

Lawn & Landscape

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Care Work**

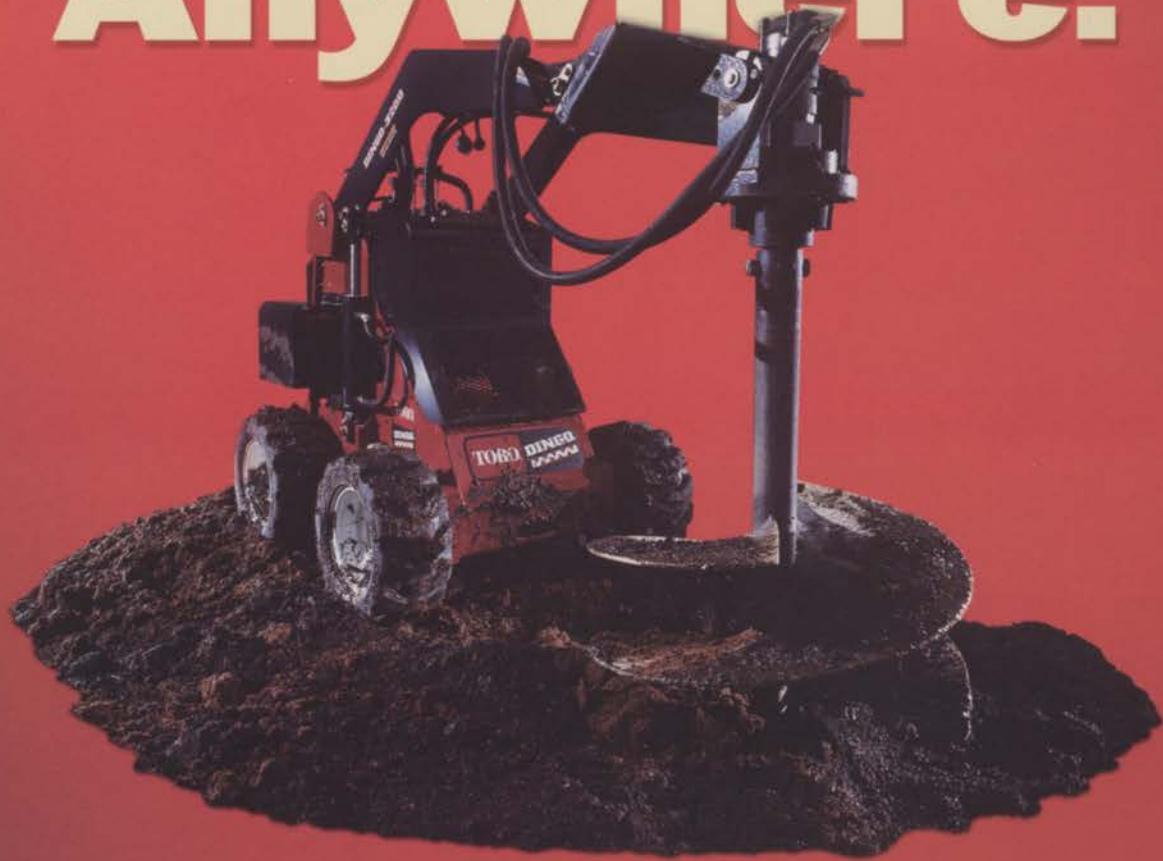
**Kenny Crenshaw (left)
and Carl Quick (right),
Herbi-Systems**

The Kings of MEMPHIS

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

Industry Research Online

Find insightful survey data and analysis that paints a picture of the industry as a whole at

www.lawnandlandscape.com/research.

Several surveys are currently available online, including Business Composition, Nursery Material, Truck & Trailer, Irrigation Industry and Specialty Pesticide surveys.

Additional surveys will be added in the coming months. If you have a general topic or a survey question you would like to see asked, please e-mail your questions to shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com.

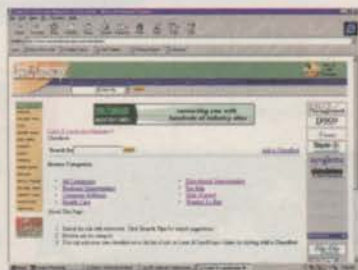
Also find weekly industry-related poll questions and archived results on our home page at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

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- Wanted To Buy



Locate Industry Events



Check www.lawnandlandscape.com/events for a comprehensive listing of industry events across the country.

You'll find event listings, locations, contact information and links to web sites related to each event when applicable. Be sure to forward your company's event listings to shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com to let the rest of the industry know about them.

Daily Features

L&L Online offers daily features on a variety of topics. Our current schedule is as follows:

Mon. - *Contractor Talk*: Profiles of industry professionals and discussions of common practices.

Tues. - *Irrigation Issues*: An update on new products and hot-button issues.

Wed. - *Lawn Care Roundup*: A look at problems and solutions for the lawn care world.

Thurs. - *Landscape Issues*: The information you need to bolster your landscape design, installation and maintenance skills.

Fri. - *Business Management*: Industry consultants and management firms offer advice on running a business.

First Sat. of each month - *Plant Of The Month*: Author Barbara Ellis covers the salvia clan in March.

Find these features at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

ONLINE Contents

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

Daily News and Features - Catch breaking industry news and daily features. www.lawnandlandscape.com

E-newsletter - Receive weekly industry news via e-mail. www.lawnandlandscape.com/my/customize_newsletter.asp

L&L Online LawnStore - Locate the best resources to help your business grow. www.lawnandlandscape.com/store

Message Boards - Discuss hot-button issues with fellow industry professionals. www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard

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

Events Calendar - Locate industry events across the country. www.lawnandlandscape.com/events

Industry Research - Survey data and analysis of the industry as a whole. www.lawnandlandscape.com/research

Magazine Archives - Years of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine back issues. www.lawnandlandscape.com/magazine

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Gary Walpole,
Memphis, Tenn.



Cover Story

The Kings of Memphis

Herbi-Systems is dealing with new challenges in order to remain enthroned as one of the leading lawn care companies in Memphis. **46**

A Commercial Success

Sutherland Landscape has found its niche providing installation and irrigation services to general contractors throughout central Florida. **56**



Simply Soil

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Walk-behind mowers might be a step behind riding mowers, but innovation keeps them cutting forward. **76**

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discuss planning a landscape design from concept to construction. **148**

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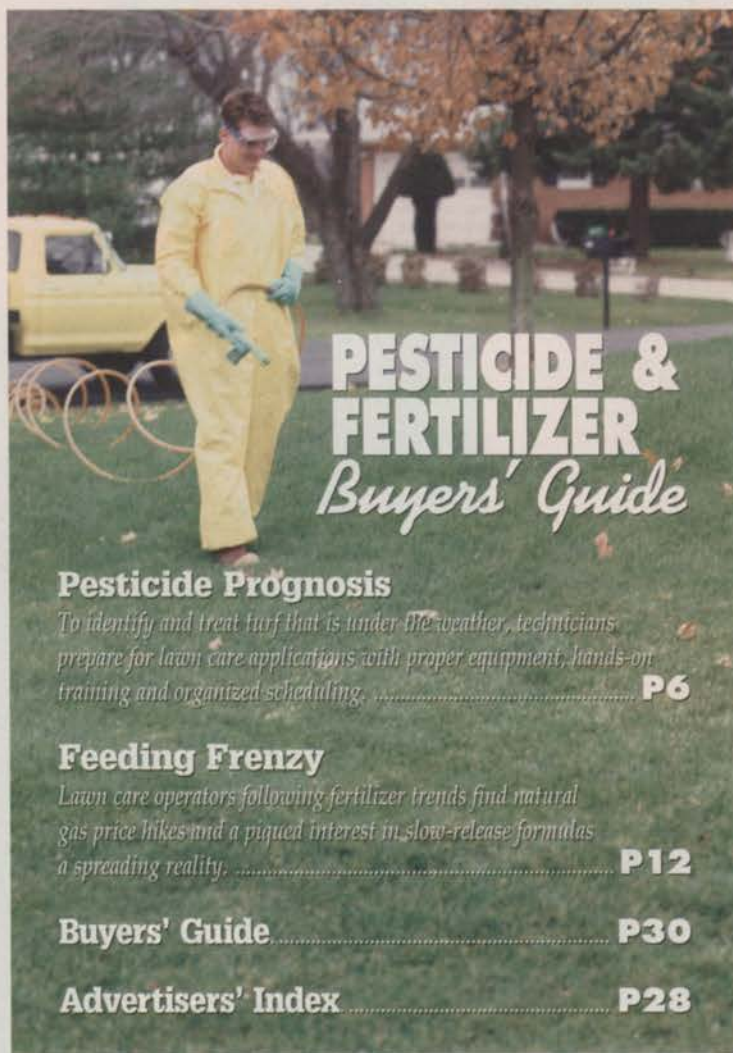
A Lawn Care Roundtable

When leading contractors got together, political issues were a top concern. **186**

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Lawn & Landscape
ONLINE

Introducing key features of the lawn and landscape industry's most interactive Web site. **3**

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then things will happen to you."*

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Hitting the Target

I am often asked how lawn and landscape firms can add big-ticket commercial customers to their primarily residential customer base. Obviously, this isn't an easy transition, but having a plan is one way to do this successfully.

I want to share some ideas shared with me by Mike Rorie, president of Cincinnati, Ohio-based Groundmasters, a company that has made this progression quite successfully.


Rorie explained to me that green industry firms compete with one another in three areas: price, level of service and quality of work – and the likelihood of one company having a competitive advantage in all three is slim. The key for you, the strategic-thinking manager or owner, is two-fold.

First, decide how your company will compete. Second, find a customer base that is attracted to what you offer. Some companies may elect to pursue a particular type of customer and then build their market identity to suit those customers, which can work just as well.

For example, if your company prides itself on delivering the finest quality product and good customer service, you're probably not winning a lot of jobs on price. This means that the general residential market may not hold a great deal of potential for your business because of its tendency to price shop.

Who isn't nearly as price sensitive and, instead values quality work and responsive service? That's a high-end residential customer. If delivering quality and service instead of low price matters to you, make sure you're pursuing clients most likely to appreciate that sales presentation.

If commercial customers are the goal, think about what they want in a service provider. This group can be a challenge to approach because there are differences between various commercial customers. Attentive service is a key factor for many commercial accounts, while others will emphasize price and some want quality work first and foremost. The key idea here is that differences can always exist between accounts and types of clients – you need to recognize this in your sales approach. Why should a prospective client hire you instead of the competition? You cannot expect property managers to hire you simply because you show up with an estimate.

Groundmasters has a formula that works for its operation, and that means no residential customers because it doesn't want to win jobs on price. Decide what customers you want to work for and set up your business accordingly. 

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for me to track labor by the hour. I prefer to track it by the minute. **CLIP** gives me the ability to track my profitability on every job easily, quickly, and efficiently—by the minute! I learned years ago that just six minutes was standing between profitability and breaking even.

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to include irrigation, landscaping, design, and installation services.

But, it's not just the software. As much as I love **CLIP**, the real value is the team behind the software. The team at **CLIP** Software was the "first kids on the block". They were there when nothing else was and they'll be there when nothing else is. I know they'll be there because they have their ears open. With so many changes resulting from the growth of my business, from technology and from the industry itself, **CLIP** has been there for me every step of the way, often anticipating enhancements to **CLIP** even before I asked!

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Bonaire, GA

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USE READER SERVICE #63



Market Trends

IN THE NEWS

Inside Illinois' Industry

URBANA, Ill. – A new University of Illinois study proved that the various well-known agriculture industries in the state don't compare to the size of Illinois' green industry.

Primary estimates show that, in 1999, the product and service sectors of Illinois' green industry generated nearly \$2.9 billion in net sales, said Gary Rolfe, professor and head of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, University of Illinois. These sales figures place the green industry ahead of corn production in its importance to the state's economy, Rolfe said. Total cash receipts from Illinois' agriculture industries are as follows: corn at \$2.56 billion, soybeans at \$2.1 billion, hogs and pigs at \$646 million and cattle at \$490 million.

"I don't think anyone had a clue that the green industry was as large as it turned out to be," Rolfe pointed out. "It's a very important piece of information that could help influence legislative initiatives and bring more research dollars to this important sector."

(continued on page 12)



Mowing, installation work and fertilization were ranked the three most profitable services in a recent *Lawn & Landscape* survey.

According to a Research USA study, 50 percent of surveyed contractors said that mowing is their most profitable service (gross margin of 52 percent), 31 percent said landscape installation is their most profitable service (gross margin of 40 percent) and 22.9 percent said turf fertilization (gross margin of 34 percent) brings in the most profit.

The varied nature of the industry is reinforced by the wide range of services generating the highest profitability for contractors, although interviews with many contractors found they are dealing with increased pressure on gross profit margins as the direct costs associated with producing a job, especially labor, continue to rise.

Money MAKERS

SERVICE	PERCENT PROFITABLE	ESTIMATED GROSS PROFIT MARGIN
Mowing	50 percent	52.5 percent
Landscape Design/Build	31 percent	40.3 percent
Turf-Fertilization	22.9 percent	33.8 percent
Lawn Care	15.1 percent	38.1 percent
Landscape Construction	14.7 percent	34.6 percent
Snow Removal	12.8 percent	30.9 percent
Edging/Trimming	10.9 percent	39.8 percent
T&O-Pruning	9.7 percent	24 percent
Irrigation	8.9 percent	25.2 percent
Seeding	8.5 percent	22.4 percent
Fall Clean-up	8.5 percent	33.6 percent

Source: Research USA

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Novartis and Zeneca Complete Merger

GREENSBORO, N.C. – The honor of being the Biggest Kid on the Block now goes to Syngenta since Novartis and Zeneca completed their

merger to form this multi-billion-dollar specialty pesticide manufacturer.

As pesticide suppliers get so much bigger through consolidation, the question is how end users of their products will benefit. Syngenta plans to use its considerable research and development budget to develop products not traditionally expected from pesticide suppliers. "Syngenta will provide customers with value-added technologies and expertise," explained the company in a press release. "Plans include development of digital predictive pest forecasting models, GPS/GIS chemical program application software, and online access to professional chemical and business management information."

The question of what pesticide suppliers, especially those new multi-billion-dollar companies, can do to better serve lawn care operators (LCOs) is something Syngenta managers hope to answer. "We want to become more knowledgeable about LCOs' businesses,"

(continued on page 25)

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Market Trends

(continued from page 10)

The survey, which was funded by a coalition of green industry professional associations, was sent out to 12,000 state businesses, agencies, institutions and others who produce, maintain, use or sell plant materials to enhance environments. It had a 31 percent response rate and offers some interesting insights regarding the industry's economic impact on a state level.

Other report findings include:

- There are more than 9,000 green industry businesses and more than 2.3 million end-users of green industry products and services in Illinois.
- Overall, the green industry employs a workforce of nearly 160,000 people with a payroll of more than \$1.74 billion.
- For every job created within the green industry, an additional .52 jobs are created within the state economy. For every dollar paid in green industry wages and salaries, an additional \$1.70 in wages and salaries are paid within the overall state economy.

(continued on page 14)

People

Bob Woods was named president of Syngenta Corporation for the United States. The company named **Heiri Gugger** head of Syngenta Crop Protection for North America and **Ed Shonsey** was named president and CEO of Syngenta Seeds.

Dan Klindera was promoted to vice president of Autumn Tree Care Experts. President **Matthew Dziedzic** was elected president elect of the Illinois Arborist Association for 2001.

Scotts Lawn Service welcomed **Don Rossi** to its management team as eastern regional manager.

Brett Fulton, vice president of Fulton Landscaping, Mertztown, Pa., recently was elected to the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association's Board of Directors. **Robert Shaffer**, general sales manager, Gooseberry Bush, Downingtown, Pa., and **Richard Weilminster**, owner, Weilminster's Brookside Nursery, Williamsport, Pa., also were elected to the board.

Green2go named **Robert Shoelson** as merchandise manager for general products.

Eric LaFleur is a new partner at Irrigation Consulting, Pepperell, Mass.

Havener Enterprises appointed **David Bynum** to national sales and marketing representative for the Mower Sulky and Trimmer Guard product lines.

Shannon Castillo and **Angie Bradley** joined RBI Companies' HR staff.



Gugger (top),
Shonsey (bottom)

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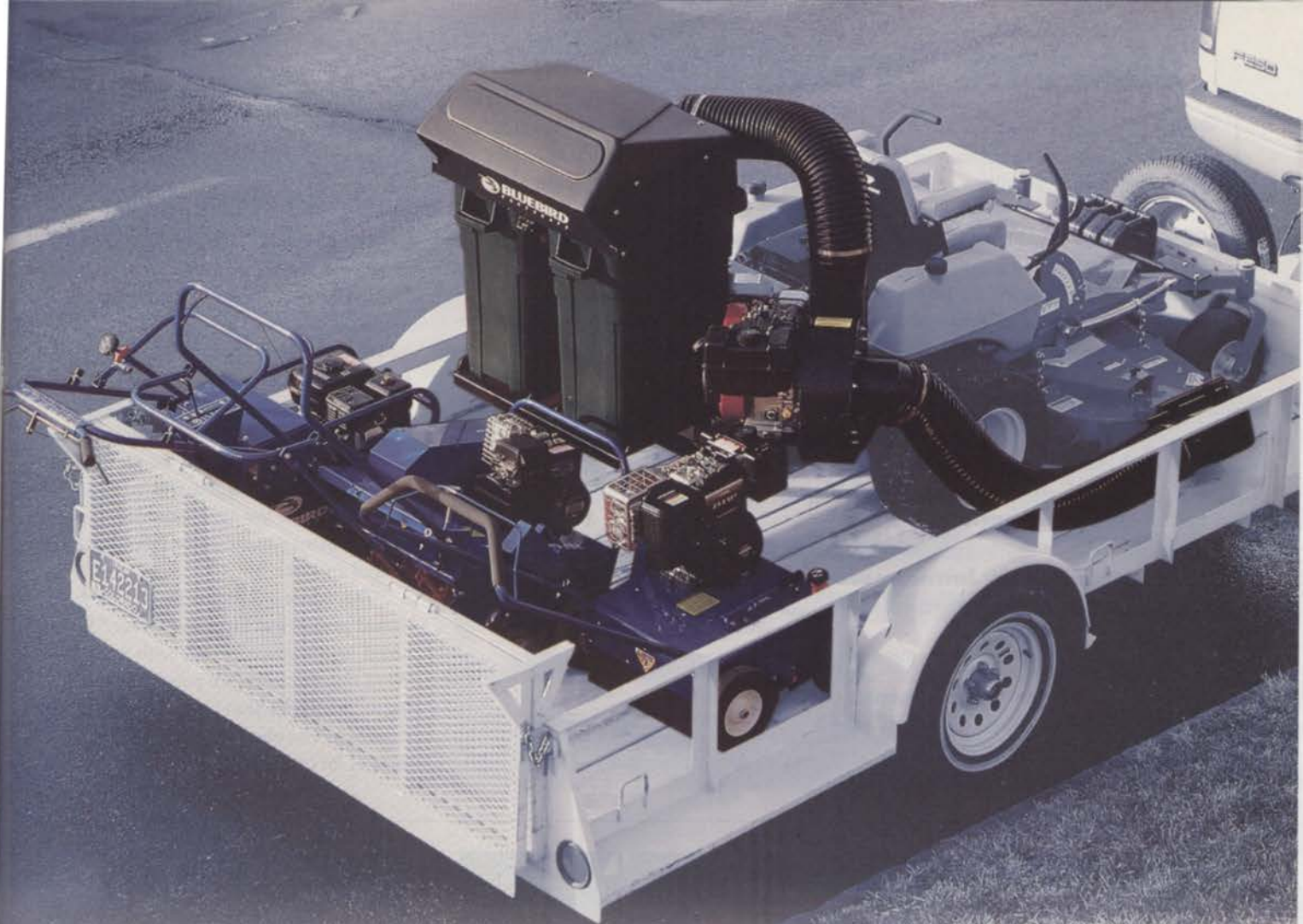
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SeedScaper



Lawn Vacs & Chipper Vacs



Sod Cutter



Lifts

Market Trends

(continued from page 12)

• The maintained turfgrass area in Illinois totaled about 1.54 million acres.

• In 1999, Illinois consumers spent \$2.89 billion to purchase and maintain indoor and outdoor plant materials including turfgrass. In addition to this amount, the same group paid more than \$1.397 billion to contractors working in the green industry.

• The green industry service sector generated more than \$1.643 billion in total receipts. More than 88 percent of these receipts are attributed to landscape contractors and lawn care firms. About 6 percent of total receipts are attributed to tree care, while the remainder – 4 and 2 percent, respectively – comes from landscape design firms and interiorscape companies.

On the WEB

BidMgr.com – www.bidmgr.com

Bob Lenc Landscaping & Lawn Care – www.boblenclandscaping.com

LawnCareSuccess.com – www.lawncaresuccess.com

Safety Storage – www.safetystorage.com

Turfquip – www.turfquip.com

Tomlinson Bomberger Lawn Care & Landscape – www.tbll.com

Spring-Green – www.spring-green.com

Bayer – www.bayerprocentral.com

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

IN THE NEWS

ServiceMaster Names New CEO

DOWNERS GROVE, Ill. – ServiceMaster, the parent company of TruGreen-ChemLawn and TruGreen LandCare, named Jonathan Ward its new chief executive officer.

Ward, replaces the retiring C. William Pollard, is confident ServiceMaster is well-positioned for success, even after TruGreen-ChemLawn's annual growth dropped from 13 to 5 percent last year and the purchase of LandCare USA drained the company's growth over the last 12 months due to poor expense management, according to one financial analyst.

"This is not a business that needs to be turned around and flipped on its ear," Ward noted in a conference call with investors. Ward also discussed the potential for creating an "umbrella brand" for the company's various service offerings in order to simplify matters for consumers.

(continued on page 18)

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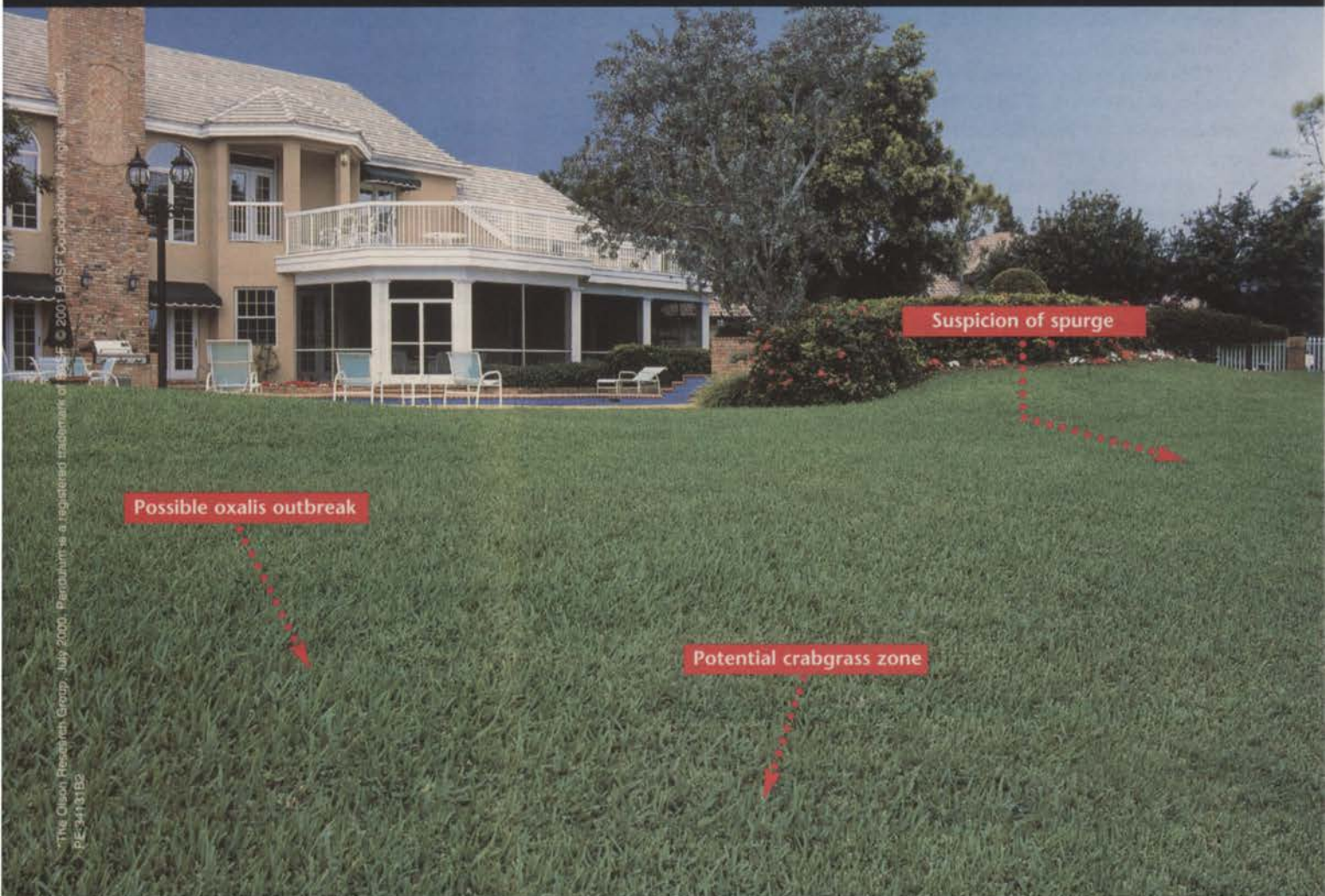
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Market Trends

ECI, OneSource Make Acquisitions

Environmental Care made its first move into the Midwest with the acquisition of Fullback Services, Louisville, Ky., while OneSource Landscape expanded its presence in Florida's landscape installation market by acquiring Austin Outdoor Services, Palm Coast, Fla.

ECI's acquisition of Fullback, which had 2000 revenue of \$10 million, gives it five new Midwest locations: Chicago, Ill.; Detroit, Mich.; St. Louis, Mo.; Lexington, Ky.; and Louisville. Ted Ennenbach, owner of Fullback, is now the vice president and regional manager of ECI's new Midwest organization.

Burt Sperber, president of ECI's parent company, Environmental Industries, said the company has made more acquisitions in the past 12 months than during any other 12-month period in its history, but he emphasized that the company continues to only pursue strategic acquisitions. "We are not interested in consolidating the industry solely for the purpose of getting bigger," he stressed. "And getting into the Midwest was not necessarily a strategic goal of ours." ECI's most recent acquisitions included STM in Oakton, Va., and North Haven Gardens in Dallas, Texas.

In addition to picking up the \$8-million Austin Outdoors, which will now operate as One Source Landscape Construction and Installation, OneSource president Rich Kissane said OneSource gained some key personnel. "The company has a young and experienced management team," he noted. "Their addition expands our service offerings of landscape construction and installation services."

GreenZebras, Green2go to Unite

FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA.—GreenZebras and Green2go (www.green2go.com) announced plans that would unite two Internet companies specializing in different areas of the green industry. "For years, there have been enormous inefficiencies in the wholesale green industry," according to Michael Apfel, co-founder of Green2go. "Together with GreenZebras, we are the first and only green industry Web site to deliver both a comprehensive selection of live and hard goods together with national shipping services."

Green2go is in the process of expanding its service reach on a region-by-region basis, having started in the Southeast last year. It expects to be in most U.S. markets by the end of this year. GreenZebras offers contractors Internet-based applications designed to help them manage their businesses and make product purchasing more efficient.

"We help contractors improve the two largest cost areas in running their businesses—labor productivity and purchasing," explained Ted Gramer, formerly president of GreenZebras (www.greenzebras.com) and now chief operating officer of Green2go.

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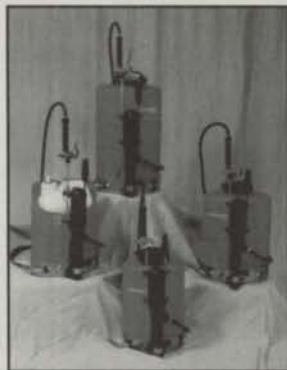
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Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

But the lawn care and landscape operation's lagging performance will be one of Ward's first areas of business. The company disclosed that its year 2000 operating revenue of \$1.563 million was 12 percent higher than the previous year, but profitability fell 25 percent in that same time from more than \$228 million to \$172 million.

IN THE NEWS

Blower Bans Heat Up Texas and California

HOUSTON, Texas, & PALO ALTO, Calif. - City officials implemented a new leaf blower ordinance after months of negotiations with residents, the California Landscape Contractors Association and other industry groups.

As of Jan. 1, all commercial gardeners must be certified by the Palo Alto Police Department to operate any type of leaf blower. In a letter to Palo Alto residents, Assistant Police Chief Lynne Johnson ex-

Calendar of Events

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.

MAR. 20 Northwest Pennsylvania Athletic Field, Turf and Ornamentals Conference, Meadville, Pa. Contact: 8000/PSU-TODAY.

MAR. 22-25 Western New York State Nursery & Landscape Association 1st Annual Flower and Garden Show, PLANTASIA. Contact: 716/741-8047.

MAR. 23-24 Plant Health Care, Inc. Plant Biology Workshop, Frogmore, S.C. Contact: 888/290-2640.

MAR. 28 California Landscape Contractors Association Construction Industry Legislative Conference, Sacramento, Calif. Contact: 800/448-2522.

MAR. 29 Mid-Atlantic Interior Landscape Conference, Collegeville, Pa. Contact: 610/489-4315

APR. 5 Adirondack Regional Conference, Lake Placid, N.Y. Contact: 518/783-1229.

APR. 7 NYSTLA Certified Landscape Technician Test, Katonah, N.Y. Contact: 914/788-6920.

MAY 4-7 International Society of Arboriculture Annual Conference, Modesto, Calif. Contact: 530/892-1118 or 650/964-7664.

MAY 19-23 American Society of Irrigation Consultants Annual National Conference, Savannah, Ga. Contact: 925/516-1124.

JUNE 7-9 Snow & Ice Management Association Symposium, Denver, Colo. Contact: 814/835-3577.

JULY 12-15 American Nursery & Landscape Association Annual Conference, Cleveland, Ohio. Contact: 202/789-2900.

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 4. Interior Landscape Design
 5. In-house Interior Contractor
 6. Grower
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 13. Trade Association, Library
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JULY 16-17 Professional Lawn Care Association Day on the Hill, Washington, D.C.

Contact: 800/458-3466.

JULY 19-22 Associated Landscape Contractors of America Summer Leadership Meeting,

Amelia Island, Fla. Contact: 800/395-2522.

JULY 20-22 Outdoor Power Equipment Show, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 502/562-1962.

JULY 24 Midwest Regional Turf Field Day, West Lafayette, Ind. Contact: 765/494-8039.

AUG. 17-19 Texas Association of Nurserymen Nursery and Landscape Expo, Dallas,

Texas. Contact: 530/458-3191

AUG 21 Cornell University Field Day, Ithaca, N.Y. Contact: 607/255-1792.

AUG. 29-SEPT. 1 CalScape Expo, Ukiah, Calif. Contact: 707/462-2276.

SEPT. 9-11 American Nursery & Landscape Association Legislative Conference,

Washington, D.C. Contact: 202/789-2900.

SEPT. 22-25 American Society of Landscape Architects Annual Meeting, Montreal,

Canada. Contact: 202/898-2444.

OCT. 3 Washington Landscape Trade Show & Field Day, Puyallup, Wash. Contact: 800/

833-2186.

OCT. 7-9 Lawn & Landscape magazine's Business Strategies Conference, Scottsdale, Ariz.

Contact: 800/456-0707.

OCT. 10-11 Southern California Turfgrass Council Turfgrass Landscape and Equipment

Expo, Pomona, Calif. Contact: 800/500-7282.

OCT. 10-11 California Association of Nurserymen Western Nursery & Garden Expo, Las

Vegas, Nev. Contact: 800/748-6214.

plained that the local police staff and representatives of the Bay Area Gardeners' Association have been training, testing and certifying commercial gardeners during the last several months.

"Gardeners have been told that they can expect citations to be issued if they are found in violation of the ordinance," Johnson said.

Blowers may be used in the city from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. The use of any type of leaf blower by anyone, including residents, is prohibited Sundays and holidays. The only exception in the ordinance for these hours of operation is for city crews who are cleaning the municipal golf courses, city, parking lots and business districts.

Additionally, professionals or homeowners cannot use leaf blowers that are not rated at 65

(continued on page 24)

Correction

The MTD Pro listing in the January Mower Buyers' Guide should have been labeled Cub Cadet Commercial. The Command Cut system is only available on the Cub Cadet Commercial line of mowers.

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USE READER SERVICE #67

Market Trends

(continued from page 21)

dBA. Blowers must have certificates indicating their dBA rating (A list of leaf blowers that will meet this standard can be found at www.lawnandlandscape.com in the news section.). Police staff will not be taking sound meter readings, but they will be checking users' equipment to determine whether blowers being used are approved.

In other news, the Texas National Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) proposed banning the morning use of all outdoor power equipment in the Houston metropolitan area.

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute argued against the ban, so the final regulation contains an exemption for contractors who submit an acceptable emission reduction plan. Homeowners and non-commercial operators of gasoline-powered outdoor equipment are exempt from the ban.

The new law will not take effect until 2005 as details relating to the type of emission reduction plans that commercial operators must submit are finalized. **LL**

Association NEWS

The **Associated Landscape Contractors of America** announced its 2001 board of directors. Drew St. John, Hillenmeyer Nurseries, president; Michael Byrne, Environmental Landscape Management, president elect; Kurt Kluznik, Yardmaster, secretary/treasurer; Emily Thompson, Advanced Lawn/Christmas Décor/Nite Time Décor, immediate past president.

The **Professional Lawn Care Association** announced its 2001 board members will be: Michael Kernaghan, Weed Man, president; John Cundiff, Turf's Up Lawn Service, vice president; Chuck McIntire, TurfPride, secretary/treasurer.

The **Ohio Nursery & Landscape Association** released the 2000-2001 edition of The Membership Yearbook & Nursery Stock Survey. The publication is a combination of ONLA's two most popular publications and serves as a tool for those interested in sources, size and quantity of Ohio-grown nursery stock. The survey features 97 Ohio nursery stock producers reporting on more than 1,750 individual plants in five distinct categories: trees and shrubs; groundcovers and vines; perennials; ferns and ornamental grasses; and aquatics, bogs and marginals. For more information, check www.onla.org or call 800/825-5062.

The **New York State Turfgrass Association** reelected Joseph Hahn to president. John Rizza was reelected to vice president and Steve Griffen was reelected to serve as secretary/treasurer.

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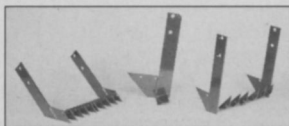
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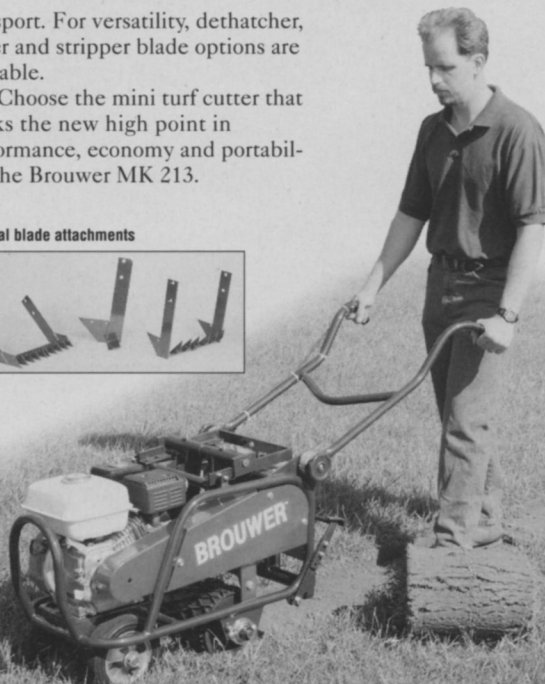
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Syngenta (continued from page 10)

explained Chuck Buffington, lawn and ornamental market manager. "By focusing in on this market, we can understand it and its needs, whether they are packaging, improved products or new products. We've got that focus."

