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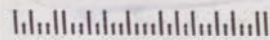
Mark Schlossberg
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**Degree-Days:
What Do
They Mean?**

**Tackle Tricky
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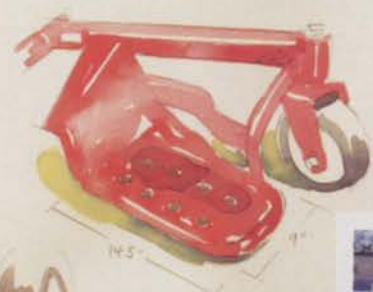
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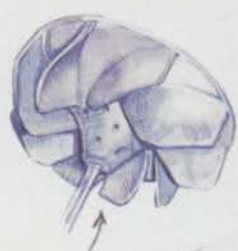
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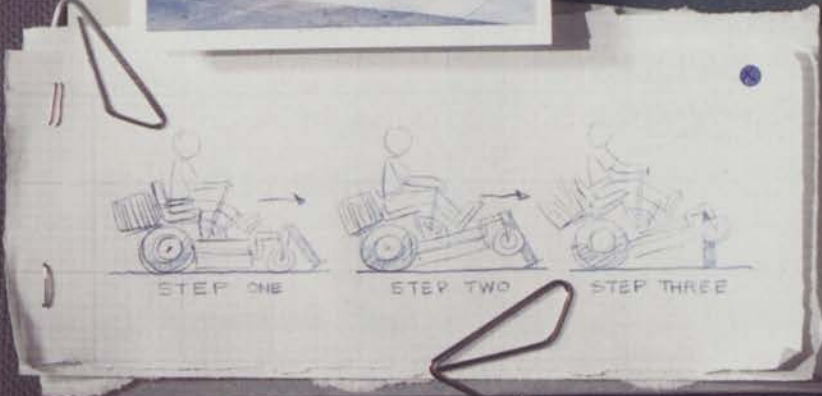
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AUTHORIZATION #	110501

Toro® T-Bar Steering
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USE READER SERVICE #10

contents

FEATURES

Cover photo:
Stuart
Zolotorow



COVER STORY

The Seeds of Success

Mark Schlossberg always wondered how plants grew from seeds. Now he knows the answer to that question as well as how to grow a business. **44**

FEATURES

Young Entrepreneur

A businessman from an early age, David Knauff created a company — Yes, We Care Landscaping — with a name that speaks for itself. **58**

Give Insects the Third Degree

By using degree-day monitoring and phenology, LCOs can optimize turf and ornamental pest control. **64**

Picturesque Patterns

Landscape contractors may find their inspiration for lawn designs at the ballpark, but these stripes, diamonds and waves also have staying power on clients' lawns. **74**



Limited Supply

When drought is a backyard reality and not a weather-watch rumor, contractors must take steps to ensure efficient water consumption. **82**

An Obstacle Course

Take these installation tips from contractors who weren't afraid to tackle tricky installation projects. **94**



Sweet & Low

Turf seed suppliers offer contractors suggestions for selecting species that can take a beating and keep on ticking. **106**

A Breath of Fresh Air

Lawn roots choked by compact soil and heavy thatch could use a dose of aeration. **115**

Light Switch

Night lights are a bright idea for dark, dreary landscapes. **122**

Gentle Giants

Transporting and installing larger-than-life tree specimens requires more than a shovel and wheelbarrow. With experience, knowledge and a little care, large tree installations can be successful. **126**



Lawn & Landscape School of Management Delivers Value for Attendees

Education program is a hit with 375 attendees at the 2002 School of Management in Charlotte. **130**



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John Buechner

Director of Technical Services, Lawn Doctor, Inc.
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“

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Lawn & Landscape

contents DEPARTMENTS

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Market Trends, page 14



Nursery Market Report, page 34



*Design Notebook,
page 38*

Look for this symbol throughout the issue for articles that have additional information online.

Advertisers' Index	143
Association News	23
Breaking News	32
Calendar	26
Classifieds	144
Design Notebook	38
Editor's Focus	10
How We Do It	150
In the Office	12
Irrigation Notebook	134
L&L Book Report	16
Market Trends	14
Mattingly's Message	28
Minding Your Business	42
Nursery Market Report	34
On Paper	40
On the Web	18
People	30
Products	139
Product Profile	136

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online CONTENTS

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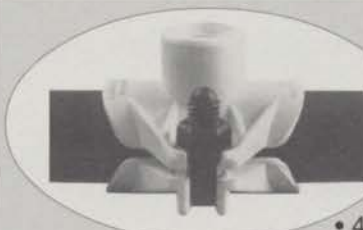
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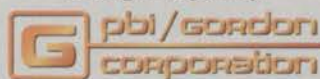
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USE READER SERVICE #56

"There is no time for ease and comfort. It is the time to dare and endure." – Winston Churchill

The Latest Invasive Pest to **Beware Of**

The children's rhyme tells us that "April showers bring May flowers," but that's not all that we can expect to see cropping up across the country in the coming weeks. Spring's arrival also tends to be heralded by a new round of anti-lawn care news articles and propaganda.

In early February, *Lawn & Landscape* and Bayer brought together the leaders from nearly 20 successful lawn care and landscape firms for a two-day

discussion of the industry's issues du jour. We addressed a number of topics, ranging from troublesome labor issues to the latest and greatest products on the market.

The interesting part of the discussion, however, occurred when the group focused on the issues the industry will encounter in the future. Hot-button terms like "prenotification," "nitrate levels," "EPA" and other anti-lawn care terms were tossed around in the usual fashion but, ultimately, the group came to a powerful realization: The biggest problems the industry deals with today and will encounter in the days to come will arise because the

general public doesn't understand the value of the work you do. Instead, proactive environmental groups with an emotion-packed political agenda have shaped most people's perceptions of our industry. This is especially true for those individuals who haven't hired a lawn care or landscape company to manage their yards.

As a result, we find ourselves continually on the defensive when legislative issues arise in our com-

munities. We have to ask ourselves just what it will take for the industry to work together as a single, unified voice that communicates the value of a healthy and attractive landscape, the professionalism of lawn care and landscape contractors nationwide and the environmental benefits of the work we do?

There's really no reason to believe that this industry is any closer to taking such action today than it was five or 10 years ago. Sure, there are groups like the Professional Lawn Care Association of America and Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment, but neither organization has the funding nor the personnel required to make this happen right now. And the continued consolidation of pesticide manufacturers only intensifies this challenging situation.

Florida contractors have taken a step toward controlling the situation, forming a committee to author best management practices for water conservation, which certainly represents an issue that can turn emotional and political in the future in that state as well as across the country. While still only in draft form, this extensive document is the sort of project we as an industry need to embrace, even if it means donating some money and giving some time.

At the very least, we all need to join and support our associations. But if we're going to truly make a difference and move this industry forward, it's time for a new initiative that takes our efforts to a higher level. The structural pest control industry markets itself through the Industry Awareness Campaign, which is funded by a minor fee assessed to all pesticide purchases. The interiorscape industry recently launched the Interior Growth Initiative with the goal of marketing the industry as a whole to its customers through the use of nearly \$1 million donated by interiorscapers and industry associations.

But what has the landscape industry, which dwarfs both industries in terms of collective revenue, done to protect or market itself? Nothing. If we're not going to do this ourselves, who will? **LU**

Bob West





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USE READER SERVICE #13

Five Regulations You Can't Ignore

When it comes to compliance with the U.S. Department of Labor's wage and hour regulations, most green industry professionals are confused by the sheer number of regulations that apply to them and are disturbed by the department's fluctuating opinions and interpretations of the regulations. Many well-intended employers, including lawn and landscape firms, have found themselves caught in the trap of the government's unusual wage and hour enforcement principles that seem, at times, to be more illogical than legal.

WHAT TO DO? Each year, thousands of businesses are investigated by the U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division and are found guilty of violating provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act even though their employees were paid generously and fairly, and even though they made every effort to comply with the regulations. In many cases, employers end up paying the price because of a lack of understanding or knowledge of the regulations.

In addressing and resolving thousands of pay issues and questions across the country, we have found that green industry owners most commonly misunderstand five federal requirements. Noncompliance in these five areas alone often results in huge back-wage liabilities. (Note: this list is not all-inclusive and only contains federal requirements. Some states have more stringent regulations.) Let's take a look at each:

1. *Proper classification of employees as "exempt" or "nonexempt" from overtime* — Many owners are under the mistaken belief that simply paying a person a salary automatically exempts him or her from federal Fair Labor Standards Act requirements. This is not true. In order for an individual to be classified as exempt from overtime, in addition to receiving a guaranteed salary, he or she must meet a number of "job duty" tests outlined in one of the few federal exemptions from overtime.

For example, to qualify for the common "Executive" exemption, a manager would have to supervise at least two full-time employees and would have to spend a minimum of 50 percent of his or her time in "supervisory duties." Contrary to popular belief, these tests are not easy to meet. The DOL's definition of supervisory duties is limited to upper-level duties such as: training employees; appraising productivity; planning and apportioning work; determining the types of materials, supplies, or tools; controlling the flow and

distribution of materials; and maintaining time records. In addition, the individual should have and exercise the authority to hire, fire and change the status of workers.

Many managers (especially office managers and crew managers) do not meet these requirements and are misclassified under the Executive Exemption. Employees who do not qualify for this (or any other) overtime exemption must maintain a time record and must be paid time and one-half for all hours worked more than 40 per week. (Some states, like California, have even more restrictive overtime requirements.)

2. *Maintaining true and accurate records of all hours of work* — According to the department, all nonexempt employees must maintain true and accurate records of their work time. To meet this federal Wage and Hour Division requirement, the employee must record the exact time in and exact time out each day, including meal times. Times should not be rounded; they should be recorded exactly to the minute. Employers must ensure that nonexempt employees record all of their hours of work, including meeting time, compensable travel time, waiting time and others. It is not necessary for nonexempt employees to punch a time clock. The records, however, must be "true and accurate."

In the absence of accurate time records, a government investigator will typically interview employees and construct an amount of overtime he or she believes the employees have worked. This "constructive overtime" is then used to calculate back wages for current and former employees who have worked in the past two or three years.

3. *Ensuring all deductions from pay are proper* — Employees who are classified as exempt from overtime must receive their full salary each week, regardless of the quantity or quality of their work. The only exceptions would be for legally authorized deductions such as: insurances, taxes, garnishments, full-day absences for personal reasons, or full-day absences due to an illness that occurs prior to an employee qualifying for a bona fide sick pay plan, or after the employee exhausts accrued time under the plan. Deducting money from an exempt employee's salary for damages, losses or other

Jean L. Seawright is president of Seawright & Associates, Inc., a management consulting firm located in Winter Park, Florida. For the past 15 years, she has provided human resource management and compliance advice to employers across the country. She can be contacted at 407/645-2433 or jpileggi@seawright.com.



In the Office

similar reasons is a violation of the regulations and could result in loss of the exemption.

Nonexempt employees, on the other hand, must always receive at least the minimum wage (\$5.15) for every hour they work up to 40, plus time and one-half their hourly rate for all hours more than 40 each week. To reduce an employee's pay below the minimum wage for losses, damages, equipment or for a similar reason is in violation of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act.

Note: some states have higher minimum wages and/or prohibit these types of deductions altogether.

4. *Paying for overtime on all compensation, including commissions and nondiscretionary bonuses* — According to the federal regulations, nonexempt employees must receive overtime on all of their wages, not just their hourly rate. This means that if you pay a nonexempt employee an hourly rate plus commissions, you must calculate the overtime on the hourly rate and on the commissions. The department takes the position that commissions are wages and, as such, effectively increase the

average hourly and overtime rates. The same holds true for nondiscretionary bonuses paid to nonexempt employees, regardless of how often the bonus is paid.

5. *Ensuring that each week stands alone for the purpose of paying overtime* — In the world of wages and hours, each week stands alone. This means to properly calculate overtime you must consider all of the hours worked within the seven-day period of time that your company has defined as its "official workweek." Any time worked more than 40 hours within this time period must be paid as overtime to nonexempt employees. (Again, a few states, including California, define overtime differently.)

Employers cannot merge workweeks to avoid paying overtime, regardless of how the pay period is defined. Also, employers may not substitute time off at a later date in lieu of paying overtime. Commonly referred to as "comp time," this practice is forbidden in the private sector. (However, a bill currently in Congress could change this practice in the future.)

CONCLUSION. Green industry professionals would do well to abide by these important requirements and continually check their compliance. One department investigation can have a huge impact on a company's bottom line.

So, how can you reduce your liability and ensure compliance with complicated wage and hour regulations? Here are some suggestions to incorporate into your company culture.

1) Attend continuing education seminars and workshops that offer information on wage and hour issues.

2) Work closely with your human resource director to ensure your company's pay plans are properly structured.

3) Subscribe to various management newsletters and publications that focus on compensation issues.

4) Work with qualified professional consultants or other human resource experts who can provide guidance on compliance issues.

5) Consider arranging for an annual comprehensive compliance audit of your company's pay practices, plans and human resource policies. **LL**

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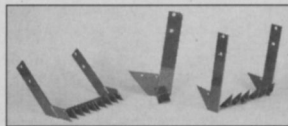
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USE READER SERVICE #130

NATIONAL OUTLOOK

Housing Starts Gain Momentum

WASHINGTON – Landscape contractors looking for new design/build clients will rejoice in the fact that nationwide housing starts rose by a surprisingly strong 6.3 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.68 million units – the fastest monthly pace in nearly two years – the U.S. Commerce Department reported.

Gary Garczynski, president of the National Association of Home Builders, attributed the good showing primarily to low interest rates on home mortgages and solid home price appreciation.

In addition to a rise in overall housing starts, single-family starts posted a 3.5 percent gain to 1.35 million units, their highest rate since December of 1999.

Regionally, starts were mixed, with the Northeast and South posting gains of 8.7 percent and 14.4 percent, respectively, and the Midwest and West registering declines of 0.3 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively.



Many people like a good mystery, but not when it's about how their hourly wage is set.

Bizmove.com suggested contractors set up a formal pay plan so employees know how much they can make. A pay plan also can remove doubt and rumors that keep a workforce anxious, unhappy, less loyal and more mobile than employers would like.

Implementing a formal pay plan doesn't have to cost a lot of time and money, according to Bizmove.com. "Formal doesn't mean complex," the company pointed out. "In fact, the more elaborate the plan is, the more difficult it is to put into practice, communicate and carry out. The foremost concern in setting up a formal pay plan is to get the acceptance, understanding and support of your management and supervisory employees."

The steps in setting up a pay plan are: 1) Define the jobs; 2) Evaluate the jobs; 3) Price the jobs; 4) Install the plan; 5) Communicate the plan to employees; and 6) Appraise employee performance under the plan.

To aid contractors in pricing jobs, *Lawn & Landscape* surveyed its readers to determine hourly pay levels for three job types: entry-level mower operator, entry-level spray technician and foreman. Use this chart to see where your pay scales fall compared to other contractors' pay scales.

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\$12-\$12.99	1.1%	5.3%	18.1%
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\$15-\$16.99	1.1%	3.8%	18.7%
\$17 or more	—	2.3%	10.4%
Avg. per Hour	\$8.08	\$9.72	\$12.80

Source: Research USA

REGIONAL NEWS

Prenotification Introduced in Missouri

LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo. – When New York legislators passed a law last year requiring lawn care operators (LCOs) to notify neighbors of abutting properties before a pesticide application was made, many in the industry feared this law was the first of several that would crop up across the country. Missouri LCOs now can see just how such legislation makes its way from one state to another, thanks to a bill introduced in that state's legislature.

The proposed law requests that notice of insecticide or herbicide applications be posted in or around government buildings 48 hours prior to such applications. The law also states that pesticide applications in or around governmental buildings be conducted after normal business hours or on weekends.

"This is a foot in the door to wider pre-notification legislation," warned the Mid-America Green Industry Coun-



(continued on page 16)

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Market Trends

(continued from page 14)

cil (MAGIC) in its March newsletter, adding that there are several problems with this bill. "There are no definitions. What is a 'government building'? Does it apply to schools? In New York, pre-notification is required of everyone making a commercial application. That's not what we want or need here."

When the law was first proposed, "public buildings" was used in the terminology instead of "government buildings," explained Jon Cundiff, Missouri legislative committee chairman, MAGIC. The council asked the state legislature to define "public buildings," which is when they changed the terminology. Now, Cundiff said the council wants to determine what "in and around" means and who's responsible for posting. "We need to find out if 'in and around' is 5 feet, 10 feet or 100 feet," he said. "Then we need to find out who needs to post - lawn care operators or the people who run the government buildings?"

One factor in the Missouri green industry's favor is that LCOs there have already had a

(continued on page 18)



L&L Book Report

DELIVERING KNOCK YOUR SOCKS OFF CUSTOMER SERVICE

by Kristin Anderson and Ron Zemke

When Jay Beckley and his employees read *Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Customer Service*, there was plenty of head-nodding. "The book talks a lot about developing long-term relationships, which is very applicable to our industry," noted Beckley, regional manager, The Brickman Group, Fairfax, Va. "It costs five times more to attract a new customer than to keep one you already have."

Listening skills, non-verbal communication, telephone tips, helpful habits - these basics and other customer service reminders offer readers a refresher course

in 132 succinct pages filled with real-life examples. A discussion on internal and external clients reminds readers "if you are not serving the customer, your job is to be serving someone who is."

"Customers don't expect you to be perfect, but they do expect you to fix problems when they occur," the book points out. These mistakes often are not production oriented, Beckley added.

"A lot of people in the industry with technical knowledge are into dealing with plant issues, the appearance of the site, the production aspects," he said. "They are doing the work, but they are also delivering a service to the customer. They have to learn to communicate with the client and that listening and interacting with them is just important as the production work that we're there to do."

- Kristen Hampshire

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~ Tom Jessen

Perma-Green Supreme President and 27-year lawn care owner, 20-year sprayer manufacturer, owner of 3 patents, and fellow dreamer



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Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

chance to watch similar legislation unfold in New York. "Every one watches New York – when things happen there, it's just a matter of time before they sweep through the country," Cundiff said. "We can't stop it, but we have to be prepared to show up at the hearings and make sure the legislature's decisions are based on fact and not emotion."

"We also have to make sure the law is manageable," Cundiff continued. "Even though the law hasn't passed, most LCOs here have already started posting because it's manageable. The problem is when this type of legisla-

tion gets to residential areas. That's where it will really hurt our industry and increase the costs of us doing business. We need to be aware of these long-term ramifications."

As of press time, the Missouri state legislature has not set a hearing date.

Though MAGIC members are monitoring the legislature's actions heavily, other Missouri LCOs are encouraged to contact their local legislator to share the green industry's position on the issue. Missouri LCOs can find their representative by calling 816/561-5323 or visiting www.moga.state.mo.us.

REGIONAL NEWS

Washington State Bans Clopyralid Use

OLYMPIA, Wash. – Less than two years after losing chlorpyrifos – one of the industry's most popular insecticides – to environmental regulation, Dow AgroSciences finds itself defending one of its leading herbicides against a similar attack.

In an effort to control the amount of clopyralid making its way to municipal and commercial compost facilities, the Department of Agriculture in Washington state instituted a ban on the use of herbicides containing this ingredient on lawns and turf for 120 days.

Under the new restrictions, products containing clopyralid are now considered "state restricted use" pesticides, which means they can be sold only by licensed dealers and purchased only by licensed pesticide applicators,

(continued on page 23)

On the WEB

Timber Creek Design –	www.timbercreekdesign.com
Fiddler's Green Landscaping –	www.fiddlersgreeninc.com
The Herman Co. –	www.thehermancompany.com
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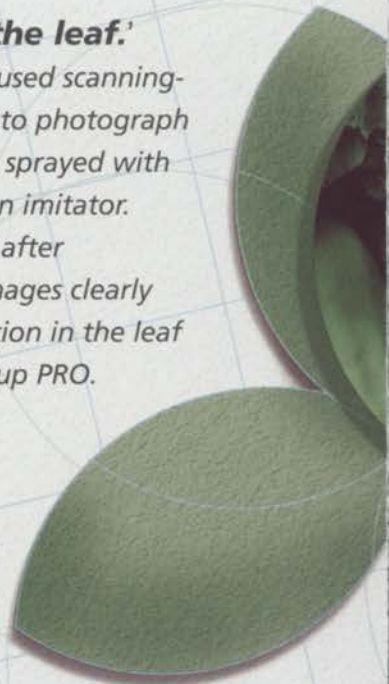
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Monsanto scientists used scanning-electron microscopy to photograph the effects of weeds sprayed with Roundup PRO and an imitator. Taken just one hour after application, these images clearly show more formulation in the leaf sprayed with Roundup PRO.



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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.





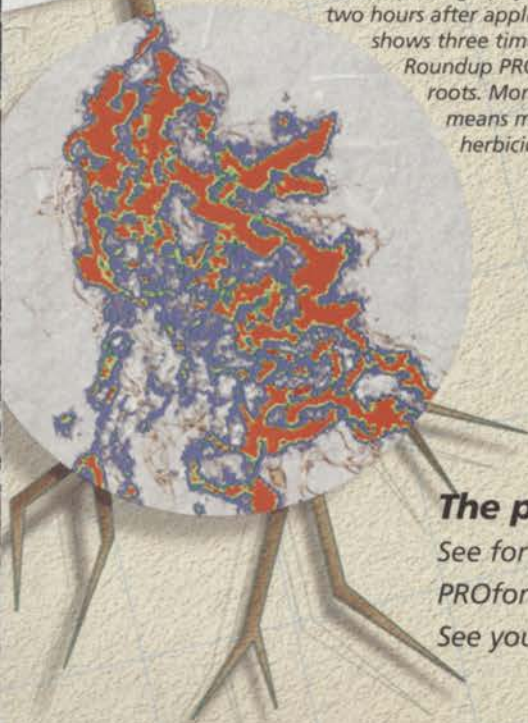
This is a cross-section of a weed leaf magnified 1000x. The yellow droplets mean Roundup PRO is already at work inside.



This weed, sprayed with the imitator, has almost no droplets in the leaf.

Syngenta's latest imitator product

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Scientific photography taken two hours after application shows three times more Roundup PRO in the roots. More color means more herbicide.



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Always read and follow label directions. Test conducted with MON 77360, EPA Reg #524-475 with comparison to Syngenta product carrying EPA Reg. #10182-449. 1. Test methodology: In scanning-electron microscopy, Monsanto scientists identified penetrated formulations of both Roundup PRO and Touchdown Pro in the mesophyll cell layer. These micrographs support the evidence that formulations containing Monsanto's patented PROformance technology rapidly penetrate the leaf surface. 2. Test methodology: Radiolabeled formulations were applied at equal acid-equivalent rates. Radioactivity was visualized by autoradiography following a simulated rain event two hours after application. Monsanto laboratory tests, 2001. Roundup®, Roundup PRO® and PROformance™ are trademarks of Monsanto Technology LLC. 112748 jct 10/01 J. ©2001 Monsanto Company RUPRO-12748

(continued from page 18)

explained Scott Eicher, senior marketing manager and technical sales manager, Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis, Ind. Dow's herbicide Confront is included in the ban.

"During the 120 days, the Department of Agriculture is going to figure out what to do from a permanent standpoint," Eicher explained.

The clopyralid issue arose when farmers complained that compost they purchased and applied to their fields was harming their crops because of clopyralid's presence. The herbicide, used mainly to kill weeds, is not deadly to humans or animals, but it can kill vegetables such as peppers, tomatoes and potatoes. Dow is also investigating this problem in an effort to come up with a reasonable solution.

"For a number of years these products have been used and with all the investigations, there have only been a few plant injuries," Eicher asserted. "Although it's important to ensure the problem doesn't get worse, we hope a valuable product won't be banned."

The Department of Agriculture reported

(continued on page 28)

Association NEWS

The Associated Landscape Contractors of America announced the release of the newly revised *Operating Cost Study*, a comprehensive collection of financial data from exterior and interior landscape contracting firms surveyed nationwide. Call 800/395-2522 for more information.

The Reno chapter of the **Nevada Landscape Association** named its board of directors for 2002. They are Steve Packer, past president; Dave Grillo, past president; Jason Perry, president; Joe Gilbert, president-elect; Tim Laskowski, secretary/treasurer; Steve Zuver, director; Henry Messenger, director; and Jeff Hill, director.

Students from Delhi College's Golf Course Operations and Turf Management programs earned half of the 14 scholarships awarded at the **New York State Turf Association's** 2001 Turf and Grounds Exposition in Syracuse.

The **American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA)** welcomes Calvin Grogan to his new position as grassroots and advocacy manager. In addition, ANLA inducted Walter Imahara, retired owner of Imahara's Landscape, Baton Rouge, La., into the National Landscape Association's Hall of Fame.

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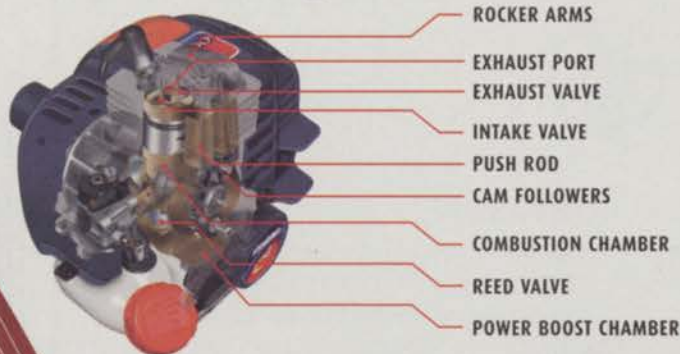


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USE READER SERVICE #63

Market Trends

Calendar of Events

TO ENSURE

that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to Kristin Mohn, Lawn & Landscape Calendar, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113. You can also fax or email the information to Mohn's attention at 216/961-0364 or kmohn@gie.net.

MAY 4-6 Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas. Contact: 952/758-6340.

MAY 15 University of California Davis Extension Selection and Management of Landscape Trees, Davis, Calif. Contact: 530/757-8753.

JUNE 10-12 2002 Interior Business Conference & Trade Show, Delray Beach, Fla. Contact: 800/456-0707.

JULY 11-14 American Nursery & Landscape Association Convention & Executive Learning Retreat, San Diego, Calif. Contact: 202/789-2900.

JULY 13-17 Ohio Florists' Association Short Course 2002, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/737-9486.

JULY 17-18 National Power Equipment Dealers' Convention, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 703/549-7600.

JULY 17-19 Turfgrass Producers International Summer Convention and Field Day, Fort Collins, Colo. Contact: 847/705-9898.

JULY 19-21 OPEI EXPO 2002, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 703/549-7600.

JULY 22-23 Professional Lawn Care Association of America Legislative Day on the Hill, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/458-3466.

JULY 30-31 Turf & Landscape Field Days, Blacksburg, Va. Contact: 540/231-9738.

AUG. 2-4 Southern Nursery Association Convention 2002, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: 770/953-3311.

AUG. 7 Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Outdoor Summer Field Day, Hampshire, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.

AUG. 9-11 Associated Landscape Contractors of America Maintenance Symposium, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: 800/395-2522.

AUG. 16-18 2002 Nursery/Landscape Expo, Houston, Texas. Contact: 800/880-0343.

AUG. 17 Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Certified Landscape Technician Exam, Joliet, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.

AUG. 18-22 American Society of Landscape Architects Expo, San Jose, Calif. Contact: 888/999-ASLA.

AUG. 22-24 2002 Farwest Show, Portland, Ore. Contact: 800/342-6401.

OCT. 9-10 Southern California Turfgrass Council Turfgrass, Landscape and Equipment Expo, Pomona, Calif. Contact: 800/500-7282.

OCT. 20-21 American Society of Landscape Architects Annual Meeting & Expo, San Jose, Calif. Contact: 202/363-4666.

OCT. 23-24 Western Nursery & Garden Expo 2002, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: 800/517-0391.

OCT. 24-26 International Irrigation Show, New Orleans, La. Contact: 703/536-7080.

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USE READER SERVICE #17

Market Trends

(continued from page 23)

that at the end of the 120 days, it plans to make the ban permanent and will consider other additional restrictions on the herbicide's use.

WATER ISSUES

Drought Consumes U.S.

PRINCETON, N.J. – With most of the country experiencing abnormally dry weather and many states on the Eastern seaboard enduring severe droughts, discussion of the

weather has changed from a way to pass the time to a topic with serious implications.

According to a March Gallup poll, nearly half – 47 percent – of Americans say they are experiencing a drought. Regionally, the numbers change based on the issue's severity. The vast majority of Eastern U.S. residents – 81 percent – say they are experiencing a drought, while only 27 percent of Midwestern residents report those findings. A similar number of Western and Southern U.S. residents said they were experiencing a drought – 41 and 42 percent, respectively.

