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# We're Under Attack — Again

"Any fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction."  
— Albert Einstein

Are you familiar with *SmartMoney* magazine? If you currently get it, then you probably know what I'm about to write about, and I hope you've already cancelled your subscription. If you haven't encountered this publication before, please read on.

In its May 2002 issue, *SmartMoney* ran an article that everyone reading this column should be concerned about. The article was called "Ten Things Your Landscaper Won't Tell You," and it portrayed the lawn care and landscape industry as everything we have spent decades proving to the public that we're not. While this article bothered me because it

Painted a horrible picture of our industry and represented disappointing journalistic standards, we should all look to this piece as a wake up call.

This article, which was distributed to nearly one million people, by the way, illustrates how pervasive negative public opinion is about landscape professionals today, and just how dangerous such opinions can be. The truth is, too many people still think green industry professionals are nothing but uneducated dropouts incapable of holding down a "real job." Here are some of the article's "high points."

- It starts with a homeowner's claim that pesticides left her dog "riddled with skin cancer and tumors."
- The article portrays contractors as deceitful businesspeople using the fine print in a contract to "raise an annual bill by 25 percent."
- Readers are also warned of contractors who intentionally install high-maintenance plants just to create extra maintenance work for themselves.
- Equipment doesn't escape this author's sharp pen, as he talks about when homeowners' "couch time is

blasted to pieces by the roar of a leaf blower."

- And, the author wrote that contractors won't tell customers that, "My workers chug your beer when they should be mowing your lawn."

In instances like these, two things need to happen. For starters, we need to set the record straight, specifically with *SmartMoney*. I already sent in my letter to the editor, and I've asked a range of industry leaders to do so as well. I think any of you with pride in this industry should also share your thoughts about this story with the publication. Letters can be emailed to [letters@smartmoney.com](mailto:letters@smartmoney.com) or sent to Editorial Dept. — Letters to the Editor, *SmartMoney* magazine, 1755 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. Don't send a letter insulting or attacking the magazine or the story's author — that's obviously what they expect of landscape contractors. Send in a copy of your pesticide applicator's license. Send in a list of customer referrals. Show them pictures of work you've done. Share a list of awards you've won. But most of all, prove to them that this is an industry of professionals who deserve respect.

Secondly, take a long, hard look at your company to make sure you send the right message to people who see your employees, your equipment and your work. Are your employees uniformed and presentable? Does your equipment look like something a professional uses at his trade? Do you address customers' complaints immediately and thoroughly so that they are satisfied and impressed? Essentially, are you part of the problem or part of the solution?

We all know where opinions like those in this article come from. The author is obviously uninformed, and that's a situation to address directly. At the same time, this article is a reminder that the great strides we've made improving professionalism in this industry haven't brought us to the finish line yet. ■

Bob West





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USE READER SERVICE #11



# In Minor's League

I am having trouble getting my staff to deliver quality service to our customers. Can you give me some tips on how I can improve in this area?

First, I think it is important that you define exactly what quality is for your particular discipline. I have often seen companies make the mistake of assuming that they understand exactly what the customer wants without even asking them. A good first step is to determine what level of quality the customer wants. This can be done in a couple of ways.

I strongly suggest the use of focus groups. Focus groups include a small group of people in a casual environment and are put together to solicit feedback regarding a number of issues. If you do this regularly you will be amazed at what you hear, not to mention the positive public relations it will bring your company. By sitting down face-to-face with your customers, you are able to get to the root of any issue. Be prepared with questions and possible follow-up questions to ensure that the time your customers invest with you will be worthwhile.

Another way to find out what the customer wants in the way of quality is through simple surveys. Keep the survey relatively brief (no more than five to six questions) and offer some prize potential for those who return the questionnaire to increase responses.

Once you have defined exactly what quality is for your customer, the next obvious step is extensive employee training. Many folks talk a good game regarding training but few really invest in it. There are many different ways to train people. Most importantly, remember that training starts on day one.

We've all heard the old adage, "You never get a second chance to make a good first impression." This cannot be over-

emphasized where training is concerned. Consider putting together an orientation video in which the importance of quality is emphasized. This also can be accomplished with computer programs. Once your employees visualize what quality is, it's important that their first few days on the job are spent with a significant focus on quality. Consider having one or two of your foremen in charge of the training for all new people to ensure consistency with your program.

Now that you have defined what quality is and trained your people, hold employees accountable for

I have **often** seen companies **make the mistake of assuming** that they **understand exactly what the customer wants** without **even asking them**. A **good first step** is **to determine what the customer wants** in the way of **quality**.

delivering quality. The best way to do this is by offering reward-based compensation. I strongly suggest that for all of your field people you put as much as 20 percent of their pay at risk and tie in factors like quality, customer service and production to their compensation. We've all heard another old adage, "What gets rewarded gets done." Simply said, if you reward your people for delivering quality service, then that is what you will get.

Lastly, you have to be obsessed with delivering quality services and emphasize that continually to your people. Quality work starts at the top. The leader has to make this a priority in the organization. Consider including verbiage in your mission statement that touches on the importance of quality. Keep that mission statement / philosophy in front of people at every opportunity. Make sure that everyone at all levels in the organization understands the importance of delivering quality service. Reward those who deliver quality financially and with non-monetary rewards, such as thank-you notes, public praise and monthly, quarterly or annual awards to keep the quality focus in front of them. If you do all of these things, you will see the quality in your services improve drastically. ■



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

Minor's Landscape Services, a 300-employee, former INC. 500 award-winning company he founded in 1978 and sold to TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1998. Readers with questions for Minor can fax them to Lawn & Landscape at 216/961-0364 or e-mail them to [bwest@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:bwest@lawnandlandscape.com).



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USE READER SERVICE #12



## The Bermuda Triangle of Employment

Picture this: One of your employees injures his or her back on the job. You file a workers' compensation claim. After a few weeks, the employee comes back to work and presents a "light duty" release requesting an "accommodation" for his or her "disability." The doctor's note calls for limited walking, bending and reaching and restricts hours to six per day with a 15-minute break every hour. The employee is a technician, making the accommodation difficult at best.

Disability, you ask? Since when is a "bad back" a disability? Since 1990 – when the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) passed. This regulation, enforced by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), is now 12 years old and, some say, getting worse with age. I would argue, thanks to the Supreme Court, that we're finally starting to see some logical enforcement of the provision. This is good if you're defending an ADA lawsuit, but what about the millions of employers who fight front-line ADA battles every day?

In addition to ADA, employers often tackle Workers' Compensation (WC) and Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requirements at the same time. These three regulations can run concurrently and have been dubbed "The Bermuda Triangle" of employment. The goal of this column is to help you make your way through the Triangle without drowning.

**DISABILITIES AND LEAVE.** Let's start with a quick review of the principal ADA requirement: Employers with 15 or more employees are obligated to make reasonable accommodations to known physical or mental limitations, unless the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the operation of the business.

According to EEOC, "disability" is "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities." If you have fewer than 15 employees, chances are you're still cov-

ered by similar state employment regulations that apply to smaller businesses.

The FMLA, on the other hand, became effective in 1993. This federal regulation requires employers with 50 or more employees within a 75-mile radius to grant eligible employees a minimum of 12 weeks unpaid leave for certain family and medical situations (like pregnancy or a workers' compensation injury) that require ongoing medical treatment. An eligible employee is one who has been employed for at least 12 months and who has worked at least 1,250 hours during the 12-month period immediately preceding the commencement of the leave. FMLA is enforced by the U.S. Department of Labor and many states have enacted more stringent leave laws that can apply to smaller businesses.

So, the big question is: How do you handle employees with job-related injuries who are eligible for FMLA and who also may have a disability?

**TEN POINTS.** To make your way through the ADA/WC/FMLA Bermuda Triangle, consider these 10 points:

1. If the workers' compensation leave extends beyond three days, initiate the FMLA leave process for eligible employees. Employers cannot go back and retroactively apply FMLA – the leave must be designated up front by the employer and proper FMLA forms must be completed. FMLA should run concurrently with workers' compensation.

2. Your obligation under ADA to reasonably accommodate an injured worker continues throughout the claim process and family or medical leave.

3. Decisions regarding return to work and "light duty" assignments for injured workers must be made with an understanding of ADA and FMLA obligations.

4. Restricting light-duty positions to occupationally injured employees who return to work could result in an ADA violation.

5. All injured workers are not covered by ADA; they must first meet the definition of a qualified person with a disability.

6. Negative attitudes toward injured workers can cause the perception of a disability, resulting in an ADA liability.

7. Decisions must be made case by case. "Blanket" return-to-work policies are unacceptable.

8. Not allowing employees to return to work until they are 100 percent recovered ("full release") could be viewed as failure to reasonably accommodate under ADA.

9. Consider bringing an injured employee back to work on a Thursday, so they ease back into work with only two days before the weekend. This can alleviate situations where they revert back to collecting workers' compensation because they cannot work a full workweek.

10. Designate someone in your company to communicate with employees who are out on FMLA and WC leaves. Litigation often stems from a failure to communicate with employees, who then feel forgotten or mistreated and become angry.

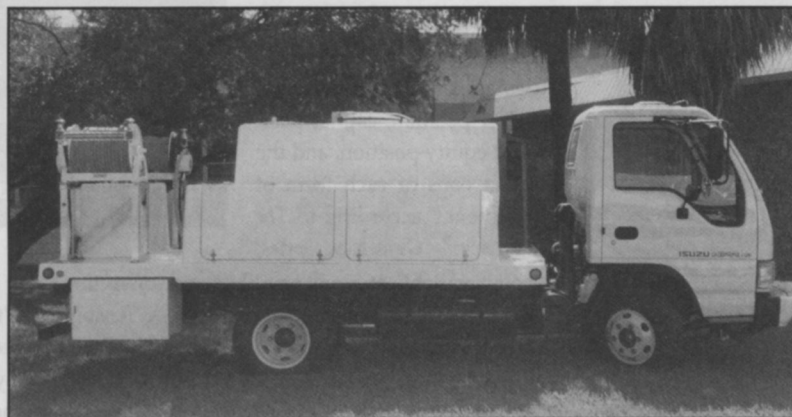
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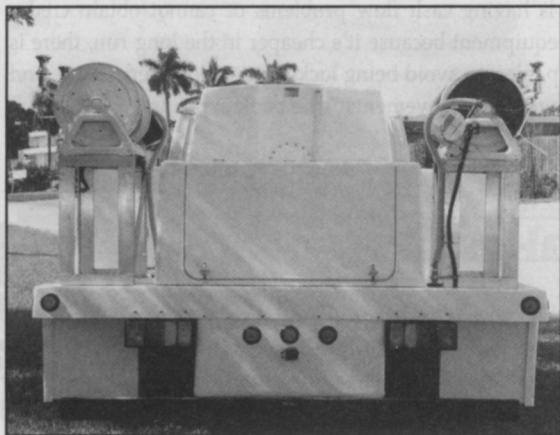
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# Market Trends

## AWARD WINNERS

### Top 10 Lawns

According to *The American Lawn*, edited by Georges Teysott, public lawns have been key U.S. fixtures for two centuries, as symbols of the colonial past and the American-built environment. They also provide lawn and garden enthusiasts with places to study the continually evolving art and science of landscaping.

To honor these spaces, Briggs & Stratton released its fifth consecutive Top 10 Lawns List, which recognizes outstanding U.S. public lawns. Each of the top 10 lawns was evaluated on the following criteria: overall appearance, lawn and garden maintenance and care philosophy, use of green space to enhance or complement the look, visual appeal, and significance of the site. Horticulturalists, turf management professionals and landscape designers nominated the noteworthy green spaces.

This year, the Top 10 winners are:

- Denver Botanic Gardens, Denver, Colo.
- Goldsmith Seeds, Gilroy, Calif.
- Harry P. Leu Gardens, Orlando, Fla.
- Lincoln Tomb, Springfield, Ill.
- Missouri Botanical Gardens, St. Louis, Mo.
- North Carolina Art Museum, Raleigh, N.C.
- South Dakota State Capitol, Pierre, S.D.
- The Children's Garden at The Oregon Garden, Silverton, Ore.
- Wesley Bolin Memorial Plaza, Phoenix, Ariz.
- William Paca House and Garden, Annapolis, Md.



Every business eventually finds itself in a situation where it has to choose between renting or buying.

"As can be expected, the route a business takes depends on the particulars of its situation, i.e. cash flow position, capital position and equity position, and the pros and cons of each form of procurement," according to *The Entrepreneur's Guidebook Series*, which is available at [www.smallbusinesstown.com](http://www.smallbusinesstown.com).

In general, businesses rent for convenience, flexibility, to "try before they buy," and to avoid being locked into a long-term situation. "Rent or lease because it's easier than getting financing, because you lack the funds to buy, to avoid taxing your cash reserves, to avoid maintenance and repair responsibilities, to avoid obsolescence and depreciation, to improve asset liquidity and to get immediate tax deduction benefits," the book points out.

Owning by either buying or financing is usually always preferable to renting or leasing, unless a company is having cash flow problems or cannot obtain credit. "Businesses buy or finance equipment because it's cheaper in the long run, there is poor selection at rental companies, to avoid being locked into a long-term lease, and to have more control over making improvements," the book explains.

## Rent OR BUY?

Have you considered renting as opposed to buying equipment this year?

Response	Percent of Contractors
Yes, we always rent	26%
Yes, especially in this economy	21%
No, we always buy	53%

Source: [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com)

## MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

### Symbiot Takes Shape

Steve Glover and Drew St. John know what it feels like to compete against large regional and national landscape firms. Glover was president of L&L Landscape Services, Sunnyvale, Calif., until he sold that business to TruGreen-ChemLawn, while St. John most recently worked for Hillenmeyer Nurseries, Lexington, Ky., after owning his own business in Mississippi. Now, the pair head a team trying to help strong companies compete on a higher level with the The Symbiot Business Group.

"The one thing that many of the successful landscape companies still lack is national visibility and strength in purchasing and marketing," observed St. John, vice president of development. Symbiot plans to fix that by creating a national network of firms that will use Symbiot's products and services to boost their sales and control their costs, thereby positioning themselves to service national customers.

"I've talked to several contractors who have lost clients who were satisfied and wanted the contractor to move into a new market so the client could work with just one provider," St. John explained. "If the contractor couldn't do this, then they lost the contract. Our plan would create a nationwide network of contractors who could work together to serve a client's needs."

Initially, Symbiot targeted some of the leading landscape companies in major metropolitan markets. Symbiot held meetings in Utah and Georgia, initiating its first such meeting earlier this month in

(continued on page 16)







# Your next skid steer Might not be a skid steer

Anybody using a mid-sized skid steer loader now has a much better alternative - the new RC•50 All Surface Loader. The RC•50 is equipped to give any operation an outstanding competitive advantage.

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USE READER SERVICE #14



# Market Trends

(continued from page 14)

Utah, and 30 of the contractors invited to attend have already signed up, St. John said. And signing up comes with a real commitment – an annual fee of “several thousand dollars,” he added, predicting the group will soon reach its target of 40 to 45 members.

What do these companies get for their money? Symbiot is currently working with a national retailer to create an opportunity for the network to handle the landscape maintenance, parking lot sweeping and snow removal for all of its U.S. locations. Once any of these deals are finalized, Symbiot members would each handle the contracts for the clients’ properties in their area, paying Symbiot a 2 percent fee for managing them. “Symbiot’s role is to act as a ‘facilitator’ and not as a contractor in these relationships,” explained St. John.

“We’ll probably limit the group to the first 50 that sign up because once we get beyond that there will be too much market overlap and we want to give our members

(continued on page 20)



## L&L Book Report

### Gung Ho

by Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles  
Reported by Steve Pattie

*Gung Ho* tells the story of a new factory supervisor who must turn around the production of one of the worst facilities her company owns in a matter of months, otherwise it will shut down.

She discovers that one department’s division manager has a detailed, organized plan that creates a highly productive workplace. The plan creates an atmosphere where management and employees are gung ho about their jobs, turning the factory into a well-oiled machine.