"The other thing we're able to do is take a solutions-oriented approach," Buffington continued. "This is not a one-product company. We've got a new grub-control product coming, and we fill most of the LCO's pesticide needs."

Being bigger also means having access to bigger dollars, and Buffington this can help LCOs. "We're working with a pest forecasting group that uses models and weather maps to predict where disease or insects will occur so, in essence, an LCO can pull up the map and see that the grubs are heading his direction or that conditions are right for brown patch," he explained. "This gives that person a heads up to identify which lawns in his area are sensitive to different problems."

Don Breeze, head of turf and ornamentals for Syngenta, explained that mergers such as the union that yielded Syngenta also create greater critical mass for the turf and ornamental market, which means more research dollars. "Our product range is so broad that we want to be careful not to cannibalize our own line, but there are a lot of things we want to bring to the market, such as resistance management," he explained. "We may actually recommend a competitor's product in rotation with one of our products on occasion if that will help avoid resistance. If we can do that then we are bringing a long-term solution to the market."

An area of real interest for pesticide users is product development, Buffington confirmed. "We're seeing more of a focus on premium products with lawn and landscape professionals," he observed. "Performance counts more now than ever, and LCOs are somewhat more willing to pay for perfor-

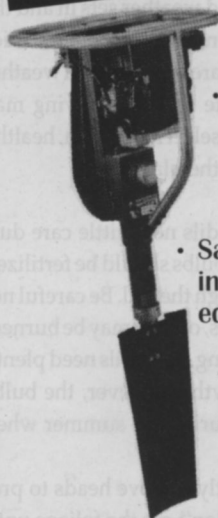
mance because they are figuring out that customer retention is the key. Getting a new customer to replace the one I lost because of poor product performance costs more than paying up front for better products."

Buffington also said LCOs can expect to see more "reduced-risk" products entering the market because "the only products getting through the EPA right now are reduced risk or organophosphate replacements." That presents greater challenges to manufacturers who must deliver safer products with increasing performance characteristics.

"We think the things we can bring to the LCO are going to be value added because having efficacy is really the entry level for playing in this business today," added Breeze. "There are a lot of 'me-too' products on the market, and everyone expects that whatever they buy will work pretty well. So we're trying to look at what else we can do, such as the pest forecasting group."

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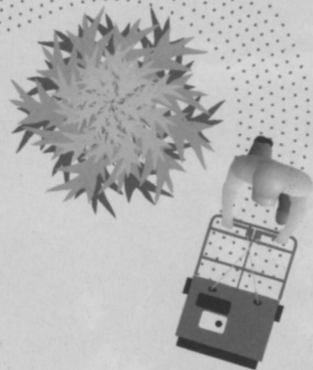
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Nursery Market Report

THINK SPRING

Daffodil Days

One of the telltale signs that spring has arrived is when daffodils begin to rear their delicate, yellow heads. Daffodils, which belong to the genus *Narcissus*, frequently appear in beds, borders, under trees and shrubs or in pots.

Few plants give as much pleasure with as little effort as daffodils. They are some of the most vigorous, colorful spring flowers, and with good drainage, these plants thrive in most soils, though they prefer medium-heavy loam.

While daffodils are fairly low maintenance, they do require some tender loving care in the landscape. Here are some care and planting guidelines from University Outreach and Extension, University of Missouri-Columbia.

PREPARING FOR DAFFODILS. Drainage, light, soils, fertilization, planting location and timing are key issues when using daffodils in the landscape.

Drainage. Daffodils need good drainage. Bulbs planted in poorly drained locations become weakened, fail to flower and often develop bulb rots. Bulbs in locations that remain moist during summer when soils are warm develop rots easily. If drainage cannot be improved, raised beds should be built for the daffodils.

Light. Daffodils must have sunlight to develop and flower each year. Plant them where they can get at least a half day of sunlight, and avoid north sides of buildings.

Soils. Because of their need for well-drained conditions, daffodils grow poorly in tight soils that have poor internal drainage – even in locations with good surface drainage.

Light soils generally will not need many amendments, but add liberal quantities of coarse sand and some organic material such as peat moss or leaf mold in heavy, clay soils. In tight soil, as much as six bushels of organic material per 100 square feet of bed area may be added.

Fertilization. Daffodils do not require heavy fertilization. When preparing beds, incorporate 2 to 3 pounds of a complete fertilizer, such as a 5-10-5, into 100 square feet of soil along with sand and organic material. Packaged bulb food also works well.

When planting bulbs in clumps rather than beds, use about a handful of fertilizer per dozen bulbs. Be sure to mix the fertilizer thoroughly with the soil. Never place it directly in the bottom of the hole – a high fertilizer concentration can kill newly emerging roots and promote bulb rots.

Location. Daffodils are suitable for planting in shrub borders, perennial beds and among certain ground covers. They should be planted in groups of three to 12 bulbs of one variety for the best effect.

Daffodils are especially suitable for planting in front of evergreens that provide background and wind protection. Also, keep in mind that daffodils planted near a building foundation in a southern exposure or those on a southern slope generally flower earlier than the same variety in another location.

Timing. Daffodils must have time to develop a good root system before cold weather sets in and the soil freezes. For this reason, planting before mid-October is generally best. In areas where cold weather arrives late, planting as late as Thanksgiving may still give good results. Also, select large, firm, healthy bulbs to get the most from the planting.

DAFFODIL CARE. Daffodils need little care during the spring. Established bulbs should be fertilized lightly as leaves come through the soil. Be careful not to get fertilizer on new leaves, or they may be burned.

During and after flowering, daffodils need plenty of moisture for active growth. However, the bulbs should remain fairly dry during the summer when they are dormant.

After flowering, promptly remove heads to prevent seed production, but don't cut the foliage until it dies down naturally. The leaves manufacture food that is stored in the bulb, which helps produce flowers the following year. The longer the foliage lasts, the better the blooms will be the following year. **LI**

Daffodils need plenty of sunlight to thrive in the landscape. Plant daffodils where they can get at least a half day of sunlight, and avoid north sides of buildings.



THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Hire Slow, Fire Quick

Many lawn and landscape professionals probably wish they had used the concept of hiring slowly at least once or twice during their business pasts. Perhaps spending more time interviewing job applicants would have prevented some contractors from hiring someone who turned out to be the worst employee imaginable.

But many contractors are uncomfortable during the interview process, even when they are the ones asking the questions. To make matters worse, this awkward feeling is typically accompanied by a sense of urgency due to the immediate need for personnel. Bill Hoopes, director of training, development and regulatory affairs for Scotts

LawnService, Marysville, Ohio, said that interviews naturally create a sense of uneasiness for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Both parties are trying to learn about the other party, while simultaneously providing information about themselves, he pointed out.

Hoopes explained that contractors can take some simple steps to alleviate any job applicant tension and actually use the interview process as a means for attracting potential employees. In fact, if the interview process is given adequate attention and approached seriously, contractors may be able to eliminate the need to "fire quick."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS MATTER. The interview process starts long before the actual interview takes place, Hoopes explained. "The first mistake contractors make when interviewing job applicants is that they aren't consistent in terms of how they advertise jobs and how they present jobs or their companies," he explained. "People show up for an interview because they've heard good things about your company or read an ad that offered an exciting description, but then they get to the office and there's a pile of cigarette butts by the door."

Such a negative impression gives the interview process

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Labor Solutions

a black eye and may even convince the applicant to leave before interviewing for the job. Cleaning up the office is a good first step toward making an employee-friendly impression on job applicants.

When a potential hire does walk through the door for an interview, Hoopes said the first person he or she meets upon entering the office plays a critical role.

"The interviewer should let the receptionist know that a job candidate is coming into the office, and provide the person's name and interview time," Hoopes recommended. "Now, when this nervous person shows up, they are greeted with a smile by someone who says, 'Oh, you must be Bob.'"

Such a greeting can make job applicants more comfortable and hopeful about the job.

Hoopes said all potential hires should fill out applications before interviews, and he also has each applicant spend 10 minutes taking a brief quiz that highlights necessary job skills. "We want our employees to have written communication with clients, so I ask each applicant some written questions, such

as how to calculate the square footage of a yard, to evaluate their skills," he said.

This quiz and the applicant's resume should be scrutinized when evaluating the candidate's qualifications. "Look for gaps in time or inconsistencies in the resume," he recommended. "If the applicant graduated from school in 1997 and lists a job that started in 1999, ask them what they did in 1998."

In addition to probing resume information, Hoopes recommended asking questions focused on the applicant's past experience because "experience is the best indicator of future performance." Avoid questions that can be answered with a yes or a no, he noted, and try to use the interview to figure out how valuable the applicant could be to your organization for the short term and how much long-term potential he or she has.

Hoopes said he spends about 30 minutes with good applicants and less with interviewees who he won't hire. "The first two minutes of the interview should be spent explaining the position you're hiring for because you should never assume they know this," he pointed out.

"Then spend about 10 minutes asking questions about the applicant's background, looking for a place he or she fits in your company.

"If they're not a good fit, end the interview right there instead of wasting any more time," he continued. "If you think this is a good fit, spend another 10 minutes answering questions they have about the job or the company."

Asking the last question and escorting the applicant out of the office doesn't necessarily end the interview, however. Hoopes recommended companies develop an interview evaluation form to complete immediately after each interview. "Use these sheets to record the salient facts of the applicant," he explained. "If you like someone but they don't take the job, call them back four weeks later and see if they're happy with their decision." — Bob West **L**

For a list of recommended interview questions and questions to avoid asking, check out the expanded online version of this story in the March issue at www.lawnandlandscape.com

The Spade



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THE SYNERGISTIC SOLUTION

Topdressing Turf

The efficient application of any product is important to remain profitable, but compost requires special handling due to its bulky nature.

When it comes to topdressing turf after aeration (a practice we all know we should do more often), spreading a thin layer of compost over the surface of turf has been challenging to do effectively or efficiently.

There is no argument among turf professionals that aeration and topdressing should be done at least yearly on most turf, yet many companies ignore this part of their program even though it is a perfect way to add valuable organic matter to the soil profile once the turf is established.

APPLICATION EFFICIENCY ISSUES. Manual application of composts or compost blends does not make for an exciting day. It is hard work, and the results are as good as the quality control of the individual on the end of the rake.

But spreaders allow contractors to topdress more easily. In effect, the equipment makes the concept of selling topdressing real and gives contractors another service to offer. And instead of breaking even due to the high cost of manual application, contractors can now actually realize profit from compost work.

NUTRIENTS: LESS IS MORE. The nutrients delivered via topdressing are not to be ignored. Organic lawn care programs using compost and topdressing are starting to take root in many areas where nutrient compost is available. Until now, the barrier has been application of materials. Many of these programs are three-step programs that deliver less than the required 6 to 8 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, but they still deliver good results due to the physical and biological benefits received from compost.

For instance, a single application of compost used as topdressing can provide about 2 pounds of available nitrogen, released over the entire growing season, as the plant requires it. And one of the main benefits about the nutrients in compost is that they rarely burn because the majority of the nitrogen is contained in the organic form and must be converted to available nitrogen prior to being used by the plant. This conversion

requires warm temperatures, moisture and microbes to do the work, so it won't take place until the compost has been applied to the soil.

The micronutrients in compost also help and compost has long been known to help reduce thatch and a host of diseases associated with heavy thatch buildup.



SELLING THE PACKAGE. Scott Jacobsen, president, Quality Cuts, Arnold, Md., first purchased a spreader last summer after the third straight year of drought. He was having some success using compost

for turf repair and establishment, so we wanted a better way to do this work. Jacobsen was successful enough to pay for the entire machine last year.

Jacobsen works with about 50 lawns a year, and he has found that topdressing actually helps him sell other parts of the program. "When customers' lawns look good, they seem to be more inclined to go with a shrub or perennial package or mulching," he said. "But when their lawn is dead from the drought, they are not interested in anything."

Quality Cuts' renovation program includes: de-thatching; aeration; over-seeding; and topdressing with a biosolid compost because of its high nitrogen content.

Now that Jacobsen's lawns have been compared to conventional programs for three years, he sees an edge. "There is no comparison during a drought," he explained. "Our lawns stay alive while the other lawns have a significant loss and need to be repaired. Using our program is easier and less expensive for the property owner instead of renovating their lawn each year after a drought. We sell a lot of programs with that comparison." — Rod Tyler

The author is a consultant with Green Horizons, Medina, Ohio, and can be reached at rodndon@gte.net.

A topdressing application of compost makes sense after aerating a lawn, and topdressing can be applied easily with the use of a spreader that attaches to commercial mowers. Photos: Rod Tyler



Insect I.D.

PLANNING AHEAD

Predicting Insect Activity

Two methods have been used to help predict when a specific pest activity should occur - Degree-Days and Plant Phenology. It is important to remember that both methods merely help predict when a pest activity will occur but neither method can predict the magnitude of the activity or potential damage.

DEGREE-DAYS. Since insect and mite pests are "cold blooded" animals, their development is slow at cool temperatures. (continued on page 32)

TARGET PEST	STAGE	DEGREE-DAYS*
Northern Masked Chafer	1 st adults	898-905
"	90% adult flight	1377-1579
Southern Masked Chafer	1 st adults	1000-1109
"	90% adult flight	1526-1679
Bluegrass billbug	1 st adult activity	280-352
"	30% adult	560-624
"	70% egg hatch	925-1035
Hairy chinch bug	1 st adult egg laying	198-252
"	1 st egg hatch	522-702
Bluegrass webworm	1 st gen. adult flight	864-900
"	2 nd gen. adult flight	1900-2000
Larger sod webworm	1 st gen. adult flight	846-882
"	2 nd gen. adult flight	1980-2100
Cranberry girdler	peak adult flight	1080-1170

*using threshold base of 50 degrees F and start date of February 1 in Ohio

This chart contains examples of degree-day accumulations for several turf pests, including bluegrass billbugs, hairy chinch bugs, bluegrass webworms, larger sod webworms, cranberry girdlers, northern masked chafers and southern masked chafers. Source: Destructive Turf Insects



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USE READER SERVICE #82

Insect I.D.

(continued from page 30)

tures and faster at higher temperatures. The number of "heat units" above a baseline developmental threshold temperature an insect is exposed to each day (=Degree-Days), has a direct influence on how fast it will develop. The base line developmental temperature for most insects is considered to be 50 degrees Fahrenheit and air temperatures are often used.

The "daily average" method is most commonly used to calculate the number of heat units above 50 degrees F to which the pest is exposed. For example, if the low temperature for a day was 40 degrees F and the high temperature was 70 degrees F, the average temperature would be 55 degrees F $[(40 + 70)/2]$. For this day 55 degrees - 50 degrees = 5 degree-day units. When these units are added to the previous days' units, one gets the cumulative degree-day units. (When calculation yields a negative number or zero, no degree-day units are accumulated - and zero is added for that day). Once a certain number of degree-day units have been accumulated,

pest activity can be expected. The following chart contains examples of degree-day accumulations for several turf pests.

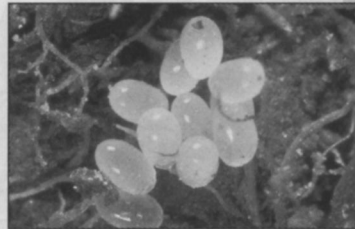
PHENOLOGICAL INDICATORS.

Apparently, certain plants and insect pests develop at similar rates, and visible or measurable events in nature (=phenological occurrences) occur at the same time. The best phenological indicators are plants that have easily observed events (e.g., bud break, flowering - beginning, full bloom, or petal drop).

We recommend development of a pho-



During the onset of full bloom in Vanhoutte spirea (left), black turfgrass ateniensis begin to lay eggs (below) for the first generation. *Insect I.D.* features excerpts from *Destructive Turf Insects* by The Ohio State University entomologists Harry Niemczyk and David Shetlar. For more information on the book, call 800/456-0707.



nological record book. Each year, record in chrono-

logical order the observable events seen and record pest activity at this time. After several years of keeping such records, it will be seen that certain plant events consistently occur in the same order and at the same time as certain pest events. Now, integrate these records into your Pest Spectrum and Target Calendar and you really have a useful tool. **U**

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USE READER SERVICE #24

In Minor's League

Editor's

NOTE

I think my business is ready to expand geographically. Can you give me some insight on what things I should pay particular attention to?

Geographic expansion is a logical move to make if you want to grow your business. As I mentioned in last month's column however, make sure you have the systems and infrastructure in place to make it work. Assuming you do, here are some things to consider.

The most important issue pertains to your staffing of the branch. Needless to say, you want a manager that you are extremely comfortable with. This individual will be the key to your company's ability to expand.

I strongly suggest promoting from within your organization for this position as opposed to going outside your company. Having a loyal associate who you know well and who understands your corporate culture is an absolute necessity for your first branch. Hiring outside of



In addition to serving the industry as a consultant and speaker, David Minor is the William M. Dickey Entrepreneur in Residence and director of the James A. Ryffel Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. Prior to joining TCU,

David was the president of Minor's Landscape Services, a \$300 employee, former INC. 500 award-winning company he founded in 1978 and sold to TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1998. Readers with questions for Minor can fax them to Lawn & Landscape at 216/961-0364 or e-mail them to bwest@lawnandlandscape.com.

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USE READER SERVICE #25

In Minor's League

the company is just too risky. The compensation structure for this individual is also important. Make sure this manager has incentives in place that reward based on quantifiable success for his or her branch. Be specific about what is important and reward him or her for successfully accomplishing goals.

The reporting mechanism you have in place for the branch is also important. At minimum, I suggest requiring a weekly management report that allows you to monitor key success factors in this business. The information contained in this report would need to include things like sales data for the branch, staffing updates, customer additions and cancellations, and depending on whether you central or decentralize your accounting system, some type of financial report.

This data should be submitted to you in a timely fashion, and you must commit to reviewing it and providing feedback to your manager right away. This may seem obvious, but how you as a leader manage your branch from the home office will probably be different that what you are accustomed to.

So developing your own leadership skills and having the right reporting mechanisms in place is going to be very important.

Another key success factor pertains to the development of your corporate culture in the branch. Make this a priority for your branch

Geographic expansion is a logical move to make if you want to grow your business.

manager and hold him or her accountable. I could write a book on developing your culture - suffice to say, it is important.

That means you must be involved in the development of the culture. In fact, as the business grows, this may be your single most important responsibility. If you promote your company's mission and values at every op-

portunity, it becomes second nature to your employees and they will live it daily. You must, however, make this a top priority.

There are numerous other logistical and tactical issues to consider as well when branching out geographically, such as locating the branch. Conduct a thorough evaluation of where you want to locate the branch. Ask these questions: what is the market potential? Who are your competitors? What are the seasonal or horticultural considerations you have to address? Where will your labor come from? Where will your physical facility be located?

The biggest mistake one can make is assuming that because they succeeded in one area they will automatically succeed in a new location. Obviously, you hope that everything you have in place is transferable, but each market has its own idiosyncrasies that must be addressed.

The bottom line is to do a thoughtful evaluation of all the above. Don't shoot from the hip, plan carefully and your chances at success will improve. **LL**



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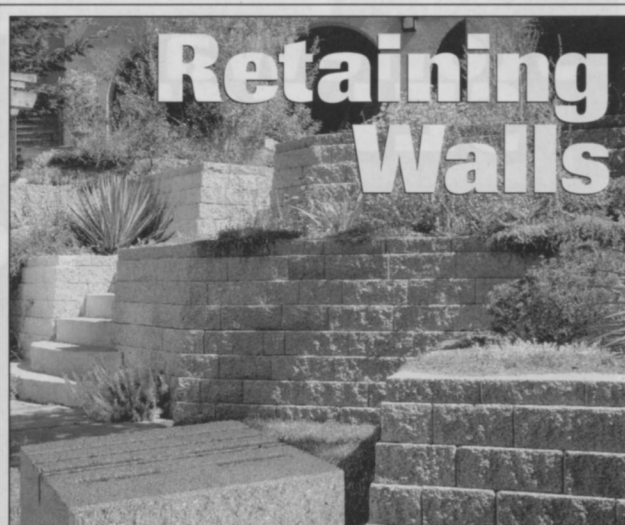
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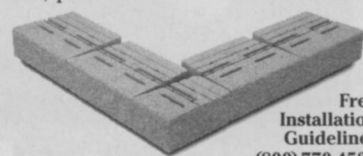
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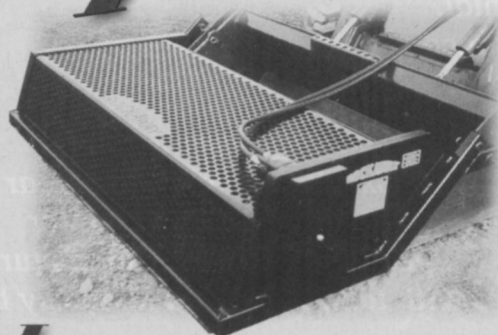


Setting up a straightforward compensation program makes sense even for a smaller company with a minimal amount of employees. Carl Rantzow, owner, Selkirk Lawn & Landscape, Spokane, Wash., learned this firsthand at his \$300,000 operation. For his eight full-time employees, "we have put in writing exactly what compensation they can expect where they're at, at their skill levels," he described. This up-front approach to compensation lets employees know what they need to do to reach the next pay range and that their efforts will eventually be rewarded, he added.

Having requirements and expectations in writing can be a helpful management tool, since it tends to separate the goal-oriented employees from those who are just showing up for work every day, according to Rantzow. "Some people want to have a place to work with no hassles and that's the end of it," he described. "Others want to make a career of it." A clear compensation program benefits more motivated employees by demonstrating how performance is tied to wages and gives them incentive to better themselves, Rantzow added. "Those

(continued on page 43)

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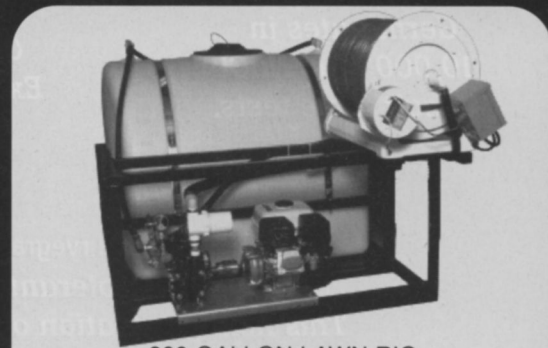
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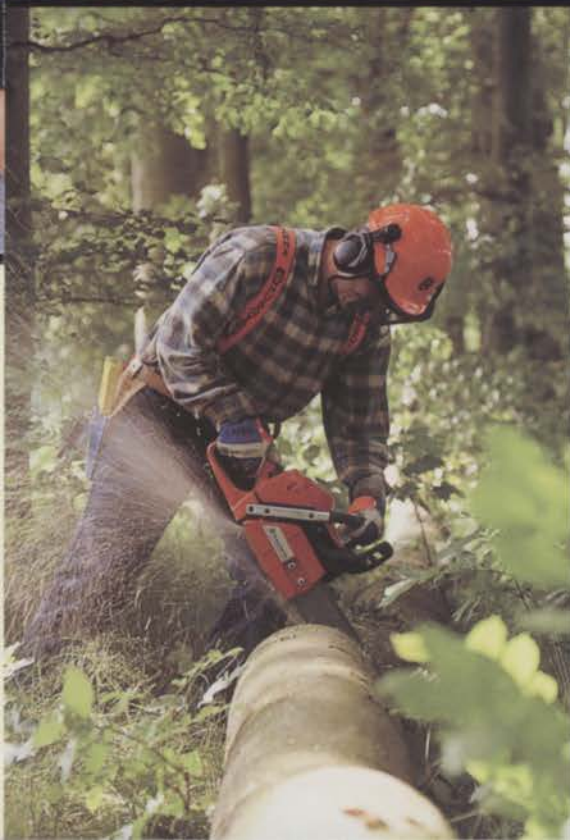




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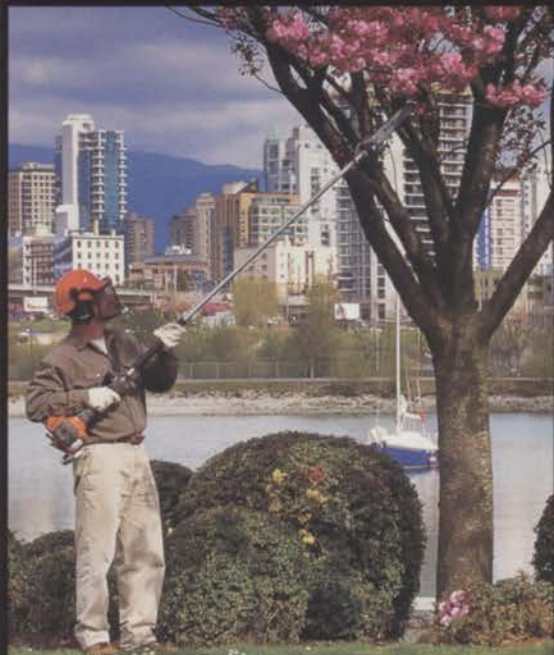
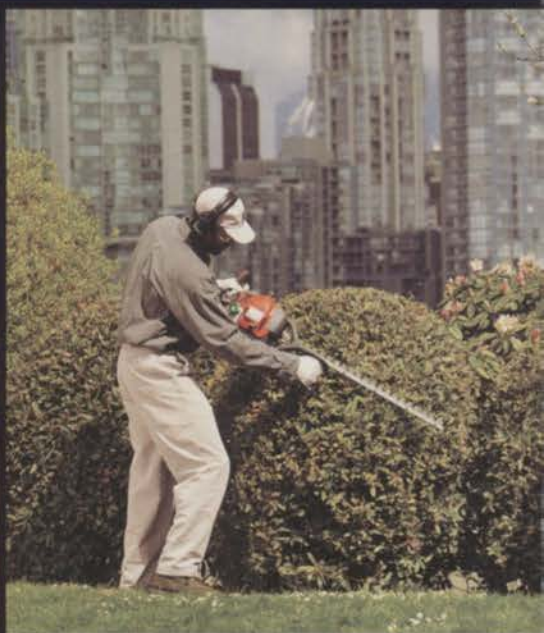
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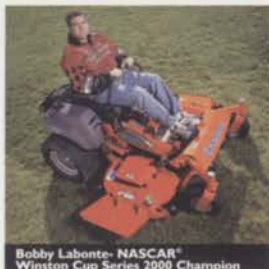
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VOLT TECH IGNITION - New technology on many of our saws. Ignition timing is retarded for easier starting. The ignition also senses when the saw comes under load and advances timing to give maximum engine torque while in the cut.

Test the Husqvarna® model 350 versus the competition's 50cc model in the square log test. The square log ensures that the thickness is constant and that the stability of the cutting surface is not a factor. The Husqvarna 350 is lighter, faster and better. Equipped with

Air Injection for longer, stronger running between filter cleanings, Smart Start® decompression valve, and LowVib® anti-vibration system, the 350 is tough to beat. Try the square log test yourself. Experience what it's like to hold a real chain saw in your hands!



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Minding Your Business

(continued from page 36)

people that want to move forward, take initiative and get educated will be rewarded."

Having this information in writing also alleviates confusion or charges of favoritism. "If an employee is just waiting for an employer to give him a raise, there are a lot of different things that come into play," Rantow pointed out, noting that formal policies also make him a more accountable manager. "If you put it in writing, you're not going to change it," he said. "These guidelines put employees in control of how much they're making."

FOR EXAMPLE... Here are a few examples of Rantow's guidelines, which are broken down into three levels. These let employees know what is expected of them and what they need to do to advance, he described.

Laborer/Helper (\$6.50 - \$8.50 an hour)
Minimum requirements: Must be willing to work hard. Does not need any previous landscape experience but must have a good work

history. Must follow directions well, have a valid drivers' license and pass a drug test.

Continued development: Carry out the tasks he is asked to do. The main objective is to work hard, be to work on time, wear company shirt and find out how each service (e.g. mowing, aeration, etc.) is expected to be carried out.

Landscaper Level 1 (\$8.50 - \$11 an hour plus basic medical)
Minimum requirements: Has a minimum of six months experience with Selkirk or one year with another commercial landscaping company. Has helped with mowing, pruning, spring or fall cleanup, core aeration, power raking and shrub bed maintenance. Must be able to complete all phases of mowing unsupervised and be able to effectively maneuver truck and trailer. Must know location and procedures for all dumping sites.

Continued development: Should take initiative to further own development and initiate

opportunities to learn from the people he is working with, from books and other sources. He should be continually refining his skills to become faster and more efficient.

Landscaper Level 2 (\$11 - \$14 an hour plus basic medical)
Minimum requirements: Has at least two years experience with Selkirk or five years with another commercial landscape company. Must have at least one of the following: pesticide applicator license; arborist or landscape technician certification; or two-year horticultural degree. Must be able to carry out all services on own and effectively manage a laborer; should be able to identify all perennials, shrubs and trees.

Continued development: Should continue own education on plants, pesticides, hardware and equipment and set a good example by offering help, training and setting high standards of punctuality and morale.

- Cynthia Greenleaf

LL

We want to know what smaller contractors are thinking. Send comments and ideas for future "Minding Your Business" topics to bwest@lawnandlandscape.com or fax 216/961-0364.



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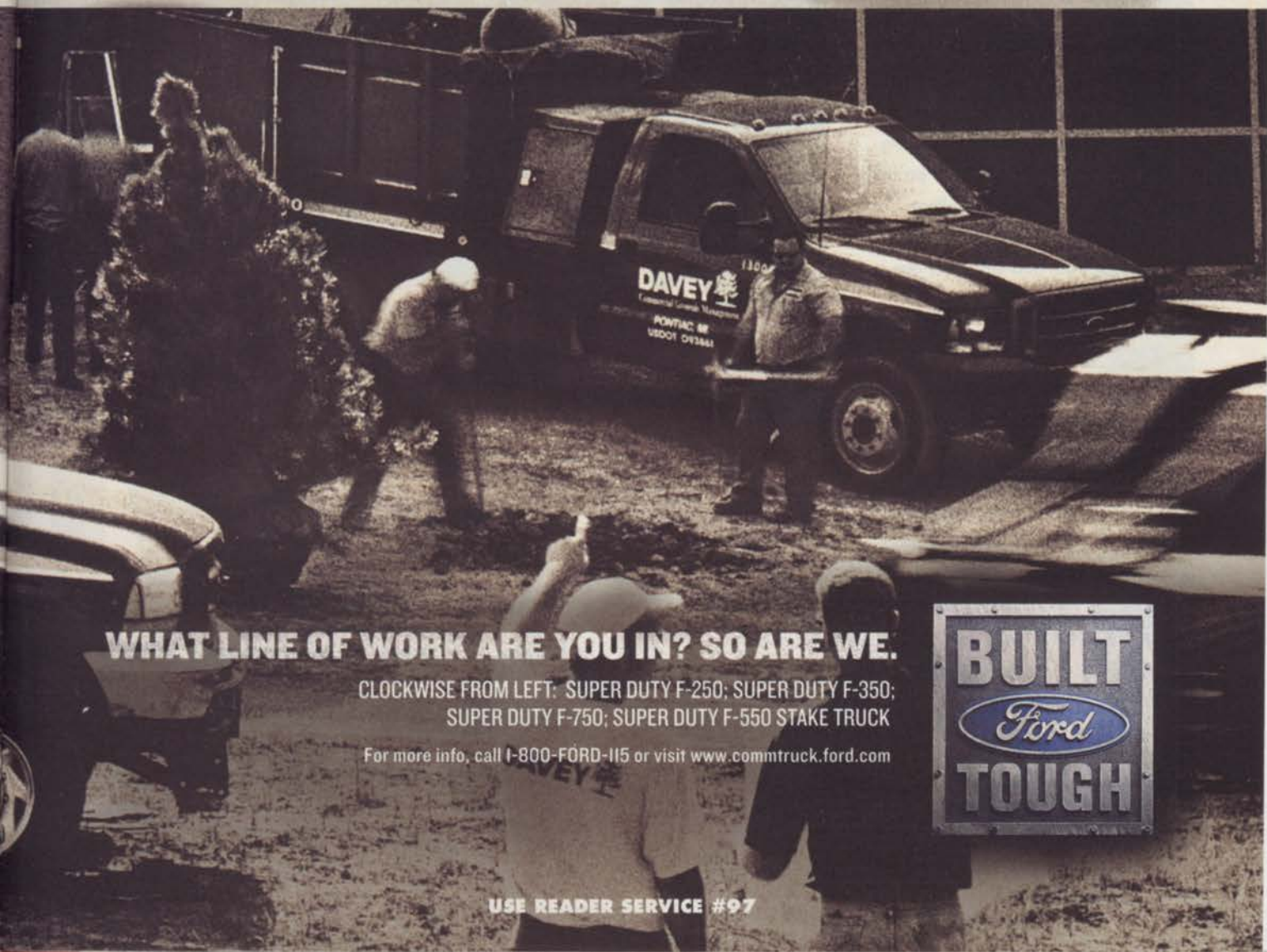


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USE READER SERVICE #97

by Bob West

HERBI-SYSTEMS

HEADQUARTERS: Bartlett, Tenn.

FOUNDED: October 1984

2001 ESTIMATE REVENUE:

\$2.75 million

SERVICE MIX: 60 percent of the revenue comes from residential customers, 30 percent from commercial/industrial and 10 percent from government/municipal. Fifty-eight percent of Herbi-Systems' work lawn care work, while 40 percent is industrial vegetation management and 2 percent is trees and ornamentals.

EMPLOYEES: 23 year-round, 2 seasonal

EQUIPMENT: 15 spray vehicles and 2 maintenance vehicles. Two aerators and four all-terrain vehicle spray rigs.

THE COMPANY

MISSION STATEMENT: We do the job right so you don't have to.

FUTURE CHALLENGES: Being able to balance growth and profitability while maintaining excellent customer service and continuing to develop, train and empower our employees.

THE OWNERS

KENNY CRENSHAW

CARL QUICK

LEE BARCLAY

Crenshaw founded the company in 1984 and remains the majority owners. Crenshaw graduated from Mississippi State University with a degree in agricultural engineering. Over the years, he has allowed Quick and Barclay to acquire minority positions in the company.

**At a
Glance**



The Of **King** MEMPHIS

Herbi-Systems is confronting new challenges in order to remain enthroned as one of the leading lawn care companies in Memphis.



ggs PHITS

Herbi-Systems' managers are quick to credit their technicians for giving the company an edge in the local market, especially since many of the employees have worked at the company for more than five years. Photo: Gary Walpole

Kenny Crenshaw thinks that after 16 years, Herbi-Systems is now an "overnight success."

The truth is that he never expected to build a lawn care company. The president of this 16-year-old firm in Memphis, Tenn., has an agriculture degree and was doing grounds maintenance for another company that eliminated his job after losing a big contract.

"The guy I was working for told me he thought lawn care would take off and that we should get into that work, so we did," Crenshaw remembered.

The company's beginnings were anything but glamorous. "I was living at home and I wasn't married, and I don't think we took any money out of the company for two years – not even a salary," he recalled. "I did other jobs to make money, and when I did start taking a salary it was only \$100 a week."

Today, Herbi-Systems is one of the leading lawn care companies in Memphis, and Crenshaw, his general manager Carl Quick, and his industrial vegetation management manager Lee Barclay find themselves turning a company into a real business to ensure its continued success.

Herbi-Systems

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THE EARLY DAYS. Crenshaw has vivid memories of Herbi-Systems' first few years in business, and they weren't glamorous times. "The market was starting to take off, ChemLawn was doing a lot of advertising locally and we got the crumbs from under the table that it didn't want," he noted. "When you're starting out, you have to take all of the work and junk contracts that no one wants, like the smaller, \$1,000 government contracts that you have to bid. Then you have to try to make lemonade out of lemons."

Making a profit in these early years challenged the company, but Herbi-Systems didn't want to earn contracts just because it had the lowest price. "We tried to avoid low prices because companies that start out that way are going to have a tough time getting their prices up," he related. "So we looked for jobs that other companies didn't want because they were either low bid or more challenging. We don't deal with a lot of that low-price bid work today, but we were able to figure out a way to make money at it back then."

