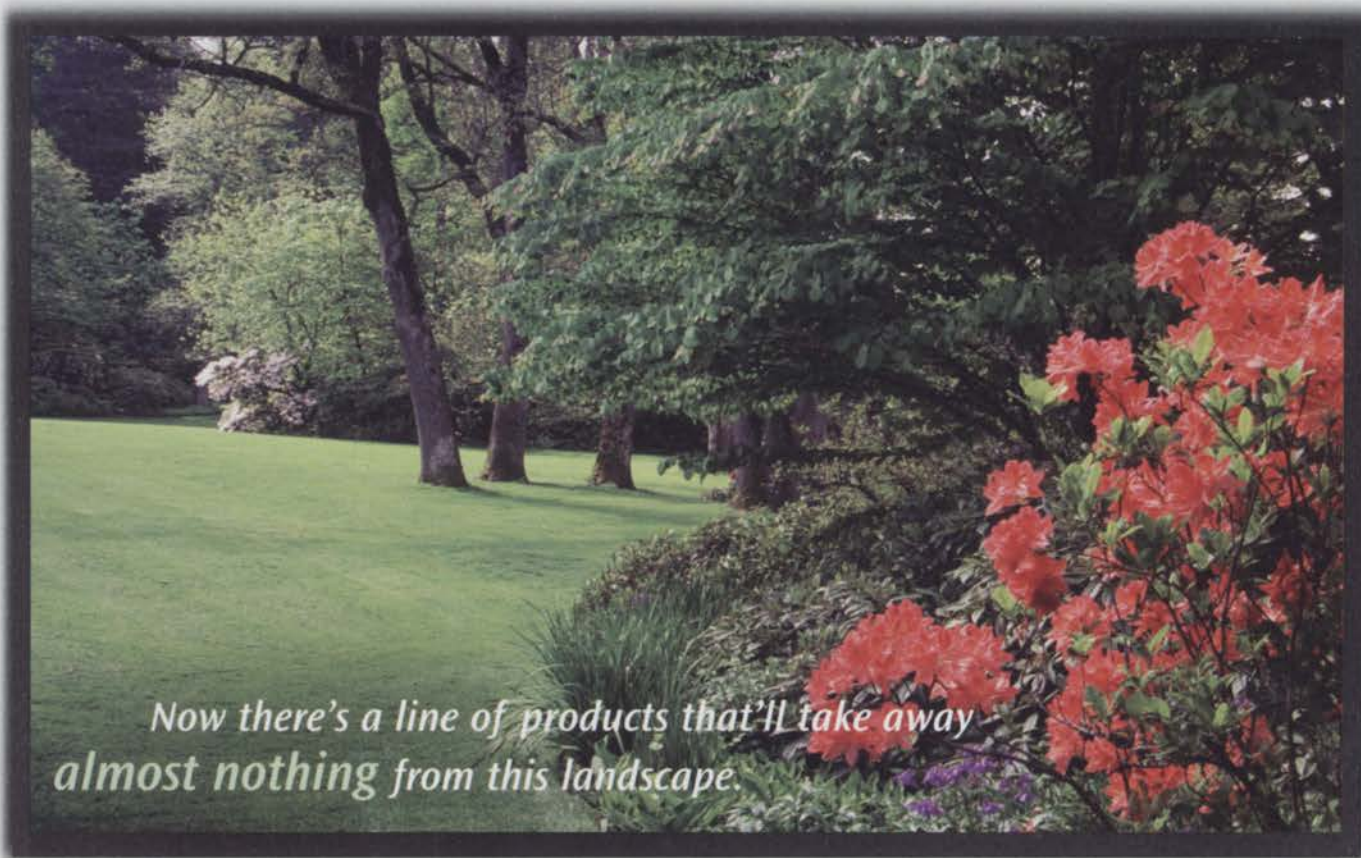
Ottley also recognized that considerable changes have taken place with lawn care equipment, and this has largely been driven by the concept of integrated pest management (IPM), which has come to prominence within the last two decades.

"We've made a big push to change our approach to applications because of IPM, and that has made us modify our equipment and use more twin-line hoses, injection spray guns and trucks with two tanks," he explained. "All of that change has brought some new problems as well because the spray equipment is more complicated to operate, is more technical and requires more technician training before operation."

Despite the added challenges, Ottley refuses to be critical of the notion of IPM, and he looks forward to the day when the majority of lawn care operators adhere to it. "As a whole, I don't think the industry has caught on to the idea of IPM yet," he said. "In some cases, whether or not you follow IPM depends on the market you're in because some of them are much more sensitive to pesticide use than others.

"But following an IPM approach makes dealing with anti-pesticide groups much easier because then you explain to them how you protect the environment instead of just making blanket applications, which is exactly what they think we all do." **LL**





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USE READER SERVICE #108

Nursery Market Report

(continued from page 30)

consumers are more sophisticated and know what they want, thanks to the recent proliferation of gardening television shows and Web sites that offer many ideas.

Cathy Goldman, a landscape industry consultant, Los Angeles, Calif., said she loves when her customers come to her with ideas for creating fragrant or hummingbird gardens. "The initial planning goes so much faster, and the client is usually thrilled with the results," she said. "There are just so many options when designing a garden, and that can be overwhelming to some people. But by focusing on one area or theme, people find it easier to learn about gardening – and that's fun for them."

Currently, Goldman is designing a custom theme garden for Peter Greenberg, travel reporter for the *Today Show*. "He spends most of his life traveling the globe, and he wanted an around-the-world theme garden," Goldman said. The result was a Japanese theme off the master bath, an Indonesian-Balinese area with bamboo and orchids, and a Mediterranean garden with bay, rosemary, figs and iceberg roses. The front yard and pool area unify the theme with colorful perennials and flowering shrubs.

Designer Kim Walden with Walden's Way Landscape Design in Nashville, Tenn., goes with her clients to the local garden center to gather ideas. "Theme collections are great for people who don't know what plants go together," she said. "Seeing a garden already put together will often ring a bell in their minds and we can create a similar theme."

Bates Nursery & Garden Center, also in Nashville, produces theme collections of plants. Owner David Bates said the collections help enhance repeat business and generate landscape design ideas. "(Customers) come back because they know we can help them envision the garden they would like to have," Bates said.

Some growers have assembled elaborate plant collections for theme gardens. "We select groups of plants based on themes, like fragrant garden, shade planting, tropical or wildlife," said Pam Wasson, marketing director for ornamental grower Monrovia, Azusa, Calif. Monrovia customizes the collections regionally, with plant suggestions based on hardiness, making it easier for contractors to select plant material for theme gardens.

Monrovia's latest theme offering features plants that reflect the West. Many are native

plants, while others were introduced by settlers who came from countries with similar climates and brought with them bougainvillea, citrus, crape myrtle, lavender and olive.

One challenge for contractors lies in educating clients about what they can expect from a theme collection. As Scott points out, a client might request a Japanese or English garden. "We have experts who have traveled

to Asia and Europe to study these gardens, and they can create a very authentic rendition," he said. "But the image clients have in their minds might be more like Hollywood's version, so before we put a single plant in the ground, we must make sure our visions are the same." – *Judy Lynes*

The author is a marketing expert with Monrovia, Azusa, Calif.

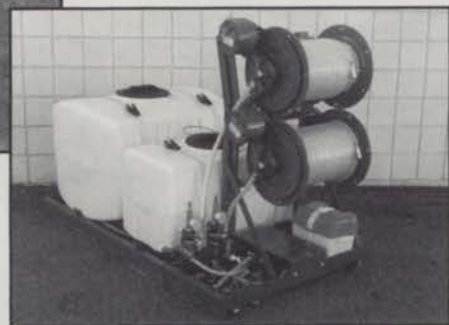


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 USE READER SERVICE #84

In Minor's League

QUESTION: *I am new in the industry. What is a good profit margin to shoot for?*

ANSWER: This is a topic of keen interest to most landscape professionals; however, it is a difficult one to answer. Much of my answer would depend on what services you specialize in.

Generally speaking, I think it is safe to say that landscape maintenance contractors are usually more profitable than design/build contractors, which are usually more profitable than landscape bid/installation contractors. (And although my business wasn't built around irrigation or chemical lawn care work, these were among our most profitable services.)

The reasoning behind this varies and is generally pretty accurate.

I would say, as a rule of thumb, the best landscape maintenance contractors have a profitability range of 15 to 20 percent. For design/

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

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

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



Editor's Note

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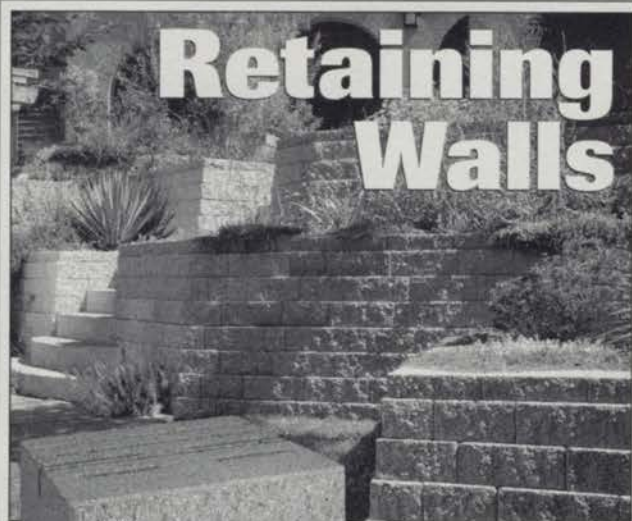
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In Minor's League

build, the best are probably in the 10 to 15 percent range, and the best landscape bid contractors are in the 5 to 10 percent range.

Many factors influence profitability, including the owner's lifestyle as well as the obvious – how efficiently he or she is running the operation. Also, keep in mind that there are exceptions to these rules on the high end and most definitely on the low end. I would advise you to contact the Associated Landscape Contractors of America and order the Cost Operating Study, which compares different profit scenarios by company type and size.

Before leaving the subject, let me say that my experience has shown that many contractors in this industry have a level of profitability in their mind that is acceptable but they have not raised their internal expectations. As a result, they reach only this desired profitability. There are many ways to increase profit margins. I have talked about these in previous columns and will talk about more in the future. The bottom line is this, raise your company's expectations for profits and I think you'll see higher margins down the road.

QUESTION: *How do we satisfy customers that are part of a consumer class that cannot be satisfied?*

ANSWER: Today's consumers have raised their level of expectations. I have also found that there are many customers who simply cannot be satisfied. To assume that an entire customer class can't be satisfied, however, is somewhat of a generalization and possibly a defeatist attitude. But I can certainly empathize with you about the difficulties of many specific types of customers.

My approach would be to do everything that you possibly can do in satisfying a customer that is reasonable and is within the parameters of the contract. For some customers that is simply not enough and you will have to accept that fact. Understand that a certain percentage of your customers will go away and try someone else because they either cannot be satisfied and/or they just want to or need to save money. To the extent you can, hold the line on the parameters of your contract. For some of the unreasonable customers, this is the only impetus they need to go away and, frankly, that is not all bad.

Many numbers get tossed around regard-

ing customer retention. I have heard people boast of customer retention rates of 90 to 95 percent. I wonder how they do this. Is their retention this high because they are that good or because they give in to every customer demand makes regardless of the request and whether or not it is within the scope of the contract? Remember, profitability is important for you, your employees and, believe it or not, your customers. If you

cave in to every demand your customers make you risk eroding your profitability.

Without question, certain customer classes are more desirable than others. Unfortunately, every contractor is chasing those desirable customers. I don't think pursuing a class that is difficult to deal with is wrong. Just understand that a good portion of that business is temporary and will have to be replaced each year. **LL**



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USE READER SERVICE #24

Minding Your

Business



*Editor's note:
This is a new
monthly department
focusing on smaller
contractor concerns.*

The Consolidation Challenge

For smaller contractors, green industry consolidation is a mixed bag. For some, this pressure is a source of increasing frustration, while for others, the influence of newly merged mega-companies is a welcome motivation to improve business strategies. Overall, consolidation has made it clear that there is a place in the industry for smaller contractors. They just have to find it.

KNOW YOUR NICHE. Consolidation has indirectly helped many smaller contractors by forcing them to recognize and capitalize on their strengths. "Seemingly, the bigger the big guys get, the more impersonal and more bureaucratic they get," said Michael Skye, general manager, Skye Landscape Detailers, Austin, Texas. "And the bigger they get, the more of an advantage it gives the small guy who's willing to look long-term at his business and make it professional."

Smaller contractors who focus on their strengths needn't worry about keeping up with the bigger companies, added Christy Webber, owner, Christy Webber & Co., Chicago, Ill. "For companies under \$5 million, the sky is the limit if you can find an edge and sharpen it, instead of trying to compete with the large guys," she said. "In this industry, you can make a niche for yourself and do quite well."

Webber's niche is being a "women business enterprise," a distinction the city of Chicago makes to provide opportunities for minority-run companies. "Our whole business plan is based on the need for quality services in the city," said Webber, who frequently works as a subcontractor for larger landscaping firms. "I think our focus is what sets us apart from the big boys."

For Skye and his team, which he jokingly referred to as a "mowing mafia," building long-term relationships with residential accounts is his company's key to success. "Everybody in the neighborhood knows us. New people moving into that area wouldn't think of calling

some stranger—they go with who everyone else is using," Skye said. "When you've built a high level of trust with clients, you can get all of their landscape related business. The big guys cannot compete with those relationships."

Similarly, Stacey Werner, owner, Tryon Creek Landscape, Portland, Ore., has made superior customer service to high-end residential properties his hallmark as a smaller contractor. By concentrating on his niche market, he doesn't need to worry about larger competitors. "A lot of the big guys can't give the customer service that I can," pointed out Werner, who does about \$1 million in volume annually. "We're small enough that I'm personally involved in every job."

Image Works, Springfield, Va., has made commercial accounts ranging from \$30,000 to \$70,000 annually its specialty. A few of these accounts really add up, and the best part is, national players won't come down to that level, according to Mike McCarron, president. "Smaller commercial accounts are an unbelievably untapped market," he pointed out. "If you're under \$500,000 in volume, that's the good ground that's left. It's a level that you can do really well at."

In this age of consolidation, smaller contractors can readily succeed if they build on their strengths and differentiate themselves from the larger competition. "Don't try to do everything and be everything until you're really good in one area," Skye said.

Webber agreed, adding that many customers want service that differs from the industry norm. She recalled that when she was in Bali on vacation recently, she had trouble finding the perfect souvenir because the stores were all alike. "What astounded me was that every other little shack sold the same old thing. If one had offered something different, I would have entered the shop," she said. "That holds true for our industry—do something different and you'll get business." — Cynthia Greenleaf ■

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

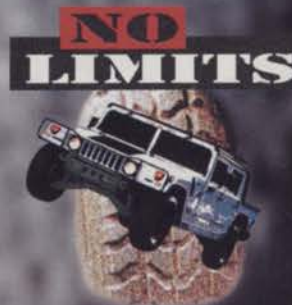
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by Bob West

GRASS-ROOTS

HEADQUARTERS: Lenexa, Kan.

FOUNDED: 1978

PRIMARY SERVICES: All of the company's revenue is from commercial customers, and about 80 percent of sales comes from physical and chemical lawn maintenance. The remaining 20 percent comes from irrigation work.

1999 REVENUE: \$3.7 million

2000 PROJECTED REVENUE: \$3.9 million

EMPLOYEES: 35 year-round, 50 seasonal

THE COMPANY

MISSION STATEMENT: Grass-Roots is dedicated to making sure each of our properties represents the best landscape maintenance has to offer.

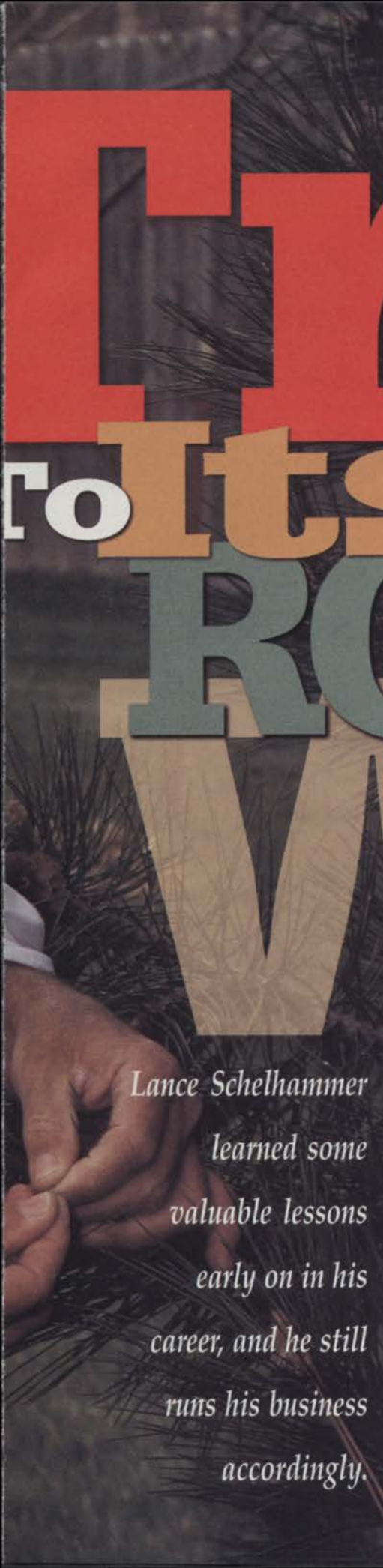
FUTURE CHALLENGES: I believe there will be continued price erosion in the market. We need to raise our profit levels or we will not be around.