(continued on page 30)

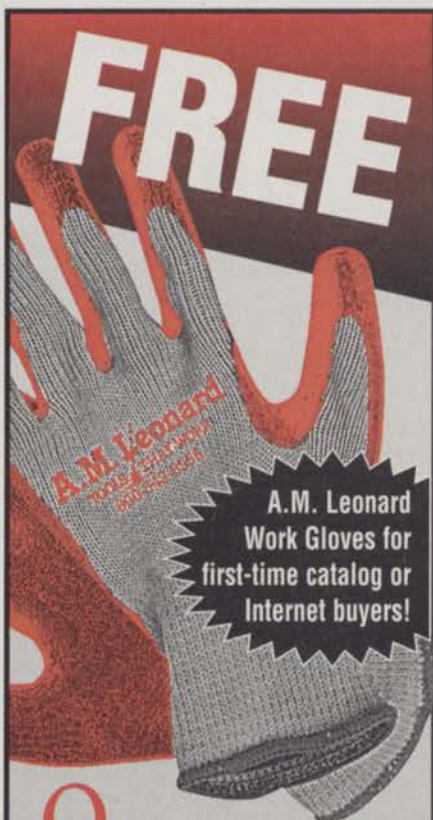
Mattingly's MESSAGE

EDITOR'S NOTE: Every month, industry consultant Jack Mattingly will offer suggestions on key tasks for contractors to focus on. Here are his April thoughts.

The sap is rising and so are the clients' expectations. Are you ready? This is the time when you need to get off on the right foot and set the stage to provide clients optimum quality and customer service. Make them ecstatic. Here are a couple of tips:

- *Think about last year.* Did you accomplish what you wanted? Do you need to reposition your company or departments to take advantage of the future? Think about how you ought to change. Then, develop a game plan with specific completion dates.
- *Develop a schedule in your day timer and visit clients.* Shake their hands and look them in the eye. With maintenance clients, ask them if they would like to walk the site. What a great time to fully understand their expectations for this season. And, do not go away without a proposal for "extra work."
- *Set the expectations for selling extras.* You can provide every client an unsolicited proposal to enhance his or her landscaping once a month. Remember, the client hired you because you are the expert. The client expects you to recommend how to improve the appearance. Be proactive. Further, this should be your highest margin work. As a manager, I would also suggest you track and display the efforts by posting on the wall the number of proposals by each individual, each month. A little peer pressure never hurts. The more you propose the more you will sell.
- *Visit the client each month.* If this is not practical, then call and talk to the client monthly. You need to understand that this client receives calls from your competitors regularly. You need to be No. 1 on the client's mind. Remember, out of sight, out of mind. You don't want that to happen with your clients.
- *Overtime.* With the spring rush, it is easy to get trapped in to a habit of working overtime. You don't want it to become a habit. You know how many hours of overtime are acceptable, if any. Be sure that you "don't let the inmates run the prison" by not watching and regulating the overtime. As an owner, I would expect the office to provide me a list of employees and the amount of overtime they worked last week by Tuesday morning.

Jack Mattingly is a green industry consultant with Mattingly Consulting. He can be reached at 770/517-9476.



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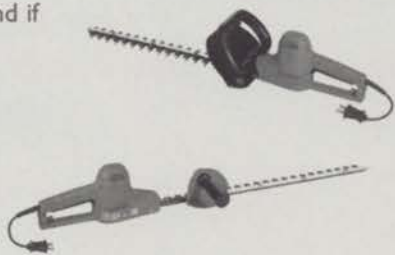
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USE READER SERVICE #66

Market Trends

(continued from page 28)

With the onset of drought conditions, many public officials are likely to call for proposals aimed at water conservation or have done so already. Given a choice, however, the majority of Americans – 60 percent – believe that voluntary actions on the part of citizens and businesses are sufficient to deal with drought problems. Only 37 percent say that federal and state governments must pass new laws to limit water use by consumers and businesses. **LL**

People

Barenbrug named
Kees Bleeker
president and chief
executive officer of
Barenbrug Holding Co.

Massey Services
appointed **Ed
Dougherty** to
regional manager for the
company's south Florida
region and **Mickey
O'Brien** to the posi-
tion of division manager
for the company's
GreenUP division.

BASF appointed
Ted Huhn as senior
sales representative
for the BASF turf and
ornamental group.

Roberts Seed added **Michael
Billman** to its sales/customer service team.

Tim Ford joined The Toro Co. as
vice president and general manager of its
commercial division.

Chris Wooley has been named
marketing manager for turf and ornamental
insecticides at Dow AgroSciences.

John Deere Landscapes hired **Bob
Olson** as western regional vice president.


LESCO named **Jeffrey
Rutherford** as senior vice president
and chief financial officer.

Jim Walter joined FMC Corp.'s special-
ty products business as turf & ornamental/
general household pest segment manager.

OASE U.S.A. appointed **Don Moore**
as national sales manager of the consumer
division's North American operations,
including the U.S., Canada and Mexico.



Kees Bleeker
(top), Don Moore



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applied to the ditches, streams and ponds that midge flies call home. One treatment lasts up to 30 days. And Strike is target specific, so it won't affect fish, waterfowl, mammals or beneficial predatory insects. It's control that you can feel good about. And learn more about by calling 1-800-920-1001 or visiting www.pct-strike.com.



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USE READER SERVICE #19

MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

Scotts Makes Biggest Purchase to Date

When Mark Long, vice president of business development at Scotts Lawn Service, was quoted in the February 2001 issue of *Lawn & Landscape* saying the company could grow to \$130 million in annual sales by 2004, many industry observers scoffed. But the company has accelerated an already aggressive acquisition plan, announcing the purchase of Massachusetts' leading lawn care firm, The Lawn Co.

This deal came just weeks after Scotts LawnService acquired J.C. Ehrlich Co.'s multi-million-dollar lawn and tree care division in Reading, Pa. Today, Scotts LawnService has company-owned operations in 35 markets, 30 of which are in the top 100 lawn care service markets in the country, according to the company. And that's not including the 46 markets served by the company's franchises.

But that doesn't mean that Scotts LawnService is making acquisitions based solely on market area. "We do have a list of cities we are targeting," he said, identifying a few of the company's major targets in the Midwest and East, including Columbus, Detroit, Chicago, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Providence, R.I. "But if a good company calls from a different region, we will consider it as an acquisition. The Lawn Co. is the perfect example. Most of the

business The Lawn Co. does is in Cape Cod, with a very small percentage of its business in Boston. We didn't have the company on our list because of the city it's in and Cape Cod wasn't a target market for us, but The Lawn Co. has a fantastic reputation for service and has a solid organization of people, so it worked out."

"The Lawn Co. transaction demonstrates our continued commitment to Scotts LawnService and our belief that this business is critical to our overall profitable growth," added James Hagedorn, president and chief executive officer of The Scotts Co. "Our recent acquisitions keep us on target with our long-term goal of having a substantial presence in the top 100 lawn service markets within the next several years."

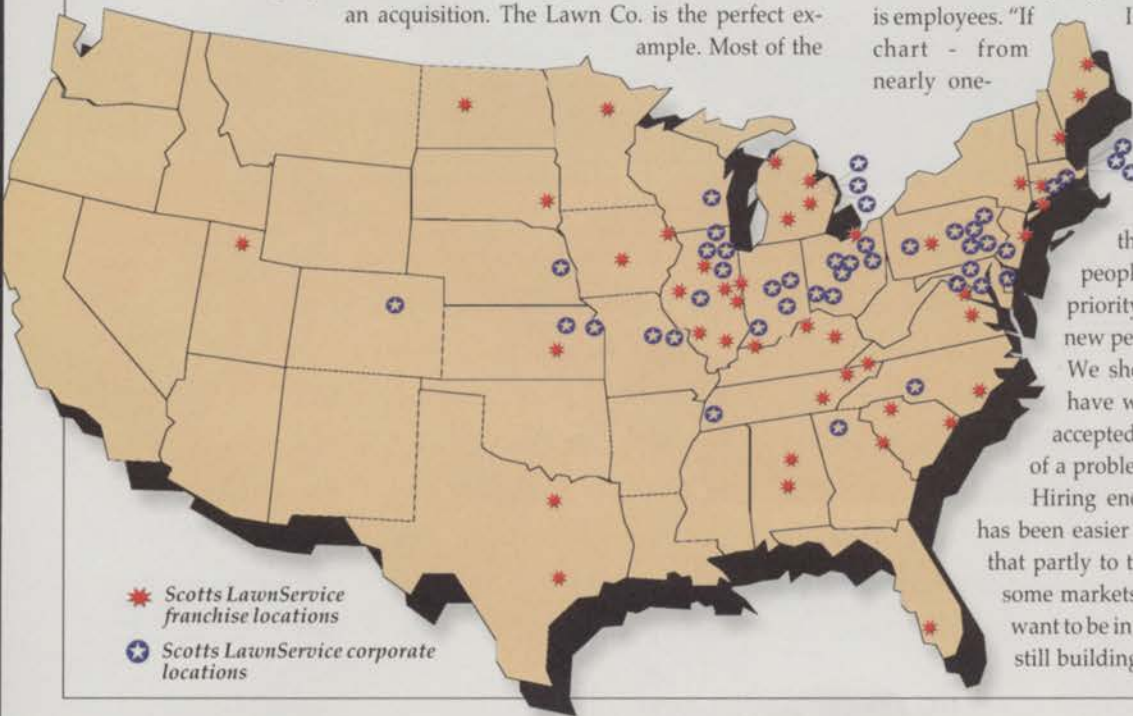
Scotts LawnService, which nearly doubled its 2000 revenue with 2001 revenue of \$42 million, already moved into Memphis, Charlotte, Dayton and Milwaukee via acquisitions in 2002. And the firm doesn't plan on slowing down.

"By leveraging the strength of the Scotts brand, we are appealing to the increasing numbers of consumers who want great results in their yard, and to have the work done for them," explained Tony Colatrella, senior vice president of Scotts. "Our industry-leading customer satisfaction and retention levels are due to the high quality results produced by Scotts products and our ongoing commitment to customer service."

During an interview in mid-March, Long said Scotts LawnService was at the peak of its selling season, adding 3,000 to 4,000 clients per week. "If I took a snapshot of all the customers we have right now, our corporate operation is at \$60 million," he said. By Sept. 30, Long projects that the company will have \$80 million in corporate revenue and \$15 million in franchise revenue, totaling more than \$95 million.

When asked whether he worries about the challenges associated with rapid growth, Long said his biggest concern is employees. "If I take a look at our organizational branch managers to the top - third of those folks came to us through acquisition," Long said. "One of the primary benefits of acquiring a company is acquiring the good employees that come along with it. And though people fear change somewhat, our first priority after acquisition is making these new people feel comfortable with Scotts. We show them the opportunities they have with us, and once the message is accepted, we typically don't have too much of a problem retaining them."

Hiring enough people to support growth has been easier this year, Long said, attributing that partly to the high unemployment rate. "In some markets, we're 100 percent to where we want to be in terms of staffing - in others, we're still building," he said.





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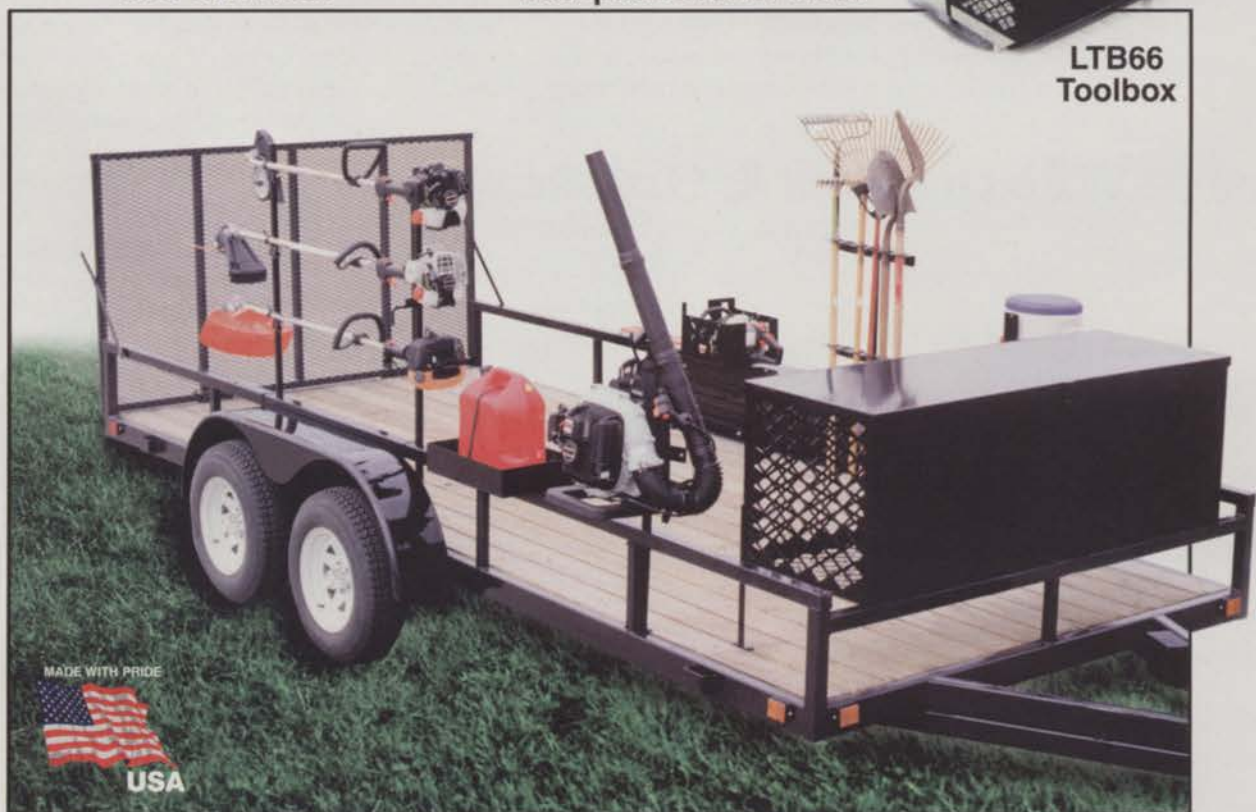
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USE READER SERVICE #20

Nursery Market Report

LANDSCAPE TRENDS

Prairie Plantings

In the landscape, prairies are an endangered species. In fact, more than 99 percent of the Midwest's tallgrass prairies have been converted to cities and

highways. For this reason, and because of their beauty and charm, interest in prairies soars.

Prairies are striking for many reasons – namely their native grasses and wildflowers, such as coneflowers, prairie phlox, false indigo and orchids, which attract birds, butterflies and other wildlife. Prairies also pique the interest of property owners and managers because they often take less time and expense to maintain than conventional lawns. They reduce use of pesticides, fertilizers and mowing.

Even though prairies aren't native to all regions, they can be created in most areas, and management includes remov-



Prairie plantings, which include native grasses and wildflowers – like these Black-eyed Susans – attract butterflies, birds and other wildlife.

ing weeds and woody plants that compete with prairie plants for water, light and space. This introduction to prairies from the University of Minnesota Extension, Saint Paul, Minn., will help you learn how to establish them in the landscape.

SELECTING A SITE. Prairie plants grow best in full sun and open spaces. When selecting a site, look for areas with maximum sun exposure and minimal root competition from trees. Ash, basswood and maple trees provide more competition for prairie plants because they have many surface roots that compete for water and nutrients. Prairie plants often are more compatible with bur or white oak.

In particular, knowing your soil type and surface drainage is important when selecting prairie plants. Native prairie soils vary greatly in composition, from dry, gravelly, sandy soils that hold little moisture to silty or heavy clay soils that can hold excessive water. Poorly drained soils should be avoided.

Also important in site selection is determining whether there are weed ordinances in the city in which you work. These ordinances were originally designed to keep yards more attractive and to control the spread of noxious weeds. Ordinances vary from one city to another, so call your city government to find out the specifics for your community.

In addition, consider using some elements of care, such as mowed edges or edging near the prairie planting to show the area is meant to be there. And because prairies can be fire hazards during dry weather, leave at least 20 feet of

Prairie Wildflowers & Grasses

NAME	FLOWER COLOR	FLOWERING DATE	HEIGHT (FEET)
Wild lupine (<i>Lupinus perennis</i>)	blue	May-June	1-2 feet
Purple coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>)	purple	June-Sept.	2-4
Meadow blazing star (<i>Liatris pycnostachya</i>)	purple	Aug.-Sept.	2-4
Prairie phlox (<i>Phlox pilosa</i>)	pink/purple	May-July	1-3
Blue false indigo (<i>Baptisia australis tralis</i>)	blue	June-July	2-5
Butterfly weed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)	orange-red	July-Aug.	1-2
Black-eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>)	yellow	July-Aug.	2-3
Grey-headed coneflower (<i>Ratibida pinnata</i>)	yellow	July-Sept.	3-6
Large-flowered beardtongue (<i>Penstemon grandiflorus</i>)	pink/purple	May-June	2-3
Hoary puccoon (<i>Lithospermum canescens</i>)	orange	May-June	1-2
Big bluestem (<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>)	bronze, bluish stems	Aug.-Sept.	3-8
Little bluestem (<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>)	white, bluish stems	Aug.-Sept.	1-3
Indian grass (<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>)	golden brown	Aug.-Sept.	3-6

Source: University of Minnesota Extension, St. Paul, Minn.

Nursery Market Report

conventional lawn or noncombustible surface between the prairie and buildings or any other combustible item.

PREPARING THE SITE. First, remove all existing vegetation. If you try to scatter seeds or put young plants into existing vegetation, you will have a low likelihood of success because of plant competition.

Then, there are several ways to establish a prairie in an existing area of vegetation. The first method is to put a dark plastic sheet, tarp or pieces of plywood over the grass for at least two months before you begin planting. This kills the grass, making it easier to remove. Once the vegetation is dead, till the area thoroughly. This method works best when begun in the summer or fall to prepare for a spring planting.

The second procedure is to turn the soil and cultivate the area every few weeks for a complete growing season. Turning the soil brings weed seeds to the surface, and cultivating kills the seeds that have germinated since the soil was last turned. Over time, many of the weed seeds present in the soil will germinate and die. If possible, till to a depth of 12 inches and rake to create a uniform, fine seedbed.

A third method involves using a nonselective herbicide containing glyphosate to kill existing vegetation. As with all herbicides, read and follow label directions. When the vegetation has died in about two weeks, till to a depth of 12 inches or more. If a slit seeder will be used, the dead vegetation can be mowed to a 1- to 2-inch stubble. This dead mat of roots and sod may act as a mulch and prevent excessive weed growth.

PLANTS VS. SEEDS. You can start a prairie from seeds or plants. Starting from seed is more economical, but it will take two to five years



Look online for information on how to maintain a prairie planting.

for the plants to reach full size. Plants are more expensive, but they establish quickly and may flower the first year. Also, some species are available only as live plants.

Always select plants with your site's characteristics in mind. Include grasses because they provide physical support, weed competition, protection for wildflowers and a source of food and shelter for birds during winter (for a list of common prairie plants, see sidebar, left).

If you use "prairie-in-a-can" mixes, which are available from a variety of sources, they often contain marginally hardy perennial and annual species that don't return in subsequent years. Better results may be achieved by using mixes created for your area by local seed dealers.


If you are using seed, even distribution and good seed to soil contact are vital for successful germination. Broadcast seed by hand or use a spreader. For small seeds, mix with a bulking agent, like clean sand or dry sawdust, for more uniform seeding. Seed slowly and make passes from two different directions. As a general rule, use ½ pound of grass seed per 1,000 square feet and two ounces of wildflower seed per 1,000 square feet, or instructions on seeding rates can be obtained when purchasing seeds.

Watering after seeding improves germination, but is not essential. Covering with a thin mulch of clean straw prevents drying out, reduces exposure to wind and animals and helps prevent erosion on slopes. **■**

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Design Notebook

Feng Shui design principles and attention to the delicate environment characterize this dunescape design.

Photo: Town & Gardens Ltd.



Fire Island stretches out like a long, bony finger parallel to New York's Long Island south shore coastline, as if to protect it against the Atlantic Ocean. It is also a convenient home away from home for many Manhattanites. Seaview, aptly named, is one of Fire Island's communities, and the location of the Hall/Kaymin residence. The client had recently fenced in a new pool and cedar deck and sought expert help in landscaping her property.

Two key goals initially were to create a beautiful garden and develop a sensitive, solution-oriented approach to various challenges inherent to the property. The design, however, quickly evolved into a more engaging, thematic extension of the seaside setting that also incorporated principles of Feng Shui.

SHIELDING THE ELEMENTS. Early into the conceptual process, a core element of the design was conceived in the form of unique soilscaping that would emulate seaside dunes in their natural state. These dunes were de-

signed to add visual interest and vertical scale to linear spaces inside and outside of the property's fencing. They also integrated a 15-foot primary dune into the garden. Through carefully calculated contouring, elements like the pool, fence and pump enclosure were seamlessly hidden to enhance the viewer's passage through the garden.

Local contractors implemented the design developed by Town & Gardens Ltd. to reduce costs and better manage logistical issues, such as contract work permits, operating around tide schedules, and sourcing and importing soils and plant materials. The entire grading phase of work was completed during the winter to prepare for a spring planting. Contractors imported more than 150 cubic yards of topsoil and delivered it by barge. Authorized construction vehicles reached the property by a beach route from the bridge for limited times during the day.

Access to the inner garden area was limited to a double doorway, which allowed only the smallest grader, requiring most of the work to be done by hand. The contractor worked from a detailed grading plan with 6-inch contours, supplemented with sections, details and

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Features					
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Seeding					•
Vertical aeration	•				
Rotary aeration		•	•	•	
Dethatching					•
Overseeding					•
Zero-turn radius	•				
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15 hp gas	•	•
17 hp gas	•	•
21 hp gas	•	
Drive		
Hydrostatic	•	
Gear		•
Features		
Grass catcher	Optional	Optional
Mulching baffle kit	Optional	Optional
Zero-turn radius	•	
ContourCut™ anti-scalp system	•	•
Anti-scalp rollers	•	•
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48"	•								
52.5"		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
61"			•	•	•	•	•	•	•
72"								•	•
Engines									
18 hp air-cooled gas		•							
19 hp air-cooled gas			•						
20 hp liquid-cooled diesel				•					
23 hp air-cooled gas					•				
23 hp liquid-cooled gas						•			
25 hp air-cooled gas		•							
26 hp fuel-injected gas							•		
31 hp liquid-cooled gas								•	
Features									
Zero-turn radius	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Anti-scalp rollers	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
3-2-1 Warranty	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Hydraulic oil cooler	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
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Design Notebook

Design Notes

PROJECT:	Hall/Kaymin residence
LANDSCAPE COMPANY:	Town & Gardens Ltd.
LOCATION:	New York, N.Y.
DESIGNER:	Brendan Sheehan
SIZE OF PROPERTY:	10,000 square feet
PROJECT TIME:	10 months
PLANTS INSTALLED:	Red cedar, glauca blue spruce, Russian olive, northern bayberry, maiden grass, flame grass, zebra grass, Montauk daisy, threadleaf, daylily, catmint, Russian sage, rosemary, periwinkle
MAN HOURS:	N/A
PROJECT COST:	\$75,000

specifications. Before grading, various trees and shrubs were cut back, with care taken to leave the root balls intact to minimize erosion.

To protect the existing fence from deterioration due to soil contact, 3/4-inch-thick plywood was attached to both sides of the fence frame, and the wood was cut to conform to the dunes' profiles. The dunes were strategically positioned to support the east fence from both sides. The north side received soilscaping on the inside, and frame-

work supports the fence's back. A 5,000-square-foot layer of photosynthetic, biodegradable geotextile pinned with sod staples was installed to prevent erosion. It was selected for its material composition and measured lifetime.

FOLIAGE. The plantings consist of a grass-based

theme accented with select perennials. Twenty-two grasses were selected for a variety of functional and aesthetic characteristics, including dune stabilization, screening and high tolerance for deer, salt and wind. The form, texture, color and plumes of the grasses reveal the presence of wind and suggest a natural environment.

Substantial screening of northern and western views was achieved by using large caliper red cedar and blue spruce. Hardy Russian olives were used as structural planting and fillers until the grasses matured on the western side. Snow fencing was installed to protect the plants from the large deer population during establishment.

Plant selection is an ongoing refinement for this project to combat the elements and deer. Wind shear and salt spray have burnt the tops of the cedars. Despite this, the garden remains a success and continues to evolve into the distinctive landscape. — Brendan Sheehan **LL**

The author is senior landscape designer for Town & Gardens Ltd., New York, N.Y.



The pool is disguised in the landscape so it doesn't interrupt the homeowners' garden view. Photo: Town & Gardens Ltd.

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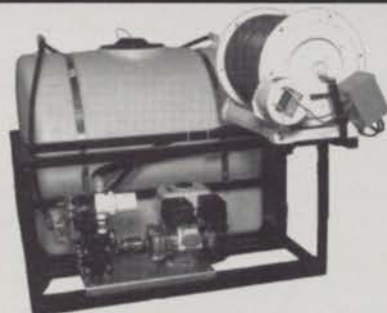
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
Whether your company employs one person or 100 people, coming up with a systematic and objective means of evaluating success in the field can be challenging. Jon Ewing, former owner of Landtrends, Inc., San Diego, Calif., came up with this evaluation system to overcome those challenges.

"We found that we were lumping our staff into classifications of laborers and foremen and the employees all had different interpretations of what those classifications meant," Ewing related. "Therefore, we wanted to standardize the system and give our employees a road map of how to progress within the company."

From that idea, a training manual that breaks down job descriptions for employees in classifications such as novice, gardener, advanced gardener, foreman and supervisor was born. "We made specific job requirements for each classification and then we began to use that as an evaluation and training tool for raises and promotions," Ewing explained.

Implementing this system ensured that employees were being promoted based on knowledge and skill rather than length of service with the company, Ewing said.

This new training and evaluation system also enabled managers to reach out to employees who might have got lost in the system. With more than 500 employees, it wasn't easy to communicate with all of them regarding their training and advancement needs, Ewing pointed out. But through the use of these evaluation forms, it was easier for managers to keep tabs on each employee's growth and skill level.

In the case of an employee who didn't want to move up the classification scale, Ewing said the management supported that decision, but then employee's pay scale was frozen, which generally provided enough motivation for the employee to want to excel. The fact that the entire staff had a hand in writing the evaluation system also proved to make the program a success. — Cheryl Green 

The author is Internet Editor of Lawn & Landscape Online.

PROGRESS EVALUATION
Novice

Employee Name: _____
Employee Number: _____ Date of Hire: _____

Responsibilities
Record: Never, Sometimes or Always

	N	S	A
1. Wears leather work boots	—	—	—
2. Wears uniform neatly	—	—	—
3. Complies with company policies	—	—	—
4. Uses tools safely and properly	—	—	—
5. Reports broken or missing tools	—	—	—
6. Helps load and unload truck	—	—	—
7. Helps keep truck clean and organized	—	—	—
8. Able to lift 50 lbs. frequently	—	—	—
9. Has reliable transportation to work	—	—	—
10. Reports to work on time or calls in	—	—	—

Use of Tools and Equipment
The understanding, ability to identify, and proper use of tools
Record: Poor, Fair or Good.

	P	F	G
1. Leaf Rake	—	—	—
2. Broom	—	—	—
3. Hoe	—	—	—
4. Shovel	—	—	—
5. Cultivator	—	—	—
6. Water Hose	—	—	—
7. Quick Coupler Key	—	—	—
8. Hand Pruner	—	—	—
9. Hedge Shears	—	—	—
10. Totes	—	—	—
11. 21-inch Mower	—	—	—
12. Blower	—	—	—

Total Points: N=0, S=1, A=2, P=0, F=1, G=2 _____

Forman's comments of overall productivity, attitude, learning ability, and reliability of employee:

Request for pay raise: Yes or No _____
Employee's signature: _____ Date: _____
Evaluator's signature: _____ Date: _____
Supervisor's signature: _____ Date: _____

Request for advancement: Yes or No _____
Date: _____

Pay Raise: Accepted or Denied _____
Explanation: _____

Promotion: Accepted or Denied _____

Though Landtrends is no longer in business, Ewing still sells this training program in both print and CD-ROM form for \$125. For information, contact Ewing at jonewing@cox.net.

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USE READER SERVICE #22



Sales Pick-Up Lines

Selling and dating are not all that different.

"If you look at the whole process for selling—from the time you write the proposal to the time you close the sale—it can mirror romancing a relationship step by step," compared Jeff Mariola, president, Rentokil Tropical Plant Services, Riverwoods, Ill.

But what happens when clients aren't so turned on by a company's sales advances? Here, a few sales pick-up lines to combat those common customer comebacks.

1. "No thank you. I'm happy with who I have." This is the most common brush-off salespeople hear from prospects, Mariola identified. However, don't let disinterest sway you from pursuing the account, he stressed. "Really, when they say they are happy with who they have, they are saying they don't want to talk," he said. "All you're looking for is a continuation of dialogue."

To keep conversation flowing, Mariola suggested this reply. "Agree with them and say, 'I'm glad you see the value in having a high-quality lawn care program,'" he suggested. "Then, there is the however. Say, 'Does that mean you will never consider another option?'"

The key word: never. Most clients will never say never, and that leaves an open door for you.

2. "I'd like to purchase only a few of the applications in your service program." Bob Miller, director of sales,

D. Foley Landscape, Walpole, Mass., said not to nix the contract just because the customer doesn't want the whole kit-n-caboodle. "I would first say, 'Why are you only interested in those applications?'" he advised. "If it is money, we could

try to give them options, and if it's a lack of education, we will try to get them up to speed."