*Gung Ho* identifies various keys to developing, integrating and acting on plans

to reach a common company goal. In a Gung-Ho organization, values are the real boss, the book points out. First, everyone must work toward a shared goal. Authors Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles discuss how to achieve the set goal: informing employees, delegating and stretching people’s potential.

The book recognizes the importance of “active congratulations,” as opposed to stepping aside to let team members face a tricky project by themselves. Cheer the progress, not just the results, the book reminds.

*Gung Ho* unravels the essentials to accomplishing an efficient, productive organization, reminding readers that success lies in the willingness of employees to work together and share a common goal. This equation sums it up:  $e=mc^2$ , or, enthusiasm equals mission times cash and congratulations. – Steve Pattie, president, The Pattie Group, Novelty, Ohio

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## Letters TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I read with particular professional interest your recent *The Return of Natives* article (March 2002). I am an expert landscape design consultant in these matters, and wished to learn your journal's particular perspective on this rapidly growing new landscaping movement.

Sadly, you missed most of what's happening – and required – in the native landscaping movement. I've dealt with a number of commercial landscape firms, and none had any idea how to design or execute an authentic native plants landscape.

In summary, most of the common procedures and experiences of commercial landscape firms will actually ensure failure in a native landscape installation. Frankly, any contractor who attempts to undertake a native plants project on the basis of your article – even though its purposes were high – will be in real trouble. The details of these problems are too detailed to go into here. But do you suppose any corn or soybean farmer could properly design and install a conventional business park landscape design? Most of your readers could. That's their expertise. But a farmer couldn't, even though he plants hundreds of acres of plants a year.

That's the problem your readers will encounter. Native landscapes are as different from conventional ones as cornfields are. Site prep alone is wholly different. No deep plowing, no fertilizing (in most cases), no mulching, and so forth.

The whole story is a complete book. But you need to present a more complete story. Those of us who do native landscapes continually confront clients and contractors who wish to do things in conventional and unsuccessful ways.

In short, your readers need a much deeper orientation to the rapidly evolving native and natural landscaping movement. Frankly, the commercial landscaping community, except in northern Illinois where the movement is 10 years old, is clueless about the many advantages and various potential clients of the movement.

Like you, those people are beginning to realize (unlike most landscape contractors stuck in the turf-and-trees mode) that native plants landscaping is no longer for just a few vegetarian eco-freaks. It's rapidly becoming mainstream.

*John Blakeman*

*Meadow Environments, Huron, Ohio*



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**USE READER SERVICE #15**



# Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

exclusivity in their area," St. John pointed out.

St. John acknowledges that Symbiot's approach is unique to the landscape industry, but he's convinced it can work. "I don't know why this was never done in our industry, but it has been done successfully in other industries," he maintained. "One example is the office furniture and supplies industry. When these companies had OfficeMax move into town, they needed something that let them play on that field. Office Furniture USA allows them to buy on a national basis by pooling their purchasing and keeping their costs competitive even if their own volume isn't that high."

Symbiot has also had conversations with suppliers about purchasing programs for its members, and interest is expected to grow significantly as the group grows.

While the group's focus is on large landscape firms right now because of the financial investment required and the importance of every member firm being able to deliver

(continued on page 22)

## People

**Phil Harley** joined Monrovia Growers as vice president of sales.

Stellar Industries appointed **David Champagne** as regional sales manager for the northeastern region of North America.

Pickseed Canada announced the appointment of **Doug MacMillan** to director of professional turfgrass sales.

Becker Underwood promoted **Peter Innes** to president and **Roger Underwood** to chief executive officer.

**Alan Squires** joined Watts Industries as national sales manager for backflow products, plumbing and irrigation markets.

BASF named **Gerald Husemann** as senior sales specialist for the BASF Turf and Ornamental Group.

Tecumseh Products hired **Richard Ruebusch** as vice president of the company's engine and transmission group.

**Karen Hartman** joined Cleary Chemical as a sales representative.



MacMillan (top),  
Ruebusch (bottom)



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TR0133	Tree, S	Green, Silver Birch	2				45.00	Delete
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# Market Trends

(continued from page 20)

quality work, Symbiot has plans to open its offerings to smaller companies or those located in smaller markets later this summer.

"There will be a whole other network, called the Symbiot affiliates, made up of companies in secondary markets that can use purchasing agreements to their advantage and to differentiate themselves from the competition," St. John explained, adding that he expects this group to include up to 2,000 companies. "The information that we gather through benchmarking and networking will filter down, and so will the sales responsibility if

we have a property in the area to maintain."

HighGrove Partners, Atlanta, Ga., joined this network, and Jim McCutcheon, the firm's chief operating officer, said he's excited about the opportunity even though the concept isn't proven. "When I first got the call, I was skeptical because I thought we were going to try to fight the big guys and that's usually a pricing issue," he noted. "So I wondered, 'How am I going to get my prices down and then cut Symbiot in on the deal?'"

"But they've put together a good opportunity for us to get a competitive edge without a large investment," McCutcheon con-

tinued. "When you evaluate the risk, it's an acceptable one. They're trying to select the best companies, and we wanted to be associated with the best, and this could give us a chance to expand within our own market as they bring us new jobs and also give us a chance to jump into new markets."

## INDUSTRY NEWS

### ServiceMaster Reports First Quarter Earnings

DOWNERS GROVE, Ill. – ServiceMaster announced that first quarter 2002 revenue of \$747 million was up 2 percent over 2001.

Specifically, year-to-date TruGreen-ChemLawn trends indicate stronger sales and better retention rates, due to new marketing strategies and quality of service initiatives begun during the fall of 2001.

"Year-to-date results show TruGreen ChemLawn contract sales growth of 3 percent over last year and customer retention

(continued on page 24)

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# Market Trends

(continued from page 22)

improving by 1 percent," said Jonathan Ward, company president and chief executive officer. "These trends make me confident that, for the first time in three years, we will see both internal growth in TruGreen customer counts and increased retention for the full year."

For the first quarter of 2002, TruGreen revenue of \$229 million was flat compared to 2001. Operating income was \$25 million compared with \$29 million in 2001, due primarily to reduced snow removal business and the timing of some seasonal expenses.

The landscape maintenance business stabilized after divestiture of the construction business in the fall of 2001. The business continues to focus on increasing sales and marketing effectiveness to generate new revenue as well as various initiatives to improve its cost structure.

(continued on page 26)

## 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](mailto:kmohn@gie.net).

**JUNE 13-16** Florida Nurserymen & Growers Association's Annual Convention and Summer Short Course, Wesley Chapel, Fla. Contact: 800/375-3642.

**JUNE 18** Georgia Green Industry Association Seminar, Meansville and Fayetteville, Ga. Contact: 706/632-0100.

**JUNE 19** UMass Turf Research Field Day, South Deerfield, Mass. Contact: 413/545-3066.

**JUNE 19-23** The American Nursery & Landscape Association Retail Roadshow, Chicago, Ill. Contact: 202/789-2900.

**JUNE 20-22** Independent Turf & Ornamental Distributors Association Summer Meeting, Los Gatos, Calif. Contact: 207/933-6708.

**JUNE 27** Idaho Nursery Association 2002 Field Day, Idaho Falls, Idaho. Contact: 800/462-4769.

**JULY 10-11** American Nursery Landscape Association Garden Center University, Class of 2004 "Second Semester," San Diego, Calif. Contact: 202/789-2900.

**JULY 11** 'FUN'amentals of Maintenance, San Jose, Calif. Contact: 707/462-2276.

**JULY 11-14** ANLA 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 13-17** Soil and Water Conservation Society "Setting the Pace for Water Conservation," Indianapolis, Ind. Contact: 515/289-2331.

**JULY 16-19** Turfgrass Producers International Summer Convention & Field Days, Fort Collins, Colo. Contact: 800/405-8873.

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

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

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# Market Trends

(continued from page 24)

## NATIONAL NEWS

### Interest Rates Remain At Four-Decade Lows

WASHINGTON – Federal Reserve policy-makers opted to keep U.S. interest rates at four-decade lows, trying to maintain cheap credit for consumers and businesses.

Members of the Federal Open Market Committee voted unanimously to keep its federal funds rate for overnight loans between banks at 1.75 percent. The discount rate was also unmoved at 1.25 percent.

In a statement, policymakers cited an "uncertain" outlook for final demand and said risks remained balanced between inflation and recession. This indicated concern about recent soft economic data including the April unemployment rate, which was its highest in more than 7½ years. Financial markets fully anticipated steady interest rates and many analysts now say it is unlikely that rates will rise again before August. **LL**

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

## Mattingly's MESSAGE

Labor is always a hot topic. Employees are the backbone of your business and can make or break you because they are your front line, meeting and dealing with your clients daily. When employees are treated fairly, they produce at an unbelievable rate. Encourage employees to embrace your company culture with these ideas:

- **Plan a cookout.** It's a great way to say thank you. Have it in the middle of the week and schedule your crews accordingly so everyone can attend. Cater the event or have the owner, managers and supervisors do the cooking. Toward the end of the cookout, raffle off a couple of pruning shears, coolers or gift certificates.
- **Take pictures.** Invest in a digital camera – they run about \$200. I like to take pictures of the crews working in the field. Then, you can print them from your computer and post them for everyone to see.
- **Communicate.** The Hispanic workforce is our backbone, so learn their language.

One suggestion is to purchase audio tapes. If you want to learn the language comprehensively, use tapes published by Pimsleur, which cost a little more than \$200. If you want to just improve communication, then give booklets with English and Spanish landscape terms to all personnel.

Jack Mattingly is a green industry consultant with Mattingly Consulting and can be reached at [www.mattinglyconsulting.com](http://www.mattinglyconsulting.com) or 770-517-9476

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# Nursery Market Report

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## All-Season Shrubs

Sometimes called the bones of the landscape or its perennial soul, shrubs can define a green space, only to then redefine it as they grow and mature. They can provide a wall of privacy when planted and sheared as a hedge, and the natural symmetry—or intriguing asymmetry—of their branches can add up to living sculpture. Indeed, the right shrubs can become the focal points in a landscape that grows more interesting from season to season and from year to year.

The following shrubs can grow in most parts of the country and offer seasonal interest year-round through

a variety of appealing attributes, from flowers to bark and berries.

**Viburnum:** U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) zones 4 to 8. A genus of 150 species, viburnums can be evergreen or deciduous, often with fragrant blooms that morph into colorful berries favored by birds. The cultivar 'Mohawk' (*Viburnum x burkwoodii*) grows up to 7 feet tall, and its leaves turn shades of orange, red and reddish-purple in the fall, but they drop in severe winters. 'Mohawk's' finest moment is in late April or May, when its reddish buds open to five-pointed white stars forming an abundance of domes. Its fragrance, a blend of clove and lily of the valley, is intense and carries as far as 30 feet. This shrub is semi-evergreen in the South and needs well-drained soil and a location that is sunny to partly shady.

**Flowering Quince:** USDA zones 5 to 9. Flowering quince has cup-shaped flowers in a color that, depending on the cultivar, can fall anywhere from pale peach to bold coral. The hybrid 'Cameo' (*Chaenomeles x superba*) has the largest blooms of the species—2 inches across and double—suggesting tea roses. The delicate color of its petals ranges from peachy pink at the edges to rosy pink in the center, and at 5 feet tall, 'Cameo' is almost completely thornless.

**Butterfly Bush:** USDA zones 5 to 9. From a distance, the butterfly bush looks like a fountain with butterflies hovering over its cascades. Close up, the cultivar 'Argentea' (*Buddleia alternifolia*) offers masses of foot-long, trumpet-like flowers that suggest lilacs. The slender, willow-like, gray-green leaves have a silver sheen. In bloom for much of the summer, the butterfly bush likes a sunny spot and fertile, well-drained soil.

**Harry Lauder's Walking Stick:** USDA zones 4 to 8. *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta' sprouts a witch's broom of upright twigs that will not grow straight, but twist and curl instead. Its foliage is handsome, like the straight members of the filbert clan, also known as hazelnut, but its crop of tasty nuts is not as bountiful. This shrub sparkles when snow covers its leafless branches.

**Flower Carpet Roses:** USDA zones 5 to 10. First introduced in North America in 1995,

*Flower Carpet roses produce a steady stream of blooms from late spring through frost. They are suitable for mass plantings, landscape beds or containers and are known for their natural disease resistance.*  
Photo: Anthony Tesselaa International





# Nursery Market Report

these landscape shrubs offer an abundance of colorful blossoms from late spring through frost. Suitable for mass plantings, garden beds or containers, Flower Carpet roses have shiny leaves and are evergreen in warmer climate zones. They're available in pink, white, appleblossom, red and, new this spring, coral. These 3-foot-tall garden shrubs are known for their long bloom season and natural disease

## For More Information

For more information on Anthony Tesselaar International landscape plants and where to purchase them, see [www.tesselaar.com](http://www.tesselaar.com).

resistance. All Flower Carpet roses thrive on five hours of sun per day.

**Mock Orange:** USDA zones 5 to 8. *Philadelphus virginialis* is a fast grower that shoots up to 10 feet in a few years, but at half that height starts yielding white flowers scented like orange blossoms.

A rambunctious producer of extra stems, this shrub needs pruning. The selection called 'Minnesota Snowflakes' is an overachiever when it comes to the number of its blooms, and 'Virginal' has the most intense fragrance.

**Heavenly Bamboo:** USDA 7 to 10. *Nandina domestica* is not a bamboo, though its leaves, divided in three, and clumps, reaching 6 feet, are similar. Fortunately, heavenly bamboo does not share the insistent suckering (sending off invasive shoots from the root) habit of that dangerously rampant genus. Its foliage is bronze-red or reddish purple in early spring and then again in the fall, and its white flowers become clusters of brilliant red berries that stay on all winter. Sun or shade, heavenly bamboo will thrive, but only a full-sun location will inspire bumper crops of berries.

**Spirea:** USDA zones 4 to 9. Dense and dainty, Spirea is a champion bloomer in the spring or summer and makes a billowing hedge. Of its numerous cultivars, 'Shibori' (*Spiraea japonica*) has two flowering periods, and it excels by producing both pink and white flowers in the same cluster. The cultivar 'Anthony Waterer' (*Spiraea x bumalda*) starts out with reddish foliage that turns blue-green in the summer, then purple in the fall.

**Siberian Dogwood:** USDA zones 5 to 10. The leafless, bright red twigs of Siberian dogwood (*Cornus alba*) 'Sibirica' light up the winter landscape and are at their most dramatic when snow covers the ground. Also known as red-twigged dogwood, its vigorous, sturdy, upright shoots can reach a height of 10 feet. Thanks to its habit of suckering, its horizontal spread will eventually catch up. As a thicket or fence, it is a showstopper, and in the spring, shirt-button size white flowers appear. The berries that follow, white flushed with blue, attract birds of all kinds.

**Lilac:** USDA zones 3 to 7. New hybrids have improved on old-fashioned favorites, yielding more flowers and recapturing the heady scent that was often lost in other hybrids. After the blooms are gone, the foliage appears as a wall of dark green, and the heart-shaped leaves are lovely. 'Miss Kim' (*Syringa patula*) offers smaller flowers but in huge numbers, and their fragrance is intense. Among the whites, 'Miss Ellen Willmott' not only retains the traditional scent of the species, but unlike other lilacs, it is reliably nonsuckering. — Charles Fenyesi

The author is a freelance garden writer based in Dickerson, Md.

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USE READER SERVICE #20



TREES & DROUGHT STRESS

## Dry & Thirsty

In the midst of the 2002 growing season, there are concerns about drought and the impact of potential restrictions on water use in landscape settings. The current drought follows several years of lower than normal precipitation that have led to deficiencies of both surface and subsurface water. Also, drought stress symptoms have been evident on many trees during the past few years.

Even though we can't control the weather, we can cope with drought and minimize its impact on trees.