Herbi-Systems benefited from being in a market that included some successful lawn care companies because this gave Crenshaw the opportunity to learn from the best. "We tried to copy everything successful companies did from their program to their routing," he admitted. "If you see something you think works, copy it. But then you have

to innovate and do your own thing to build the business."

After about five years in business, Herbi-Systems started enjoying tremendous growth — up to 40 percent a year. "Today, the market is much more saturated, and we're satisfied with 10 percent growth," Crenshaw noted.

"The market today includes a lot of swapping of customers from company to company," added Quick. "We've gone from spending nothing on advertising 10 years ago to spending almost \$100,000 this year, which is 7 to 8 percent of lawn care revenue.

(continued on page 50)

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The world of industrial vegetation management (IVM) is one that many lawn care companies know about but that few explore. Minimal competition and the variety of the jobs are what drew Herbi-Systems, Memphis, Tenn., toward offering this service.

"IVM was more interesting to me than lawn care," explained Kenny Crenshaw, president. "IVM is a different town every day, and we have IVM clients in seven states, while lawn care is more local and routine."

Herbi-Systems found enough synergies between IVM and lawn care to offer both services, with lawn care representing 66 percent of sales and IVM 30 percent. "Both services require the same equipment, but IVM customers are pipelines, power companies, chemical plants and cities," Crenshaw said. "These are typically big accounts, so you become very customer driven and you go where they want you to go. We prefer to stay within two to three hours of Memphis, but that's not always feasible."

Crenshaw hopes the market for IVM work will soon grow. "A lot of municipalities have resisted herbicide use in favor of doing everything by hand, but we've established a good track record with the products we use and we're overcoming that obstacle with some people," he commented. "The problem is that governments don't want to make waves. They've got X dollars in the budget, and they'll keep doing work however they've always done it."

"Now, people are looking for governments to save money, and that means using herbicides," he continued.

Herbi-Systems dedicates employees to its IVM work in two-person crews and always strives to cover travel costs in its job bids. "These companies pay us in a timely manner, and the competition isn't as intense as in lawn care," he observed, adding that lawn care typically delivers slightly higher profit margins than IVM. "But there isn't nearly as much work to do, either, so customers are harder to find." — Bob West

Taking on Vegetation Management



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Cover Story

(continued from page 48)

But we don't spend anything marketing the vegetation management."

Regardless of Herbi-Systems' growth, Crenshaw has always maintained a long-term perspective. "I take a long view of things, and sometimes that hurts us," he related. "Any time I do something, I want to know

how that will help or hurt the company in five years. We don't do things for the short term if they won't help us long term. For example, we won't buy a piece of equipment that we won't be using five years from now. Sometimes we'll even endure some immediate pain for long-term benefits.

"We might buy a piece of equipment that we don't have the work to support right now but that we'll have too much work for in five years," Quick added. "We'll buy it to get a foot in the door and get ourselves going."

Crenshaw's long-term vision resulted in a new facility, built from the ground up, five years ago, which he said was an investment in the company's future. "We have a completely self-contained facility that was unlike any other in the market when it was built," Quick described.

"The facility really helps us during the hiring process," Crenshaw noted, adding that he thought ChemLawn used to attract the best technicians in part because of its professional appearance. "When people see our nice, brick building they know we're a permanent company and that we offer more than a summer job. They know they can make a good living with us and that they'll always have a place to park and wash their truck, products will be well stored and there won't be junk all over the place."

Today, Herbi-Systems employs what Crenshaw called "the best technicians in Memphis," each handling between 500 and 700 accounts for a six-application program.

"The challenge is that we're working out of a \$500,000 facility, and we're competing against people who are operating out of their homes," Quick added. "They're using part-time labor while we're paying benefits to 23 employees. We're trying to sell quality, but our competitors can buy the same products we use. Selling quality can be tough because some people just want a decent-looking lawn, but we have to sell that quality and name recognition to get customers at a higher price."

"We also designed the facility to save wasted time, such as filling up trucks, cleaning up and doing paperwork," Quick explained. "We want our technicians working on their craft and out in the field because that's when they're making us money. So our filling area lets us load two trucks at a time with a loading dock that puts the tank level with the floor. We have water pumping in at 100 gallons per minute, and all of the products are stored right there so people aren't walking all around for products."

A MARKETING MESSAGE. Most lawn care companies do some marketing. Herbi-

(continued on page 52)



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USE READER SERVICE #66

Cover Story

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Systems wanted something different, so it turned to the radio to generate customers.

"We did live commercials on the radio, and the customers came in so fast that we could hardly keep up," Crenshaw recalled.

For the most part, the company hired a local radio personality to be the voice of the ads, such as a morning talk show host or the traffic reporter. "We wanted to use someone who could catch people's attention and who people would believe," Crenshaw explained.

Herbi-Systems has scaled back its radio advertising for more direct mail for now because radio prices got too high, although it continues advertising on a local home and garden show. "I would recommend doing that for anyone," Crenshaw related. "Those commercials don't generate a lot of leads, but it does get us some good leads."

The company is also spending more time analyzing its advertising. "We track all of our leads and ask everyone who

(continued on page 54)

A few years after founding Herbi-Systems, Kenny Crenshaw's first employee left the company to enter the ministry. This individual had gained some ownership in the company, so Crenshaw decided to buy it back from him over a three-year period.

Since that time, Crenshaw has let two other key employees acquire equity in the company, both of whom still work there. "I always thought that I wanted to own something that other people could own a piece of as well," Crenshaw explained. "A lot of people just want a place to work, but others want ownership, so you need to figure out a way to make that work. That meant we had to change the business from a partnership to a C corporation."

Crenshaw still believes in this philosophy, but he isn't certain about how widespread ownership in a company can be. "I've found out that this process is complicated and expensive, which is why most people probably don't do it," he explained, adding that owners who want to share ownership should use a good attorney.

Crenshaw and his general manager, Carl Quick, have also taken steps to protect the company in the event either of them dies unexpectedly. "We have a buy/sell agreement as well with our life insurance so that if either one of us dies the other one will be able to buy his stock," Crenshaw noted. — Bob West

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USE READER SERVICE #84

Cover Story

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calls the office how they heard about us," Quick related. "This tells us where to spend or not spend our money, when to quit spending it and when to spend more.

"We used to think we knew all about our marketing, but then we'd get to the end of the year and be surprised about where our sales came from," Quick continued, noting that weather impacts the effectiveness of different advertising methods. "Studies show that half of a company's advertising is wasted every year, so the challenge is knowing which half. We're constantly trying to chase that down and spend less in areas that aren't working and more in areas that are working."

MONEY MATTERS. Now that the popularity of lawn care work has attracted so many new companies into the industry and the company's growth has slowed, Herbi-Systems finds itself spending more time on business management issues that didn't seem as important in the past. So while Quick

focuses on managing the lawn care work and Barclay oversees the vegetation management, Crenshaw focuses on the financial side of the business, oversees advertising and works to grow the vegetation management. Additional difficulty stems from the fact that each of these three key managers has an agricultural background instead of a financial base.


"There aren't too many chiefs at this place, but sometimes we probably have too few of them," Quick recognized. "We used to be growing so fast that we just had to get the work done. The work was so easy to get that we didn't have to worry about sales or marketing.

"That would have been a good time for us to learn the business part of the company so we could run it better then and now," Quick observed. "Then we could've been marketing the right way and been prepared for the more challenging times. Now, we'd like to get more profitable through increased efficiency so we can keep our wages up and pay more than our competitors pay. To do that,

we have to provide the best service so our customers are willing to pay us more. That all leads to a quality company.

"Sometimes it leaves us longing for the old days of going out and doing the work," Quick continued. "But, as you grow, you have to move from the guy doing the work to the guy figuring out how to get the work done."

"We need more foresight now as our company gets bigger," Crenshaw confirmed.

"We could've been more bottom-line oriented and squeezed more out of the organization, but everything isn't always about money," Crenshaw concluded. "We're different than a lot of companies because we service and maintain our own equipment. We seldom send anything out for repairs unless it's a specialized repair. That may not make us the most profitable company, but it helps keep employees all year." 

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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by Cynthia Greenleaf

Cindy Sutherland, president, Sutherland Landscape, Debary, Fla., landed her first commercial installation job in 1990 and has since grown her company into a \$650,000 operation with million-dollar potential.

IN FOCUS. Commercial installation work is Sutherland's forte, and recognizing this from the beginning has been her secret to success. Compared to residential work, where the "homeowner wants you to wine and dine them, hold their hand and explain everything," Sutherland has found commercial work to be a no-hassle, straightforward experience, she said.

From paperwork and safety meetings to financial rewards and scheduling ease, Sutherland simply loves commercial work, she said. "You don't have to worry about the money and you are guaranteed a six-month lead time before you even get there."

Doing her own irrigation work, in particular, has helped her secure a niche with local general contractors, who prefer to work with a versatile landscape contractor who can do both installation and irrigation, Sutherland said. "General contractors won't split the two - they always want to keep the commercial contracts together," she explained.

Establishing solid relationships with local builders has allowed Sutherland to pick and choose which jobs she takes on. "We don't work for everybody - just a little clique of builders," she said.

The key to establishing these relationships is constant professionalism - from being efficient and dependable to emphasizing quality and meeting customer expectations, she added. "People I've worked for like me because we do what we say we're going to do," she described. "Our word is good."

For a landscape contractor working with builders who are often in a state of panic, getting in and out of a job site efficiently is paramount, Sutherland observed. Her company has capitalized on its ability to do this well, she added.

(continued on page 58)

Sutherland Landscape has found its niche providing installation and irrigation services to general contractors throughout central Florida.

For Cindy Sutherland, being a woman in a predominantly male industry has never been an issue. "When you're bidding jobs, (general contractors) don't know if you're a woman or a man," she observed. "They really just care about the numbers."



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USE READER SERVICE #54

First Look

(continued from page 56)

Sutherland recalled one job with the kind of adrenaline-pumping deadline she thrives on. A late-October shopping center installation job needed to be finished in a tight time frame, since the two on-site owls mated Nov. 1 and couldn't be disturbed by the project, she described. Sutherland's challenge was to get in and out, installing a 12-zone irrigation system and full landscape in just a few weeks, so the owls would remain undisturbed during their annual rendezvous. "That was the quickest we ever had to do a job, and it was perfect," Sutherland remembered. "We had four days to do an entire irrigation system."

Extreme organization aids in the company's quick turnarounds. When trucks deliver plant material, for example, drivers know exactly where to unload. Plants are then marked with different colored flags to indicate variety and planting location. "Crape myrtle might be blue and hollies might be red, for example," Sutherland related. This is just one of many systems that ensure jobs run



Sutherland Landscape's crew prides itself on its organization and efficiency.

Photo: Cindy Sutherland

smoothly. "I've always been over-organized," she admitted. "I try to work out everything in my mind ahead of time."

LESSONS LEARNED. After more than a decade as a smaller contractor, Sutherland has gleaned plenty of wisdom on successfully navigating a business in the landscape industry. As a smaller contractor, she realizes the importance of setting up systems in every aspect of her business. This means always working with a contract, no matter how straightforward or simple the job ap-

pears. "Get it in writing, even if it's on a piece of scratch paper," she advised.

While she has never lost money on a job, "which is a hard thing for someone to say after 11 years," Sutherland remembered a few close calls when a contract came in handy.

She was installing irrigation and landscaping for one general contractor's three commercial sites and discovered that the builder failed to provide a water source. With no way to water the plant material, Sutherland eliminated her liability by having both the

(continued on page 63)



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In a time when more and more products are disappearing from your arsenal, Bayer is investing time and resources to keep the products you trust on the market. The Bayer product line is equipped with several tools that our customers trust to provide excellent control of their pest problems – Merit® Insecticide, Tempo® Insecticide, Dylox® Insecticide and Bayleton® Fungicide. During this time of turmoil, turf and ornamental professionals can count on Bayer's solid product line as a lifeboat.

Our guiding factor in product development and support is you, the customer, and we are constantly looking for new uses for our existing products. When we heard about the need for a better way to

control *Pyricularia grisea*, the fungus that causes gray leaf spot disease, we worked with researchers at the University of Kentucky and Penn State University to refine our recommendations for controlling the disease with Bayleton 50 Fungicide. And now, we are proud to also offer Compass – with its proven performance against gray leaf spot – in our arsenal against the devastating disease.

Similarly, when turf and ornamental professionals told us about the need for a solution for insects on fruit and nut trees in residential areas, we undertook research to evaluate the efficacy of Merit. As a result, the Merit label now includes apple, pear, pecan, grape and other urban fruit trees. Because of our customers' success and comfort in using Merit, we will continue to research new uses for this incredible product.

Even in the face of potential pitfalls, we stand behind our products. Last year, when organophosphates came under regulatory scrutiny of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, we worked diligently to re-register Dylox Insecticide (trichlorfon) to keep it available because of its importance to our customers as a curative treatment for white grubs.

New Business Models

Although great products are vital to successfully navigating the course, they are only half of the equation. Just as following an old map will lead to missed destinations, so too will following the same business models year after year. In fact, the "competition based on price" model that carried many of us through the

20th century is no longer viable.

Bayer offers two new programs to help increase your customer base and your income from current customers, as well as fostering customer loyalty and boosting employee satisfaction.

Offer Something Better

The key to doing this is to differentiate yourself from the competition. Bayer offers the perfect tool for doing just that – the Merit Guarantee for Grub Control, the first and only guarantee of its kind. Turf and ornamental professionals can use this to deepen customer relationships and protect their downside financial risk.

The Merit Guarantee for Grub Control offers repayment for retreatment if grubs break through the spring or summer Merit treatment. If white grubs actively damage turf treated with Merit during fall 2001, Bayer will provide a rebate on up to 7 percent of the

total acres the customer treated with Merit. For complete information, call Bayer Professional Care at 800-842-8020.

Turf and ornamental professionals can extend a guarantee to their residential and commercial customers, instilling a greater sense of confidence in their grub control efforts. In this way, you can reduce retreats with a program customers highly value and will be willing to pay extra for. Knowing they will receive reimbursement if Merit doesn't work assures turf managers that their budgets have been wisely spent.

Building Partnerships

In addition to the Merit Guarantee, Bayer offers another business model to help improve employee satisfaction and to reward loyal customers. Bayer Accolades™ is an innovative rewards program that can be used to benefit both employees and the bottom line.

There is much talk these days about forming strong partnerships. Yet the weakness in many of these partnerships is that they are often one-sided. When we created Bayer Accolades, we made sure each partner benefited from the partnership. When you buy Bayer products, we, of course, benefit, and we wanted to make sure your benefit extends beyond the purchase. That's why we talked to turf and ornamental professionals like you to find out

what kinds of rewards would help them succeed. And, that's why the Bayer Accolades rewards include technology to help you in your office, logo apparel and recreational equipment to help you enjoy your time off.

Receiving these rewards is easy. Turf and ornamental professionals who purchase Bayer products for lawn care, golf course and commercial turf treatments earn points for each purchase of Bayer products. Professionals then trade their points for valuable rewards, chosen especially for the turf care professional. Not only can these rewards help enhance your business, but also they can be used as employee incentives to increase productivity and morale.



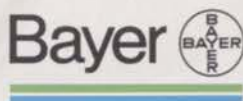
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(continued from page 58)

project's superintendent and manager sign a piece of paper indicating that she was not responsible for dead plants. "I said, 'I am not guaranteeing any material without an automatic irrigation system,'" Sutherland recalled, adding that the general contractor eventually refit the system and she didn't lose any money.

In her experience, Sutherland also has learned the importance of keeping her employees happy and letting them know they're valued – an especially critical move in a tight labor market. While her company's work is concentrated in central Florida, Sutherland will mix in an out-of-town trip periodically to give her crew a change of scenery and break the monotony of "doing tract home after tract home," she related.

Sutherland also gets creative with employee appreciation gestures, which pay off in crew member loyalty and longevity, she observed. For one Spanish-speaking employee's year anniversary, she rented a

limo and an interpreter and took everyone out to dinner to celebrate, she recalled.

She encouraged and financially assisted another employee, Charley Barker, with earning his irrigation license. At 18 years old, he is now the youngest person in the state of Florida to be certified in irrigation.

ALWAYS IMPROVING. As a manager, learning to let go of responsibilities has been one of Sutherland's biggest challenges. "I try to micromanage too much," she admitted, noting that she's trying to get out of the mindset that she's "the only one who can do it right."

Sutherland recently addressed this issue by hiring a field superintendent to take over many of the day-to-day activities that get in the way of growing the business, such as running crews and supervising jobs. Between doing the payroll, taxes, hiring and bidding, "I'm really doing two full-time jobs," Sutherland observed.

"It used to be cool to have a 'boy' job, but the novelty has worn off," she added. "I don't want to be out there driving a trencher. I want to be in the office, bidding and bringing in work."

Like many smaller, growing contractors, Sutherland has reached a point where wearing all the proverbial hats in the business, while once advantageous, is now detrimental. Adding an additional layer of management with a new field superintendent will help Sutherland refine her focus on securing work – a move that should easily increase her annual revenue into the \$1.2 million range by year's end, she predicted.

"Right now, I'll bid a lot of work and stop and go do it," she described. "Then I'll come back, bid a lot of work and then stop and go do it. If I just bid continually, however, I could do four times the work." **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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USE READER SERVICE #136

Soil Basics

by Nicole Wisniewski

As far as landscape aesthetics are concerned, soil is just the rich, dark bottom framing the view.

But for landscape contractors who want their clients to have more than a mental image of the perfect landscape, soil health cannot be overlooked.

Even though soil testing and improvements are not substitutes for premium varieties, fine weather and proper plant maintenance, they remain useful tools for sustaining quality turf and plant material.

Contractors first must care for the soil that feeds the landscape if they are going to properly maintain, fertilize and grow lush plants. Discovering – rather than guessing – the soil's ingredients is the first step.

LIKE A SPONGE. Soil is defined as “a complex medium of organic and inorganic materials providing water and nutrients for plant growth and development,” according to John Street, extension agronomist, Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio,

In most lawns, the basic inorganic soil elements are silt, clay and sand, pointed out Richard Pete, president, Planet Green, Charlotte, Vt.

“The percentages, by weight, of each of these three components are used to determine the texture of the soil,” Street said, explaining that organic matter is the remains of the previous plant growth in the soil and generally ranges from 2 to 4 percent in most Ohio lawns. “Soil nutrients needed by turfgrass and other plants are retained on the surfaces of soil particles and organic matter called exchange sites. The total number of nutrient exchange sites is referred to as the Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC) of the soil. The higher the CEC value, the richer the soil is in the contents of nutrients.” (see “Soil Test Interpretation” on page 74).

(continued on page 68)

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USE READER SERVICE #140

Soil Basics

(continued from page 66)

Soil microbes digest organic matter, creating humus, which is a characteristic of perfect loam soil. Humus, according to Pete, is a basic soil element that can only be manufactured by healthy soil. It is also the element most neglected by contractors.

Landscape contractors who know nothing about soil are like doctors who know nothing about nutrition, Pete remarked. "What's happening above ground isn't always more important than what's happening below ground," he said. "Without healthy soil, healthy plants aren't possible."

But before contractors rush to achieve healthy, loam soil on their clients' properties, they should examine its appearance and texture. One way for contractors to see and feel healthy soil is to go into a forest and pull back the top soil layer to reveal the microbial layer, Pete said. "This soil is top quality, containing about 20 percent organic matter," he noted. "This is where the soil microbes are feeding on organic matter."

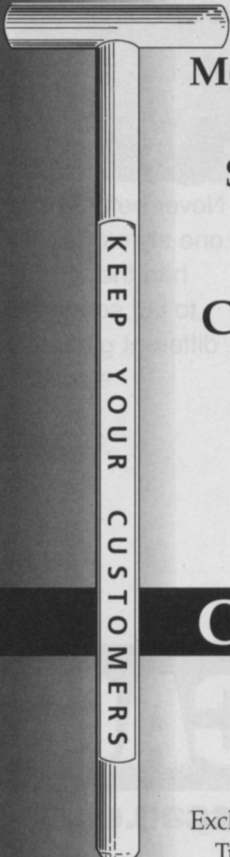
1. Sample areas used for different types of plants separately. Keep samples taken from lawn areas separate from samples taken from flower and shrub areas. Most samples should represent only one type of planting. If more than three types of plantings are selected, the sample probably represents none of them well.
2. Sample areas that have received different lime and/or fertilizer treatments separately.
3. Do not sample areas that have been limed or fertilized within the past few weeks unless trouble is evident.
4. Where poor growth exists, separate samples should be taken from both good and bad areas, if possible.
5. To obtain a representative sample, plan to collect 10 to 15 subsamples at random locations within each area. Exception: In areas smaller than 100 square feet, five to 10 subsample locations will be adequate.
6. Each sample must be submitted in a separate soil test kit with the appropriate soil test questionnaire. — **Rutgers Cooperative Extension, New Brunswick, N.J.**

Sampling Scheme

Perfect soil should be sponge-like with a balance between spaces that stick together and porous areas. Soil that is more like a brick, completely stuck together, or like sand, falling apart, is very unhealthy, Pete pointed out. "Sponge-like soil holds more water than most things, but also allows water to pass through it," he said.

TAKE THE TEST. Nutrient-deficient soil is normally evident by plant or lawn appearance, Street said. "In turfgrass, symptoms include a light green color, weak or thin turfgrass density despite generous applications of fertilizer or a rapid decline in quality during periods of stress," he said.

(continued on page 70)



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Soil Basics

(continued from page 68)

The best way for contractors to determine if a client's property lacks important nutrients and what they should do is by collecting a soil sample and having it tested at a laboratory, a list of which can be obtained through most university extension services.

"To apply optimum levels of nutrients or lime to your soil, you need to know the existing pH and the availability of essential plant nutrients," explained Zane Helsel, director, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Cook College, New Brunswick, N.J.

The typical soil test determines the soil pH, salinity, nitrates and levels of primary nutrients (phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sodium and sulfur) available to plants and turf. The routine test can also provide the basic N-P-K (nitrogen - phosphorus - potassium) fertilizer recommendations. "The soil test takes the guesswork out of fertilization and is extremely cost effective," Street said. "It not only eliminates the

(continued on page 72)

1. The best time to sample soils is when the moisture content is right for tilling - not too wet, not too dry.
2. Use a trowel, spade, auger or soil tube to obtain thin, vertical slices or cores of soil from the surface to a depth of 6 to 7 inches. If using a trowel or spade, insert the blade into the soil to this same depth, remove soil and throw it aside. Reinsert the blade to take a thin 1/2-inch soil slice and lift it from the ground. Using a knife, cut a long 1-inch wide core from the slice's center. Place the core in a clean bucket or other container.
3. Repeat this procedure in 10 to 15 locations within the sampling area, placing the subsamples together in the container.
4. If the soil is wet when samples are taken, the soil should be laid out on clean paper to air-dry (do not heat to dry).
5. Mix the subsamples for a sampling area together in the container. The goal is to provide a representative sample.
6. Place 1/2 or 1 pint of the soil in a plastic bag (zip-lock type or one provided by soil testing facility). Seal the plastic bag with a rubber band or twist tie, and place the sample in the cloth mailer bag (or follow mailing instructions set by soil testing facility). The excess soil can be returned to sampling holes.
7. Repeat for any separate areas that you wish to have tested. Do not place more than one sample in a sample bag.
8. Fill out soil test questionnaire provided by soil testing facility. Keep your own record of areas sampled, sample identification, serial numbers and date mailed to the soil testing laboratory. Follow mailing instructions set by soil testing lab. - Rutgers Cooperative Extension, New Brunswick, N.J.

Sampling Procedure

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USE READER SERVICE #87

Soil Basics

(continued from page 70)

waste of money spent on unnecessary fertilizers, but also eliminates over-usage of fertilizers, hence protecting the environment."

Soil test prices vary slightly from region to region. For instance, a standard soil test is \$8 at Rutgers Soil Testing Laboratory, Milltown, N.J., while a quick pH test is \$3 and other more specific tests range in price from \$3 to \$40. A routine test at the Virginia Tech Soil Testing Lab, Blacksburg, Va., is \$7 for in-state samples and \$10.50 for out-of-state samples. And a routine analysis at the Soil, Water and Forage Testing Laboratory at Texas A&M University - Soil and Crop Sciences, College Station, Texas, is \$10. Some tests include fertilizer and lime recommendations, others do not.

When contractors are searching for a soil testing lab to work with, Lynn Griffith, president, A&L Southern Laboratories, suggested finding one they are comfortable with and will continue using. "Don't use different laboratories or you can become confused by the

differences in methods and units," Griffith said, pointing out that some important factors in choosing a laboratory are quality of data, price, soil testing method and ease of understanding the report.

The proper soil test depends on landscape type and condition. Most contractors request a routine test, but lime tests and organic matter tests also are important. Micronutrient, boron and detailed salinity tests are typically used for specialty crops or environmental or research purposes, remarked Tony Provin, assistant professor and soil chemist/laboratory director, Soil, Water and Forage Testing Laboratory.

Soil samples can be taken any time of year, but sampling when the soil is extremely wet is not recommended. Fall months are best, according to most extension agents. "Soil samples can be taken in the spring or fall for established sites," Street attested, adding that sampling every two to three years is usually adequate. "For new sites,

soil samples can be taken anytime when the soil is workable. Most people conduct their soil tests in the spring. However, fall is the preferred time if one wants to avoid the spring rush and suspects a soil pH problem. Fall soil testing will allow you ample time to apply lime to raise the soil pH. Sulfur should be applied in the spring if the soil pH needs to be lowered."

Soil testing also is suggested before lawn or landscape establishment, said Bruce Spangenberg, extension educator, horticulture, Rockford Extension Center, Rockford, Ill. "Lawns will get off to a better start if soils are modified at this time," he said.

Steve White, owner, Second Nature Lawn Care, Nashville, Tenn., agreed. "First, you have to get the soil ready," he said. "Skip this step and you'll have pitiful petunias and awful alyssum."

Soil test results and fertilizer recommendations usually are mailed in two weeks, depend-

(continued on page 74)

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Soil Basics

(continued from page 72)

ing on the laboratory. "Make sure you fill out the form for the types of plants you grow or will be growing," Street stressed. "Otherwise, no recommendations will be given."

NOW WHAT? After test results arrive, contractors should have an idea of what soil needs. Most researchers emphasize the appropriate application of nutrients or other materials that will trigger growth because wasting money on nutrients soils don't need isn't economically or environmentally prudent.

Many options exist to improve soil. White mixes in compost and peat moss or vermiculite to ease soil drainage when he prepares sites for planting.

According to Pete, a minimum of 5 percent organic matter is necessary to sustain healthy soil. A source of organic matter like compost will cost contractors 2 to 4 cents per square foot applied, Pete said.

White also said he sometimes mixes a slow-release granular fertilizer into the soil before planting because it lasts up to four months and nourishes plants all season long.

"Soil test results that reveal a shortage of phosphorus or potassium influence the decision of how much starter fertilizer is needed since starter fertilizers typically have balanced ratios of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, such as 10-10-10 or 12-12-12," Spangenberg added.

But this step may not be necessary based on the amount of organic matter in the soil, Pete said. "If you have 10 percent organic matter in the soil, you don't have to fertilize because you are getting 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre from the microbial process in the soil," he explained.

Becoming more knowledgeable about soil contents and needs can help contractors choose the right methods of improvement without wasting time, money or plant lives. "If you put a \$5 plant in a \$50 hole, in 10 years, you'll have a \$500 plant," Pete said, pointing out a common industry adage. "But if you put a \$50 plant in a \$5 hole, in 10 years, you'll still only have a \$50 plant."

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

For information on soil pH and soil health for trees, check out this article with the March issue of www.lawnandlandscape.com.

Once the soil test has been conducted and the results are available, the ability to interpret the results is an important consideration in correcting the nutrient deficiency or imbalance.

The acceptable levels for each of the tests performed in The Ohio State University Research Extension Analytical Lab Standard Test are listed in the chart below. This chart should serve as a general guideline to help determine if your soil is within the acceptable range for each of the parameters tested.

ACCEPTABLE LEVELS FROM STANDARD SOIL TEST

Test Parameter	Acceptable Regional** Range
pH	6.3 to 7.0
Lime Test Index	68 to 70
Phosphorus (P) pound/acre	50 to 75
Potassium (K) pound/acre	200 to 250
Calcium (Ca) pound/acre	800 to 16,000
Magnesium (Mg) pound/acre	150 to 2,000
Cation Exchange Capacity – Course Textures (sands)	1 to 5
Cation Exchange Capacity – Medium Textures (silts)	5 to 20
Cation Exchange Capacity – Fine Textures (clays)	20 to 30 plus
Base Saturation*, percent Ca	40 to 80
Base Saturation*, percent Mg	0 to 40
Base Saturation* percent K	1 to 5

*Assuming pH value is within recommended range

** These ranges were prepared for the Ohio area and are meant to give contractors in other areas an example of general ranges.

CATION EXCHANGE CAPACITY (CEC) – CEC measures the capacity of the soil to hold exchangeable cations (nutrients). The cations include hydrogen, calcium, magnesium and potassium. The CEC depends largely on the amount and type of clay present and the organic matter content. The higher the CEC value, the more cations the soil is able to hold against leaching. It is not practical to attempt to increase the CEC of a soil by adding clay or organic matter on a large-scale basis. Liming an acidic soil will slightly increase the effective CEC.

BASE SATURATION – The extent to which the absorption complex of a soil is saturated with exchangeable cations other than hydrogen or aluminum. It is expressed as a percentage of the total CEC.

CALCIUM TO MAGNESIUM RATIO – This ratio is calculated on the basis of percentage saturation of the soil CEC by each element. This ratio should be considered when lime is added to the soil. If the ratio is 1:1 or less (less Ca than Mg), low magnesium limestone should be used. Turfgrasses grow over a wide range of ratios with the ideal ratio being between 6:1 and 10:1.

MAGNESIUM TO POTASSIUM RATIO – This ratio should be greater than 2:1. In other words, the percent base saturation of Mg should be at least two times the percent base saturation of K. High K frequently results in reduced uptake of Mg by plants. Therefore, to help prevent plant nutrient imbalance, additional Mg may be required to maintain a Mg to K ratio of at least 2:1. – **John Street, extension agronomist, Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio**

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Walk-Behind Mowers

by Dave Clancy

Walk-behind mowers might be a step behind their riding counterparts, but innovation keeps these models cutting forward.

Walk-behind mower market share is slowly eroding due to improved riding units. However, manufacturers still see a long life for the walk-behind category because of the many ways landscaper contractors can use walk behinds to improve their businesses.

Manufacturers don't deny that riding mowers have become a hot product because of the productivity advantages they can deliver to users. In fact, some mower producers think the biggest factor affecting the walk-behind mower category is the labor shortage. With unemployment rates low and employers scrambling for every available body, more contractors are looking at means of being more efficient.

"If I can put someone in a seat and have them cut twice as fast as someone who walks behind the mower, I have just solved some of my labor problems," remarked Randy Harris, marketing manager, Toro Landscape Contractor Equipment Group, Minneapolis, Minn. "This is a trend not only in the landscape industry, but all across the workplace. Fast food, factories – employers everywhere are looking to find quality employees and keep them productive."

Harris said that as a result of the labor shortage, manufacturers have seen more growth in their zero-turn riding units in particular. "We have seen an explosion in this category, and they are cutting into the growth of our walk-behind sales," he said.

"Labor is the single biggest issue that any landscape contractor has at this point," agreed John Cloutier, marketing communications manager, Exmark, Beatrice, Neb. "We have had many meetings with contractors, and they all claim they could double their business if they could hire and retain good, qualified employees.

"With that being said, the bottom line is these contractors cannot find the employees so they are simply trying to adapt and maximize what they can get out of each piece of machinery," Cloutier added.

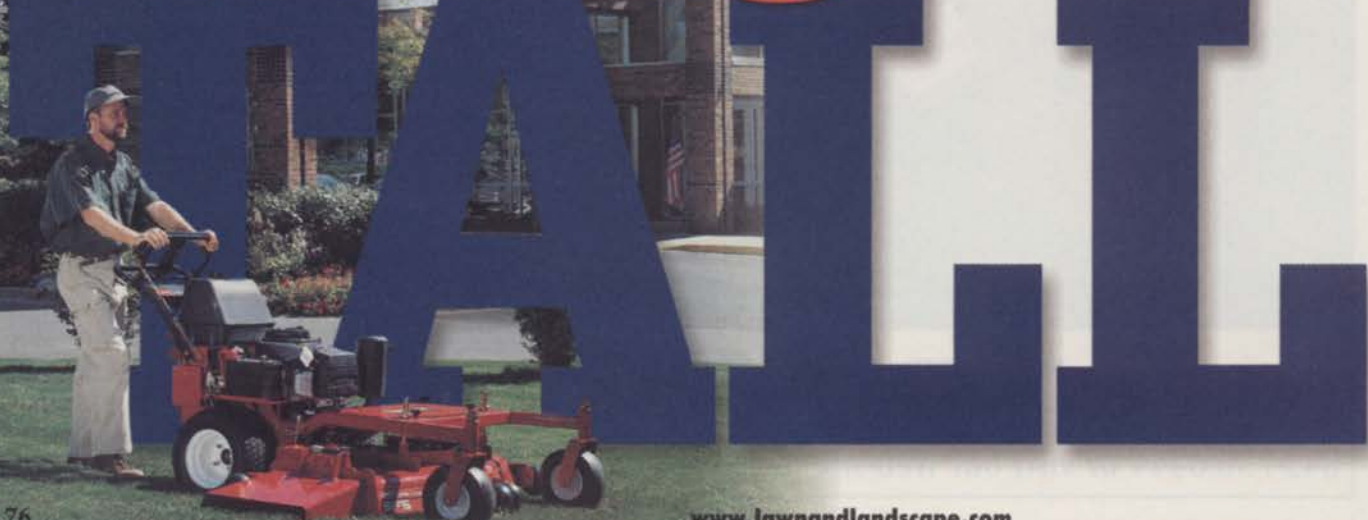
THE EMPLOYEE EQUATION. A lack of labor translates into a need for increased productivity. "Zero-turn riding mowers offer landscape contractors increases in productivity and they're putting a lot of downward price pressure on the walk-behind category," noted Ken Speece,

(continued on page 78)

Keeping mower operators comfortable throughout long summer days is a must for landscape companies, so manufacturers are investing more time and money in ergonomic research.

Photo: Toro

Walking





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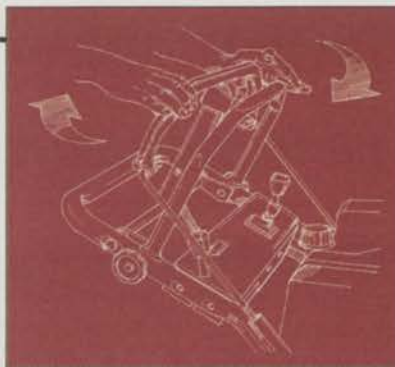
(continued from page 76)

product manager, Cub Cadet Commercial Products, Cleveland, Ohio. "And since most mower operators prefer to ride than walk, the need to retain employees is pushing many contractors toward small riding mowers."

"Contractors need to keep employees as productive and as happy as possible," added Cheri Stange, marketing communications

manager, Scag Power Equipment, Mayville, Wis. "And we know that many of them prefer to ride, so we take that into consideration.

"However, walk behind mowers will always have a place in the landscape contractor's



Riding mowers are attractive for those seeking labor savings, but the walk-behind offers maneuverability in tight spaces. Image: Toro

shed," she continued. "There are certain areas that you cannot get into with a riding unit, and there are some contractors who swear by the walk-behind mower.

Dick Tegtmeier, president, Encore, Beatrice, Neb., agreed that the walk-behind market will not disappear. "But it will be on a considerably lower level than what we have seen in the past. The small Zs and their maneuverability is cutting right into the walk-behind market."

Fortunately for contractors, the intense competition among manufacturers of riding mowers means there is less price difference between walk-behind and riding mowers than ever before.