THE OWNER Lance Schelhammer

BACKGROUND: Started in the horticulture industry working in a flower shop in New York City. Received a horticulture degree from Farmingdale College and a plant pathology degree from the University of Georgia. Served in a sales capacity for American Cyanamid, BASF and Ortho before founding Grass-Roots in 1978.

At a
Glance





True to Its ROOTS

*Lance Schelhammer
learned some
valuable lessons
early on in his
career, and he still
runs his business
accordingly.*

We're often told that people are very impressionable at a young age. Lance Schelhammer, owner, Grass-Roots, Lenexa, Kan., might tell us that our professional philosophies are also shaped in the early stages of our careers. That has certainly proven true in his case.

Schelhammer's first experiences in the horticulture industry involved caring for plants at the once-renowned Astor Hotel on Times Square in New York City and maintaining the grounds at estates in New York's affluent Hamptons.

"I was attending Farmingdale studying plant pathology and the school was so well known that we got to practice our skills maintaining these wonderful properties," he recalled. "But there was no room for error on these jobs because our teachers came down hard on us."

After spending several years in sales for specialty pesticide manufacturers serving the turf industry, Schelhammer decided to put his plant skills to work and start a business of his own in 1978. And although he has traded in the glitz and glamour of the Big Apple for the comfort and easy pace of the Midwest, Schelhammer still focuses his work on the high-end property and still sees no room for error.

FOLLOWING THE PLAN. Grass-Roots didn't grow into the company it is today by mistake. Schelhammer has always had a vision of the company he wanted to develop, and he constantly worked to make this vision tangible through the creation of business plans.

"The most important decision I ever made in this business was to have a business plan and to stick to that plan as best I could," Schelhammer

GRASS-ROOTS

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Cover Story

explained. "When I started the company, I focused on goals like who to target, how many people I would have to call on to get a certain number of customers and what kind of profit I would need to survive.

"Actually, I think that not setting a minimum acceptable profit level and adhering to that minimum is one of the biggest mistakes

a lot of people make starting up a new business," he continued. "Too many landscape companies start out and go after new business at any cost, and that's a mistake."

Schelhammer has watched the landscape industry explode from three or four companies in the late 1970s to three or four pages of

(continued on page 50)

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Lance Schelhammer understands plants. He has degrees in horticulture and plant pathology and he spent a few years selling pesticides to turf and agriculture professionals before founding his own landscape company that is now 22 years old. And Schelhammer has some concerns about the way he sees some lawn and landscape professionals treat the environment.

"I really don't like the use of standard pesticide programs for all properties where the client gets five applications whether the lawn needs them all or not," the owner of Grass-Roots, Lenexa, Kan., related. "We design our programs for every account based on what is on that property. Different trees and shrubs get different insects and diseases.

"And we work from a soil test in a great many cases instead of guessing what's wrong with the soil," he continued. "Those tests are a small price to pay to be right every time instead of guessing."

Schelhammer said he thinks turf professionals don't take long-term perspectives with the management strategies and they don't view properties as complex systems that have a variety of needs. "We need to focus more on the overall health of the soil complex instead of just focusing on how much pesticide we can sell our customers," he noted. "And we need to give more attention to cultural practices, like aeration, that can create healthier soil."

Schelhammer can even envision a future with less lawn mowing due to scientific advances. "We should all be watching what takes place in the agriculture industry because advances made there will trickle down to the turf industry eventually," he said. "And, if scientists can isolate and control the gene that causes plants to grow, we could see a significant reduction in the amount of mowing we do." — **Bob West**

**Schelhammer
of the
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Cover Story

(continued from page 48)

companies in the local phone book today, and he said this increased competition has certainly made profit more difficult to come by. But businesses that don't understand their costs and their pricing well enough to identify and pursue a required profit goal are setting themselves up for failure.

"I listen to other contractors sitting in bid meetings who say, 'I could've done the job for that amount,' or 'I wish I would've bid just a little bit less,' and that tells me these contractors don't know their costs or have a profit goal that drives their pricing," Schelhammer noted.

Building a business plan the company adheres to throughout the year is one way Schelhammer ensures that Grass-Roots pursues its profit goal and doesn't let its margins erode because of poor job selection or overly competitive pricing.

"We still do a business plan today, but we've gotten away from just having me as the boss put it together every year," he said. "Now, the account managers handle their budgets and the office staff handles its budget and so on. The controller gives everyone the numbers they need to know whether they are making or losing money, and then the employees come up with the solutions based on this information.

"But a business plan is a living document that is only accurate for the very first second after it is complete, then you have to be flexible and have contingencies in place to make the plan a success," Schelhammer continued. "We are always making notes in the margins of the plan about what worked, what didn't work and why so we can review them later and incorporate them into the next plan."

A key portion of Schelhammer's very first business plan for Grass-Roots included targeting the high-end commercial accounts as prospects. "I had noticed that every market in the landscape industry was segmented by customer type in terms of how much attention the customers required," he said. "But the industry at the time hadn't really noticed this yet and everyone was trying to do everything for everybody. As a result, the high-profile accounts didn't look like high-profile properties."

Subsequently, Grass-Roots has been able to amass a considerable number of high-profile accounts in the Kansas City market - approximately 60 percent of all high-profile jobs, Schelhammer estimated. And the company's growth has been fairly consistent, with the exception of major two years.

"We obtained a major account during our third year in business, and that doubled our size," reported Schelhammer of the first big growth year. But he remains un-impressed by companies boasting of 20 or 30 percent annual growth.

"I think those companies chasing growth are making a bad mistake because you can't control the quality of work being done as you grow," Schelhammer related. "Growing fast means bringing new crew members on board rapidly, and that doesn't leave any time for



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training them on doing certain tasks the right way for high-profile accounts.

"For example, a crew person can't go on to a high-profile account with a hedge trimmer," he continued. "Instead, that crew person needs to have pruning shears so he or she can 'feather' the hedges. These things have to be taught to employees, and sending them out there without these skills is just going to lead to customer complaints and cancellations.

"Smaller companies—those doing less than \$500,000 in annual sales—can probably handle this type of growth, but they will still end up dealing with three or four months of customer complaints because the service just isn't as good when you grow like this," he added.

Schelhammer believes the prudent course is the one favoring slow, consistent growth. "We've grown at a rate of 5 to 7 percent a year for the last 22 years," he related, although Schelhammer is pleased that this year sales should actually drop.

"We decided to stop pursuing landscape construction work, which should result in us doing two-thirds less construction work this year than we did last year," he explained. Overall, the move should cost the company about 15 percent of its total 1999 revenue, but Schelhammer said only handling construction projects for current customers will boost the company's profitability.

"There is a lot of new construction in the Kansas City market, and the bidding process is so difficult here that customers are too focused on the low price instead of quality," Schelhammer noted. "We don't want any part of that work. I consider bid work more of an exercise in stupidity than sound business."

In many cases, Grass-Roots will agree to handle the design for a new construction project if a customer asks the company to do so, but then the installation portion of the job will be subcontracted out.

SMOOTHER SAILING. Schelhammer said he thinks there is potential for Grass-Roots to increase its growth rate in the near future, but, first, the company must complete an operational overhaul that he recommends all contractors do as early as possible in their business's life.

"Our entire organization was very department oriented in the past, and we decided we needed to switch this over to an account manager orientation two years ago if

we're going to continue growing," Schelhammer said.

The problem Schelhammer identified with the department orientation was that every client had as many as five contacts at Grass-Roots—one for each service they used. In addition, that meant Schelhammer had five

department managers who each had approximately 100 clients, even though those 100 clients were the same people.

"We had too many clients for the department heads to manage and remain in contact with, so our customer service was slipping,"

(continued on page 54)

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Cover Story

(continued from page 51)

Schelhammer pointed out. "Now we have account managers who are each responsible for about \$1 million worth of business, and they are responsible for everything that happens on the properties they manage. This gives the clients one contact and the account managers are able to be on every property they manage at least once a week."

Each account manager then has a series of field supervisors who are on properties more often and spend time managing crews.

Schelhammer said most companies are forced into the department orientation due to a lack of quality people early in the business's life, but structuring operations around account managers should position the company better for growth.

"This was a difficult transition for us to go through because our entire mindset had to change," Schelhammer admitted. "But I think companies have to make this change if they want to grow beyond \$2.5 million, and I would say do this as soon as possible."

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Operation Set Up

FOR THE FUTURE. Once Grass-Roots' employees are completely comfortable with the new account manager structure, Schelhammer said he sees one more change that should bolster the company's ability to grow—scaling back his day-to-day involvement.

"At the age of 59, now is the time for me to start thinking about other things in life, like golf or fishing," he commented. "I compare getting old to operating a 166 computer when there are so many 366 machines around—you've got all of the knowledge in there but retrieving it becomes more difficult."

"Stepping back is an extremely difficult process, but we all have to realize that as we get older we're slower to react and we're more prone to making mistakes," Schelhammer continued. "I'm fortunate to have a talented general manager and management team in place to keep things going well." **LL**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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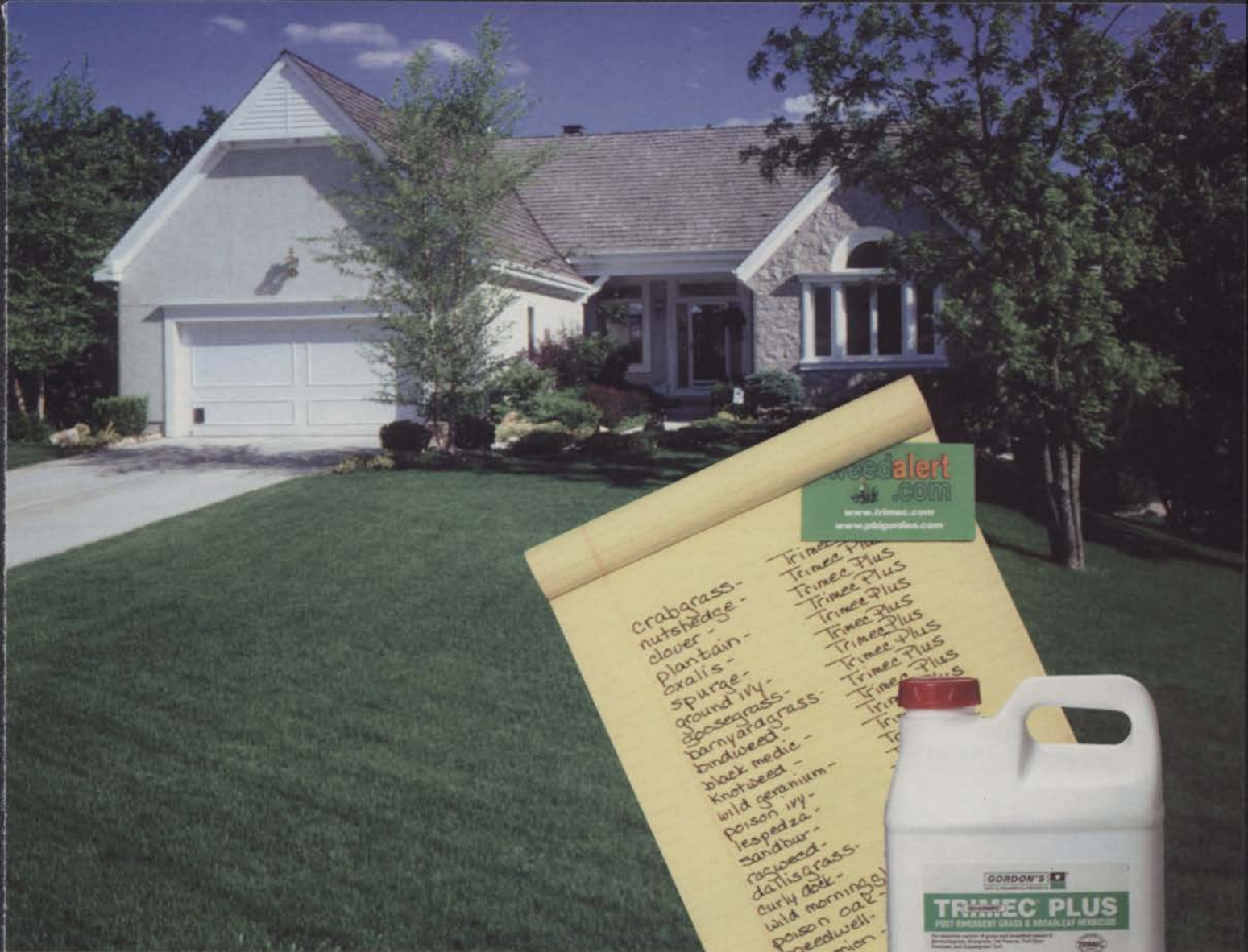
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by Cynthia Greenleaf

As with most living things, treat a tree well and it will flourish. Contractors need to keep this essential point in mind when first planting trees from a nursery. If important pre-planting steps are not followed, a tree's health could hang in the balance.

MATERIAL MATTERS. A sapling's future as a thriving adult tree is largely determined by the nursery material a contractor begins with. While using only quality material from a reputable nursery seems like common sense, plenty of contractors buy plant material sight unseen, which can leave them with less-than-desirable trees. If possible, contractors should go to a nursery and tag the trees they want, advised Bruce Phillips,

president, Treemasters, Fulton, Md.

Choose vigorous trees with a solid trunk, good branch structure and well-established roots, advised Nina Bassuk, professor of urban horticulture and director, Urban Horticulture Institute, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. Also, make sure the trunk doesn't have any major dings or scratches since damage such as this will hinder the plant's development, she said.

In terms of resilience, planting a smaller tree with a ½- to 3-inch caliper is generally better since it will recover more quickly from transplant shock than a larger one, Bassuk noted.

Similarly, Dusty Resneck, an independent contractor based in Petaluma, Calif., encourages his clients to plant smaller trees, since they tend to provide a better return on a smaller financial investment and generally acclimate more smoothly than larger ones. Phillips agreed with this approach. "If you're willing to wait, starting with smaller trees is a good idea," he said.

(continued on page 58)

Smart START

A photograph showing a man in a white polo shirt and a light-colored cap standing on the back of a red truck. He is handling several large trees with root balls wrapped in burlap. The truck is filled with these trees, and the background shows more trees and foliage.

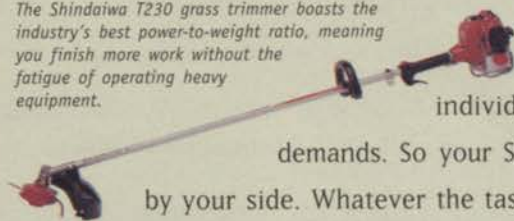
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Tree Care

(continued from page 56)

Once plant material has been selected, make sure it's handled carefully. The minute a tree leaves the nursery, the likelihood of damage increases. "This point is when things start to go wrong," Bassuk warned. Phillips agreed, noting that a tree is handled at least four or five times before it gets into the ground, which provides ample opportunity for damage.

A tree should always be handled by its ball or container, not by its trunk. Even if the tree is dormant, it should be transported in a tarped vehicle with the root ball kept moist, Bassuk advised. "Make sure you're getting it to the site with the least amount of water loss," she said. Ideally, trees should be planted as soon as possible after leaving the nursery, especially if they're balled and burlapped (B&B).

PROPER PLANTING. Just as with real estate, location is a primary concern when

planting a tree. While contractors don't always have a say as to where a tree is planted, they can do their best to encourage intelligent decisions, Resneck said. Picking an area

**"The more a tree
moves and sways,
the better for its
root stimulation."**

- Dusty Resneck

with good drainage is vital as is selecting one with good clearance.

Resneck noted that clients have a tendency to pack trees into as small a space as possible or plant flowers or turf immediately underneath a tree, which can hinder

full root development. Remember that trees need room to thrive. "Give the roots as much space as possible and try to minimize companion planting," he advised. "And once a tree is in the ground, respect its space and don't try and crowd it out."

When a good location has been selected, proper planting is the next step in giving a tree a head start, since one of the biggest causes of tree failure is improper planting. When planting, think of preparing a site, rather than just carelessly digging a hole, since a contractor has to create a healthy environment in which the tree can take root and thrive, Bassuk said.