**ROOT DOWN.** To manage drought stress, contractors must understand a tree's root system, which has four types of roots: framework roots consisting of primary and secondary woody roots, transport and storage roots, nonwoody feeder roots and roots hairs. Almost 99 percent of this root mass is in the top 3 feet of the soil. The feeder roots and root hairs, which are in the top 12 inches of the soil, are responsible for water and nutrient uptake. Unfortunately, since they are sensitive to drying they are the first part of the root system drought affects.

When feeder roots and root hairs become nonfunctional, they can no longer provide sufficient water to the top of the plant. In addition to direct damage to the root system, drought triggers other factors like those that influence the number of leaves that will emerge the next year.

*Drought-stressed trees can be seen a mile away, as evident in these photos. Symptoms include wilting, yellowing and premature leaf or needle drop. Photos: Sharon Douglas*



**SPOTTING SYMPTOMS.** Drought symptoms manifest in different ways depending on the plant species and water deficit severity. Symptoms often are not evident in the tree top until sometime after the event has occurred – even as much as one to two years later. These symptoms include loss of turgor in needles and leaves, wilting, yellowing,

premature leaf or needle drop, bark cracks, and twig and branch dieback. Leaves on deciduous trees often develop a marginal scorch whereas needles on evergreens turn brown at the tips. Other symptoms include canopy thinning, poor growth and stunting.

In addition to direct root damage, drought weakens plants and predisposes them to secondary invaders and opportunistic pests such as fungal tip blights, vascular wilts, root rots and needlecasts. Many drought-stressed trees also show increased sensitivity to deicing salts, air pollutants and pesticides. In short, drought threatens a tree's health and, in extreme cases, can result in death.

**PLANTING PROBLEMS.** Native plants growing naturally in forested areas are usually adapted to regional and seasonal fluctuations in the amount of precipitation, and only unusually severe drought causes problems. However, planted landscape trees often show symptoms of drought and severe water stress. Planting practices are frequently key sources of drought problems since people often plant trees in unfavorable sites, don't prepare the rootball properly or plant too deep or too shallow.

It is important to match the needs of the plant with what the site has to offer. This helps maximize plant vigor from the time of planting. Avoid spacing trees too closely since crowding increases competition for available water and promotes disease.

Proper preparation of the rootball is also critical to plant growth. With balled-and-burlapped material, the burlap should be removed or shredded and folded down. If a wire basket is present, it should be removed or the top  $\frac{1}{3}$  cut off. With a container grown woody plant, the rootball should be moist – not wet – and scored, cut and teased apart before planting. This is especially important if the root mass is very tight and dense.

Planting holes should be dug two to four times wider, but no

*(continued on page 34)*








# MAUGET MICRO-INJECTION

## 33 TREE DISEASES

Oak Wilt  
Dutch Elm Disease  
Anthracnose  
Oak Decline  
Elm Wilt  
Fusarium Wilt  
Verticillium Wilt  
Nectria Canker  
Phomopsis Canker  
Leptographium Canker  
Dothiorella  
Vermicularia Dieback  
Palm Bud Rot  
Philalophora  
Botryosphaeria Branch Canker  
Verticicladiella  
Pestalotia  
Melanconium Dieback  
Diplodia Tip Blight  
Mimosa Wilt  
Ceratocystis Dieback  
Kabatina Branch Canker  
Atropellis  
Thielaviopsis Decline  
Coryneum Canker  
Ceratocystis Canker  
Coryneum Blight  
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# Arbor Business

(continued from page 32)

deeper than the rootballs to be planted. In most cases, the soil dug from the planting hole with minimal amendments should be used as backfill. This method promotes faster root growth into the planting site since the soil is receptive to lateral root growth and minimizes the transitions between soil types as the roots grow into the planting hole and the planting site.

Remember, recent transplants typically lose important feeder roots during the transplant process. For example, balled-and-burlapped trees are estimated to contain only 5 to 20 percent of their original root mass after digging. For container-grown plants, the medium in which the transplant is growing can be a key factor – many of the soilless mixes used for container stock are highly porous, dry out quickly and are difficult to rewet. This situation creates moisture stress in the rootball regardless of the availability of water in the surrounding soil. This problem often continues until the roots grow beyond the rootball and establish themselves.

Complete establishment in a new planting site often takes woody transplants two years. Thus, these plants should be given extra care and attention during periods of drought.


**PREVENTION STRATEGIES.** While there is no cure for drought, its effects can be minimized by following some preventive measures:

- **Water in periods of soil moisture.** Trees and shrubs require approximately 1 inch of water weekly. For most soil types, water is best applied at one time as a slow, deep soaking of the entire root zone to a depth of approximately 12 to 18 inches. The length of time required to deep water will vary depending on soil type and water pressure – clay soils usually require more time than sandy soils. Frequent, light surface watering will not help the tree and can actually cause harm by promoting surface root growth. A deep soaking just before the ground freezes in the fall will also increase winter hardiness of drought-stressed plants.

- **Select native plants or match plant species to site conditions.** Be mindful of drought-sensitive trees (dogwood, some oaks, ash, birch) vs. drought-tolerant ones (most pines, many Prunus, larch) when selecting plants.

- **Mulch to maintain soil moisture.** Properly applied mulches are helpful in drought situations. Mulches are usually applied 1 to 3 inches thick and spread evenly out to the drip line of the tree. Keep the mulch 6 to 12 inches away from the trunk.

- **Prune any dead or weakened tissues to avoid secondary problems.**

- **Maintain plant vigor by following good cultural practices.** It is generally accepted that trees under stress should not be fertilized. However, applications of biostimulants, mycorrhizae or similar compounds can be beneficial and can help to stimulate root growth and regeneration. – Sharon Douglas 

The author is agricultural scientist, department of plant pathology, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, New Haven, Conn., and can be reached at [Sharon.Douglas@po.state.co.us](mailto:Sharon.Douglas@po.state.co.us).

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## Action Figures

The more supervisors a company has, the more its liability escalates. Hence, business owners have to ensure supervisors are consistent in their discipline warnings and firing practices, pointed out Gerry Andrews, president, Landscape Associates, DePere, Wis.

This is why implementing a Disciplinary Warning Notice and Action Taken form is crucial. "You can get yourself in trouble legally if you don't have a system in place," Andrews said. "You certainly can't have a supervisor getting rid of people because he doesn't like them or just feels like it."

This form aids Andrews' business because it takes the pressure and argument out of disciplinary action. "We sit down with the employee, state to them that this is the rule or policy and this is what he did that violated it," he said. "And then we state actions he has to take from now on and the stated time period in which he has to change. He receives a copy of the form and we keep one for our personnel files. There's no room for argument."

The form, which the company has used since its beginning, has evolved. It started as a standard disciplinary warning, but with the aid of a human resources consultant Andrews added the "Improvement Required" section in 1999. "It wasn't just enough to give disciplinary action," he said. "We also had to document the change of action."

The most difficult part of the form is stating a measurable performance change. Improvement on a bad attitude is subjective and hard to document, Andrews explained. "The key is to be specific," he said. "If someone has an attitude problem, we may say he has to demonstrate more team spirit or have a smile on his face more often – something that's measurable. If someone is habitually late, we may say he cannot be late more than once a month and this has to be consistent for three months."

Employees are reviewed twice each year. Three disciplinary warnings lead to dismissal, but supervisors do have discretion. "If it's a tardiness issue and on the third notice the guy is five minutes late, we probably won't fire him," Andrews said. "You have to weigh the severity of the discipline problem and ask yourself if it's worth losing an otherwise good employee." – Nicole Wisniewski **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com).

### Disciplinary Warning Notice and Action Taken

EMPLOYEE'S NAME	SOCIAL SECURITY #	DATE OF VIOLATION
POSITION	DEPARTMENT	

#### VIOLATION:

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dishonesty      | <input type="checkbox"/> Violation of Rules | <input type="checkbox"/> Unsatisfactory Performance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insubordination | <input type="checkbox"/> Misconduct         | <input type="checkbox"/> Inaccurate                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intoxication    | <input type="checkbox"/> Not Following      | <input type="checkbox"/> Low Output                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor Attendance | <input type="checkbox"/> Instructions       | <input type="checkbox"/> Not Adaptable              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tardiness       | <input type="checkbox"/> Equipment Abuse    | <input type="checkbox"/> Undependable               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Absenteeism     | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety             | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncooperative              |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other              |   |

Details of above:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**IMMEDIATE SATISFACTORY IMPROVEMENT MUST BE SHOWN OR FURTHER DISCIPLINARY ACTION WILL BE TAKEN, INCLUDING POSSIBLE SUSPENSION FROM DUTY OR DISCHARGE.**

#### Action Taken:

Warned     Suspended     Discharged

Date of Previous Warning	Suspended Days	From	thru	Discharged Effective
--------------------------	----------------	------	------	----------------------

Improvement Required \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Dates \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Employee Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I have received a copy of this notice. I have read this notice and have had an opportunity to discuss it with my supervisor. I understand the requirements and expectations.

Employee Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Rev 3/99



## HEALTHY LAWNS

# Applying Lime

The model in the magazine appears perfect with her straight teeth, flawless complexion and trim figure. However, although she seems to be the epitome of health, the picture fails to mention her rising blood pressure and dangerous cholesterol levels. Clearly, what initially appears healthy may not be, and unless the model visits a physician, her internal balance will remain unchecked and eventually affect her appearance.

Soil also requires this frequent testing to determine its nutrient content and acid levels, which will eventually affect plant growth. "If you don't have healthy soil, you're going to be bucking the system the entire time," said Richard Pete, president, Planet Green, Charlotte, Vt.

While the model can regulate her diet to regain a healthy balance, soil can benefit from lime to regulate pH levels. Although far from a miracle drug, lime's ability to even out soil acidity positions it as a strong player in the contractor's medicine cabinet.

**TAKE THE TEST.** Before issuing a lime prescription, contractors should conduct soil tests with pH meters to determine soil acidity, said Jim Campanella, president, Lawn Dawg, Nashua, N.H. "We take a pH test when we're out doing the first treatment on a lawn," he said. Generally, if pH levels fall below 6.0, the lawn requires an alkaline dose of lime, Pete added. Soil tests are traditionally conducted in the spring before the season starts, but can occur year-round, he said.

High-acidity soils cause problems for plants for a variety of reasons, Campanella noted. "If the soil pH is acidic, the lawn can't access fertilizer properly, and microbial activity is reduced so the fertilizer is not breaking down properly," he explained. "With lime, the lawn will have 100 percent access to fertilizer, but if it's acidic, the plant can draw as little as 25 percent from the lawn."

Also, balanced soil allows plants to reach elements such as iron and nitrogen, related Bob Ottley, president, One Step Lawn Care, North Chili, N.Y.

After determining the need for lime, contractors must sell the pH cure-all to customers. Ottley sends

clients a copy of the soil test and a lime recommendation based on that test. "We send a scientific form with an explanation, and then we suggest a price for applying that much lime," he said.

Campanella sends a postcard to clients with suggested prices, asking them to check "yes" for a certain number of applications, he said. "We try to avoid extra visits to the property and keep the price of this service down," he noted, adding that he charges \$50 for lime applications that can be done during a scheduled visit.

**APPLICATION POINTERS.** Most prescriptions require the patient to take the full amount, even after he or she feels better. Similarly, lime applications cannot be effective if the applicator "skimps" on the application, Campanella pointed out. "When you're liming a lawn, the rates are very high – sometimes 15 to 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet," he said. "It's many trips back and forth to the truck in the middle of July, but the rates are important so you're not cutting corners."

Further, pay attention to plant types on the property when applying lime, Pete said. For example, contractors may need to apply more lime around acid-producing plant material, like pine trees and hockweed, Campanella stated. "We do a pH test in the middle of the front lawn, but the back might have more acid problems," he said. "Pay attention and place heavier amounts of lime in areas where there would appear to be a more significant pH problem."

In turn, frequent soil testing establishes predictable pH levels for properties, especially those of long-term clients. "During our first three years we did complete soil tests, and after 10,000 soil tests, we have a pretty good understanding of how much lime clients need in our area," Campanella related. Ottley said his company always tests new clients' soil, and re-tests existing clients' soil every four years.

Just as daily vitamins boost a person's metabolism and energy, lime applications help guarantee an internal balance. "Some nutrients are just not as readily available to a plant," Pete stated. "But lowering pH makes them available." – Kristin Mohn

*The author is Assistant Editor – Internet of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at kmohn@lawnandlandscape.com.*

*Soil tests determine soil pH and acidity levels. If the number on a pH scale falls below 6.0, the soil is too acidic, and generally will benefit from a lime application, which raises alkalinity. Photo: PhotoDisc*