After all, some services are better than none at all, Mariola added. "All you really want is a foot in the door, so if I can get in the door with two services, that gives me a platform to build on."

3. "Can you beat this price?" Here is the typical price shopper—a character familiar to most contractors. "First, we try to make sure we can review the specifications or

a service calendar to make sure we are comparing apples to apples," said Tom Brown, corporate sales consultant, GroundMasters, Cincinnati, Ohio.

But for the most part, GroundMasters won't consider matching prices. Brown is not interested in that "game." He tells price-shopping clients: "We are providing you what we feel your site needs or what you've communicated to us that you want, and we know that we are an affordably priced company that can give you the best service available."

4. "I can do it better myself anyway." Sure, Mr. Jones says he can mow better, mulch better and spot spray his plants better than your company. But this doesn't mean he might not rather spend his time doing something else, Mariola noted.

Mariola calls it "opportunity cost." What is the customer giving up to take care of their lawn? You must make them feel like they are missing out on a piece of life before they will be convinced that a professional service is for them, he said.

5. "You have reached the voicemail of..." Man-on-the-run types will not likely have time to talk about lawn service. That is, unless you trap them for 10 minutes.

Mariola sends them a letter like this: "I've been trying to contact you, and I'd like 10 minutes of your time. On Tuesday or Wednesday, allow me to see if there is any mutual benefit between what we offer and your business, and at the end of the conversation, you can tell me two things. We can continue our dialogue, or you can tell me no, you are not interested, and I'll never call you again."

"If you say 'I will never bother you again,' people really respond to that," he added.

Miller makes a point to place no more than five calls to clients, contacting them at different times. "I call at weird hours, and I will leave voicemail at three different times," he said. "That way I can tell if they are on the run, and if I get a hold of someone who answers the phone, I will ask when is a good time to get a hold of the person I am trying to reach." — Kristen Hampshire

The author is Managing Editor—Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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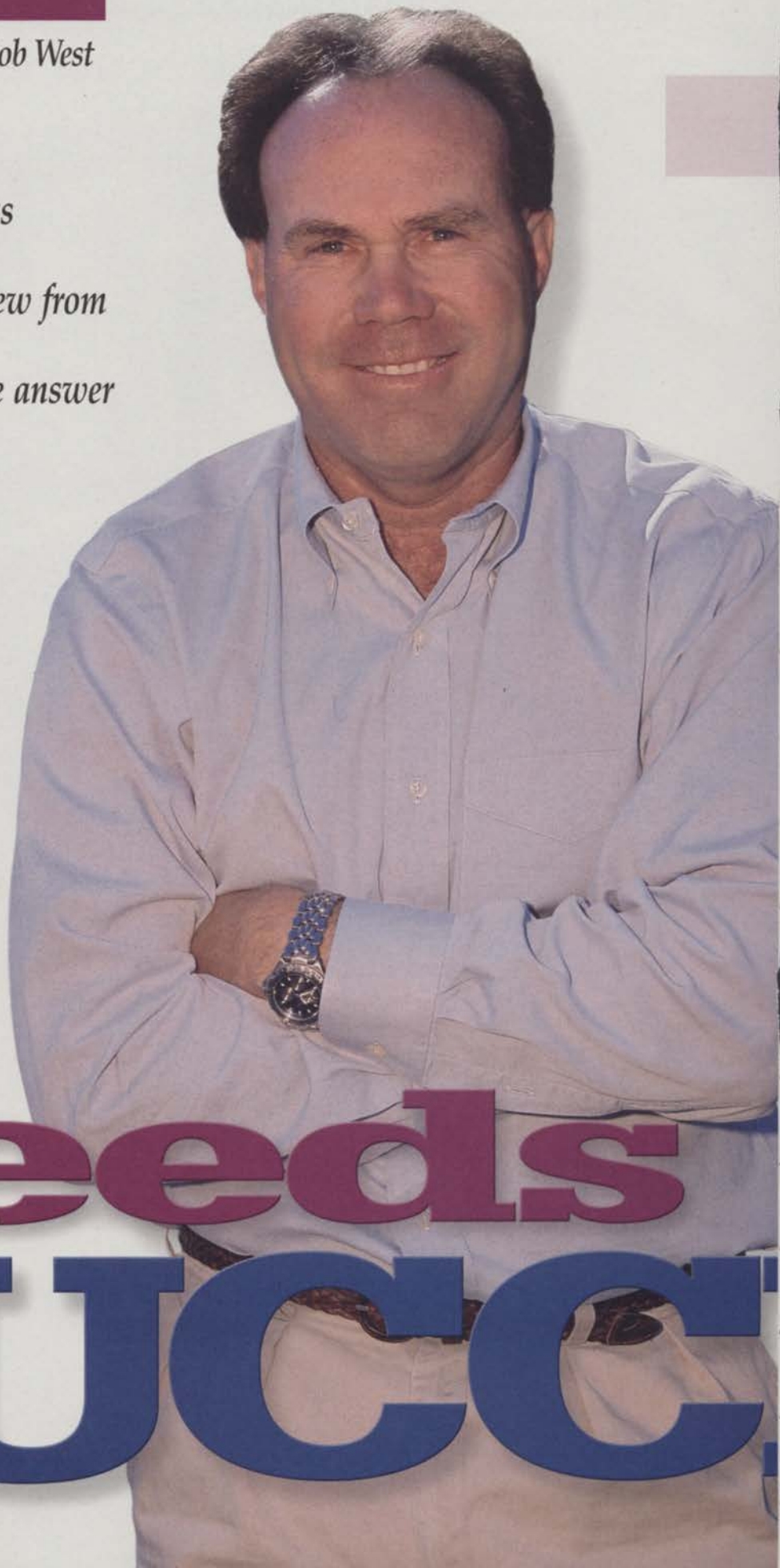
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USE READER SERVICE #23

by Bob West

Mark Schlossberg always wondered how plants grew from seeds. Now he knows the answer to that question as well as how to grow a business.

A dramatic increase in customers taking advantage of a pre-pay discount gives Mark Schlossberg reason to smile Photo: Stuart Zolotorow



The Seeds of SUCC

The seed for Mark Schlossberg's career was planted in his grandparents' garden while he was a young boy. "My grandparents had this huge garden behind their house, and I was always fascinated with how plants could grow from a simple seed," he recalled.

That fascination clearly took root within Schlossberg, and his passion for plants only grew stronger during his years in the University of Maryland's turf/urban botany department. Of course, turf students tend to head in one consistent direction, and Schlossberg was no different. "I was going into golf

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because that's what the curriculum was all about, but one of my professors knew someone at Jerry Faulring's company, Hydro Lawn," Schlossberg related. "So I went to work for him in 1978, earning \$12,000 a year."

But it wasn't until Schlossberg joined Frank Stevens at Pro-Lawn-Plus in 1985 that his career really began to bloom. "The company was floundering at the time, and Frank had severe arthritis so he couldn't get out into the field at all," explained Schlossberg. "He hired me as his vice president and told me he would eventually sell the company to me if I could get it turned around."

Thanks to his extensive relationships and sales experience with commercial clients in the area, Schlossberg was able to help the company grow almost immediately. "The mid- to late 1980s were a good time in lawn care, but we didn't have anyone really focused on sales," he said, adding that he had to deal with other problems as well, such as the company having its warehouse and office in separate locations.

Like caring for a neglected plant, Schlossberg returned Pro-Lawn-Plus to health, and Stevens sold him the company in 1988. Since Schlossberg joined the business, it has grown six-fold, from \$300,000 in annual sales to almost \$2 million in 2001, and he has realized how sweet the flower of success truly smells.

DO IF YOU DARE. Commercial accounts offered the opportunity for a quick turnaround after Schlossberg joined Pro-Lawn-Plus because of the higher revenue-per-job figures they represent. Picking up a few commercial clients was the first step to building a customer base that included many commercial jobs. "By 1992, probably 45 percent of our sales came from apartment buildings, condominium complexes and offices," Schlossberg commented.

(continued on page 48)

PRO-LAWN-PLUS

HEADQUARTERS: Baltimore, Md.

FOUNDED: 1978

2001 REVENUE: \$1.86 million

2002 PROJECTED REVENUE: \$2 million

SERVICE MIX: 77 percent of the company's revenue is from single-family residential clients, with 23 percent from commercial jobs. About 88 percent of the sales are from turf applications with 12 percent stemming from tree and shrub work.

EMPLOYEES: 16 employees

THE PHILOSOPHY

MISSION STATEMENT: The purpose of Pro-Lawn-Plus is to provide the highest quality of service to our clients while achieving the profitability needed to help our employees reach their long-term objectives.

FUTURE CHALLENGES:

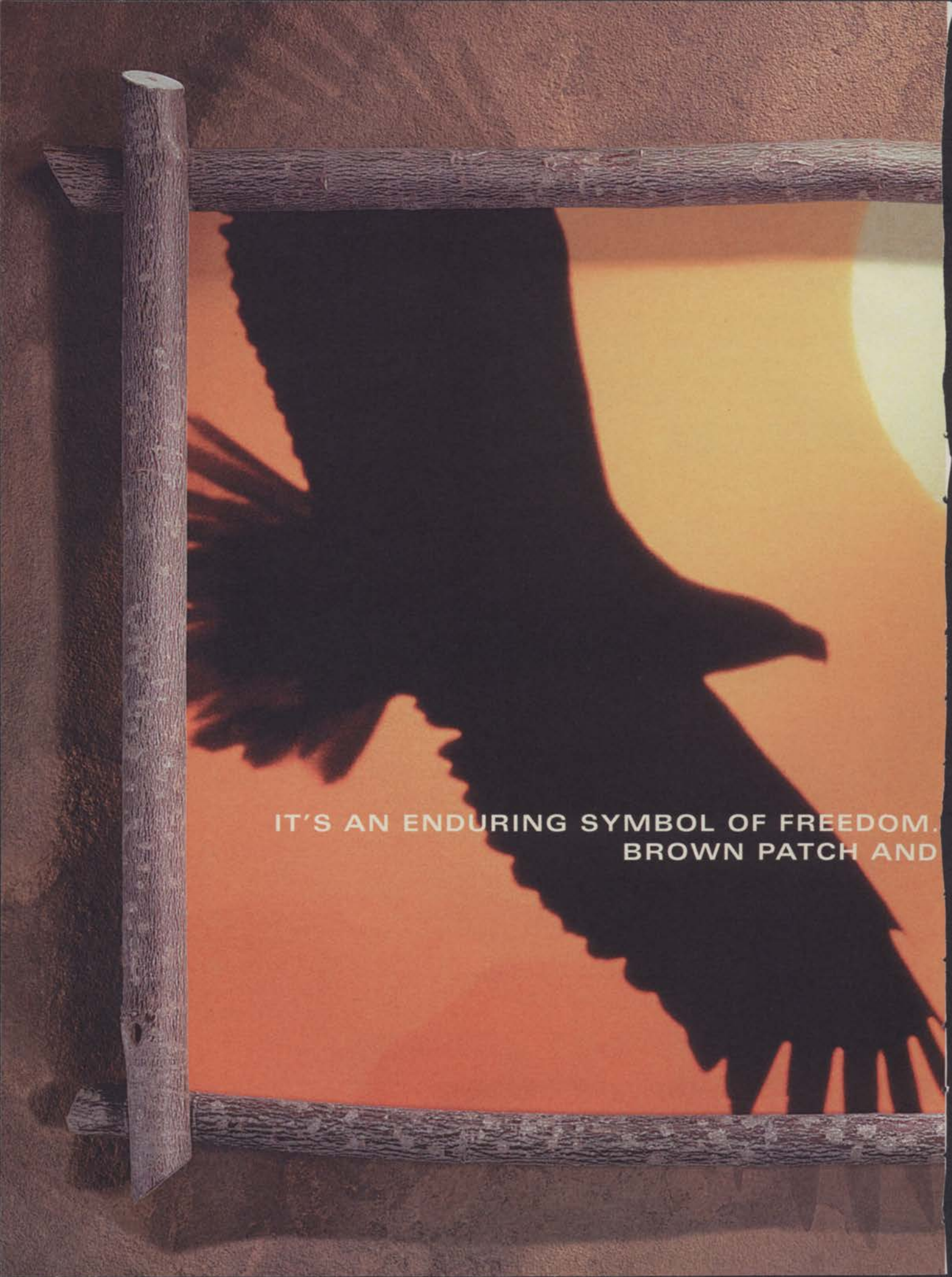
Pro-Lawn-Plus, Inc. is only as good as our employees in the field and in the office. The future challenge for the company is to be able to maintain the high-quality employees we need to continue to provide the high level of service our customers expect.

THE OWNER

PRESIDENT: Mark Schlossberg

BACKGROUND: Worked for seven years at Hydro-Lawn after graduating from the University of Maryland's turf/urban agronomy program. Worked for Pro-Lawn-Plus for two years before buying the company in 1988.

At a
Glance

A framed silhouette of an eagle in flight against a sunset background. The eagle is shown in profile, flying towards the right. Its wings are spread wide, with the primary feathers clearly visible. The background is a warm, orange and yellow gradient, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. A large, bright sun is partially visible in the upper right corner. The entire scene is framed by a rustic, wooden frame made of three weathered branches. The frame is set against a dark, textured background that looks like a wall or a piece of fabric.

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USE READER SERVICE #24

Cover Story

(continued from page 45)

But that year created a new set of challenges for the company when some of its managers left to start their own lawn care company. At the same time, competition from larger firms heated up in the Baltimore market. To make matters worse, the economy was still struggling with the tail end of an economic recession. Schlossberg suddenly

saw companies cutting their prices, and he began losing big clients.

"I decided that I could either get into a price war or refocus the business, and I ultimately walked away from a lot of commercial customers," he shared. "I decided the residential market was less risky because it takes a lot of losses of smaller,

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USE READER SERVICE #72

Many lawn care and landscape companies struggle with the issue of price increases. For Mark Schlossberg, president, Pro-Lawn-Plus, Baltimore, Md., there is no issue. "We have at least a 1 or 2 percent price increase every year," Schlossberg explained. "One year, we didn't raise our prices, and our cancellation rate was the same as the previous years, so we do it. The customers' perception is that you're raising your prices every year, so don't miss a chance to do it."

While every company obviously likes charging more for its work, Schlossberg also views such annual increases as a form of insurance. "Two years ago, we all had to deal with the high fertilizer and gas prices, which created a lot of problems for a lot of companies," he noted. "At least then I was able to cover the gas charges through my annual increase instead of going back to the customers and raising prices mid-season or adding a surcharge.

"There are always going to be unexpected charges in business, so that's another reason to raise your prices each year," he maintained. — **Bob West**

An Increase Every Year

residential jobs to hurt you like losing one big, commercial job hurts. Plus, I didn't think I'd be able to continue growing with a focus on the commercial market because I would have to lower my prices every year just to compete."

As a result of that decision, about 77 percent of the company's revenue comes from single-family residential customers at an average of \$475 a year per customer. However, today, Schlossberg wants to boost the commercial business back up to about 30 percent of corporate revenue. "That would maximize our commercial crew's efficiency," Schlossberg related, adding that he's a big believer in separate commercial and residential crews. "Commercial technicians don't like dealing with people. Plus, we handle

our residential clients with granular fertilizer and spraying for weeds, but we're pretty much all liquid on commercial properties, so we don't have to deal with the granules all over the concrete on larger properties."

Building a company around residential clients can create additional challenges, of course. Many lawn care companies share one particular frustration with homeowners, but Schlossberg reports that Pro-Lawn-Plus has been able to avoid the "switch to save \$5" customers. He attributes this long-term customer loyalty to effectively positioning the company in the market and understanding his customers' needs.

"Our pricing is high, and we don't try to compete with the bigger companies," he explained. "They want us to compete with them on price because then we'll end up working 90 hours a week just to make the same money we could make working for someone else."

Customers won't pay higher prices unless they perceive value in the service, and that's the key to Pro-Lawn-Plus' success. "If the customers don't feel that we're worth the price, then we're not doing our job," Schlossberg asserted, adding that consumers are fed up with companies that don't take responsibility for their actions. "My guys get mad when there's a situation and they feel they're right but the customer thinks he's right, because I always side with the customer. I tell my technicians, 'It may not be your fault, but now it's your problem.'"

Of course, talking the talk is easier than walking the walk, and Schlossberg deals with a variety of obstacles while creating a customer service culture. "Keeping customers happy has been a real challenge the last couple of years due to the weather, which has resulted in some pretty poor lawn care results," he pointed out. "That really heightens the importance of the education issue and getting your employees to continually communicate with the customers."

Unfortunately, the last thing most lawn care technicians want to do is spend time talking to customers. "These guys can't just ignore the brown areas in a lawn if they see them," Schlossberg emphasized. "They have to acknowledge the area and explain to the customer that this is caused by drought or disease, and then explain what we're doing to take care of the problem. Customers ap-

preciate even the slightest bit of interest from the technician."

Schlossberg remains sensitive to his technicians' concerns that customer contact only hinders productivity. "One of the things I've noticed the last few years is that my employees want to work less hours," he observed. "We've got them down to 40 hours a week in

most cases, and they're still getting all of their work done and making good money in the \$30,000 to \$40,000 range with a 401k, a couple of weeks off at Christmas and medical insurance."

Pro-Lawn-Plus only works 10 to 12 weeks a year, and Schlossberg said his employees recognize the importance of doing

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so occasionally. "They just really value their time off," he related, adding that his employees minimize wasted time in the office each day so nothing interferes with their work. "I worked 60 to 70 hours a week when I started in this industry, and that doesn't fly any more. Sometimes it bothers me that they don't work more, but they're generating about \$1,000 a day and we're not getting cancellations or complaints. What can I do?"

Despite his frustration with this evolving trend, Schlossberg recognizes that being as committed to his employees as he is to his customers ultimately serves his company well. "We've been able to keep a lot of our technicians for six or even 10 years, and I think one reason for that is that we don't burn them out," he asserted.

GROW THE BOTTOM. While Schlossberg doesn't have any complaints about the company's impressive growth since he bought it, the economic and climatic challenges of the last couple of years have given him a renewed focus on the importance of growing the company's profitability as well as its revenue.

A key profitability driver is customer retention. "Right now, we try to reinforce with our technicians that customers don't cancel because of how the lawn looks," he explained. "They cancel because of our attitude or service – not closing the gate, not calling ahead if they ask us to, not blowing granules off the sidewalk. Since we're more expensive, people are with us because they want our service."

Understanding his customers this deeply convinced Schlossberg that he didn't need to slash his prices when the economy slowed. Instead, the brown lawns created by one of the worst droughts in Maryland history reinforced to him the importance of constant customer appreciation.

At times like these, savvy marketing certainly doesn't hurt either. Schlossberg has always been a fan of offering a 10 percent pre-pay discount to customers who pay for their entire year's service in advance of the first application. Significantly more customers took advantage of this opportunity already in 2002 – upwards of 40 percent of his entire customer count. "Their money is only making 1 or 2 percent in a savings account

(continued on page 52)

USE READER SERVICE #74

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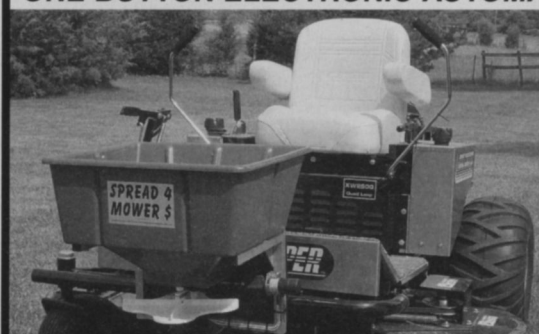
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Cover Story

(continued from page 50)

these days, so why not save 10 percent with this discount?" he pointed out.

The state of Maryland passed a nutrient management law that went into effect last year requiring lawn care companies to follow University of Maryland recommendations, which means conducting a soil test for every new customer and additional soil tests one out of every three years for ongoing customers. Pro-Lawn-Plus communicated this to its clients and generated about \$50,000 in new revenue from soil tests.

"Our customer count

stayed fairly consistent

last year from 2000,

but we still grew about

8.5 percent by selling

more services to our

current customers."

- Mark Schlossberg

Maryland also experienced above-average grub pressure in 2000, so Pro-Lawn-Plus subtly stepped up its grub treatment sales effort last winter by reminding customers of the problem via the winter renewal letter. As a result, grub applications doubled the next year. "Our customer count stayed fairly consistent last year from 2000, but we still grew about 8½ percent by selling more services to our current customers," Schlossberg shared.

However, don't hastily label Schlossberg as someone constantly upselling his customers. "I don't do many extra mailings to customers because they don't want me selling to them all the time," he countered. "But when a bad situation comes up, like the grubs two years ago or the drought last year, we'll mention it in a letter or make up handouts for the technicians to deliver with extension service sheets and backup information."

One sales area that will garner Schlossberg's attention this year will be the company's tree and shrub care services, which currently represent about 12 percent of Pro-Lawn-Plus' total sales but are espe-

(continued on page 54)



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USE READER SERVICE #26

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Taking the Industry by Storm...

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Cover Story

(continued from page 52)

cially attractive because of the high profitability margins that result from a service with such low product use costs. Almost all of the company's current tree and shrub customers started out as turf customers, so Schlossberg will focus on caring for a bigger part of his current customers' properties this year, especially since the drought's cumulative damage is starting to pose a significant threat to plants.

"Trees and shrubs are more economically sensitive to drought because they cost so much more to repair or replace than turf does," Schlossberg observed, anticipating significant losses for his customers this year. "From a technical standpoint, these plants need moisture, especially in the fall for them to overwinter, and we've had two dry falls in a row."

A key to successfully developing this service at Pro-Lawn-Plus will be Schlossberg's ability to hire the right individual to work as a dedicated tree and shrub technician. "I've learned in this business that you want to have the guys go out and not have to mix up their services," he related. "If they switch from inspections to treatment to surveying, then they get out of the groove. Treatment, treatment, treatment may be boring, but it's more profitable and there's less wasted time."

Clearly, Schlossberg understands the numbers side of the business, and he uses the information he gleans from regular updates of Pro-Lawn-Plus' 300-line financial report to maneuver the business accordingly. For example, he can tell you off the top of his head that his material costs for fertilizing a townhouse property are about \$.50 per 1,000 square feet while he'll bill \$35.

"With a grub treatment, the gross profit dollars are better, but I'll do that same townhouse lawn for \$70 while my materials costs go up to \$3.50 per 1,000 square feet," he related. "That means my materials cost is significantly higher as a percent of revenue for a grub application than it is for a basic fertilizer application, which is why regular lawn treatments are still the most profitable work we do."

So it's with a watchful eye on the bottom line and a full dose of optimism that Schlossberg prepares for another season. "I'm optimistic about our industry," he enthused, adding that the biggest threat to lawn care operators' future resides in the 50 state legis-

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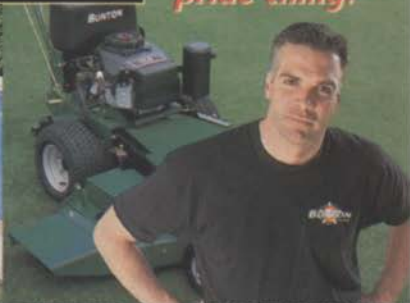


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Honda®		4 hp	4 hp		
Features					
Aerating width	28"	19"	26.5"	36"	35.5"
Seeding					•
Vertical aeration	•				
Rotary aeration		•	•	•	
Dethatching					•
Overseeding					•
Zero-turn radius	•				
Coring depth	2.5"	2.75"	2.75"	4"	
Productivity: sq. ft./hr.	24,000	21,000	29,300	65,340	NA

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	Bunton Hydro	Bunton Gear-Drive
Decks		
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Engines		
15 hp gas	•	•
17 hp gas	•	•
21 hp gas	•	
Drive		
Hydrostatic	•	
Gear		•
Features		
Grass catcher	Optional	Optional
Mulching baffle kit	Optional	Optional
Zero-turn radius	•	
Anti-scalp rollers	•	•
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Heavy-duty deck design	•	•
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Deck size									
48"	•	•							
52.5"		•	•	•	•			•	
61"			•	•	•	•			
72"							•		•
Engines									
18 hp air-cooled gas									•
19 hp air-cooled gas		•							
20 hp liquid-cooled diesel			•						
23 hp air-cooled gas				•					
23 hp liquid-cooled gas					•				
25 hp air-cooled gas	•					•			
26 hp fuel-injected gas							•		
31 hp liquid-cooled gas									•
Features									
Zero-turn radius	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Anti-scalp rollers	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
3-2-1 Warranty	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Hydraulic oil cooler	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Adjustable seat	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
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- 52.5" or 61" side-discharge deck (BZT-2230, BZT-2230 LC)
- 61" side-discharge deck (BZT-2250)



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- 42" or 48" rear-discharge deck
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BZT-2260 EFI Gas Riding Mower

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- 61" or 72" side-discharge deck
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 - Hydraulic oil cooler
 - 12-gallon fuel tank
 - Electric deck lift
 - Bunton 3-2-1 Warranty



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Cover Story

lawnandlandscape.com



Check out this story online for more about Schlossberg's work on the regulatory front.

latures around the country. "I don't think anti-pesticide regulations will ever put us out of business, but the people who pay attention to these issues know that we have to keep ourselves represented in state governments or else we will get legislated right out of existence. We're an easy target."

Still, Schlossberg expects to grow 5 to 7 percent this year. "We try to achieve that same level of growth every year through our price increase and customer growth," he explained, well aware that businesses, like plants, grow strong and healthy over time and not in a hurry. "I want slow, steady growth instead of trying to be the next big

company. Plus, this year should be a good profit year because of all of the investments we made last year that we won't have to make this year." **LL**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Mark Schlossberg isn't a violent man, but he won't shun away from fights he thinks are worth fighting. The most fearsome opponent Schlossberg, president of Baltimore, Md.-based Pro-Lawn-Plus knows of these days comes in the form of anti-lawn care groups and individuals all around the country and especially in the Maryland area.

"I don't think the anti-pesticide regulations could put us out of business because people want our service, but the people who pay attention to these issues know that we have to keep ourselves represented in legislatures or else we will get legislated out of business," noted this twenty-four-year-veteran of the lawn care industry. "The fact is that we're an easy target."

Schlossberg's solution, along with making sure his company only offers customers an environmentally sensitive lawn care program, is to work tirelessly on the industry's behalf battling inappropriate legislation. Schlossberg has done this as president of the Maryland Turfgrass Council, the state of Maryland's Nutrient Management Advisory Committee and, most recently, as president of the Maryland Association of Green Industries, a collaborative effort comprised of lawn care companies, arborists, golf course superintendents, landscape contractors, nursery growers and other allied professions.

"I started dealing with legislation as soon as I came to Pro-Lawn-Plus," Schlossberg recalled. "It all started with the posting laws that took effect in the mid-1980s. These laws required lawn care companies to post signs in lawns right after treatments. Then, legislators wanted pre-posting as well, but, so far, this has not passed."

Such an extensive commitment can challenge time-strapped business owners, but Schlossberg doesn't view that as an acceptable excuse. "I don't do this just to be a good guy," he emphasized in an interview conducted just after he returned from testifying in the state legislature about a proposed law that would require national background checks by employers for any potential employee who would apply pesticides. "I do this because I want my business to survive." - **Bob West**

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USE READER SERVICE #27

A businessman from an early age, David Knauff created a company — Yes, We Care Landscaping — with a name that speaks for itself.

Young Entrepreneur

When David Knauff decided to play on the varsity golf team in high school, his parents were very supportive — but couldn't help foot the bill. Financing equipment, uniforms and other team expenditures quickly put David in the hole, and he realized an after-school job was imperative.

But while his peers were asking, "Do you want fries with that?" or sweeping up popcorn at the local movie theater, Knauff decided to further his fairway dreams with an uncharacteristic choice for a teenager: launching his own business.

"I started cutting lawns when I was nine, and started caddying at a local country club," Knauff remembered. "I liked mowing lawns better than caddying, so when I turned 15, I decided to make a little business — by the time I was 16, I had 22 clients."

What started as a means to finance another pastime eventually turned into a lifestyle, even as Knauff finished high school and went to college. "My hobby simply turned into something I enjoyed," he stated. Twelve years later, at the ripe old age of 27, Knauff is a veteran who is only just beginning his run.

JUGGLING ACT. In 2001, Yes, We Care Landscaping, located in the Chicago suburb of Wilmette, Ill., reported \$1.2 million in revenue, hoping to grow another 20 percent by the end of 2002. This present-day picture is a far cry from Knauff's first two-dozen mowing clients — obvious growth that has mirrored his metamorphosis from boy to business owner. "By the end of the first year, I had to have a foreman work all day for me while I was in school, and then I met up with him after school," Knauff

Yes, We Care Landscaping

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(continued on page 60)

The Yes, We Care Landscaping team: Front row, L-R, Juan Rivera, Liz Upsall and David Knauff. Back row, L-R, Tisha Teeluck, Dan Flores and Mark Opal. Photo: Yes, We Care Landscaping



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First Look

(continued from page 58)

reminisced. "By the time I was out of school, I had two crews working for me."