When contractors dig into the soil, they need to backfill with existing soil to avoid the "bathtub effect," warned John Wolski, president, Ski Landscape, Indianapolis, Ind. "If you dig a hole in heavy clay soil, in particular, and then plant a tree, the first time it

(continued on page 60)

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USE READER SERVICE #51

Tree Care

(continued from page 58)

rains, all the water will sit there and take a long, long time to drain away," he said.

For containerized trees, make sure the roots are pruned prior to planting. If the roots are too thick, they can be root-bound and choke themselves, Phillips said.

Wolski advised deep watering with a

probe and then floating the tree in the hole to eliminate any air pockets that might become water pockets that could eventually kill the tree. "This ensures compaction, tightening a loose root ball and eliminating the need for staking and guying," he said.

To remove any air pockets, Bassuk rec-

ommends taking the handle of the shovel and tapping the ground gently while backfilling to let the soil settle naturally, she said.

Make sure the hole isn't too deep, since that will eventually drown the tree or cause root rot, Resneck pointed out. The hole should be twice as deep and three to five times the width of the root ball if it's a smaller tree, according to Bassuk. "Plant the tree so you can see the flare of the trunk going into the root system," she advised. "See where the flare and root starts. If the trunk's like a telephone pole going right into the ground, remove it and replant. Plant the tree at same depth as it was planted at the nursery."

When planting a B&B tree, be careful not to destroy the root ball's integrity, Bassuk

"After a **tree** is **transplanted**, it's set back for a **number of years** and must take time to **recover**."

— Nina Bassuk

said. Also, remove the wire basket or at least the top half if possible, and take off any ties or guide wires around the trunk. Otherwise, the wires can strangle the tree as it grows, Phillips warned.

Resneck advised hand digging the hole since that would create a rougher surface than a machine-drilled hole, which can be smooth, shiny and not conducive to root growth. "If that's the case, you don't have as many surfaces for the tree to take root," he pointed out.

Don't stake the tree if it can be avoided. "There should be trunk movement," Bassuk noted. "If the trunk is rigid, the tree doesn't grow as well."

Resneck agreed. "The more the tree moves and sways, the better the root stimulation," he said, adding that he recommends supporting the root ball with low stakes.

POST-PLANTING CONSIDERATIONS.

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(continued on page 62)

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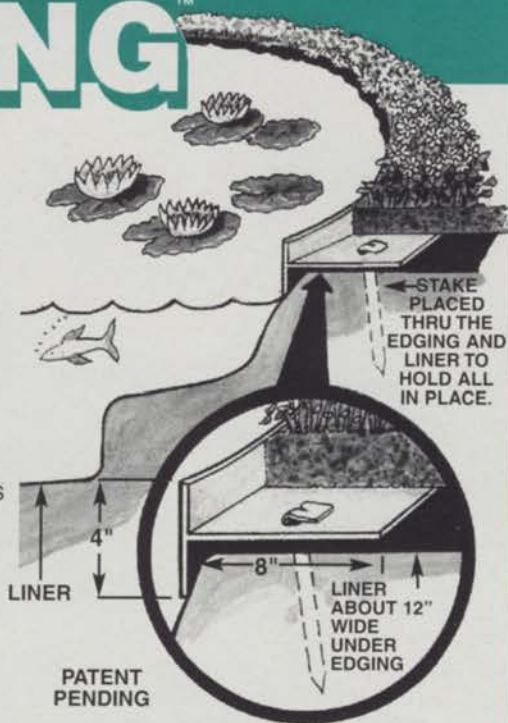
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Tree Care

(continued from page 60)

age, mulch should be applied around the base of the tree immediately after planting. Bassuk advised placing 3 to 4 inches of shredded organic bark or chips in a 2 foot or more radius from the tree. Spread the mulch evenly and avoid making a "volcano" of mulch around the tree's base, she said.

In terms of other post-planting issues, pruning isn't necessary for a newly planted tree, except for removing dead, diseased or damaged branches, according to Bassuk.

"Hold off on pruning and give a tree a year or so to settle in," Phillips added.

Fertilizer is also generally unnecessary unless a soil test indicates it is required, Bassuk said, noting that contractors have a tendency to overfertilize, which can actually hurt a tree, halting its growth. "Most soil should support tree growth. Ninety-nine percent of the time you don't need fertilizer," she said.

Phillips agreed. "I wouldn't use any fertilizer during the first year," he said, pointing out that root stimulants or soil amendments are acceptable to use in moderation. Similarly, Resneck uses a small amount of inoculant at the time of planting to ease transplant shock, he said.

The most important concern with a newly planted tree is monitoring and maintaining a good moisture level. "After planting, checking the moisture content is a must," Wolski said, pointing out that one of the biggest reasons newly installed trees fail is overwatering.

"Plants need a perfect balance of air and moisture for good root growth and health, Wolski noted, advising contractors to check the soil around the tree on a regular basis. "If the soil is moist and cool and you can make a soil ball with your hand, then the tree has plenty of moisture," he said.

THE WAITING GAME. Once the key pre-planting and planting steps are addressed, there isn't much for contractors to do but wait for a tree to adapt to its new environment. "Once a tree is in the ground, leave it alone," Resneck urged.

Wolski agreed. "The main concern with a new tree is pre-planting care," he said. "From there, it's Mother Nature's."

Since a large portion of its root system is stressed during the transplanting process, a tree needs time to recover and settle into a

BACKING up Trees

Contractors have to be prepared for unfortunate scenarios, and tree failure is one of them. With tree installation, a one-year guarantee is most common, according to Bruce Phillips, president, Treemasters, Fulton, Md.

When he plants a tree, Dusty Resneck, a contractor based in Petaluma, Calif., bases his warranties on whether he's performing the client's maintenance work, as well. "If I do a planting and do maintenance, I'll guarantee the tree's survival for 21 days after the contract ends," he said. "If it fails during the maintenance contract, I'll replace it."

Ski Landscape, Indianapolis, Ind., offers a one-year/one-replacement warranty from the invoice date on tree and shrub material, according to John Wolski, the company's president. Replacements are put in at the client's request and the warranty does not extend to trees damaged by vandalism, mechanical or chemical abuse, "acts of nature" such as wind, ice, severe drought or overwatering due to irrigation, he said.

Resneck advised contractors to remind their clients that trees are perishable products with specific cultural needs. In his experience, the most common cause of tree failure is inadequate water, he said.

— Cynthia Greenleaf

Affordable Mycorrhiza

new home, Bassuk pointed out. After a tree is transplanted, it's set back for a number of years and must take time to recover from transplant shock, she said. In the Northeast, for example, a tree generally requires one year per caliper inch to outgrow any setback from transplanting. In the South, with a longer growing season, the recovery happens faster, according to Bassuk.

Contractors should periodically monitor a newly planted tree to ensure its progress. "You don't just water it once and walk away," Bassuk said. Examine a tree periodically for signs of stress. Phillips advised looking for suspicious developments such as leaf discoloration, pests or diseases.

In addition, Resneck often looks at the undersides of leaves for any insect damage, which can often be indicative of a larger problem. "Oftentimes, pest problems are a secondary invasion," he said. "Insects are opportunistic and can come in after a tree is stressed out from other causes."

Generally, a healthy tree should experience 3 to 5 inches of growth one year after planting, according to Phillips. Since the first two years is a critical time in a tree's development, Phillip's rule of thumb is if a tree survives its second hot summer after transplanting, "it's going to make it," he said.

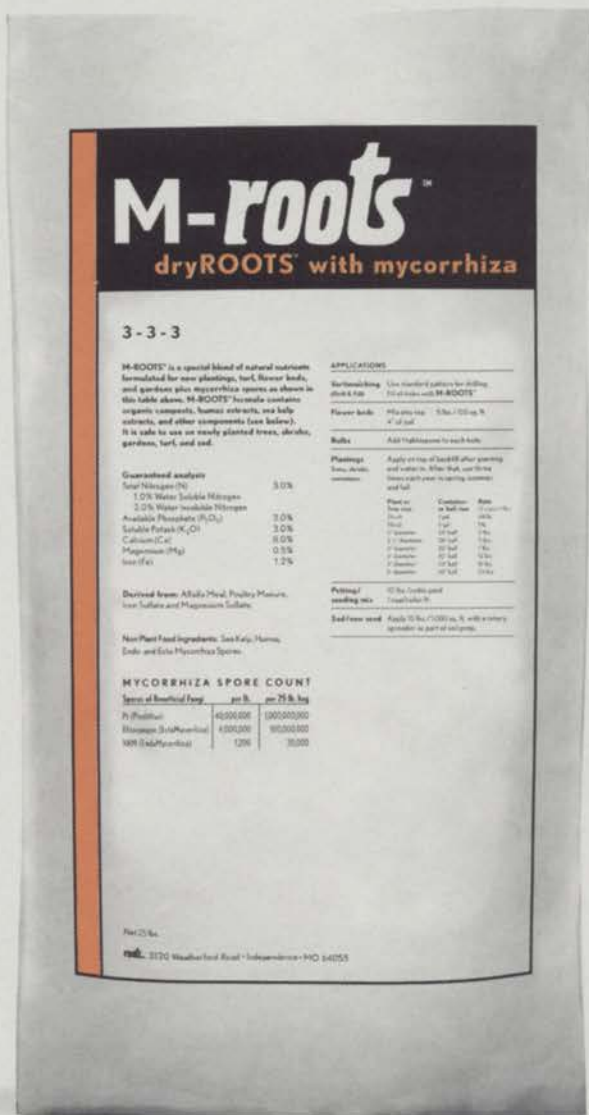
Overall, contractors should keep in mind what they can and can't control when tending to trees, Resneck pointed out. As fate would have it, sometimes a tree just fails and there's nothing a contractor could have done, he said. "It may just have bad genes." **LL**

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

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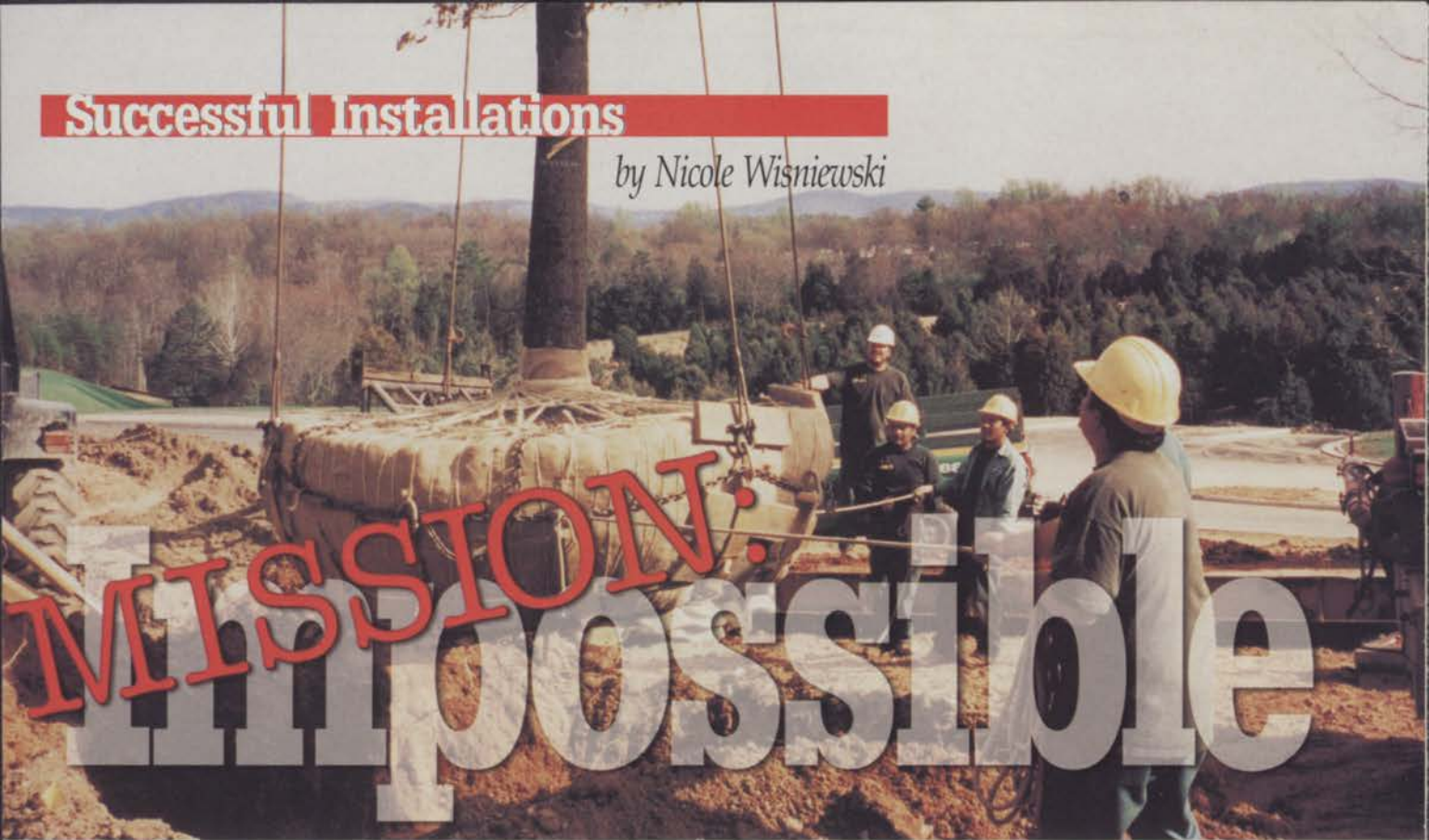


TO THE TOP

USE READER SERVICE #30

Successful Installations

by Nicole Wisniewski



Davey Tree Expert Co. employees had to dig many of the 3,000 trees they relocated on one site by hand, wrapping them in burlap and securing their rootballs. Photo: The Davey Tree Expert Co.

Four landscape
contractors
used challenging
conditions
to their advantage,
transforming
ill-fated
landscapes
into works of art.

When landscape contractors are faced with impossible landscape conditions, whether flooding from poor drainage, uncontrollable weather, a cramped site condition, a tight deadline or a tree transplant that amounts to Herculean proportions, they have some design and installation challenges ahead of them.

On the following four projects, contractors explain how they worked with challenging site conditions.

MISSION 1: Moving a Forest

Developers of the University of Virginia Foundation, Charlottesville, Va., ran into a dilemma when they began planning the school's Research Park at North Fork. They needed to incorporate 3 million square feet of office, retail and industrial buildings into more than 500 acres of forest.

Their solution presented Davey Tree Expert Co.'s northern Virginia office with its largest tree-relocation project to date when developers contracted the company to move 3,000 trees from development sites to a mile-long stretch along Louis & Clark Drive, the Research Park's main road.

To complete the four-month project that began in February 1999 and ended in May 1999, Davey Tree's

Virginia office teamed up with its Wooster, Ohio residential office for two weeks to enlist the help of a two-man crew and a few large tree spades to move the 3- to 4-inch caliper and 4- to 6-inch caliper trees. The 11-man Virginia crew was responsible for hand digging the larger 6- to 8-inch caliper trees and three 10- to 15-inch caliper oak trees and then putting the rootballs into burlap and wire baskets and transporting the trees to their new locations, explained Robert Craft, assistant district manager at Davey Tree Co.'s Virginia office.

"We did a lot of the digging by hand with the use of a backhoe, shook the trees and then wrapped them in burlap, hand-lacing them to make sure the rootball was secure," Craft said. "Then we would lift each tree up with a crane and put it on the back of a tractor and take it to the roadway. The tree spade was used on the smaller trees because it was more efficient."

The crew members moved more than 2,500 cedar trees and 500 other deciduous trees. Many of the cedar trees were moved to a 1½-acre hillside instead of along the main road. "We actually had to blast through a rise because of the bedrock in there and slope the hillside so it wasn't left vertical," Craft pointed out. "Then we planted the cedar trees on it. We planted 6- to 8-inch caliper trees at the bottom, 4- to 6-inch caliper trees in

(continued on page 79)

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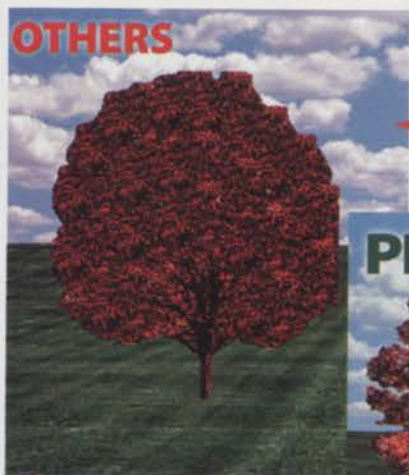
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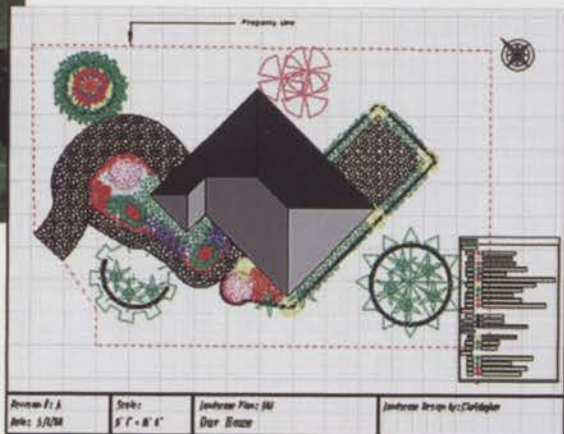


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Digital Design



The power of imaging software is best utilized when landscape designers can put a "before" and an "after" in front of clients to show them the potential of their property. Images: Design Imaging Group



Many contractors are turning to computer software to provide potential customers a rendering of the "after" exhibit.