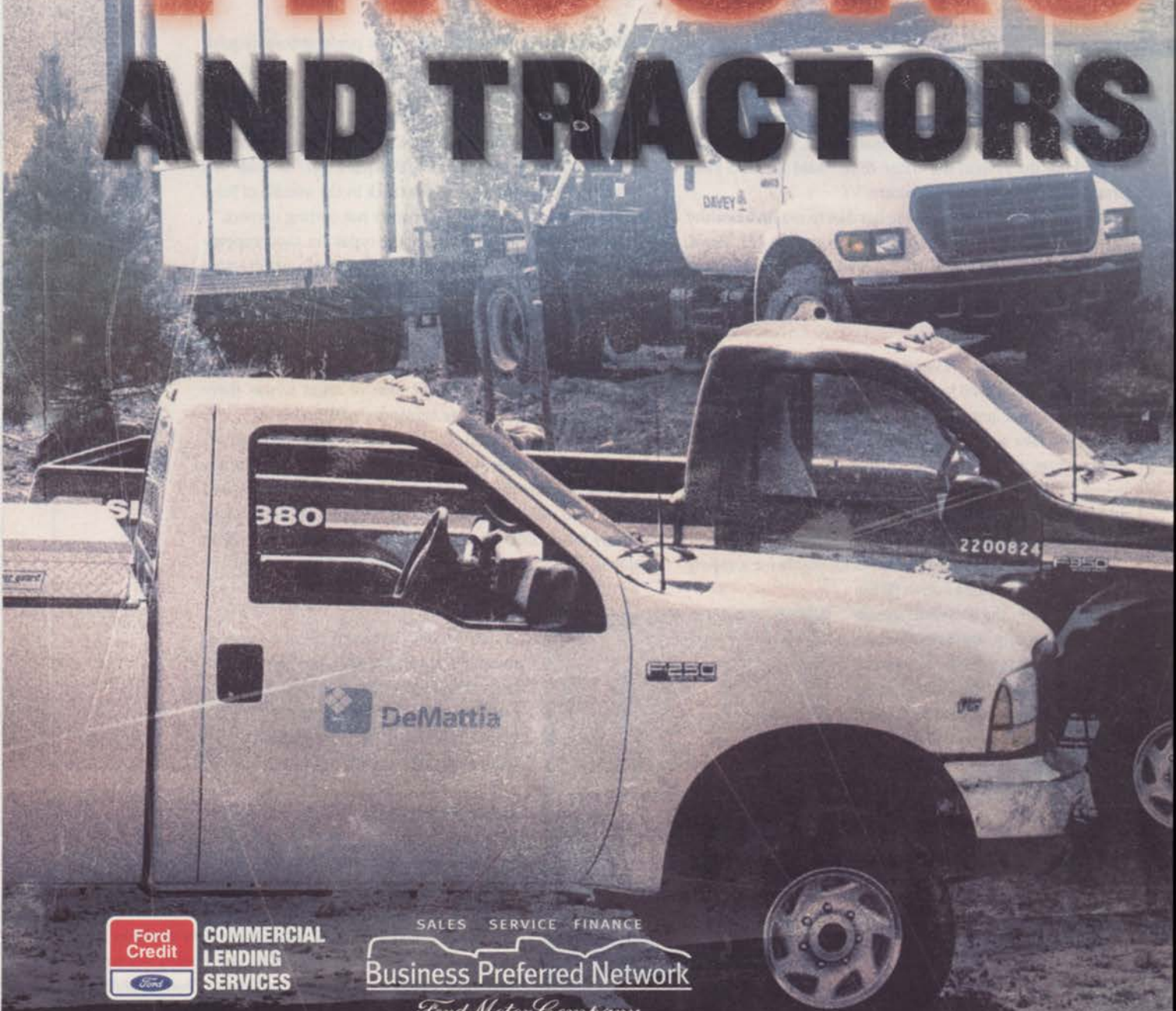
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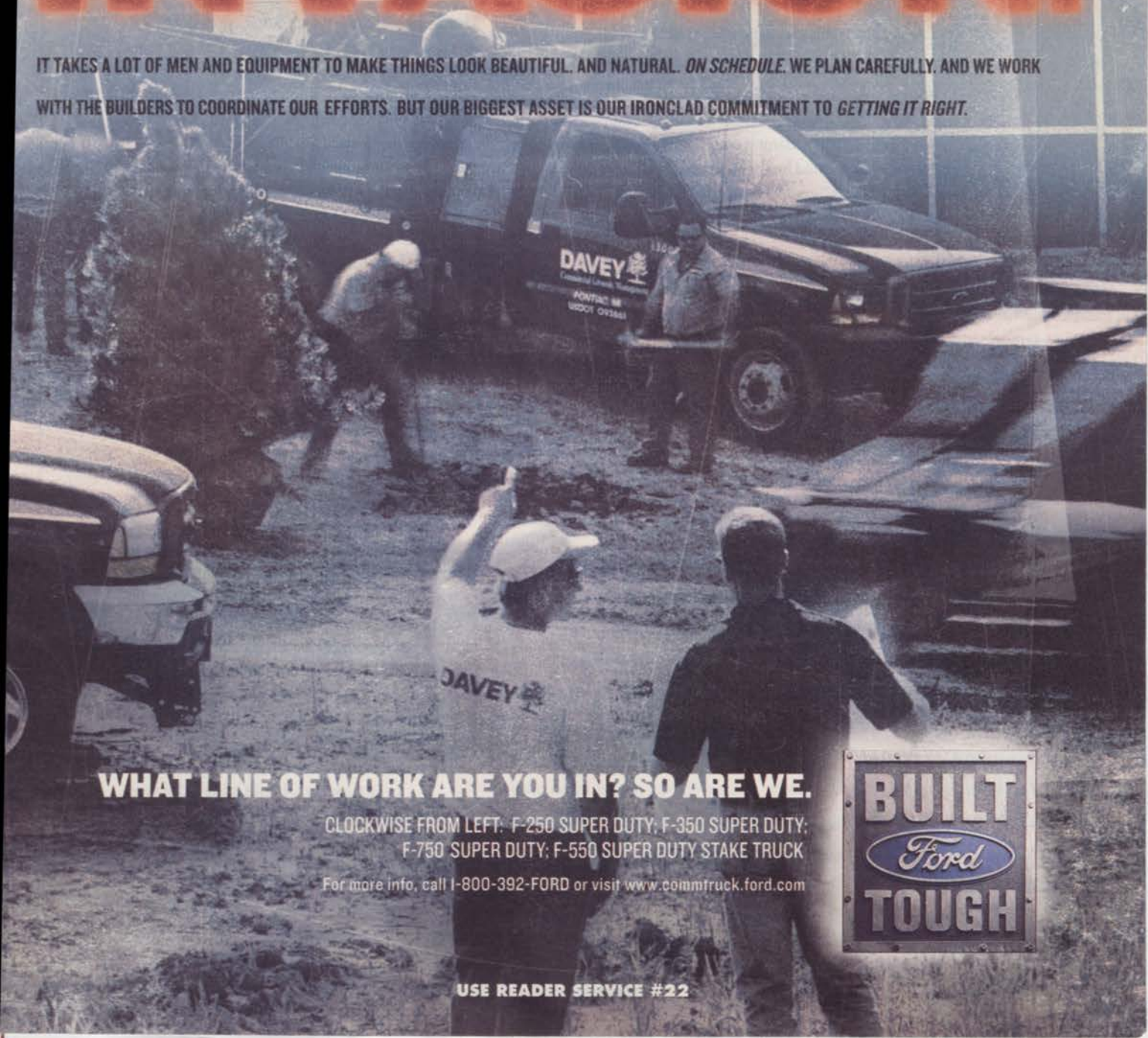
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## Your Very Own Number Cruncher

Business is more than selling, servicing and billing.

A paper trail follows every job, employee, equipment purchase – every aspect of a company's daily operations, practically. Truth be told, most landscape contractors admit they never studied accounting.

Hiring a financial watchdog like a certified public accountant (CPA) from the start can keep companies growing rather than groaning over confusing tax documents and complicated financial jargon. "We landscape, we don't account," remarked Chip McClintock, presi-

dent, Green & White Outdoors, Kent, Ohio. "Without an accountant, you can start off on the wrong foot and get into a jam."

**THE TIME IS NOW.** Pieter Rossi, president, B.P. Landscapes, Grass Valley, Calif., waited a couple years before hiring an accountant – a couple years too long, he said. In the beginning, his company was small enough that he and his partner could handle both operations and administrative responsibilities.

But soon, business picked up and Rossi realized his time was better spent in his profession: landscape services, not number crunching.

"It gets more complicated as you grow," he explained. "Tax returns get thicker and thicker, there are more schedules and forms, and the more assets you own, then you have to figure their depreciations. And when you throw some real estate in there it gets even more complicated."

"There were questions we couldn't figure out and we were no longer able to spend the time to try to figure them out," he continued. "Our time was better spent building the company and making money the way we knew how."

While Rossi still oversees the books, he passes payroll reports, quarterly payroll filing, tax deposits and estimates for state, federal and corporate tax filings to his accountant, who he keeps on retainer. He meets with the accountant once every quarter, but e-mails, faxes and calls her weekly with questions. This daily contact, along with help from his office manager and pension administrator, keeps him on track.

In fact, owners should initiate this communication before completing a business plan, pointed out Mike Perry, chief financial officer, ProGreen Lawn Care, Austell, Ga. "If you are a new business and you don't

*(continued on page 42)*

### TAX ASSISTANCE

## CPA Services

A certified public accountant (CPA) can do more than calculate taxes come April. From financial planning to consulting, CPAs offer valuable business advice to entrepreneurs, pointed out David Battles, CPA, Pollen & Battles, Burton, Ohio. Here are some services company owners might consider:

- Financial planning
- Tax planning
- Financial statement preparations
- Business valuations – how to sell or buy a business
- Succession planning – how to move a company from one level to another and passing a business down through generations
- Initial planning – how to gain working capital to launch the business
- Outsourcing – hire CPAs on a daily fee to avoid adding someone to payroll
- Partnering – some CPAs team up with other professionals in the banking or insurance fields, so clients have confidence of their advisers trust in each other

Just as offering high-quality landscape services doesn't always mean offering the lowest price, Battles reminded that valuable accountants don't always boast the least expensive fees. "Don't go the cheapest route," he advised.

– *Kristen Hampshire*



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# Minding Your Business

(continued from page 40)

have personnel with financial experience and qualifications, then the time to get an accountant is Day One minus whatever the period of time that you put together the business plan," he stressed. "You need an accountant before you even start your business."

Besides offering financial expertise, accountants provide an outside perspective, Perry added. "They remind you of the things you might have forgotten," he said. "It's the same with anything – if you suddenly have a difficulty with a litigation, do you handle it yourself or go to an attorney?"

Depending on the company's maturity and growth plans, one company might choose to keep an accountant on a monthly retainer while another might opt to hire one specifically for tax purposes. For example, McClintock is now wrestling with growth issues that require more financial help than tracking numbers, and he is considering switching to an accountant who also offers more in-depth financial advice to take his business "to the next level."

"It's one thing to say I'm going to St. Louis, but if you don't know what roads to take, instead of following a compass sometimes you need a map," he related. "I'm in my 10<sup>th</sup> year and I need long-range plans, and that's where this next level of an accountant comes in."

Now, he meets with his accountant once every month "sparingly" – more intensely around tax time. With an accountant who plays more of a financial advisor role – suggesting consolidated loans, offering equipment purchase advice regarding cash flow and easing bookkeeping – he expects to triple his cost with a \$300 to \$400 monthly retainer fee. However, he rationalizes that he will get three times the service.

"I'll have a player for all four quarters of the game instead of just one," he compared. "We tell our clients that we will be their landscape police – their eyeballs. If we see a tree that is starting to get weak and needs food, we'll feed it. And that's the kind of accounting I need at this juncture. Not just year-end plugging in numbers."

On the other hand, for owners with a business knack, touching base with a CPA periodically might suffice, Rossi said. "If you're small enough, you might just have an accountant to check your taxes and payroll when you need to. If you have someone you trust, you could do quarterly payroll accounting, check in with the accountant and only spend a couple thousand a year with tax returns and everything."

Whether a full-time employee, regular consultant or quarterly service, an accountant is well worth the investment, McClintock noted. "Guys in our industry are not afraid to spend \$30,000 on a truck, but when it comes to dropping three grand a year for something that keeps your operation together [they might hesitate]," he said. "Don't be afraid to spend the money as long as you know what you're getting."

**WHO FITS THE BILL?** Exactly what qualities should owners seek in an accountant? In McClintock's case, he wants someone to do more than tax time computations. And just as

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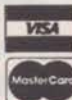
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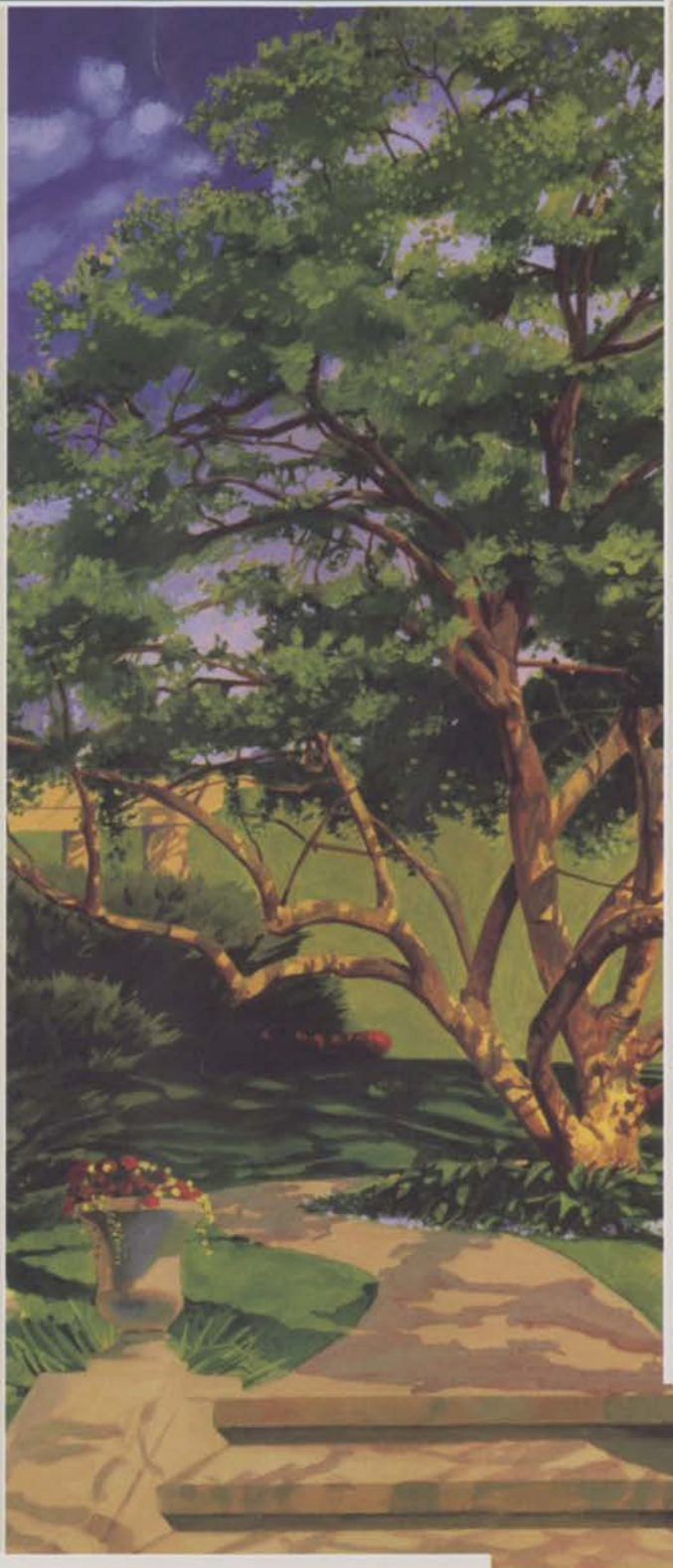
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- Low use rates

**COMPASS provides broad-spectrum disease management.**

**COMPASS delivers excellent control of these diseases:**

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- Black spot
- *Botrytis*
- Downy mildew
- Leaf spot
- Powdery mildew
- Rust
- Apple scab



# P R O T E C T I O N   G U I D E

*COMPASS delivers protection from the most damaging diseases.*

## **Not Just Innovative: Revolutionary**

COMPASS has an innovative mode of action that securely locks the fungicide into the plant surface, where it is then absorbed in the waxy layer of the plant, resulting in a protective reservoir of strobilurin fungicide for rain-resistant disease control that can last up to 28 days.

## **High Efficacy at Low Rates**

COMPASS delivers high efficacy against a broad spectrum of diseases at the lowest rates of any fungicide on the market.



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**COMPASS™**

*COMPASS Delivers the Highest Efficacy Against a Broad Spectrum of Diseases at the Lowest Rates of Any Disease Control Product.*





Disease	Foliar Spray Rate	Intervals
Anthrachnose <i>Colletotrichum</i>	2-4 oz/100 gal	7- to 14-day intervals until the threat of disease is over
Black spot <i>Diplocarpon</i>	2-4 oz/100 gal	7- to 14-day intervals until the threat of disease is over
Botrytis <i>Botrytis</i>	2-4 oz/100 gal	7- to 14-day intervals until the threat of disease is over
Leaf spot <i>Septoria</i>	2-4 oz/100 gal	7- to 14-day intervals until the threat of disease is over
Rust <i>Gymnosporangium</i> <i>Phragmidium</i>	2-4 oz/100 gal	7- to 14-day intervals until the threat of disease is over
Scab <i>Cladosporium</i>	2-4 oz/100 gal	7- to 14-day intervals until the threat of disease is over
Scab <i>Venturia inaequalis</i>	2-4 oz/100 gal	7- to 14-day intervals until the threat of disease is over
Downey mildew <i>Peronospora</i>	1-2 oz/100 gal	7- to 14-day intervals until the threat of disease is over
Powdery mildew <i>Erysiphe</i> <i>Microsphaera</i> <i>Oidium</i> <i>Podosphaera</i> <i>Sphaerotheca</i>	1-2 oz/100 gal	7- to 14-day intervals until the threat of disease is over

COMPASS Fungicide is classified as a Reduced Risk compound by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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# Minding Your Business

he offers his landscape customers a list of his company's available services, his accountant presented him with the financial benefits of his firm.

First, the professional will monitor cash flow and oversee long-term assets and long-term debt. In other words, when McClintock makes an equipment purchase, the accountant might advise whether to use a line of credit or cash, depending on the company's cash flow at that time. Bookkeeping duties will also be double-checked, as well as operating expenses and loans, and the accountant also can provide information on bank interest rates and lines of credit. "They are on top of all that pertains to the day-to-day operating expenses, which is crucial because we're not always paying attention to that because we are too busy going yard to yard," McClintock admitted.

Perry added that job costing and estimating is a common pitfall for businesses and asking accountants to audit costing systems can reduce crunches for cash down the road. This detail work is where some mistakes slip

though the cracks, he noted. Also, accountants can find tax breaks for owners, who generally do not keep up with the multitude of tax amendments each year, Rossi said.

"Tax laws take a lot of reading," he asserted, noting that owners should ask potential accountants if they attend seminars to refresh their knowledge. "There are so many things that change to your advantage, and an accountant needs to know these."