High school graduation came and went, and Knauff enrolled at Michigan State University, pursuing a degree in horticulture with a specialty in landscape design/build. However, in between the early-morning classes and the late-night study sessions, Knauff juggled his landscape company in Wilmette. "I essentially ran the business from a satellite - meaning, my dorm room," he joked. "I would fax the schedule every day, my mom would pick it up off the fax machine, and then my foremen would come by and get it."

Knauff's dual commitment to his education and his business venture paid off, and when he graduated, he was finally able to perpetuate the image Yes, We Care Landscaping represented. Soon, Knauff's company expanded. "One year, we grew 80 percent," he said. "I didn't have much of a management team in place yet, so I was really doing everything. I was more worried

about putting work in the ground than the billing, so cash flow became a problem."

Yes, We Care Landscaping couldn't live up to its promises without a solid management team, Knauff soon realized. "One of the biggest obstacles we overcame was getting the right managers in place," related Liz Upsall, horticulturalist and designer.

Eventually, Knauff realized he needed to establish priorities for the managerial staff. "Each one of the managers was good at one thing," he identified. "Once we realized what our core competencies were, we went from there. And with the management structure we put into place, it wasn't hard to find where the gaps were and fill those gaps."

With Upsall focusing on the design duties and Knauff gradually shifting his attention to the company's business operations, the management structure is just beginning to even out, Knauff said. "We're trying to develop a company where there's not a lot of red tape - so you need some levels of manage-

At 15 years old, David Knauff stood in his kitchen with his mother, throwing around possible names for the company. When his mother suggested Yes, We Care Landscaping, the name struck a chord with Knauff. "The name says everything in one line," he pointed out. "It automatically creates quality and customer service, because I can't hide my name." - *Kristin Mohn*

What's In a Name?

ment," he stated. "By adding the right staff, and with the team I've built around myself, I'm able to produce what we're selling on a higher level, with more responsiveness."

Still, company growth and restructuring haven't caused Knauff to stray from his original focus on residential maintenance. Eighty percent of Yes, We Care's clients are residen-

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USE READER SERVICE #83

tial, with 15 percent commercial/industrial properties and 5 percent government/municipal clients. Installation makes up 30 percent of the company's service mix, while lawn care and trees and ornamentals contribute 5 percent each. Sixty percent of the company's services revolve around maintenance.

LESSONS IN LABOR. When Knauff's fledgling company started to grow, he noticed the need for additional labor. As a younger owner, gaining respect from his workers proved to be another challenge, Knauff remembered. "There was a lot of hesitation with some of the older workforce," he said. "They said, 'Here we are working for a really young guy - what kind of job security is this?' So from the very beginning, I took care of my guys and treated them like family. I invited them to family functions, compensated them well, took care of them and paid attention to them."

Soon, Knauff's reputation as a compas-

sionate, respectable employer spread through the neighborhood by way of his friends and family. "Any time I put out the word for one guy, I get 10," he said proudly. Even today, with an unstable economy and a tight labor market, Knauff's original focus on the employee overcomes these obstacles, and prospective crew members still come through his door, he said.

Of course, Yes, We Care Landscaping employees know they have to live up to the company's name by proving that each and every client will receive individualized attention. Thus, the company capitalizes on its name the same way it has from the very beginning: by cultivating customer referrals with quality one-on-one relationships.

Even during the first few years of business, Knauff marketed his name and reputation through word of mouth, he remarked. "People liked the idea of a high school kid out there cutting lawns - they knew they could walk out and communicate with me," he explained.

lawnandlandscape.com

Look online for more information, including Yes, We Care Landscaping's recruiting strategies.

"That's how the referrals grew." Today, 95 to 98 percent of Yes, We Care's business stems from referrals, Knauff stated.

But Knauff is in the business for more than the quick sales and percentage growth. Although his former hobby has turned into a career, enjoying his job and extending that zeal throughout the company lets clients know Yes, We Care does in fact care about its properties. "It's all about our mission statement," he said. "We're passionate about the landscapes we create, and committed to the people that call them home." **LI**

The author is Assistant Editor - Internet of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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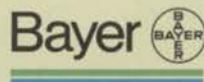


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USE READER SERVICE #29

by Fred Baxendale & John Fech

By using degree-day monitoring and phenology, LCOs can optimize turf and ornamental pest control.

Give INSECTS the Third Degree

When gathering at turfgrass conferences, lawn care operators (LCOs) often discuss the recent weather. Why? They know from years of experience that weather patterns often correlate with outbreaks of plant diseases and pests during the growing season.

Of course, there also are many other factors that influence the likelihood of a pest outbreak, including the genetic resistance of the host plant, how heavily a turf or ornamental plant is fertilized, the physical characteristics of the soil, and plant location.

Still, if it were possible to predict the severity of certain insect problems during a given year, we could all throw away our proverbial crystal balls. As it turns out, one particular factor has a significant influence on plant and insect development: temperature. Because temperatures fluctuate daily, an insect that normally takes four weeks to mature from egg to adult may require five weeks or more in a cooler year, and only two-and-a-half weeks during an abnormally warm period.

(continued on page 66)

Degree-Day Sample

Date	Max. Temp	Min. Temp	Ave. Temp	Daily DD*	Accumulated DD*
5/1	54	42	48	0	0
5/2	54	44	49	0	0
5/3	46	36	41	0	0
5/4	45	35	40	0	0
5/5	51	33	42	0	0
5/6	53	41	47	0	0
5/7	53	39	46	0	0
5/8	61	37	49	0	0
5/9	58	40	49	0	0
5/10	62	46	54	4	4
5/11	69	55	62	12	16
5/12	55	45	50	0	16
5/13	56	44	50	0	16
5/14	63	47	55	5	21
5/15	68	54	62	12	33
5/16	65	59	62	12	45
5/17	71	49	60	10	55

Chart specifics: Sample is for pine needle scale with a base temperature 50 F.

*DD = Degree Day

- Fred Baxendale and John Fech

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110131	Tree 01	Maple, Burford	2	1	0	0	25.00	Open
110132	Shrub 02	Yucca, Pink	10	1	0	0	5.50	
110133	Shrub 03	Hydrangea, Pink	4	1	0	0	34.50	Save
110134	Tree 02	Spirea, Alberta 2	2	1	0	0	40.00	Delete
110135	Shrub 04	Jump, Blue Chip	8	1	0	0	10.00	
110136	Flower Perennial	Verbena, Cascade	20	1	0	0	12.00	Print
110137	Flower Perennial	Coreopsis, Moonbeam	8	1	0	0	8.50	End
110138	Tree 03	Small, Yellow	1	1	0	0	25.00	

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Degree-Day Monitoring

(continued from page 64)

DEGREE-DAYS DEFINED. The system of degree-day calculation was developed to help LCOs get a better handle on how temperature impacts insects. Once LCOs start working with the concept, it becomes a useful tool for calculating and predicting insect activity. It's a bit like your first experience typing on a computer or riding a bicycle – at first, you are clumsy, but after some effort and experience, it becomes comfortable.

So, what is a degree-day? The best way to think of it is as an accumulation of temperature over time. Because degree-days dictate

the rate of growth and development of plants and animals, they are also sometimes thought of as “thermal time.”

With most pest organisms in the landscape, there is a certain minimum temperature at which activity, growth and development slows and eventually stops, otherwise known as base temperature or developmental threshold. For most organisms, base temperature is 50 F. Other organisms' base temperatures may be as low as 39 F or as high as 54 F.

Defined, degree-day accumulation is the sum of the number of degrees by which each

day's average temperature exceeds the base temperature. Luckily, this is easy to calculate. A 24-hour period in which the average temperature for the day is only one degree above the base temperature accumulates or yields one degree-day. So, every day, the degree-day accumulation can be calculated for a specific pest and then analyzed over time.

Most degree-day models start with the calendar year, beginning with Jan. 1. However, if you live in the Northeast, Pacific Northwest or Midwest, you can choose a starting date much closer to the onset of insect activity that you've noticed in previous years because very few days early in the season are warm enough to significantly contribute to the insect's degree-day accumulation. For example, if you notice that pine needle scale crawlers start hatching in mid-May in your area, start your calculations with May 1.

The best way to obtain temperature information is to purchase and install a Max./Min. thermometer, available at many home improvement and hardware stores. You also can use weather data from television stations or newspaper reports, however, the equipment used to record the temperatures is likely to be as much as 20 miles away. There could be important differences between local and weather service temperatures, especially if the property you're inspecting is coastal or near a lake. If you operate a lawn care business, you may need to obtain separate data sets from each part of the city. If you have a large account (i. e., estate, shopping mall) or you work for a golf course or campus grounds department, it may be practical to purchase and install a weather station containing a Max./Min. thermometer specifically for the landscape you work with every day.

Here's how to figure the calculation (for a degree-day example using pine needle scale and a base temperature of 50 F, see page 64):

- Using a Max./Min. thermometer, determine each day's average temperature by adding the daily maximum temperature to the daily minimum temperature and dividing the result by two.

- To determine the number of degree-days for each calendar day, subtract the base temperature for the pest species from the daily average temperature. This is the degree-day temperature.

(continued on page 68)

The following table is adapted from data accumulated by The Ohio State University professors Warren Johnson, David Shetlar and Dan Herms. A more complete table is available from Extension Entomology, Ohio State University, 1991, Kenny Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210. Ask for Bulletin No. 504.

These degree-day accumulations are based on a developmental threshold temperature of 50 F. The Max./Min. range represents the degree-day accumulations during which the pest is most susceptible to control. More than one Max./Min. range indicates multiple generations or control periods.

INSECT	TARGET DEGREE-DAYS					
	MIN.	MAX.	MIN.	MAX.	MIN.	MAX.
Elm Bark Beetle	7	120	135	250		
European Red Mite	7	58	240	810		
Kermes Oak Scale	7	91	298	912		
Oystershell Scale	7	91	363	707		
Spruce Spider Mite	7	121	192	363	2375	2806
Taxus Mealybug	7	91	246	618		
White Pine Aphid	7	121	121	246	1917	2271
Cooley Spruce Adelgid	22	92	1500	1775		
Euonymous Scale	35	120	533	820		
Fletcher Scale	35	148	1029	1388	2515	2800
Honeylocust Plant Bug	58	246				
Maple Bladder Gall Mite	58	148	98	155		
Eastern Tent Caterpillar	90	190				
Gypsy Moth	90	448				
Nantucket Pine Tip Moth	121	448	1514	1917		
Zimmerman Pine Moth	121	246	912	1917	1917	2154
Cankerworms	148	290				
Lilac Borer	148	299				
Birch Leafminer	190	290	530	700		

Insect Insights



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Degree-Day Monitoring

(continued from page 66)

• Add up the daily calculations. This provides the accumulated number of degree-days.

DEGREE-DAY BENEFITS. Several well-respected entomologists have developed tables and charts that list degree-day accumulations for the important life stages of

various landscape insects. This information can be used to identify optimal control periods for these insects and as a starting point in an LCO's insect monitoring program.

By using degree-day calculations, LCOs can be much more precise in their pesticide application timing. Within just a few days

Extensive phenological charts are available for various insect pests.

A comprehensive reference volume is *Coincide* by Donald Orton. The following examples detail the type of information available in these references:

PLANT/ INSECT SPECIES	PHENO- LOGICAL EVENT	DD BASE 50*
-----------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------

(*Degree-day accumulations are based on a development threshold temperature of 50 F)

Eastern Tent Caterpillar	Egg Hatch	80
--------------------------------	-----------	----

Border Forsythia	First Bloom	80
---------------------	----------------	----

Star Magnolia	First Bloom	80
------------------	----------------	----

Red Maple	Full Bloom	80
--------------	---------------	----

European Pine Sawfly	Egg Hatch	152
----------------------------	--------------	-----

Spring Snow Crabapple	First Bloom	152
-----------------------------	----------------	-----

Bradford Pear	Full Bloom	155
------------------	---------------	-----

Allegheny Service- berry	First Bloom	155
--------------------------------	----------------	-----

— Fred Baxendale and John Fech

A Phenology Paradigm

or so, they will know when the target insect is at a controllable stage, taking much of the guesswork out of their control efforts. Take notes on the pests regularly encountered and localize the information. Adapted information will then become a valuable resource in an Integrated Pest Management program.

PHENOLOGY. To further refine pesticide application precision, consider using plant/insect phenology relationships in addition to degree-day calculations. Using these two methods together provides a significant advantage over making insecticide applications based merely on a calendar or historical basis.

So, what is phenology and how does it work? Simply put, phenology is the observa-

(continued on page 72)

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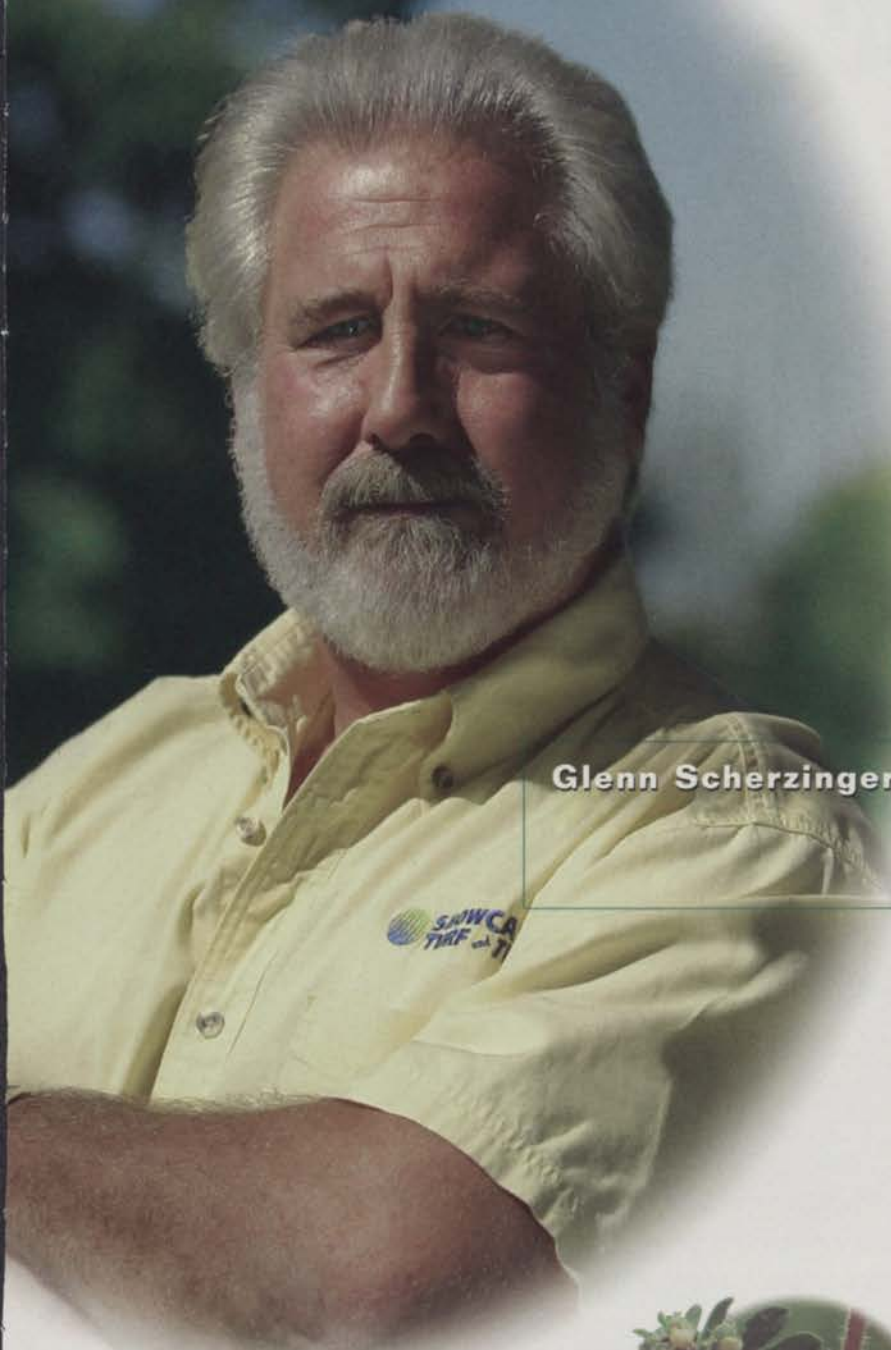
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Degree-Day Monitoring

(continued from page 68)

tion of recurring biological events (plants' blooming characteristics, birds' migration patterns and the insects' seasonal appearances). Plants, as well as insects, are heavily dependent on temperature for maturation and development. Thus, plants can be good indicators of what's going on in the insect

world. A big advantage of using plants is that they're a whole lot bigger and easier to observe than itty-bitty insects.

The power of phenology comes from being able to match a particular growth stage of a plant with the activity or life stage of a specific pest. A visible sign – such as a

plant beginning to bloom – can become your signal that it's time to treat for the pest. (To review a phenology chart example, see A Phenology Paradigm on page 68.)

Phenological relationships should be calibrated to local conditions in a similar fashion to degree-day accumulation charts. Recent research indicates that phenological correlations developed in one region of the country are not always accurate when used in another area of the United States. Just as degree-day data varies, there are many reasons for variation in phenological relationships.

When plants that originate in one region are planted more than 500 miles away, they can look and respond differently than they do in their place of origin. For example, red maple trees from a seed source in southern Oklahoma often suffer winter injury when grown in South Dakota landscapes. These differences can affect both degree-day accumulations and phenological relationships.

Day length and other environmental factors also can affect these relationships. For insects that overwinter in the soil, such as white grubs, differences in the number of days of very cold temperatures and the length of time that snow cover is in place can cause variable responses as well. Despite all of these influencing factors, the sequence of basic phenological events is remarkably consistent from year to year. Highly visible and readily monitored plant growth stages can serve as effective indicators of when a certain pest is in its most controllable stage.

While phenology and degree-day calculations can be useful for identifying the best times for pest control applications, they should never be substituted for field monitoring potential insect pests. Assess and fine-tune your degree-day and phenological predictions by keeping an eye on insect populations in the landscapes you service. Maintain accurate records and compare notes with other LCOs to gain insights into why a particular pest's development may have been delayed or is right on schedule. Natural enemies, overlapping pest generations or inaccurate weather data may have caused your predictions to be off base. **LL**

Baxendale is an entomology professor, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Neb., and Fech is an extension educator, University of Nebraska Extension, Omaha, Neb.

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Mowing Techniques

by Kristin Mohn

As the outfielder races against time to catch the fly ball in left field, he zooms in and out of an intricately designed pattern of grass stripes. During the fifth inning, the grounds crew members race out of the dugout, dusting and cleaning the infield while the crowd cheers. Clearly, major league baseball fans take their beloved team – and its front yard – seriously.

Likewise, landscape contractors' residential clients feel devoted to their own playing fields – the yards where little boys play catch with their fathers and where family picnics turn into cherished memories. In addition, when playing the aesthetics game, clients desire properties that present pure curb appeal, which translates to sales wins for contractors.

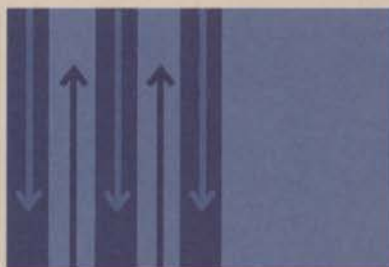
Mowing designs spice up an endless expanse of green and create a charismatic lawn that existing clients enjoy and future clients call for. Landscape contractors who incorporate patterns into their clients' lawns can benefit from the variety in their maintenance work – as well as the resulting referrals.

"It's the whole idea of curbside appeal – having the

(continued on page 76)

Landscape contractors may find their inspiration for lawn designs at the ballpark, but these stripes, diamonds and waves also have staying power on clients' lawns.

The Basic Checkerboard



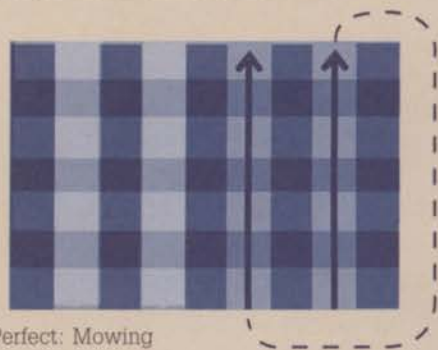
This is a great pattern to begin with – it's easy and looks great on every lawn. It's a pattern you've seen many times on big league ball fields.

1. Begin at one side of the lawn and make side-by-side passes, moving across to the other side of the lawn, alternating light and dark stripes.

2. When making side-by-side passes, be sure to overlap the previous pass a bit with the mowing deck to make sure the grass is completely cut.

3. To make the 90-degree crossing stripes, pass along an edge where your first light and dark stripes end. (If your first stripes went north and south, these will go east and west.) Then, just like you did with your first stripes, pass right next to it. Continue making crossing stripes with side-by-side passes until you reach the other side of the lawn.

4. Now, to finish the checkerboard and enhance the pattern, redo every other stripe of your first passes. Then mow around the outside of the pattern to clean up any turn marks and frame it. – **David Mellor and Simplicity**



Editor's Note: The sidebars on this page and page 76 are adapted from Mellor's book, Picture Perfect: Mowing Techniques for Lawns, Landscapes and Sports and appear in Simplicity's "Big League Lawns: Lawn Stripping Tips" brochure.

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Mowing Techniques

(continued from page 74)

nicest lawn in the neighborhood," said Troy Blewett, manager of corporate communications, Simplicity, Port Washington, Wis. "You have that group of people who want the 'wow' factor. The designs give lawns a real tailored finish."

FIRST BASE. Landscape contractors interested in big-league lawns may initially feel intimidated by the intricacies of mowing designs into their clients' lawns. Or, they may worry about time lost to training employees to create lawn stripes or checkerboard patterns. However, learning to create mowing patterns

only requires minor preparation, related David Mellor, director of grounds, Fenway Park, Boston, Mass. "Creating designs just takes a little bit of planning, and it really adds to the professionalism of the lawn," he admitted.

Mellor is author of *Picture Perfect: Mowing Techniques for Lawns, Landscapes and Sports*, which pinpoints basic information for creating a picturesque lawn (see "The Basic Checkerboard" on page 74 and "Small and Big Diamonds" on this page). Although these designs may consist of waves, angles and circular patterns, Mellor insisted that the first hurdle to clear is mowing along a straight path.

Small and Big Diamonds

This pattern is created by mowing single- and double-wide lines. The diamonds look best if they don't cross at a 90-degree angle.

1. Start this design by making a pass between two corners of the lawn. Make a return pass right next to it, but now go back out on the original pass and make another pass back next to the first return pass, making it twice as wide. Continue this procedure, one stripe out, two stripes back, until you reach the corner of the lawn.

2. Do the other side the same way. Begin by heading out on the original corner-to-corner stripe and make two return stripes next to it. Continue this same pattern to the other corner of the lawn.

3. To make the crossing stripes, use exactly the same sequence you've used thus far. Begin with another long stripe between the other two corners and make two return stripes next to it. Continue to the corner of the lawn. Then, head back out on the center stripe again and do the other half of the lawn. The crossing stripes procedure is identical to your original pattern – it's just at an angle to your first stripes.

4. Now, to complete the diamonds and enhance the pattern, go back and redo the single lines from the very first striping pass you made to begin this pattern. That means you head out on your first corner-to-corner stripe, but now mow around the pattern and make the next single stripe again. You will be making a light stripe, mowing around the pattern, skipping the two dark stripes and doing another light stripe. Do this for all the original light stripes across the complete pattern. This helps set the design and gives it more contrast and detail. – **David Mellor and Simplicity**

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Look online at this story for additional step-by-step techniques for exciting mowing designs.

"Learning something new takes a little bit of time, but the hardest thing initially is to mow a straight line," he explained. "What you do is just pick a point in the distance and mow toward that point." Practicing steadiness with the mower translates to more success when moving toward more advanced designs, he said.

Lawn striping occurs when the full-width rollers on the back of the mower bend the grass in the direction the mower is traveling. When mowing toward a person, he or she will see a dark stripe – when mowing away, a light-colored stripe. These different shades result from light reflecting off the grass.

After understanding these basic concepts, and remembering to be patient, landscape contractors can start lawn striping, Blewett pointed out. "In general, I would say that it's not as difficult as people might think," he said. "After a couple of passes with the mower, you start to get the hang of it. It's basically trial and error." Prior to practicing their striping techniques, contractors can benefit from planning and drawing a specific design, Blewett added.

Of course, be patient when an artistic design on a piece of paper doesn't create the same effect on the actual lawn, Mellor cautioned. "What looks good on paper or on the computer screen doesn't always transfer onto the grass," he reminded. "Even though grass is the perfect canvas, it takes trial and error."

And, when contractors are pleased with their designs, Mellor encourages them to take pictures and create a portfolio of their range of work. "The portfolio can be used for advertising and for future employees," he suggested. "You can see what you like and what you don't like, and then it's easier to look back and say, 'This is what I did.'"

HOME RUN. Manicured turf with swirling waves or interlocking stripes does more than just entertain the crowd at the ballpark. Once clients know their contractor has the ability to create these designs, they ask for the creative patterns to differentiate their lawn from others in the neighborhood, said Gary

(continued on page 78)



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Mowing Techniques

(continued from page 76)

Ground, president, Forsyth Lawn Co., Forsyth, Ill. "Clients like the look of the finished cut because people will drive by and notice the different directions of the grass," he said. "People make remarks about it and then want to know how it happened."

Some clients attend baseball games regularly and want a lawn that rivals their favorite team's playing field. Others desire certain pictures in their yard for special occasions. "The patterns are really only limited by imagination," Mellor said. "You can work with the client and use the curves of the landscape and the way it is laid out to add to the landscape's appeal. I've done traditional lines but also insignias for birthdays, etc."

Popular patterns for residential clients include checkerboards, diamonds or converging arches, Blewett identified, while others choose wavy patterns or designs created from their specifications. With the right planning, these designs don't take any longer than regular maintenance services, he added.

However, Ground pointed out, patterns add flavor and pizzazz to the yard, which inspires clients to recognize the need for proper and timely maintenance. "The clients want to try to maintain that professional look because it's something the homeowner can be proud of," he said.

And for clients, pride means having the most attractive lawn in the neighborhood — one that is tailored, fresh and unique. Yet, Blewett maintained that residential clients also ask for these types of services because of a trend toward cocooning — staying at home and concentrating on the quality of residential life. "People are entertaining more at home, and the home is the center of the things clients are doing," he said. "Having a nice yard and landscape is just an extension of that."

Lawn striping may not be difficult, but contractors need to keep correct mowing practices in mind when implementing yard designs, said Ground. For example, repeating the same design for several weeks can

leave ruts and impressions in the yard that will eventually ruin the turf, said Mellor. "Remember to change the pattern about every three weeks," he said. "You don't want to wear patterns into the lawn." Also, when making sharp turns for angled patterns, be careful not to turn too aggressively and damage the grass, he added.