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but to landscape designers, a computer image could be worth a lot more. Software that allows designers to show customers an "after" picture of a project before it is even started is a hot sales tool. Designers report using the software to push sales closings upwards of 90 percent.

"You can go up to a homeowner and say, 'This is the way your house looks today. And this is how it will look tomorrow.' And they go crazy," said Jim Vazanna, Design Imaging Group, Holtsville, N.Y. "The inability of the homeowner to visualize the finished project has been alleviated. Now they can see exactly what they will get."

The software allows Vazanna to present an appealing design to potential customers faster than ever before. "So, not only are we closing more sales, but we have time to create many more plans," Vazanna said. "Contractors are finding they can make between four and six presentations by using imaging software for every one they used to make using a pencil and paper."

By Dave Clancy

DOING DOUBLE DESIGNS. "People have always like my designs," said Connie Hombeck, president, C.J. Futures, Logan, Iowa. "But I never had the

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time to do as many as I would have liked. Since I moved to the computer programs, I have more time to get to more prospects."

Hombeck said that while customers were excited to see her designs in the past, there is a new, different excitement when they see an "after" shot she created with the software. "They will look at one of these photos and say, 'Oh my! I didn't know you could do that.'"

"The ability of the customer to see the finished product does increase sales," agreed Mark Watkins, president, Mark IV Landscaping, Lansing, Ill. "But the biggest benefit is my increase in productivity," he said. "In the past, the process took maybe a week, and we had a hand drawn sketch from which to sell. Today, I can be at a meeting in the morning, design the landscaping in three or four hours, and be back in the afternoon with a completed design."

Watkins said the learning curve associated with imaging software isn't overwhelming. "Getting (the software) up and running took us a few days and maybe a month before I was proficient," he noted.

Hombeck was using the software the same day she installed it. "The amount of work that goes into learning how to use the software all depends on how much you want to do with it," she added.

Still, Chad Oberson, president, CPO & Company, Hamilton, Ohio, warned that not all software is simple to learn. "How many landscape contractors spend a great deal of time on the computer? I don't think you can learn the program unless you commit to 100 or so hours to learn it," he said. "I set aside three weeks to focus on learning the program, and it has been a great benefit to me."

Oberson said that many of his designs done with imaging software have helped him increase prices. "Often we are able to

charge up to 50 percent more for a design that we did on the computer simply because the customer is that much more enthusiastic about it," he said.

Oberson said his company has had such success with design that it has completely gotten out of maintenance. "We used to be a maintenance and construction company, but after the sales we have had with this, I said, 'Forget maintenance.' This process has changed my business that dramatically," he added.

GETTING EQUIPPED. Okay, so it all sounds like easy money, right? Well, just like anything else, a commitment is required. First of all, the capital expenditure. Most software available today requires at least a computer with a Pentium processor and at least 32 MB of RAM. Some programs require at least 64 MB.

Hombeck said her system was running slowly until she upgraded to a 256 MB. "All

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systems will slow somewhat with the larger designs," she said.

Another requirement is the purchase of a digital camera or a flatbed scanner. Designers must be able to take a photo of the customer's property and design the landscape based on that image. A digital camera allows the designer to take the photo and download it immediately into the system. Designers who wish to add plants that are not in the software library should purchase a scanner as well.

"I recommend using both," said Vazanna. Contractors can continually add to and build their databases by using photos from books and magazines. For \$99, you can get a decent scanner. A good digital camera costs around \$500.

A good quality color printer is a plus. But be warned, printing photos on good paper is not cheap. "My biggest cost is printing - about \$3 per photo," said Oberson. "Between the good paper at about 80 cents a sheet and the ink cartridges at 90 bucks each, I run up large printing bills."

A way around large printing bills is e-mailing the photo to the client. Then the client has to bear the cost of printing the photo, but contractors should also be aware that customers can shop for landscape services using your work as a sample if they have the picture.

"Everybody wants to have the picture, and I struggle with that," admitted Hombeck. "They can take my work, go to Wal-Mart and do the job themselves."

Are there limitations to imaging capabilities? "Yes," said Hombeck. "The plant libraries are somewhat limited. But my digital camera expedites that process. Now I just shoot the photo and import it."

Oberson noted that the seasonality of plants is difficult to show. "While I might have a pear tree in bloom in the front, at the rear I might have a Red River birch in a fall setting. I want to show my customers the color they will get, but I have to explain to them that these colors won't occur at the same time," he said.

Contractors also need to consider their present hardware configurations. Most of these design programs can be run on a computer's existing platform. And contractors noted that if you are able to increase business by using the software, your

billing department will be busier as well.

"For the longest time the green industry has lagged behind other industries with technology," said Vazanna. "We didn't think computers belonged in our businesses. But during the past few years we are beginning to embrace them."

"Contractors will have to keep up," he continued. "No maintenance contractor would try to cut an acre of grass with a 21-

inch mower. A contractor who is going to move topsoil 20 yards with a wheelbarrow instead of a skid-steer cannot be competitive."

The same principle applies to design technology - contractors need to use it to keep an edge, Vazanna pointed out. **L**

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

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The Benefits

Automation

More landscape

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By Dave Clancy

Bob Smart and Bruce Stone, partners at Yard Smart, Olmsted Falls, Ohio, used to spread out their work order tickets in a conference room, with paper often spilling onto the floor. They would enlist their wives to help and the next three days would be spent processing invoices instead of performing income-generating landscape work.

Today, office manager Hollie Slusarczyk processes seven times the invoices in four hours each month. The secret? Automating the billing process using computer software.

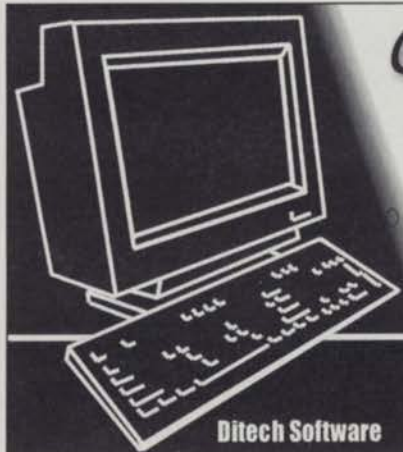
Every morning each crew leader picks up the day's route sheet. During the day, the crew leader notes what jobs the crew went to and the results. At the end of the day, the sheet is turned into the operations manager, who enters the information into the computer. "When the information is entered, it is automatically billed to the customer's account," Smart said.

The data entry process takes only five to 10 minutes per route. "We used to have route tickets, which we left at the customers' homes, but we did away with them," he explained. "Now we just have the single route sheet, which is less that can get lost during the day."

At the end of the month, when it is time for invoicing, Slusarczyk can process 2,000 invoices in four hours.

An additional benefit to automation, Smart added, is being able to bill regularly for service charges. "Because payments are recorded on the computer and the computer doesn't forget, service charges for late payments are automatically added," Smart said. "In the past, I would invariably remember a customer was late after the next invoice went out."

And, since every job performed for a customer is input into the system, the company can



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also track which clients are due for clean-ups or have added or cancelled services and market to those clients effectively.

ESTIMATION ACCURACY. Increasing sales 63 percent the first year with one investment? "Sure," said John Collins, general manager, English Gardens, Walled Lake, Mich. "And we have grown 500 percent in the six years since we started using an estimating system."

Collins wanted to streamline the estimating function and get a more accurate feel for areas where the company could manage its business better. "If you had 10 people doing estimates for the same project, you would get 10 different estimates," he said. "By standardizing, we could each estimate the same amount of time, material and labor, and our pricing would be more accurate."

The process allows Collins to spend more time creating appealing designs and selling

them. "We get 150 price inquiries per week," Collins said. "By getting good, accurate prices fast, the design staff can spend its time doing design and sales."

With the system, Collins can take a designer's plans and quickly assess how much each portion of that design will cost with his margins that are already programmed. In addition, the company has programmed the accoutrements – such as tree stakes and tree wrap – that need to be added to the project's cost. "If we sell a stone path, the computer will also add the amount of sand that will be needed for the project," he explained.

"With this system I can track any changes that need to be made and make adjustments accordingly, such as adjusting estimates depending on our actual installation times vs. the estimated times," he said.

In 1999, about 20 of more than 1,300 English Garden jobs were 5 percent off the

estimated cost. "If I get a job that comes in more than 5 percent off the estimated cost, I need to talk to the estimator," Collins noted.

Another benefit of the program, Collins added, is its ability to track crews and their job performance. "We are able to give our better crews more money because of their productivity," he said. "And I can put them to work on the most demanding projects."

COST CONTROL. Bob Donovan, controller, STM Landscape Services, Oakton, Va., an Environmental Care Co., relies on a computer software program to show him the specific costs associated with each job the company performs. "We don't want to know that we spent \$1,000 this month on direct labor," he explained. "We want to see the hours involved. To us, the critical point is how many times we visited the site, when we visited, what we did there and how many hours were spent there."

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"We use computer software to manage our business from the estimate to the billing," he added.

When a new customer asks for an estimate, a staff member develops that quote, plugging in probable labor hours per visit and calculating how many visits would be necessary. "We put that estimate into our boilerplate contract with all the project specifications," Donovan explained. "If the contract gets signed, we roll that into a job number, and hours will accumulate."

Most of STM's clients have their contracts budgeted to a monthly rate rather than paying actual costs per month. Billing this way does put a burden on the company because labor accounts for a big portion of its costs and employees have to be paid based on their hours worked. And STM needs to track those expenses when the revenue is not coming in.

When a crew member's time is allocated to a job, not only does the software allocate that crew member's wages, but also the company's share of FICA, unemployment and worker's compensation taxes. "If you have a five-man crew on a job for just 10 minutes, the software might only allocate a few pennies, but it will allocate the appropriate percentages," Donovan said.

All the information the company tracks comes in handy at the end of the season, when STM begins preparing for the following year. "We can make adjustments to our renewal contracts based on the information we have collected," explained Donovan.

Donovan has also looked at a hand-held program for the crew leaders to carry. In the morning, each crew leader would be handed a unit with his or her day's route on it. "By clicking on start and stop when they begin and end a job, the unit will track hours on the job," he said. "The unit would be given to the night operator at the end of the day and he or she would prepare the unit for the next day."

"We haven't made the move to hand-held machines because of our Hispanic employees, and we are not sure how the translations would evolve," he added.

Since the company installed the software, STM has doubled its revenue without adding to overhead costs. "We need the labor and managers, but we shouldn't have to add to the overhead structure to get these employees," he said.

ROUTING THE RIGHT WAY. Diana Southall, vice president, Botanicus Interior Landscapes, Buffalo, N.Y., uses computer software to schedule routes. "We try to schedule by geography, using zip codes, then manually fine tune the schedule to make crews more efficient," she explained.

"Our system takes into consideration the estimated time of job completion and the job requirements when suggesting a route pattern," Southall said. "We then adapt that suggestion based on the city being served."

But Southall noted that routes occasionally need to be altered. "For instance, the software may suggest a route with a restaurant as the fifth stop. If that restaurant is scheduled to be serviced at noon, we have to look at rescheduling when it is less crowded."

In addition, crews adjust the route based on personal preferences – as long as doing so does not adversely affect their ability to serve clients. "Many times it is easier to go down one side of the street and then double back, instead of crossing the street over and over again," she said.

The human function also allows crews to adjust based on actual travel time, not simply mileage. "Sometimes there is a longer drive that has fewer stop lights or is less congested. Our crews have the ability to take those routes, as well, as long as they stay on schedule," Southall said.

The software allows her to add jobs to the route in a logical location. "When we add a customer, their service time is added to that specific route. The crew's work time is also calculated, and we must determine if that addition will put that specific crew into overtime," she noted. "If so, we must make adjustments and reschedule that account."

For Botanicus, the major growth has been in net profits, rather than revenues. "While we have expanded our business, we have not had to expand our administrative costs. As a result, our net income has increased over the past five years.

"You don't make any money on administration," she said. "This allows us to minimize those costs." ■

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

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20-20 Computerized Design	20-20 The Pro Series Design Software	X	X	X	X	X						
Authority Software	Landscape Manager	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
CadEasy Corporation	EasySite		X			X	X					
CLIP - Sensible Software	CLIP	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
	Bid Right	X		X	X			X				X
CompuScapes	CompuScapes	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X
Creative Automation Solutions		X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
Design Imaging Group	DESIGNWARE	X	X	X			X	X				
Diehl/Graphsoft	VectorWorks		X			X						
Ditech	Gopher 2000 Billing & Rescheduling Software	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
drafix.com	Pro Landscape		X		X	X	X	X				
DTN Weather Center	DTN Turf Manager	X		X	X							
Eagle Point Software	LANDCADD '98	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X
FMC	PowerRoute 2000	X		X	X			X	X	X		X
Garden Graphics	Dynascape	X	X			X		X				
Genius Software	Lawn Genius	X		X				X	X	X		X
Hunter Industries	Irrigation System Design Calculator				X							
	Irrigation Design Tools				X							
Include Software	Asset	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Intermec Technologies Corporation	PEN*KEY	X	X	X	X				X		X	X
Inter-active Learning	Lawn Lore	X	X	X	X							
Lawn Monkey Software	Lawn Monkey Pro	X	X	X			X		X	X		
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Performance Software Technologies	"Route Rite"®32	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X
	"Pen Writer"	X		X	X			X	X			
Practical Solutions	The Service Solution			X				X	X	X		
Qquest Software	Shop	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X
	ETC	X	X	X	X							
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	SLICEplus for Landscape Maintenance	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X
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	TRIMS Grounds Management Software	X									X	
UDS Green Industry Software	Active Accounting	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
	Active Design	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Vanderkooi & Associates	VKA Estimating Software	X	X	X	X			X				
	Mr. Accountant	X	X	X	X						X	X
Visual Impact	Earthscapes		X			X	X	X				

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			Requires AutoCAD	Site modeling and presentation	800/627-3279
X	X		Windows 95, 98, NT	Includes additional program links	800/635-8485
				Bidding	
X	X	X	Windows 3.1, 95, 98, NT, Novell	Interiorscape module	800/350-3534
X	X	X		Designed for arborists as well	800/49-ARBOR
			N/A	L/S site planning and pool imaging	516/654-1600
			Windows, MAC	2D and 3D CAD software	410/290-5114
		X		Timesheets, application tracking	888/606-5150
			Windows 95, 98, NT		800/231-8574
			N/A	Weather forecastinG, chemical info.	800/610-0777
			Windows 95, NT 4.0		319/556-8392
X	X	X	Windows 95, 98, NT	Mapping, sales tracking, telemrktng.	215/299-6014
					800/710-1900
			Windows 95, 98, NT	Product application records	800/758-4711
				Estimates system capacity/pressure	800/733-2823
				Irrigation design & specification	
X	X	X	Windows 3.1, 95, NT, Intel-based PCs		800/475-0311
	X	X	DOS, Windows 3.1, 95	Dispatching	www.intermec.com
				Training for customer communication	612/941-1282
X	X		Windows 95, 98, NT	Chemical/spray applications,	877/529-6659
X	X		Windows 95, 98, NT	material use projections, proposals, scheduling	
X	X	X	Windows 95, 98, NT		
X	X	X	Windows 95, 98, NT, Novell	Sales prospecting, diagramming, bar coding,	800/624-8244
X	X	X	Windows CE 2.0, Newton 2.0	Customer information	
			Windows 95, 98, NT	Marketing, bar coding, notepad	614/436-9066
X		X	DOS, Windows 3.1, 95, NT		800/733-8839
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USE READER SERVICE #151

(continued from page 66)

A 60-man crew from Dennis' Seven Dees had to protect buildings and plant materials from the 100-year flood 11 days before the grand opening deadline of their project.

Photo: Dennis' Seven Dees



the middle and then 2- to 4-inch caliper trees at the top of the 35-degree hill.

The challenge didn't come from the number of trees moved, but from their location - hidden in the Research Park's heavily wooded acres. Working with the road crew was also a challenge because the Davey Tree crew had to wait until sections of the road were completed before they could move the trees, some of which reached 60 feet in height.