Rossi's accountant files state and federal employee reports each quarter and helps him depreciate asset accounts. Most of all, the CPA serves as a watchdog for paperwork mistakes. "There is something to be said for having a professional firm that what they do for a living is accounting," he emphasized. "They are willing to stick their profession on the paperwork and they sign it. That means something to the government, and it's a good idea for any company to not just keep their own set of books at the office, but to have someone preparing returns."

Someone – but not just anyone. Rossi suggested acquiring references – both pro-

fessional and personal – and checking credentials and resumes. Also, find out if they are too busy to take on another client. "Look for someone who is not too busy to spend the time with you to educate you and look into your business deeply to see where things might need changed, but someone who can also stay up on annual tax laws," he advised.

Also, choose an accountant you trust – someone you can confide in, Perry suggested. Honesty is crucial. "You have to let him know about you, your background, your goals and how you are going to structure your business" he detailed. "You have to feed him the 100-percent truth so you can get a 100-percent answer. There is nothing wrong with saying, 'I don't have a lot of money and I need to borrow.' They can tell you how and where to go. They know what the average guy doesn't." – *Kristen Hampshire* **LL**

*The author is Managing Editor – Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at khampshire@lawnandlandscape.com.*

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by Nicole Wisniewski

Today, instead of running day-to-day operations, Bartels gets a chance to focus on his company's growth and development.

Photo: Richard Nicol

### **NORTHWESTERN LANDSCAPE CO.**

**HEADQUARTERS:** Puyallup, Wash.

**FOUNDED:** 1982

**BRANCHES:** Redmond, Wash., and Seattle, Wash.

**2001 REVENUE:** \$11.9 million

**2002 PROJECTED REVENUE:** \$13 million

**SERVICE MIX:** 55 percent installation and 45 percent maintenance

**CLIENT MIX:** 75 percent commercial, 10 percent residential, 15 percent government/municipal

**EMPLOYEES:** 150 year-round and 50 seasonal

### **THE PHILOSOPHY**

**MISSION STATEMENT:** Northwestern Landscape Co. is committed to providing the highest level of quality and customer service; and through profitable growth, we can ensure the success of our organization for the future of our employees.

**CURRENT/FUTURE CHALLENGES:** The economy, controlling growth and developing necessary personnel to meet growth needs.

### **THE OWNER**

**PRESIDENT:** Jonathan Bartels

**BACKGROUND:** Bartels grew up working in his parents' and grandparents' yards.

**At a Glance**

Each decade has certain definitive characteristics.

The 1960s inspired flower power and bellbottoms, the 1970s brought disco to the dance clubs and Saturday Night Fever to the theater, and the 1980s is labeled the self-indulgent "me" decade when ET phoned home and people cried over John Lennon's death and celebrated Prince Charles and Lady Diana's royal wedding.

Decades also mark business milestones, as they did for Jonathan Bartels.

Bartels calls his first 10 business years "a learning experience." The president of the 20-year-old Northwestern Landscape Co., Puyallup, Wash., said it wasn't until decade No. 2 that the company really took off. "We were probably at \$3 to \$4 million when we started our second decade and that's when we started to apply a lot of what we learned in our first 10 years of business," Bartels said.

The owner of this \$13-million-dollar company plans to start a third decade by embracing new services and morphing the business to match market changes and secure its future success.

### **Northwestern Landscape Co.**

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Puyallup, Wash. 98371  
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FX: 253/848-8187  
[www.northwesternlandscape.com](http://www.northwesternlandscape.com)

**A TIME TO GROW.** Bartels truly can say he got his hands dirty learning the landscaping business. Though as a chore, Bartels helped his mom and dad in the garden and played underneath the big willow tree in his grandparents' yard.

Bartels leaned on this childhood pastime when he wanted to secure a job and make money during high school. Each year, the work multiplied and by graduation, he had classmates helping him start his company.

Bartels wrapped his arms around these years like one would a college course textbook and immersed himself in self-taught business basics. "I didn't go to college and get a degree in business management and I didn't work for other companies to see what they did or didn't do right and how it affected them," he explained, pointing out weaknesses he realized early on.

(continued on page 48)

# Decades of DIS



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## Cover Story

(continued from page 45)

Bartels secured focused advisors – an attorney and an accountant – to get him through this trial-by-error period. He had friends who stuck by him during these years, which also smoothed entrepreneurship ups and downs.

He also paid attention to profits and made sure growth never came before them. "A lot of companies put growth before profit when they are young – they want to take on more but this slows them down in the long run," Bartels said. "I tried to keep profit strong at every level of growth. At the end of the year, I made sure I had a strong bottom line by paying attention during the year and making changes where I needed too, such as keeping my debt low and making sure I had the working capital to support growth."

By the start of the 1990s, pop and punk rock music were creating that decade's defining sounds, and Bartels had grown Northwestern to \$4 million and its client split was now 75 percent commercial, 10 percent residential and 15 percent government/municipal.

*The Northwestern senior management team includes (clockwise from top left): Frank Miesner, Linda Oakes, Randy Morris, Jonathan Bartels, Bob Morris, and Jeff Telgenhoff. Not pictured is Tony Toste. Photo: Richard Nicol*



Bartels also added commercial maintenance at this point to please installation clients who requested this service.

Despite obvious success, Bartels wanted a more structured company. Up until this point, there was no mission statement, budgeting process or management team in place – the business was booming, but lacked organization. This decade-long entrepreneurship crash course whet Bartels' appetite for real business-building growth.

"Instead of managing the company like a

sole proprietorship, I wanted to start working for the overall good of the company," Bartels explained. "This decade is when everything came into focus and I started applying what I had learned in a different way."

**DECADE OF DEFINEMENT.** Bartels wanted to continue growing, so he knew he had to build a sturdy support system.

He embraced a structure where five profit centers reside under two main divisions –

(continued on page 50)

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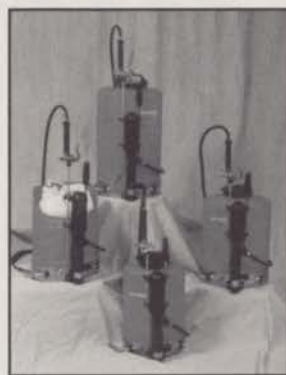
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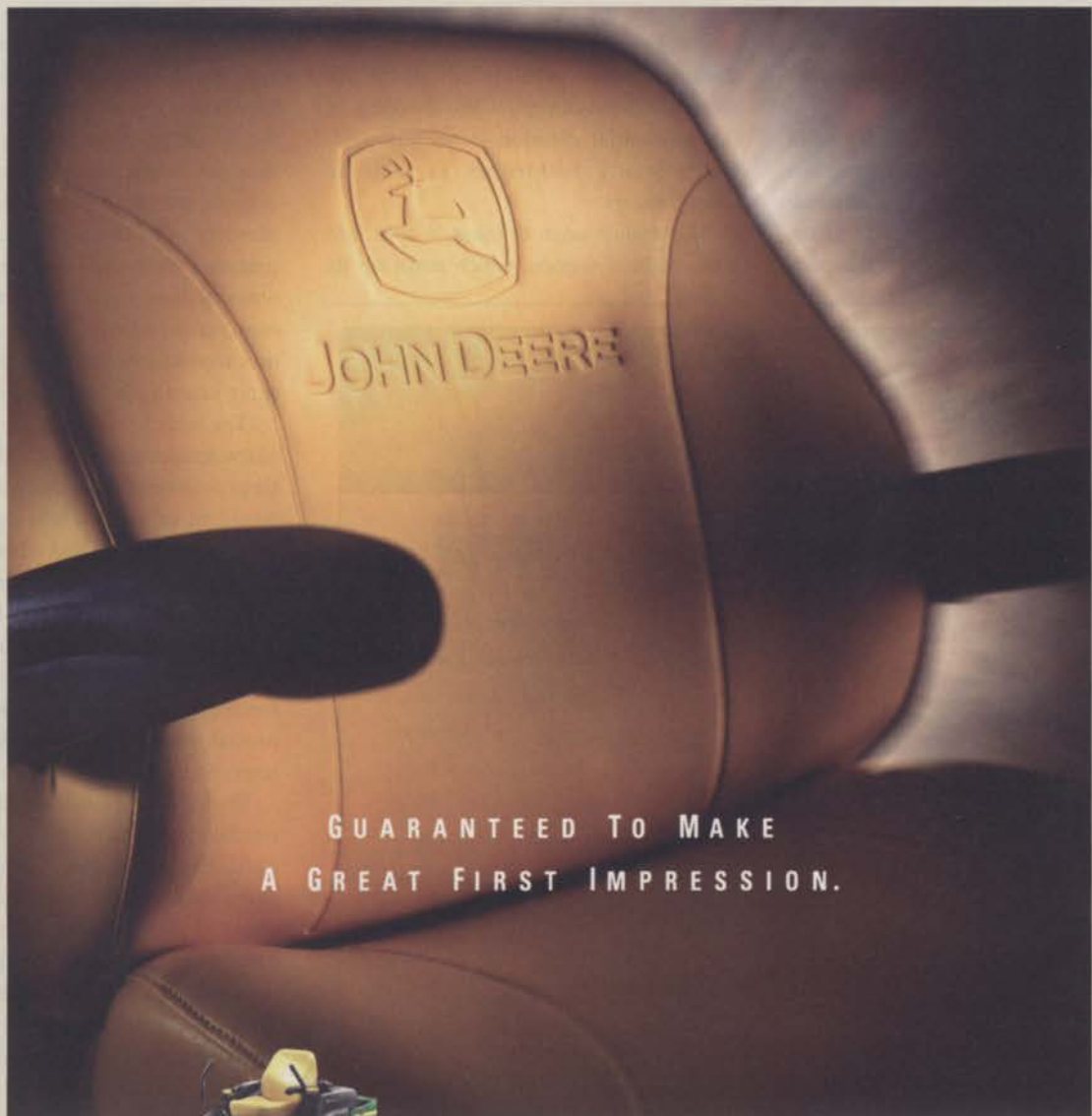
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USE READER SERVICE #25



## Cover Story

(continued from page 48)

the construction division's residential and commercial departments and three maintenance branches.

The construction division, which instead of using a typical design/build approach is more on the build end bringing local landscape architects' and designers' plans to life, includes commercial and residential depart-

ments. Key customers in the commercial division include general contractors and commercial developers, while the focus in the residential division is on high-end, single-family residences as well as homebuilders.

The maintenance division is split into three distinct regions, which make up its

branches: Puyallup, Redmond and Seattle. Each branch operates exactly the same in what Bartels calls a branch prototype system, with five to six people answering to the branch manager: an administrative assistant in charge of hiring and office duties; a special projects manager who oversees enhancements, all irrigation work and renovations; a full-time seasonal color expert; a business development/sales person and two to three production supervisors, each responsible for managing ongoing property maintenance.

The branch managers are part of the senior management team, which in addition to them consists of three other people: the vice president of construction operations, vice president of finance and administration and the residential construction department manager – all of whom report to Bartels.

Bartels meets with the entire management team for three hours twice monthly. The first meeting is based on the previous month's financial results and the second meeting is reserved for general business and training.

During these meetings, budgets are closely watched to ensure the company is staying on track. The group also reviews various reports, such as job costing, sales, labor and retention factors, observing trends and discussing improvements, Bartels pointed out.

Additionally, Bartels meets with each of the six managers individually once a week. "These people run their own show, but we get a chance to sit down weekly one-on-one to discuss specific problems, concerns or goals."

Once a management team was in place, managing the numbers and the future more effectively – i.e. developing strategic planning and budgeting processes – became crucial.

Northwestern's extensive budgeting process takes place in the fall, where departments sets goals, plan capital purchases and create an overall budget that rolls into their strategic growth plans, Bartels said. The strategic growth plans, which are mainly split up by division – construction and maintenance – are finalized and/or revised during this process. The work culminates in a year-end planning meeting, where senior managers share finalized budgets and confirm goals.

In July, the senior managers convene again for a semiannual meeting to readjust budget numbers for the rest of the year, if necessary.

By holding senior managers accountable

(continued on page 52)

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## Cover Story

(continued from page 50)

during this process and essentially running the company as autonomous organizations instead of one big business, Bartels believes these managers set examples as role models for the rest of the employees. "It sort of acts as a people retention method because it shows that people starting out can grow into management positions based on performance," he shared. "By empowering people in the company and letting them take on new responsibilities, it helps develop their skills and ultimately improve their opportunities to advance within the company."

"Also, as a reward for helping us grow and accomplish company goals," Bartels continued, "employees who have been here three or more years are eligible to receive an incentive if the company has reached a certain amount of profit."

But what is a reorganized company without a mission? Before a business can be recognized as having structure or values, it needs to have a stated purpose. Since Northwestern

did not have a mission statement, Bartels decided to enlist the help of his senior management team to create one that would act as "marching orders for what we are trying to accomplish on a daily basis," he said.

He asked each of his senior managers to go to their respective divisions and, as a group, come up with their idea of the perfect mission statement. After all the mission statements were written, the senior management team presented their ideas to Bartels. "They were all really proud of their own version," he enthused. "But then as we blended different parts of them all, we realized that we came up with a better one together than we did separately." (To read Northwestern's mission statement, see page 44).

But a mission statement by itself wasn't enough, Bartels decided. In addition, he drafted what he calls the company's guiding principles, which list more specific responsibilities all managers and employees should adhere to daily. "I developed them

as a founder explaining what I'd like to see accomplished everyday so that we are making a positive impact," he explained, adding that all new employees receive copies of the mission statement and guiding principles when they are hired so they are aware of the company's culture (see *The Vision Viewfinder* on page 54 for more information).

**A NEW ERA.** By 2001, the company more than doubled its revenue to \$11.9 million. A big part of this boost was the streamlining of the maintenance division, which happened five years ago when Bartels realized that for that profit center to be more effective, the company needed another office at the Puget Sound region's north end. "We spent a tremendous amount of travel time going up to Redmond, which is 40 minutes from our main office, to maintain clients' landscapes," Bartels said. "The commute was killing us."

(continued on page 54)



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## Cover Story

(continued from page 52)

This past winter, the company also saw the need for another branch in Seattle. Bartels approached Jeff Telgenhoff, who at the time owned his own maintenance company called Pacific Landscape. "We were looking for an opportunity to build more accounts in that region to justify adding the branch," Bartels said. "We approached Jeff with the idea of acquiring his accounts and in the process we realized we were looking for a person like him to run that branch."

Northwestern purchased Pacific Landscape's accounts and made Telgenhoff the Seattle branch manager. This boosted the company's maintenance revenue by approx \$500,000 in that area, which will help cover the extra overhead costs necessary to start the new branch.

In addition to branching out the maintenance division, Bartels decided that improving performance also meant creating a branch prototype system with specialists in various

(continued on page 110)

To stress a more positive daily atmosphere at Northwestern Landscape Co., Puyallup, Wash., President Jonathan Bartels drafted guiding principles in addition to a company mission statement. The purpose is to make sure new employees, as well as senior managers, are aware of what the company strives to accomplish daily.

Some of the guiding principles are:

- *Integrity & fairness.* To Bartels, these words amount to leadership in the company and making sure managers treat employees fairly so employees will, in turn, treat clients fairly. "As the president and founder of the company, I remind my managers constantly of these principles in the actions I take and when talking with them during meetings," he said. "And we promote and reward people who display these qualities by moving them into supervisory and management positions."
- *Commitment to excellence.* "This is most visible in the company awards we've received for projects we've worked on and through annual customer surveys we send out to clients," Bartels explained. "We collect the survey results and share them with the management team and people in the field to let them know what customers are thinking."
- *Positive, enjoyable work environment.* "We do this by having employee events throughout the year to encourage interaction," Bartels commented. "We have a summer family picnic where employees bring their families and we bring in clowns or magicians for the kids and have kid-and-parent games where they are working together to reach goals. We have a big raffle during the event where we give away prizes, like camping gear and children's toys. Then, throughout the year, we have company breakfasts or barbecues to reward goals and let people know we appreciate their efforts."
- *Opportunity for all.* "We focus on promoting people from within the company - 90 percent of our key managers and supervisors have been promoted from within," Bartels enthused. — **Nicole Wisniewski**

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# Down to EARTH

Peter Donovan clearly recalls a conversation eight years ago that sent his systems for a loop and spun his business in a 180-degree turn for the better.