Ultimately, contractors who incorporate mowing designs into their maintenance lineup impress clients with the professional, polished results. Customers have fun with the big-league-inspired patterns and, when neighbors drive by, asking who created the design, contractors can hit a home run with referrals. Lawn designs simply exist as another way for landscape contractors to creatively differentiate services, Ground emphasized. "Lots of people cut grass," he said. "But we mow lawns." **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor — Internet of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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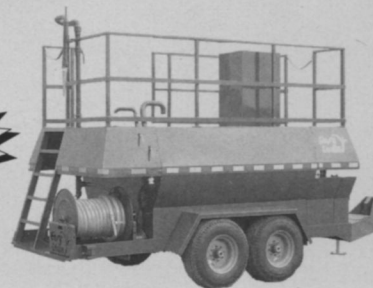
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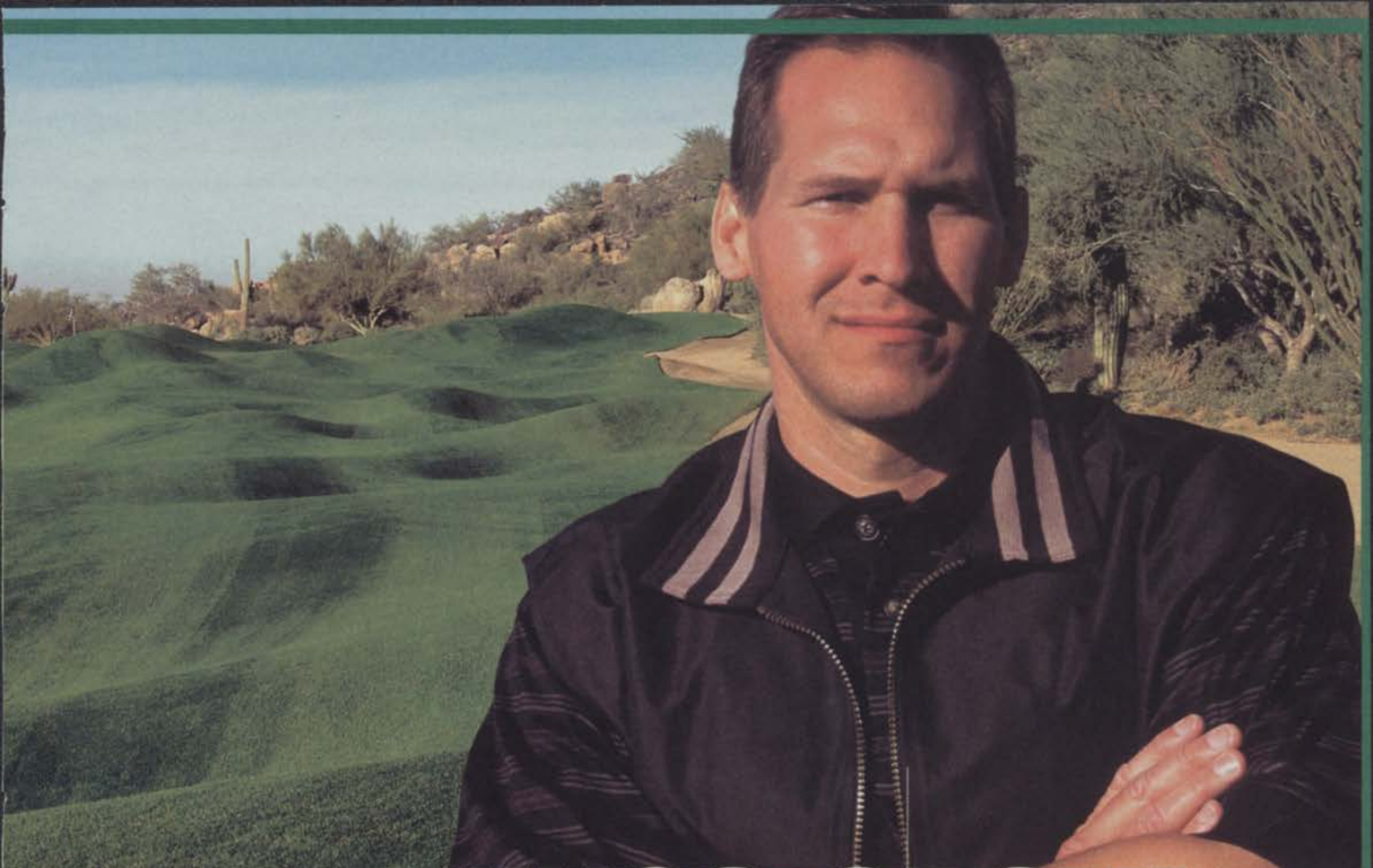
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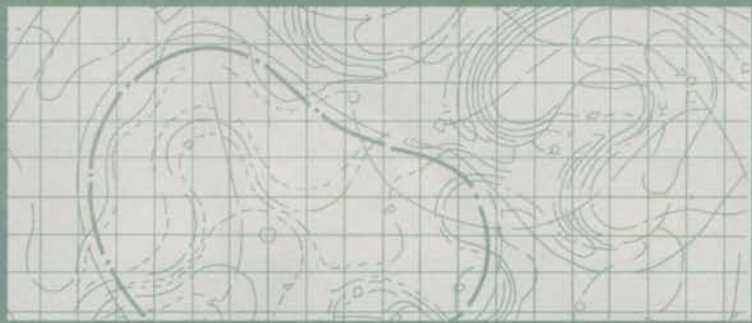
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Water Restrictions

by Kristen Hampshire

W

Water doesn't just run out. It flows from kitchen taps, sprays from sprinkler systems, runs from hoses and fills rivers, lakes and oceans. Plenty to go around, enough to last a lifetime, right?

Or, perhaps water is the resource most taken for granted. After a dry summer and a mild winter, many regions are thirsty and rainfall isn't quenching the need for precipitation. "We have a shortage on water and one of the highest demands we've ever had," reported Kurt Hall, owner and consultant, Water Management Specialists, Houston, Texas. "Water is becoming a commodity."

This warning might surprise landscape contractors who haven't dealt with regulations or even low-level restrictions. For a resource that never seems to run out, they might challenge, "What's the worry?"

Ask the state of California, where conservation is a constant hot-button, or Florida, where the state began to explore ideas for more efficient use. Or, consider the New England states and parts of Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania that reportedly declared drought emergency with mandatory water restrictions, according to a February ABCNews.com update. Droughts have been confirmed in parts of 15 states from Georgia to Maine and 14 states in the Midwest and West, the report identified.

More regions realize the time is now to set water use parameters, and landscape contractors need to design and install efficient irrigation systems, educate clients on water conservation and, in general, explore some "little things" that can make big differences, Hall recommended.

"If we don't manage the water effectively, we're flat going to run out," he predicted. "We are consuming at a rate in which a lot of our smaller cities can't keep up with the demand that irrigation systems put on them."

PUSHING LIMITS. States—and specific regions, for that matter—have constructed webs of red tape to tie

(continued on page 84)

When drought is a backyard reality and not a weather-watch rumor, contractors must take steps to ensure efficient water consumption.

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USE READER SERVICE #40

Water Restrictions

(continued from page 82)

knots in water overuse. Depending on the region, legislation regarding acceptable watering practices might be lenient and virtually non-existent, or restraining and specific. Drought-suffering states lean toward the latter.

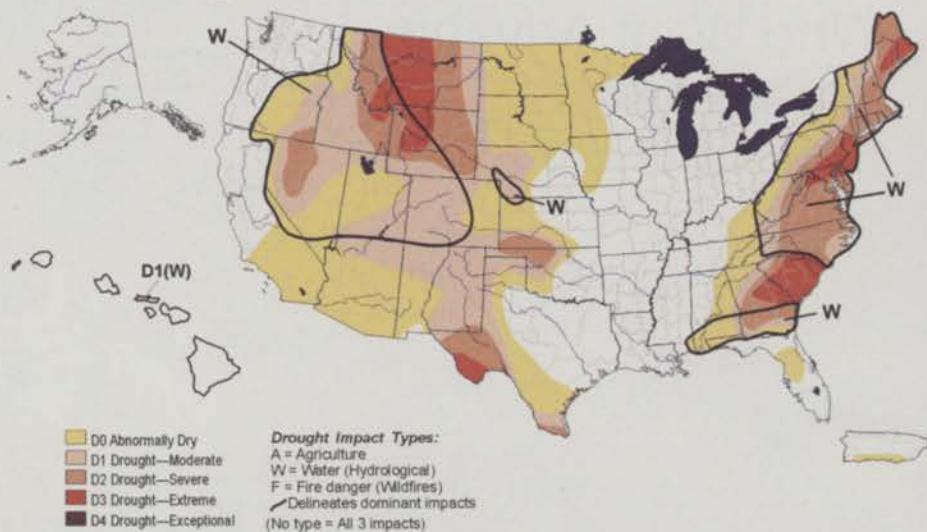
"The most common water restriction is when municipalities restrict the days of the weeks that you can water," explained Todd Hayden, president, Raindance Irrigation & Lighting, Mundelein, Ill.

In his area, environmental conditions determine restrictions. "They aren't automatic," he clarified. "If it is a dry spring or summer, then the towns will enforce them. But if we have a year where the weather gives us the normal precipitation and the water reserves are adequate, they won't enforce them."

In Texas, irrigation constitutes nearly 65 percent of water consumption

(continued on page 86)

Drought Watch



What's in store for your region? The Drought Mitigation Center, Lincoln, Neb., releases this U.S. Drought Monitor every Thursday. The map shown was posted on March 14. Find the map at <http://enso.unl.edu/>

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Water Restrictions

(continued from page 84)

tion from May through September, Hall reported. "If that was managed, the number would drop drastically," he figured.

Some states approach the issue from a restriction standpoint, others choose licensing. In Illinois, only licensed plumbers can install a certain irrigation system hookup, Hayden noted. In San Antonio, Texas, a licensed irrigation contractor must approve designs, Hall added. And in Denver, Colo., Scott Schell said his company, Swingle Tree, deals with municipal suggestions that are enforced during dry times.

This practice is common, and many cities impose restrictions based on weather conditions, Hall pointed out.

While states subscribe to a variety of water conservation methods, regions within states also adopt various action plans as environmental conditions can fluctuate even within county lines, Hall reminded. "The state of Texas is broken down into four zones based on cli-

(continued on page 88)

The Irrigation Association suggests municipalities facing drought conditions consider the following stages of water restriction, depending on the severity of the dry spell:

- *Stage One:* Odd/even water days (or similar plans) are made mandatory for all outdoor uses. No restriction on time of day.
- *Stage Two:* Stage one restrictions, plus watering using hand and hose sprinklers only from 5 to 7 a.m. and 7 to 10 p.m. Automatic irrigation system operation from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. No filling of swimming pools (although pools may be topped off). Only personal vehicles may be spray washed using an automatic shut-off nozzle.
- *Stage Three:* Hand-watering of gardens only. No car washing. Automatic irrigation systems may be used only from midnight to 5 a.m. on scheduled days.
- *Stage Four:* Outside garden watering only with drip irrigation or saved shower water. New landscapes may be watered by permit only.
- *Stage Five:* No outside water use except with saved shower water.

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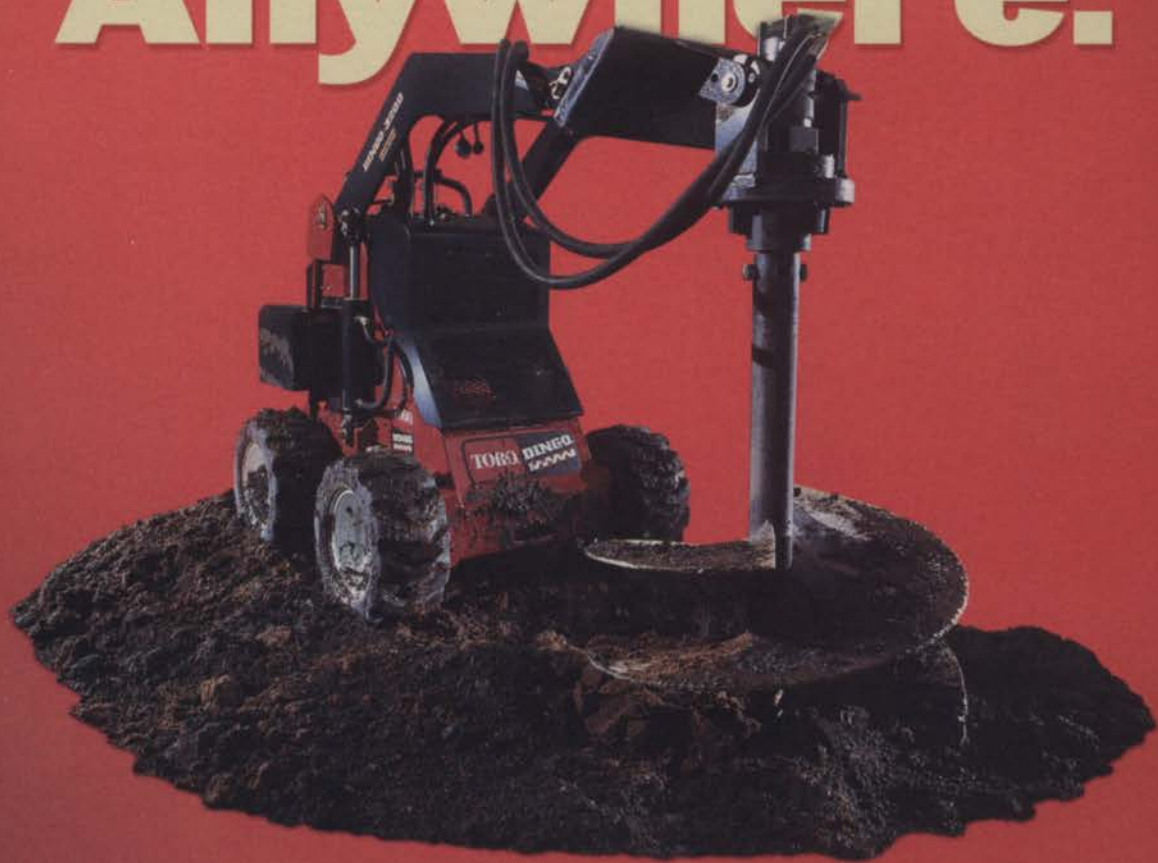


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Water Restrictions

(continued from page 86)

mactic conditions because the further west you go, the more dry it is," he said. "By law, they have determined the minimum amount of efficiency the irrigation system should put out based on the evapotranspiration rate."

This figure can help contractors determine if their systems are water-friendly – and if they are wasting the precious commodity. Contractors should check evapotranspiration (ET) rates for plants they install to determine their water needs. Then, they should adjust systems to accommodate this amount.

"Evapotranspiration rate is basically a monthly format," Hall explained. "In the eastern part of Texas, it is 0.25, and if you multiply that by 30 it will give you the amount of water the plant will need in July, which is the highest water-consuming month in the year."

Conservation balances landscape requirements with supply, an equilibrium contractors must approach carefully, especially as housing starts remain healthy and suburban subdivisions insist that their residents install irrigation systems, Hall observed. "You take a look at the billboards advertising homes in the million-dollar range and, of course, they will be irrigated," he said.

CURBING USE. Contractors might be in tune with local regulations, but most clients aren't losing sleep over the depleting water source. Convenience and the promise of a green lawn sells irrigation services, and Schell said only about 20 percent of his accounts express genuine concern about water consumption.

"There is a growing awareness, but I'm not sure that it's the people truly consuming the water [who are worried]," he said. "I know I'm aware of water regulations because I'm in the industry and it's a big issue with us."

Educating clients on water awareness sparks more urgency for the issue. Simply explaining an irrigation system and how to adjust its schedule gives customers the control to save water. Many of them do not understand how the timers function, so they can't change the percentages even if they realize their lawn is being overwatered, Schell said.

Not adjusting systems wastes water, especially in the fall when most controllers are still set for dry summer watering times, he added. "When we set up the mid-summer checks, our idea behind them was to adjust the controllers that were not watering

(continued on page 90)

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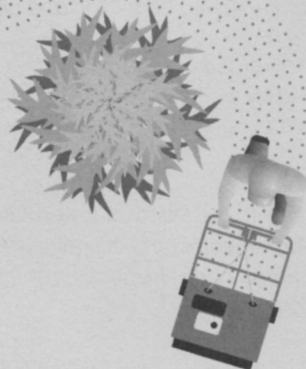
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USE READER SERVICE #94

Water Restrictions

(continued from page 88)

enough," he said. "We were also adjusting controllers that were overwatering and we would find systems where two or three zones were overwatering areas, so we could adjust them down. It was an efficiency check."

However, the last summer check ultimately saves resources, as output is minimized for winter months, Schell pointed out.

These "little things" add up to water savings, and if contractors put these basics into practice when designing and installing irrigation systems, planning plant beds and treating lawns, regulations won't seem so rigorous, he noted.

First, irrigation contractors should consider efficient designs, grouping together plants with similar irrigation needs and arranging spray heads based on the microclimates of the site, Hayden suggested. "If the system is laid out and designed properly, you will give more water to a sunny area of the yard than a shady area," he noted.

Design also includes pressure and uniformity of the spray, added Reid Nelson, marketing and product manager, Nelson Irrigation, Walla Walla, Wash. "If you're dealing with fluctuating pressure or slopes, make sure each sprinkler head is delivering the right amount of water," he advised.

While tweaking these variables to ensure an even, consistent spray, contractors should also consider system set-up, minding the sprinkler streams on each zone. System accuracy also minimizes water waste, Nelson added. In other words, avoid watering at noon when temperatures are climbing the thermometer, or during blustering winds when droplets travel to the neighbor's lawn. Also, rain sensors – a simple system addition – are another tool to keep from watering at inopportune times, and planting native grasses often cuts out some water use.

In addition, soil additives such as wetting agents, surfactants and penetrants help manage soil moisture, lessening the workload on irrigation systems, added Rick Irwin, president, Ecologel USA, Ocala, Fla. Since dry ground can repel moisture, additives can enhance water absorption. "Wetting agents are a good way to guarantee that water gets into the soil," he recommended. "Their function is to make water wetter. It's similar to dishwashing detergent, which makes water wetter to remove grease from pans."

(continued on page 92)

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Water Restrictions

(continued from page 90)

Taking advantage of some soil technologies might reduce the need for irrigation, he said. "Contractors are beginning to understand the value of these products, especially since they are put under water restrictions," he noticed. "If they are under water restrictions that prevent them from watering as

often as they'd like, they need to look at tools to protect them."

COUNTING PENNIES. Conservation doesn't sell – cost does.

"If you tell clients the system will conserve water, they'll say, 'That's wonderful,

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Read about drought-tolerant landscape in Xeriscape Zone in the April 2001 online archive.

but how much will it cost me," Hall remarked. "But, if you tell them it will save them X dollars in X months they'll say, 'Goodness, let's set up two of them.'"

Some states approach conservation from the earth-friendly angle, but money motivates in most regions. And often, the conservative road isn't the least expensive route.

Hall compared it to purchasing an economical car. "The more fuel-efficient the vehicle is, the higher the acquisition cost is up front because of what it takes to make the vehicle efficient," he remarked. "But once you spend the money, you reap the benefits."

Sometimes, spreading this message to clients challenges contractors. How do you sell a system to price-hunting customers when the initial cost is a little more? Some seem blind to the "savings down the road" pitch. But, as Hayden pointed out, irrigation is generally an indulgence.

"I think that it's important that we sell the quality design and installation as No. 1 for our customer instead of just competing on price," he noted. "We're selling a luxury item as it is – why would you sell it at a cut-rate price?"

If customers were aware of the dollars that would disappear from their water bills if they adjusted system clocks when they were overwatering, they would take technicians' tips, Schell figured. "I don't think people will conserve water until they are forced to by the money issue," he reasoned.

Conservation can decrease water use by 25 percent and the client will realize value associated this savings, Hall pointed out. "It all comes circular," he said.

"If the contractor can educate the consumer on water or dollar conservation – however they want to spin it – we will get some serious work done," he continued. "We will not get any major movement in water conservation other than buzzwords until the contractor gets in front of the client and educates them on things that they can do." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor – Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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by Kristen Hampshire

AN OBSTACLE Course

Take these installation tips from contractors who weren't afraid to tackle tricky installation projects.

Attention design/build dare-devils, fearless construction crews and installation risk-takers: Ready to roll up your sleeves? Prepare to get your hands dirty and to wipe the sweat from your brows. This installation job calls for elbow grease – some extra effort and a little oomph, if you will.

Sound like an appealing come-on? Bring it on, you say?

"We're design/build problem solvers," remarked John Thelen, vice president and general manager, Landmark Landscapes, Carolina Division, Swannanoa, N.C. "If a client comes to us with an idea that they think is unrealistic or crazy, we'll try to figure out the best solution that will make the most economic sense."

Thelen is not unlike many in the field who see these

challenging proposals as invitations. Difficult installation jobs meld many elements – from hardscapes to water features to intricate plantings – and they offer contractors an opportunity to stretch their skill sets and test their savvy in different services.

More reason to crank it up a notch – lay your cards on the line.

"I think most landscape contractors, like myself, are tinkerers and jacks-of-all-trades, and they're attracted to the scope of the business itself," characterized Harry Vignocchi, chairman, ILT/Vignocchi, Wauconda, Ill. In other words, the "catch me if you can" appeal of tricky installation projects is a turn on that sparks an inherent trait in many contractors to take on the challenge.

Learn from these design/build contractors who flirted with installation adventure.

(continued on page 96)



Access issues and steep slopes create installation obstacles. Photo: Watters & Associates Landscape

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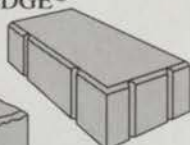
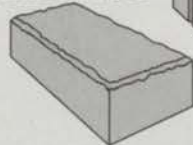
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Tricky Installations

(continued from page 94)

APPROACH WITH CAUTION. Perhaps the thrill of taking on tricky installation jobs stems from the unknown, like tackling an obstacle course or taking a pop quiz on project skills. On the other hand, planning first can iron out potential problems, and understanding the project's scope prevents on-site hassles.

For Thelen, tackling tricky installation endeavors is a matter of approach, which he simply describes as "cautious." "We try to think everything through," he explained. "What problems are we going to run into? What special equipment are we going to need? What kind of special materials are we going to need, and how much is this all going to cost?"

"You can never foresee the future completely, and there will always be things you won't know about or that you will miss, but we try to figure out the project as best we can," he added.

Sure, planning might minimize project flubs, but how do contractors know if the job will be tricky to begin with? Certain clues tip off Brian Akehurst, vice president, Akehurst Landscape, Joppa, Md. First, he looks for areas where soil forms mounds or dips, which indicates extra grading. Standing water shows poor drainage, which needs to be remedied before installing retaining walls or planting beds. He also opens his eyes to potential erosion problems by noting areas where water collects.

But first, Akehurst checks for accessibility. "You need to see how big openings are, and if you go about it the right way, you will look at your access first before you make decisions on plants and materials you design into the job," he recommended.

While contractors might drive a skid steer into a backyard for a "normal" installation project, a property with a picket fence or tight property line eliminates this option. Here, Thelen encouraged contractors to be creative. "Don't think that every job has to be done the same way that you did the last job."

Thelen described a project where his crews installed a 3,000-square-foot sculpture on one side of a water feature they built. "We rented a crane and it picked up the sculpture and set it where we needed it," he noted. "We married that with some other boulder work and made [the equipment rental] more affordable, but you have to think outside the box."

Also, don't hesitate to use outside resources, he advised. "You have to think, 'Who

(continued on page 98)



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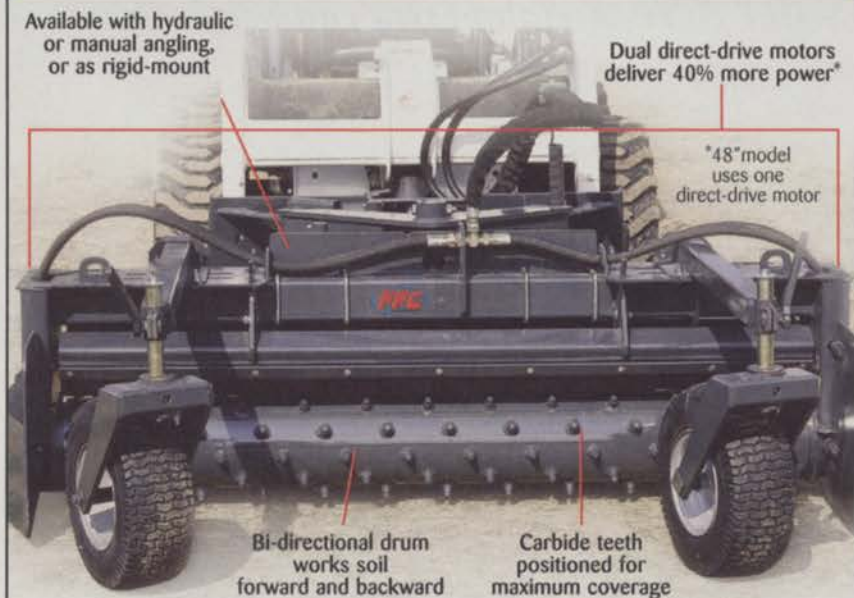
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Tricky Installations

(continued from page 96)

can help me with this?" and don't be afraid to rely on subcontractors or bring in extra equipment if that's what the job needs," he said.

Vignocchi echoed access importance, and noted soil and site conditions as additional issues to address when assessing a property. Swampy, wet soils might require extra labor if machinery can't cross the land without damaging it. Also, soil composition – what's under-

"If you treat **your clients**

like **mushrooms** and

feed them stuff and **put**

them in the corner in

the dark, they will **act**

like **mushrooms.**"

– *Harry Vignocchi*

neath the top, grassy layer – can make or break excavating jobs.


"Years ago we were asked to put some parking islands in an asphalted area, and we assumed that we would hit 6 to 8 inches of clay underneath the gravel," he related. "Instead, we hit another parking lot, and under that was a dump site for old concrete. So, the cost of digging those islands quadrupled. We learned a big lesson."

Scenarios like this do just that – they raise red flags so mistakes aren't repeated. If the following stories haven't already made your books, maybe you'll learn from them, too.

EPISODE I: THE BIG SQUEEZE. Fitting big equipment through small spaces causes contractors to do some projects the old-fashioned way – with hard labor. In short, less equipment means more man-hours and higher prices, Vignocchi pointed out.

"Because time is money, the faster you can get materials to a site and the quicker you can get them installed, the less money you can charge or the more money you can save," he said. This is why access is so important, and contractors need to ask, "Can I get my equipment around the site without being impeded by water, hills and dales, and all the other things that can occur?"

(continued on page 100)



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Tricky Installations

(continued from page 98)

In Akehurst's case, the answer was no. A townhouse community his company serviced several years ago required transporting materials in the front door, through the home and out the back door to reach the yard, he explained. The middle unit did not have side-yard access for his crew to reach the back yard.

"We laid down plastic in the house and had to build small ramps to get up and down the stairs with wheelbarrows," he described. "The plant material had to be selected so it was the size we could get through the door, so we chose small plants like dwarf trees. Trees were also tied extra tight, without snapping the limbs, and the plant material had to be flexible enough to bend and make it through." In addition, Akehurst's crew moved furniture to maneuver through the house with the materials.

On another project, the crew had to find a way to get soil and blue stones into a building courtyard. Again, this situation required some brainstorming and creative solutions, Akehurst noted. Because the blue stones were so heavy, they had to be taken into the courtyard by hand, and the angles on the ramps the crew built up the stairs were too steep to use a dolly to transport the rocks. They would inevitably tip. Instead, stones were carried one by one and topsoil was moved into the area with wheelbarrows.

As lot sizes shrink and neighborhoods cram more homes closer together, access issues become more commonplace, said Doug Berlin, general manager, New Garden, Greensboro, N.C. "And if there is a fence, then access is very challenging with the traditional landscape equipment," he pointed out, adding that he has considered smaller mowers and skid steers that can maneuver through gates so that he is "at least more mechanized than a wheelbarrow to deal with the big home on the small lot."

When compact tools aren't an option and extra labor is the only solution, prices need to reflect the time spent on these projects, Akehurst reminded. Back to the labor equation - more man-hours spent executing creative access solutions requires higher prices to make sure non-traditional projects are still profitable.

Akehurst uses a pricing system that compares jobs to what is "normal." He assigns a difficulty percentage to the project based on this measure. For example, the townhome

(continued on page 102)



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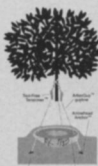
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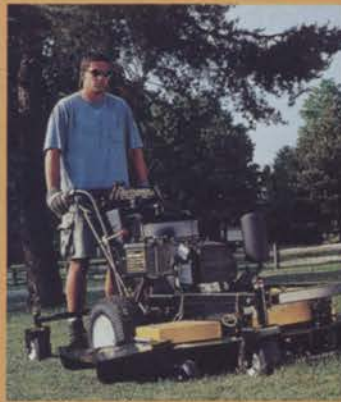
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Tricky Installations

(continued from page 100)

project would carry a 75-percent difficulty level, he said – same with the courtyard account. “The crew might do a dry run without the materials to see how much labor it will require,” he noted. “Walking through step by step – that is usually the easiest way to figure out [the estimate]. Then, throw in a fudge factor.”

Berlin uses a similar pricing model, defining a “norm” and pricing projects from this base. New Garden’s designers have experience on the production crew, so when they estimate man-hours, their numbers are realistic and based on experience, he said.

Larger equipment, more time, additional labor – Vignocchi enters these requirements into his computer database, which also compares these numbers to a “normal” job, to produce an estimate for difficult jobs. An average job was determined by reviewing project histories along with trial and error, he said. No matter how a company prices a project, it must make sure the estimate makes

up for the challenges, he stressed. Accuracy and knowledge are key.

“Like a computer, if bad information goes in, bad information comes out,” he compared. “It’s an information business more than anything else, and the more you know, the better adapted you are to solve whatever problem confronts you.”

Of course, background information doesn’t take all the guesswork out, Akehurst pointed out. “Sometimes you just grit your teeth and hope that you bid it properly.”

EPISODE II: SLIPPERY SLOPES. Most landscapes are relatively level – or at least not situated on drastic inclines or cavernous cliffs. But many contractors discovered areas that aren’t prairie-flat dredge up a slew of installation issues, including drainage and erosion. Besides, transporting equipment up and down slopes and working on soils that are too soppy present additional labor stresses. “Every slope has a method of draining,”

Vignocchi explained. “The water comes over the top or it comes through the slope itself. Water builds up a tremendous amount of pressure that is against the structures you put up, and they can topple and fall.

Many times, the difficult aspects of a project occur in areas that clients can’t see. Such is the case for drainage systems: essential components to keeping retaining walls intact, Vignocchi emphasized.

Systems to manage water come in various forms, such as landscape fabrics and gravel. More complex arrangements include curtain drains, which are applied to the top of a slope to collect water before it rolls to the bottom, and wells, which are drilled into the slope where water is removed through a pipe at the bottom. Some contractors choose to swail the land, or grade the soil in a manner that increases water flow.

No matter the method, controlling water flow prevents erosion and swampy plant

(continued on page 104)

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Tricky Installations

(continued from page 102)

beds, Akehurst said. "If plants are placed in low areas, we might have to build up the area, put the plant in a different location, or put in a drainage pipe to keep the water flowing so it doesn't drown the plants."