"The bulk of the time spent on the project was dedicated to hauling the trees to their new locations," Craft said. "The trees weren't moved very far - no more than a quarter mile in any direction - but because of the size and

number of them, we worked for several months moving and replanting them."

Also, the crew needed to move the trees before they came out of dormancy, which usually happens in mid-April.

After the trees were transplanted, Davey Tree did installation work on the site, as well, including the installation of 900 2½-inch caliper trees, such as maple, oak and dogwood. After the creek running through the site was realigned to make room for a roadway, the crew also had to reforest along the stream bank with wetland plants.

So far, the trees are enjoying a 98 percent survival rate, according to Craft.

Successful Installations

MISSION 2: Battling Mother Nature

As a landscape contractor working along the Columbia River Gorge, one has to know a few things about the wind, according to David Snodgrass, president, Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping, Portland, Ore.

"Along the river exists an extreme microclimate with steady winds," Snodgrass explained. "In the winter, those winds come from the east and are cold. Working in those elements can chill you and tire you out."

This area sets the stage for the \$1 million landscape project Dennis' Seven Dees did for the \$40 million Marine Park Water Resource Area development project for the city of Vancouver, Wash. The project included an extension of the Columbia River Renaissance Trail, improvements to Marine Park and construction of the Marine Park Water Reclamation Facility and Water Resources Education Center. The 73-acre site includes a 40-acre wetland, 5 acres of wildflower meadows and 9 acres of finished landscape.



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Successful Installations

When working on the planting areas not open to the public, employees at Dennis' Seven Dees used effluent water straight from the sewage treatment plant that had not been through the entire water treatment process and could not be drunk. "We had to be very careful when using that water," Snodgrass said. "Employees had to wash their hands after using the water at safety wash stations and we held many safety meetings as a reminder."

The water, which at the effluent stage is high in minerals, was dispersed on the plant material. The water would then leach through the soil, go through the wetland area and into the river, being cleansed through the process. "Being a water resource area and being located in a sensitive planting area, the site offered education opportunities on wetland pollution and polluted water, and the clients wanted to build up the landscape area around the facility to show this," Snodgrass explained.

Because the project took place along the river, the weather varied. Dennis' Seven Dees employees worked through heavy rains and snowfall that fall and winter. Melting snow in February combined with the heavy rains added difficulty to the job, Snodgrass said.

The project had to be completed in eight months to meet a Feb. 23 grand opening deadline. Eleven days before this date, the 100-year-flood hit, drowning the entire area with water and causing damage to already completed landscape areas. The site was evacuated.

When employees returned, they had to focus their attention on protecting the buildings and plant material from water. A 60-man crew filled bags with sand and dispersed them around the buildings for protection. While some plant material was damaged, the total loss was minimal, Snodgrass pointed out.

"We were lucky," he said. "The water wasn't moving at a rapid pace and it didn't cover the plants longer than 10 days. If the flow was any faster, all the plant material would have been washed away. Even with flood-related delays, the project was completed by deadline."

In an uncontrollable situation like extreme weather affecting an installation project, Snodgrass said the most important



To control a severe drainage problem on one site, Perficut employees had to dig a trench along the back of a condominium complex partly by hand to lay piping and draining tile. Photo: Perficut

action a contractor can take is to budget for unusual weather beforehand by adding extra labor to the bid, especially if the area is prone to cold and wind. "Cold winds and varying temperatures are hard on your people," Snodgrass said. "We know the Columbia River Gorge and we planned for some of the weather problems. In Oregon and Washington, contractors still have to perform in heavy rainfall, but the flood and excess snowfalls took us by surprise."

MISSION 3: Dealing with Drainage

Last season, one of Perficut Lawn & Landscape's maintenance clients asked for the company's help.

For years, residents of a 10-acre condominium complex in Des Moines, Iowa, had been dealing with flooding in the basement and patio areas due to poor drainage.

"One part of the back of the L-shaped complex faces a large 70-degree hill and another part faces a 30-foot-high, 200-foot-long retaining wall that was not installed by our company," explained Perficut President Kory Ballard. "On top of the hill is an irrigated apartment complex. The water would come down the hill and constantly flood the property. Only 3 to 8 feet of space existed in some areas between the retaining wall base and the patios on the property, so there was also water runoff from the wall that the builder did not originally plan.

"Each unit did have a sump pump that would run nonstop to control the water and keep the basement from flooding, but it pumped the water back into the backyard, further aggravating the problem," Ballard continued. "Turf areas weren't surviving because

(continued on page 82)

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USE READER SERVICE #41

Successful Installations

(continued from page 80)

standing water in their patios and backyards, at all times, created insect problems."

Even during maintenance, Perficut employees had to deal with the constant battle of mowing the flooded areas, including getting mowers stuck in the mud, Ballard said.

The condominium complex bid the project out and Perficut won the contract because of its existing relationship with the client.

Ballard said the first step of the project was to have an irrigation designer come up with a way to redirect the water flow on the property. There were two drainage areas on each corner of the complex, so the designer had to create a constant flow of water from the site into one of those two areas.

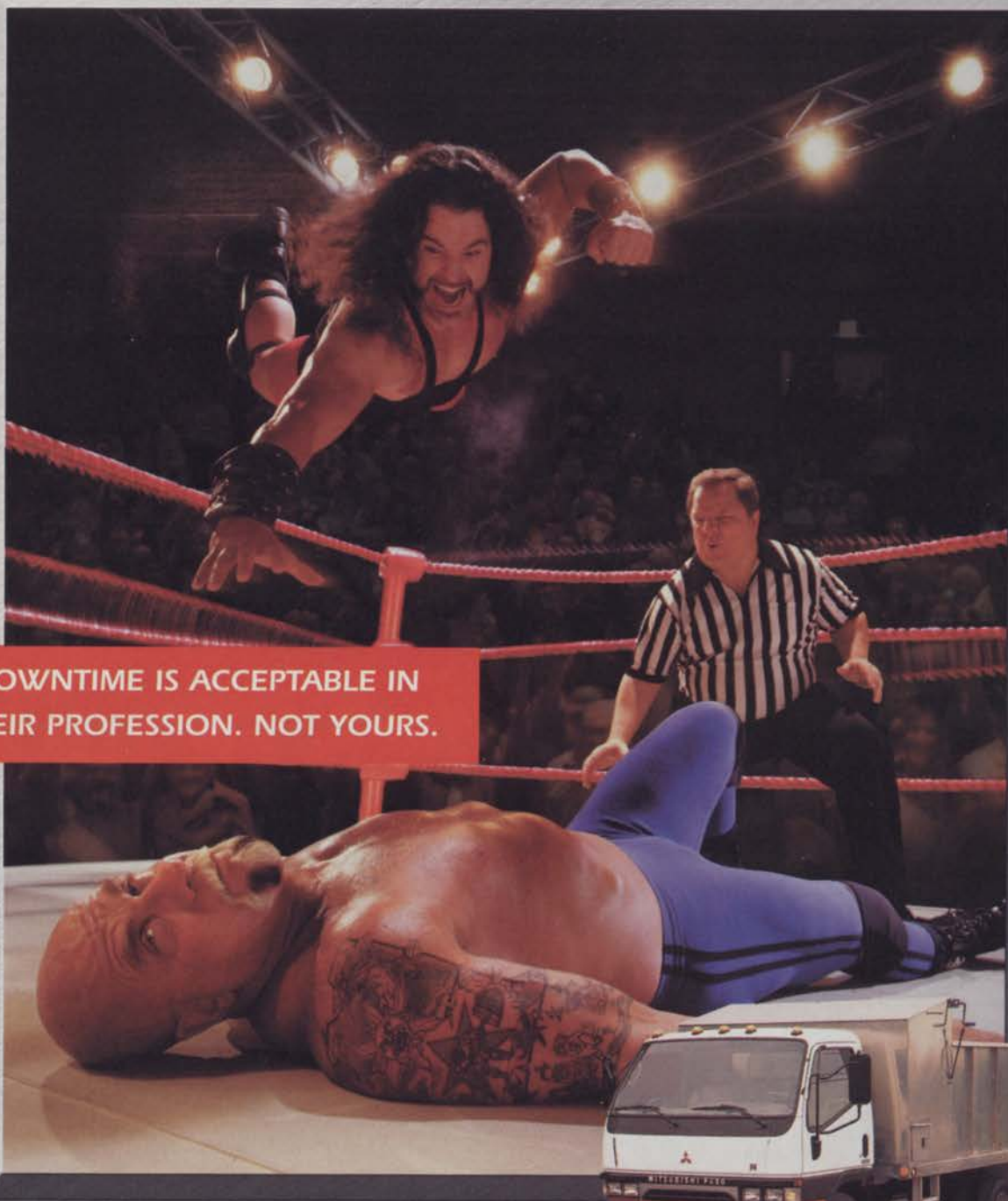
The solution was to dig a 1,440-foot-long trench along the back of the building and run a 1½-inch PVC pipe from the sump pumps into this trench, which was lined with perforated drainage tile, Ballard said. The Perficut crew also ran 3-inch solid tile from the downspouts that came in off the building's gutters to the 8-inch tile they installed in the trench.

"After the pipe was laid and connected and once the tile was laid, we brought in 58 tons of pea gravel so we could cover the area up to 10 inches from the surface and then fill it with dirt so we could bring it back up to grade and resod the area," Ballard commented. "The project was very labor intensive. We dug the 100 feet of the trench by hand when we couldn't get our modified trencher between the base of the retaining wall and the decks or patios at the rear of the complex units. We also hand dug around phone lines. We couldn't get dump trucks into the area either, so we had to carry a lot of that rock into the site."

Perficut used from two to six employees daily throughout the duration of the project—a total of 480 man hours—which had to be scheduled in August 1999 because the area had to be as dry as possible so employees didn't have to work in mud and swamp conditions, and to make sure machines wouldn't get stuck in those conditions. "However, there were a few days of 100-degree weather and the crews were really suffering," Ballard said.

The property was not irrigated, so after installing the 112 square of sod, Perficut employees spent a lot of time watering to make sure the roots got moisture. This added unex-

(continued on page 84)



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USE READER SERVICE #107

Successful Installations

(continued from page 82)

pected labor costs to the project, Ballard pointed out.

"We definitely underbid the project," Ballard said. "The problem wasn't with the material costs, but with the labor costs. We didn't take into consideration the extra watering time and the heat. And we don't specialize in drainage tile work. We also had to haul a lot of material out of the complex, such as the 6-foot-wide and 1,400-foot-long old sod."

While the job was a success, Ballard warned contractors of the risk of taking on installation jobs that include specifications that aren't a company specialty. "Adding an extra percentage for unexpected costs to the bid is always a good idea," Ballard suggested.

MISSION 4: Cramped Site Conditions and a Condensed Deadline

Chicago's oldest major open-air shopping mall had fallen on hard times by the 1990s. Old Orchard, which was built in 1956, was



Equipment access into the Old Orchard open-air shopping mall was difficult for Church Landscape employees, particularly after building canopies were installed. Photo: Church Landscape

small compared to contemporary mall standards, had declined below an acceptable level of market share and looked dated.

"The mall was old," explained Dan Nitzsche, senior project manager, Church Landscape – a TruGreen LandCare Co., Lombard, Ill. "The 30- to 40-year-old trees on the site were dying and the site had paving and parking problems. Current tenants weren't happy and potential tenants weren't interested. Being located amongst competitive indoor malls on the high-end north shore of Chicago made Old Orchard seem even more out of place. The mall needed to look more like Disney World and less like a rundown shopping center."

High-end department stores like Nordstrom and Bloomingdale's knew the potential of Old Orchard and its location in Skokie, Ill., and agreed to open up shop there if the owners would renovate the property, Nitzsche said. The owners agreed. And a simple renovation turned into a \$25- to \$30-million dollar construction project, including a \$1.8-million landscape installation done by Church Landscape.

"But the shopping mall owners wanted Old Orchard to be open for business by the holiday shopping season – around the end of September," Nitzsche said. "Because of other construction, we couldn't get in there until

(continued on page 86)

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Successful Installations

(continued from page 84)

July, giving us four months to finish the project by Oct. 1."

Access was also a big problem. To get machinery and many 8-inch-diameter trees into the site, Nitzsche said he had to meet frequently with other project construction workers to coordinate schedules and make sure the large trees could get into the site before the fountains and other hardscapes.

"The site included a total of 47 shade trees moved without a tree spade or winch, 81 6- to 12-foot ornamental trees and 50 one-of-a-kind specimen dwarf conifers," Nitzsche pointed out. "We had about 30 feet to work with from building to building when we started. After the building canopies were installed, the 30 feet of space became 10 to 12 feet. Some other structures, such as existing hardscapes, were also hard to get around."

"Access was so limited that at one point we discussed using a helicopter to bring in the larger trees so the steel workers could keep going and not lose any time," Nitzsche continued. "But we opted against that and just made sure we worked together while planning. I really had to speak up at these meetings and let the other workers know that the landscaping needed to fit into the schedule. Otherwise, they would have planned without us."

Underground obstructions were just as unpredictable since utility lines ran through planting areas—many of which were 40 years old—with no accurate record of location. Because of this, hand digging was required for planting all the trees, Nitzsche said.


Each major garden court was given its own identity, Nitzsche explained, meaning uniform plant material was not an option. Some of the plant material used on the site required special attention. The dozen sensitive, 7-inch pear trees had to be dug in early spring and then put in a holding area at Church Landscaping set up with above-ground drip irrigation so they could be cared for and kept moist. Due to timing, the trees weren't planted until September, Nitzsche pointed out. Other trees were dug in the heat of July—"a very high-risk time to dig because it can be detrimental to a tree's survival," Nitzsche said. "The trees had to go from the nursery to the planting hole the same day. Luckily, we had 80-degrees-Fahrenheit temperatures instead of 95 degrees Fahrenheit. We had to do this with about 35 locust trees. We took five or six trees on every truckload and moved two truckloads each day."

Existing canopy columns were given a garden appearance by enclosing them with trelliswork and training temporary morning glory and permanent clematis and wisteria vines to crawl up the columns for the illusion of a vertical landscape. Plantings included 160 species of perennials, grasses and vines, 25 varieties of roses and 581,000 annual seasonal plantings. Black grid matting made of recycled rubber/PVC was installed over the turf in high-traffic areas to ensure a non-slick surface and protect the turf from wear and tear.

At any given time during the project, including a few 15-hour Saturdays and Sundays at the end, Church used a crew of 30 people to get the work done, Nitzsche said.

Despite deadline and access challenges, the project was successfully completed on time. According to Nitzsche, all of the trees survived the first year after transplanting. **LL**

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



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USE READER SERVICE #76

Mowing Options

by Ali Cybulski

Contractors consider the pros and cons of managing residential vs. commercial maintenance accounts.

Some landscape contractors chalk up residential maintenance as the cause of many headaches. These jobs require more interaction with chatty clients, more intense detail work and more administrative chores. Even contractors who enjoy residential work readily admit it can be a pain.

Residential customers are often demanding, explained James Reeve, commercial division manager, Chapel Valley Landscape Co., Woodbine, Md. "They all want to be mowed on Friday," Reeve said, laughing. "Each client has a very specific set of needs he or she wishes to pursue, and they are unique. You have to find the right prescription for each job site. You have to consider the client's likes and dislikes. Pesticides you can use on one site, you might not be able to use on another. There may be pets on the site, so you have to make sure you close the gate or the dogs will run out. Some people won't allow blowers on their property, so everything has to be done by hand. That's inefficient and costs more, but that's their desire. You have to tailor those needs as required."

Contractors say they choose to focus on residential, commercial or a mix of both based on their own personal style and the type of work they enjoy doing. "I like unemotional and larger work – that spells commercial," said Mike Rorie, president, Groundmasters, Cincinnati, Ohio. "If I wanted to know what Mrs. Jones thought and if I liked to do gardens, I'd be in residential."

While larger companies like Groundmasters tend to do more commercial work since it is capital and labor intensive, smaller companies generally gravitate toward residential jobs. "I think people start in residential, decide whether they will stay there and then may graduate to commercial," Rorie said. "You don't see many people start out in commercial because there is a lower barrier to entry in residential."

(continued on page 90)



Residential mowing jobs (above) require more attention to detail and time spent socializing with clients while most commercial jobs (below) are less customer focused but require more capital investments. Photos: above, Kubota; below John Deere.

WEIGHING

Your Options

A photograph of a person wearing a yellow hard hat and a blue shirt operating a green John Deere riding lawn mower. The mower is on a large, well-maintained lawn in front of a modern building with large windows. The text 'WEIGHING Your Options' is overlaid on the image.

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USE READER SERVICE #42

Mowing Options

(continued from page 88)

There are pros and cons to focusing solely on residential or commercial maintenance, or choosing to do both. Several landscape contractors reflected on their experiences managing residential vs. commercial properties.