"My friend, who owns a nursery, asked me, 'How much will it cost you to open your doors tomorrow?'" said the president of Earthworks Landscaping, Wakefield, Mass. "I looked at him with six heads," he laughed. "Then he said to me, 'Don't go out into the field until you know.'"

Donovan and his wife, Linda, who serves as vice president and runs office administrative operations, collected every receipt and the two sat down for a three-day number-crunching powwow, adding each cost and figuring overhead expenses.

Still, Donovan is flabbergasted by his blank stare to a question so crucial to running an efficient, profit-bearing business, but as illustrated by the company's 40-percent revenue growth last year, things have changed since. The difference? Now, Donovan can tell you that each hour costs him exactly \$36.25 – and his customers are paying for a mulch application instead of vice-versa. "We were getting raked over the coals," Donovan remarked. "The bottom line is, know your numbers. What does it cost you to be in business? If you don't know, how do you know if you're making money?"

This mantra held steadfast – and it will drive the changes at Earthworks this year, as it hopes to push up profits 40 percent.

This number sounds a bit high, perhaps, but Donovan considers it conservative. The company's \$340,000 revenue last year grew from \$240,000 the year before, the extra dollars stemming from a hardscape division that started mid-season. And, with hardscape jobs booked through spring, Peter's brother, Charlie, managing the fertilization department full-time, and new systems to cut overtime, spread the company name and sell add-ons to existing clients, Donovan is confident this year will be the "best numbers year yet."

**THE ROUGH DRAFT.** Donovan wasn't always so optimistic about the future for Earthworks. In 1998, Linda reminded Peter that he wasn't sure the business would support their family – with "three under three," as Linda describes their children. "We needed to set goals and priorities, but we had no clue where to go," she said.

Donovan went to New England Grows, a conference and tradeshow in Boston, Mass., and he came home with

(continued on page 58)

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Peter Donovan parks his three trucks at his home-office, which is situated on commercial property. Photo: Earthworks



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## First Look

(continued from page 56)

new ideas and fresh perspective. "I had friends in similar businesses and they went big-time," he said. "They were buying nicer houses and they had nicer cars, and I'm going, 'You know, what's the deal here?'"

Peter realized he needed more manpower than just him, Linda and his maintenance manager, Anthony Rigiore. He hired addi-

tional employees and trained them to maintain his accounts, which largely are high-end residential homes in his Boston suburb, which is infected with the same urban sprawl many U.S. cities see today. New construction opportunities built up his client list and offering more services to his key accounts kept



*Donovan stressed the importance of careful hiring practices to find employees who mesh with company goals.*



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them coming back. "Don't go out and look for new business when you already have a client base that knows you, knows your work and trusts you," Linda emphasized, noting that 98 percent of clients purchase multiple services. "Ask for their business."

This principle explains Earthworks' service mix: 50 percent maintenance, 30 percent installation and 20 percent lawn care. Three two-man crews handle jobs, and 75 percent of employees are cross-trained. Donovan expects to hire two more employees this season, however, to keep up with the company's growth, and he is also looking for someone to manage the hardscape department, which is his primary concentration at this point.

While Donovan allots most of his field time to installation projects, his brother, Charlie, will increase his duties at Earthworks to become the full-time fertilization manager in the spring. This will tap into another profit center for the company, Donovan noted.

**ONGOING REVISIONS.** Meanwhile, Linda manages the administrative flurry in their home office – a colonial situated on commercial property with a two-room office extension and a back yard that houses three storage areas and a fenced in section for their three service trucks. Earthworks and the Donovan residence are one in the same, and Linda says their clients appreciate and relate to the down-to-earth office setting.

"Seventy percent of the time it's a stay-at-home mom calling you, and when I say, 'I'm Peter's wife,' you have no idea how valuable that is," she explained. "For them, it's a personal touch, and they think, 'This woman is doing what I'm doing.'"

This human connection defines many of Linda's projects as she strives to make a name for Earthworks with creative marketing ideas – bibs for children that say "We dig Earthworks Landscaping" and thank-you cards with bags

(continued on page 64)

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# OP Options

*When the organophosphate class of insecticides was restricted as part of FQPA, the lawn care industry lost important insecticides. Today, lawn care operators are identifying new options that deliver quality control.*





# OP Options

*When the organophosphate class of insecticides was restricted as part of FQPA, the lawn care industry lost important insecticides. Today, lawn care operators are identifying new options that deliver quality control.*

FOR YEARS, lawn care operators (LCOs) relied heavily on organophosphates as a critical part of their insect management program. In fact, organophosphate represented more than 75 percent of many LCOs' insecticide purchases. But in 1996, the government passed the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA), which called for a review of all pesticide products being sold to consumers and professionals. These reviews, of more than 9,000 products, have to be completed by 2006.

On Aug. 3, 1999, reviews of the first 3,000 products were completed, and LCOs learned they would lose access to organophosphates. Without these products, LCOs find themselves facing new challenges in order to continue delivering the level of insect control that their customers demand. In particular, they have to figure out exactly which products do the work they need done.

"LCOs' reactions to losing the organophosphates range from, 'It's no big deal,' to 'What am I going to do?'" recalled George

Raymond, product manager for Chipco Professional Products, Montvale, N.J. "Those with good technical groups had already been testing alternatives. This was a bigger problem for smaller operators who had a comfort level with these products. They knew what to buy, the application rates, what the products controlled. They weren't worried they couldn't find replacement products, but they didn't want to."

For many LCOs, this process of identifying new insecticides continues to today. Obviously, having the right products in your insect control program is the foundation of the entire program and the key to delivering the desired control. But with so many products to choose from and so many labels to explore, where do you start this search? How do you decide which are the best products for you? Here are some options to consider.

"But they have a lot of options now," Raymond observed. "They just have to look at their own situations and make the right decision."

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# Quiz Yourself

HOW'S YOUR KNOWLEDGE about different pesticide chemistries? Are you looking for a way to educate your employees about the products they apply? Check out the "Options for OP Replacement," a training module available online at Chipco Academy ([www.aventischipco.com](http://www.aventischipco.com)). Training includes materials and interactive quizzes on old and new insecticide chemistries, legal issues and government restrictions, OP replacements options and more. Example questions are on pages 3 and 4 with the answers on page 4.

Many LCOs find themselves using more liquid formulations because some of the newer products aren't available on granules yet. Photos: Chipco Professional Products

## 1. Which of the following is not a characteristic of organophosphates?

- A. All with low toxicity
- B. Many restricted under FQPA
- C. Effects on animals usually can't be reversed
- D. Break down quickly

(See answer on page 4)

**PICK A CLASS.** Without organophosphates to work with, LCOs turned their attention primarily to two other classes of pesticides: carbamates and pyrethroids.

"Generally, carbamates are used at a higher rate per acre than the pyrethroids, but they also have an opportunity to be used as a curative product for grubs and surface-feeding insects," Raymond pointed out. "That's a big difference. Everybody knows the carbamates, how to use them, what to use them on and that they offer a little broader control."

Pyrethroids are the newer insecticides, so LCOs may not be as familiar with them. "Pyrethroids mean getting used to a very low dosage rate, and they are unbelievably good at a very low rate for the surface feeders," Raymond explained. "They are generally low odor and reasonably good, broad-spectrum materials with a good label in this day and age."

Raymond's phrase "this day and age" really stands out. Successful lawn care companies know they have to plan their control programs differently than in the past when blanket applications of one or two products would eliminate the threat of most pest problems.

Products aren't labeled for use on as many sites today as they were even 10 years ago, and they likely control fewer problems. The good news is that less product needs to be applied and the products are safer for the environment and the technicians handling them. "LCOs have to fine tune their program," Raymond noted. "They need to think about insect control and review what's available to them, which depends on their application method. There are a limited number of granular products with pyrethroids or

carbamates on them compared to how many granulars had organophosphates, but liquid applicators will have more to choose from."

Selecting the right product for your own needs doesn't have to be a complicated process, according to Raymond. "Initially, look at the pest you want to control," he stressed. "What insects do you most commonly apply for? Then make a checklist comparing different products. Do the labels have a broad spectrum of places to apply? What restrictions are on the label? Look at the issues that matter most for your situation."

**STRONGER AS A RESULT.** While pesticide suppliers recognize the problems losing the organophosphates created for many LCOs, they also believe this transition will result in better lawn care companies. "Now, these companies are all looking at more than one chemistry and they want experience with different products because they got burned by relying so heavily on one class," Raymond observed, adding that many companies are going through this process this year because they purchased a lot of organophosphate inventory before the products were taken off the market. "This change will help these companies become more targeted or focused on particular pests. In addition, companies that worry about pesticide resistance will be better prepared to rotate their products with this new expertise."

## 2. The perfect insecticide would not offer what?

- A. Environmental safety
- B. Toxicity
- C. Residual
- D. Selectivity

(See answer on page 4)





# Searching for a new Solution

JOE WILLIAMS readily admits that he wasn't happy when organophosphates lost their labels after review by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1999. In fact, the president of Pensacola, Fla.-based Lawn Master said that his company relied so heavily on these products that it stockpiled enough inventory (which the EPA allowed professional users to do) to last all of last season.

Now, Williams and thousands of lawn care professionals like him, face the challenge of identifying new insecticides they can use to deliver the control customers demand. "Organophosphates were probably used for 60 to 75 percent of our insect control," Williams noted. "We knew this was going to be a major problem for us, so we started looking for new products a couple of years ago, but it didn't become a real issue until this year."



Joe Williams

**UNDERSTAND YOUR OPTIONS.** So how can lawn care operators (LCOs) make the most of this situation and continue pleasing customers while also turning a profit? In Williams' case, the first step to answering that question meant testing.

"Last year we started testing a handful of different products and different chemistries on our properties to see how they worked," he explained. Conducting this field research meant selecting six to eight properties to each be treated with one of the various products for the entire season and then comparing the results at the end of the year.

Williams understands that the biggest profit killer for any LCO is retreating a customer's property because that means spending money without charging anything, so he wanted to

3. Which is not an IPM control tactic?

- A. Sanitation
- B. Physical tactics
- C. Host plant resistance
- D. Insecticide rotation

(See answer below)

know how many retreats were required on the properties with the new products. "Of course, you have to keep in mind that a lot of retreats are driven by customer calls or the customer's failure to irrigate properly, but that can happen with any product," he pointed out.

After a year of testing and preparing for the transition, Williams has found products he has high hopes for, not to mention some additional benefits he didn't expect as well. "I think being more diverse in terms of the products we use gives us more product to choose from if one supplier decides to go up in price," he observed, giving voice to a common concern among LCOs that without the organophosphates many insecticide prices would skyrocket. "Plus, we simply have

more products to choose from, which gives us more options to get the result we want."

**FORMULATE A PLAN.** Part of Lawn Master's research included evaluating different product formulations to compare and contrast the results they offered. "Several of these insecticides are available in granular or liquid formulations, and the liquids come as wettable powders as well," he noted. "But we would rather use the granulars so we don't have to tank mix and then feel pressure to apply to properties that don't really need the application just to empty the tank."

And his efforts to make this insecticide transition have readied him for a similar change that may be looming – the loss of the popular herbicide chemistry of triazines.

"We're already looking at other herbicides to get ready for losing those products, in case that happens," Williams remarked.

But, again, the key for Williams is having the flexibility to pick the right product in the right formulation for a particular problem pest or property. "I think we'll see more products in the future that are weed- or insect-specific," he predicted. "That means we'll have to have a lot more backpack sprayers or tanks, and that could be a big challenge. We'll have to educate the customer and the employee to know exactly what products work on what pests, and that's a significant job for us. Customers will have to understand that we can't always treat when we're there."

4. What characteristics are important when replacing OPs?

- A. Reduced human and environmental exposure
- B. IPM compatibility
- C. Reduced pounds of pesticide use
- D. All of the above

(See answer below)



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(continued from page 60)

of seed for clients who request estimates, even if they don't choose to purchase the services. A newsletter is in the works and the company rewards clients for referrals with free fertilizer applications and gift certificates for dinners with their families. "That's my baby now," she said of these recent incentive additions. "I want our name to get out there."

While Linda concentrates on these developments and bookkeeping, she relies more on their accountant for financial advice and has trusted another accountant with the checkbook. "When you're running the kind of money in and out every day that we do, you need help," she said simply.

Donovan agrees. Asking for assistance

Check this story online for insight on Earthworks' partnership approach to business.

will keep the business focused. "Peter cannot be everywhere every time and have knowledge in every field," Linda piped in.

This is why "educated delegation" will be a large part of Earthworks' future, Donovan noted. As he passes off key responsibilities in the hardscape division and lets Charlie handle fertilization, he will concentrate on tweaking inefficiencies, like timing, cutting down man-hours and implementing an incentive program.

Already, the company has whittled last year's 55- to 60-hour workweek down to 40 to 45 hours. Crews know they have a schedule to stick to, and finishing it in fewer hours means more free time. "Last year was our biggest growth year, but also our biggest payroll and overtime year," Donovan said. "If I could have controlled our overtime – that really shot our net full of holes."

Already, the company notices less burn-out among employees and has increased efficiency on jobs.

Also, Donovan is sticking to the clock when timing jobs so he can accurately estimate project man-hours. No more guesswork, no more wasted hours spent loading trucks or stopping between jobs. "Right now, we're timing each job," he noted, stressing the specificity of his records. "We go there at 8:07 a.m. and we leave at 12:08 p.m. – we have more detail to our [labor tracking] and we're getting it down to the minute to know exactly to the penny how much we spent on the job."

Donovan knows tackling these operational adjustments will take more than a three-day workshop, but he's heading into growth with numbers in mind.

"Right now, there is only so much one company can handle at once," Donovan admitted, realizing the weight of his own words – the challenges that come with carrying out his hefty to-do list. "Earthworks isn't at 100-percent efficiency, but it's three-quarters of the way there." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor – Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [khampshire@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:khampshire@lawnandlandscape.com).

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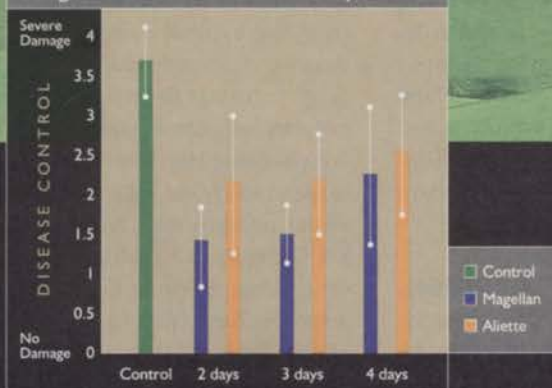
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**USE READER SERVICE #31**



by Nicole Wisniewski

*You've formed solid client relationships and lured clients with visual landscape design bait. Think you're off the hook? Think again. Now you must close the sale.*

# It's In The Reel

build clients with some fairly appetizing visual bait, but the "gone fishing" approach doesn't always close the sale. Without some strong pulls on the rod and a little crafty maneuvering, the fish will just take the worm.

Contractors can't waste time waiting for hesitant clients to bite. To reel in design/build sales, contractors have to put the weight of professionalism behind their reel and use proper estimation and budget discussion, as well as other helpers, like design fees and phased-in projects, to hoist sales on board.

### PLACE A STANDARD ON DESIGN.

Since landscape design sales involve visual and artistic creations, charging for this expertise is customary – and can encourage clients, who already have invested in designs, to retain contractors for build services as well.

But customers typically confuse estimates with designs and plans during the sales process, which makes placing a value on them difficult, pointed out Andy White, president and majority owner, Wayside Landscape Services, Asheville, N.C. "For all practical purposes, bids, prices, estimates and proposals are the same things," he explained. "An estimate should be free because it is merely a price to do a previously defined job. Do not confuse estimating with designing: One task is done for free, the other is not."