Akehurst controls erosion problems by installing shrubs that withstand steep slopes, or channeling water by laying dried, stacked stones to create a waterway. "You can make it look somewhat decorative," he reasoned.

Besides the lay of the land, contractors also must consider its composition. "Wet soil that is malleable can be difficult to dig in and cause weight problems, because when you bring in your equipment it can get stuck," Vignocchi warned. On the other hand, rocky soil isn't particularly plant-friendly. Soil amendments can help cure malnourished soil, and proper drainage will remedy sloppy soil.

Besides material "Band-aids" for these scenarios, Akehurst suggested that contractors assign only well-trained employees to difficult drainage and land-grading jobs. "We

have certain crews that work on drainage—usually our hardscape personnel," he said. "It's more efficient that way, because if it's not done right the first time, it won't work."

EPISODE III: DETAIL WORK. Damage control, add-on possibilities, cables, wires, tread tracks—oftentimes, it's the little things that add up to landscape installation disasters. That's why Thelen tries to plan for these in the beginning stages of project development.

"We try to think of all these things, because when everything is torn up, if we can get piping and wiring in the ground, it makes things easier down the road," he said, referring to installing extra piping for potential irrigation and lighting lines, just in case the client later decides to add these options.

"Conduit, conduit, conduit," he repeated. "Install plenty of conduit under the hardscape. It costs so little to put sleeving underneath sidewalks, driveways and patios." And it's much less of a mess than digging up the

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lawn later on, he pointed out.

Thelen notes the location of junction boxes and meters when designing the landscape plan so he can develop a rough sketch of where a client might want to run irrigation or lighting lines. This way, the crew can complete this portion while it is already working around utility lines, reducing the risk of cutting into wires later. Besides, it cuts labor costs to do it all at once, he reasoned.

"Down the road, it is easier to sell the add-on service if you have the provisions already," he pointed out. "You invest time in the client and you want to get as much out of them as you can."

(continued on page 149)

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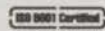
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USE READER SERVICE #50

Low-Maintenance Turf

by Nicole Wisniewski

Sweet & Low

Turf seed suppliers offer contractors suggestions for selecting species that can take a beating and keep on ticking.

Few homeowners intentionally ask contractors to install lawns that require maximum maintenance. In a high-speed culture with fast food, express mail and speedways, no one wants to come home to turf that slows them down.

"Customers want lower maintenance for the same reasons they want automatic car washes – to save time and resources, i.e. money," maintained Doug Washburn, president, Agronotec Seed Co., Wildomar, Calif.

Unfortunately, no living lawn can survive without a touch of maintenance like a little water and some fertilization. "The Holy Grail for the perfect lawn in America has always been a lawn that never needs mowing, watering or fertilizing," explained Steve Tubbs, president, Turf Merchants, Tangent, Ore. "To date, this means only AstroTurf will fill the bill."

But there is hope.

Certain turfgrass species, either by themselves or blended, are more low maintenance than others. And turf seed suppliers and university researchers claim that "a truly low-maintenance lawn is just around the corner in the form of entirely new species that have never been considered as acceptable lawn grasses," Tubbs said.

HOW LOW CAN YOU GO? Before selecting the right grass, contractors must know what constitutes a low-maintenance lawn.

To do that, turf seed suppliers first suggest contractors look at what traditional lawns typically need. "Conventional lawns are mowed twice per week and require frequent irrigation, fertilization, and extensive chemical and hand-weed control," described Bill Rose, president, Turf-Seed, Canby, Ore.

Below, *Koeleria turf* (forefront) and *Kentucky bluegrass* are planted side-by-side to compare growth rates.

Photos: Agronotec Seed Co. and Cebeco International Seeds (above)



(continued on page 108)



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USE READER SERVICE #51

Low-Maintenance Turf

(continued from page 106)

Therefore, low-maintenance lawns must demand less mowing, fertilization, water and pesticide applications, yet still thrive as lush, green lawns. "Simply put, low-maintenance lawns require less inputs," said Scott Harer, regional sales manager, Seed Research of Oregon, Corvallis, Ore.

Craig Edminster, vice president of marketing, Cebeco International Seeds, Halsey, Ore., agreed, pointing out turf traits that inspire time savings. "Characteristics of low-maintenance lawns would include reduced vertical growth and greater tiller density at established mowing heights."

Additionally, Washburn mentioned salt tolerance, root depth, insect and disease resistance, and winter/summer color options as other ideal low-maintenance turf traits.

Lower-maintenance lawns are typically desired for parks, around vacation and retirement homes, along roadsides or parking lots, and in places that need erosion control,

(continued on page 110)

Fine fescue, which many researchers and turf seed suppliers say is the most low-maintenance turf, is relatively inexpensive when compared to other low-maintenance grasses like Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue, said Stacy Bonos, assistant professor, turfgrass breeding, department of plant biology and pathology, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.

But contractors searching for improved cultivars won't find this to be the case. Regardless of turf species, "new cultivars are typically more expensive than older cultivars because they are better quality," Bonos said. "Seed of new cultivars could reach twice the price of older cultivars, depending on the species and the quality of the cultivar."

Nevertheless, these higher prices shouldn't sway contractors' purchasing decisions of low-maintenance or high-quality turf because as the saying goes, "You get what you pay for," suggested Scott Harer, regional sales manager, Seed Research of Oregon, Corvallis, Ore. "[Contractors] typically choose a lower priced mix instead of the right seed for the customer," he explained. "They want grass that's green now instead of looking for long-term performance. When you seed a lawn or redo a lawn, don't skimp on the one thing that is going to be the most noticeable - the species you choose."

- Nicole Wisniewski

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Low-Maintenance Turf

(continued from page 108)

Rose said. But time and financial savings also lure other clients toward low-maintenance lawns. This is especially true for clients who have low-quality turf installed to save money and then realize after the job is done that they spend more on maintenance. "Shortly after the sweetness of saving money on the

installation is forgotten, the cost of maintenance begins to hit the taste buds and leaves a sour taste," Washburn explained.

Additionally, residential clients demand trouble-free lawns because of increasing environmental issues, Harer said. "With the supply of fresh water decreasing, which is

made worse by drought conditions, lawn areas are the first to be affected," he said. "So, low-maintenance lawns are more desirable where water availability is an issue."

And consumers are paying attention — they know what's out there based on the Internet, magazine articles and television gardening programs. Whether contractors like it or not, consumers are educating themselves on new turf types, Washburn said. "They are deducing that if we can go to the moon, we can make a low-upkeep lawn," he explained, adding that a lack of low-maintenance turf availability leaves educated consumers wanting. "The end result is a consumer looking for strawberry ice cream and having to settle for vanilla. Well, consumers are getting very tired of vanilla."

In addition to the consumer craze, turf seed suppliers and landscape contractors boost the popularity for low-maintenance turf, Edminster said. "Golf courses, lawns, landscapes and commercial sites require plenty of work and input," he explained. "Reduction in this effort with similar aesthetic and turf functionality has value. Consumers are not the only catalyst in this trend. Turf seed suppliers have been breeding for reduced maintenance for years. Improved pest resistance, endophytes, dwarf growth habits and genetically modified turfgrasses are all a part of this process."

Unfortunately, results are slow to develop because of the amount of time needed to produce and promote new turf varieties. "It takes an average of 10 years to generate a new type of grass and then it takes another five to 10 years to get the market to accept it," Washburn said.

SPECIES SELECTION. To please fast-paced, educated clients who desire low-maintenance lawns, contractors must first choose the right species. "Selection of proper turfgrass species in one of the most important decisions to be made when establishing a lawn," noted John Street, Ohio State University Extension, Columbus, Ohio. "Since a lawn is meant to be permanent, it is important to select a grass species adapted to the area and to the intended level of management."

Unfortunately, contractors make the most mistakes when selecting turf, pointed out Stacy Bonos, assistant professor, turfgrass breeding, department of plant biology and pathology, Rutgers University, New

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Brunswick, N.J. "First, the most mistakes are made in species chosen and, second, in terms of the varieties chosen," she said, adding that education helps contractors avoid mistakes.

Not all lawn species are low maintenance, but those that generally require fewer inputs include fine fescue, tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass.

Fine fescues top the low-maintenance list and are used predominantly on northern U.S. lawns. "They are fine-leaved turfgrasses that grow well under conditions of shade, low soil moisture, low fertility and soils with unfavorable pHs," Street said. "Fine fescues require well-drained, slightly dry soils with minimum levels of management. Excess applications of fertilizer, frequent irrigation or establish-

ment on poorly drained soils will result in a decline in quality and plant density."

Fine fescue mixes, which include chewings, hard, creeping red, slender creeping red, blue and sheeps fescues, are particularly popular low-care lawns, Harer said, pointing out that they grow more slowly than other species and require less water and fertilizer to maintain health. Fine fescues blended with other cool-season turfgrasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass, also maintain success in shady areas, Street added.



Here, test plots compare the similar soft textures of *Koeleria* turf (left) and Kentucky bluegrass.
Photo: Agronotec Seed Co.

However, contractors have to be cautious when selecting fine fescues, particularly for high-traffic sites, Edminster warned. "There are about seven or eight fine fescues that are commercially available, and most of them are not tolerant of traffic pressure," he said.

That's where tall fescue comes in. Edminster describes tall-fescue turf as low maintenance because it tolerates acidic or alkaline soils, is pest and disease resistant, and is drought tolerant because of its extensive root system. And it has excellent wear tolerance, Street pointed out, as long as clients don't mind its coarse texture.

"Tall fescue tolerates soils of low fertility," Street said. "It germinates and establishes quickly but slower than perennial ryegrass. When mature, tall fescue, due to its deep-rooted nature, tolerates drought and will remain green throughout most Midwest summers without supplemental irrigation."

Though tall fescue has its benefits, there

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is another side to the coin, Edminster said. "Tall fescue grows like [crazy] in the spring and fall, requiring more mowing," he said.

And Street said contractors must be wary of promising low maintenance on newly seeded tall-fescue lawns. "Juvenile tall-fescue seedlings are not cold tolerant and are prone to winterkill," he said. "However,

well-established seedlings and mature lawns will endure most winters."

Although tall fescue generally adorns northern U.S. lawns, its use in the transition zone and upper South is increasing, particularly in place of St. Augustinegrass in well-shaded areas, according to The Lawn Institute, Rolling Meadows, Ill.

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New turf-type tall fescues often are sold as blends of two or more named varieties, and mixtures with Kentucky bluegrass are more common, The Lawn Institute reported.

Kentucky bluegrass is the primary grass species used on northern U.S. lawns, Street said. According to The Lawn Institute: "The new named bluegrass varieties found in premium blends and mixtures have been developed with more heat and drought tolerance, and with greater insect and disease resistance. This makes the turf more persistent in crowding out weeds throughout the year. In seed mixtures, Kentucky bluegrass should be the dominant type of grass seed."

The species produces rhizomes, or underground stems, that yield new bluegrass plants, enabling it to rapidly recuperate from injury and fill in thin lawn areas, Street said. "With proper management, Kentucky bluegrass forms a fine-textured, high-quality, long-lasting turf," he explained. "It is winter hardy and capable of withstanding temperature and moisture extremes. During hot, dry periods, it tends to become dormant and lose color. If high quality is desired during the summer, irrigation is often necessary." Unlike fine and tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass will not tolerate extremely acidic or alkaline soils or heavy shade, Street added.

If low maintenance is desired, there also are some species contractors should not use. "Avoid using annual ryegrass or even perennial ryegrass," Bonos said. "Annual ryegrass is normally in a high percentage of construction mixes and will establish reasonably well and then die since it is an annual, and weeds will encroach in the voids."

Turfgrass mixtures, which are created by mixing different species, and turfgrass blends, which are created by blending cultivars of the same species, also can be developed for low maintenance. "It all depends on what's in the mix," she said. "If you want a low-maintenance blend or mixture, you use cultivars adapted for low-maintenance situations."

Turfgrass blends also require less upkeep than pure varieties. "Blends are often a better choice because they provide genetic diversity, which translates into improved disease resistance and drought tolerance," Harer said.

Harer said improved varieties that were started in the early 1990s are just now entering the market. Some of these varieties on the

(continued on page 114)



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Low-Maintenance Turf

(continued from page 112)

horizon include tall fescues with rhizomes that accelerate damage recovery, drought- and salt-tolerant bluegrasses, nonselective herbicide-resistant and shade- and salt-tolerant fine fescues, and salt-tolerant perennial ryegrasses.

"Improvements continue in all of the cool-season and warm-season turfgrass species and they can provide benefits to low-maintenance situations," Bonos said, adding that new cultivars will always offer more than their older counterparts. "The main reason to choose new cultivars over older ones is because breeders have done a lot of work improving the disease resistance and turf quality of them so they actually don't need to apply as much pesticides and fertilizer — they just look better because they are genetically superior."

The quest to develop a truly low-maintenance lawn is on-going, Bonos said some of the new cultivars, strong creeping and hard fescues contain fungal endophytes that control dollar spot. "And one endophyte in strong creeping fescue has been shown to

control red thread disease, which is the major low-maintenance disease in fine fescues," she pointed out. "It's a natural association that's beneficial for both the fungi and the plant. The fungus provides insect, drought and some disease resistance and the plant provides food for the fungus."

Some new turfgrass varieties that promise less upkeep include Deschampsia; the cool-season Koeleria that is replacing Buffalograss and Bermudagrass because of its extended green traits, Washburn said; and Texas bluegrass, a Rutgers University project that is a cross-breed of Kentucky and native Texas bluegrass plants, creating a bluegrass-like lawn that has greater heat and drought tolerance than tall fescue, Tubbs said.

Since these turfgrasses are fairly new, further research and development will improve their kinks, Bonos said. "Texas bluegrass is very drought and heat tolerant, but has poor turf quality," she explained. "The idea is to try to incorporate heat and drought

tolerance into Kentucky bluegrass, but maintain good color, density and mowing quality.

"Deschampsia is a beautiful dark green grass in the spring that needs very little fertilizer but is wiped out by billbugs in the summer," Bonos continued. "Breeding for resistance to billbugs in Deschampsia will improve the use of this species as a low-maintenance grass. Koeleria can persist for many years under low maintenance and can form a dense, attractive turf, however, seed production has been difficult with this species. Breeders are working to improve those characteristics as well as turf quality."

Many of these new lawns, including Deschampsia and Koeleria, are native to the United States, Bonos pointed out. This increases their low-maintenance tendencies because a region's native plants always need less care than non-native varieties. **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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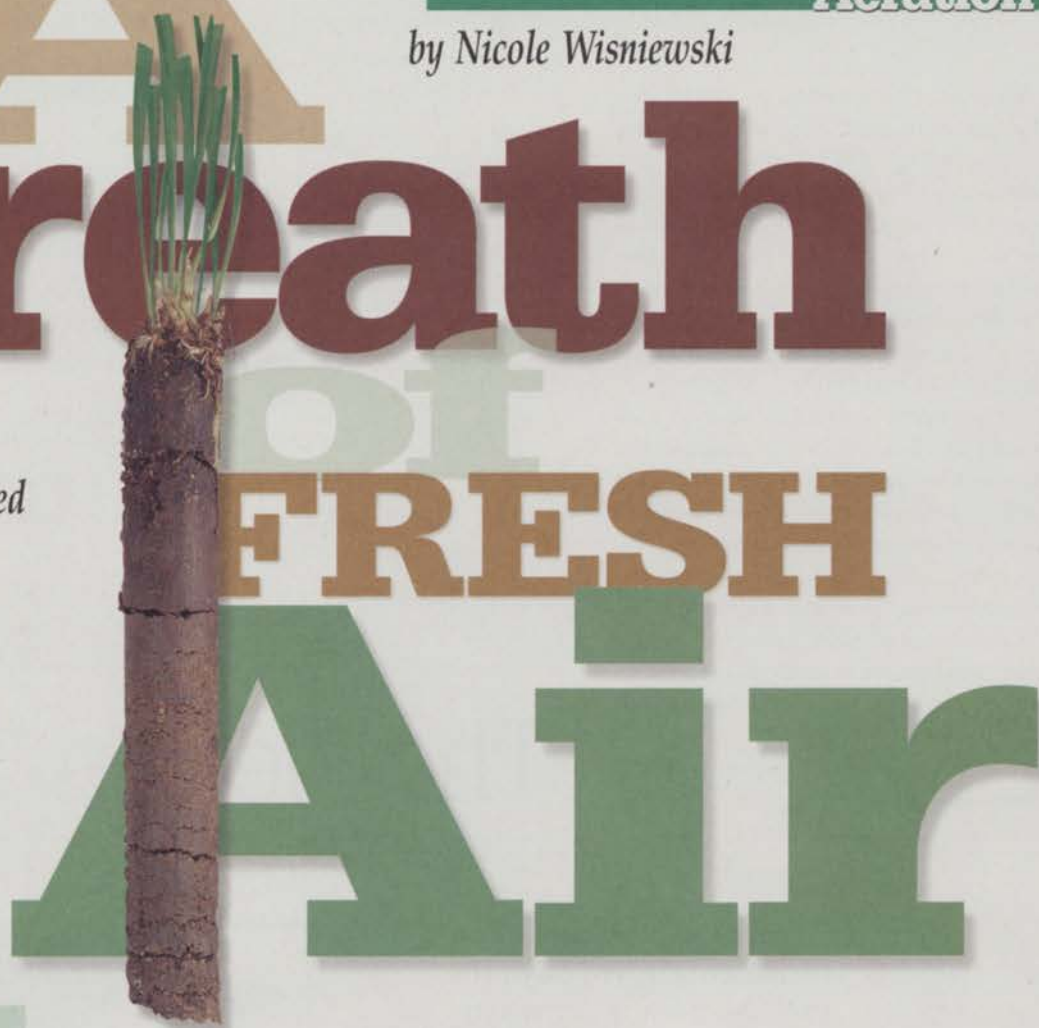
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by Nicole Wisniewski

Breathe

Lawn roots choked
by compact soil
and heavy thatch
could use a dose
of aeration.



Listen closely, and you might hear a strangled lawn screaming, "I can't breathe."

Thick thatch and compressed soil stifle lawn roots and prevent air, water and nutrients from breaking through, despite adequate water and fertilization.

Aeration is CPR for suffocating turf. It opens up lawn lungs and relieves compaction through the removal of ½-inch diameter plugs of thatch and soil.

Cliff Drezek, manager, Green Lawns Plus, Marlboro, Mass., compares aeration to farmers turning over the soil in their fields. "Like the fields, aeration exposes lawn roots to air, killing the germs and bacteria harming the lawn, controlling the thatch, relieving the compaction and enhancing the lawn's ability to absorb water and fertilizer," he said. "Overall, aeration promotes long-term lawn survival."

But to offer aeration effectively, contractors, like people who get certified to offer CPR, must learn the lingo so they can educate clients thoroughly, aerate the lawn correctly, price the service accordingly and develop a successful service system.

COMPACTION: THE SILENT KILLER. Turf troubles start when plants grow quickly and the intensity constricts the top 4 inches of soil, shrinking pores and blocking air, water and nutrients from grass roots.

"A compacted layer as thin as ¼ to ½ inch can greatly impede water infiltration, nutrient penetration and gaseous exchange between the soil and the atmosphere," pointed out John Harper, extension agronomist, Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, University Park, Pa.

As this pressure intensifies, grass plants become powerless against weeds and are slow to recover from traffic or mower injury. They also become lazy and refuse to take in fertilizer or drain water – symptoms that falsely alert lawn care operators of other villains when, in fact, compaction is the criminal. "Insects, diseases, nematodes, improper watering and a lack of fertilizer are often blamed for a lawn's decline when the real culprit is compaction," maintained Bob Polomski, extension consumer horticulturist, Clemson University, Clemson, S.C.

Compaction also has adverse effects on the earthworms and microorganisms that decompose de-

Through aeration, contractors remove 3- to 4-inch plugs of soil and thatch (above). After aeration, soil plugs are left on the lawn as an added top dressing (below). Photos: Bluebird International (above) and Four Seasons Aeration & Thatch



Aeration

caying plant parts below the soil surface. Consequently, these living and dead roots, crowns, and lower turf shoots are no longer exposed to air that breaks them apart. Instead, they build and form thatch, which can weaken or even destroy a lawn if not prevented or removed, Drezek warned. "Over a period of time, the natural decomposition process can only go so fast, and the thatch level can get ahead of that," he said.

"And thatch accumulates faster on compacted soils, heavy clay soils and subsoils that are disturbed during construction," Polomski added. "Left unmanaged, thatch can lead to serious maintenance and pest problems."

When soil is compacted, the solution is straightforward: aerate, Polomski said. "Aeration enhances the decomposition process so oxygen can reach the lawn roots and stimulate bacteria that aids the decomposition process," Drezek agreed.

Though unfit lawns require aeration, "all lawns are prime candidates for it," pointed

Thatch is a layer of undecomposed turf stems and roots that accumulate near the soil surface. Thatch, though a normal part of every lawn, can become harmful when the layer exceeds ½ inch because turf will then root into the thatch instead of the soil, making the lawn weak.

Dethatching machines, power rakers or vertical mowers help control thatch. These machines rip into the lawn surface and pull up dormant turf tissue and a little of the thatch surface, explained Cliff Drezek, manager, Green Lawns Plus, Marlboro, Mass. But they also can cause lawn damage if not used correctly, he said. "If these machines are set too low, they can pull up too much good turf growth instead of thatch," he explained.

In addition to being labor intensive, dethatching machines have negatively affected crabgrass control in Drezek's experience. "We try to talk clients who contract other landscapers for dethatching into doing it in the fall vs. spring so it doesn't affect their crabgrass control," he said. "A lot of times, in the spring, we don't know a lawn has been dethatched and the efficacy is affected anyway."

Drezek pointed out that aeration can control thatch just as much as dethatching can, and sometimes more. "For thick thatch build-up, aeration is sometimes more beneficial because the dethatching blades don't go down as deep as the aeration ones and crabgrass control isn't as negatively affected," he said. — **Nicole Wisniewski**

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out John Muehlbauer, owner, M&K Lawn Services, Sheboygan Falls, Wis. "And aeration decreases the level of water runoff by 30 percent, meaning you can water less."

Many of Paul Wagner's clients have thatch-ridden, bluegrass sod that was installed in clay soil void of a healthy topsoil layer. "These bluegrass lawns with heavy thatch are prone to disease," said the president of Masters Green, Walled Lake, Mich.

And Dominic Carlos' San Diego clients have a mix of warm- and cool-season grasses, including some, like bluegrass, which doesn't perform well in the summer, and others, like Bermudagrass, which can be aerated most of the year except for January. "Bermudagrass is dormant in January and no matter how much water or fertilizer we give it, it won't green up," explained Carlos, president, Four Seasons Aeration & Thatch.

Aeration success is best achieved in spring or fall. Timing is based on location, turf type and desired results. Muehlbauer aerates be-

tween the first spring mowing and the initial fertilizer application. If he doesn't aerate during spring, fall is just as good - enhancing root growth and improving spring green-up of cool-season grasses. "Again, you want to do it before a fertilizer treatment," he suggested. "If you aerate after a fertilization treatment, you could encourage weeds to germinate and grow in the lawn."

Drezek also deals with cool-season Kentucky bluegrass lawns that react well to spring and fall aeration. But summer's high temperatures stress this turf, so he avoids aeration at this time. As far as spring or fall aeration is concerned, each season has its benefits, but fall has an added bonus for Drezek. "In spring, aeration is a nice pick-me-up because turf is already growing and vibrant," he said. "But in the fall, you see more filling-in action because the lawn is recovering from the ravage of summer."

However, this is only the case with turf like Kentucky bluegrass that produces rhi-

zomes or underground stems that yield new bluegrass plants and spread rapidly, Drezek said. Bunch-type grasses, which are slower to reproduce, may not benefit as much from the growth stimulation of fall aeration.

The intensity of lawn troubles will indicate how often aeration is needed, Muehlbauer said. "Usually, annually is sufficient," he remarked. "With repeated aerations over time, the lawn will show improved tolerance to heat and drought stress. Customers should not expect miracles after a single aeration."

THE AERATION ADVANTAGE. Carlos has been offering aeration since the mid-1970s, when it was an easy add-on service in Southern California because the primarily cool-season residential lawns were close and flat. "Over the last 15 years, the service has become its own industry," he said.

A successful marketing strategy for
(continued on page 120)

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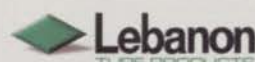
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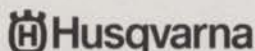
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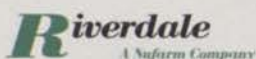
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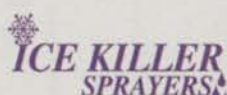


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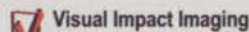
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Aeration

(continued from page 117)

Carlos includes scheduling as many jobs in a five-block-radius neighborhood as possible on the same day. "Then, when our sales representatives call the area, they call that specific zip code," he explained. "And the education process is easier because clients can see what the lawn looks like before and after and how the aeration process works."

His salespeople also distribute door hangers and conduct door-to-door service sign-ups in evenings when his 90-percent residential client base is home from work.

All clients are entered into a database and are categorized based on lawn type to ensure adequate service timing. After aeration, Carlos said his "silver bullet" is an immediate fertilization treatment. "Fertilization after aeration is like force-feeding it, and the lawn looks almost instantly like you painted it bright green - it's the greenest lawn on the street two weeks later," he said. "If you don't fertilize, you'll still get the benefits of aeration, but you won't see a green-up that fast."

After aeration, the lawn is full of small dirt plugs. "They dry up after two or three mowings and melt back into the soil," explained Dominic Carlos, president, Four Seasons Aeration & Thatch, San Diego, Calif. "It's an added topdressing."

Today, since clients are more educated on aeration, they rarely ask contractors to remove these soil plugs from the lawn because they understand their benefit. Instead, contractors said they

are more interested in having clean, dirt- and mud-free driveways and sidewalks after the service.

Every once in awhile, a client will ask Carlos to clean up soil plugs instead of leaving them - but for this process, his price increases. "Very rarely do we get a customer who can't stand the soil plugs," he said. "But if a client insists on it, we charge them double price for the aeration." - *Nicole Wisniewski*

The Plug Problem

Most contractors don't include aeration in their regular maintenance programs. For instance, Wagner keeps aeration separate from his normal five- or six-application lawn care program, and about 30 percent of his clients order aeration sometime during the season.

Just as service offerings vary, so does pricing. Most contractors price their service by square footage. Drezek's prices in Massa-

chusetts range from \$8 to \$12 per square foot, depending on service difficulty and lawn obstructions, such as gates or trees. He said an average 6,000-square-foot lawn is priced at approximately \$72, but if the lawn is more than 10,000 square feet, the price increases.

Muehlbauer prices aeration based on every 500 square feet, so an average 6,000-square-foot lawn is about \$110 in Wisconsin.



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Wagner said his minimum price in Michigan is \$66, and jobs are typically priced \$11 to \$13 per 1,000 square feet.

Carlos offers aeration for a minimum of \$40 for any yard between 500 and 1,000 square feet in California. If a client wants the back yard aerated as well, he'll offer that at a 50 percent discount if it is similar in size to the front yard. These prices are for the first 2,500 square feet. Then, he charges \$10 for every additional 1,000 square feet. "I stick to my prices," Carlos said. "The guys out there selling it for less use cheaper machines and don't fix problems or instruct clients on care."

DO IT RIGHT. There are two basic types of aerators contractors can purchase: rolling machines, which rotate metal rods around a drum to extract cores, and reciprocating machines, which punch up and down with force to penetrate soil and pull up cores.

Since both machines puncture the soil with force, the first step in a successful ser-

vice is checking for any lawn systems that are buried within the first 3 inches of soil and flagging elements, like sprinkler heads, to avoid unnecessary damage. In addition to irrigation systems, contractors should make sure to ask clients about invisible fences and landscape lighting, which also tend to be installed close to the surface.

Since avoiding these lines isn't always possible, many contractors, like Drezek and Carlos, carry small repair kits that include tools and replacement parts for punctured piping or damaged irrigation heads. To make sure his kit included the right equipment, Drezek consulted irrigation manufacturers for advice.

Carlos said having this tool kit is essential for sufficient customer service. "We can't say it's the client's fault - even if they didn't tell us about their invisible fence," he commented. "Ninety percent of the people we service aren't home, so we don't want them to come home to a broken system. Instead, we flag everything the best we can, turn the

system on afterward to make sure it's OK, fix any problems that result, and leave the client with service sheets and maintenance instructions. Customers respect that if we break something, we're going to fix it."

Prior to aeration, Carlos advised contractors to remind clients that their lawns need to be slightly moist - not soaking wet.

During the service, staying in straight lines with the machine is important to avoid tearing up turf, particularly if the grass isn't deep-rooted, Drezek pointed out.

Afterward, cleanup is crucial. Wagner suggested contractors clear concrete areas of any cores or fertilizer.