100 PERCENT RESIDENTIAL. Commercial maintenance jobs just don't bring Shawn McLean the same sense of satisfaction as residential jobs. McLean heads the department of property maintenance at Stonebridge Associates Inc., Wilton, Conn. "You don't get the appreciation you get when a homeowner is satisfied," he said. "You get a lot more 'thank you's' and 'well done's' with residential than you would from a board member or committee with a commercial park."

Also, since homeowners always want to dress up their properties, McLean said, there are more opportunities to sell add-on services. But there are also challenges. "They are looking for perfection," he said. "When they pull into the driveway, they don't want

to have to deal with anything. They are paying us a premium to deal with (maintenance). We are full service and do everything from spring to fall clean-ups, pruning, mowing, edging and planting annuals."

An additional challenge is continually identifying new services to offer customers, McLean said. "We always look at how we can improve and do more for our residential customers," he said. "Each one wants his house to be the best-looking one on the street."

Being honest and upfront with customers and asking about their expectations will lead to success in residential maintenance, McLean said. Having these discussions will address unrealistic expectations while educating clients, he added. "Some clients will say, 'I want my lawn to look like a golf course,'" he said.

Residential maintenance can be profitable by carefully watching labor, material and equipment costs, McLean said. Efficiency in all aspects of the business is key. "Your employees have to know exactly how much


time is allotted for each visit (to a site)," McLean explained. "Having two crew members is not profitable because there's too much to do. But having a three-person crew has been profitable."

With residential, employees also must be adequately trained. They must be familiar with the properties and the areas where they work, McLean said. "Just taking the shortcuts instead of sitting in traffic on the freeway, in the long run, saves you 20 minutes," he said. "And all that little stuff adds up at the end of the year."

Having a small number of clients helps McLean attend to their many individualized needs. Responding quickly to questions or concerns will ensure success for any contractor, he said. "If there's a phone call that needs attention, respond immediately," McLean said. "Don't let complaints go. The client starts to fester at that point and the situation just becomes worse."

(continued on page 92)

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Mowing Options

(continued from page 90)

100 PERCENT COMMERCIAL. Rorie prefers commercial maintenance. With residential, he explained, too much administrative intensity is needed to deal with clients, and these accounts have less profit potential.

"You're dealing with someone's home, and the average account is \$3,500 vs. \$10,000 to

\$12,000 (for a commercial property)," Rorie said. "In commercial work, you've got one-fifth as many customers per dollar and about one-tenth as much administrative structure per dollar compared to a residential contractor."

For residential maintenance, contractors must also hire more skilled employees be-

cause the work is more intense and detail oriented, Rorie said. "You've got to get an even more conscientious worker to do residential work," he said.

Still, commercial maintenance has its down side – the work is more capital intensive, Rorie explained. "You need larger, more expensive equipment because you get into bigger work," he said.

Another drawback to commercial work, Rorie said, is that most of the properties are controlled by third-party management, which can be unstable. "There might not be the most competent person or there may be high turnover," he said. "The Smiths will be at their home for 10 or 15 years. As long as you can make them happy, you know what you're dealing with. Office parks may continually change managers on you."

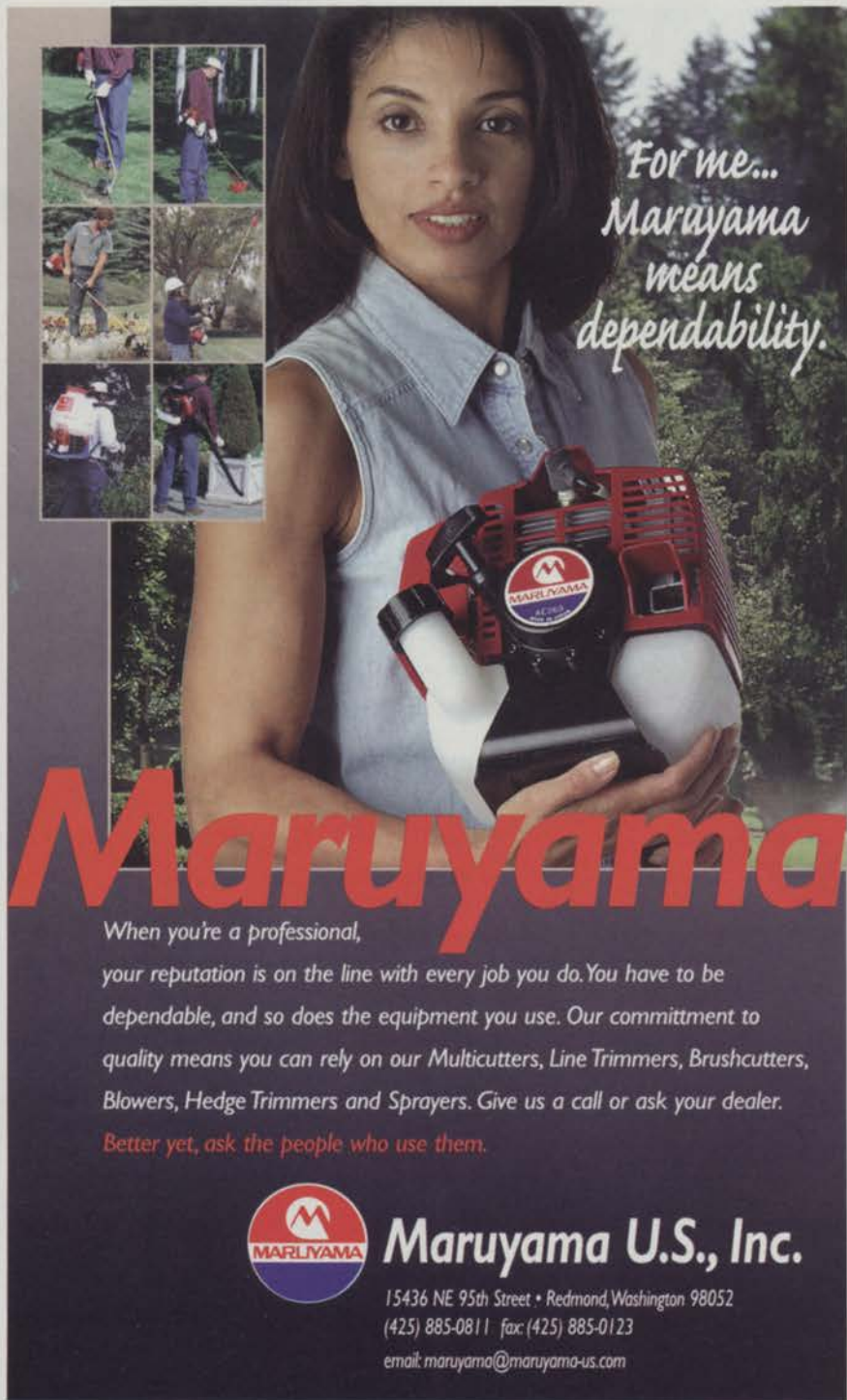
By focusing on commercial accounts, Rorie said he can structure the business to one type of client and perfect marketing and other services that are necessary to improve profitability. "It's easier than trying to service both markets and manage both sets of employees and managers, and finding people who are fluent at billing both types of clients," Rorie explained.

Like McLean, Rorie emphasized the importance of communication for success in commercial or residential maintenance. E-mails, voice mails, faxes and mobile phones allow Rorie to respond quickly to his clients' needs. "If you can communicate with them quickly in whatever form they like, that's a very competitive advantage to discover and be competent at," he said.

Rorie said landscape contractors can be successful in either residential or commercial, but he doesn't advise trying to do both. "Decide what you want to do and then structure your organization accordingly," he said. "Getting caught in the middle is a dangerous place. You're really a hero if you choose both. You'll have to work twice as hard. If you have separate divisions in one company, you need to run them independently. And you still will have to divide your resources."

Rorie offered some questions for contractors who are trying to decide between residential or commercial to consider. "Where's your passion? What kind of work do you want to do? What kind of structure and organization do you want to build?" he asked. "You can hit higher margins if you're good at residential

(continued on page 94)




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Mowing Options

(continued from page 92)

because the costs are lower, but you have to be good at backing up what you say."

15 PERCENT RESIDENTIAL. Chapel Valley Landscape Co. plans to grow the residential maintenance portion of its business. "We recently split off a residential maintenance branch, and we're going to pursue that specifically as an area of growth," Reeve said. "This has been part of our long-range plans to provide that complete service to those customers."

Reeve said forming a separate branch was a natural, gradual move. "I think it was really the people who had the desire to do residential," he said. "We basically had separate crews already internally. We grew to a size that made sense to do residential as a focal group and split it that way."

Focusing labor in the appropriate areas, Reeve said, is the key to making residential maintenance worthwhile. Ask employees which type of work they enjoy doing better

and then match them to the appropriate jobs. "If they're not having fun, they shouldn't do (residential)," Reeve said. "People who struggle with it should be doing commercial."

While Reeve said residential clients can be more loyal than commercial ones, he admitted his high-end customers can be more high maintenance. They are pickier and have higher standards than most property managers do, Reeve explained. "They live there," he said. "They see a weed and it grows on them."

Because residential customers don't operate on business hours, he said, contractors must adjust their schedules appropriately to accommodate their clients. "Clients are working during the week," Reeve said. "From a sales and marketing standpoint, you have to target evenings and weekends, when they will be at home."

Reeve, like the other contractors, emphasized the importance of communicating effec-

tively with clients, who want to know how the site is progressing every step of the way. Communicate with clients at least once a week to make sure they are happy, he suggested.

In addition, keep in mind that residential customers tend to see the site from a different angle than commercial customers do and structure services accordingly, Reeve said. "The commercial customer is looking for curb appeal and functionality, while the residential customer is concerned with how the property looks," he said.

Residential work can be profitable if the work is done well, Reeve said. He offered a simple formula for success: "Do what you say you're going to do. Be there and don't let them down. Look at the job from their perspective, not just your own."

"If you do a fantastic job, you'll get referrals, which grow your work. You get interwoven into the customer's way of life. They depend on you. That's what drives your profitability."

(continued on page 96)

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Mowing Options

(continued from page 94)

50/50 MIX. Robb Lied, president, Lied's Landscape, operates two locations in Wisconsin. The metropolitan Milwaukee office is 66 percent residential and the other office, in Fox Valley, is 40 percent residential. Lied said he is pleased with this mix. "We've predominantly been a residential contractor," Lied noted, adding that commercial work presents more potential than residential work does. "We won't give up residential work, but we're trying to grow the commercial end faster."

At the Fox Valley office, Lied is breaking residential and commercial maintenance into separate divisions. "It is a smaller office and making some of those changes is easier," Lied said. "We're doing this as a pilot program this year."

A lot of contractors won't touch both sides of the business, he noted. "They will do either one side or the other," Lied said, pointing out that one residential contract gener-

(continued on page 98)

1. Track client likes and dislikes, then create a "dos and don'ts" list. Can you use pesticides at the site? Does the client have pets? Will the client allow power equipment on the property?

2. Adjust your work schedule to accommodate clients. Find out their schedules for parties and events in advance because clients forget to call until the last minute. Target evenings and weekends for sales and marketing, when they will be home.

3. Consider identifying new services to offer clients to please them and boost your bottom line. Deliver consistent services.

4. Be honest and upfront with clients. Ask their expectations of a job and take this chance to educate them. Do

frequent walk-throughs with clients to make sure they are happy with your work.

5. Watch labor, equipment and material costs.

6. Hire skilled employees because residential work is generally more intense and detail oriented. Make sure they enjoy residential work and are more social in nature.

7. Spend sufficient time training employees. Make sure they are familiar with each property and the areas where they work. Teach them shortcuts to the site to save time and money.

8. The foreman on the site needs to be a strong communicator. Develop and share budgets for projects so the foreman and crew know what your expectations are for the year.

9. Take on a smaller number of clients, which may allow you to better manage their many individualized needs.

10. Communicate constantly and quickly in whatever form the client likes. Respond quickly to complaints.

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Mowing Options

(continued from page 96)

ally has less impact on a company than a commercial contract. "If big projects turn over, you can lose or gain \$200,000 on an account, and it's tough to either gear up or gear down."

Lied said the benefits of residential work are smaller job size and less turnover. But residential customers continue to become more demanding. "As consumers get better educated, it becomes more and more challenging to stay on top from a technical standpoint," he pointed out. "Client service is the key, which takes a lot more time than commercial. We do a lot of technical maintenance, color installations, holiday decorating, renovation projects, and a number of our clients want to stay on the cutting edge."

To meet customer demands, there needs to be regular communication between the salesperson, the foreman managing the account and the supervisor, Lied explained. "We create a kind of 'dos and don'ts' list," he said. "There's a book on each client's likes and dislikes. Aside

Landscape contractors offered their comments on residential vs. commercial landscape maintenance work in a bulletin board chat on *Lawn & Landscape's* Web site. Check out their conversation at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

Residential and Commercial Face-Off

from that, we try to do more walk-throughs, looking at the site with them."

Lied said he has made residential work profitable by developing budgets for projects so the foreman and crew know what the expectations are for the year. The foreman should know how much time he should be putting in on a monthly basis, and reviews are conducted to ensure the foreman is get-

ting the job done. "You need to meet the expectations of the client," Lied emphasized. "You don't want to overpromise and underdeliver."

Lied has set different price levels for various types of residential and commercial maintenance work to reflect the services that are needed and efficiencies of scale. "Pricing is changed to develop the same type of profitability out of commercial and residential services," Lied said.

The type of residential accounts his business is after, he said, are bigger. "The smallest size account we would do is \$200 to \$300 a month," Lied said. "Some residential accounts are \$3,000 a month. We're predominantly focused on getting high-end residential accounts. For the full-service end, you have to pay more."

50/50 MIX. Mike Ward, president, Mike Ward Landscaping, Loveland, Ohio, said resi-

(continued from page 133)

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USE READER SERVICE #126

by Nicole Wisniewski

Contractors and manufacturers share the advantages and disadvantages of using liquid and granular pesticide applications.

A Matter of CHOICE

Typically, Mentzer's Greenscape puts down one application of pesticide in the spring. Some early summer crabgrass infestations the past few years may change that as the company is looking into offering a second application.

The Washingtonboro, Pa., company usually uses a granular form of pesticide with a fertilizer, but this year it is switching to a liquid application because "we are trying not to use too much," explained Wade Smith, supervisor/foreman. "We just want to keep the worst of the problem out."

Most contractors like Smith are experimenting with both liquid and granular pesticide applications and instead of using one or the other, are attempting to fit both into their programs.

"Ten years ago, there was probably a good argument going that a better job could be done while using granular applications vs. liquid applications," commented Bob Andrews, president, Greenskeeper, Indianapolis, Ind. "But that's not the case anymore. Products

are made better and the technological sophistication of the applicator is also more advanced. Today, you can do as much bad with the wrong components of granular as you can with the wrong components of liquid."

Pointing out the pros and cons of using liquid and granular applications, contractors and manufacturers shared their approaches to controlling insects, weeds and diseases in the landscape.

THE APPROACH. Greenskeeper offers a five-step program comprised of three granular and two liquid applications. "We like to use the liquid program in the spring (April, May and early June) and fall (September, October and mid-November)," Andrews said. "Those are the best times for us to get weed control, and we like to do that with liquid applications."

Tim Doppel, president, Atwood Lawn Care, Ster-

(continued on page 102)



Based on the time of year, weather conditions, the disease or insect being controlled, the type of equipment being used and labor availability, more contractors are incorporating both liquid and granular pesticide applications into their programs.

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THE PREMIER
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Liquid vs. Granular

(continued from page 100)

ling Heights, Mich., uses two approaches. "In our all-natural/organic program, we do not apply pesticides of any type unless we see a problem in the lawn or landscape," Doppel said. "Our traditional program schedule includes preemergent crabgrass control, broadleaf weed control and preventative grub control."

While granular and liquid pesticide applications are incorporated into both Andrews' and Doppel's programs, one or the other is favored at different times of the year based on weather, the insect, disease or weed being controlled and labor availability.

Doppel said liquid applications work for him when time is a concern. "They give us the ability to do more lawns in any given day," he pointed out. "Also, depending on what kind of application is being performed—weed control, for example—the results may be better after using a liquid application because I can get better coverage and the application is, therefore, more effective."

In addition to saving time, liquid appli-

cations require less effort, according to Cristi Palmer, turf and ornamental product manager, FMC Agricultural Product Group's Specialty Products Business office, Philadelphia, Pa. "Liquid applications may require less physical effort by technicians and are favored during the hot summer months," Palmer said. "Plus, they provide coverage for both foliar and soil applications."

Another advantage of using liquid applications is being able to add other products into the spray mix, such as a liquid fertilizer, and putting all the products down in one application, pointed out Curtis Clark, business development and marketing manager, Riverdale Chemical Co., Glenwood, Ill.