"When manufacturers have the pressure of keeping the margins low on the Zs, they are fast approaching the cost of the hydrostatic walk-behind mowers," Tegtmeier added. "The Zs will bite into the hydros first, and then they'll hurt the belt drives and the mechanical drives."

LOOKING FORWARD. "I think every manufacturer is looking for a way to provide a lower cost piece of equipment than a rider," related Harris, in support of the future of walk-behind mowers. "The mid-sized, walk-behind mower will not go away simply because certain landscape designs require their use. You physically cannot get a riding unit into some of those designs.


"I think the biggest challenge for manufacturers is to look at what some of these firms are designing and to develop mowers that will fit the needs of the maintenance contractors who have to care for the property," he continued. "We are trying to spend more time getting to understand the landscape design side of the business, what they are seeing and how we can serve them."

Harris said that many landscape contractors are creating fantastic designs, but during the design phase they have forgotten how much money it costs to maintain the

(continued on page 85)

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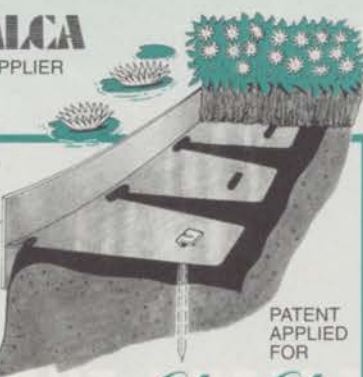
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(continued from page 76)

property. "They look at trying to develop a clean, manicured look within the budget constraints and realize that they may not have the equipment to do the job.

"That is especially true if they have replaced all of their walk behinds with riders, and now have small berm areas to cut," Harris added.

A solution, Harris said, is for contractors to look to manufacturers to produce more versatile equipment. "The trick is to develop a mower that allows the operator to move at a faster pace than a simple walk," he commented, adding that Toro has begun offering mowers with an attached operator platform for walk-behind mowers. "That way he can cut faster and be more productive."

"You want the operator to stay fresh and comfortable throughout the day, and we can do that if he is not walking the entire time – just the times where walking is mandatory," Harris explained.

Other manufacturers focus on ergonomic considerations when developing products to maximize productivity and efficiency. "Ease of operation and comfort are both critical," Cloutier observed.

"If your employees are more comfortable over the long haul, they will feel better operating the equipment."

When the topic is walk-behind mower ergonomics, the discussion almost always focuses on the handlebars or grips. "Many of these contractors with labor problems are working with untrained labor," Cloutier related. "They have to get that new employee and running quickly, and the easiest way to do that is to make sure his equipment is simple to operate. That way the employee can be productive from day one."

"Improvements in operator controls will continue," Speece agreed. "But these are really minor improvements as opposed to true innovations. As an industry, ergonomics is probably where most of the research and development dollars are being spent on this particular product category.

"Ergonomic improvements also improve the appeal and competitiveness of walk-behind products," he added.

"Everyone in the industry is looking into ergonomics," Harris echoed. "I'm not sure just how much, if at all, manufacturers bring in independent ergonomic consultants, but we have relied on a study we did back in 1996

where we learned a lot working with ergonomics specialists regarding neutral positions of hands, arms and wrists," he said.

TALK IS VALUABLE. Communication is also an area where manufacturers say further developments will come. According to Cloutier, communication starts with the ser-

vice dealer. "The dealer must communicate with both the manufacturer and the contractor. If there is a dealer in a particular town who has an existing relationship with that contractor, that is a good start.

"There really isn't much product differentiation at the lower ends, so the dealer plays a major role in the contractor's satisfac-

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tion," Clautier continued. "If that contractor has a good relationship with the dealer, chances are he will take the dealer's recommendations to heart."

The problem, Clautier recognized, is that despite their best efforts, manufacturers lack consistency across the board with their dealer networks. "These dealers are all indepen-

dent business people," he commented. "It is hard to structure what they will and will not do with a customer. But we try to give them as many support programs as possible to help them better serve their customers."

"Contractors shopping for a mower must rely on the dealer to help him be as produc-

The **biggest trend** affecting the **walk-behind mower category** is the **labor shortage**.

tive as possible," Stange remarked. "The dealer is a conduit back to the manufacturer, and along with the distributor, brings a great deal to the relationship."

And contractors can help dealers better serve them by approaching the deal with value in mind rather than strictly shopping for price, Tegtmeier added. "So many people are talking price, price, price. That just kills the dealer's margins, and in effect, the level of service he can offer," he related.

"Any manufacturer in America, regardless of the product he is making, that succumbs on price will have to sacrifice something to make up for that," Tegtmeier continued. "If he starts sacrificing service, the customers that bought his product for his service reputation will leave. If he sacrifices quality, other customers will leave. And, if the manufacturer just commits to the lower price, he will be the one that is gone."

Instead, Tegtmeier recommended asking dealers and manufacturers for value. "We understand that landscape professionals need to make their margins," he said. "Our landscape customer needs to understand that dealers and manufacturers have margins to meet as well. There has to be a level playing field or no one will survive."

"What is the use in a dealer paying \$200 less for something just to have it break down three weeks later?" he asked.

Besides, the walk-behind mower category has become one with little product differentiation, Tegtmeier noted. "Put all the mowers in the industry side by side and you go over a field of grass, they will all do a fairly good job," he observed. "The difference comes down to people."

Tegtmeier said that he knows some salespeople or dealers who have represented different manufacturers over the years. "When they carry brand X, their customers buy brand X. When they switch to brand Y or Z, guess what their customers decide to buy?"

"That doesn't mean brand Y or Z is better," he noted. "It means that salesman's customers are confident in his ability to provide the necessary service if they need it. In this sector, that is what is important."

Manufacturers say the dealer relationship is especially important in this market due to

(continued on page 88)

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1	Flower	Bluebonnets	2				45.00	
1	Evergreen	Archie's Coral Bell	6				15.00	Save
1	Evergreen	Archie's Coral Bell	6				15.00	
1	Flower	Apple Blossom Flowering	1				25.00	Delete
1	Shrub	Barkers Red	3				25.00	Prev
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USE READER SERVICE #90

Walk-Behind Mowers

(continued from page 86)

several factors, most notably:

- The cannibalization of the product sector by smaller, riding mowers at a slightly higher price point;
- Product improvements coming in small increments, rather than huge innovations;
- The low price point of walk-behind units means they are usually purchased by new contractors looking to get a low cost start in the business;
- The increased competition for employees means training is at a premium

"The dealer is the most important variable when purchasing a walk-behind mower," asserted Harris.

"You can buy the greatest piece of equipment, but if you don't have the dealer support behind it then it's difficult to stay productive in the field and the contractor will not be in business long."

The author is a contributing writer for *Lawn & Landscape* magazine, based in Columbus, Ohio.

One of the more common mower dilemmas – to mulch or bag? – is being debated on the Message Boards at www.lawnandlandscape.com. Here's a sampling:

Richard Blake: We have a variety of clients. Some want their lawns mulched and some insist on having it bagged every time. What are the general thoughts on this?

Russ Browning: We bag only around pools, and then only when clippings can be disposed of on site. When a new customer brings up bagging we quote a bag price so high it will be out of the question. We don't transport clippings. If they insist on bagging, they need to find someone who will do it.

Kyle Zimmer: I would mulch or charge a lot higher for bagging. I have been told by many experienced lawn care operators that mulching returns nutrients to the lawn.

John Blake: We mow every five or six days, and we keep sharp blades on our mowers everyday. If you do these things, you can mulch only, and the lawn will look like it has been bagged, and Kyle you are correct, it will replenish the lawn with nutrients. If you mow wet grass, you will probably have to bag it in areas. Like I said, we professionally mulch our lawns, but we put on our contracts, "Bagging included when necessary," which means when it rains for two days straight or we didn't get it cut within six or seven days in the spring rush. Another thing to consider... Is there a local place that will take your clippings for free? Is it out of your way/off the route to get there?

Chuck Twist: Mulch except around pools or other similarly "sensitive" areas! If the grass is real wet or tall, you may have to go over the clippings again to "double" mulch them, then take a blower and distribute the clippings around. Sometimes you may need to rake a little but very little! When clients insist on bagging, I give them a brochure on the benefits of mulching! If they still insist, then they will pay for it!

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USE READER SERVICE #91

Pricing Services

by Cynthia Greenleaf

In this issue, *Lawn & Landscape* asked three southern lawn care companies to recommend a basic program for a hypothetical property, a 5,000-square-foot Bermudagrass lawn. They're suggestions, as well as an explanation of their pricing philosophies are presented here.

PRICING PHILOSOPHIES. Southern Lawns, Montgomery, Ala., works from a set price list that illustrates the company's pricing structure. This is based on a volume discount – the larger the area, the cheaper the rate per thousand square feet, according to James Bartley, the company's general manager, who added that the price list indicates what each base price is for a range of properties – anywhere from 2,000 to 20,000 square feet. Having this pricing information in writing has been a reliable system that makes a good impression with customers and alleviates any potential misunderstandings, he noted. "It shows them that we're being open with them and we're not just coming

up with arbitrary numbers," he said. "Sometimes it's a situation where they're comparing the price with another company and ask, 'Why are you charging me \$55 when my neighbor pays \$50?'"

While this might seem obvious, always measuring a property is equally important in the estimating process, Bartley added. "We take a measuring wheel and measure the property as close as we can so we can accurately price for the customer and ourselves," he said, adding that knowing precise square footage increases application accuracy.

"It's disturbing how some companies guess at the lawn size," he observed. "How can they know they're putting down enough product?"

Chuck McIntire, vice president, TurfPride, Kennesaw, Ga., agreed with the necessity of measuring. "We don't quote prices over the phone since that can be misleading," he said. "We normally insist on looking at a lawn and measuring the turf."


When setting up its pricing system, TurfPride conducted a survey of what its competitors were charging. The company then set its prices about \$1 per treatment higher, to account for its emphasis

(continued on page 92)

On-site scouting for potential problems is an essential part of coming up with a lawn care estimate.

Photo: L&L staff

PRICING Sense



Three southern lawn care companies share their pricing strategies and philosophies.

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USE READER SERVICE #142

Pricing Services

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on superior customer service, McIntire explained. "In our program, we charge to keep costs in line."

Part of keeping costs under control is carefully choosing customers, Bartley suggested. Before it takes on a new customer, Southern Lawns always assesses a lawn to see if there are severe pest problems. "We ask, 'Can we really help that lawn?'" Bartley said. "After all, the results will have our name on it."

Being cautious can help a lawn care contractor avoid being liable for a lawn that was destined to fail, anyway. Bartley noted that installation flaws can signal future problems. Contractors need to take these factors into consideration when pricing. "You've got total shade and someone planted Bermuda that is beginning to die," he said, describing one hopeless situation he's encountered. "Bermuda has to have full sunlight."

If a lawn has problems, Southern Lawns

(continued on page 94)

SOUTHERN LAWN

Montgomery, Ala.

James Bartley, the company's general manager, recommended a five-application program running January through December at \$50 per treatment.

TREATMENT 1. A crabgrass preemergent is applied since this weed is a frequent problem in the company's service area, according to Bartley.

TREATMENTS 2 - 4. A slow release, granular fertilizer is applied. Since southern grasses require more nutrients than cool-season grasses, the granular format reduces the danger of burn, Bartley said.

TREATMENT 5. A cool-season weed preemergent is applied.

EXTRAS? Dallisgrass and nutsedge treatments are offered at no extra charge, since these tend to be a common problem, Bartley pointed out. In addition, lime is a minimal charge every other year and soil tests are extra if a customer wants one or if there is a problem, Bartley related. These are generally unnecessary, however. Having been in the business for 23 years, Bartley said he knows the soil he is working with.

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Pricing Services

(continued from page 92)

might take on the customer but charge them in the upper end of the company's price range, Bartley described. Conversely, "a lawn in excellent shape or next to a customer we already have will get the lower end."

PRICING FOR PROFIT. Ensuring a profit can be a challenge for lawn care companies facing constant pressure to keep prices low. In Lawn Master's case, budgeting for profit has been a trial and error process throughout the company's history. When it comes to setting up a budget, "experience is a big help," noted Joe Williams, president of the Pensacola, Fla.-based company. He added that details are the secret to good planning. "We try our best to anticipate the cost of sales and overhead," he described. "We put a lot of detail, and always have, in making projections, such as knowing what sales need to be for the year."

(continued on page 96)

LAWN MASTER

Pensacola, Fla.

Joe Williams, president, Pensacola, Fla., suggested a six-application program running February through December, ranging from \$40 to \$50 per treatment.

TREATMENT 1. A preemergent is applied

TREATMENT 2. A pre- and postemergent is applied, along with a balanced fertilizer formulated for the soil.

TREATMENTS 3 - 4. A balanced fertilizer with micronutrients is applied. Insecticides are used as needed, Williams noted, adding that the most common problems in his area are chinch bugs, mole crickets or webworms. "We only apply a product if a pest is there," he said.

TREATMENTS 5 - 6. A winterizer is applied, which includes potash, nitrogen and a fall preemergent herbicide.

EXTRAS? Lawn Master's program is all-inclusive and covers all fertilizer, weed and insect control costs, Williams said. The company typically does not conduct soil tests since it did soil profiles throughout its service area. Lawn Master does check pH every three years or so, however, to monitor acidity.

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(continued from page 94)

To make profit a priority, Williams advised lawn care operators to put their target profit in their budget as a line item. Lawn Master, for example, generally tries to aim for the 8 to 10 percent range.

"The big thing is to keep up with product and labor costs," Bartley added, noting that he reviews his financial statements religiously. "We need to know how low is still profitable."

Keeping chemical costs under control is especially important, Bartley said. "Most companies will try to keep chemical costs around 20 percent of sales," he observed. "Keep it down in that range. If your product costs are higher than that, you're not going to make a profit."

McIntire takes a similar approach to ensuring a profit. "It takes a lot of analysis from product to labor to equipment to stay in line," he pointed out, adding that costs are always fluctuating. "Expenses are changing

Part of **keeping costs**

under control is carefully

choosing customers. Before it

takes on a new customer,

Southern Lawns always

assesses a lawn to see

if there are any **severe**

pest problems.

all the time," he said. "Fertilizer costs, for example, are shooting through the roof this year."


When the time comes for a price increase, explaining this to clients requires a straight-

forward approach. If a company explains why it's raising prices, customers generally understand, McIntire pointed out, adding that TurfPride has raised its prices—anywhere from 2 to 4 percent—every other year since the company was established six years ago. "We try to be fair with them and they know that," he said. "If your customer is focused on service, price isn't as big an issue, anyway."

"The main thing is to let customers know how long it has been since we've raised prices," Bartley advised. "If it has been three or four years, we put that in the letter."

When Southern Lawns sends out a price increase notice, the company offers a prepay discount at the same time. "If there is a 6 percent increase, we offer a 7 percent dis-

(continued on page 98)



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(continued from page 96)

count – that (discount) cushions the fall," Bartley said, adding that his customers have rarely complained about a price increase. "Good customers are not price oriented," he said. "They're service-oriented and results oriented. Price-oriented customers, however, leave you next time someone can get them a better deal."

McIntire has had a similar experience, which has taught him to always stress service. "We lose customers all the time because someone else is cheaper," he noted. "But more than 50 percent we get back because they don't get the service elsewhere." ■

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Kennesaw, Ga.

TURFPRIDE

Chuck McIntire, vice president of TurfPride, advised going with a seven-application program running January through December at \$37 per treatment. The treatments are evenly spaced out at six week intervals.

TREATMENT 1. A pre- and postemergent weed control with a potassium treatment is applied.

TREATMENT 2. A pre- and postemergent weed control along with a balanced fertilizer is applied.

TREATMENTS 3 - 5. A slow release, granular fertilizer is applied to "get the color up," McIntire said. Granular is used because in the South, "heat and humidity poses a problem with liquid, which winds up being too expensive and burns, anyway."

TREATMENT 6. A potash application as well as a preemergent treatment are made to address winter weeds.

TREATMENT 7. TurfPride puts down another potash application as well as lime to raise pH, since soils tend to be acidic in the company's service area.

EXTRAS? TurfPride generally does not conduct soil tests since it knows "within a few percentage points what each lawn is like," McIntire said. While insect treatments are included in the program, fungicides are an extra charge, since weeds tend to pose a more serious problem in TurfPride's market, McIntire said.

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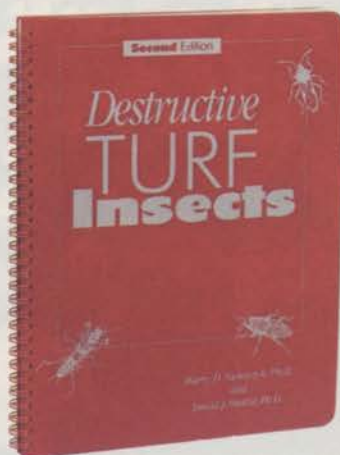
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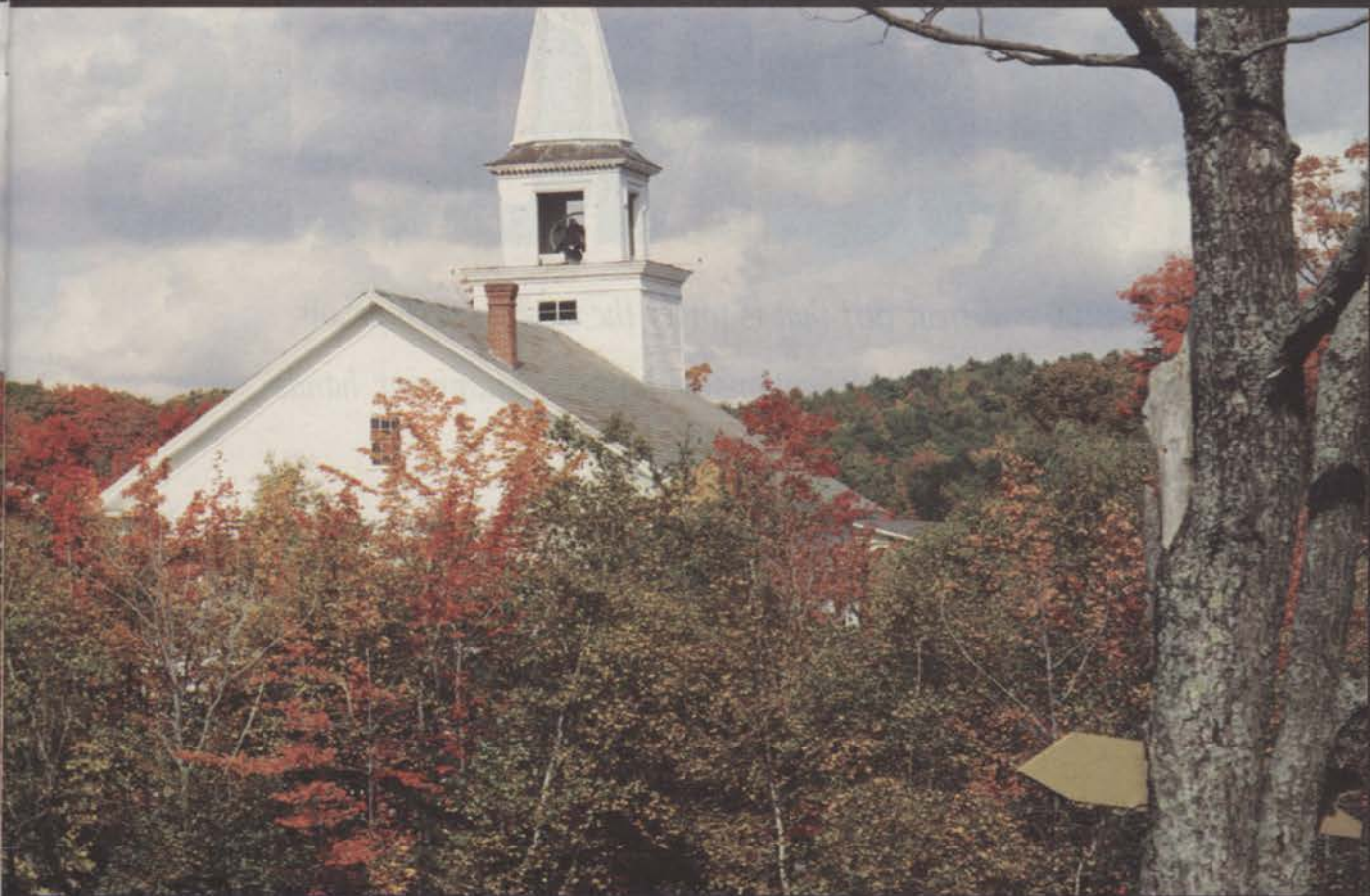
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Pesticide PROGNOSIS

To identify and treat turf that is under the weather, technicians prepare for lawn care applications with proper equipment, hands-on training and organized scheduling.

by Kristen
Hampshire

Sometimes, sick lawns could use a little good medicine.

Lawn care operators with a Ph.D. in pesticides have the background to diagnose turf disease and prescribe treatments necessary to maintain a lush lawn. However, the nature of the business doesn't allow haphazard decision-making. Lawn care operators must prepare with tools and training.

"Your lawn is a living thing – it's like us getting a cold," related Marlene Patrick, owner, Avon Lake Lawn Care, Avon Lake, Ohio. "There are many kinds of barriers that can prevent your fertilizer from not working as well as someone else's next door, including compaction and thatch problems.

"You need to be prepared with knowledge," she advised. "Know what you're talking about, and be honest with yourself and with your customer."

Blending pesticide mixtures, stocking treatment products, organizing service routes, preparing and loading equipment – all of these preparation measures pay off



An efficient use of time each morning or at the end of each day results in a well-stocked truck that is ready for any problems that might be encountered along the route. Such preparation eliminates unnecessary return trips to the office for supplies and helps technicians provide immediate service to clients. Photo: L&L Staff

when a lawn care operator (LCO) is en route. Planning these application details in advance helps technicians deliver effective, efficient service.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE. Technicians need tools to deliver successful treatments, and equipment choice – sprayers, spreaders or combination outfits – depends on the contents of a company's lawn care program. Vehicle check sheets are similar at many lawn care companies, with a line item list of necessary staple, such as gloves, glasses, spill kits, invoice materials and paperwork.

However, LCOs (lawn care operators) must person-

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alize their processes to match their pesticide prescriptions. For example, programs that emphasize granular products require different equipment and preparation than those that utilize liquid products.

Mike Pender, co-owner, Classic Gardens and Lawn Care, Birmingham, Ala., primarily applies granular treatments – what he considers a more environmentally friendly option. “Granular products go where you put them and stay where you put them,” he noted. “With sprays, the minute you put them down, they lose effectiveness due to evaporation. Since they’re on top of the grass blade, photosynthesis breaks them down, so there is degradation.”

Besides being preferred by his clients, granular products also allow his technicians to prepare for their routes the night before, Pender explained. “You wouldn’t

be able to prepare in advance with liquids,” he added. “They sit in the tank and lose their potency.”

Kirk Hurto, vice president technical and support services, TruGreen-ChemLawn, Memphis, Tenn., stressed that different applications require different preparation. Technicians who stock trucks with liquid treatments might not have the luxury of organizing their supplies the night before. “Filling of spray tanks, especially, must factor into what products are used and how stable they are in a spray mix,” he explained. “Some insecticides are prone to rapid breakdown through a process called hydrolysis. The rate of pesticide degradation is influenced by several factors, including water hardness, temperature, pH and, in some instances, what else may be included in the spray tank.”

Pender’s program allows his advanced planning to begin when technicians return in the evening after daily routes. The 30 minutes LCOs dedicate at the end of the day to restocking their trucks and organizing the next morning’s schedule alleviates rushed, morning supply stress, he noted. Technicians can take off immediately at 7 a.m., beat rush hour traffic and get a head start on service calls so they have ample time to deal with complications that crop up during the day.

“It’s a lot less hectic to prepare in the evening than in the morning,” Pender confirmed. “In the evening, the technicians don’t all come in at the same time – they show up when they are done for the day, so you can handle the trucks at a more relaxed pace rather than in the morning when you are frantic and have six trucks

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that have to go out at the same time."

Evening tasks include taking a bag inventory, which assures that technicians applied the correct amount of product to properties, Pender explained. Also, mileage, gas and global positioning system information is recorded nightly and serves as "proof of service" should customers claim their property was bypassed. This inventory checklist, which is updated in the morning and evening, teamed with the traditional tools such as spreaders, backpack sprayers and extra insect or disease treatment, builds a solid system, he said.

In addition, sharp scheduling will usher preparation systems to the service route. Timing is everything for LCOs, and it encompasses more than hours clocked in vehicles. Seasons, weather conditions, application increments - these intricate ele-

ments must piece together to form a secure schedule, Patrick stressed. Sprouting weeds will generate customer complaints, while overzealous applications will burn the lawn.

Patrick's preparation and scheduling depends on timing, so her 'checklist' varies at different points during the season. Extras she adds to service trucks include a spray bottle to spot-treat weeds, preemergent treatments, insecticides or broadleaf herbicides. "The treatments I include also depend on which insects are prevalent at that time," she added.

Treatments also figure into route scheduling for Lynn Tootle, manager, Gro-Masters, Garden City, Ga. He organizes his technicians' service routes based on geographic area and grass-type, since different lawns require different antidotes.

"Our scheduling is organized to meet

the needs of each different grass, which requires a different set of nutrients and requirements," he explained. "By dividing routes by the type of grass, we're able to keep our guys from going back to the shop to fill up on materials."

He creates territories in Savannah, where his company's client base is focused, assigning each technician to a route. This way, they become regulars on the property and can then build relationships that result in satisfied, long-term clients, Tootle explained. In turn, the LCOs' familiarity with their regular route allows them to manage their time.

"Also, my technicians are really good about routing themselves," he added. "They know the area so well that I can give them five days of work at one time, and they can figure out how to get that done in

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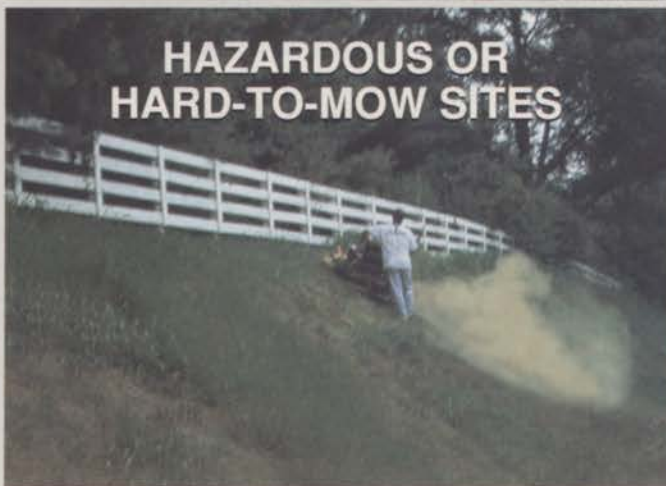
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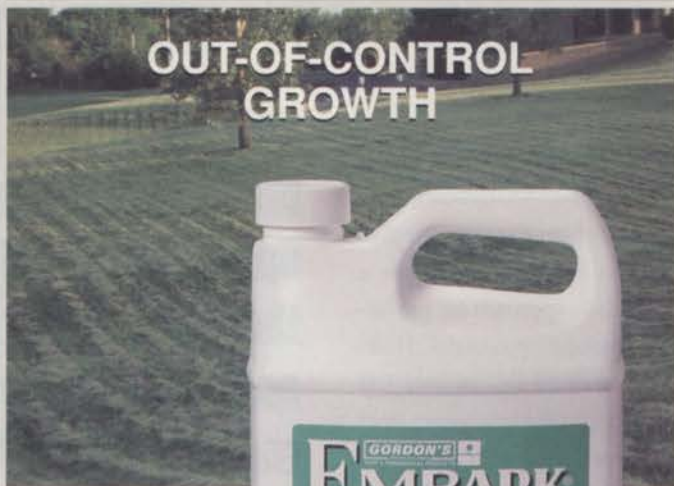
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Pender also relies on geographic divisions to schedule technician routes, but his commission-based company orders a slight variation on territory scheduling. Desirable accounts are split up among the technicians to even out earning capability, he described. "All of our guys work on commission, so we try to make it so they can all have some cream of the crop routes and some bizarre routes that are harder to travel," he said.

ON THE PROGRAM. Preparation checklists and scheduling systems paired with an effective application program create a full-circle approach for providing pesticide prognoses. However, technicians can only nail down an efficient system once they personalize their preparation measures to match their treatment methods.

Patrick's six-step application program is a common formula. These increments allow enough time between applications, without providing so much time that customers spot the problems in their lawns that they wanted to avoid.

"Timing is so crucial," Patrick emphasized. "It is so critical for having the product put on at the right time." Preemergents cannot be applied too soon, she noted, admitting to be "meticulous about things."

The second site visit includes a "weed and feed," which is a broadleaf herbicide and a granular feed. Depending on the environment and temperature, the third visit consists of an insecticide or feed treatment and the fourth and fifth service calls include an insecticide application. The fifth and sixth treatments also include a feed treatment, again, depending on weather.

"If it is windy, we'll have to wait until the next week, and we can't put an appli-

cation on, so that will change whether or not the treatment is an insecticide or a feed." Fungicides are applied only when needed, as they tend to be rather expensive, Patrick explained.

Additionally, she couples these bi-monthly check-ups with a detailed form that tracks data including the materials applied. This sheet then can be referenced when preparing for a route as technicians determine equipment and products need

"All employees require a basic training program upon hiring, but it's more than just classroom activities. Be sure they receive proper hands-on training by pairing them with an experienced mentor who knows the walk." – Kirk Hurto

on a service truck.

Tootle files information dating back to each client's initial phone call and request for service, he said. He tracks all correspondence between the customer and his company – every letter, every invoice. "Any time the technicians have a question about what part of a property needs to be serviced, they just pull the file," he explained. "For example, if only part of the yard is supposed to be treated, there will be a map that marks the location."

He, too, benefits from this background information when preparing for service routes. These records eliminate guessing when a property is assigned to a different technician or a technician leaves the com-

pany entirely, Tootle added.

His seven-application program consists of mostly liquid treatments, which requires him to prepare accordingly. "When customers sign up with us, I like to think of it as a turn-key job," he described. "We will take care of the fertilizer, insect, weed and disease control." This all-inclusive approach demands all-encompassing preparation and planning.

"We like to have the trucks empty when technicians come back each day because the pesticides break down rapidly," he said. "We don't mix the pesticide until right before they spray to keep the breakdown to a minimum."

Tootle's program calls for equipment that differs from those that are predominantly granular. His trucks are furnished with 600-gallon main tanks and 100-gallon drop tanks to hold liquid treatments. Powered beam pumps deliver applications. He also builds weed and insect control into the program, which incorporates a continuous scouting program, where technicians tune into potential problems.

Continuous for Pender, however, means a year-round program – a variation from most companies' six-visit schedule. His program consists of a 12-month application process. "I always kid the customer and say that in the South we're blessed that the weeds emerge 12 months a year," he joked. "But we have a long growing season. We're preemerging six times per year and, in between that, we're liming in December and putting out fertilizer in the summer."

These application models prove the importance of matching the preparation to the treatment. Each company's philosophy influences the organizational system.

BASIC TRAINING. Tools are not limited to sprayers and spreaders. Training is a vital prerequisite to prescribing lawn care treatments, and technicians that sidestep education will not have the back-

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ground to identify turf terrorists.

Today's lean job market means that on-the-job training replaces historic intensive winter training sessions, which were the norm in many companies. This new, hands-on education familiarizes technicians with the company's application methods while orienting them to the trade, work atmosphere and client base – three key service elements.

"Training is adjusted to the needs of the seasonality of hiring workers to address employee turnover, as well as building their confidence to address the challenges they face in performing their duties," Hurto explained. "All employees require a basic training program upon hiring, but it's more than just classroom activities. Be sure they receive proper hands-on training by pairing them with an experienced mentor who knows the walk."

Hurto tags this method "contemporary training," and added that adopting a field mentor can reduce new employee turnover. Regular meetings that emphasize seasonal topics or explain new technology motivate employees and bolster their industry knowledge, noted John Steiner, Midwest regional manager,

NaturalLawn, Frederick, Md. His company hosts 20- to 30-minute weekly meetings to review goals, investigate relevant issues and supply additional training.

"We discuss issues such as insects and pests, depending on what time of year it is,

"Your lawn is a living thing – it's like us getting a cold." – Marlene Patrick

and provide some training material and a short quiz for technicians to be able to take during the time we hold the meeting," he explained. "We'll include education on threshold levels for insects, and discuss whether or not a technician should treat a problem or if it can be scouted, monitored and controlled in a different way."

In turn, technicians educate their clients, pointing out problematic areas on the lawn and involving them in the application treatment decision-making process, Steiner added.

Training also allows technicians to make informed choices. "We educate the customer as to what the problem is in order to make a conscious decision, and

we also empower the applicators to make a decision as to whether or not a problem has reached a level where it could be causing damage, if we can change what the consumer is doing to alleviate the problem or if the problem is at such a level that it needs to be treated," he said.

Patrick accompanies her technicians on their routes when they are first learning the ropes so that these choices can be joint decisions while her new technician is learning company's decision-making criteria. "Making an even application is everything," she commented, adding that this is one area she stressed while training employees. "You have to teach them how to use the equipment and the proper way of putting on an application."

Reading books, asking questions, taking classes – all of these training supplements create a well-rounded industry education.

"The most important thing is being knowledgeable," she accentuated. "The customer will question you and you have to know what is wrong with the lawn if a problem arises. Know what you're talking about, and be honest with yourself and with your customer." **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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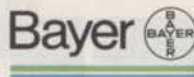
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Lawn care operators following fertilizer trends know that natural gas price hikes and new interest in slow-release formulas are a spreading reality.

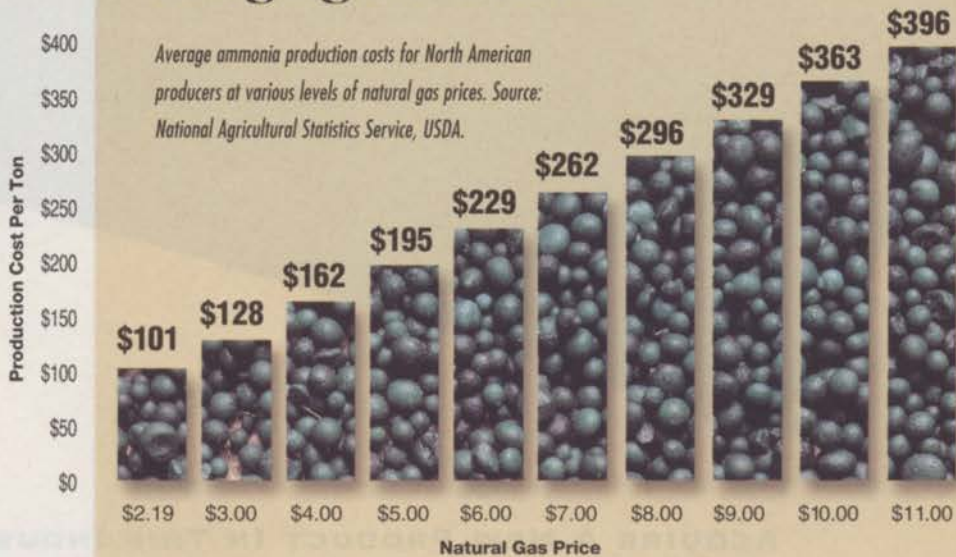
"One fertilizer that does it all," summed up Louis Carta, owner, Connecticut Lawn Care, Bristol, Conn., laughing at the possibility of a lawn care cure-all. "A one-shot product would be great, but that's not going to happen."

Pinpointing the perfect formula might not be a realistic industry development, however many lawn care operators are experimenting with various products, methods and mixtures. With slow-release nitrogen penetrating the market, natural gas costs pressuring price and granular products dominating formula choice, some predict a fertilizer future quite different than its tank-sprayer past.

GOING GRANULAR. Historically, liquid-based fertilizers dominated the market, their precise application capabilities and easy mixing qualities creating a "double-time treatment" when combined with control products such as preemergent herbicides or insecticides, noted

by Kristen Hampshire

Gauging Gas Prices



Feeding FRENZY

Ray Buckwalter, product manager, Lebanon Turf Products, Lebanon, Penn.