Most design/build contractors charge for their design work because it demonstrates a client's sincere interest in the project and shows that he or she has a clear understanding of the time and skill needed to produce that design.

Though many contractors bill for designs, some admit doing so early in a business' history is challenging. "It is tough to [charge for designs] when you just start out because you see all this work and you think, 'Hey, they have this money to spend and I need the work, so I will do all this planning work for free to get the job,'" admitted Chip McClintock, president, Green & White Outdoors Landscape Co., Kent, Ohio. "But then you do all that work and they don't hire you – now what?"

Donna Vignocchi, vice president of sales and marketing, ILT Vignocchi, Wauconda, Ill., agreed, stating that experience and professionalism are worth the extra cost. "We are landscape architects and, therefore, charge for our professional services," she maintained.

All contractors charge differently for their design work. Some base design fees on the time it takes an architect or designer to complete the drawing or plan. For instance, Rick Winnestaffer, president, WinnScapes, Gahanna, Ohio, said his company charges approximately \$50 an hour, "so a \$200- to \$400-design is not elaborate," he re-

*(continued on page 68)*

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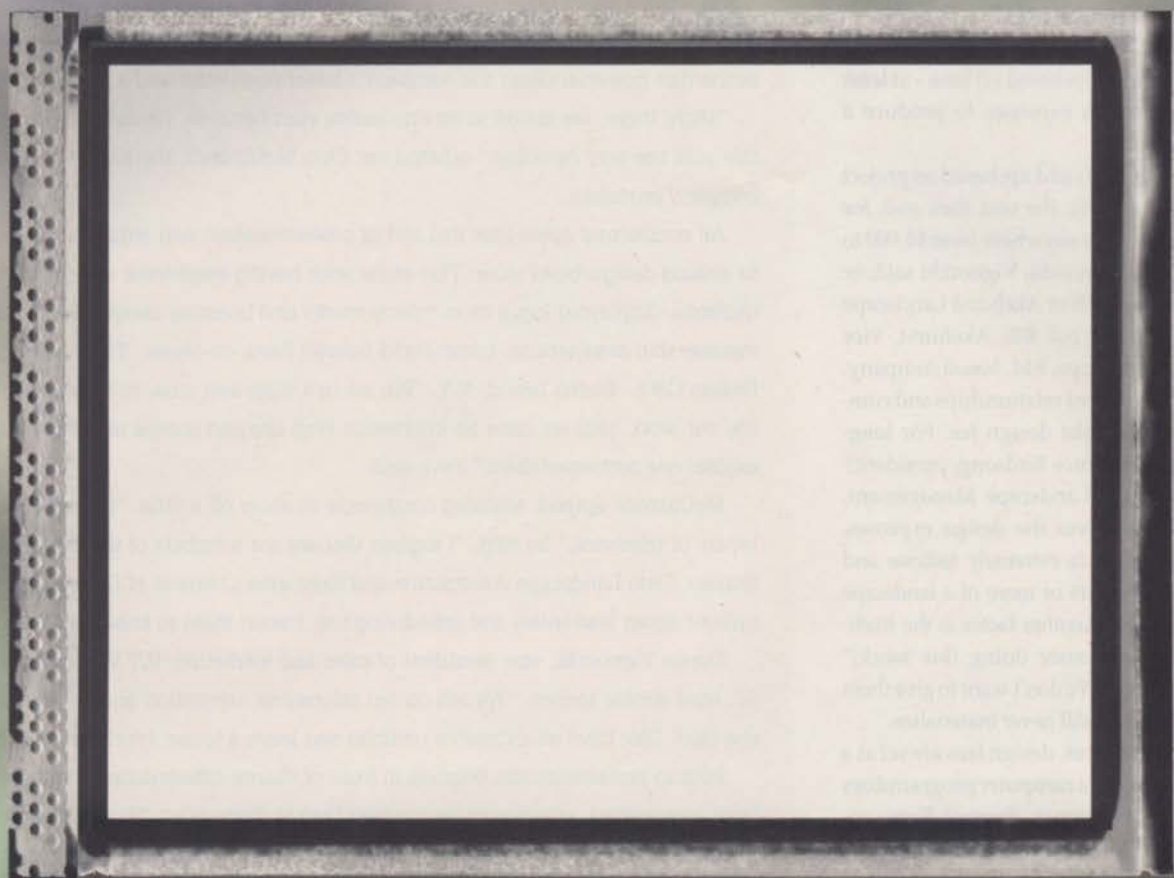
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*Securing design/build sales is like fishing – contractors must use many tactics, like design fees, to draw clients in.*



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USE READER SERVICE #32



(continued from page 66)

marked. "It's a quick sketch that works simply to show a general idea."

Wayside Landscape Services also charges its clients design fees based on time – at least \$75 per hour plus expenses to produce a plan, White said.

And as the hours add up, based on project size and complexity, the cost rises and, for example, can range anywhere from \$1,000 to \$75,000 at ILT Vignocchi, Vignocchi said, or from \$150 to \$50,000 at Akehurst Landscape Services, pointed out Bill Akehurst, vice president of the Joppa, Md.-based company.

Sometimes, client relationships and commitments dictate the design fee. For long-time customers, Bruce Birdsong, president/owner, Precision Landscape Management, Dallas, Texas, waives the design expenses, unless the project is extremely tedious and requires a few hours or more of a landscape architect's time. "Another factor is the likelihood of the customer doing this work," Birdsong added. "We don't want to give them ideas for jobs that will never materialize."

In other instances, design fees are set at a base price because a computer program does the work. For instance, Samuel Fava, co-owner, TLC Landscaping & Design Corp., Staten Island, N.Y., uses digital imaging software to produce a likeness of the completed project. He charges a base price of \$300 and adds to this as needed for more difficult drawings or larger projects. "Then we do a three- to five-page proposal explaining every detail plus options, including cost and warranties," Fava explained. "Digital imaging has been the best sales pitch by itself. The client gets to see an actual photo of the completed job before we lift our first tool – they love it. And it gives us an edge over the guy who says, 'Imagine this here and this over there.'"

However, talking the visual talk works for some contractors. Akehurst said his top gun design/build salesman Charles Newcomb "can sell ice cubes to an Eskimo," when he's depicting vast landscape plans with words. "He is not a very good designer when it comes to plotting on paper, but he knows what he wants to do with the project and conveys that through words to his clients," Akehurst explained, adding that on one occasion Newcomb drew a very quick, yet bland, black-marker sketch in the field with the client, but his verbal description

**A**fter a client calls, Green & White Outdoors' office manager sets an appointment, and as soon as she hangs up the phone, she prepares an envelope and sends that potential client the company's latest newsletter and a meeting reminder.

"Right there, we are off to an impressive start because, typically, clients receive this mail the very next day," pointed out Chip McClintock, the Kent, Ohio-based company president.

All contractors agree that this sort of professionalism and organization are the keys to closing design/build sales. This starts with having employees wear neat matching uniforms, displaying logos on company trucks and boasting about awards and membership associations, commented Samuel Fava, co-owner, TLC Landscaping & Design Corp., Staten Island, N.Y. "We are in a tight-knit area, so future clients always see our work, plus we have an impressive Web site and annual newsletters that also explain our professionalism," Fava said.

McClintock agreed, advising contractors to show off a little. "I show clients my letters of reference," he said. "I explain that we are members of the Better Business Bureau, Ohio Landscape Association and Kent-area Chamber of Commerce. I am very upfront about warranties and scheduling too. I want them to know they can trust me."

Donna Vignocchi, vice president of sales and marketing, ILT Vignocchi, Wauconda, Ill., uses similar tactics. "We sell on our references, reputation and our end results," she said. "We have an extensive portfolio and leave a teaser brochure with clients."

Putting professionalism pointers in front of clients differentiates contractors from their competitors, which may be the best way to close sales. "Everyone makes mistakes like not paying close attention to the client's needs and wants, not moving the process along smoothly or not being as professional as the next guy," Fava said. "To avoid these problems and see and feel what the client wants, remember that client has to live with the final outcome, so deal with your current project instead of overdoing yourself, and always project professionalism in everything you do."

– Nicole Wisniewski

## Above All, Be Professional

and excitement about the project sold the job. "Upon completion of the sketch [and explanation], he looked them right in the eyes and said, 'That will cost about \$15,000, what do you say?' He closed the deal right then and there."

McClintock has sold jobs using a similar approach. "Many of the projects that are our bread and butter are those that I am able to prepare a thumbnail sketch of as well as including pictures downloaded from the Internet that depict specific plants," he said, referencing online plant dictionaries as ideal sources for these images.

But be careful when showing specific plant photos, Vignocchi warned. "We want to sell the concept, not the minutia," she said, point-

ing out that preliminary drawings act as budgets for ILT Vignocchi's clients of scale, i.e. projects that cost \$75,000 or more. "You don't want to have the customer stuck on the necessity of having a certain plant at the beginning of the sales process. The consequences could be that you cannot find it at the time of the installation. You have to be careful of setting up expectations that could trip you up later."

Since many design/build contractors want to sell clients on the design and the installation – and not one or the other – they often refund their design fees based on a build agreement to lure clients.

Wayside Landscape Services offers design-purchase rebates where some or the entire design fee factors into the construction



## Design/Build Sales

price as long as crews finish the project within the year. "This can be a decided advantage over companies that only offer design services," White said (see Wayside's example in *How We Do It* on page 118).

ILT Vignocchi uses a comparable method. "If they just want the design, we keep the retainer," Vignocchi said. "If they hire us for the installation, we return it. For example, if we collect a \$2,000 design fee, propose a \$100,000 landscape and the customer opts out of doing everything except for an option for annual flowers that total \$1,700, we would owe the client \$300 for installing flowers. This is a way to cover ourselves. That is why we set a minimum purchase amount for the return of the retainer. This one was a learning experience - a scenario that actually happened, believe it or not."

Clients like the one above, who tease contractors by nibbling at the \$100,000 bait, but then take only a tiny portion and run, aren't typically model clients for an average design/build contractor. Stating the design fees up front can save contractors from these wasted efforts. "Mentioning the charge is the fastest way that I get turned down for a sale," McClintock said. "This is fine with me, as it usually means that I have just eliminated a possible headache."

**OFFER PIECES & PARTS.** Occasionally, fishermen break up their days, casting their lines early in the morning one day and late at night the next. Maybe a fish steals the bait and runs the first day, but like a mouse, that potential catch will be back to sniff the cheese again.

Similarly, installing a design/build project in phases can help snag one large project. This works particularly for larger, more complex and expensive projects that can be split into parts, White said.

"Sometimes the only way to keep the door open when presenting a project is to break the project down into acceptable bites," Akehurst maintained. "The belief is that by having a project broken out the client is more likely to pick and choose, rather than become sticker-shocked by a lump sum that would close the door on the sale."

This lifts the pressure off of money-conscious clients and makes them more comfortable with closing the sale as long as they spend in small bits. "Customers can spread

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USE READER SERVICE #69



the cost over several years and not be hit with large capital expenditures all at once," Birdsong said. "If they see we can be flexible and work with them and within their budgets, they are inclined to go ahead with the project."

Because of the success of this sales tool, many contractors, like Fava, are adding stepped projects to their service options. Fava calls his P.O.M.P. – phasing out a master plan.

However, phasing in a landscape can add to its overall cost due to extra mobilization and other work-related inefficiencies, White pointed out. Phasing also needs to be planned carefully. "Phasing a project cannot be done haphazardly," he said. "It must be done in such a manner that work completed in an earlier phase is not affected by work done in later phases. Compare the phasing of a landscape with painting the floor of a room having only one exit. You must start at the furthest point and work towards the exit, otherwise you will be trapped or ruin your work trying to get out. In general, construction work must be done before planting work."

Phasing projects also requires client patience. Contractors should inform clients of the specifics of what each installation will include so they aren't shocked by the outcome. "Each project is unique and has its own logical phasing scheme," White said. "Once a landscape plan is developed, it is easy for the designer to define a phasing plan to suit the needs of the client. It is important to note that often the landscape element the client wants most or that is the main focal point cannot be included in the first phase because doing so would make completion of the later phases impossible or prohibitively expensive."

At Wayside, phasing also affects clients' rebate on design fees since the company's agreement states that all project phases must be completed within 12 months of the original proposal date to be eligible for rebate. "Despite the extra costs, sometimes phasing a project is the only way a client can afford it, much the same as a car loan makes it possible to purchase a new vehicle," White said.

Just as splitting up project steps aids sales, so does speeding up the installation to

meet a client's deadline. "When you are design/build, design and construction feed each other – we try to be very conscious of that. We can sell those projects to the clients more quickly because we can sell timeliness to them," Vignocchi commented. "We also try to fast-track certain projects if it will benefit the production schedule."

"But don't set up time expectations with the client that are unrealistic to your system," Vignocchi added, stating that building clients for referrals is the name of the game. "Instead, tell them they will see a design in five weeks and deliver it in two."

**TALK IN DOLLARS & SENSE.** After a contractor spends hours putting together a \$10,000 bid, crafting a nice presentation and presenting it to the client, the last words he or she wants to hear are, "Oh, I only have \$2,500 to spend," McClintock pointed out.

Budget is the most feared discussion among design/build contractors and cli-

**"Mentioning the charge is the fastest way that I get turned down for a sale. This is fine with me, as it usually means that I have just eliminated a possible headache."**

*– Chip McClintock*

ents. Clients fear revealing their budgets because they think a contractor will max it out, while contractors hesitate to ask, figuring they won't be able to sell a larger, more extravagant landscape once clients mention their magic number. Either way, without a budget discussion of some sort, both the client and the contractor lose due to wasted time and increased, unreachable expectations.

To avoid any misunderstandings, McClintock uses a sales trick that always forces a client to admit the budget he or she has in mind. "I find most clients are reluctant to tell me their budget, which at times I can understand," he said. "But what I have been doing this year that works really well is

call them [to tell them the amount their ideas will cost before I start designing the project] and that brings out the budget in them. For example, I called a client yesterday and told her our ideas would cost just over \$9,000 and then she said that in her mind she was thinking \$6,000. So, at this point, I have not wasted any time on preliminary or thumbnail sketches – I just used what she told me and what I saw from her property as a means to determine a close guesstimate. Now that I have her in range, I can draft the concept, run over to her house and nail the sale. And I saved myself a late night of drawing and not seeing the kids to bed – which I don't get paid for."

Using positive words also helps clients feel comfortable discussing budgets and ideas with contractors, Newcomb said. "It's like thinking of the close from the minute you meet them," he explained. "Speak positively with words like, 'when we do this...,' 'as we are doing this...,' or 'we will...'"

Then, Newcomb's encouraging closing statements include, "Do you want me to finalize this and move forward with this project?" "What can I do next?" or "Can we get together? I'd like to have your thoughts about this project and when we can get started."

Winnestaffer said another option is looking the client dead in the eye and asking, "May I do this job for you?" If there isn't an immediate acceptance, I'll try to address issues they have and schedule an appointment to follow up and keep them interested in the project."

And after asking the closing question, use a pause to expose answers, Newcomb advised. Just as a fisherman remains quiet as a fish nibbles the bait, waiting for the chance to reel it in, contractors can use the classic sales shut-up to close the sale. "Ask the right question and then wait for the answer," he said. "The pause is an absolute sales technique that forces the client to act. Say, 'What do you want me to do next?' And then take a break and let them do the talking." **□**

*The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com).*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is part two of a two-part series. To read part one, check out the May 2002 issue of Lawn & Landscape.



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## Incentive Programs

by Kristen Hampshire

*Give gold stars to your maintenance crews with incentive programs that reward not just productivity, but teamwork and quality.*

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Maintenance crews on the move jump from one account to the next – mowing, trimming, pruning, blowing. Front yard to back, space to space – soon, a neighborhood seems more like a life-sized Monopoly board where contractors make their way from Baltic to Boardwalk, working to “pass go” and collect \$200 dollars by the end of the day.