"On the other hand, a disadvantage to using liquid," noted Palmer, "is that the product may be more difficult to contain in case of a spill. Ensuring the appropriate dilution for small volumes can also be more difficult."

"IPM requires the applicator to think. Once the decision to make an application has been made, the applicator should choose the best product and the best method of application to do the job." - Tim Doppel

Granular applications, Palmer said, are easier to apply and tend to be easier to contain in case of a spill. She also said granular applications have a similar result to liquid applications in terms of labor savings. "Often, granular materials, being ready-to-use, offer an appealing savings in time and preparation," Palmer said. "The reasons being that loading the spreader can be done in a short time and some granular products do not require irrigation after application."

(continued on page 104)

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Liquid vs. Granular

(continued from page 102)

Andrews agreed. "We use granular applications when we want to use the product that is going to allow us to get the most coverage in one pass across the yard," he said. "A second pass stunts productivity and adds unnecessary time to the job."

The biggest advantage to using granular applications for Doppel is the flexibility the

product offers an applicator. "Several kinds of granular products can be on the truck at the same time, allowing the applicator to choose what is needed at the job site," he pointed out.

A disadvantage of using granular applications, pointed out Palmer, is that they tend

(continued on page 106)

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Every time you apply a pesticide, follow these basic procedures to make sure that you are using the pesticide safely and effectively:

1. Check the delivery rate – Be sure you are applying the pesticide evenly and in the right amounts. No puddles of liquid pesticide or mounds of dry pesticide should be deposited in the application area. Be especially careful in areas where you turn or pause. Many types of application equipment continues to release pesticide even when not in motion. If too little is being released, check equipment openings for clogging. If too much is being released, check for worn or stuck openings.

2. Check pesticide appearance – As you apply, notice whether the pesticide you are releasing looks the way it should. Applications of wettable powders usually have a white color. If the liquid is clear, be sure you are agitating the mixture enough to keep the wettable powder mixed with the water. Granules should appear dry and should not form clumps. Emulsifiable concentrates usually look milky. If the pesticide does not look right, be sure you have the right mixture and that it is blended evenly. Also, if the surface you just sprayed is changing colors, stop and check whether you are harming the surface.

3. Operate equipment safely – Turn off equipment whenever you pause or need to make any adjustments or repairs. When you stop application to take a break, to move to another site or for repairs, depressurize any pressurized tanks. Turn off the main pressure valve on the tank and release any pressure remaining at the nozzles.

Check hoses, valves, nozzles and other equipment parts occasionally while you are applying. If you notice a problem, stop immediately and fix it. Do not use bare hands or your mouth to clear nozzles or hoses. Carry a small nylon brush for such jobs. Be sure that any tool used for this kind of job is never used for any other purpose. – *Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

Know your Application Procedures

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Liquid vs. Granular

(continued from page 104)

not to be used for foliar applications on landscape plantings, and spreaders can be difficult to push through dense lawns in hot summer weather.

Most contractors and manufacturers agree that either liquid or granular applications can be used in preemergent, postemergent and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programs.

"IPM requires the applicator to think," Doppel added. "Once the decision to make an application has been made, the applicator should choose the best product and the best method of application to do the job."

But some landscape contractors have preferences based on what has worked successfully for them. "For us, preemergent and

broadleaf weed control is better achieved with a liquid formulation," Doppel said. "Fungicides also will work better if they are applied as a liquid application. Insecticides can be applied successfully either in a liquid or granular form."

PURCHASING TRENDS. Andrews makes product decisions based on what he is trying to control. "In weed control, I look for a broad-spectrum herbicide that kills many varieties of weeds for a long period of time," Andrews explained. "With insecticides, the decision is tough. So many insecticides have been removed from the market, so the decision is more difficult and depends on the current pest problem and whether it needs to be controlled. Few insects actually damage the lawn, so killing them may be a waste of time. Contractors have to determine what insecticide to purchase based on whether the insect is damaging the turf and if there is a sufficient quantity to warrant control."

From a manufacturer standpoint, the popularity of liquid and granular applications varies depending on product technology and formulation ingredients.

According to Clark, there is a trend toward granular applications vs. the sprayable kind because contractors can't spray in windy conditions and in tight backyards where they can run out of hose.

"The trend in liquid formulations is a move from solvent-based emulsifiable concentrates to water-based products, which reduce solvent-based odors," Palmer explained. "As far as dry formulations, one of the newest types is a wettable dry granular. This type of granule will disperse when placed into solution, plus it does not have the dust associated with wettable powder."

Palmer said end users often prefer liquid products because they leave little residue on plant foliage and are easy to re-suspend if they are left in the tank overnight. But she also said the public perceives granular materials as less threatening to nontarget organisms, which is why some landscape contracting companies are moving toward that application method.

The final choice, Clark concluded, is always based on personal preference. **LL**

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

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USE READER SERVICE #58

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following information was mistakenly omitted from the Pesticide Buyers' Guide that ran as a supplement to the March issue of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENT	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON:
AMERICAN CYANAMID				
HERBICIDES				
	Image	Amonium salt of imazaquin	Liquid concentrate	Well-established, nonstressed, warm-season turfgrasses or many landscape ornamental plants/perennial ryegrass, purple and yellow nutsedge, dollarweed, tall fescue, violets, crabgrass, wild garlic, chickweed, henbit, red sorrel.
	Pendulum	Pendimethalin	Granular, emulsifiable concentrate and WDG	Turfgrass or ornamentals/annual grasses and broadleaf weeds, such as crabgrass, goosegrass, foxtail, poa annua, oxalis, spurge, henbit, chickweed.
INSECTICIDES				
	Amdro Pro	Hydramethylnon	Powder	Turf and landscaped areas as well as on and around nursery material/Imported and native fire ants and other ants.
	Mach 2	Halofenozide	Liquid or granular	Turf/Grubs, armyworm, beetle, billbug, cutworm, sod webworm.
AVENTIS/CHIPCO PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTS				
FUNGICIDES				
	26 GT	Iprodione	Foliar applied fungicide	Turfgrass/dollar spot, brown patch, fusarium blight and gray snow mold.
	Banol	Propamocarb hydrochloride	Water miscible concentrate	Turfgrass and ornamentals/Pythium blight, Phytophthora on ornamental plants.
	Chipco Signature Prostar	Aluminum tris N-2-benzamide	Foliar spray Water soluble	Turfgrass/Pythium blight. Turfgrass/Rhizoctonia brown patch, fairy ring, gray snow mold, yellow patch, red thread.
HERBICIDES				
	Acclaim Extra	Fenoxaprop-ethyl	Water emulsion	Established turf and ornamentals/annual and perennial grassy weeds such as crabgrass, foxtail species, johnsongrass, sandbur, common bermudagrass.
	Finale	Glufosinate-ammonium	Water soluble	Turfgrass/chickweed, clover, purslane, barnyardgrass, goosegrass, johnsongrass, dandelion, lambsquarters, plantain, woodsorrel, annual bluegrass, bermudagrass, fescue, nutsedge.
	Prograss	Ethofumesate	Emulsifiable concentrate	Ornamental turfgrass/poa annua, chick weed, white clover, smooth crabgrass, large crabgrass, foxtail, canarygrass, barnyardgrass.
	Ronstar	Oxadiazon	Water soluble	Turfgrass and ornamentals/crabgrass, goosegrass, annual bluegrass, Virginia buttonweed, carpetweed, cheeseweed, prostrate spurge, common purslane, annual sedge.
INSECTICIDES				
	DeltaGard Granular T&O 5SC	Deltamethrin	Suspension concentrate	Established turf and landscape ornamental plants/wide range of insects including ants, cutworms, sod webworms, billbugs, mole crickets and red imported fire ants.
	DeltaGard T&O Granular	Deltamethrin		Turf, landscape ornamental plantings and perimeters around commercial, industrial, residential and recreational areas/wide range of insects including ants, armyworms, billbugs, cockroaches, cutworms, sod webworms and sowbugs.

Rain Sensors

by Cynthia Greenleaf

*Saving water and money,
rain sensors make perfect sense
for most irrigation systems.*



Rain sensors are only effective if installed properly. They should extend out from a house, for example – not mounted underneath a gutter or eave.

Photo: Hunter Industries.

Economical, efficient and easy to install, rain sensors are, indisputably, a good idea. Having been on the market in some form or another for about half a century, these straightforward devices are based on a simple objective: operating an irrigation system only when necessary. Jerry Gunter, general manager, TechScape, Richardson, Texas, summed up the logic underlying rain sensors nicely: "No sense watering your lawn when the Lord's doing it for you."

Whether they simulate the rate of moisture evaporation in soil with an absorbent wafer or disk or collect rainwater in a cup, rain sensors *know* when it's raining and shut down a system accordingly. While they've been around for years, these devices started seeing increased use in the mid-1980s, according to Rick Malkin, product manager, Rain Bird, Glendora, Calif. "They started to come into their own about 15 years ago," he observed. "Technology got to the point where they were inexpensive and easy to install."

Conserving water and reducing operating costs, these devices are a beneficial addition to most any system, according to irrigation experts.

SAVING RESOURCES. Rain sensors conserve water, which is of vital importance, especially in areas where municipal water supplies are increasingly strained because of population growth and population expansion. Rain sensors have saved hundreds of thousands of gallons of water, according to Dave Klever, president, Ecologic, Richmond, Va., which makes the RainBrain rain sensor.

By conserving water, rain sensors also provide a sizeable economic benefit in many cases. After all, "no one gets free water," pointed out Kevin Gordon, senior product development manager, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif. These sensors

(continued on page 110)

Weather or NOT

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to view an Online Storefront featuring product and service information. You can e-mail these companies directly or head right to their web sites.

APRIL SHOWERS BRING MAY FLOWERS

The month of April brought you the first installment of a brand new item in the Weekly Features section. Plant Of The Month includes information about interesting plants and cultivars you can use to brighten up your customers' properties. In April we checked out Capsicum (ornamental peppers), and May's Plant Of The Month will be Calendula (pot marigold).

Other features for May include:

- GreenSearch PeopleSmarts** – "The Consequences of Hiring Bad Managers ... And How to Improve" and "Is Your Pay Plan Working For You?"
- ALCA Driver Safety Toolbox Talks** – "To Be Seen Is Your Responsibility" and "Emergency Warning Devices."
- Gempler's Labor Issues** – More information from Gempler's publication "How to Avoid an INS Nightmare."
- Novartis TechNotes** – Weekly tips, data, maps and soil temperatures from around the United States.

Please e-mail any comments to Internet Editor Scott Hunsberger at shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com.

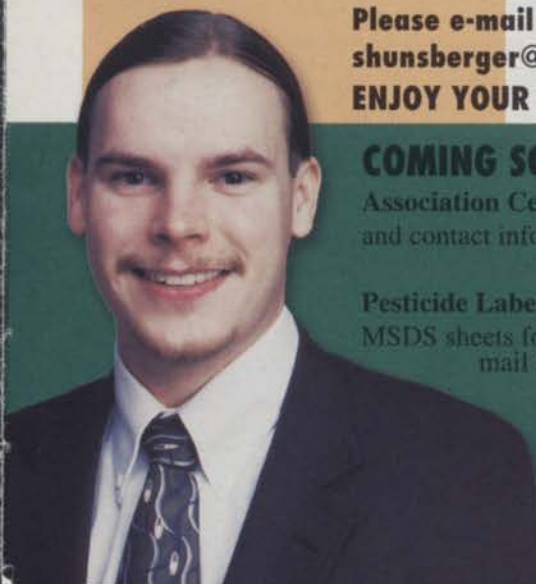
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Rain Sensors

(continued from page 108)

can also save on electricity costs if a system relies on a pump for water delivery.

Rain sensors are also a way of maintaining a property's health, observed Dan Standley, owner, Dan's Landscaping and Lawn Care, Terrytown, La. "If a property is overwatered, it runs the risk of fungal or

insect problems," he said. With a rain sensor, however, "you're protecting your landscape investment."

With many commercial accounts, politics also come into play. "Taxpayers do not like to see sprinklers working when it is raining," said Dirk Lenie, marketing man-

ager, irrigation division, The Toro Company, Riverside, Calif.

While rain sensors are generally a good idea, they're not usually necessary in extremely arid environments that receive relatively small amounts of precipitation. In this case, a sensor would have little or no value, Gordon said.

Klever agreed, noting that locations with annual rainfall in the single digits shouldn't bother installing a rain sensor. "It just wouldn't be cost effective," he said.

In some areas, rain sensors are mandated by law, including Florida, which is the only state with an overall rain sensor statute. Laws such as these, which are also locally enacted in areas of California, Minnesota, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina and South Carolina, are generally driven by water conservation concerns, Gordon observed.

EASY TO INSTALL. Rain sensors are simple to incorporate into a new or an existing irrigation system, according to industry experts. Better yet, most sensors are compatible with almost any irrigation components. Usually,



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they're usually

not a tough sell for

contractors.

setting a sensor up is just a matter of running some wires and mounting a system, Malkin said.

If a sensor doesn't have a bypass switch built in, contractor Robert Sigsworth always installs one for convenience sake. This makes routine maintenance and other tasks, such as washing fertilizer into a lawn, simpler, said Sigsworth, owner, Robert's Landscaping and Maintenance, Metairie, La. "If the device is

(continued on page 112)

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Rain Sensors

(continued from page 110)

mounted really high on a two-story home and you're not sure if the cup is full of water, you can bypass it and make the system come on," he said.

Simple in design, most rain sensors require little, if any, maintenance. With a cup-type sensor, Malkin suggested checking the

device occasionally to make sure it's not full of leaves or dirt, he said.

Matt Piper, product manager, Weathermatic, Dallas, Texas, advised testing a sensor at installation and verifying that it works.

Similarly, Gordon said a periodic visual inspection would be fine. Generally, though,

"there's very little that can go wrong with a rain sensor," he said.

Basic, no-frills rain sensors are relatively inexpensive, with most retailing between \$30 to \$40. Many contractors look at these devices as a minor investment that pays for itself in time. And better yet, they're durable and long-lasting. Gunter has been installing sensors for about 15 years and said he can't remember ever replacing one.



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where water supplies

are **increasingly**

strained because of

population growth

and **population**

expansion.

INTELLIGENT INSTALLATION. Despite their simplicity, even the most effective rain sensor is useless if installed incorrectly. For a sensor to provide an accurate reading, it must be properly located. This means not putting a sensor behind a sign, beneath a gutter or under an eave. If this is the case, "you're not getting a true feel for actual rainfall," Standley said.

Malkin agreed, noting that the biggest installation mistake contractors make is not considering the nature of rainfall in relation to the rain sensor. He recalled a few jobs where the sensor was mounted so inaccessibly that he had to crawl up on a roof to deactivate it.

Along the same lines, Sigsworth observed that many of his jobs come from contractors who install rain sensors improperly. "Nobody understands the principle of the rain sensor device," he said, pointing out that many contractors run the sensor directly from

(continued on page 128)

Wind and freeze sensors can be beneficial additions to irrigation systems – but on a more limited basis than rain sensors. Freeze sensors are well suited to climates that don't experience drastic changes of season and might have unpredictable freezes, according to Kevin Gordon, senior product development manager, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif. These devices are most popular in markets that don't shut down systems for the winter, he said. "In Dallas, for example, it can freeze one day and the next day be 75 degrees."

Similarly, in a climate like Colorado's, irrigation often takes place in colder weather, Rick Malkin, product manager, Rain Bird, Glendora, Calif., pointed out. "Many times in the late spring or early fall, temperatures will drop, but they'll still need to irrigate," he said. Contractors in climates without a definitive seasonal transition find freeze sensors a good way to prevent irrigation rather than shutting off the system completely.

Freeze sensors are commonly used as safety devices, activated at a pre-set temperature. "These can eliminate any runoff that can cause dangerous icing on a road or sidewalk," Gordon said. In some areas, freeze sensors are even required by law as a safety precaution. Jerry Gunter, director of irrigation, TechScape, Richardson, Texas, recalled a big automobile wreck that happened years

ago in nearby Dallas that was caused by a sprinkler operating in freezing weather. In this case, freeze sensors would have provided considerable liability protection. Because of this accident, they have since been mandated by law in Dallas, Gunter said.

Wind sensors, on the other hand, are useful in areas with sporadic wind or if a system is watering a landscape near a glass building, for example, Gordon said. He sees a lot of these devices used in fountains where a big column of water can blow outward onto passers-by. Malkin noted that wind sensors are often used in more sophisticated systems, such as one where effluent water is used under strict regulations and can only flow at a limited velocity. – *Cynthia Greenleaf*

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Equipment Notebook

TRIM TIME:

Pruner Primer

While pruning trees and shrubs is an ordinary task, the practice often presents some extraordinary challenges, one of which is selecting the right tools. Contractors must consider a number of factors, including pruner durability, weight and feel, and level of dealer support, but ultimately, the choice comes down to personal preference.