Carlos agreed. "You can't leave muddy tracks all over the sidewalk," he insisted. "You have to make sure you do a thorough job - your reputation depends on it, and you'll gain more clients because of it." ■

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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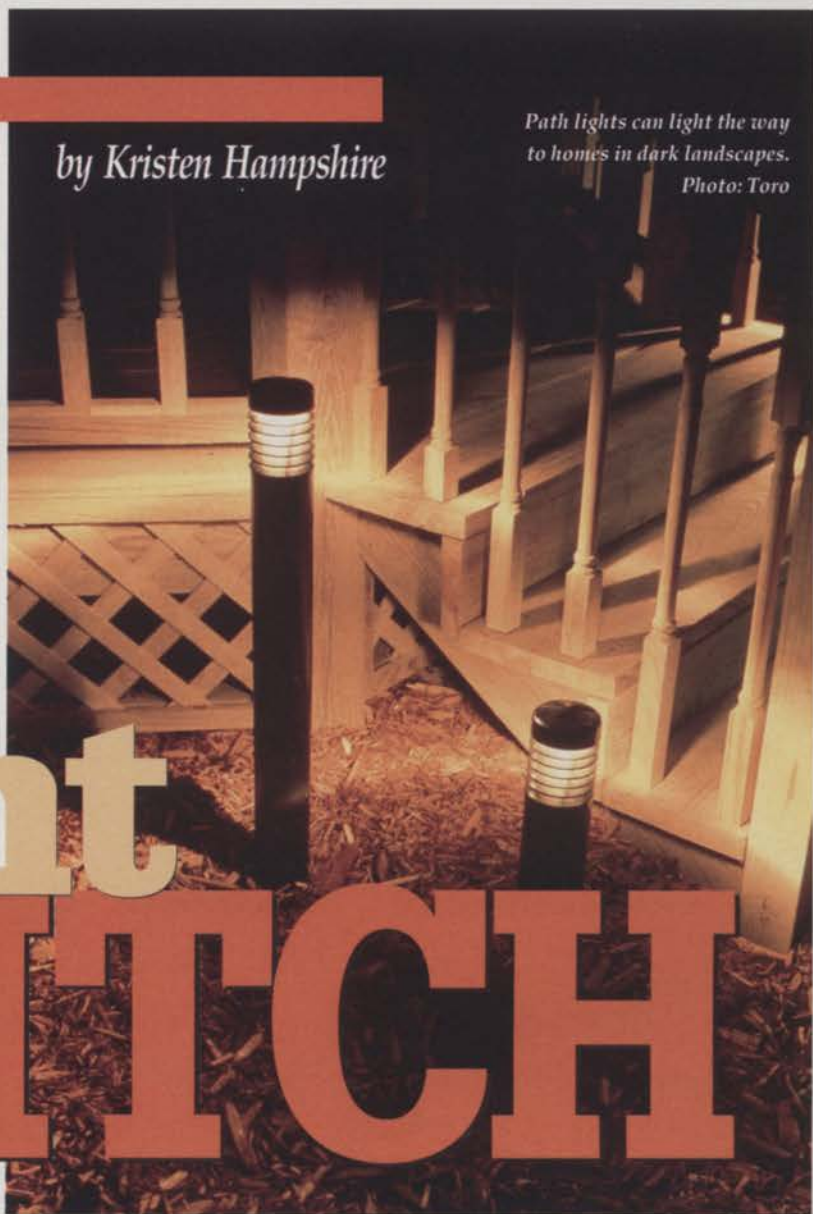
by Kristen Hampshire

Path lights can light the way to homes in dark landscapes.

Photo: Toro

Night lights are a bright idea for dark, dreary landscapes.

Light SWITCH



Night masks landscapes, no matter their dramatic designs or drastic colors. The setting sun erases landscape efforts, leaving homeowners with a drab, dark view. Vibrant plantings wash out, deftly-designed hardscapes disappear, flowering shrubs fade and patios blur and blend into the black.

"I always hear, 'We did this great landscape, but we're not home to enjoy it. We sit on our porch and realize that there's nothing to look at,'" remarked Chris Reichard, designer, Moonscape Landscape Illumination, Downers Grove, Ill. "We bring their landscapes to life at night for them."

Landscape contractors are gathering an earful of feedback similar to this lately, especially since more homeowners work long hours and have little time to enjoy their views during the daylight. Like Reichard, other contractors are tapping into an ample market of clients who want to bring a nighttime dimension to their landscapes.

"People work so much—they want to go outside at night," Reichard recognized. "When you get home from work, everyone's instinct is to unwind. They might walk their

dogs, barbecue—they want to enjoy the outdoors without a large floodlight shining on them."

Landscape lighting offers new, subtle ways to brighten up sleepy landscapes.

NIGHT OWLS. No longer just a primo service for luxury lawns, more clients realize that lighting adds value to their properties and allows them to appreciate their outdoor investments. "More people are finding it a necessity as opposed to just something nice that only a few people have," related Tony Cunado, quality control manager, Vista Professional Landscape Lighting, Simi Valley, Calif. "A lot more people are going in and adding more than just one fixture."

Since people are spending more time at home, they are splurging on features like landscape lighting, added Curtis Hogan, president, Nite Time Décor, Lubbock, Texas. "People are building their nests," he noticed. "Lighting comes into that. They can create their own resort-like feeling on their property. I'm seeing that over and over again."

If the service is less luxury and more mainstream, who is buying into the brightening trend? After all, a lighting sys-

tem can cost upwards of \$2,000, noted Michael Southard, national sales manager, Kichler Landscape Lighting, Cleveland, Ohio. Working couples are one demographic group that have taken interest in the service, he said. "It is for the people who work all day and come home at night and they want to be able to enjoy their landscapes," he explained.

Selling the service to existing landscape customers is another avenue some companies explore to increase their lighting businesses, Southard added. "[The contractor] is already installing the landscape, and [lighting] is a nice add-on," he reasoned.

To give clients the "night vision," some contractors set the scene by arranging lights where they might exist in the lighting design, giving the customer a show with a demo set, a battery pack and a flip of a switch. New computer imaging programs also provide homeowners with a visual aid and help contractors sell the service, Southard added.

It's not just looks that tempt clients, however. Visibility enhances security, so some see the service as a safety add-on, pointed out Brian Culliton, landscape architect, Rocco Fiore, Libertyville, Ill. "[It provides] safety, in terms of not having your property become a black hole," he compared.

Landscape lighting offers an understated alternative to security floodlights or glaring front porch fixtures, Cunado added. "You may not need a porch light on if you have 5 to 10 watts of light on your pathway, and it may look nicer," he remarked.

Since lighting lures in customers for reasons other than sheer aesthetic appeal, the market for this feature is substantial. A recent *Lawn & Landscape* online poll suggested that most companies that offer lighting services find it a growing part of their business. Sixty-eight percent of respondents said the profit center is increasing, while 32 percent said they expect the service to remain steady. Another 26 percent will consider adding the service this year.

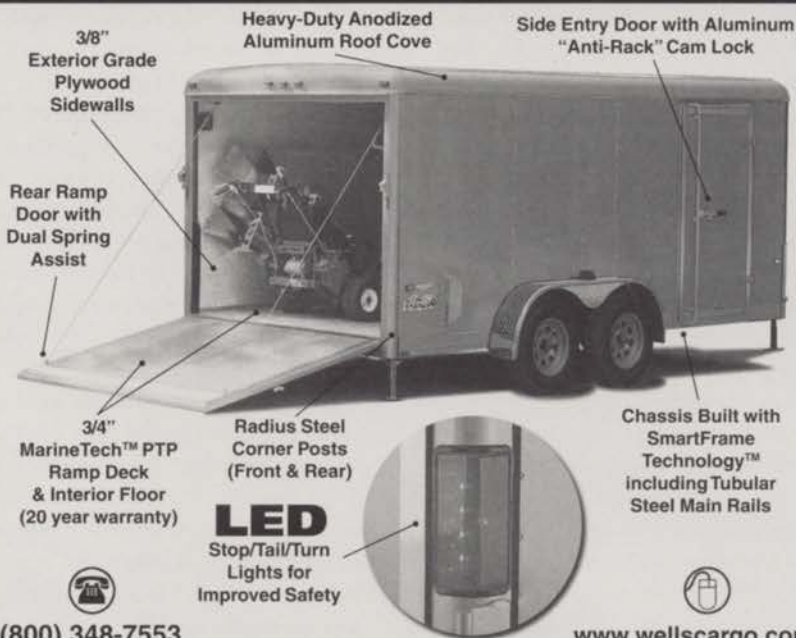
"Most consumers don't know what is available today, and in most neighborhoods you still find that most homes don't have landscape lighting," Southard noted. "There is still a huge opportunity for contractors."

BRIGHT IDEAS. More than do-it-yourself deals, new lighting trends create dimension – expression and character – allowing clients to capture qualities daylight doesn't catch.

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Lighting Installation

ing glow on homes while mercury vapor lamps radiate blue-green rays, which freshen a landscape, Reichard described. "It keeps the landscape looking like it does during its best point in the spring," he compared. "Everything looks live and lush and cool and green." These lights also last five to seven years, a bonus considering that many times they are installed in high trees, which are difficult to access for bulb changes.

"We combine the mercury vapor lights with the incandescent to create a whole palate," he explained.

Besides the glowing options that can illuminate properties, several design concepts add drama to dowdy night landscapes. For contractors, it's a matter of avoiding a common mistake Cunado noticed among lighting experts: a lack of confidence. "A lot of guys are afraid to try new things and new technologies," he said. "Landscape lighting is a personal preference – it's one part artistry. Once

you get a feel for it, you can do some nice presentations. Some are afraid to get in there, get their hands dirty and give it a try."

On the other hand, others aren't so hesitant and end up turning the property into a virtual theme-park lighting bonanza – a bit of a sensory overload for most residential landscapes. This is probably contractors' No. 1 mistake when installing lighting systems, Southard noticed. "A couple fixtures in a dark yard is a nice improvement, but 20 or 50 can be worse than having less," he commented.

Subtlety is the secret when planning lighting designs, Culliton agreed. "You don't want the overall plan to take away from the neighborhood," he said. "We're not trying to create Disneyland – and you do see that. We don't want everything lit. A little in one section, a little on the house – we look for a balance."

Ornamental flowering trees, statues, pathways – these focal points are some of the highlights that homeowners complement



with lighting. "Again, you're looking for balance," Culliton reminded.

Southard listed some popular lighting techniques, including silhouetting, shadowing, path lighting and bed lighting, which are fairly common tactics. In addition, more contractors are experimenting with grazing, where fixtures are situated close to a wall or surface to play up its texture. This is an

Before contractors can break ground for a lighting system installation, they need to ask themselves a few questions. First, will the lighting system be low-voltage or line-voltage?

Line-voltage systems allow for more extravagant results, but also require an electrician and a larger budget. Low-voltage systems, on the other hand, can be installed by a trained landscape contractor and still offer plenty of options, said Mike Southard, national sales manager, Kichler Landscape Lighting, Cleveland, Ohio.

Estimating voltage drop, or the amount of power lost in sections between fixtures on a line, helps ensure that low-voltage fixtures will burn bright – a common criticism of this lighting variety, Southard said.

First, figure out the length of the cable. Then, determine the number of fixtures on that line. As power travels down the line, it weakens, so lights at the end of the cable might appear dimmer if the contractor doesn't allow for enough wattage. "You can't have more than, say, 100 watts on 75 feet of cable," Southard noted. "If people try to put 200 watts on the cable, then they have dim fixtures. Then, they say low-voltage is terrible.

"This is what gives low-voltage a bad name – when it is not installed properly and they don't get much light out of the fixture," he added. However, if installed correctly, this fading effect

is not an issue, added Tony Cunado, quality control manager, Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting, Simi Valley, Calif. "Basically, it's the paperwork," he reasoned. "Once the contractor says to the homeowner, 'I want to put lights here and here, and this is how I want to lay it out for you,' you count the distance from where the transformers are going to be and the wattage the fixtures will consume, and with those two numbers you identify what wire you need and what layout you need to adopt."

Most of Brian Culliton's upscale clients choose line-voltage systems, however. "You can get more output from line-voltage systems than from low-voltage," noted the landscape architect for Rocco Fiore, Libertyville, Ill.

Homeowners who want to highlight large trees might choose line-voltage systems, while those who only want path lighting might opt for low-voltage installations. Also, adding on to line-voltage systems is simple because wiring is run through conduit piping. The groundwork is there, contractors just have to add more wires to accommodate additional fixtures, he added.

In addition, line-voltage systems allow for brighter, longer-lasting and more complicated lighting arrangements. "There is a trend going toward the line-voltage – people are doing more dramatic effects," Cunado noticed. – **Kristen Hampshire**

Vamp Up Voltage



Subtle lights against a house offer an alternative to bright, offensive spot-lights, and still provide safety advantages to homeowners.

attractive effect from a distance, he pointed out. With moonlighting, lighting shoots down from trees and appears as if it peeks out from foliage.

"We are experimenting with different looks and designs," Southard said. "Ten years ago there were only four or five different designs, and now we've moved into some different designs, such as fixtures that blend in with the landscape." Lights resembling ivy, frogs and lighthouses comprise a growing list of light covers. Various materials like copper, brass, steel and aluminum, present a flaming pupu platter of fixture finishes.

FLICKER FIGURES. Of course, before contractors can begin to tinker with new technologies and install interesting lighting concepts, they must have a clear picture of the client's vision for the property. Reichard learns preferences in an initial meeting, since each job inevitably has its quirks, he said.

"No two designs are the same," he noted.

"I go on every single job and I don't just give them a quote - we meet and discuss the project a little."

Questions keep this process simple and concise so end-results match mental pictures. "What do you want to see? What do you use your yard for? Is the front yard more important than the back? Do you want it to be bright or not? Is security a concern? Do you have pathways through gardens that need to be lit?"

"The question-and-answer process leads me to which direction we will take on the project, and then we have to look at the landscape," he continued. The company rolls this information into a plan, determining how it will juggle these needs into the lighting plan. Existing landscape also comes into play, Reichard added. "If they want to light up and down the driveway, do we have trees near the area to put in downlights to do that?" he suggested. "If not, we will have to come up with another design."

In some cases, clients plan in advance for lighting during the initial landscape design process, which gives design/build companies a heads-up for conduit and wiring installation. Knowing beforehand that a property needs a few trenches to hide wiring prevents clean-up work on already-established properties, Culliton said.

Though his company doesn't offer an in-house lighting division, designers lay out and oversee lighting plans, Culliton explained. They are involved in the process, but subcontract the work to electrical professionals who can install the in-line lighting

systems, which require expertise beyond basic knowledge that contractors who install low-voltage lighting need for smaller-scale installations (see sidebar on page 124). Planning for lighting add-ons cuts down on digging jobs down the road, he figured.

With lighting, careful work yields shining results. This is why Southard suggests dedicating one passionate employee to lighting, or designating a specialized crew to handle these jobs. "Then, they can concentrate on it and they can be the go-to person," he figured. "If it is a larger firm, they generally have someone who does the lighting and they have a love for it. Then, they do a better job."

Regardless of their approach, more companies are exploring this add-on service, finding that its low start-up costs and high-profit potential produce a lucrative profit center. "It doesn't take a huge capital investment," Southard pointed out. "There are only basic tools that one would need to install low-voltage lighting. You could do it with a shovel and a tool box."

And since landscape companies already have client contacts, selling lighting installations to existing customers can be a cinch, Hogan pointed out. "People like doing business with people they already do business with, so what better way to offer clients enhancements than to add on this turn-key service?" he said. "Landscape lighting is the finishing touch on a project." **ll**

The author is Managing Editor - Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Tree Installation

by Kristin Mohn



Transporting and installing larger-than-life tree specimens requires more than a shovel and wheelbarrow. With experience, knowledge and a little care, large tree installations can be successful.

Housing subdivisions sometimes appear to drop out of the sky overnight. What was once an expanse of field dotted with centenarian trees suddenly morphs into row after row of homes with gleaming white siding and plastic swing sets in the back yards. The field is now a grid of cul-de-sacs; the trees, no longer part of the horizon.

However, as environmental concerns grow throughout the industry and regulations instruct builders to preserve gargantuan trees, contractors see the need to become educated in the process – so detailed it may be called an art – of transporting and installing large trees.

In addition, residential clients realize the merit these older trees lend to the aesthetics of their landscapes, as well as to the eventual resale values of their homes. Other customers, building a new addition onto their existing home, find trees in the way and want them moved, said Tadd Russikoff, vice president, Valley Crest Tree Co., San Fernando, Calif. “Homeowners want trees out pretty quickly,” he said. “Sometimes they want it done within a few days.”


Thus, efficiency and speed – in addition to protection of the tree’s root system and life support – must be intermingled to create a successful large tree removal and installation. “Having a good, broad experience and the ability to communicate that to others is important,” said Bryan Williams, president, Worldwide Tree Moving, Oxford, Mich. “There are so many differences in the variety, conditions and environment of the tree in regards to determining the type of care needed – standards and methods need to be demonstrated and taught.”

LOCK & LOAD. Often, clients know they want large trees on their properties, but they do not have specific specimens in mind. Contractors can either consult a nursery that specializes in larger trees or hire individuals to specifically locate the trees, Russikoff explained. “We have scouts that knock on the door of the location of the tree we’re looking for and we see if we can make a deal to remove the tree,” he said.

Many times, commercial and residential construction sites serve as veritable large tree shopping malls, stated Kevin Kenny, branch manager, Marders, White Plains, N.Y. “We take the trees away from people’s houses so the trees are not destroyed, and we save them and put them on someone else’s property,” he said.

Further, when site specifications require construction companies to save a certain percentage of the trees on the site, landscape contractors can come in and make their selections, noted Preston Leyshon, equipment manager, Chapel Valley Landscape Co., Woodbine, Md. “Some-

Gentle GIANTS



times they have to save so much of the forest to get construction permits, so we go in and select that percentage and dig them up," he said. In cases where money is no issue, clients can identify a particular tree and have it shipped, or buy the tree themselves and have the contractors handle the technical aspects, Leyshon added.

Even when contractors don't have an immediate need for several large trees, they can store the extras for future installation jobs, Leyshon reminded. The trees are balled and burlapped and arranged in a grouping with mulch packed around the rootballs and, sometimes, a fence to hold in the material.

If the trees will be stored for more than a month, he recommended installing an irrigation system to keep the trees hydrated. And, if time is not an issue, contractors can root-prune trees weeks or months in advance to ready them for the move, Leyshon added. Then, they can judge how the tree reacts to root severing and if it can survive a move.

Finally, consider accessibility when planning a tree transplant to a new site, Williams said. "Understand the limitations of your

infrastructure in relation to the size of the tree," he shared. "For example, in a big city, if you want a very large tree, you have a lot of wires to go under and bridges to cross."

Leyshon reminded that when using several-ton cranes, check the weight restrictions of the site. "You can put large chunks of oak planking over weak areas, just because the crane weighs so much," he stated. In addition, contractors need to call local utility companies to determine line locations prior to digging the tree's rootball and consult local authorities to determine state regulations on permits regarding size, weight and access on bridges and similar structures.

MOVIN' ON OUT. After finalizing site specifications, contractors need to consider their tree removal options. Leyshon said 4- to 6-man-crews are ideal for the job, depending on tree size and location. This way, one worker can man the backhoe while the others direct the action on the ground, he said.

Russikoff described one removal method of boxing in the sides and rootball of the tree so the tree can be lifted out. If done a few months in advance, the side boxing also can help prepare the tree for the move, he suggested. "If you leave the tree side-boxed for

90 days or so, it stabilizes the roots," he said. "These trees are pretty old and we've already tapped into the root system - we go in there and disturb that system. Every tree goes into shock, so we try to minimize that."

If time allows, side boxing stabilizes the tree for transport to its new home. While side-boxing trees, don't forget to provide a water source, Russikoff reminded. "The most important part of moving a tree is remembering you're going in there and cutting its source of water," he said. Also, for deciduous trees, side-box during the winter when the tree is in a dormant stage, Russikoff continued.

Tree spades also can be used to prepare large trees for a move, Kenny remarked. This equipment consists of several spade-shaped blades that surround the rootball and cut the roots, forming a triangular rootball. Although a popular method of removing trees, Kenny noted this approach sometimes damages the root structure. "The tree spade doesn't provide as clean of a cut," he pointed out. "We use a backhoe and excavate by hand, and then a sharp hand spade to trim off excess roots and make smooth cuts on all the roots. Those roots will inherently generate new growth far superior to the roots that have been snapped or pushed downward."

The tree spade offers an efficient means of moving trees in a pinch, but it might not be the most effective way, Kenny continued. Instead, he suggested digging the rootball by hand and forming an apple-shaped rootball. This also creates an advantage because the rootball is a different shape than the planting hole, which allows the tree some room to grow. "When you put a tree-spaded tree into a tree-spaded hole, basically the rootball is jammed up against the wall and doesn't have any new growing medium to go into," he explained.

Leyshon mentioned a convenient technique when using a crane for the final transport. After drum lacing and burlapping the rootball, attach chain rigging to the crane so it drapes down over the tree to a chain basket secured



LS

Prior to the transport of a large tree specimen, contractors must prepare the rootball for the journey. This involves careful attention to the method of removal, whether using a tree spade or cutting roots by hand, and a look at the moisture, soil and general health requirements of the tree's root system. Top photo: Chapel Valley Landscape Company, Lower photo: Marders

Tree Installation

around the rootball. Then, when moving the tree, lasso cable around the bottom of the rootball to undercut the roots along the bottom of the chain basket. The upward tension helps break the roots and allows for easy lifting, he noted.

After contractors shape the rootball to their liking, they need to consider the tree foliage for the transporting process, Leyshon reminded. Measure the rootball and determine the outside edges, paying close attention to the caliper and the foliage, he listed. "You might want to prune some of that heavy foliage out, especially crossed or cracked branches, because there is less weight involved when you're not dealing with as much foliage," he said.

Wrapping the rootball necessitates looking at the moisture content and soil type, Kenny said. If the soil material is dry, he adds compost to retain moisture during the move, and if it is wet, he drains the rootball. Additionally, Leyshon said exceptionally sandy rootballs might fall apart, so he wraps

them with chicken wire or a similar fabric to keep the material compact.

A NEW HOME. When people move to a new home, they encounter several stress factors related to their new environment. Similarly, contractors must remember that trees, as living things, encounter the same acclimation challenges in new locations, said Rex Bastian, Ph.D., vice president of field education and development, The Care of Trees, Wheeling, Ill. "The transplanting process and removal of the roots expose the tree to stress-related problems that come in afterwards," he stressed. "That risk goes up exponentially as the size of the tree goes up."

Thus, contractors need to take extra care when repositioning large tree specimens. In particular, because a tree's root system has been impaired, the plant cannot absorb water as quickly. Kenny suggested installing



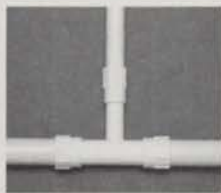
Major transports can shock a tree's sensitive system. Follow-up maintenance helps ensure the tree's survival in its new climate. Photo: Marders

the root system at a higher grade so the roots can reach the air and avoid drowning when water pools within the root structure. "If the plant root zone is buried too deep, water sits there and there's no drainage, which rots away the root ball," he said. Also, planting the tree at a higher grade protects new root growth from being smothered by the mulch and soil, Kenny stated.

Russikoff highlighted the importance of a well-maintained drainage system to stave off some water collection. "We provide a

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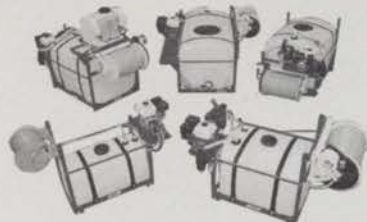


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drain system in every tree we relocate to improve water management in the root zone area," he explained. "We put drainages in almost every tree because of the pooling effect on the bottom." However, Bastian insisted on balancing drainage systems with the plant's moisture requirements, especially with weather changes. "Even if the water content of the soil is perfect, in really hot, dry weather, because of the loss of its root system, the tree cannot draw up enough water," he said.

As a possible solution, Leyshon suggested watering the tree in quadrants or other specified sections, since different parts of the tree

will require different amounts of moisture. The water also needs to percolate down to the root system and not just touch the surface. Since each site and tree type includes its own requirements, simply monitoring the site and checking the moisture content of the soil at different levels – although time-consuming and tedious – can help ensure tree survival. Proper mulching also assists the tree with moisture conservation, Bastian added.

Further, pay attention to the orientation of a tree before the big move, Leyshon targeted. A tree that spends most of its life facing east in a shady area will encounter system shock if transplanted to a sunny, southern-oriented site. "Be sure to tag trees on their north and south orientation, and put the tree relatively back in the orientation where it used to be in regards to the sun," he said. Otherwise, trees will suffer bark cracking from the expansion and contraction of the bark in new temperatures, or scalding from the full-on sun.

Yet, even when contractors are on top of their tree moving and installation game, educating clients on the challenges associated with moving these plants can be the most frustrating roadblock, Bastian theorized. "It's really important for the client to be aware of the risks they are taking," he said. "If they don't hear about them, they won't be prepared. Clients don't understand that you are dealing with biological systems, and these systems play by their own rules."

Clearly, larger trees pose benefits for clients who desire established properties. However, contractors need to make sure they can ensure proper post-installation maintenance before breaking ground. "It's asking a tremendous thing to transplant these trees – there are no quick fixes," Bastian said. "You need to consider what you're getting into before you do it." **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor – Internet of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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See this story online for the civil engineering considerations related to large tree removal.

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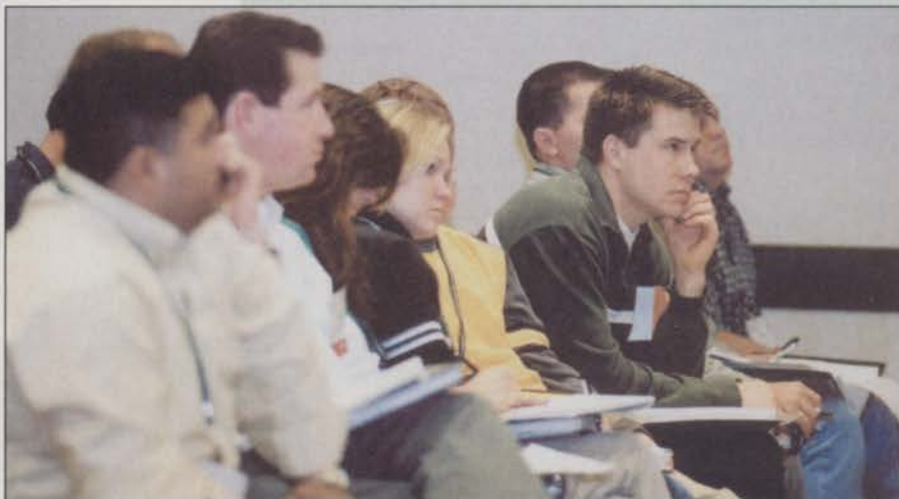
Education

program is a hit with 375 attendees at the 2002

School of Management in Charlotte.

Conference Makes A Splash With Attendees

The 2002 *Lawn & Landscape* School of Management Conference took center stage in Charlotte, N.C., Feb. 17-19, as more than 375 lawn and landscape contractors from 32 states enjoyed the three-day show. Now in its fourth year, the *Lawn & Landscape* School of Management is designed to bring valuable business management and operations information to contractors who are



the backbone of the green industry. From sales and marketing to bidding and estimating to managing and recruiting employees, the 2002 *Lawn & Landscape* School of Management provided contractors with vital, practical information that will help them better manage their businesses.



Education Program: A Grand Slam Winner

The education program at the 2002 *Lawn & Landscape* School of Management delivered a wide variety of speakers and topics to help lawn and landscape contractors effectively expand and diversify their businesses. Attendees heard from industry experts including Jerry Gaeta of Vander Kooi & Associates on "Effective Crew Management," Kevin Kehoe of Kevin Kehoe & Co. on "Three Key Growth

Strategies," Tom Grandy of Grandy & Associates on "Pricing for Profitability" and *Lawn & Landscape* columnist Jean Seawright of Seawright & Associates on "Hiring Tips for A Generational Workforce." *Lawn & Landscape* Editor Bob West (right) also made a presentation at the conference on "Getting Organized: Using Business Forms."



Attendance Jumps in 2002

Attendance at the 2002 *Lawn & Landscape* School of Management boosted 15 percent over last year's numbers. More than 375 attendees registered for the conference and enjoyed six dynamic general sessions, multiple breakout seminars and numerous networking opportunities with fellow contractors. Plan to attend the 2003 *Lawn & Landscape* School of Management Feb. 8-11, 2003, in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. Contact Maria Miller at 800/456-0707 for more information.

Attendees Preview Sponsor Offerings

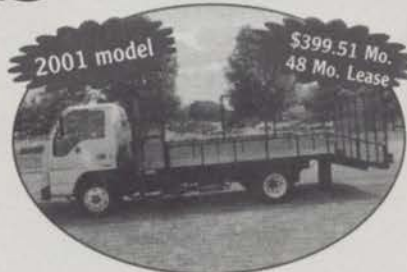
Attendees at the 2002 Lawn & Landscape School of Management visited with leading industry suppliers in the Sponsor Display Area in between sessions. Pete Lord (sitting, right) of Drafix Software discussed software options with attendees during the show. The Lawn & Landscape Media Group thanks all its sponsor partners for their continued support of the conference.