Today, granular treatments shadow liquid products. A rising concern for the environment pushed the popularity of this type of fertilizer, Buckwalter explained. "Dry applications are less likely to be perceived as 'potentially dangerous lawn chemicals' by customers or casual observers," he commented. "This also prompted many turf managers to switch. Many new granular fertilizers are available with herbicides or insecticides, which allows labor savings when doing two applications simultaneously."

Preference for granular material continues to peak, and has swelled steadily since companies began to add granular products to their all-liquid programs 15 years ago, explained Bill Hubbell, vice president of service centers, LESCO, Rocky River, Ohio. Another reason for the popularity of granular is that equipment and training requirements are lower for this material, which does not involve the chemistry of mixing formulas, he noted. "You don't need expensive sprayers to make applications, and you don't have the mixing involved with liquid fertilizers – you don't need fill charts."

In addition, shipping liquid fertilizer costs significantly more than transporting granular products, so many companies favor dry products for the economy of ordering material, Hubbell added. Granular products also offer a greater variety of options for slow-release nitrogen formulas – dry products outnumber liquid roughly 10 to 2, noted Dean Nelson, owner, Nelson Plant Food, Bellville, Texas.

"Liquid in the southern United States burns in the summer," Nelson added. "So, you have to be really careful with that."


While many lawn care companies are going granular, still, many turn to liquid formulas to spot-treat. Others are further exploring dry fertilization options by playing chemist and creating combination products that meet soil needs. Concocting an effective blend means fortifying fertilizer with weed and insect control products. Carta uses combination products for blanket insect control, applying these puffed-up pesticides to control widespread problems where spot

spraying would be time consuming, he said.

"Combination products are a much cleaner, safer, more efficient way of treating a lawn," he said, adding that many LCOs (lawn care operators) are choosing this mix for the same reason he did. "They're tired of walking around the lawns spraying. It's a one-time over the lawn instead of two trips. It's probably more cost effective also."

Besides time and money, organic concern rules some lawn care companies' fertilizer product choices.

Green-centered thinking has spread to many lawn care customers in recent years – they want to know that applications will not harm the environment. This pushes many technicians to consider alternative, environmentally friendly treatments with less potent



Environmental concern is a prevalent consideration for lawn care companies as customers are demanding earth-friendly services.

Photo: Pursell



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ingredients. In recent years, pesticides have acquired a negative connotation and LCOs must address this reality when considering fertilizer products, Carta reasoned. "People are being forced to be more environmentally responsible," he said. "That's why some companies are working hard at coming up with lower active ingredients."

Ecological inspiration motivated Carta to experiment with biosolids, a treatment that is growing in popularity, he observed. Composed of sewer bi-products, Carta said the material is affordable and the environmentally conscious ingredients make waste workable.

"We're taking something—waste—and making it into something," he reasoned. "Not only are we gaining the benefits of it as a fertilizer, but we're also helping the environment and recycling."

PICKING AND CHOOSING. LCOs must tailor the product to match their program, which spans from simple "weed and feed" applications, including ferti-

"If you've gotten that natural gas bill lately, the prices are having the same effect on fertilizer." – Bill Hubbell

zation and weed and insect control, to more sophisticated preventive and curative fungicide treatment. Some companies have expanded into core aeration, thatch management, lawn renovation, slit seed-

ing, tree and shrub fertilization and leaf removal, Buckwalter listed, noting that service options reach as far as an LCO is willing to explore.

"There are no limits as to what can be done by the imaginative LCO," Buckwalter commented.

If options are endless and products are plentiful, lawn care companies need to evaluate key fertilizer features. Technicians should consider turf quality, number of applications and timing of applications in addition to conducting a soil test to identify relevant data for their specific geographic regions, Buckwalter noted. "Knowledge of soils, weather and turf varieties helps determine what types of fertilizer are needed to achieve the desired results."



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Some soils might require special blending to create a concoction that caters to local turf characteristics, added Jim Collins, owner, Komp Horticulture, Houston, Texas. He relies on his providers to custom blend fertilizers. "We work hand in hand, trying to look at what is going to be most effective for a particular application," he explained.

The variegated soil composition in Collins' area calls for versatility. Some areas of the city contain clay-based soil while other locations hold a more acidic soil, he noted. "In some cases, we have to custom blend for a particular project."

Buying and blending fertilizer still requires attention to quality and not necessarily cost. Price shopping is not limited to customers who weed out expensive service providers. LCOs also play the numbers game, some of them seeking rock-bottom fertilizer prices and settling for what Buckwalter considers an inferior option, in many cases. "With fertilizer, you get what you pay for," he summed up, noting that less expensive options tend to have lower quality nutrient sources and lack slow-release nitrogen. These two negatives can both be detrimental to turf.

"Everything else being equal, it makes sense for the LCO to choose the most economical fertilizer that meets his or her specifications," he added. "If there is a significant disparity in price, everything else is probably not equal."

Buckwalter noted that size and uniformity of fertilizer granules often is overlooked during the purchasing process, along with how well application rates match desired nutrient rates.

"Granular products are ideally applied at between 3 and 6 pounds per thousand square feet," he explained. "Poor coverage can result if the rate is too low, and excessively high rates require the handling of large amounts of material." Safety, application quality and environmental fac-



The relative ease of application with spreaders instead of spray tanks has contributed to the rising popularity of granular fertilizer applications, according to many manufacturers.

tors play into pricing, and LCOs who ignore these important factors sell themselves short, he said.

Jim Rhodes, owner, Texas Green Turf, Houston, Texas, noticed waning quality in available fertilizer products. Prices are climbing and value is falling, he criticized. "I've bought bad fertilizer in the past that caked up in the mildest humidity and really turned into a block of cement," he described. "I could see all kinds of trash in it—cigarette butts, a dead rat. Those kinds of things happen all the time, which is why you need to look at the products suppliers give you."

Rhodes looks for fertilizer products that are clean and free of trash with a medium prill size, which eases application. Fertilizer that is too dusty is challenging to apply, he noted. He also evaluates the fertilizer's past performance. "The bottom line of any kind of fertilizer performance is what it does to help the turf," he explained. "Good root development, good green up, does it flow well when you

spread it? All of these factors are involved."

Other basic considerations lawn care companies should review when purchasing fertilizer might include storage capabilities, quality and consistency of the product, particle size and percent of slow-release nitrogen content, Hubbell added. A company with minimal storage capacity should recognize the space that large, liquid tanks consume, and instead opt to stock bags of dry fertilizer.

Also, medium-sized, consistent particle size is important to ensure even application, and nitrogen content will change depending on the season, he said. The key is to identify the lawn's needs.

"One of the larger variables with fertilizer is the slow-release source and the amount of slow-release formula in a bag," Hubbell explained.

"If you put down a fertilizer, the lawn looks great for about 10 days because the fertilizer is quickly absorbed by the plant, but what doesn't get absorbed can leach away from the root zone," Hubbell added.

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"The lawn goes from being dark green to not dark green until it is fertilized again."

"GREEN-UP," THUMBS DOWN.

"Green up" pleases customers, who are

often more concerned about color than chemical composition. And often, fertilizers that focus on quick green up also result in quick burnout. Nelson relates slow-release nitrogen to eating habits. "It is

better to eat smaller meals more frequently than one giant meal every day," he compared. "If you do that for grass with slow-release nitrogen, the lawn won't have surges of growth that have to be chopped off at one time."

The results from cutting grass after a growth spurt are less than appealing, added Mark Barbera, vice president and general manager, Nu-Gro Technologies, Powell, Ohio.

"Besides environmental benefits, quality slow-release products provide turf and soil benefits," he explained.

"I compare it to human nutrition. It is easy to make turf dark green with regular applications of straight urea (found in traditional fertilizers), but you are just feeding top growth and too much of that will actually stress the root system. It is like living on Snickers bars for a few weeks. They provide energy to keep you going, but neither case does much for long-term health and is no substitute for a balanced nutritional program."

By pairing slow-release nitrogen fertilizers with organic products, Carta hopes to decrease the chemical content of his applications while enhancing the soil's nutrition level. A mixture of slow-release nitrogen and an organic base will feed and nurture the soil while providing constant, long-term fertilization. "The lawn will get organic matter, which is an important thing, and you're freeing the grass plant and the soil," he described.

Slow-release nitrogen fertilizers also are accompanied with ingredient decisions. Quality nitrogen sources differ from their mediocre counterparts in that they feed longer, allowing for more time in between applications, Buckwalter said. The increased time increments between applications reduce fertilizer burn and allow grass to flourish with minimal treatments, he explained. Fall fertilization also provides a useful outlet for slow-release nitrogen

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products, Carta added. This way, the soil can receive vital nutrients during the winter months, and LCOs extend their window of service while getting a head start on upcoming spring work.

Some companies, however, are hesitant to adopt slow-release nitrogen products because they fear losing money due to fewer applications on a client's property, he added.

A COSTLY REACTION. Natural gas price hikes create expensive heating bills, but what consumers might not realize is how these steep cost increases inflate the price of fertilizer.

"If you've gotten that natural gas bill lately, the prices are having the same effect on fertilizer," Hubbell explained. "The fertilizer business has been pretty consistent over the last few years with pricing, but it's not like that this year."

Barbera commented that, "it may help to have an abbreviated 'Nitrogen Basics 101' course," to understand the chemistry behind the cost. In a nutshell, ammonia, the building block for all nitrogen fertilizer, is produced by combining natural gas in the presence of a catalyst with air. Urea, a primary fertilizer ingredient, also is produced indirectly through an ammonia reaction.

High natural gas prices intensify the cost of producing urea, and therefore increase prices of all urea-based products. Today, ammonia on the Gulf Coast runs \$290 per ton compared to last year's \$112 per ton cost.

This means lawn care companies will be paying top dollar for fertilizer this year, and in turn, will be forced to pass this cost to the consumer, Barbera explained.

"North American nitrogen producers cannot buy \$10 natural gas and make

money selling \$300 ammonia," he detailed. "It is estimated that 50 percent of the North American ammonia production capacity has been idled in the last several months. Producers cannot afford to produce ammonia or urea at today's selling prices."

Supply is likely to be more of an issue than price, Barbera concluded.

"An LCO who has not done any buying yet is going to find fertilizer prices up significantly for the coming season and,

"What there is right now is an industry that's tied to natural gas, and we're going to have some economic issues in 2001." – Bill Hubbell

again, availability will be an issue," he stressed. "I think we will see some homeowners taking a second look at having their lawn fertilized when they see the increased costs."

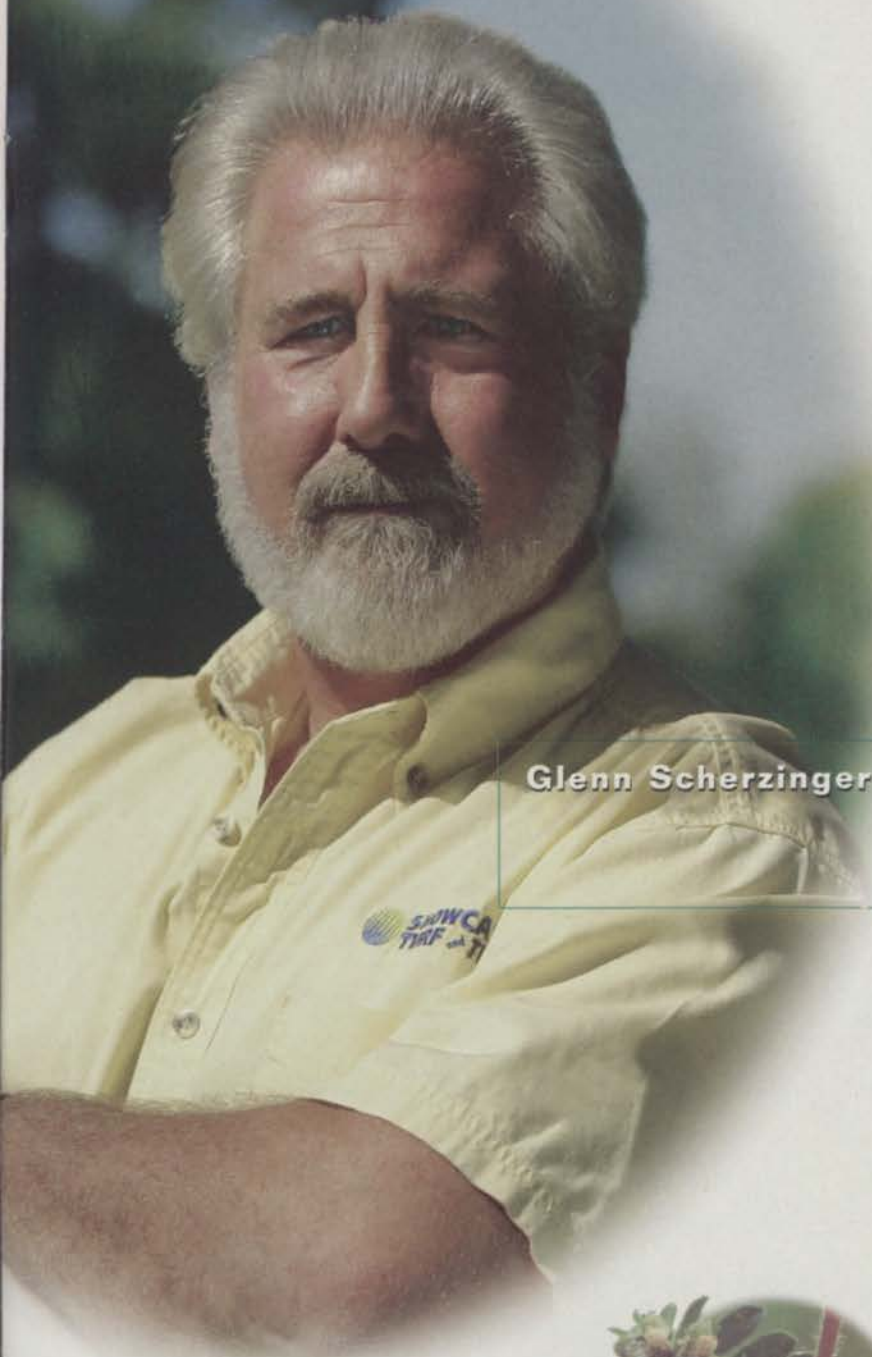
Barbera is advising his customers to buy fertilizer early and buy in bulk. Though some lawn care companies have secured pricing for their customers because of their generous inventory, others have not had this luxury, and instead are left explaining the discrepancy.

Hubbell emphasized that customer communication is crucial in lieu of these sharp price increases. "Cost will hurt companies if they haven't raised their prices," he predicted.

"Right now the industry is tied to natural gas, and we're going to see some economic issues in 2001." **□**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.





Glenn Scherzinger

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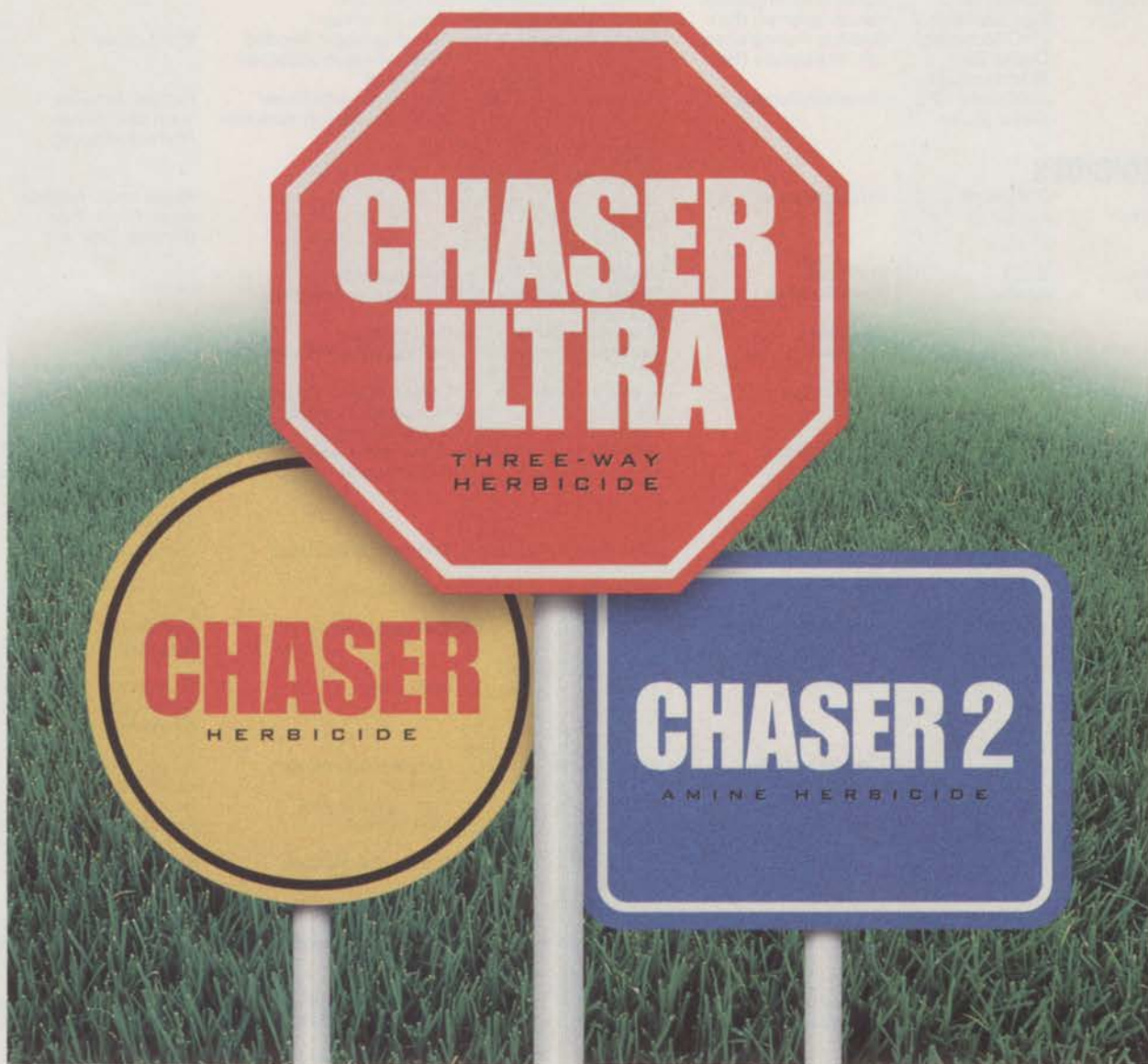
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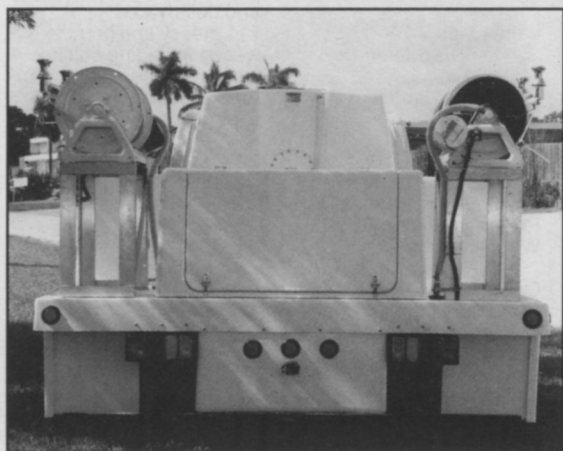
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MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENT	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED
PESTICIDES					
BIOLOGICALS					
Plant Health Care	Teknar Bti Bioinsecticide PHC Mosquito Dunks Bti Bioinsecticide SoilGuard 12G Biofungicide	Bacillus thuringiensis var. israelensis (Bti) Bacillus thuringiensis var. israelensis (Bti) Beneficial fungus	Teknar granules or water soluble packets Floating dunks 12 percent granule	Mosquito and black fly larvae Standing water, flooded areas where mosquitoes can breed Landscape and flower beds, soil/potting mixtures	Mosquitoes Fungal diseases such as Pythium, Rhizoctonia, etc.
FUNGICIDES					
Arbor Systems	Shepherd	Propaconazole			Apple scab, Anthracnose, Dutch Elm disease, Oak wilt
Aventis/Chipco	26GT Aliette	Iprodione Aluminum tris	Liquid Water dispersible granular Wettable powder	Institutional turf Turf and ornamentals	
	Chipco 26019 ProStar	Aprodione Flutolanil	Wettable powder Wettable powder	Ornamentals Residential and commercial	
Bayer	Bayleton 50	Triadimefon	Water soluble packets	Certain flower diseases foliage plants, shrubs, turf shade trees	Dollar spot, brown patch, summer patch, copper spot, etc.
	Compass	Trifloxystrobin	50 WG	All turfgrass and ornamentals	Anthracnose, brown patch, gray leaf spot, etc.
Cleary Chemical	Spectro 90 WDG Spotrete F	TM and Daconal Thiram	Wettable dry granule Flowable	Turf and ornamental Turf diseases	Gray leaf spot, rusts, et al. Dollar spot, brown patch, rust
	Protect T/O	Mancozeb		Turf and ornamental	Dollar spot, leaf spot, fusarium
Dow AgroSciences	Rubigan A.S.	Fenarimol	Liquid	Lawn care	Poa annua, dollar spot, rusts, patch and fungal diseases
Griffin	Junction	Copper hydroxide and mancozeb	Dry flowable	Greenhouse, nursery and turf	Algae, brown patch, dollar spot, etc.
	Concorde SST	Chlorothalol	Liquid	Turf, nursery and ornamental	Brown patch, dollar spot, leaf spot, algae, melting out rust and red thread
	Pentathlon	Maneb	Liquid	Turf and landscape	Botrytis, anthracnose, cercospora, rust, etc.
	Kocide 2000	Copperhydroxide	Dry flowable	Turf, nursery and ornamental	Alternaria blight, anthracnose, phemapsis, etc.
	Pentathlon DF	Mancozeb	Dry Flowable	Turf and landscape	Botrytis, anthracnose, cercospora, rust, etc.
J.J. Mauget	Fungisol Tebuject	Debacarb Tebuconazole	2 percent 4 percent	Ornamental trees Ornamental trees	31 pathogenic diseases Red oak wilt, leaf spot, apple scab, etc.
	Imisol	Imidacloprid, debacarb	5 percent	Ornamental trees	Combination of insects and pathogenic diseases
	Abasol	Abamectin, debacarb	5 percent	Ornamental trees	Insects and pathogenic diseases
Knox	1370029	Bayleton	Granular		
PBI Gordon	Bordeaux Mixture		Soluble powder	Flower beds, ornamental landscape and shade trees	Fungal and bacterial diseases
Plant Health Care	Trilogy Neem Oil Biopesticide	Neem oil	Sprayable horticultural oil	Landscape plants and shrubs	Powdery mildew, rust, black spot, aphid
Rohm and Haas	Dithane T/O Dithane WF Systhane WSP	Mancozeb Mancozeb Myclobutanil	Dry flowable Flowable Wettable powder in water soluble pouch	Ornamentals Ornamentals Ornamentals	
	Fore WSP	Mancozeb	Wettable powder in water soluble pouch	Turf	
	Fore Flowable Eagle	Mancozeb Myclobutanil	Flowable Wettable powder	Turf Turf	

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Syngenta	Banner MAXX			Turf	Broad-spectrum; controls dollar spot Broad-spectrum; resistance management 22 soil and foliar turfgrass diseases, brown leaf patch, etc. Broad-spectrum disease control; resists Pythium
	Daconil			Turf	
	Heritage			Turf	
	Subdue MAXX			Turf	
United Horticultural Supply	Banol C	Banol, daconil	Flowable	Disease control on turf	
	Engage	PCNB	Granular and flowable	Various turf diseases	

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	Ronstar	Oxadiazon	Powder, granule	Commercial nursery, turf and landscape	
	Finale	Glufosinate ammonium	Liquid	Emerged weeds in noncrop areas	
Bayer	Sencor 75	Metribuzin	Wettable powder	Broadleaf and grass	Annual bluegrass, weeds in turf goosegrass, bedstraw, carolina geranium, etc.
Dow Agro-Sciences	Confront	Triclopyr and clopyralid	Liquid, on fertilizer	Lawn care	Dandelion, clover and other broadleaf weeds Chickweed, spurge and oxalis Clover, dandelion, thistle and dollarweed 111 grassy and broadleaf weeds including chickweed, spurge, oxalis, etc. Crabgrass and chickweed Crabgrass, spurge, etc.
	Gallery	Isoxaben	Liquid, on fertilizer	Landscape, lawn care	
	Lontrel T&O	Clopyralid	Liquid	Lawn care	
	Snapshot	Irifluralin and isoxaben 2.5 TG	Granular	Landscape	
	Surflan A.S. Team Pro	Oryzalin Benefin and trifluralin	Liquid Granular, on fertilizer	Lawn care, landscape Lawn care	
Knox	1100409	Balan	Granular	Preemergent herbicide	
	1104109	Team	Granular	Preemergent herbicide	
	1103409	Treflan	Granular	Preemergent herbicide	
	1219009	Trimec	Granular	Weed control	
Monsanto	Roundup Pro		Liquid	Ornamentals, plant nurseries, Christmas trees, parks, recreational areas and residential areas	
	Roundup Pro Dry		Dry	Ornamentals, plant nurseries, Christmas trees, parks, recreational areas and residential areas	
	Manage			Turf	
PBI Gordon	Trimec Classic	2,4-D, MCP, dicamba	Low-odor liquid and low-odor dry	Warm- and cool-season turf grasses	Post-emergent broadleaf weeds
	Trimec Turf Ester	2,4-D, 2,4-DP, dicamba	Low-odor liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Cool-season turf grasses	broadleaf weeds
	Super Trimec	2,4-D, 2,4-DP, dicamba	Low-odor liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Cool-season turf grasses	Post-emergent broadleaf weeds
	Trimec Plus	2,4-D, MCP, dicamba, MSMA	Liquid	Warm- and cool-season	Post-emergent turf grasses and grass weeds
	Trimec 992	2,4-D, MCP, dicamba, MSMA	Liquid	Cool-season turf grasses	Post-emergent broadleaf weeds
	BrushMaster	Trimec Southern 2,4-D, 2,4-DP, dicamba	2,4-D, MCP, Low-odor liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Liquid Non-crop areas	Warm-season turf grasses Post-emergent brush, stumps and broadleaf weeds
	Pre-San	Bensulide	12.5 granule, 7 granule	Established turf grasses	Preemergent broadleaf and grass weeds
	Barrier	Dichlobenil	Granular	Ornamental beds,	Pre- and post-emergent tree wells, and fence lines

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENT	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED
	Vegemec	Prometon, 2,4-D	Liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Sidewalk cracks, patios, driveways, fenceline, vegetation	Post-and Pre-emergent total bare earth areas
	Tupersan	Siduron	Wettable powder	Newly-seeded and seedling turf grasses	Crabgrass, foxtail and downy brome
	Bensumec 4LF	Bensulide	Liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Established turf grasses	Preemergent broadleaf and grass weeds
	Mecomec	MCPPP	4-pound/gallon and 2.5-pound/gallon liquid	Cool-season turf grasses	Chickweed and clover
	Ornamec 170	Fluaziflop-P, butyl	Liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Flower beds, landscape plantings and wildflowers	Post-emergent grassy weeds
Riverdale Chemical	Manor	Metsulfuron methyl	WDG	Removes bahiagrass from St. Augustine and Bermuda-grass; controls weeds	
	Corsair	Chlorsulfuron	WDG	Removes clump grasses from grasses; controls weeds	
	Cool Power	MCPA, Triclopyr and Dicamba	All ester form	Cool-weather broadleaf weed applications	Wild violet and geranium, spurge, oxials, etc.
	Razor	Glyphosate	41% WSL	Grassy and broadleaf weeds	
	Razor SPI	Glyphosate	41% WSL	Indicator shows where product was applied	
	Horsepower	MCPA, triclopyr, dicamba, 2,4-D free amine		Turfgrass/black medic, buckhorn, chickweed, clover, daisy, dandelion, etc.	
Rohm and Haas	Dimension Ultra	Dithiopyr	Wettable powder in water soluble pouch	Ornamentals	
	Goal T/O	Oxyfluorfen	EC	Ornamentals	
	Dimension Ultra	Dithiopyr water soluble pouch	Wettable powder in	Turf	
	KERB	Pronamide water soluble pouch	Wettable powder in	Turf	
Syngenta	Barricade			Turf	Pre-emergence herbicide for grass and broadleaf weeds; controls crabgrass, etc.
	Reward			Turf	Non-selective; landscape and aquatic herbicide
	Touchdown PRO			Turf	Non-selective; improves weed contact
United Horticultural Supply	Surflan Coated	Surflan	Granular	Annual grasses and certain broadleaf weeds on warm-season turf and in nursery and on ornamentals	
	Chaser Ultra	Clopyralid, MCPA and dichloroprop-P	Liquid	New-generation broadleaf weeds; where a 3-way product is commonly used	
	Millennium Ultra	Dlopyralid and dicamba			
INSECTICIDES					
Arbor Systems	Pointer	Imidacloprid	5 percent	Ornamentals	Aphids, adelgids, feeding borers
	Greyhound	Abamectin	2 percent	beetles, psyllids, cambial	mites, beetles, etc.
Aventis/Chipco	Chipco Choice	Fipronil	Granular for slit applications	Ornamentals	
	DeltaGard T&O	Deltamethrin	5SC concentrate, granular	Commercial grounds	
	Sevin	Carbamate applications	Granular for slit	Turf and ornamentals, residential and commercial	
BASF	Pendulum	Pendiamathalin	26, 33 FC, WDS	Turf and ornamentals	More than 45 grassy and broadleaf weeds
	Basamid	Dazomet	Granular soil fumigant	Turf renovation and seed beds	Grasses, weeds, diseases and nematodes
	Drive	Quinclorae	75 DF	Turf	Broad-spectrum post-emergent herbicide offers
	Image	Imazaquin	70 DG	overseeding flexibility and	turf safety
				Turf	Purple and yellow nutsedge, dollarweed, green
				kallinga, etc.	
Bayer	Dylox 6.2	Trichlorfon	Granular	Turf	White grubs, mole crickets, etc.
	Dylox 80	Trichlorfon	Wettable powder	Landscape, flowers,	Nantucket pine tipmoth,

Focus On PESTICIDES & FERTILIZERS

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENT	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED
Imidacloprid	Water soluble	Turfgrass, ornamentals,	shrubs and trees Larvae of: annual blue- packets	armyworms, bagworms fruit and nut trees, etc.	Merit 75 WSP grass weevil, asiatic garden beetle, billbugs, etc. Larvae of: annual bluegrass weevil, etc. Larvae of: annual bluegrass weevil, asiatic garden beetle, billbugs, cutworms, etc.
	Merit 75 WP	Imidacloprid	Wettable powder	Turfgrass, ornamentals, fruit and nut trees, etc.	
	Merit 0.5 G	Imidacloprid	Granular	Turfgrass and landscape ornamentals	
	Tempo SC Ultra	Beta-Cyfluthrin	Liquid	Indoor and outdoor surfaces and ornamentals	
	Tempo 20 WP	Cyfluthrin	Wettable powder	Broad-spectrum control	
	Tempo 20 WP Power Pak	Cyfluthrin	Water soluble packets	Broad-spectrum control of crawling, flying and wood-infesting insect pests, etc.	
	Tempo 20 WP	Cyfluthrin	Water soluble packets	Broad-spectrum control for turf, trees, etc.	
Dow Agro-Sciences	Conserve SC	Spinosad	Liquid	lawn care, nursery, greenhouse, arborist	Cutworm, armyworm, sod webworm, lepidoptera, spider mite, etc.
	Dursban	Chlorpyrifos	Liquid, wettable powder	road medians, industrial der in pre-measured water-soluble packets, granular, on fertilizer	plant sites, rights-of-way, nursery
Gowan	Hexygon	Hexythiazox	Wettable powder	Ornamental plants	European red mite, pacific spidermite, etc.
	Vendex T/N/O	Fenbutatin-oxide	Wettable powder	Turf, nursery and ornamental	Two-spotted and spruce spidermites, olingonychus, etc.
	Talstar Lawn & Tree Flowable Insecticide/Miticide	Bifenthrin	Flowable liquid	Indoors, ornamentals and landscapes	Adelgids, annual bluegrass weevil, ants, aphids, army-
	Talstar PL Granular Insecticide	Bifenthrin	Granular	Ants, mole crickets and other insect pests	Annual bluegrass weevil, ants, army worms, billbugs, etc.
	Astro Insecticide	Permethrin	Flowable liquid	Lawns, ornamental trees and shrubs, and around buildings for perimeter insect control	Ant mounds, ants, armyworm, ash borer/banded, ash clearing, etc.
Talstar Nursery Granular Insecticide	Bifenthrin	Granular	Quarantine treatment against imported fire ants and other balled and containerized nursery stocks	Black vine weevil, european chafer larvae, fungus gnat larvae, etc.	
J.J. Mauget	Imicide	Imidacloprid	10 percent	Ornamental trees	Borers, piercing, sucking insects, etc.
	Abacide	Abamectin	1 percent	Ornamental trees	Mites, caterpillars, scales, etc.
	Inject-A-Cide B	Bidrin	80 percent	Ornamental trees	Chewing, piercing, sucking insects, etc.
	Inject-A-Cide	Metasystox-R	50 percent	Ornamental trees	Chewing, piercing, sucking insects, etc.
Knox	1300059	Diazinon	Granular	Insect control	
LESCO		Triad	Ortho Boricacid	Commercial and residential	Ants, roaches, beetles, silverfish, etc.
	LESCO Wasp	Tetramethrin and	Aerosol can and Hornet Spray	Phenoybennzyl	Wasps, hornets, yellow jackets and bees
Rohm and Haas	Confirm T/O Address T/O	Tebufenozide Acephate Ketch	Flowable Wettable powder BT	Ornamentals Ornamentals Wettable powder	Ornamentals
Malofenozide	Liquid, granu-	Turf	Grubs, cutworms, sod lar fertilizer	Rohmid	Mach 2 webworms, etc.
	Syngenta	Award Scimitar			Turf Fire ants
United Horticultural Supply	Dursban 2 Coated Granular		Granular	Turf	Surface feeders and mole crickets

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- 11. Tree Pruning
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- 14. Other _____

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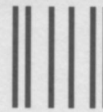
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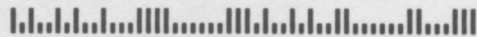


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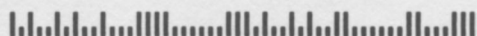


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MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ANALYSIS (N-P-K)	SGN PARTICLE SIZE	% SLOW-RELEASE NITROGEN	FOR USE IN/ON	
FERTILIZERS						
The Andersons	Straight Fertilizer	32-3-5	215	1.18% Ammoniacal N, 30.82% Urea Nitrogen, 16% CSRUN		
	Fertilizer with Weed Control	16-4-8	150	1.56 Ammoniacal N, 14.44 Urea Nitrogen, 4% CSRUN		
	Fertilizer with Insect Control	22-3-8	215	1.17 Ammoniacal N, 13.82% Urea Nitrogen, 3.75% CSRUN		
	22-0-6+0.75% ProPendi	22-0-6	150	40%		
	22-4-4+0.87% ProPendi	22-4-4	150	0%		
	13-3-7+0.86% ProPendi	13-3-7	150	40%		
	20-3-4+0.86% ProPendi	20-3-4	150	40%		
Cleary Chemical	Nutrigrow	0-28-26			Plant nutrient	
J.R. Simplot	Turf Supreme + Trimec	16-6-8	140	0%	Turf	
	270G with 0.2% Dimension	0-0-0	130	0%	Turf and ornamentals	
	12-8-16 with 0.2% Dimension	12-8-16	140	0%	Turf	
	16-8-8 with 0/2% Dimension	16-8-8	140	0%	Turf	
	18-3-7 with 0.107% Dimension	18-3-7	160	25%	Turf	
	24-3-8 with 0.2% Dimension	24-3-8	140	60%	Turf	
	30-3-7 with 0.107% Dimension	30-3-7	160	98%	Turf	
	12-8-16 with 0.4% Barricade	12-8-16	140	0%	Turf	
	16-8-8 with 0.4% Barricade	16-8-8	140	0%	Turf	
	18-2-12 with 0.86% Mach II	18-2-10	166	40%	Turf	
	18-2-12 with 0.86% Mach II	18-2-12	166	50%	Turf	
	Knox	1217099	28-5-8	TP	20%	Broadleaf weed control
		1219799	25-4-9	TP	25%	Broadleaf weed control
		1120219	15-0-15	STD	30%	With Team Pro preemergent
1120299		19-3-5	TP	25%	With Team Pro preemergent	
1114129		19-3-5	STD	40%	With Dimension preemergent	
1114219		12-4-08	STD	25%	With Dimension preemergent	
1112619		23-3-6	STD	25%	With Barricade preemergent	
1113109		5-5-25	STD	N/A	With Barricade preemergent	
1308659		15-0-15	TP	50%	With Merit insect control	
1308839		28-3-10	STD	25%	With Merit insect control	
1310729		15-0-15	TP	75%	With Mach 2 insecticide	
1310789		20-3-5	STD	50%	With Mach 2 insecticide	
1300589		21-3-8	STD	33%	With insecticides	
Lebanon		Proscape with Confront herbicide MESA	19-2-9 and 17-2-17			Established cool and warm-season turf High-activity methylene urea complex with sulfate of amonia Includes IBDU slow-release
	Woodace 18-5-10 and 14-4-6	12-3-6, 14-14-14, nitrogen, MethEX 40 high Al methylene urea complex,				
LESCO	See catalogue for complete product line					
Milorganite	Milorganite Classic	6-2-00	150	85%	Turf, flowers, trees and shrubs	
	Milorganite Green Grade	6-2-00	90	85%	Turf, flowers, trees and shrubs	
Moyer & Son	Arborflo	16-3-3	Liquid	55%	Trees and shrubs	
	Micro Plus	5-0-0	Liquid iron	N/A	Turf	
	Turflo	20-3-3	Liquid	35%	Turf	
	Coron Plus	25-0-0	Liquid	50%	Turf and shrubs	
	Green Gro	26-6-12	240	50% or 70%	Turf	
	Green Gro	32-4-8	235	30%	Turf	
	Green Gro	20-9-9	235	50%	Turf	
	Green Gro	18-24-5	235	20%	Turf	
	MOST	10-9-08	235	45%	Turf and ornamentals	
	MOST	16-4-8	235	50% organic	Turf and ornamentals	
	MOST	19-3-6	235	50% organic, 25% SCU	Turf	
	MOST	6-12-12	235	75%	Shrubs and flowers	

Focus On PESTICIDES & FERTILIZERS

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ANALYSIS (N-P-K)	SGN PARTICLE SIZE	% SLOW-RELEASE NITROGEN	FOR USE IN/ON
Plant Health Care	Healthy Start Bio-Tabs	12-8-08		2%	Newly-planted trees
	Healthy Start for Flowers	12-16-12		N/A	shrubs
	Healthy Turf	8-1-19		8%	Flowering plants
	Mycor Plant Saver	4-7-04		4%	Soil conditioner for turfgrass
	Mycor Palm Saver	6-3-06		6%	Containerized perennials, shrubs, trees and plants
PHC	BioPak Plus	3-0-20		N/A	Planting, growing and maintaining palms and tropical plants
United Horticultural Supply	Signature	varied	100	BCMU methylene urea	Drench or soil injection
Valent	Orthene Turf, Tree and Ornamental	Spray	97	N/A	Turf
	DiPel PRO DF Tame 2.4 EC Spray Insecticide Distance Insect Growth Regulator Envoy Herbicide				Turf Ornamentals Ornamentals Ornamentals

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USE READER SERVICE #174

THIS SPRING
THINK DIFFERENTLY
ABOUT TREE INSECT CONTROL

by Cynthia Greenleaf

Tackling irrigation maintenance issues demands technical skill and a thoughtful approach.