"There are a lot of pruners out there, and we've used a lot of them," said Larry Vickers, buyer, Jimmy's Tree Service, Vero Beach, Fla. "We have 45 employees and they all have their own opinions about what they like."

Generally, contractors want pruners that cut clean and easy, said John Reisbeck, vice president of marketing and sales, Corona Clipper, Corona, Calif. "They must not be too heavy, and they have to be



There are a variety of pruners on the market, including pole pruners (pictured right). Pole pruners give contractors extended reach, but they may sacrifice speed and maneuverability.

Photo: Echo



pruner," he said. "Will the tool stand up under intense use and can it be repaired, rather than thrown away? Contractors pay more and want to be able to repair their tools instead of tossing them away."

Manufacturers recommend that contractors buy the best quality pruners they can afford because when the tools are properly cared for, they will last longer and perform better than cheaply made ones.

There are a sea of pruners to choose from on the market (See *Pruning Toolbox*, page 115). Landscape contractors must be cognizant of new tools as they become available, said Robin Pendergrast, marketing and public



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relations specialist for Echo, Lake Zurich, Ill. "If you've got a good dealer you can depend on, the dealer will know the product lines and tell you the differences," he said.

TOOL TIME. There are three basic types of pruners, Reisbeck explained. "The bypass type is where the blade bypasses the opposing hook," he said. "The anvil pruner is where the blade comes down, cuts through the material and rests against the anvil, or flat surface. The ratchet pruner, which is a variation on the anvil pruner, cuts through the wood in a series of stages. The ratchet pruner is almost like a PVC pipe cutter."

The bypass pruner is popular, Reisbeck said, because it requires little maintenance and cuts closer to where the branch, or stem, originates.

Still, the blades on the bypass pruner can be prone to crossing over each other if they are not made with a good pivot bolt system, said Don Prescott, president, Push-N-Prune, Shelley, Idaho.

The anvil pruner, Reisbeck continued, is excellent for cutting tough, diseased, dead or frozen wood. "The blade is sharpened down to a point on both sides, but what frequently happens is people don't maintain the blade," he said. "It becomes dull and tends to crush the stem."

The anvil may keep the pruner from getting close to the

KNOW YOUR TOOLS:

Pruning Toolbox

Choosing the right tools can make pruning easier and minimize plant injuries. Here are some common types of pruning tools and their uses:

Pruning knife – This sharp, folding knife's forward-curving blade is used for removing small twigs and for nicking and notching.

Pull-cut saws – The folding saw is used for shrub and dormant season pruning. The curved saw is for cutting larger branches.

Push-cut saws – These two-edged saws have small teeth that cut on the push stroke and coarse teeth that cut on both strokes.

Pole pruners and saws – These tools allow extra reach for high branches with telescoping and other extensions. A saw blade is mounted in combination with the pole pruner or may be mounted on a pole itself.

One-hand pruners – Anvil and bypass types are used for cutting stems.

Two-hand loppers – They have long handles, providing better leverage, more cutting power and extended reach. They come in anvil or bypass types.

Hedge shears – They are used for shearing plants into formal shapes.

Power tools – Hedge trimmers are used only for trimming and will jam if the tool is used on hard twigs. Chainsaws are used for jobs with larger trees.

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Equipment Notebook

trunk, Prescott said. "The anvil type makes large cuts easier and can be incorporated into leverage-compounding handle designs," he said. "But anvils get require replacement."

While the ratchet pruner allows contractors to make effortless cuts, a series of cuts is needed to get through one branch, Reisbeck added. "The drawback is the lack of speed," he said.

On the other hand, power pruners often

increase productivity, Pendergrast noted. Still, there are safety issues. "You have to be careful and you have to know how to prune," Pendergrast said. "It's a 14- to 16-pound piece of equipment, and you have to be in decent shape (to operate it)."

MATCHMAKER. Carefully evaluate pruning jobs to determine what tools are needed,

Pendergrast suggested, offering some questions for contractors to consider. "Is the job ground level or bucket?" he asked. "Can you reach it effectively? Are you doing a lot in one location or just a branch or two? What types of trees are you pruning?"

As opposed to going in and butchering the tree, Pendergrast said, contractors must learn proper pruning techniques. "You need to know how to handle the product so you don't hurt the equipment, the tree and yourself," he said.

Matching pruners to a job means knowing what type of material will be cut and how thick it is, Reisbeck said. A hand pruner, for example, is good for branches 1 inch or less in diameter. "Anything above that takes an inordinate amount of strength to cut through the wood," he said. "It's easier to go to a larger tool."

The cut's size will determine which pruner to use, said Way Hoyt, president, Tree Trimmers & Associates, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "For the most part, we're using chainsaws if the tree is 2 to 3 inches in diameter," Hoyt said.

Prescott said his criteria for choosing a pruner is based on the size of the branches being cut and how far one must reach to get to the branch comfortably. Pole pruners, for example, give contractors extended reach, but sometimes they sacrifice maneuverability and speed. "The lever mechanism makes getting into congested areas difficult, and you have to keep track of the rope," he said. "One advantage of the rope is that the pruner can be operated from any point you grasp along the pole."

But there is a fatigue factor with pole pruners. "If you aren't in shape, you're asking for an accident," Pendergrast said.

Hoyt agreed that pole pruners can be difficult to use, except for aesthetic cuts. "They don't always make correct cuts very easily," Hoyt said. "Anything above 23 to 24 feet becomes too awkward to handle. You have very little control at these kinds of distances."

LOOK FOR SUPPORT. Contractors must do their homework to find products that suit their needs, Pendergrast said. "They must see if the pruner is well made and easily serviced," he said. "Good dealer support is particularly important and so is parts availability."

Some suppliers go out of their way to help contractors stay on the cutting edge, Vickers said. "Our supplier is good about letting us try products out and in return, if we like them, we buy them," he said. — Ali Cybulski

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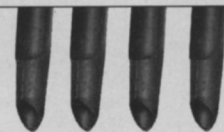
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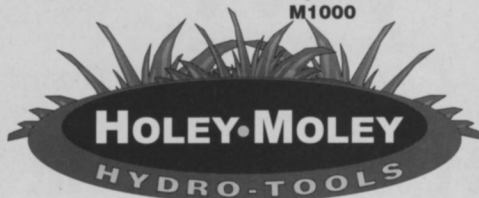
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- Available in PVC, brass or stainless steel
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- Metal sensors can handle up to 400 psi and plastic sensor can accommodate up to 100 psi
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- Two transmitter models are available: PT322, a pulse type that can be calibrated by connecting it to a computer via a cable and PT1502, a wall-mounted, microprocessor-based, digital unit capable of displaying both flow rate and total flow on an eight-character LCD

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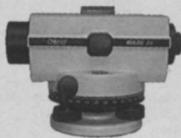


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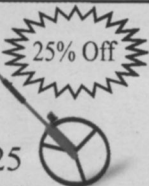
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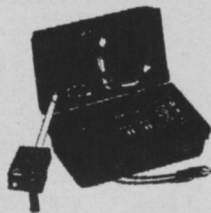
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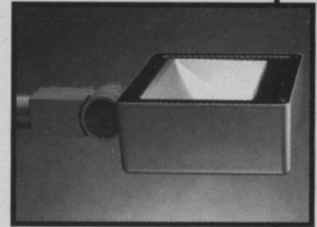
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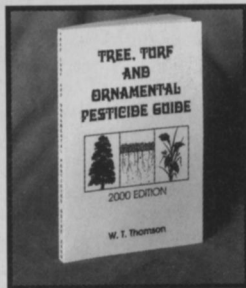
• Revision includes the latest pesticides for use on ornamentals, trees and turf

• Book's sections cover insecticides, herbicides, fungicides and growth regulators

• Species are listed in alphabetical order, from abelias to zinnias

• Includes a cross reference of botanical and common names of most ornamental species

Circle 217 on reader service card



Dixon ZTR 7025 Mid-mount Riding Mower

• Powered by a 25-hp Kohler Command engine

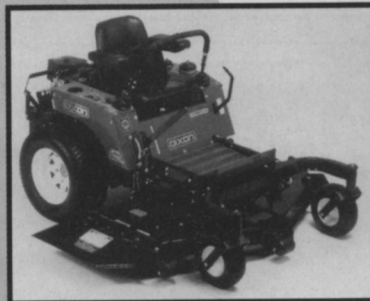
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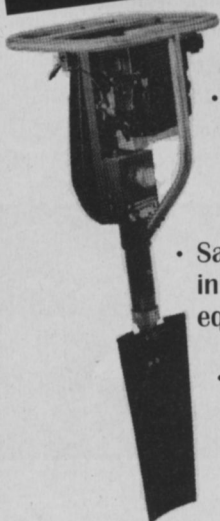
lighting applications can be accessed

• Operates within the Windows platform

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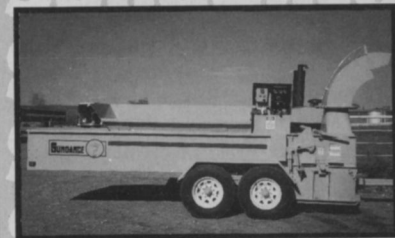
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Products

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- Landscaping and irrigation design software series
- Contour tools allow users to draft proposed or existing contours in 3D
- Intersecting pipe option in the irrigation

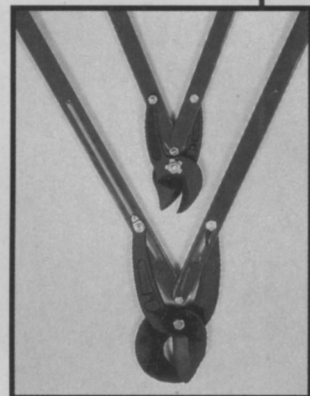
design module allows users to draw laterals over existing zones without cutting into intersecting pipes

- Label baseline offset supports curved lines
- In the plant database, planting size can be set as default for each plant type
- Tree Shadows command places shadows based on the type of plant

Circle 220 on reader service card

Porter-Ferguson Brush Cutters, Pruners

- Forester Model 0290F brush cutter is 27 inches long, weighs about 5 pounds and has a cutting capacity of 1 to 1½ inches
- Forester Model 0390F brush cutter is 34 inches long, weighs 7¼ pounds and is designed to cut 2-inch material



- Each model features two cutting blades made of forged alloy tool steel
 - Porter Point Cut Pruner can cut material up to 1¼-inch thick
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- Circle 221 on reader service card**

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USE READER SERVICE #113

Rain Sensors

(continued from page 113)

the system timer, which is an easy installation but won't yield an accurate rainfall reading. For greatest accuracy, always put the sensor in the highest point in the yard and in the most open area, he advised.

Another common mistake is mounting a sensor too close to a sprinkler head. "So when the head comes up, it sprays and fills the cup up and the system turns off," Sigsworth said. "Meanwhile, it's a hot, dry day and the flowers are dying." Other installation gaffes include putting a sensor too close to a bird feeder or underneath a tree. "You don't want to put it where a tree branch is sitting 3 feet above it," Sigsworth warned.

And, while this might be obvious advice, avoid putting a sensor on the ground where it can be run over by a lawnmower, said Dave Cujas, irrigation manager, TruGreen LandCare, Naples, Fla. Placing the sensor two stories or higher is generally a good rule of thumb, he concluded.

Finally, don't install a rain sensor in an area that doesn't receive precipitation, such as an enclosed courtyard with a skylight or one with a sizeable overhang, Sigsworth advised. To avoid creating a problem spot, contractors should bypass the rain sensor on any zone with these considerations, he said. Especially with larger or more elaborate irrigation systems, contractors must consider the individual needs of each zone, he said. "You've got to manage each zone as a system inside of a system."

AN EFFORTLESS SELL. Since rain sensors operate on a premise that's difficult to argue with – water conservation and financial savings – they're usually not a tough sell for contractors. Gunter started selling them with great success about a decade ago.

"I was driving down the road one day and saw somebody's sprinkler running in the rain and I thought, 'That's pretty stupid,'" he

recalled. "So I went to the door and said, 'I can put a rain sensor on your system that will cause it not to run in the rain.'" Gunter sold a rain sensor that day.

Sigsworth has used a similar approach with his customers. "I'll walk up when it's raining and ask, 'Are you tired of seeing your system run in the rain?'" he said. "It's such an easy idea, they try to put money in my pocket before I get started."

For Standley, the issue of cost control is his biggest selling point with commercial properties. "They always want to look for a way of saving money," he said.

Gordon agreed, adding that there is such a clear economic argument for using a rain sensor. "If I can install a \$35 device and pay for it after about 10 waterings, it's real easy math," he said. **LL**

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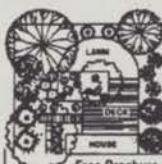
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Mowing Options

(continued from page 98)


dential customers "will bug the hell out of you" if there's a problem with their property. If the weather was rainy on Tuesday, he said, and the grass is taller and needs mowed: "The residential customer will call you every time, but commercial won't bother."

Residential clients, Ward said, often have a lot of specific requests – and all want to be mowed on the same day. "Everything is emotional to them," he said. "If the lawn doesn't look good, they're not all business. They say, 'You ruined my lawn.' They get excited and scream and yell at you."

Staying on schedule is a must if contractors want to please their residential clients and remain profitable, Ward said. Use small crews and make sure they are efficient, "or you won't make any money," he advised.

Doing residential maintenance well, Ward said, also means getting to know each client personally, determining each client's needs, using appropriately sized equipment for each job and delivering consistent services.

In addition, pricing must be competitive, he said. "I think that markets can bear certain pricing and you have to be in the ballpark," Ward explained. "I think there are two approaches. You have the 'whole bunch in the neighborhood' approach, and you can price more competitively. Or there is the 'I do the greatest work and only I can do it' approach, where you can charge more."

In residential services, the key to making more money is tying other services to mowing – "not being just mow, trim and go," Ward said. "That way you're not dependent on just mowing for money." 

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

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How We Do It

Forming Design Teams

Two years ago, the dynamics of our design sales staff were changing for the worse at Lied's – Landscape Design & Development, Sussex, Wis. A couple of our designers left to

pursue other opportunities, our top design salespeople were buried with referrals, and many of the new sales people, starving for leads, were forced to make cold calls.

The situation came to a climax when two more of our landscape architects approached me and said they did not see a professional future for themselves at Lied's because they were not comfortable dealing with the demands of our high-end clients.

After conferring with other allied professionals, I learned that a concept native to architectural offices could also work for Lied's. As a result, I decided to switch our operation from a design group of individuals to a group of design teams. The design teams were composed of:

- A senior design salesperson with a history of client success – one of the leaders in the department;
- A newer design salesperson with three to six years of experience and a strong client focus;
- A designer with a great deal of technical knowledge in computer-aided design, construction and horticulture; and
- A recent university graduate with relatively little experience but great promise.

This mix of different levels of experience worked well, creating a synergy that increased profits and raised the enthusiasm on our staff considerably.

Some of the reorganization's benefits include:

1. Better training for new staff members. We never did a great job training new design salespeople. When we

For Lied's design teams, collaboration is an everyday activity that keeps the design process fresh and challenging. Photo: Lied's – Landscape Design & Development



trained them and sent them out to meet our clients, sometimes the training worked and other times, it did not. Now we can slowly integrate new people into our system. They can work closely with our senior designers and landscape architects, learning not only the design process, but more importantly, our client service philosophy.

2. Taking advantage of all employees' strengths. Instead of developing a group of generalists, we develop specialists within each design team. Designers are not forced into roles they do not feel comfortable with – they can choose to be in a client service role or in a design and technical support role.

3. More balanced workload for each employee. Our senior design leaders can more comfortably bring projects into the company knowing they have their team's support to complete projects on time. The senior designers can focus their efforts on design and client development, while other team members can handle administrative aspects.

4. Employees are better able to handle large projects. Our design/build projects have grown considerably in size during the past five years. Having \$1 million commercial projects and \$250,000 to \$500,000 residential projects is not uncommon for us. A design team with varied talents is better equipped to handle large projects than one person is.

5. More interaction between designers. When everyone worked individually, design collaboration occurred sporadically. Without input from others, designers fell into ruts. Now, collaboration happens everyday, keeping the design process new and exciting.

The transition from a group of individuals to several design teams was not without its bumps, including making the shift go smoothly for employees at all skill levels. But I believe the best evidence of our success is our sales numbers, which have increased 30 percent during the past two years using the same number of design professionals.

Restructuring the department helped to bring out the best in the people we had. The saying is true: "The whole is better than the sum of its parts." – Judson Griggs

The author is vice president of design and development at Lied's – Landscape Design & Development, Sussex, Wis.

FIVE Keys to Success

- 1. Better training for new staff members**
- 2. Taking advantage of all employees' strengths**
- 3. More balanced workload for each employee**
- 4. Employees are better able to handle large projects**
- 5. More interaction between designers**

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