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Mariola Delivers The Goods On Driving Sales

Rentokil Tropical Plant President Jeff Mariola shared his views on "Driving Sales In Your Company" with attendees at the 2002 *Lawn & Landscape School of Management* in Charlotte, N.C. Mariola took the stage before a jam-packed crowd and shared his keys to implementing and delivering a successful sales program.



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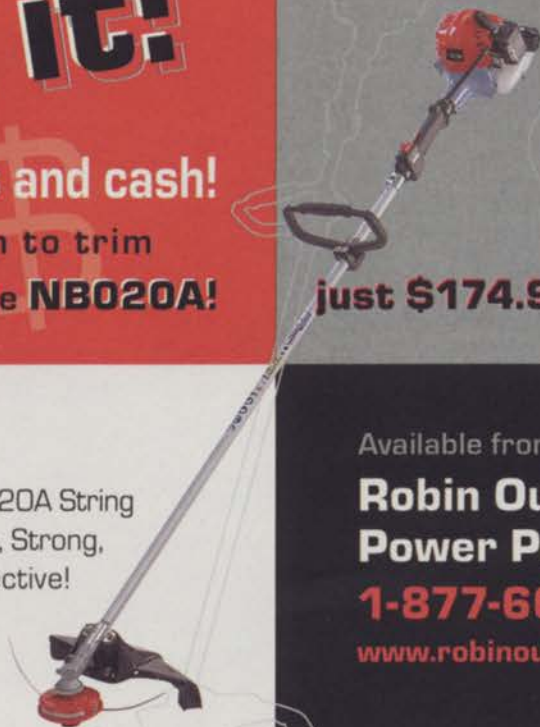


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SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

Spring Fever

Robins chirping, dogwoods blooming and ice melting: signs of an inevitable spring. Seasonal start-ups mean hurried preparations for the spring rush—a rise and shine after frosty winter hibernation.

In particular, contractors need to schedule a spring fling with their clients' irrigation systems, performing a detailed system run-through to target leaky valves, incorrect head placements or any other problems that lie unnoticed under a blanket of snow. A brief devotion to pre-season maintenance will guarantee breezy system functioning all summer long, insisted Chris Joyce, president, Joyce Landscaping, Marstons Mills, Mass. "It only takes about an hour to get a system up and running," he identified.

WINTER'S OVER. To ease the seasonal transition, Joyce suggested accurately recording any system problems in the fall, and if at all possible, working on repairs throughout the winter. "We make major notes of any

problems the system has, and try to repair those if the ground is not frozen," he said. This way, contractors can minimize the list of start-up chores in the spring.

If the system controller is located within the client's home, set up a meeting in early spring with the client to gain access to the controller, maintained Jason Cupp, president, The Kinkaide Co., Overland Park, Kan. Since meshing clients' and contractors' schedules for the start-up appointment can be a challenge, Joyce said he urges clients to install control valves on the outside of their houses. "That way, our service technicians can just monitor the system without having to make an appointment to get inside the house," he said.

Initially, remember that patience is imperative when starting systems after a long, cold winter, Cupp reminded. "The key to turning on the system is not to water-tap the lawns," he said. "That means don't crank on the water and cause immediate pressure. You can hit a master valve or mainline and blow out connections or fittings very easily." Instead, gradually turn on the water over a 30-second interval to avoid pressure surges, Cupp recommended.

Then, begin cycling through the system to identify any cracks, leaks or other problems, Cupp continued. "Look in all the valve boxes and make sure there's no leaking in any of the valves," he stressed. "Sometimes they don't get blown out properly, and over the winter, water in the valve may have caused it to crack." Also, once the zones are running, inspect the valves for leaking and adjust spray heads that may have come loose during the cold season.

Sometimes, system tweaking involves adding a new zone or replacing mainlines or heads, especially in older systems, Joyce said. "A five- to six-year-old system perpetually has a few things to take care of," he noted. "You might have mainlines leaking, heads that need to be changed out, too much water, etc." Further, test any additional system construction that may have occurred during the winter and change settings accordingly, he said.

SEASON WARM-UPS. Once contractors analyze and adjust the system components, they should double-check the system clock and its settings, Cupp remarked. "Verify the control box has the right time on it—maybe daylight-saving time caused it not to get set correctly," he said. "Set the proper amount of

To make the most of hectic spring start-ups, landscape contractors need to make sure their irrigation equipment is ready for action.

Photo: Hunter



Irrigation Notebook

output for each zone and make sure the control box is labeled correctly."

As spring slowly graduates to summer, contractors must continue system maintenance, Joyce emphasized. Setting irrigation system output in the spring ensures adequate coverage for the first few months, but

"A brief devotion to pre-season maintenance will guarantee breezy system functioning all summer long."

— Chris Joyce

it won't be efficient as weather conditions change. "The biggest problem with the irrigation system is once it is turned on in the spring, the times have to be continually changed and the water amounts have to be

adjusted," he said. "It is set in the spring for the climate and weather that we're anticipating, but as the season goes on, the growing season changes." Therefore, monitor systems weekly to check on water output and, again, to watch for problems such as leaks.

Constant maintenance also necessitates thorough communication with clients about their systems' changing needs as one season ends and another begins, Cupp stated. "The irrigation system will have to be accommodated to a higher temperature and a lack of rain, but clients think they can just put a system on autopilot," he said. "Let customers know that throughout the season, you'll have to come out a few times to tweak to make sure you have adequate watering."

And, even in southern regions with less dramatic shifts from spring to summer, contractors should allow for seasonal system



Be sure to discuss seasonal changes for water requirements with customers so they understand the need for repeat maintenance visits throughout the year. Photo: Rain Bird

inspections to locate any hidden flaws, offered Frank Fistner, vice president, Save On Enterprises, Venice, Fla. "Down here, we have spring all year long," he said. "But we still run through every zone, make sure we have proper coverage and that nozzles aren't clogged with sand." — Kristin Mohn **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor — Internet of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Managing Snow & Ice

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MULTI-TASK SYSTEMS

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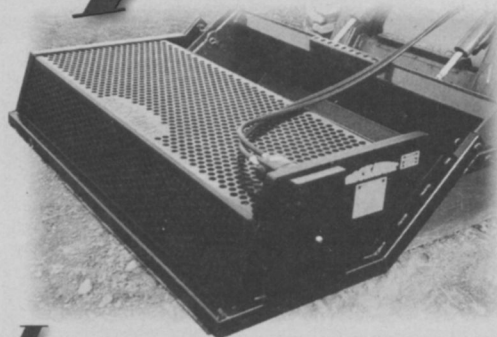
Contending with seasonal revenue fluctuations has long been a challenge for lawn care professionals. "When I started my company back in the early 1990s, I was like everybody else - I was out mowing grass, trying to make a living," said Garrett Betts, owner, Cut Above Landscaping, Desoto, Ill. "At the end of that first growing season, it didn't take long to realize that if I wanted to continue generating revenue year-round, I needed to offer more than just grass-cutting."

Betts realized that expanding services also meant adding equipment. He calculated that if he were to buy separate pieces of equipment for leaf removal, snow removal, aeration and other year-round operations, maintenance on each piece would be far more time-consuming and costly than



practical. Instead, Betts said he chose two Grasshopper 928D zero-turn out-front mowers that accept a wide variety of attachments. "I own just about every attachment that Grasshopper makes," he remarked. "We have PTO-driven snowblowers, large capacity collection systems, AERAvators™, dozer blades and remote wand-vac systems. Purchasing attachments for my mowers is definitely the better option - it keeps my equipment and maintenance costs at a minimum and performs just as well or better."

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Product Profile



Cut Above Landscaping uses a variety of attachments with its Grasshopper mowers for add-on maintenance such as leaf removal, snow removal, overseeding and other services. Photo: Cut Above Landscaping.

Betts also uses a stand-up ride-on mower and a walk-behind mower. Recently, the company has added a flatbed dump truck to hold a large leaf receptacle and to serve as a platform for three spray rigs. Several snowplows augment snow removal operations.

In addition to generating off-season revenues, reinforcing his relationships with preferred high-end clients throughout all sea-

sons is also key to customer retention, Betts said. "If you can't provide a service a customer needs, you are basically forcing that customer into the arms of someone who can," he pointed out. "Once a competitor forms a relationship with your customer, it's harder to recapture that customer's loyalty."

Therefore, Cut Above Landscaping offers a complete year-round, five-application program that provides the customer with a comprehensive array of lawn care services that promotes the optimum health of a customer's lawn, trees and shrubbery.

Two years ago, when Cut Above Landscaping transitioned into fall, it could complete its schedule of leaf removal contracts before the first snow, Betts explained. "Our leaf removal business has grown so much that even with the use of both Grasshoppers, our remote-vac leaf removal attachments and the turbine blower attachment, we usually end up completing some leaf removal work later in the year in between snows," he said.

The powerful vacuuming action of the mowers allows the company to tackle leaves

and debris even after they become wet from melting snow, Betts added. "The Buffalo Blower also helps a lot to force out wet debris," he said. "We do such a complete and thorough job of leaf and debris removal, I tell my customers that I'll pay them a dollar for every stick, leaf or gumball they find on their lawn when we are finished."

Thanks to these services, August to January is the company's busiest and most profitable time of year, with the workload and list of new customers constantly growing.

Betts said there is nothing magic about his marketing techniques that have allowed him to continue to expand his current customer base, in spite of being in the midst of a national recession. "Though we put an ad in the Yellow Pages, most of our customers come from word-of-mouth recommendations," he explained. "People see a neighbor's lawn we have taken care of and ask the owner who does the work. Then we get a call. As in any business - recession or not - satisfied customers are still the best way to attract new customers."

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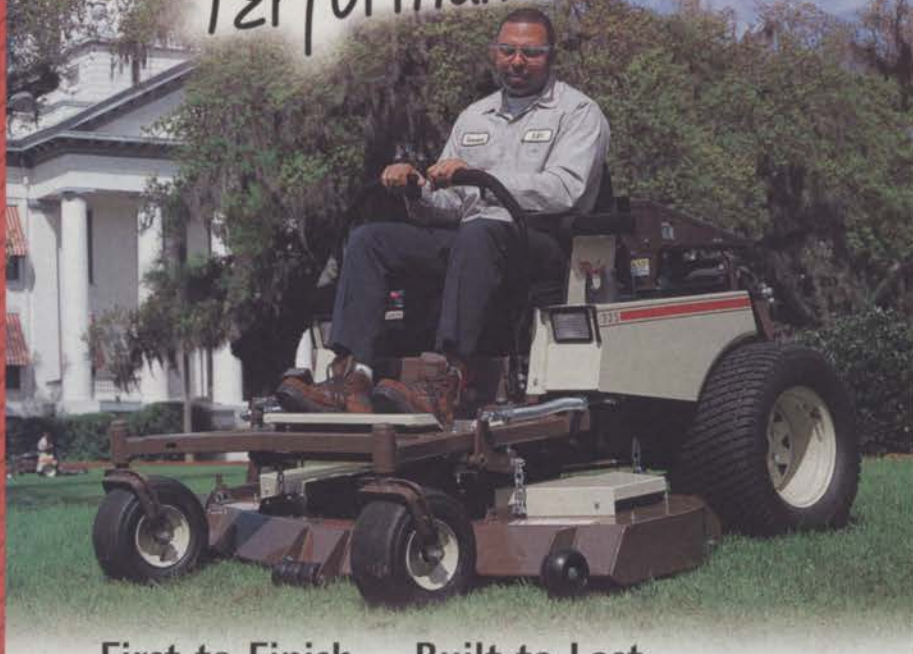
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USE READER SERVICE #132

Product Profile

In addition to referrals, Betts also watches for homes and businesses that are possible candidates for his services. "I actually make cold calls," he remarked. "I tell them we're doing work nearby and ask them to inspect that customer's lawn. Once people see the quality we deliver or hear a friend or neighbor brag about our work, we can usually count on getting their business, too."

The company offers year-round services to its clients, including leaf removal, snow removal and overseeding. A few years ago

**"If you can't provide a
service a customer
needs, you are basically
forcing that cus-
tomer into the arms
of someone who
can." – Garrett Betts**

when Betts was looking for a niche beyond mowing, leaf removal, snow removal and other typical services, hydroseeding was a service not yet available to customers in his area. "It occurred to me that hydroseeding would be an ideal service to offer people who are building a new house," he said. Today, turf preparation, followed by hydroseeding, ranks high on the company's service list. Clearly, attachments maximize the company's labor efficiency in its pursuit to be a one-stop shop for customers.

"With one person in the office and six people in the field at any given time, being able to quickly switch from one attachment to the next without tools allows us to maximize our equipment's productivity as well as that of each team member," Betts stated. "Versatile equipment that maximizes productivity, a comprehensive menu of services that no one else offers, and delivering those services beyond the customer's expectations – those factors make up our formula for success." – Carl Williams

The author is senior public relations writer, Associated Advertising, Wichita, Kan.

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- Deluxe model features a digital readout pump displaying total gallons and gallon-per-minute flows for each zone

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- Upgraded components include spiral bevel gears, tapered roller bearings, cast iron housing and connector tubes and O-ring seals
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- Easy-to-use and assemble, the curb assist and fully adjustable to the wheel-widths of any size lawn tractor

Circle 220 on reader service form

Products

CareTree Systems Compact Tree Spade

- Equipped with compound triple cylinders to reduce the height and width of the tree transplanter



- Lower profile of the spade enables operator to maneuver underneath the outcropping branches
- Product's compact spades travel up and down in a tight, rigid channel on Teflon bearing blocks
- Eliminates spade moving side-to-side while digging

Circle 221 on reader service form

NSW Tree Protector

- Protector's rigid plastic mesh protects young tree trunks from damage caused by string trimmers, mowers and other tools
- Material does not harbor insects or trap moisture
- Allows needed air, light and chemicals to reach the bark
- The product can be easily applied and removed
- Does not corrode, scar, or cause deformed growth
- NSW Tree Protector is available in standard lengths of up to 5 feet and also can be easily cut to fit any size tree

Circle 222 on reader service form

Lebanon Turf Products IsoPro Fertilizer

- Ideal for efficient nitrogen application
- Can be used on all turf varieties
- Designed for fall applications at higher nitrogen rates or for providing supplemental nitrogen year round
- Phosphorus aids in utilization of applied nitrogen and potassium improves mowing characteristics and stress tolerance
- Package includes 22 percent controlled release nitrogen from IBDU

Circle 223 on reader service form

Oly-Ola Sales Bulldog Edg

- Designed for curved or straight, tough paver restraints and edging jobs
- Product's unique "L" shape design and stake holes make it easy to use and install
- Less material bulk allows turf to easily grow, providing a clean, professional look
- Bulldog Edg is constructed of heavy-duty vinyl
- Flexes without snapping or cutting
- Available in 7½-foot pieces

Circle 224 on reader service form

Hancor Endwall

- Total unit weighs less than 100 pounds
- No need for cutting, forming or other modifications
- Can be easily filled from the top with a variety of materials, including concrete, dirt and sand

Circle 225 on reader service form



Barreto PTO Trencher

- Hydraulic trencher can be mounted directly onto tractor
- Product trenches to a depth of 3 to 5 feet with a horsepower range of 35 to 45 feet
- Trencher features a char-lynn hydraulic motor with a direct drive to the headshaft, eliminating the need for belts, pulleys and gear boxes

Circle 226 on reader service form

Bluebird P18 Seeder

- Engine options include 5.5-hp Briggs & Stratton Intek, 5.5-hp Honda or 8-hp Briggs & Stratton
- Seed hopper fits snugly on the rear of the seeder deck
- Seed hopper has 30-pound capacity, allowing machine to cover large areas
- Window allows user to see how much seed is in hopper
- Blades feature unique angled position and beveled edge to cut slits in the ground 2 inches apart
- Seeder's dial selector controls rate of seed distribution
- Seeding hole adjusts to accommodate seed sizes and rates of application

Circle 227 on reader service form



Ad Index

COMPANY NAME	WEB ADDRESS	PG#	RS#
Alocet	www.alocet.com	18	59
All Seasons		52	75
AM Leonard	www.amleo.com	28	64
American Arborist	www.arborist.com	116	112
American Steel Building		92	96
Arborguy/Staking Systems	www.arborguy.com	100	103
Aqua Master	www.aquamasterfountains.com	49	73
ASV	www.asvi.com	67	31
Aventis	www.aventischipco.com	97*	
B. & D. A. Weisburger	www.weisburger.com	35	42
Ballard Equipment	www.ez-gate.com	23	61
Bandit Industries	www.banditchippers.com	7	12
BASF	www.turfacts.com	91*	44
Bayer	www.bayerprocentral.com	62-63	29
BedShaper	www.bedshaper.com	90	93
BioPlex Organics		116	113
Brisco	www.briscoinc.com	100	102
Brite Ideas	www.briteidea.com	84	90
Brouwer	www.brouwer.com	13	130
Brown Mfg.	www.brownmfgcorp.com	111	109
Buyers' Products	www.buyersproducts.com	33	20
Cascade Lighting	www.cascadelighting.com	123	120
Caterpillar	www.cat.co	75*,85*	36,41
Chevy Truck	www.chevy.com/silverado/	27	17
Classen	www.classen-mfg.com	90	94
Combined Manufacturing	www.spread4mower.com	52	78
COMPASS System	www.compasssystem.com	26	62
Concrete Edge	www.concreteedge.com	100	101
Creative Curb	www.ccurb.com	120	116
C&S Turf Care	www.csturfequip.com	78	122
Cub Cadet	www.cubcadet.com	101	48
Danuser	www.danuser.com	54	79
Dawn Industries	www.dawnindustries.co	9,128	57,125
Dixie Chopper	www.dixiechopper.com	79	38
Dow AgroSciences	www.dowagro.com	46-47,99	24,47
Drafix	www.drafix.com	65	30
Earth & Turf	www.earthandturf.com	120	117
Easy Lawn	www.easylawn.com	78	123
Ecogel USA	www.ecogel.com	84	89
Exmark	www.exmark.com	77	37
Express Blowers	www.expressblower.com	72	
Fabriscape	www.fabriscape.com	102	104
FFC	www.ffcattachments.com	98	99
Finn	www.finncorp.com	29	18
FMC Corp.	www.fmc-apgspec.com	5	11
Golf Greens International	www.greenmaker.com	52	77
Grasshopper	www.grasshopper.com	138	132
Great Dane	www.greatdanemowers.com	11	13
Green & Bio Tech	www.sureturf.com	61	84
GreenIndustry YellowPages.com	www.greenindustry.com		
	yellowpages.com	113	34
Gregson Clark	www.gregsonclark.com	128	126
Hortica	www.floristsmutual.com	17	15
Horticipia	www.horticipia.com	125	124
Hunter	www.hunterindustries.com	83	40
Husqvarna	www.husqvarna.com	36-37	21
Hydroseed Innovations	www.tr3rake.com	96	97
ICD	www.selecticd.com	102	105
Irritrol Systems	www.irritrol.com	43	23
Jacklin Seed	www.jacklinseed.com	107	51
John Deere	www.johndeere.com	41,73	22,35
John Deere Landscapes	www.johndeerelandscapes.com	103	49
JRCO	www.jrcoinc.com	52	76
Kawasaki	www.kawpower.com	51	25

COMPANY NAME	WEB ADDRESS	PG#	RS#
Lawn & Landscape Interactive Grub CD	www.lawnandlandscape.com/store	75*	
Lawn & Landscape Online Marketplace	www.lawnandlandscape.com	118-119	
Lawn & Landscape Online Sweepstakes	www.lawnandlandscape.com	109	
Lawn Power & Equipment	www.brandtekus.com	92,121	95,119
Lebanon Turf Products	www.lebturf.com	59,80-81	28,39
Little Wonder	www.littlewonder.com	30	66
Marcus Drake Consultants		60	82
Marsan Turf	www.marsanturf.com	26,98	63,100
McCullough Innovations	www.mcculloughcoverup.com	39	71
Middle Georgia Freightliner	www.middlegafreightliner.com	132	128
Monsanto	www.monsanto.com	19-22	133
Oldham Chemical	www.oldhamchem.com	39	70
International Lawn, Garden and Power Equipment Exposition	www.expo.mow.org	91	
Otterbine Barebo	www.otterbine.com	86	91
PBI Gordon	www.weedalart.com	9,50,88	56,74,92
Perma-Green Supreme	www.ride-onspreader.com	16	58
Pinehall Brick	www.pinehallbrick.com	96	98
Planter Technology	www.plantertechnology.com	18	60
ProSource	www.prosource.com	53	26
Rain Bird	www.rainbird.com	15,93	14,45
Ramrod	www.ramrodequip.com	30	65
Rawson Manufacturing	www.rawsonscreens.com	38	68
Reading Body Works	www.readingbody.com	110	108
Richway Industries	www.richwayind.com	60	83
Riverdale	www.riverdalecc.com	69	32,33
Rockaway		136	131
Robin Outdoor Power Equipment	www.carswelldist.com	133	129
RotaDairon	www.mge-dairon.com	121	118
Scotts LawnService	www.scottslawnservice.com	38	67
Shindaiwa	www.shindaiwa.com	24-25	16
Side Hitcher		55	81
Skinner Nurseries	www.skinnernurseries.com	114*	111
Snapper	www.snapper.com	68	86
Sprayer Parts Depot	www.sprayerpartsdepot.com	129	127
Steiner Turf	www.steinerturf.com	104	106
Syngenta	www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com	56-57	27
Textron	www.textron.com	39abc, 55abc	134,135
Toro Landscape Contractor Equipment	www.toro.com	2-3	10
Toro Sitework Systems	www.toro.com	87	42
Toyota	www.toyota.com	151	52
Tree Staple	www.treestapleinc.com	108	107
Tuflex Manufacturing	www.tuflexmfg.com	48	72
Turfco	www.turfco.com	105	50
Triple D	www.tripled-enterprises.com	111	110
United Horticultural Supply	www.uhsonline.com	89,112	43,87
Versa-Lok	www.versa-lok.com	95	46
Visual Impact	www.visualimpactimaging.com	117	114
Vitamin Institute	www.superthrive.com	152	53
Wells Cargo	www.wellscargo.com	123	121
Wellmark International		31	19

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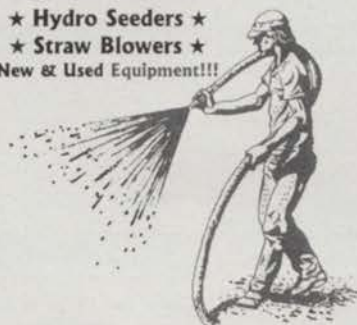
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Tricky Installations

(continued from page 104)

You also want to be as considerate as you can, which means being careful on their properties, Thelen added. Clients don't appreciate tire tracks, material piles or leftover debris on their front yards. They also don't want their satellite television wires cut in the process. This is why he checks with utility companies to make sure he won't hit wires during installation, and considers options to minimize damage on existing landscapes.

"You can lay down plywood [to run machines over the property]," he suggested. "Or you might bring in another piece of equipment. Maybe rubber-track equipment would bring in the material better." Finally, fix up the mess-ups. Don't leave clients with a landscape more disheveled than before they hired you, he advised.

Naturally, pleasing the client starts with effective communication. Tell them in the beginning that the project is tricky - update them on the steps necessary to complete the project and be honest about potential problems on their properties.

"If you treat your clients like mushrooms and feed them stuff and put them in the corner in the dark, they will act like mushrooms," Vignocchi related. "Keep them informed of what it is you intend to do, how you are going to do it, how long it will take, and if there are factors that occur that change the conditions, make them aware of them."

While being honest with clients, why not ask yourself whether you are capable of successfully completing the project. Though risky jobs seem to attract adventurous contractors, a poorly executed installation can mar a company's image. When it comes to taking on challenging jobs, don't play "keepin' up with the Joneses" with your competitors, Vignocchi advised.

"A lot of contractors bid jobs because they see other people do those jobs and they think that they should be able to do them, too," Vignocchi said, then revealing his adventurous flair. "But I can't say not to take on all jobs, because at some point you do have to learn. But, before you take it on, have someone to lean on or somewhere to get more information if you need it - another company to back you up."

After all, it never hurts to have a few cohorts to help you do the dirty work. ■

The author is Managing Editor - Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Publishing an E-Newsletter at Second Nature

E-mail is one of the most popular and powerful marketing tools available to businesses on the Web today. A Web site alone, without effective use of e-mail, can leave a company's marketing efforts lacking punch.

So how can one take advantage of e-mail marketing? At Second Nature in Nashville, Tenn., we have found that one of the best ways is to implement an opt-in e-newsletter from our Web site: www.secondnature.net.

We decided to implement an e-newsletter for two primary reasons. First, to provide useful information on lawn care to an information hungry audience. The typical Internet user seeks information on which to base his or her purchase decisions. If we can offer good content without a hard sell to visitors, then we can gain trust and loyalty in the eyes of potential customers. Second, if we can remind these potential customers of our services by providing them additional information from time-to-time we might be able to convert these users to customers.

There are a few simple rules we learned when implementing our e-newsletter:

1. *Provide valuable information.* When writing the e-mail content of our issues, we keep a clear picture of the end users in mind. Do they understand the jargon of our industry? Do they care about the latest green industry news or are they really concerned with the half-acre of grass under their children's feet?

2. *Have a content strategy.* Original content – news, tips, etc. – takes work. We collect published information that can be freely distributed and take a few moments weekly to write down situations and solutions we have encountered while working with current customers (i.e. a common outbreak of fungus during an extended hot and wet time-frame).

FIVE KEYS TO *Publishing an E-Newsletter*

1. Provide valuable content that is short and simple, yet informative and interesting.
2. Aggressively promote the e-newsletter in e-mails, brochures and on the Web site.
3. Stick to a monthly schedule.
4. Provide ways for users to subscribe.
5. Secure a delivery system.

3. *Make it short and simple.* We try and respect our e-newsletter subscribers' time by keeping our e-newsletter relatively free of long advertisements and hard sells.


4. *Promote your e-newsletter prominently.* We promote our e-newsletter on our Web site and on any other written material (regular e-mail, brochures, etc.). We built a small, unobtrusive pop-up window that launches when a visitor hits our Web site's index page. This way, visitors can sign up there rather than search for the sub-page where the sign-up resides. On the registration page, we also include links to sample issues and our privacy policy so people can get more information before they sign up.

Finally, here's a review of the tools we use:

1. *Opt-in e-mail.* Too collect our users's e-mail addresses we use opt-in e-mail, which is permission-based so recipients have confirmed their interest. Recipients are also able to unsubscribe from the list at any time, and all e-mail messages are clearly identified as coming from a specific and approved source.

2. *A delivery system.* We employ a Web master (www.spinshop.com) and a CGI script to publish and distribute our e-newsletter. This combination meets our needs and is relatively inexpensive – we pay our Web master \$255 monthly to maintain the site and send our e-newsletters in a timely fashion. We have complete control over the amount of information a subscriber must include and can keep the user on our Web site during the sign-up process. More limited agreements can cost less.

3. *A publishing strategy.* Since our Web master knows HTML and CGI scripts but not much about turf care, we devised a way to deliver the content to him monthly so he can input it into the delivery system and send it. We try to make sure our subscribers receive no more than one e-mail a month from us – this is a good balance for our customers and our already-taxed employees.

We started providing our e-newsletter two years ago and used the opt-in process to capture subscribers. After one year, we had 41 subscribers and by early 2002 we had 60 to 75 subscribers. We also gave our e-newsletter a catchy title – *Tips From the Tool Shed* – to entice Web site visitors and customers to check it out. – Steve White 

The author is president of Second Nature, Nashville, Tenn.

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Click out this article online to see copies of the e-newsletter.

A FIELD GUIDE TO CATCHING A 1512LB. BLACK MARLIN USING TOYOTA TRUCKS.



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You've got your fleet of Toyota trucks and you haven't heard a word about them in weeks when it dawns on you that this free time could be cashed in on that marlin fishing trip you've always dreamed about. A little research on Thursday and you've booked a flight south.

Friday you take an hour and call Uncle Al who's been there twice. He's got the name of some guy in Lima, Peru, who sets you up right. Monday comes and you take your first "personal day" in years. Just so you can familiarize yourself with all the items in the equipment section at Fishing World.

A WEEK later you're strapped into the "fighting chair" on the back of a boat just about 25 miles off the coast when the line



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snaps taut. Time freezes as you reach for the pole. A whirlwind of all the decisions that got you here races through your mind. And at this precise moment you're realizing, if you'd had Toyota trucks in your fleet years ago, this might be your third or fourth trip to South America. When suddenly the line whips to the left and you're back to the moment at hand.

THE TECHNICAL name for marlin is *Makaira indica* but for now we'll just call him...

let's see...how about...Stan. Stan's come all the way from the Galapagos Islands and he's doing his best to

decline your invitation to the backyard fish fry that's been planned for your return. He breaks the water and you see him staring you in the face. Winking as if to say, "How strong are your arms? How sturdy your back? My pull on this line is that of six strong men, so how's about you come in here with me in the water?"



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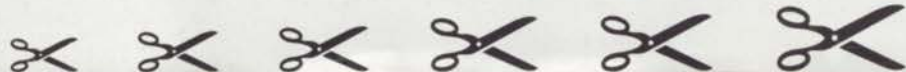
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