PROBLEM Solving

Until designs are flawless and installations are infallible, no irrigation system will ever be perfect.

That's why polishing troubleshooting techniques and technical knowledge is a must for any contractor maintaining irrigation systems.

From crooked, plugged or improperly sized sprinkler heads to pressure problems, electrical issues and mismatched precipitation rates, there is no shortage of problems that can pop up in an irrigation system, according to Tim Wilson, director of education for the Irrigation Association, Falls Church, Va. That's why staying on top of troubleshooting techniques is critical, he urged.

NO QUICK FIX. Being systematic and organized is the first rule of effective troubleshooting, according to Tim Malooly, president, Irrigation By Design, Plymouth, Minn. "What's always important is having some sort of step-by-step methodology to narrow down your focus," he said, adding that this is especially critical since many irrigation problems can be "underground and complicated," and in turn, difficult to diagnose. There is no room

for a scattershot approach in troubleshooting, he warned. Instead, contractors should "move back from the visible point of the symptom and find the point of the problem."

A clearly established system of procedures is indeed essential for a successful repair job, agreed Nathan Stivers, owner, Advanced Irrigation, Bettendorf, Iowa. His typical approach to fixing a system with a restricted water flow problem is a clear example. "The first thing I do when trying to track down a restriction problem is to make sure the valve is opening all the way or, in the case of adjustable flow valves, make sure that it has not been screwed shut," he described.

"Next, with the valve on, I walk around the yard and listen for a hissing sound. From here, I start locating the pipe, cut it open and check the flow. I usually start near the first head. Sometimes we cut the pipe in several locations and slide objects through the pipe to check for blockages.

"If we can narrow down the location of the restriction, we may just install a new pipe," he continued, adding that practicality in approaching a problem works wonders for customer relations. "Since our repair fees are based on time and materials, we try to give the customer the best

Sharp troubleshooting skills are essential when diagnosing system problems, such as a pipe that has been restricted by tree roots, shown above and below.

Photos: Nathan Stivers



Irrigation Troubleshooting

value by performing the repair as efficiently as we can."

Wilson noted that many contractors tend to go for the quick fix instead of determining what the underlying problem is. This usually amounts to a waste of time and resources in the long run, he said.

"A lot of contractors try to band-aid work, but they're not actually fixing the problem, just rearranging it," he pointed out.

When addressing coverage or pressure problems, "you need to be careful about just randomly adding or removing sprinkler heads, for example," he described. The green donut effect is a common situation in which contractors tend to go for the quick fix. When contractors observe this problem – which happens when a large rotary sprinkler yields a circle pattern with a dry, brown area next to the head while the area further out is wet with a green ring – they often just switch nozzles, assuming that will do the trick,

Wilson said. Shifting system components around, however, only augments the problem instead of remedying it, he pointed out.

For coverage problems such as the green donut effect, Wilson recommended performing an audit. "Lay out catch cans and let the sprinklers run," he suggested. "Come back and see how much water is in some vs. others."

This will clue contractors into what exactly they can do, he said.

In terms of pricing, charging for time and material for troubleshooting tends to be the industry norm. On routine service calls, where a valve won't operate, for example, Malooly charges about \$68 an hour plus a \$15 activation fee, he said.

Similarly, Haase Landscape, Spokane, Wash., charges \$45 to show up and then \$35 an hour plus parts, according to Chris Harfield, the company's production manager.

"What's always important is

having some sort of

step-by-step methodology

to narrow down your focus."

– Tim Malooly

Glenn Cooper, president, Dancing Waters Lawn Sprinkler Systems, Jonesboro, Ga., takes a different approach and has his customers sign an annual maintenance agreement, which generally run around \$169. Short of any unexpected major maintenance, this eliminates constantly going back to the customer for additional money, he said.

TRICKY ISSUES. One perplexing issue can be tree roots that have grown around an irrigation pipe, restricting or entirely cutting off water flow to sprinklers. Stivers has frequently encountered this issue and notes it can be tricky to diagnose. "You know there's

(continued on page 144)

The Eye of the Storm



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Irrigation Troubleshooting

(continued from page 142)

enough water getting to the house and not too many sprinkler heads in a zone, but not enough water is getting to the heads," he described, adding that this situation is most common with polyethylene piping in systems that are more than 10 years old.

However, electrical problems are undoubtedly the most difficult irrigation problems to troubleshoot. "They can be a little bit vexing," according to Malooly.

"Those are the hardest to track down because you don't always know where to look," Stivers agreed. "You need to just start narrowing it down."

Signs of an electrical problem include zones that inexplicably come on or off. For example, "if one zone stays stuck on and whatever you do, it doesn't go off," described Jeff Walters, manager of irrigation department, Munie Outdoor Services, Caseyville, Ill. "Or if more than one zone in a row won't come on for some reason, such as zones one through 5 won't come on, and

then zones 6 through 10 have the same problem."

Although not always obvious, this scenario might indicate a faulty ground wire with a poor connection, Walters said.

Corroded wire is another common electrical issue that often results in random dry patches throughout a lawn. Such wire problems are more common in older systems and are tough to track down, Stivers observed. These can result from damage caused during installation, water damage or just wear and tear through the years, he said, pointing out that improperly sized wire can also cause system malfunction.

Stivers added that he always keeps wire splices at valve locations, so finding them at a later date to address a problem is never too difficult a task, he said.

When faced with an electrical problem, many contractors mistakenly assume the

Unlike general crew members or technicians, troubleshooters aren't necessarily the fastest, most productive workers, but they must be highly disciplined and deliberate in their problem solving methods.

controller is faulty, Wilson noted. "Inexperienced people just replace the controller, because to them, that's the heart of a system. That's what they can see."

At least 95 percent of the time, however, the electrical problem is not with the controller, but with the field wiring or solenoid, Wilson pointed out, adding that these issues can be addressed through the controller. Doing this just takes technical skills to diagnose properly with a volt-ohmmeter.

Meters are an essential tool for troubleshooting electrical problems, Cooper agreed. Using them effectively can save valuable time. Having to locate a faulty wire buried in a yard, for example, is almost impossible to do, he said. "It takes money to locate wire. Using a meter, however, can tell you right up front what your problem is."

A NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE. Ongoing technical training is critical for effective and efficient troubleshooting. Employers paying for this training should view it as money well spent, Wilson observed, pointing out that investing upfront in troubleshooting training and education is easier than paying for it later with a free fix while a system is under warranty, he noted.

Since troubleshooting is such a technical area, contractors doing this work ideally should be certified in a range of areas – from being a certified landscape irrigation auditor to having a low-voltage license and a backflow test accreditation, depending upon the state, according to Malooly.

Basic irrigation design familiarity is also a must, Cooper added. As is knowing the basic principles of electricity, Stivers said.

In addition to manufacturer education and training materials, the Irrigation Association offers a range of seminars and classes throughout the country with dates posted on its Web site, www.irrigation.org.

(continued on page 146)

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Irrigation Troubleshooting

(continued from page 144)

Those newer to the industry should seek out a troubleshooting mentor, Stivers advised. "Find someone who has been doing it a while, so you have access to call them when you're stumped," he said, adding that since there are so many unwritten tricks of the trade, taking advantage of a more experienced contractor's insights can be invaluable.

Don't underestimate the value of interoffice discussion, either, Malooly suggested. Passing information back and forth among coworkers can be a tremendous way of sharing experience and solving troubleshooting conundrums, he advised.

Lastly, contractors should make sure the

right employee is tending to irrigation maintenance issues. This person should be a logical perfectionist able to follow a precise sequence of steps, time after time, Wilson pointed out. Unlike general crew members or technicians, troubleshooters aren't necessarily the fastest, most productive workers, but they must be highly disciplined and deliberate in their problem solving methods.

Walters recommended picking a troubleshooter who is a versatile, quick learner who's not afraid to get dirty. **LI**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

No irrigation troubleshooter is complete without a comprehensive set of tools to diagnose system ills. According to industry experts, no problem solver should be without:

- **VOLT-OHMMETER.** This device, which measures electrical resistance, is the most important tool for troubleshooting electrical problems, according to Tim Wilson, director of education for the Irrigation Association, Falls Church, Va. Since they can be expensive, running anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000, these meters can be rented from an irrigation supplier if need be, Wilson suggested.
- **PITOT TUBE.** These devices, equipped with a pressure gauge, can readily diagnose pressure problems. These inexpensive tubes – generally priced around \$20, are suited for rotary heads but adaptable for spray heads.
- **SOIL PROBE.** These allow an irrigation contractor to know what's going on with out-of-sight watering. By pushing into the soil and pulling out a sample, a probe can tell how deep you're watering and helps you figure out how to schedule, according to Wilson.
- **FULLY STOCKED SERVICE TRUCK.** Since they need to be ready to tackle most any kind of problem on a moment's notice, troubleshooters should have a stockpile of essential supplies such as sprinkler heads, hand tools, electrical wire and so on.
- **REFERENCE MATERIAL.** To aid technicians in problem solving, having reference materials on hand is a good idea, pointed out Tim Malooly, president, Irrigation By Design, Plymouth, Minn. Throughout the years, his company, for example, has come up with its own methods and practices manual that covers every troubleshooting scenario – from electrical problems to sprinkler head adjustments, Malooly described.

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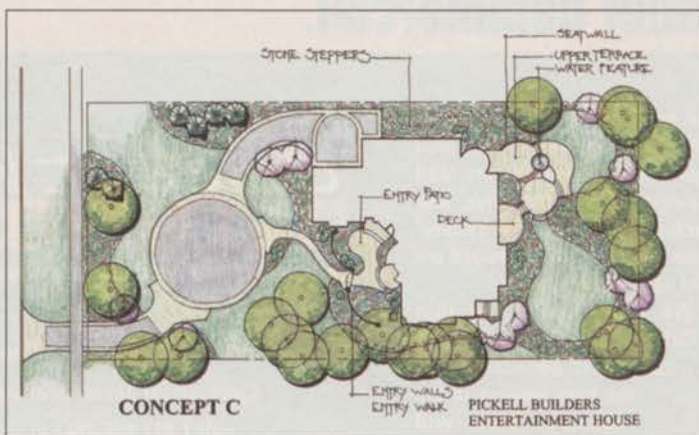
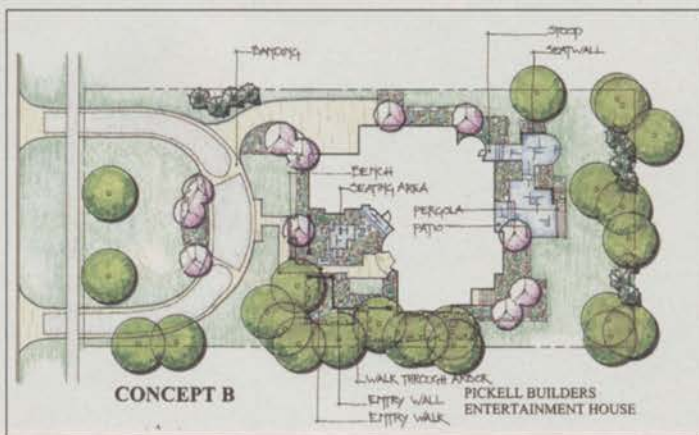
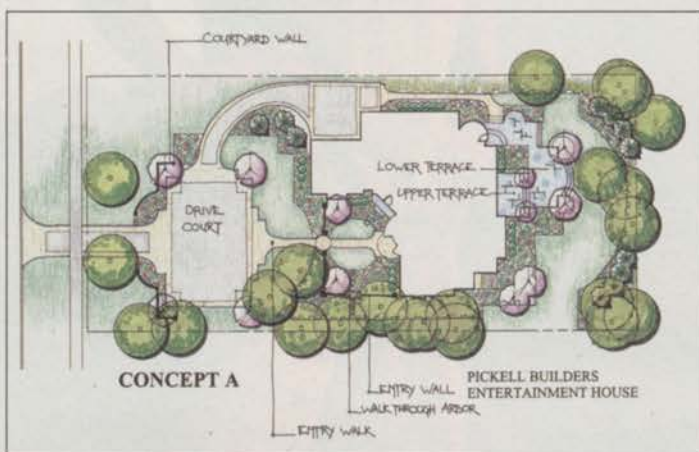
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USE READER SERVICE #112

Landscape Design

by Kristen Hampshire

*More than sketching a scene,
architects discuss planning a landscape
design from concept to construction.*



Landscapes provide a personal reflecting pool – each plant and patio reveals individual expression and style. A backyard might serve as a playground for one family, but provide an extension of the living room, or even offer a private refuge, for another household.

“I like to think that every property is different – it mirrors the personality of the client,” described David Knauff, owner, Yes, We Care Landscaping, Wilmette, Ill.

By developing a design that is both creative and sensible, landscape designers devise a plan to solidify their clients’ vision and address their needs. The process is a culmination of creativity, practicality and technicality – considerations that designers should carry to the drawing board.

Quite simply, landscape installation designs require fine-tuning the senses and synchronizing form and function.

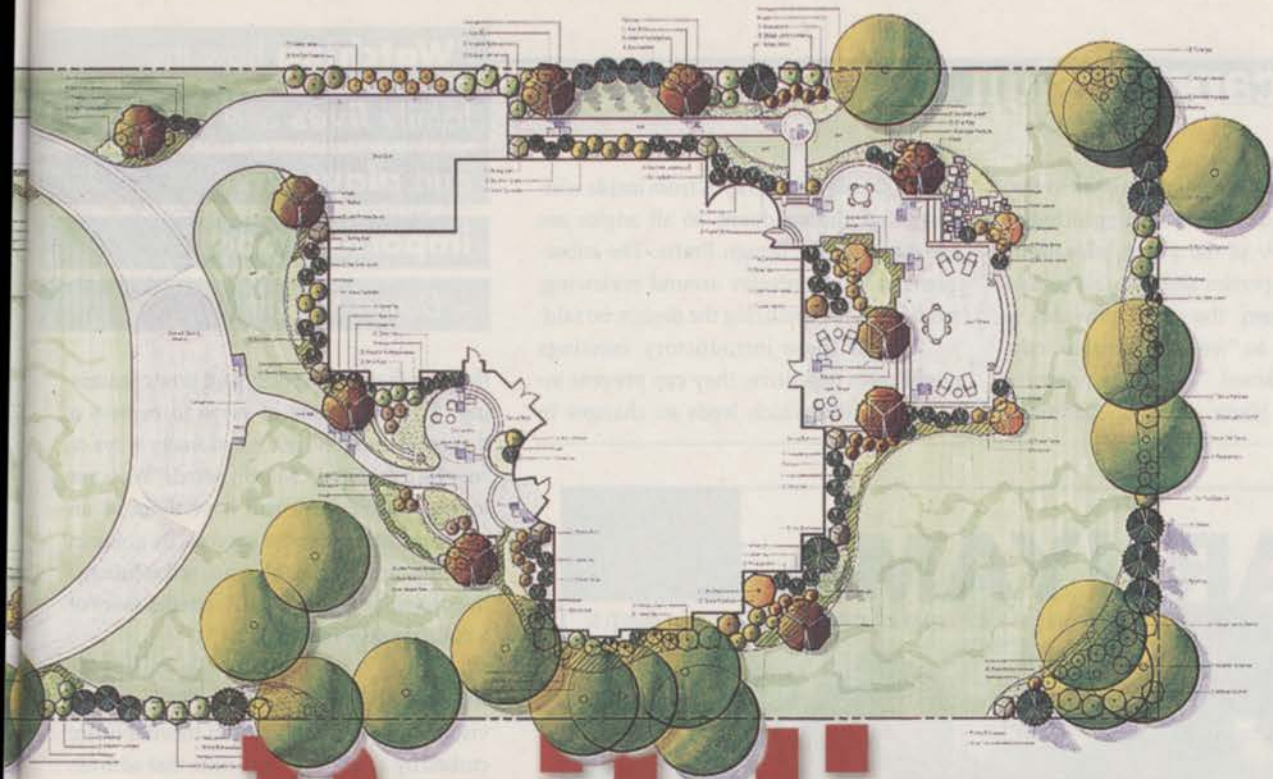
TUNING THE SENSES. Relationship building is an essential prerequisite to the contract and even the estimate, as designers stress that communication is ultimately what allows a project to flow smoothly through the installation process. Conversation during initial meetings with prospective clients allows designers to become familiar with the quirks and qualities of the site and get a feel for the homeowner’s tastes and intentions for the project, Knauff said.

“We begin the process by having an open discussion – not getting into the specifics, but really listening to the client from the beginning,” he explained. “By keeping an open dialogue, they will tell you how they want to see the space used.”

Keeping an open dialogue includes keeping open eyes. Observation is two-fold, as designers focus on the aesthetic and physical properties of the client’s

Creating several design concepts and melding them into one blueprint allows clients to customize their installation project.

Renderings: James Martin Associates



Building from BLUEPRINTS

site, while also tuning into less natural qualities. Flooding indicates slope; footprints reveal traffic. Both cues expose elements that figure into the planning stages of a landscape design.

While touring the property with the customer, Knauff pays attention to additional signs, recording a mental inventory of installation ideas. For example, extra cars in the driveway might indicate a need for additional parking, he said.

Interior clues also expose clients' tastes—whether their style is contemporary or leans toward conservative, noted Jeremy Clayton, president, Clayton Landscaping Technologies, Ijamsville, Md. "If the house itself is structured and the interior has a standard living room, sofas and tables, you might choose another style of landscape than if you go into a house and there's different pictures and a lot of statues," he described. "I try to blend the inside and the outside together."

Stylistic continuity includes bringing indoor color schemes to outdoor plant beds and coordinating landscape features with window views, Knauff added. Here, too, designers must fine-tune their senses during an initial site visit to go beyond questionnaire-type responses from prospective clients. Visual clues often speak louder than the homeowner's verbal requests, he noted.

"By being on the property, you can get an idea of the soil type, existing plants and the size of the property itself," noted Dan Devore, designer, Blanchford Landscape Contractors, Bozeman, Mont. A sense of the property's atmosphere allows a designer to truly delve into the environment and create a complementary design, he said. "It is hard to get a feel for how the area will mature if you don't see the area you are going to be working in." Devore supplements this visual inventory with probing questions to gain a better understanding of the client's expectations.

Jim Martin, president, James Martin Associates, Vernon Hills, Ill., structures his "conversation meetings" to ensure he will obtain the information necessary to identify possible designs. His design planning process generally includes six meetings before installation begins. The first meeting is centered on a questionnaire that pulls information on the client's outdoor activities, long-term plans for pools, tennis courts or spas, and overall expectations.

Martin stresses that initial meetings are not only opportunities for clients to express their dreams, but also a chance for the designer to prove his or her talents are worthy of winning the account. "A lot of times, the client is considering other people, too," he noted. "In a competitive market where a client is shopping around, that first meeting is your opportunity to distance yourself from your competition."

During Martin's second contact with a

Landscape Design

potential client, he gathers responses to the questionnaire, and the third meeting includes a physical survey of the plants, elevation, surrounding properties and possible installation issues. Then, the client provides a property survey, so "we know what exactly is there," he explained. "We don't want to be designing on a blank slate." In addition,

Martin shoots photographs from inside windows and sliding doors, so all angles are addressed in the design drafts. The subsequent meetings revolve around reviewing, modifying and finalizing the design, he said.

Though these introductory meetings might seem repetitive, they can prevent in-decision later, which leads to changes in

"Watching how the family *lives* and *works* and *plays* is an **important part."**

— David Knauff

the plan that can be costly and time consuming. "There are lots of ways to express a design in the same place and many ways of solving a problem," Martin noted. "We want to engage the client and have them be an active participant in the process. By going in this direction we don't have to sell solutions, the customer selects them. It creates more of a collaborative relationship."

BUILDING THE BUDGET. The designer's vision and the client's dream inevitably are curbed by a budget. Companies that address the customer's financial parameters from the start will avoid miscommunication that often results in them eating unexpected costs, Martin warned.

The key to costs: Discuss early, and discuss in detail.

"In the past we were creating solutions where clients were blown out of the water with the potential budget," Martin recalled, adding that he now breaks down the costs for customers and lets them choose material in various price ranges so they gain more control during the pricing process. "Patios could cost \$4 or \$24 per square foot. Now the client feels empowered to decide whether they want to spend the \$4 or the \$24. Maybe they'd rather have the irrigation and lighting be more expensive than the patio. By showing all of those details, we have created communication and a greater understanding, and we don't have to repeat steps."

Martin also brings up budget during the first couple of meetings with the client. "Do they want us to explore ideas toward a specific budget or do they want to turn us loose and see what the possibilities are," he asked.

Part of setting a budget includes identifying features clients can realistically include on the property and offering honest estimates so they will not be surprised by the cost of plants or materials. Labor, materials, design fees — all of these components should appear in the estimate so the customer and company can agree on the cost of the job. Also, contractors should stress to clients that

(continued on page 152)



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Landscape Design

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each change comes with a cost, Knauff added.

"You have to be careful how your contracts are written," he noted. "Some clients are realistic about making dramatic changes and that they'll have to pay for the change order."

Set budgeting precedents at initial meetings, Clayton stressed. By discussing potentially expensive alterations while walking

the site, customers are immediately aware of their price. Also, designers can pad prices to avoid underestimating and disappointing customers, he added.

"You can tell them, 'I estimated this much, and it won't be more than that,' and they appreciate that vs. adding additional costs at the end of the project," Clayton said.

DRAFTING THE DESIGN. After becoming acquainted with the people, property and price, designers can draft a design to fit the guidelines. For Martin, these first sketches are merely drafts. His project team prepares three or four preliminary designs with various project solutions. Clients review these conceptual sketches and modify or meld the designs into final plans, he explained.

Follow-up meetings occur in the company's conference room to finalize design decisions. Display boards with more than 400 photographs of landscape features and eight display gardens with a variety of hardscape materials create a virtual installation showcase. These on-site model landscapes turn the conceptual into concrete.

"When the client is here, we have taken them out of their home with distractions, and most of the time when we show them the options we can walk out of the conference room and into the patio spaces and find almost any factor – any element – that is suggested in the plan," Martin noted.

The design team then integrates these choices into the final plan, which almost always is a culmination of several drafts, he added. In fact, he offers clients a broad range of designs and hopes some of the options will collect negative feedback.

"If we show them three solutions and they're minor in differences, that wouldn't allow us to show them the options for their property," he explained. "If we show them a range of three or four contrasting ways to do a driveway and they say, 'That one is not for us,' we absolutely get the client to react."

This reaction translates to less indecision during the installation process, Martin noted.

Clayton drafts designs quite differently from Martin, relying on a one-plan approach. He might trace 50 designs over his original copy, but he offers customers a single plan.

"One is better than more," he said. "This says to the customer, 'This is what I believe to be the best plan.' If you present too many options, unless you're getting paid by the hour to do the plan, you'll end up spending more time developing several plans."

Clayton considers the frequency of client revisions and builds flexibility into the design to accommodate various plants and hardscapes. "Most changes are in plant material and minor alterations in walks or patios,"

(continued on page 154)

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Landscape Design

(continued from page 152)

he noted, adding that he saves these choices for last. After working on the property, the crew is more familiar with the site's light and water availability and can select appropriate varieties.

After the clients approve the plan, however, Clayton said revisions are rare, and he tries to harness customers' additions and amendments – too many alterations stack up on the invoice, he added. "The way to get around indecisive customers is discipline on the contractor side," he advised. "Set a schedule and stick to it. What you're telling the customer is, 'I expect prompt payment, but I am providing prompt service.'

"If you show indecision, then they'll show indecision," Clayton reasoned.

Indecision is a notorious installation dilemma, Knauff noted. He limits this temptation by carefully overseeing each project so that problems can be identified immediately. By involving project managers during the design phase and supervising subcontractors, he keeps tight communication with all parties participating in the installation.

"More often than not, I stop in on a project to make sure there is open communication among the project manager, labor staff and client so if they have a concern, I can turn around and get it changed before it becomes a problem," he described. "All parties need to know the philosophy in my design and thinking so it can be translated into that project."

While assuring the client's ownership in the process is the key to their satisfaction with the end-result, contractors should hold them accountable for changes, Knauff added. "You don't want them to think they can pick up the phone and get everything changed on a dime." Clients must understand the chain of command and respect the implications tied with tweaking design projects: time and money.

Martin stressed that as in many installation issues, the roots of indecision are buried in communication. Interactive clients and contractors will avoid massive reconstruction.

"A project is more of a partnership or a collaboration than them hiring us to serve them," he noted. "We don't have problems later on if they've looked at the project during the planning phase – they don't second-guess if the patio should go there, or a tree should go here. By going through that thought process, we don't have a lot of

"We want to **engage**
the client and have
them be a **very active**
participant in the
process." – *Jim Martin*

changes or second guessing during the construction phase."

LEARNING FROM LESSONS. Most design/build firms mold their systems from years of trial and error. Learning from pricing, timing and planning mistakes builds a foundation for a landscape planning system that pleases both the company and client.

Project changes prompted Martin's greatest lesson.

"We do multiple concepts now because we used to have too many projects that were in the middle of the building stage, and the client would say, 'This wasn't how I envisioned it to be at all,'" he explained.

After a few cases like this, Martin and his design team devised the multi-meeting system they implement in their business today. He is also careful to evaluate the site's topography after a previous project's inadequate drainage caused water back-up that ultimately resulted in an insurance claim, he recalled. Now, his design team carries equipment to measure the property's grades to avoid future flooding.

Clayton discovered the importance of a post-project site walk-through with clients after one client suggested his company was responsible for ruined plants, when in fact, tire treads in the bed indicated the homeowner's car had trampled the plants.

"I always meet with the customer to do a final walk to go over the job and get a final check," he noted. "If they have a couple of things that they want moved or replaced, we can do it promptly. As the kids play in the yard and the dog walks through it, the job will slowly degrade, and if you can finalize your job, have the people look over it, and fix the problems, anything that happens from there on out is not your responsibility." **LL**

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



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Sprayer UPDATE

Anything goes with these invaluable pieces of lawn care equipment.

Like the landscape industry itself, spray equipment has come a long way in recent years. While once one-size-fit-all, sprayers are now available in an array of sizes and styles with various functions.

A MATURING MARKET. Today's diverse sprayer industry is a far cry from several decades ago, when contractors had few options to choose from. In the 1970s, two manufacturers, FMC and FE Myers, comprised about 95 percent of the sprayer market, recalled Garry Palmer, owner, GNC Industries, Pocahontas, Ark. "They made pumps, which are the heart of the equipment and did not sell to the aftermarket," he related. "Then in the early 1980s, the Italians came in with the diaphragm pump and now everyone could build (sprayers) in their garages."

The industry now has matured to a point that manufacturers are fully utilizing available technology to address their customers' every requirement, observed Tom Sayward, president, Tuflex, Pompano Beach, Fla. "Everyone's needs are being met," he noted. "The upshot: you dream it and we're building it."

Such custom construction represents a dramatic shift from sprayer construction of years ago, which Palmer attributed to the slower evolution of the sprayer

industry. "The market is not that large and historically hasn't demanded much research and development," he observed.

TOP TRENDS. In terms of specific trends, sprayer versatility is increasingly critical. "Once upon a time, a contractor used three different trucks to go out to do three different things," Sayward recalled. "Now, one spray truck can go out and do multiple things, providing a range of service on a one-stop basis."

These all-purpose sprayers are now becoming more of a standard than the exception, Sayward added, noting that trucks with multiple compartments can now accommodate a riding fertilizer spreader or other equipment, for example, so contractors can go out on a property, spray and then take care of maintenance at the same time. "You have a captive audience when maintaining someone's property," he pointed out, adding that these versatile spray trucks are helping contractors' bottom lines by letting them increase efficiency while offering a range of services. "It's coming back to having one piece of equipment that will generate the most revenue."

In addition to more versatile trucks, the sprayers can apply different treatments and a broader range of products with developments such as dual hose tech-

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nology, customized pump capability or side mounting spray guns.

Increased application accuracy is also on the rise. "There has been a significant trend away from single compartment large tanker type trucks that are capable of blanket appli-

cations only," noted Rhett Clark, president, Gregson Clark, Le Roy, N.Y. "Application equipment has become more sophisticated and also less labor intensive to use. Multiple spray units and chemical injection systems have become much more accurate and dependable, allowing the operator to practice IPM efficiently and perform multiple services at each property."

"Once upon a time, a contractor used three different trucks to go out to do three different things.

Now, one spray truck can go out and do multiple things, providing a range of services on a one-stop basis." – Tom Sayward

Sprayers are now able to carry a smaller, concentrated amount of liquid, added Tab Grubbs, national sales director, C & S Turf Care Equipment, North Canton, Ohio. "In terms of broadleaf weed control, this yields better results because it develops a smaller droplet," he said.

With pesticide regulations constantly surfacing, increased application accuracy lessens safety concerns and reduces waste, Palmer pointed out. This, in turn, can save contractors in product costs. Better yet, converting to a newer, more accurate sprayer requires a minimal investment, generally less than \$1,000, according to Palmer. "You can save that amount alone the first six months in reduced product costs."

The price is definitely right for contractors looking to invest in spray equipment: there is a sprayer out there to fit into most any kind of budget, Sayward observed. "There's a huge spread of prices," he said. "From a small pickup sprayer at \$3,500 to a full-blown turf/tree unit in excess of \$35,000."

"Hand-held and backpack sprayers are ideal for limited spot applications with a price range from \$30 to \$250," Clark added, agreeing with the range of options available to contractors. "Mobile portable boom type

sprayers can be mounted on push type spreaders, mowers and dedicated power units with a price ranging from \$200 to \$15,000."

"Skid-type, truck-mounted sprayers run \$1,500 to \$15,000. Pull-type and 3-point hitch mounted boom sprayers run \$900 to \$10,000,

and complete spray trucks run \$30,000 plus."

Equipment cost should not be a contractor's only consideration when purchasing spray equipment. "Although price is always important, it is not nearly as important as the quality and versatility of equipment and the service commitment from a supplier," Clark warned.

MAKING THE INVESTMENT. Like any major equipment purchase, buying spray equipment should be a well thought out process. Here are a few questions to consider before investing:

- What size truck are you working with? Water weighs 8 pounds per gallon, so contractors need to know what their weight limitation is, Palmer advised.
- What application rate are you going to

apply at? Before you can size the pump and engine, you need to know if you want three or five gallons per minute, for example, and then find a pump to do that, Palmer noted.

"In terms of pump capability and volume, evaluate how many gallons per square feet per day you want to apply," Grubbs added.

- What kind of tank is needed? Poly or fiberglass? Agitation?
- What do you want the truck to do? Keep it simple, Sayward advised. A truck with a minimal amount of moving parts, for example, is a good idea. "Stick with the basics and a truck will make you money."

Answer these key questions before buying a sprayer, Clark advised. "Since a commercial quality sprayer can last many years, it's important to consider both immediate and future use of the equipment," he said. "When considering a sprayer purchase, it's best to talk with your suppliers at length about what your needs are in order to obtain the best possible solution for your spraying needs."

Knowing exactly what to look for in a sprayer can help a contractor avoid a maintenance nightmare later on. Making sure the pump is properly sized to the engine or that a filter is properly suited to suction lines, for example, will ensure optimum sprayer performance, Palmer pointed out. **||**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

A sprayer system is comprised of three primary components: a tank, pump and gun or boom, according to Garry Palmer, owner, GNC Industries, Pocahontas, Ark., who offered this sprayer overview: the tank is the storage compartment for the water and product to be applied. The pump delivers the liquid from the tank to the gun or boom. The spray gun or boom is the device used to apply the water and product to the targeted area.

Pump: This determines how much liquid is applied and at what pressure.

Pressure regulator: This allows for calibration, which is essential for application accuracy. This should be tested on a regular basis by using the pressure gauge

Pulsation dampener: Much like the shocks on a car, this smooths out pulsations created by the pump. The system will work without it, but it will be rougher and can cause premature sprayer wear

Pressure gauge: Essential for calibration, this tool ensures that a sprayer is applying accurately.

Sprayers 101

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PERSONALIZATION

by Bob West

Lawn & Landscape brought 22 industry leaders together for two days to discuss the state of the industry. Here's what they said.

How can this labor shortage be addressed? What role will dealers play in the future? What makes one piece of equipment better than another one? How can contractors market their services more effectively?

These are questions that contractors and suppliers across the country are asking themselves as they strategize for the future. Meanwhile, *Lawn & Landscape* magazine invited 22 members of the industry – 10 contractors and 12 suppliers – to attend a two-day Industry Summit in Cleveland, Ohio, to discuss these issues and what needs to happen to move the industry forward.

CONSOLIDATION IMPACT. The rapid-fire consolidation of landscape companies seems to have subsided, but the question is how will these numerous acquisitions and mergers affect landscape companies and local markets? Many contractor attendees said it's too early to determine the impact of consolidation, but they only effects they've experienced within their businesses to date have been positive.

"I've been surprised at the lack of negative impact the consolidation has had on our businesses," noted Wayne Richards, vice president, Cagwin & Dorward, Novato, Calif. "The one impact we have seen has been positive because we have fewer companies to compete against instead of a lot of entrepreneurs."

"That's similar to what we've seen in our market," added Landon Reeve, president, Chapel Valley Landscape, Woodbine, Md. "The larger players were already there, so consolidation hasn't changed our strategies or market much. But we have seen some fallout in terms of consolidating companies losing some customers and employees while there seems to be some overall indecision in their company."

"In a broader stroke, the game really hasn't been played out," added Russ Frith, president, Lawn Doctor, Marlboro, N.J. "Consolidation is cyclical in nature, and it will also create new opportunities for companies to enter the industry, which will mean a new generation of entrepreneurs."

Obviously, most consolidation discussion centers on the efforts of TruGreen LandCare,

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Industry Summit

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Memphis, Tenn., because of its tremendous volume of acquisitions. The consensus during the discussion was that the industry will be better off if TruGreen LandCare succeeds.

"That company has to work its way out of what it has jumped into," related Mike Rorie, president, Groundmasters, Cincinnati, Ohio. "I don't see an easy way for it to back up. And I'd like to see them survive because then you've got a rich buyer that wasn't in our industry a couple of years ago. That's a huge benefit to any independent contractor looking to retire or make a change.

"Of course, the other side of that coin is that now we're playing against someone with a lot of money, and if they do identify a new strategic advantage they have the hubs to implement it in a lot of markets," Rorie continued.

Competing against national companies such as TruGreen LandCare, Calabasas, Calif.-based Environmental Care, or The Brickman Group, Long Grove, Ill., has inspired a number of companies to reevaluate their operations. "This consolidation has given us an incentive to get more excited about our business, keep a closer watch on what's going in the market in try some new ideas," related Richards.

"There are no economies of scale when you're dealing with labor," added Rorie. "An hour is an hour. Selling that hour for more is the easiest way to make more money, but you also have to manage it well. Those are key challenges now."

Consolidation also impacts industry suppliers. "Providing products and services is irrespective of consolidation," explained Brian Masterson, marketing manager, The Toro Co., Minneapolis, Minn. "There's still a huge percent of the industry that isn't participating in any roll-ups. Yes, we want to be partners with the organizations that are consolidating, but 99 percent of the industry is outside of that group. The entrepreneurial spirit is what brings people into this industry, so how do I as a supplier to your business increase my business?"

LABOR PAINS. "The real issue we see with any expansion is how do you keep the costs in line with the escalating labor rates," related Scott Brickman, president, The Brickman Group. "We keep hearing that you can't hire people unless you pay them

more, so that means we have to be getting increases for what we do that reflect our increased costs instead of just wringing more out of what we're doing. We've experienced a 10 to 20 percent wage increase annually for the last three years. Those are important numbers to take to our customers at renewal time.

"The H2B program has been a good solution for us, but I think the government has had it out for this industry," he continued.

Dave Tucker, president, Sensible Software, Gaithersburg, Md., said his customers are dealing with the challenge of climbing wages by implementing incentive-based compensation plans. "I'm seeing a real trend moving to a bonus or piecework compensation program to pay employees a certain percent based on the dollars that each job produces," explained Tucker. "Then the best workers make the most money and the worst workers aren't going to be a problem because they'll either improve or they won't stick around. That reduces your management and your valuable employees work as though they are partners in the company."

Different contractors face different labor challenges, however. "Getting good supervisors has been a challenge for us," noted Kurt Kluznik, president, Yardmaster, Painesville, Ohio. "As a result, we've started outsourcing some work to three or four companies who operate almost as full-time subcontractors for us in specialized areas like waterfalls and hardscapes. These are people who don't like sales and are more like technicians, so they struggle in business for themselves. We pay a little more for them but not much more when you factor in what we save in equipment costs and other employee costs."

Richards said the key to compensation issues is actually spending more on employees, but viewing such expenses as an investment. "We need to look at what we can do to invest in our employees' growth and provide a career for them," he asserted. "We have to invest more in training and in the business' growth to provide opportunities for them. The competition for our employees isn't other landscape companies - it's other industries. We have to make work easy. We do things like provide van pool transportation, and that has given us an edge."

This notion of competing against other industries for employees is critical at

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Industry Summit

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Groundmasters. "If you're losing employees to other landscape companies, that should send up a big red flag because then you're not losing them to a different kind of work or significantly higher wages," he asserted. "So you need to be doing exit interviews with everyone that leaves the company to find out why they're going."

"We try to create a family atmosphere, more than anything," explained Jeff Oxley, operations manager, Swingle Tree & Landscape Care, Denver, Colo., who added that the company dropped its policy against facial hair and piercings to compete for employees. "We've got a diverse workforce, and getting them to gel as one is tough. People who come to work for us from another country often leave because there's no one they associate with. So we do things like putting up a volleyball court in front of the office for them to use."

Many companies look to their current employees to find new ones. "People like to be around people they like, so referral bonuses work well," noted Ken Taylor, corporate business development manager, Husqvarna, Charlotte, N.C.

"We pay \$1,000 for a referral if an employee stays for one year," agreed Oxley. "The referring employee gets \$50 when the new employee starts, \$200 two months later and the balance at the end of the year."

"You can spend a lot of money on Help Wanted ads, so I would rather give that money to an employee, have a celebration with donuts and put that employee on a pedestal for a few minutes," agreed George Gaumer, vice president, Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio.

"After 30 years in the landscape business, now I'm in the Internet world," related Bruce Wilson, vice president of business development, GreenZebras, Boston, Mass. "I feel like a relic at this office place with ping pong tables, foosball tables, free food and drink and no obvious work hours. The employees

put in a tremendous amount of time, but they do so on their terms. To the extent that we can figure out how to make that work, our industry can improve. That may not work with our field labor, but we have to at least give the mid-level managers some flexibility."

Unfortunately, the problems don't end when employees are hired, especially with younger employees.

"A challenge today is that employees quit if you criticize them," commented Rorie. "We benchmarked against some companies who had great employee retention rates, and we found out they were nicer than us to their labor. They let their employees have cookouts, flex time, the volleyball courts and so on. That means we have to do this, which creates a mental adjustment for the managers. These employees just don't want to work hard because they don't want our jobs."

"Then, if you have a star, you have to show him the path and walk him right past everyone who doesn't want to do anything," he continued. "Don't penalize these great employees for a lack of seniority."

Moving employees into senior positions creates additional challenges, however, and contractors want help from manufacturers. "The best business partners we've got are the people who are interested in our business and help us train our employees," Rorie emphasized. "As far as brand loyalty, that goes to whoever is helping me solve problems. I don't care what color the mower is any more because if you develop something superior everyone will catch up soon. I want support. I want my truck supplier to help me troubleshoot an engine and get commercial drivers' licenses for my employees. Whoever jumps in the ring with us will win loyalty if they've got the best product or not."



Finn's Wally Butman (left) listens as Scott Brickman (right) encourages other contractors to raise their prices. Photo: Roger Mastroianni

PEOPLE POWER. Despite the many frustrations associated with employees, roundtable participants acknowledged their dependence on labor and the importance of being able to develop them into more skilled personnel.

"The employees need to build their own competency to stay employable, and then companies need to build competency in their own organization in order to grow," remarked Wilson. "Environmental Care has a four-level gardener program that lays out the specific skill levels employees have to achieve in order to progress and advance. If the first one isn't completed in 90 days then an individual isn't employable. That teaches them that to be eligible to remain with the company they have to become competent."

"The challenge we have with a similar system is that some people are very good at checking off different criteria, but they may not be very good at doing their job," commented Brickman.

Richards, however, noted other benefits to such a clearly defined hierarchical system. "Once we assigned competency requirements to job descriptions, we eliminated the compensation headaches of 'it's time for a raise,' and we were able to get back to the value that employees deliver to the company instead of having them just expect a raise," he explained. "That also challenges the managers because employees want to get ahead, so now you have to tell them what to do to succeed."

IS MORE LESS? In the last decade, more companies have been exploring ways to become full service. Participants noted that while expanding service offerings seems like a logical method of generating more revenue, danger can also lurk in such a strategy.

"I believe very strongly in trying to penetrate wide and deeper into our customers' businesses," noted Kujawa, adding that com-

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INFORMATION

The two-day Industry Summit, sponsored by *Lawn & Landscape* magazine, yielded a tremendous amount of information. Check out this article with the March issue of *Lawn & Landscape* at www.lawnandlandscape.com to see more discussion.

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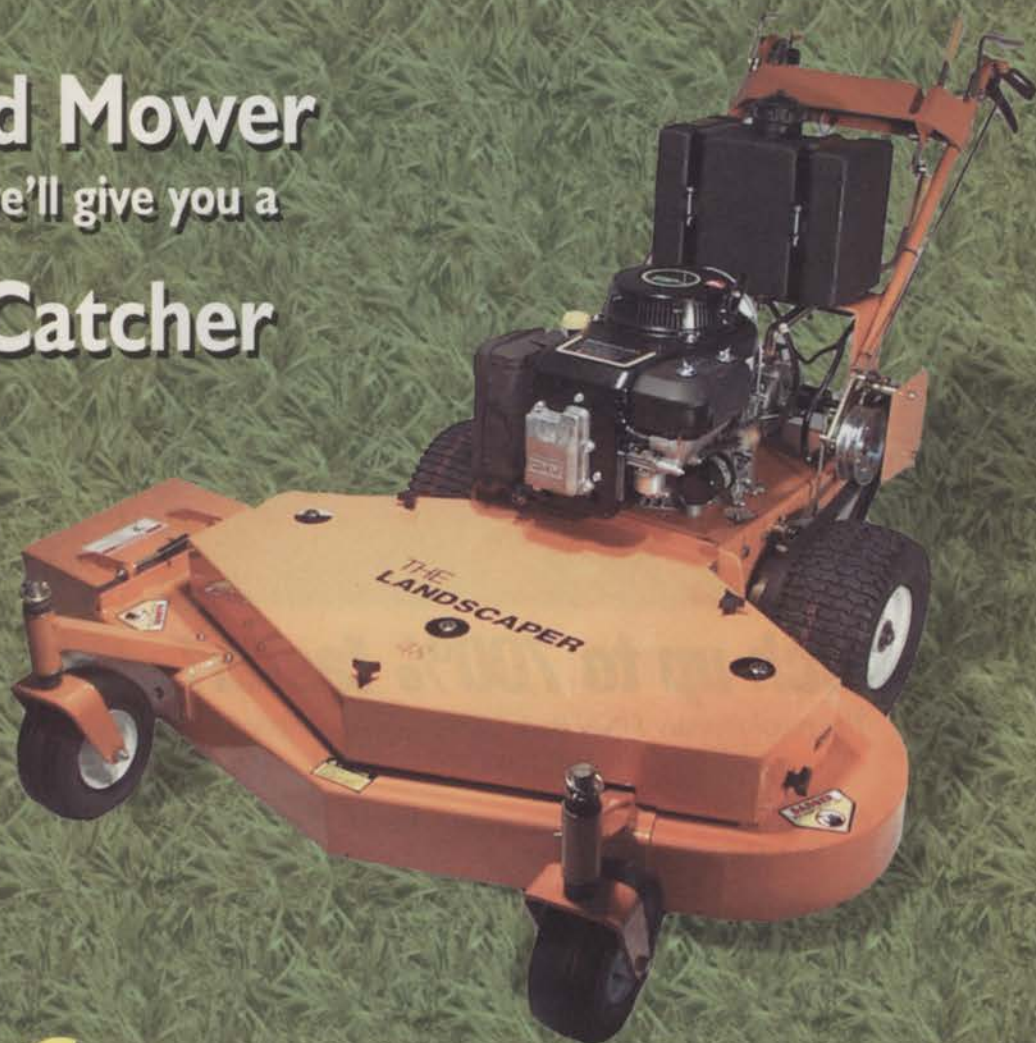
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Industry Summit

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mercial property managers in particular appreciate contractors' extensive service offerings. "The more valuable you are to him, the more headaches you relieve him of."

A key determinant for contractors should be the market they serve, however. "Customer expectations should drive what you offer," Reeve noted. "But you have to have

the resources to be able to respond to customers' expectations."

"Customers are expecting us to deliver more, but equally important is delivering the product appropriately," Richards countered. "Oftentimes, the answer is to form an alliance with good companies so you don't have to offer the services yourself."



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"We try to be the best we can be at whatever work we do," agreed Reeve. "That gets harder and harder as you grow and expand your services, so sometimes you need to know what you do best."

"I'm of the believe that if you can do the snow removal and total grounds care, which our industry has been asked to do, then you have the leg up on the company that can't do that work," observed Rorie. "I bet 10 to 12 percent of our corporate overhead goes into being the 'Snow King' in our area, and I know our snow work doesn't contribute that much back to the company, but we need to do that work to get on the property for some more profitable opportunities."

TECH WONDERS. Contractors who want to grow their businesses profitably in coming years should expect to integrate technology into their operations.

Kujawa said the landscape industry has to examine other industries that better utilize technology to find new solutions. "For example, we need to think about ways to use a Palm Pilot with our crews in the field instead of just using it ourselves," he noted, wondering how much better and more efficient data collection efforts could be with these machines. "We'll look at any new technology because labor is also a problem among the office personnel. I want to get to the point where there is less paperwork and more automation."

Tucker expects to see new technological tools in contractors' hands before long, and he doesn't expect this to just be executive tools. "In a year or two, we should see wireless e-mail that could let foremen use hand-held units to hit 'done' as soon as they complete a job and automatically begin processing that paperwork back in the office," he predicted.

"The numbers that we can track and understand about the work we do is where the real payoff will be," commented Fogarty.

Brickman agreed, noting that unless contractors boost their prices in order to cover climbing labor costs, they have to look for ways to reduce other costs.

"Technology will benefit us as we streamline the job costing part of the business," he noted. "The manual work we're doing now is what we want to automate." **LI**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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USE READER SERVICE #118

Getting Clients to Pay

by Nicole Wisniewski

PAID DAY

Contractors toughen up their approach to collecting unpaid and overdue bills instead of writing off additional losses.

Kathleen Neave admits that even a 28-year-old landscape company that continues to grow and add services has problems collecting money from its clients.

"Our customers seem to think we're unimportant," said Neave, vice president, Neave Landscaping, Wappingers Falls, N.Y. "We should stop maintaining their properties, but we don't."

Collecting unpaid and overdue bills is a time-consuming chore for contractors to tackle while still maintaining and caring for their clients' properties. "Nobody likes to do it, but the alternative is worse: writing it off as a loss," pointed out Thomas Montminy, a principal specializing in collections at Montminy Law Firm, Quincy, Mass.

The key is to not be caught off-guard, Montminy said. "A company that is vigilant about getting paid for its services from the beginning will have fewer problems when its services have been completed," he explained, adding that a company's collection process can be efficient and doesn't have to become a long, drawn-out and costly affair.

TREAT ME RIGHT. In the long run, getting clients to pay their bills on time and in full starts with training those customers to "treat you like a utility," described Rick Lenth, administrative manager, Tovar's Landscape Contractors, Elgin, Ill. "We have to get customers to look at it from our mindset," he said. "We're a professional organization. They agreed to pay for our service, so they have to pay just like they pay their electric or gas bills."

Having a contract is the first step toward training clients to think seriously about paying their landscape bills. "Even simple, one-page contracts can do the trick," Lenth said. "This way, when clients decide they don't want to pay their bills, you have contracts that lay out exactly what your services included and the payments you are entitled to receive from those services."

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USE READER SERVICE #119

Getting Clients to Pay

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For maximum effectiveness, contracts should include a statement detailing the client's responsibility to cover court fees incurred from legal action the company might take to demand payment. Lenth's contracts didn't include this statement a few years ago when a commercial client refused to pay for a \$40,000 snow removal bill because he didn't budget enough for it.

"It wasn't our problem that he thought the service cost too much," Lenth explained. "We fulfilled our contract and the client was happy with our service. The client also knew, up front, what the costs were. We had this client for two or three years and, in the past, the winters were light, so he budgeted too low this particular year."

Even though Tovar's Landscape Contractors settled with this client before going to court, attorney's fees were still considerable — near \$7,000, Lenth said. "Pushing the situation as far as we could take it cost us these attorney's fees, but we still ended up with a

Project acceptance forms, which clients sign at project completion agreeing that the work was done to their satisfaction, can be helpful tools when clients refuse to pay their bills on time. Photo: NaturaLawn

majority of the bill paid for by the client," he explained. "And we learned a lesson about having this statement on all our contracts."

Another form of contract that can be helpful when collecting payments is a project acceptance form, pointed out Kathleen Moran, senior landscape architect, Yardmaster, Painesville, Ohio. "This form, which clients sign at the completion of the project, says that the work we did was done to the clients satisfaction," Moran explained. "This way clients can't come back two weeks later when the bill arrives and say they weren't happy with something we did."

Contractors can also create a powerful, professional impression by setting up clear, precise billing operations. Lenth has staff members who answer phones 24 hours a



day and handle billing and faxing. "As soon as a bill is 35 days past due, we are on the phone to that client," he said.

Clients who don't pay bills on time to ILT Vignocchi receive second and third notices with bold, black "LATE" or "PAST DUE" stamps on them, said Matt Hoppe, an ac-

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Getting Clients to Pay

(continued from page 174)

count manager at the Wauconda, Ill.-based company. These types of urgent messages put a little bit of fear into clients and don't cost additional time or money to include, Hoppe said.

In addition, the threat of service or finance charges can leave clients with this same type of anxiety and urgency to send in

their payments, Lenth said, adding out that they "don't always work."

"We add interest for late bills, but when the bills arrive, we deduct the late charge off of most of them," he explained. "The interest is there for people who become a problem. If someone pays his or her bill in 45 days but

(continued on page 181)

1. Verify clients' backgrounds. Obtain as much financial information about them as you can. This will prove helpful during bill collection.

2. Keep current on overdue accounts. As an overdue account becomes older, it is less likely that you will receive payment. Set aside time each week to compile a list of accounts that are overdue by 30 days or more.

3. Get on the phone. Nothing is as effective as a telephone call. This is an opportunity to pinpoint the reasons why you have not been paid. Don't accuse or threaten. Instead, listen to the customer. Express empathy for their situation, but remain firm that the payment of the outstanding account is critical.

4. Be flexible, but set guidelines. If you are satisfied that the debtor is experiencing short-term financial difficulty, devise a payment plan. Smaller payments over time are better than no payments at all. The plan should include consecutive payments that are no more than monthly intervals and last no more than six months to one year.

5. Get it in writing. Once you have worked out a resolution, write it out immediately. Draft the agreement, including the terms of the payment plan, and fax it to the other party the same day.

6. Stand firm. If the customer refuses to agree to a payment plan or reneges on your agreement, turn them over to a collections specialist.

7. Hire an aggressive law firm.

— **Thomas Montminy, Montminy Law Firm, Quincy, Mass.**



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The proof is in the roots.²

Scientists also used autoradiography to photograph and measure the amount of herbicide in the roots two hours after application. Time after time, at least three times more herbicide showed up in the weeds sprayed with Roundup Pro. With the imitator, barely any herbicide has moved to the roots.



This is a cross-section of a weed leaf magnified 1000x. The yellow droplets mean Roundup Pro is already at work inside.

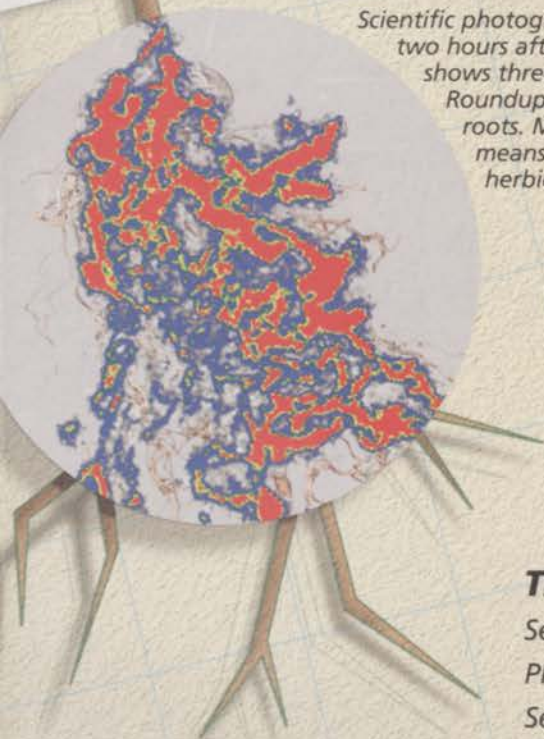
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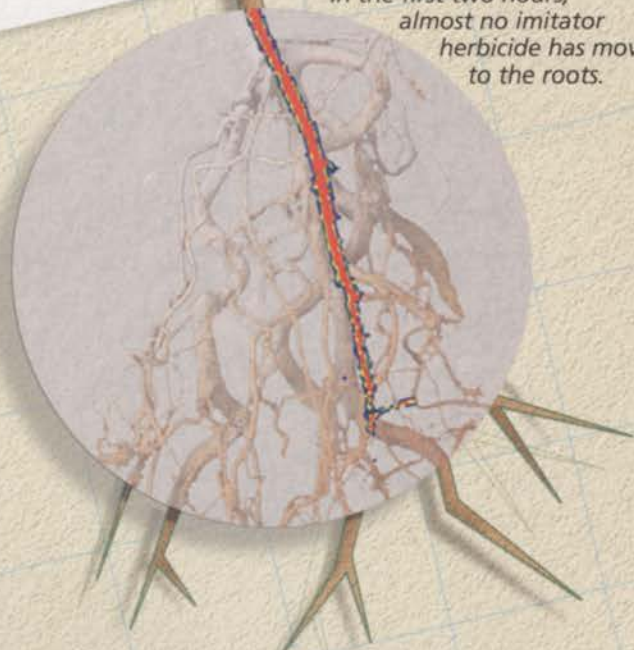
This weed, sprayed with the imitator, has almost no droplets in the leaf.

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(continued from page 176)

they don't pay the interest from the 15 days the bill was late, we'll take off the interest. But if clients are 60 or more days late and we're fighting with them to get their bills in, then the interest will remain on their bills.

"Interest also comes in handy if you have to take someone to court," Lenth added. "This extra money could help pay for your time spent with attorneys or in court handling the case."

Even though he's determined to get bills in on time, Lenth said he'll work with clients who are sincere about paying and are willing to send in a little bit of money each month as an expression of their sincerity. "I had one customer who took two years to pay off \$2,000," Lenth remarked. "He paid us \$50 here and there. We'll work with our clients as long as they are paying and we reach our goal of writing nothing off every year."

GETTING SERIOUS. Once clients understand that contractors are willing to take the necessary steps to receive payment for services rendered, bills start coming in pretty regularly, according to most contractors.

And contractors shouldn't feel bad for taking additional, more serious steps with clients who don't pay their bills, Montminy stressed. "You've exhausted your good faith efforts, so don't waste any more time in the hopes that the customer will come around or that the next promise of payment will be kept," he said.

If Lenth can't reach his clients by phone to notify them of late bills, he'll send them a letter. If he does not receive a response after 60 days, he turns the matter over to a third party. The company is not a collection agency, but a service that sends out collection notices with letterhead that has a more official look, giving the appearance that the bill is being sent to a creditor or bill collector.

The service is fairly inexpensive, according to Lenth. "There is a sign-up fee, maybe giving us a certain number of people within a certain time frame that we can use the service on—maybe a couple hundred dollars for 100 people," he explained. "From there, it costs about \$10 or \$15 per customer. This service will send about four warning letters to the client. Out of the 10 to 15 people we sent this letter to last year, 12 or 13 of them paid their bills immediately."

Finally, if this approach still doesn't influ-

ence the client to pay his or her bill, then the matter is turned over to a collections agency. Their fee is typically 50 cents for every dollar the client owes, Lenth said. "We've done this with only a few clients," he said. "This works with smaller accounts, especially, because we don't want to waste time and money on court costs. You'll find that most of the time

this step is enough to influence these clients to send in their checks."

But Montminy pointed out that most agencies simply send out computer-generated notices. "Collections agencies tout their ability to hound debtors, but they have no legal authority to compel payment," he said.

A contractor who doesn't want to scare

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Offering this option produced an immediate improvement in our cash flow and helped keep us out of our line, but I recommend contractors consult their accountants before moving forward this way.

Following are some tips to consider if you plan on accepting credit card payments at your company:

- Test the waters first. Do a simple survey and ask your clients if they are interested before you start.
- Accept Visa and MasterCard only. You pay more for the others, and most people have these cards.
- Research several credit card processing firms. They all of-

fer something different. The more volume you have, the lower your fees should be. We pay \$.15 per transaction on about \$600,000 in total credit card charges.

- Ease existing clients into this system. Offer it to them as an option. If the customers who oppose this are clients in good standing, don't force them, but make sure they understand you need their payment by the 10th of each month (or whatever date your company uses).

- Expect new clients to pay by credit card only.

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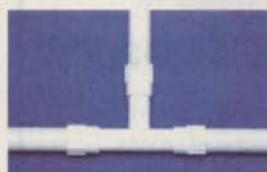
- Fertilization-only clients are automatically charged. If they prefer to pay by check, they can prepay for the season. Why wait for \$40 that covers product costs? Our vendors don't.

- Landscape design/build clients get both options. We add a small percentage into all bids to cover the cost of the processing. Most of these customers pay by check. — **Derek Blumberg, president, Quality Seasons, Savage, Minn.**

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Getting Clients to Pay

(continued from page 182)

clients with a warning letter can skip this step and hire a law firm to file a lawsuit, Montminy said. "If the debt is undisputed and the debtor is viable, you will be paid," he said. "Excuses, followed by delays, are no longer options for the debtor, unless he or she is prepared to spend needless legal fees or is willing to risk default by the court."

The ultimate final step, of course, is taking the client who hasn't paid his or her bill to court. Bills more than \$5,000 are too high for small claims court, and costs increase considerably beyond small claims court, Lenth said. As long as the contractor has a contract stating that the client is responsible for attorney's fees if the bill isn't paid, then the client will pay these costs if and when the contractor wins the case. Unfortunately, a contractor's lost time fighting clients in court cannot be won back even if money from late bills can.

Montminy also pointed out that "if the client is not paying your bill, there are most likely other creditors out there who are also

seeking payment," he explained, adding that most likely not everyone seeking money from that client will get paid. "This makes it even more important for you to collect as much of your bill as quickly as possible."

TRICKS OF THE TRADE. According to most contractors, snow and holiday lighting clients notoriously miss payments, mostly due to the fact that these customers may not need the company's service in the future.

"They always whine about not having the money to pay their bills," Moran said of snow clients.

Lenth agreed. "A lot of times when they get the bill, they don't remember what storm it is for," he said.

Contractors have a couple of tricks for getting these frustrating clients to pay their bills on time, such as rewarding those clients who respect payment due dates.

Unpaid snow jobs were a dilemma for Irene Sidlowski, Live Oak Landscape Con-

tractors, Piscataway, N.J. To protect her business, she had to increase her snow prices and then offer a reduction for those clients who pay on time.

Lenth said that he has also waited until snow was in the forecast, and then he threatens to put a client with an unpaid bill last on his list of snow removal clients or to not show up at all. He knows commercial clients depend on clear parking lots for employees and customers, and that they will respond to the timing change.

Lenth also charges per storm. And since clients have problems remembering which storm they are paying for, his billing team faxes storm reports to clients after every single storm, stating the conditions. Then he sends a copy of the same fax with the bill so that clients have little opportunity to become confused about what they are paying for. ■

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



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Lawn & Landscape
MEDIA GROUP

by Bob West

LAWN CARE

Roundtable



Gary Chamberlin explained that lawn care customers fear pesticides.
Photo: Carl York

When leading contractors got together, political issues were a top concern.

The last 18 months has been anything but smooth sailing for the lawn care and specialty pesticides industries.

Increasing political pressure and environmental sentiment in the nation's capital and various state capitals has led to the loss of two popular pesticides – chlorpyrifos and diazinon – despite contractors' and manufacturers' repeated claims about the safety of these products. At the same time, New York shocked the industry last summer by passing a bill requiring prenotification for customers abutting a property that was about to receive a lawn care application.

To get a field-level perspective of the issues challenging lawn care operators businesses, Aventus

Environmental Science/Chipco Professional Products, Montvale, N.J., and *Lawn & Landscape* magazine sponsored by a two-day industry roundtable that included nearly two dozen of the industry's leading minds. Here is an excerpt of the conversation that took place.

How is the political climate going to impact the industry?

SAM LANG, Fairway Green – "I think we're in trouble. We're going to lose so many of our products. What we're seeing is a big focus on nutrient fate, and pesticides will come right behind that. That's going to shape what products we have left to lose. People are building housing in old farmlands and finding atrazine contamination in wells. So now we have to have buffers of 50 feet on each side of a stream.

"We're funding a huge, nutrient fate study at North Carolina State University, and a pesticide study is going to be next. The Turfgrass Council of North Carolina tracked nitrogen through all turf uses, and with radioisotopes you can tell what nitrogen came off each setting. The initial results show that the turfgrass system is almost 100 percent efficient. Apply 1 pound of nitrogen and you'll recover 2 pounds of nitrogen through clippings. We're trying to see if there is a problem with pesticides and how they move through turf in lawn care and golf.

"They've got us under the gun. Everyone who pushes a spreader has to go through nutrient certification through the department of natural resources vs. dept. of agriculture. We see this nutri-

(continued on page 188)



Tom Tolkacz (left) and Chris Senske (right) give thought to what Jerry Grossi (center) had to say about how pesticide applicators could do a better job of communicating with customers.

Photo: Carl York

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USE READER SERVICE #123

Industry Roundtable

(continued from page 186)

ent fate coming to the other states. They're writing up the first data right now. The question is what happens when the system gets totally loaded - where does the nitrogen go? For right now, we can't apply any more nitrogen than what is recommended by N.C. State."

JOHN BUECHNER, Lawn Doctor - "What's alarming to me is that no one on fertilizer manufacturing side seems to be showing any concern about this issue. The Fertilizer Institute should also jump on board."

LANG - "That's true. This study is costing us \$1 million, and the fertilizer manufacturers aren't the ones funding it."

BILL HOOPES, Scotts Lawn Service - "Do you think we're pressuring RISE to help this end of the business. But why would RISE be motivated on the specialty pesticide way?"

BUECHNER - "Combination products maybe? Fifteen years ago, things were the same way. We're not under siege, we're still under siege. We've gone from splashy sto-

When Lawn & Landscape and Aventis Environmental Science/Chipco Professional Products, Montvale, N.J., decided to produce a Lawn Care Industry Roundtable, they had to get the right people at the table to make sure the hottest trends and most pressing concerns were addressed. Here's the group that spent two days covering these issues:

- **SAM LANG**, president, Fairway Green, Raleigh, N.C.
- **TOM TOLKACZ**, president, Swingle Tree & Landscape, Denver, Colo.
- **JERRY GROSSI**, president, Arborlawn, Lansing, Mich.
- **CHRIS SENSKE**, president, Senske Lawn & Tree Care, Kennewick, Wash.
- **TIM DOPPEL**, president, Atwood Lawn Care, Sterling Heights, Mich.

At the Table

- **GARY CHAMBERLIN**, director of technical services, TruGreen-ChemLawn, Kansas City, Mo.
- **KEITH BURRELL**, agronomist, The Lawn Co., S. Dennis, Mass.
- **JOHN BUECHNER**, dir. of technical services, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J.
- **JACK ROBERTSON**, president, Robertston Lawn Care, Springfield, Ill.
- **GARY CLAYTON**, director of technical services, All Green, Atlanta, Ga.
- **KEN WENTLAND**, production supt., Lied's Landscape, Milwaukee, Wis.
- **JIM CAMPANELLA**, president, The Lawn Dawg, Nashua, N.H.
- **MIKE YOUNG**, president, Lawn & Shrub, Lafayette, Ind.
- **BILL HOOPES**, director of training, Scotts Lawn Service, Marysville, Ohio
- **DARYLE JOHNSON**, president, All-American Turf Beauty, Van Meter, Iowa
- **GARY LASCALEA**, president, GroGreen, Plano, Texas
- **TREY WEBSTER**, operations manager, Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio

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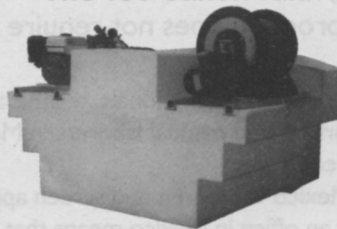
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ries to Ph.D.s working with ludicrous default assumptions through FQPA. Now the whole game is that all they have to do is show presence with this 10x assumption. I don't want to argue about the fate of pesticides being next, but to me, it's a done deal. All the fate study is going to show is that pesticides are there and they don't have to show any harm."

TOM TOLKACZ, Swingle Tree & Landscape Care – "The techniques of the warfare are different because the strategy used to be a media issue, taking pesticide concerns in front of our customers with the perception that doing so would hurt us. But we realized that really didn't hurt us. We probably ended up being better communicators with our customers in the end."

"Now, the technique is votes. However, getting legislators to believe in us, our cause and sound science isn't working because they're all chasing votes."

KEITH BURRELL, The Lawn Co. – "In Massachusetts, they package legislation as

the children's and family protection act. Then you get the activist groups out there knocking on the doors. There's no correlation to what is really going on in the field, but legislators won't touch the issue because they can't vote against an act to protect children and families."

TOLKACZ – "When you talk about votes, we're having some presence. In Colorado, when we had city bills going forward, RISE brought money and expertise to the table to deal with state preemption. But how well do we as an industry communicate how many votes we carry? In Colorado, we showed that the green industry has more votes than the ski industry, and that hit home and got us a place at the table. Maybe that has to be our issue."

LANG – "We update our economic impact survey every five years in North Carolina. We got all of the industry personnel in there together – turf, nursery stock and so on. The survey shows that the industry employs 120,000 people in our state, and they can do

the math from there. There needs to be one clearinghouse to get everyone together for the industry."

"When I see what happens in New York with posting and prenotification, I worry about that running downhill to us. The Sierra Club has been very successful in its lobbying, so we need to be prepared. One of the most important ways to do that is with money."

TOLKACZ – "The other thing is that it's awesome to have legislative events, but I find that we as an industry do an extremely poor job of getting our employees out to vote. That's another issue we could drive home, and that could even mean changing your routes for a day."

HOOPES – "How would we set up a national clearinghouse?"

LANG – "It has to be a joint effort with Golf Course Superintendents Association of America because they have such a high visibility even though they are only 2 percent of North Carolina's managed turf. Then add in

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USE READER SERVICE #107

USE READER SERVICE #106

Industry Roundtable

ALCA and PLCAA. But this has to be done because they're picking us off one at a time."

GARY CLAYTON, All Green – "We have to recognize that the battlefield is not good science. The battle is the political endeavors. We've tried to incorporate GCSAA and ALCA, but the effort has always been too fractionalized. The perception is that there's not enough commonality among the different groups. Everyone's too busy, there's a lack of money and the list goes on. There are too many tight circles that aren't touching each other"

LANG – "We have to get farmers included because they apply pesticides. What we're talking about is a full-time job, but we can't let this keep happening because what happened in New York really shocked me."

TOLKACZ – "RISE is structured as a clearinghouse. Every state association should be getting communication from them. If you aren't, don't blame RISE. Blame the association because the manufacturers are supportive and they're the force behind RISE."

CLAYTON – "Our opponent is much more focused than we are."

GARY CHAMBERLIN, TruGreen-ChemLawn – "This may be slightly contrary to the point, but what works well is having a very strong state organization. In Ohio, Ohio Pesticide Applicators for Responsible Regulation is one of the best going."

LANG – "RISE or whoever needs to look at each state and see if they are prepared and organized for negative legislation. In New York, I think they weren't ready."

TIM DOPPEL, Atwood Lawn Care – "It all goes back to the idea of being under siege. The strategy of a siege is to wear people down. In Michigan, we can't get anyone excited about these issues because business is good and our customers don't care. They've been beaten down to the point that they don't see a problem. What's the issue when business is great?"

HOOPES – "They're reactive instead of being proactive."

LANG – "The problem is that it will cost you \$10 to stop something and \$10,000 to unscrew it."

DOPPEL – "How do we get the word out?"
DARYLE JOHNSON, All-American Turf Beauty – "As long as we're asking the public about the important issues and public says the environment, then all we're doing is putting out fires. We have to change the paranoia about pesticides. I talked to a local fourth grade class a couple of years ago and those kids thought I was a devil. We need to get the facts out there, and I fault the pesticide companies and everyone in the industry

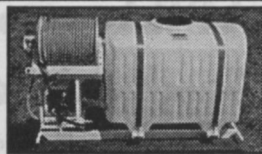
"We've hired a turfgrass information coordinator in Iowa to get the information out there. We put up \$30,000 a year for three years to fund this position. His job is to communicate the benefits of turf to the public instead of fighting the negative news. The Sierra Club has someone in every state – why doesn't the turf industry?"

(continued on page 192)



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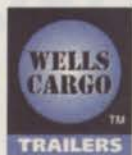
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Industry Roundtable

(continued from page 190)

BURRELL – "It's amazing to explain reality to them and see the looks on their face as they realize the truth. We have to lay the groundwork ahead of time before there is a crisis or else people won't come to you for information and then they won't trust you."

GARY LASCALEA, GroGreen – "All of these issues started locally. In the 1980s, sign posting started in Maryland, but the Sierra Club and Rachel Carson had plenty of people. Those groups wanted pre-notification at that time and they wanted us to use much larger signs than what we ended up using. We were able to get involved to some degree and get those signs reduced."

BUECHNER – "It's just hard to get other lawn care professionals involved in issues. They don't know enough to be concerned, but yet it impacts their life."

TOLKACZ – "The issue in front of us is that the issues have gotten so complicated with FQPA and the Risk Cup that people don't understand them. When the lawn care hear-

ings were going on, we were able to get people there pretty easily because we saw how it was going to impact our business."

LANG – "But we all started a business, put a structure together, went out and marketed and built up a customer base. Why can't we do it now? If we took this same attitude we're taking here with our businesses we all would have failed."

JIM CAMPANELLA, The Lawn Dawg – "Such an effort has to start locally, which is where we haven't been very organized. Legislators trust the people in the middle like us more than Sierra on one end and RISE on the other end."

HOOPES – "I don't think we sound like we can't do, but we sound like we don't know how to do it. We have a tremendous story if we can just get the communications vehicle going."

TOLKACZ – "I do this with an MSDS sheet for table salt, which requires you to wear goggles and rubber gloves when you use it."

LANG – "This needs to happen soon. We can't mess around for two or three more

years. How many more states will be picked off by that time?"

BUECHNER – "Historically, New York is not a pesticide-friendly state. It's the only state that requires customer contracts. To this date, we still don't have guidance on how to administer that law. I'm not sure anyone really knows what happened there, but it's a very fractionalized state with Nassau/Suffolk, the upstate area and the New York State Lawn Care Association (NYSLCA) in the western part of the state, and they have never really worked together."

"What worked together were the breast cancer concerns, and I firmly believe the culmination of this was that 2000 was an election year. There was a lot of legislative effort and we were feeling pretty confident. We didn't even think this was going to come up for a vote even a week before the vote. At this point, the NYSLCA has put out a position paper and taken some action, established an

(continued on page 194)

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USE READER SERVICE #124

Industry Roundtable

(continued from page 192)

800-number to educate the county legislators, and we think we're having some effect. Even though the pre-notification was passed, it's still up to the individual counties to pass. This law also excludes granular products, so you can bet there will be a lot of companies going the granular route."

DOPPEL - "The amazing thing is that my customers don't care. We'll still grow."

CHAMBERLIN - "At the same time, our customers think there is a risk with what we do. They keep the kids and dogs off the lawns whenever we're around."

DOPPEL - "We get a fair amount of interest in our non-pesticides program, then we go over the costs and expected results with them and about 98 percent of the time they go with the pesticides and just tell us to be careful."

HOOPES - "Organic is a nice sounding word until customers realize they're going to have weeds."

BURRELL - "We really promoted a natural program in our newsletter and on our trucks,

and we might have added 50 customers."

TREY WEBSTER, Davey Tree - "Our customers always trust what we're doing. It's the neighbor of our customer who causes the problems."

BUECHNER - "In New York, I think some people will look at this as an opportunity. A lot of companies will figure out how to do this and some will just subcontract their work out. We could go granular, but we just won't kill broadleaf weeds as well."

TOLKACZ - "When the issues were hot in the media, we took a bunch of our tree spraying over to natural controls and people cancelled so fast because the results just weren't there. They just don't want beetle larvae dropping on their patios."

TOLKACZ - "Our reaction is to the neighbors of our customers. From a product standpoint, one of the major concerns we have is the lack of residual. I know this is a response to what's going on, but our clients are realizing that it will take five visits to do what

we used to do with three with what we felt was a safe product. This isn't a resistance issue as much as it is a residual issue. Our ornamental applications will increase as well, and that means we'll be putting more in the risk cup. We'll probably make more money long term, but I don't know if that's a good thing.

"We also have to work more with the universities because the students coming out of schools hate pesticides. There isn't any good pesticide education anywhere at the collegiate level. That's a real struggle for us with recruiting. Kids coming out of these schools don't want to handle pesticides."

HOOPES - "There's a real dichotomy going on because these kids coming out and get rich and buy their house on Mortgage Hill and then they get grubs and hire us. But they don't want to apply pesticides at all." **L**

The author is editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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TRENCHERS

Trencher Trends

When Pierre Sprinkler and Landscape was in its early years of operation in Los Angeles, Calif., co-owner Harold Young didn't have a need for riding trenchers to handle irrigation and drainage system work on residential properties.

"Many installations out here are done along a curb or next to a house or building," Young explained. "In many cases, you can't use trenchers because the lawns tend to be smaller and more detailed, garden layouts with curving or zigzag-shaped planter beds that make it more difficult to use mechanized trenching equipment. As a result, much of the digging is done by hand."

But in the past two years, Los Angeles' school district administration has put more commercial projects out to bid, and Young has picked up much of this work, having replaced leaky irrigation systems on more than 50 sites.

In most cases, large amounts of irrigation piping needs to be replaced on these systems, Young said, and L.A. basin soil ranging from soft, loamy material to rock or slate can make digging challenging. Also, Young's crews have to operate as efficiently as possible because deadlines for these replacements are very tight. For instance, one job at Jefferson High School had a six-week deadline for irrigation replacement, and some of these jobs, such as the one at Birmingham High School, require the installation of more than 2 miles of new irrigation piping, ranging in size from 3/4-inch to 4-inches in diameter. Frequently, penalties are the result of any completion delays on these projects, excluding weather-related reasons, Young said.

"When you have large jobs such as replacement projects for schools, productivity is essential," Young pointed out. "The kinds of restrictions I'm under with these school contracts demand that the installer be able to open and close almost 2,000 trench feet a day. And all trenches must be closed by the end of the workday for school liability reasons."

As a result of this increased commercial work and his need for better productivity to meet deadlines, Young purchased a hydrostatic riding trencher. "Having this trencher allows me to have 10- to 12-man crews and get the needed amount of daily productivity," he said.

Like Young, many landscape contractors have spe-

Difficult or unknown soil conditions can lead to significant efficiency headaches for irrigation installers, which leads many contractors to buy the most power in a trencher they can get.

Photo: Vermeer



cific needs when it comes to trenching equipment. Based on the application's level of difficulty, manufacturers are offering many trencher options for the landscape market.

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON WISELY. In the landscape market, trenchers are used for anything from soil and turf work to irrigation and drainage system installation or repair and replacement, pointed out Richard Greenwell, product manager of the compact line, Ditch Witch, Perry, Okla.

There are two types of dedicated trenchers available to landscape contractors: walk-behind / walk-beside trenchers and riding trenchers.

Walk-behind trenchers' price tags are approximately one-third those of riding trenchers, costing between \$7,000

Equipment Notebook

and \$10,000, pointed out Todd Roorda, rubber tire product specialist, Vermeer Manufacturing, Pella, Iowa.

"Walk-behind trenchers are great for residential properties with 36-inch backyard gates and other landscape elements, such as trees, contractors need to get through and around," Roorda said. "Although, due to the limited power of a walk-behind trencher when compared to a riding trencher, contractors lose the ability to dig deeper with a walk-behind and have less available power, particularly in tough soils."

Riding trenchers, on the other hand, cost between \$23,000 and \$37,000, according to Greenwell, and offer a greater variety as far as horsepower and add-on options are concerned.

Typical riding trenchers start with 43 horsepower and can go all the way up to 116 horsepower, but these riding trenchers cannot fit through 36-inch gates because they are too wide, Roorda said. But there are compact riding trenchers now available that are 35 inches wide and offer the same power options as traditional riding trenchers, Greenwell said.

In addition to a choice of horsepower and unit size, contractors can also choose to add different supplemental attachment options to their trenchers, such as a backhoe or vibratory plow.

"A backhoe is nice for contractors who dig many trenches," Greenwell said. "With a backhoe they don't have to manually fill the hole back in themselves. They can use the backhoe to push the dirt back into the holes."

A vibratory plow, which is a blade that when put into the ground uses vibration to place irrigation piping or utility lines in a thin trench, is a popular add-on tool for contractors who use the chain teeth of trenchers to dig up to 4-inch-wide and 2-foot-

to 25 percent, which means rental companies are reacting by putting larger numbers of construction equipment in their yards and by altering their fleet mix, Roorda reported.

"Contractors make a profit when they are able to use their capital equipment at a high

rate of utilization," he said, explaining the reason for the increased interest in renting vs. buying. "Although 100 percent utilization is unrealistic, the higher the utilization rate, the less downtime, and the more work contractors can get done in a given amount of time. If contractors are between jobs, they don't like to pay for new machinery that sits in their yards. As a result, many companies choose to pass this up-front investment onto the rental com-

panies, lower their indebtedness and let the rental company take the 'utilization risk' gamble."

Desert Care Landscape, a division of TruGreen LandCare based in Phoenix, Ariz., was awarded the contract to install 7,800 feet of mainline irrigation along the right-of-ways for the roads that will wind their way through a 6,000-acre area. Thousands more feet of lateral water lines also will need to be installed. The company's Project Supervisor, Patrick Franks, said he will rent trenchers to place the 1/5-inch diameter water lines under a minimum 2-feet of cover in the rocky, densely compacted soil in Phoenix.

"Every contractor on this project is using rental equipment," Franks explained. "The reason is the unpredictability of the ground conditions. Nobody wants the uncertainty of project completion dates that machine downtime would bring. We would rather rely on a rental company's maintenance staff to keep us up and running when there is a problem."

The cost of renting can vary on a case-by-case basis, Roorda said, depending on if contractors are renting multiple, larger machines for one week or smaller machines for one day. "The average cost for renting a walk-behind trencher for one day is \$150, depending on the region," he said. "Multiply that number by five and you have the average cost for one five-day week. This is a rough average, though, because many rental yards have different deals. For example, some rent machines for four days and that constitutes one week and others count a week as all five days." — Nicole Wisniewski

'If you're only laying a 1-inch pipe, the vibratory plow works like a knife and you just pull irrigation piping in behind the machine.' - Todd Roorda

deep holes for one application or renovation project, but who also need to dig narrower trenches for installing irrigation piping without disturbing clients' lawns too much.

"When you're trenching, you are digging as deep at 2 feet and as wide as 6 inches — there's a lot of restoration that needs to be done to a lawn after that," Roorda said. "For all the dirt you dig out, you have to put it back in along with grass seed. For drainage problems, there's a need to dig a wider hole as well. But if you're only laying a 1-inch pipe, the vibratory plow works like a knife and you just pull irrigation piping in behind the machine. There are a lot less restoration costs involved this way.

"Ultimately, the choice depends on the project," Roorda continued. "If you're in clay soil, you could use a vibratory plow to put in irrigation. If you are in an area where there is more cobble or rock, you'll want to trench it in. If you tend to have both types of soil and a variety of projects in your business, you may need a machine that can do both."

RENTING OPTIONS. In the past, only about 10 percent of contractors rented equipment instead of buying equipment, according to Vermeer Manufacturing. But recent reports have shown that number to be closer

The size of riding trenchers limits the number of jobs they can be used on, but with more size comes added power, and that makes these trenchers desirable in tough or rocky soils. Photo: Vermeer



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John Deere Chain Saws

- CS36 and CS40 lightweight professional saws feature 35.2-cc and 39-cc engines with 2.1 and 2.4 hp
- Bar sizes available from 12 to 18 inches
- CS56 and CS62 heavy-duty professional saws weigh 12.6 and 12.4 pounds and offer 56.5-cc and 61.5-cc engines with 4.1 and 4.7 hp; includes .325-inch chisel chains and 16- to 24-inch guidebars
- CS71 and CS81 offer 5.2- and 5.7-hp engines with 20- to 32-inch guidebars and

3/8-inch chisel chains; equipped with electronic speed limiter to prolong engine life

- CS56, CS62, CS71 and CS81 models

feature semi-self-cleaning air filters; a decompression valve provides easy starting

- CS40, CS56, CS62, CS71 and CS81 models offer two piston rings that create greater compression for increased power and efficiency
- Forged and wafered connecting rods promote heat dissipation and thorough lubrication
- 3-piece crankshaft reduces vibration
- The machine's 3-piece clutch creates smoother clutch engagement and offers more surface to reduce slippage

Circle 200 on reader service card

Planet Green Pelletized Compost

- Concentrated, lightweight compost product can be applied with conventional broadcast or drop spreader equipment
- Increases nutrient exchange, drought resistance, disease resistance, humus development, cation exchange capacity, moisture holding capacity, aerating, structural development and soil health
- Available in pelletized form with guaranteed analysis

Circle 201 on reader service card

Morbark Twister Chipper/Chip Box Combination

- Heavy-duty, mid-range chipper does not require specially outfitted truck
- Combination chipper and chip box allows users to diversify operations
- Turntable chipper features a 180-degree rotation and 14 locking positions so brush can be fed from either side of unit
- Turntable is mounted on a ball-bearing turret for easy, one-handed operation
- Chip box is equipped with dual, hydraulic lift cylinders with lock valves for operator safety
- The machine's self-contained, electric hydraulic pump eliminates need to start power unit while dumping
- Combination includes electric brakes, a removable, coiled light connector, an air impeller for discharging light and leafy material, and environmentally friendly hydraulic fluid
- Machine contains vents in chip box to reduce dust blow-back
- Rugged, dual latching door protects against bowing when box is full

Circle 202 on reader service card



CWI Classic Container Irrigation System

- Planter Technology's irrigation solution is designed for terra cotta pots
- Allows for extended hand watering intervals up to three weeks
- Does not require irrigation plumbing
- Built-in overflow drainage adapter prevents drainage during normal conditions, but allows water to drain after heavy rains
- Double-walled reservoir insert relies on a vacuum sensor system to monitor moisture level at the root ball
- Fits tapered containers from 20- to 36-inch in diameter
- System releases water as the plant uses it, preventing over- and underwatering
- An extra-large reservoir to allows maximum time between watering
- Overflow adapter prevents everyday drainage problems and can be capped to create a waterproof indoor insert

Circle 203 on reader service card

Rockaway H-Series Tools

- H-series shroud is constructed from strong, 1/4-inch steel with holes sized to contain rocks in unit while allowing fine dirt for seeding to pass through
- Tools include two greaseable bearings and one chain
- Rocks are separated by a single, rugged rotor with mining teeth arranged in a spiral pattern

- Versatile tool can be used on various buckets of the same size

- Easily attaches to bucket with two pins and two hoses
- Ability to level ground
- Performs rock-picking function in reverse and pushes small amounts of dirt when moving forward

- Model 6715H fits 60- to 66.5-inch buckets, model 6915H fits 62- to 68.5-inch buckets and model 7415 fits 68- to 74-inch buckets

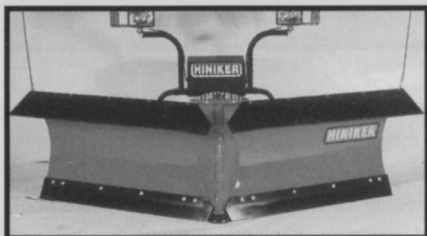
Circle 204 on reader service card



Products

Hiniker V-Plow

- 1850 V-Plow allows operator to easily break, scoop and stack snow
- Utilizes a quick-hitch mounting system and a drive-in, single-lever hook-up system to reduce time and effort when attaching plow
- 5-inch square trip tower provides maximum strength and performance
- Center shoe prevents snow from passing



through the center pivot point

- 30-inch deep-curve box section features reinforced moldboards
- The multiple configuration plow provides variable cutting widths
- Plow mounts on full-size, heavy-duty pick-up trucks

Circle 205 on reader service card

Orival Water Filters

- Self-cleaning filters remove suspended solids from water
- Protects sprinklers, drippers, mini-jets, spray nozzles and valves
- Line-pressure powered with no external power required
- PLC-, electrical-, battery- and solar-operated controls
- With 2- to 16-inch flanges, units handle flow rates of 10 to 5,000 gpm
- Pressures to 150 psi with a 30 psi minimum inlet pressure
- Flat stainless steel screens down to 50 micron
- Versatile filters operate in any position, including upside down
- Optional features include high- or low-pressure units, units for flow rates to 15,000 gpm, hydraulic control and screens down to 15 microns

Circle 206 on reader service card

RedMax Clean Air Trimmer

- Features a 25.4-cc, two-cycle Strato Charged™ engine
 - Engine meets 2000 standards without a catalytic converter
 - Trimmer is ergonomically engineered and commercial grade
- Circle 207 on reader service card**



Plantskydd Animal Repellent

- Tree World's Swedish formula is packaged in a one-quart sprayer and complements user's soluble powder product
- 100-percent natural product does not contain synthetic additives
- Ingredients consist of specially processed food-grade animal protein, vegetable fat, salt and water
- Formula's odor repels deer, elk, moose and rabbits
- Provides up to six months of effective, over-winter plant protection against animal browse
- Effective for protecting ornamental shrubs, perennials and annuals

Circle 208 on reader service card



Boss Straight-Blade Trip-Edge Plow

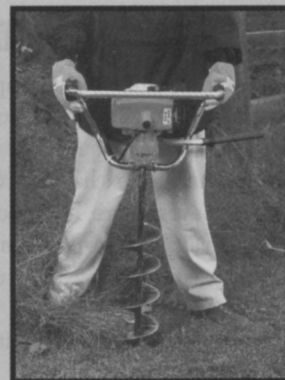
- 8-foot snowplow is designed to avoid damage caused by striking obstacles while clearing snow
- Trip-edge of plow is hinged on heavy-duty 1-inch diameter steel pivot pins with adjustable springs to allow trip-back after hitting an obstacle
- Features an extension-style trip spring mechanism, allowing users to adjust spring tension depending on job
- Cast-iron blade shoes are tucked under base angle to prevent wear and damage during plowing
- 11-gauge steel continuous moldboard is reinforced with six vertical ribs and two diagonal cross braces to increase strength
- Includes six 1/2-inch high-abrasion steel gussets to strengthen base angle

Circle 210 on reader service card

Stihl Earth Auger

- BT 120C model is a lightweight, one-man auger
- Equipped with a Stihl QuickStop® brake that halts rotation of the auger bit when the activating lever is engaged
- Features a single-handle engine throttle control and a transmission lock-out pin for easy starting
- Auger's Easy Start® system consists of ElastoStart™ shock-absorbing handle and fuel primer bulb

Circle 209 on reader service card



Products

Rain Bird RSD Rain Sensor Dials

- Moisture sensor is suitable for 24 VAC residential and commercial applications
- Automatically measures precipitation and guards irrigation systems from overwatering
- Features more than 20 rainfall settings

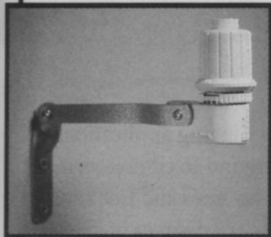
from 1/8 to 3/4; adjustments align sensor according to turf's needs

- Sensing device shuts off during rainy conditions
- Design allows

simple installation and adjustment

- Compatible with most industry controllers
- UV-resistant body improves durability and weather-resistant hardware provides long life

Circle 211 on reader service card



Hunter Pro-Spray Sprinkler

- Constructed from heavy-duty ABS, sprinkler features an extra-thick body design for durability
- Available as a 4-, 6- and 12-inch pop-up head
- New gripable body ribbing makes sprinkler easier to install and adjust, adding stability in loose soil conditions
- A directional flush cap equipped with a pull-up ring can be directed toward landscaping during system flushing, preventing spray from reaching walkways and buildings
- A self-sealing flapper closes flush cap after lines are flushed, preventing additional dirt from contaminating the riser
- Built-in pull-up ring is used during installation to raise the riser, remove the flush cap and install the new nozzle
- Features a pressure-activated, multi-function wiper seal to minimize flow-by and allow more spray heads to be installed in a zone

Circle 212 on reader service card

RAB Bullet Flood Light

- HB101 floodlight features a bullet design and a large glare shield for effective light control



- Durable, one-piece die cast construction includes a rugged mounting arm
- Accepts 150 watt PAR 38 lamp maximum
- Features a large, silicon gasket to provide weatherproof protection around lamp and socket
- Equipped with an EZ Grip locknut and heavy-duty mounting arm with O-ring seal and stainless steel screw
- Barrier dam prevents water from entering wiring box
- Available in black, white, green or bronze powder-coat finish

Circle 213 on reader service card

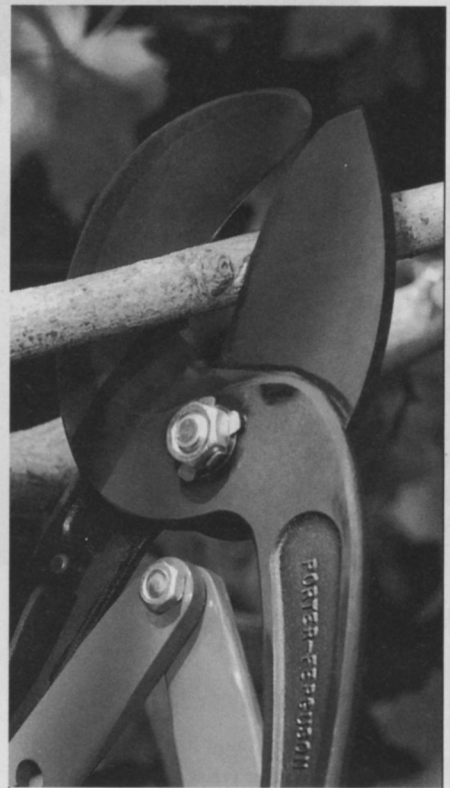
Great Dane Scampers

- HG Series Scamper Dual Hydro Walk-Behind mower features an integrated dual drive system



- Includes two hydro-gear #2400 IZT hydrostatic zero-turn systems and a single-lever tracking control
- 14-, 15- and 17-hp twin Kawasaki engines and 36-, 48- and 52-inch, 7-gauge cutting decks with electromagnetic blade clutch

Circle 214 on reader service card



A CUT ABOVE

For the finest brush cutters, point cut pruners, pole pruners and replacement poles, you can't beat P-F technology.

Pruner blades are made of tough forged alloy tool steel, heat-treated for exceptionally long life.

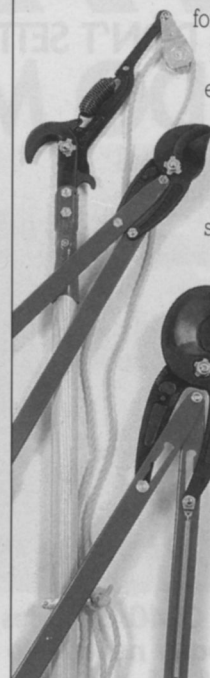
Both blades cut – for easier operation and to avoid unnecessary damage to bark and cambium

while promoting quick healing. Pruner poles have snug-fitting, locking sleeves that won't snag leaves or branches.

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USE READER SERVICE #130

Products

Encore Power-Plug Aerator

- Walk-behind aerator can handle commercial-duty jobs
- No add-on weights or water drums
- Aerating tines are driven with machine action similar to an engine crank shaft – each revolution drives tines into the ground
- Maneuverability and light weight makes machine manageable on slopes and curved areas
- 30-inch aerating width

- $5/8$ -inch diameter tines adjust to $2\frac{3}{4}$ -inches deep to loosen compact surfaces
- Hand lever disengages tines to skip over sprinkler heads and sidewalks
- Separate throttle and clutch allow for control in tight areas
- Tines are chrome plated for extended life and clean plug ejection

Circle 215 on reader service card



Bobcat PowerTilt Attachment

- Excavator attachment functions as an articulated, hydraulic wrist, which allows operator to tilt bucket to either the right or left side for improved excavating
- Operators can tilt bucket instead of repositioning machine, saving time



- Ideal for awkward digging applications, such as under and around fixed objects including culverts, sewer lines and tree roots
- PTX3 model allows 178 degrees of side-to-side rotation and features an output torque of 2,100 feet per pound at 3,000 psi
- PTX4 model offers 180 degrees of side-to-side rotation and features 3,250 feet per pound at 3,000 psi

Circle 216 on reader service card

DON'T SETTLE FOR LESS.
DO MORE.

C240 with sweeper and
watertank attachments



The HOLDER C240 provides the multi-season productivity your company needs—to help your budget do more.

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3 Models Available

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- Harley model PRO.6 and PRO.8 power landscape rakes pulverize, level and wind-row rock
- Rakes are suited for site preparation and landscape jobs
- Designed to produce a well-screened, rock-free surface
- System contains two power-rotated steel rollers angled toward the ground
- ¾-inch steel bars
- The 6-inch bottom roller welded to bars rotates clockwise
- Top roller's height is adjustable to screen rocks and debris
- An auxiliary hydraulic cylinder allows operator to adjust depth
- Available in three PTO-driven models with 6-, 8- and 12- foot raking widths
- Tractor power requirements range from 18 hp to 50 hp



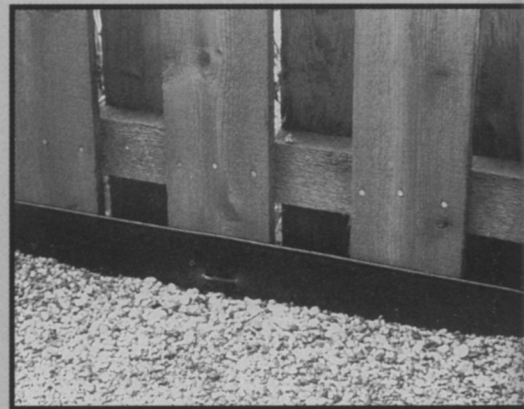
- One hydraulic tank
- Rakes feature trailing gauge wheels, which allow operators to stabilize, level and fine grade

Circle 217 on reader service card

Oly-Ola Super-Edg

- Low-profile landscape edging product is ideal for both residential and commercial installations
- Product provides a nearly invisible landscape border
- Can be used to form and contain shaped logos and patterns
- Eliminates the need for contractors to hand trim
- Material is composed of 6-inch-deep black vinyl
- Inhibits landscape growth and keeps animals from digging underneath fences
- Ideal for edging at the base of chain link and wood fences
- Edging secured by steel anchoring stakes with tapered points that slide through pre-cut slots and penetrate ground for permanent installation

Circle 218 on reader service card



Xeritron Sprinkler Device

- Electronic device connects to sprinkler system's controller and sends signal through system during run time to uniformly apply water
- Device allows sprinkler heads to activate and remain fully open for a few seconds; then, heads close for an equal time period
- Sprinkler heads extend and retract during each open/closed cycle allowing uniform water distribution
- Prevents overwatering

Circle 219 on reader service card

Robin Backpack Sprayer

- RS401 model features a 37.7 cc engine with a 34-ounce fuel tank
- Weighs 18.7 pounds
- Includes a 3.2-quart chemical tank, diaphragm carburetor, solid-state ignition, rotary-type pump and a self-priming gravity-type system
- Maximum spray output is 3 quarts per minute at 327 psi
- Measures 11¼ by 15¾ by 25¾ inches
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Screening Plant for Skid-Steer Loaders

- Tiger Screen model 45D screening plant is designed to be loaded by a skid-steer
 - Separates topsoil from rocks, sand and gravel
 - Features a 4- by 5-foot double-deck shaker screen with end tensioned screens
 - Powered by a 4.5-hp Yanmar diesel engine with electric start and hour meter
 - Includes a 3.5-gallon lockable fuel tank and lockable control panel
 - Screening plant is constructed of heavy-duty bolted material with primer and enamel paint
 - Wing plates, panels, sidewalls and other parts are removable for easy rebuilding or replacement
 - Smooth Start™ technology reduces vibration from starting and stopping equipment
 - Single axle with 7:00-15 six-ply tires allows easy transportation
 - Includes a pintle hitch with electric brakes and running lights
- Circle 221 on reader service card**

Hustler Deck-Mounted Catcher

- 4.5-bushel, fabric hopper features a flow-through venting system to provide air movement
- Dust and airflow is directed down and



away from the operator

- Catcher is easy to empty and includes a latching mechanism to prevent premature dumping

- Fits on 37-, 48- or 54-inch walk-behind decks
- Circle 222 on reader service card**

Growth Products Micronutrient Blend

- Big Fore 4-0-0 blend can be used for both foliar and soil applications to correct problems such as compound deficiencies and chlorosis
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 - Crystal clear solution contains 4 percent nitrogen, sulfur, iron and manganese
 - Can be safely tank mixed and sprayed with herbicides and insecticides
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- Specially molded, 9-gallon polyethylene tank fits most commercial broadcast spreaders
- Quick-attach 80-inch boom features a spring breakaway and four dripless nozzle bodies with ¼-turn caps
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- Includes a deep-cycle gel battery and diaphragm pump with pressure regulator and gauge
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Circle 224 on reader service card

Encore High-Wheel Trim Mower

- One-speed, self-propelled unit has a 26-inch cutting deck constructed of 10-gauge steel
 - Uses a drawn cup clutch on the rear wheel drive shaft
 - Additional features include replaceable, precision-sealed ball bearings on drive wheels, blade brake stop and operator present controls
 - Mower is powered by a 8.5-hp Briggs & Stratton I/C engine
 - 1- to 3.5-inch cutting height
 - Includes ¼- by 26-inch high-lift cutting blade with a 5/8-inch reinforced belt
 - Reaches 3 mph and has a fuel capacity of 2.3 quarts
- Circle 225 on reader service card**

Caterpillar Compact Radius Hydraulic Excavator

- The 313B CR model is designed for high production in tight working spaces
- 13-metric-ton class excavator features a reduced tailswing radius and curved upper structure
- Boom can raise to a high angle to reduce front swing radius

- Rotates with little or no counterweight protruding over the tracks
- Equipped with an 8-foot 2-inch stick and 20-inch shoes
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- Maximum loading height is 22 feet by 4 inches, and a 9-foot by 10-inch stick is available for larger working ranges
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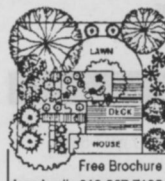
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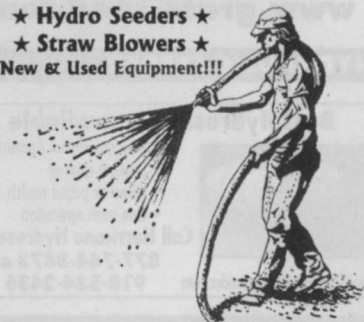
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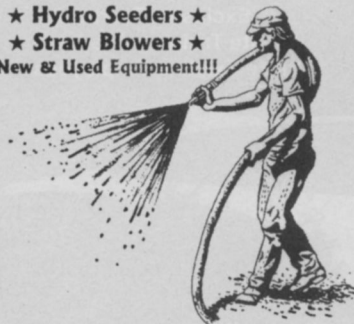
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www.highridge.com

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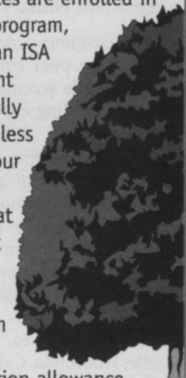
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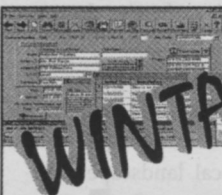
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When I started Forsyth Lawn Co. in 1994, I decided to focus on quality, not quantity.

That year, people were starting to build upscale homes ranging in price from \$200,000 to \$1 million in the Forsyth, Ill., area, and these were the customers I wanted to build my business around. I knew if I was going to pursue this market, I had to offer the very best in service so that I could stand out among my competitors, especially since I planned on charging a higher price for my service. In fact, I charge approximately \$20 per hour more than my competition.

To capture this market, I created a mowing system focused on mowing, trimming, edging and blowing clients' properties. I mow the turf 3¼ to 3½ inches high during the mowing season until September, when I switch to a 3-inch cutting height. But the real key, and my signature approach, is the way I edge lawns.

To edge my clients' properties, I use a trim mower first to create the edge. Then I use a 60-inch mower to mow the lawn, without breaking the edge. I put the right side wheel next to the sidewalk so it stands straight. The edge is mowed 3¼ inches to make it noticeable so it stands out.

I also rotate my cuts, but remain with the flow of traffic on the street when I'm mowing. This way there is no pattern on the lawn. People driving by can't follow the tracks of the

mower from the vehicle to the horizon.

The end result is a cleaner, sharper, more professional look, which also says something about my company's image. When clients see a lawn with that distinctive edge, they know I care for it, and when their friends ask about this landscape look, they recommend me to them.

To emphasize my unique approach, I came up with a company slogan: "Our edge is the difference." I put this slogan on my business cards and on the green coffee mugs that I give to all new clients. Mugs were a better way to get my message out than something like pens and pencils because mugs are used over and over again while pens are just thrown away or lost.

Even if the client's property is fairly good-looking when I arrive, I try to make sure that it looks even better when I leave. I've had realtors tell me this manicured look adds as much as 12 to 18 percent of value to my clients' properties.

Because this approach takes more time and focuses on the final appearance of the properties, I can only maintain approximately 40 clients and \$100,000 to \$200,000 in revenue, but I retain almost all of my clients annually, and most of them tell me it's because of my unique approach. I also replace the clients I lose every year with referrals from other clients.

In addition to this specific look, I try to build trust with my clients. I carry \$3 million in liability insurance so that anyone using my equipment on their properties is covered. If damage occurs to the home or a person in a client's yard due to a rock flying from one of my mowers, or some sort of damage occurs while I'm on the property, I want to be the one to take full responsibility for that. Homeowner's insurance

may cover incidents like this, but if a damage claim settlement falls on the responsibility of my client and not me, he or she will not trust me with his or her property in the future, and this is something I want to avoid.

When caring for clients' properties, I try to do the best job I can. What better way to do this than to have a unique, appealing way of maintaining their properties. And by selling this approach, I am making a name for myself in the local landscape industry. — Gary Ground

The author is president of Forsyth Lawn Co., Forsyth, Ill.

When I started Forsyth Lawn Co. in 1994, I decided to focus on quality, not quantity.

FIVE Keys to Capturing Your Niche Market

1. Do something different – have a signature service style.
2. Develop a slogan to support your service.
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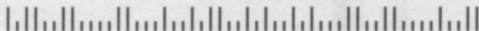
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