But swift players don’t always round the board with more money in the bank. In the maintenance game, productivity and speed aren’t one and the same. And if employees aren’t motivated to play the game without dragging their heels – without tending to quality and timing their progress – no one will win, pointed out Kurt Bland, maintenance division manager, Del Conte’s Landscaping, Fremont, Calif.

“Make employees realize we can’t do the job without them,” he emphasized. “Fifty to 60 percent of a maintenance budget is spent on labor. If you’re working on keeping your mowers happy all the time and you’re not worrying about your labor, then you’re denying 50 to 60 percent of what you do.”

**MAIN INCENTIVE.** Jerry Gaeta realizes that without his hardworking crews, the most high-tech mowers won’t deliver results. This is why teamwork is the root of the incentive program for The Good Earth, Mt. Pleasant, S.C.

“I wanted a system that would reward everyone in the company, not just the field foremen and their laborers, but also the account representatives, the receptionist...” he listed. “The whole support team needs to benefit.”

*(continued on page 74)*





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## Incentive Programs

(continued from page 72)

Besides basing kudos on camaraderie, Gaeta wanted a long-term system that influenced workers to stay with the company — one that prompted employees to maintain equipment and one that was tied into the estimating system and not dependent on a certain net profit figure. "The crew thinks about hours," he explained. "You can't say dollars because they sometimes don't understand that."

So, 11 months ago, Good Earth integrated an incentive program into its operation that so far has nipped 7 percent of its labor costs. The crew hustles in the morning and doesn't stall when servicing properties. "They are conscious of their time in the morning and their time coming back, and that's where a company loses money," Gaeta described. "The foreman doesn't have to be responsible for working hard — everyone has a stake in it."

Here's how it works: Gaeta figured a dollar value for each work hour. If he estimates a project will consume six man-hours and the crew finishes it in five, the money from this extra hour (75 percent of the hourly wage) goes into a pool. He subtracts 10 percent each quarter for equipment maintenance costs, which motivates employees to care for machines, and leftover money from this allocation is distributed at the end of the year. At the end of each quarter, employees receive a part of the pool.

"The split is based on your hourly rate, so it will benefit the people really pushing the crews," Gaeta said, adding that employees can increase their yearly pay up to 15 percent simply by being efficient. As the owner, he does not take a portion of the pool. When employees leave the company in the middle of the season, their portion of the pool is set aside to split with loyal employees who stay on board all year. "This encourages long-term employees. When crews stay together after a year, they are more productive."

However, implementing a system based on man-hours requires knowing exact production hours. No guesstimates. "That's where most people make their mistakes," Gaeta related. "They try to give incentives without knowing how they are costing it out."

Before Good Earth put the plan in place, Gaeta spent four months timing each task so there weren't estimation discrepancies. He broke out recorded yearly hours into quarters and noticed certain quarters had too many man-hour savings — in some cases, too many hours were allocated to a project, he explained. This would result in hefty bonuses one quarter and skimpy ones the next. Working out these production hours before implementing the system ensured realistic expectations for substantial bonuses.

Doug Collinson, president, Collinson Brothers Landscaping, Wharton, N.J., also bases bonus dollars on saved man-hours. The Compass System he adapted for his company compensates employees at time-and-a-half pay if they finish a project early. For example, if a property is estimated at 40 man-hours and the crew finishes it in 30, they have 10 hours to get a head-start on the next job. Since they are increasing the company's productivity and profit through this efficiency, the crew earns time-and-a-half for these 10 hours. Collinson distributes this bonus monthly.

"The whole premise is that you are selling hours and time and you are not selling a product or a service," he explained. "It gives the guys incentive to get done with one job and get on with the next, therefore not having to work overtime or 50 or 60 hours per week."

For some, whittling away these long work weeks is a bonus in itself.

(continued on page 76)



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## Incentive Programs

(continued from page 74)

Jake Silvas, president, S & S Landscaping, Greensburg, Pa., said his four-day workweek not only cuts overtime, but also builds morale. "A four-day workweek is an incentive to stay on schedule and get the job done in the allotted hours," he said.

The company erased nearly half of its overtime, he added. Routes are scheduled

with geography in mind, crews know when and where to go as soon as they arrive in the morning, and most of all, they know the hours allotted for each project so they can meet these goals.

At Del Conte's Landscaping, the goal is to exceed a 6-percent net profit, and if the company reaches this mark employees share

the benefits, Bland noted. "The first \$100,000 dollars above and beyond that 6 percent net profit will be given back to the employees," he said, adding that though some businesses motivate their employees based on hours, Del Conte's high wages please its employees.

While dangling the carrot of a year-end bonus in front of crews, Bland says showing employees how each aspect of the business affects the bottom line keeps them considering efficiencies on a daily basis. "If there is a broken irrigation head, I will hold it up at a meeting and say, 'This is one more expense that takes away from that 6 percent so that we can give you guys the bonus,'" he related, knowing their work directly affects the company's financial health and, in turn, their bonuses.

**SEE IT TO BELIEVE IT.** An incentive system fades without employee support, so from the beginning, key managers should form a communication funnel, filtering to crew members information, examples and reasons they should trust the plan.

This isn't always easy at first. Gaeta's operations manager, David Schwartz, remembers when the first quarter bonuses were far less than employees expected.

"We got a lot of, 'Well, this isn't a lot of money,'" he recalled, adding that the first quarter the landscape department was 300 hours over budget, which drew money from the pool and deflated bonuses.

Gaeta remembers presenting these checks at a company meeting with donuts, coffee and awards and explaining the bonuses to employees. "My management talked to key personnel and explained to them what happened, so they were our front line to help communicate with the laborers," Gaeta said. "It was very positive. I had several people tell me they weren't working for the incentive and it was a reward for doing the job they already understood."

Hashing out specifics with employees is crucial to getting them to buy into an incentive plan, Schwartz added. Taking the time to answer questions can dispel uncertainties.

"When we first presented it to everyone, it was a lot," Schwartz admitted. "I would say that 50 percent of the employees didn't understand [the program]. When you get down to small percentages it can make you dizzy. But as it develops and they can see

(continued on page 78)

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## Incentive Programs

(continued from page 76)

where they are making money in a job, their view changes."

Collinson saw attitudes shift when his employees gained confidence that they could finish jobs in the estimated hours. At first, they were worried that set schedules might be unrealistic and bonuses difficult to obtain. However, when he provided crews with specific route sheets and work orders for each job, they knew the essentials for each project. "Keep the crew informed so when they get out there, there isn't any guesswork," he emphasized.

Collinson also supplied the group with scenarios. "We tracked hours on some of the jobs with the Compass System without judging them on their performance for bonuses," he said. "Then, we said, 'With this job you were given X man-hours and you came in under that amount, so you were making the system work without realizing it.' Until they saw it could be done, they were hesitant to buy into it."

And until everyone buys into the plan, no one will prosper. The owner, managers, foremen and crew members – including those who work in the office or maintain equipment – must see the benefits in the program, Bland added. "If you send one message and it stops at a certain level, then it's really pointless," he said. "Whether the owner of the company or a manager or a supervisor, we all have to be on the same page."

The company presents goals and budgets to its employees, and everyone is constantly reminded of the reward – the dollars that they will find in their checks if the business beats a 6-percent net profit, Bland said. The message appears in the company newsletter and is repeated at weekly training meetings. "You have to build this culture – the big picture of it. You make this culture and the people feel like they are so important to what you're doing – that's the greatest incentive a person can have."

**CHECK, CHECK.** Once employees realize the tie between productivity and extra pocket money, speeding past "Go" might seem more appealing than spending the extra time for finishing touches. In the pursuit of efficiency and profit, owners must make sure their crews aren't sacrificing quality for quantity.

Silvas checks quality on each property by going through a checklist that is divided into a two-part form that clients sign. Team lead-

**T**o pay or not to pay...that is the question for some company owners when deciding on an incentive program to reward maintenance crews. While some say, "Show me the money," others argue that you can't buy a job well done.

"Money is easily forgotten," remarked Jake Silvas, president, S & S Landscaping, Greensburg, Pa. "Everyone has to earn a paycheck and support their families and their lifestyles, but I'm seeing nowadays that money is not the incentive."

On the other hand, paid vacations, holidays, retirement plans and nice benefit packages are an attractive feature for Silvas' employees, who filled out surveys with their hobbies so the company could reward them with kudos they'd appreciate – like dinner to their favorite restaurants. When he asked them how they'd like to see the company reward them, health care won out, he noted. So S & S Landscaping added that benefit plus six days of paid vacation for year-round employees.

"These guys are sincere about supporting their families and having things for the future, so the response to a retirement plan was incredible," he reported. "Three-quarters of the people that have at least one year of service in the company are enrolled in the retirement plan."

His advice: ask and listen. You might find that money isn't the primary motivator.

However, ask Doug Collinson what gets his employees moving and the president of Wharton, N.J.-based Collinson Brothers Landscaping answers "money" without hesitation. "It's the incentive they respond to the best," he said matter-of-factly.

Collinson relies on an incentive program that pays monthly bonuses based on productivity and man-hours. If crews complete a 40-hour job in 30 hours, the 10 man-hours saved are paid at a time-and-a-half rate, since this extra time allows them to get a head-start on another job. "We have some guys that have been with us for five and six years and they are loyal and make a lot of decisions in the field based on economics," he noted. "They won't go along with a system that they feel will hurt them in the wallet. They wanted to see examples of how if they work harder the math of the bonus system will work out and how it will correlate into more money for them."

Once they learned that they could easily achieve the man-hours estimated for jobs, exceed these expectations and earn bonus dollars, they were sold on the money-based system, Collinson said.

Still, most contractors agree that the "little things" help keep employees happy on the job – whether or not these rewards are paired with a monetary bonus. Collinson said burgers and sodas after a hot day perk up worn-out crews and sharing client compliments during meetings offers a pat on the back for high-quality service. "If they are happy, there is a good chance they will provide a better service for their clients."

– **Kristen Hampshire**

## Show Me the Money?

ers walk the sites with customers upon completion of installation projects to ensure their satisfaction with the results. These managers meet Monday mornings to review works-in-progress, noting details that demand attention. They check in with maintenance crews daily and address issues within a day or two, he explained. In the office, Silvas or the operations manager assesses man-hours to record daily progress and amend future schedules.

To supplement daily communications, visual aids uncover a property's pluses and problems, he added. "We have digital cameras and take pictures that we bring to the Monday meetings," he said. "We point out the good and the bad and the ugly and the beautiful – it's a good tool. Taking the pic-

tures, taking them to the meeting – now you can show 10 people what is going on vs. one person that was at the job."

Bland uses similar tactics in weekly crew meetings. A weekly slide show doesn't hide cracks in quality, but it does motivate employees to deliver value and not just move their mowers like pawns to the next account on the board. "No one wants to see their picture on the slideshow for being problematic," he remarked.

Besides, positive results prevent returning to jobs for clean-up work, Gaeta noted. His employees know that not following through with job requirements means they will have to return to the property to fix mistakes. "If they slow down on quality and make a lot of extra time savings, the next week they have to clean it up and lose the



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Check out this article online for some operational basics to check before implementing a program.

which are set up like a class-room to promote a learning environment.

"If you are teaching someone and it's not an interactive process, then they won't stay involved," he noticed. "There is a term: experience learning. Reinforce what you're trying to teach and add to it an experience of some kind."

Bland's in-class "experiences" center around images of projects so he can point out the pros and cons. He involves employees with hands-on teamwork exercises like building a card house, and they fill out worksheets and take a test at the end of each session. "The second to last page, they have to sign a line saying they understood what they were taught and in the future they will be held accountable," he said. "We take a copy and let them keep the rest of the notes, and I file these papers."

S & S Landscaping sends crew members to pesticide training or horticultural classes at the local department of agriculture, pro-

viding them the opportunity to create a career for themselves. Jennifer Ranalla, human resources director, said this piques their interest and refreshes their field knowledge.

Employees who aren't motivated don't produce, and incentive programs that reward complacency miss quality. Incentives might not compete with the "Get Out of Jail Free" card, but supplemented with a solid estimating structure, open lines of communication, and ongoing training, companies can ensure employees give 100 percent to that crucial 50- to 60-percent labor figure.

"You don't find good people, you make good people," Bland concluded. "People are not born caring about whether their job looks better than the competition - you have to build and train the person and you have to continually invest in them." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor - Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [khamphshire@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:khamphshire@lawnandlandscape.com)

hours," he pointed out. Now, crews approach jobs and quality issues with a team attitude.

However, without the tools - the training and communication - to deliver quality service, employees are set up to fail, no matter the intricacies of the incentive system. After all, players need rules before they can play fairly and enjoy the game.

Bland said regular site inspections - both random visits and upon project completion - keep employees on their toes, but the high-energy training meetings motivate them to practice perfection in the field. Upbeat music welcomes employees to weekly meetings,

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by Nicole Wisniewski

*Toasty summer days and soggy lawns feed disease spores, giving them the strength to spread. LCOs can battle these turf invaders with fungicide education.*

# WW

Who doesn't love a sizzling summer day after the chilly winter has passed and spring has sprung, causing plants to bloom and blossom? On a hot, humid afternoon among the beauty of summer foliage, a refreshing pool welcomes swimmers while the sun's warmth invites sunbathers to stay awhile.

Ah, the days of summer – you may think you like these days more than anyone, but something has you beat.

Microscopic reproductive fungus spores feed on humidity and thrive on excessively damp turf, uncontrollably spreading and wrapping their arms around every bare, healthy inch. Atlanta's fescue lawns are prime candidates for such spore invasion during the stifling summer months, pointed out Chuck McIntire, president, Turf Pride. Bentgrass or bluegrass-fescue mixes in Wolcott, Conn., also are top targets, according to John Chiarella, Jr., founder and president, Ultimate Services Professional Grounds Management.

And in 12 or more hours, moist foliage can trigger a major summer disease outbreak, added Curtis Swift, horticulture extension agent, Colorado State, Grand Junction, Colo.

Assuming turf cultural practices have been followed, there is only one savior from disease: fungicide. But using it requires expertise, experience and, sometimes, first-rate detective work when identifying the disease and means of control.

Sounds easy enough, except for the fact that disease detection is challenging because many diseases look alike and neglecting cultural practices can cause symptoms that mimic disease, explained Joseph Krausz, associate department head and professor, plant pathology and microbiology, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, College Station, Texas. "For example, differences in soil conditions may cause the grass in one area to wilt sooner than in another area," he described. "Also, changes in turf color or

*(continued on page 82)*

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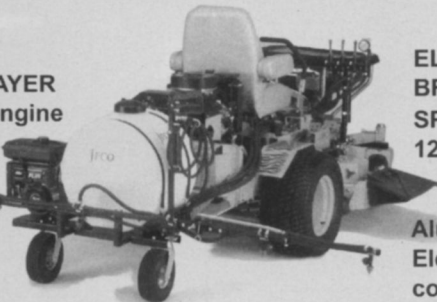
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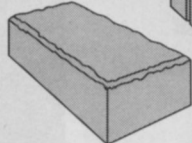
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## Fungicides

(continued from page 80)

growth rate may indicate a nutrient deficiency. Too often we identify only one factor contributing to a turfgrass problem, when, in fact, several factors are to blame."

Not to mention that changing environmental conditions like rain modify disease, so pinpointing the problem is more difficult. And, after the grass has been killed, identifying the cause becomes increasingly tough, Krausz added. Add a race-against-the-clock mindset, and the pressure of this job rises.

Plus, memorizing a list of diseases, symptoms and cures may not be enough. Even the most experienced technicians don't get it right all of the time. "An experienced turf manager might correctly identify a turf disease problem 60 percent of the time," Krausz said. "The expert might correctly identify a problem 70 or 80 percent of the time, but neither will be correct 100 percent of the time."

Starting to catch on? Disease identification and proper fungicide use takes time to perfect, but if you're up to the challenge, you can save summer turf with these suggestions from researchers and lawn care operators (LCOs) – and a glass of iced tea might help you cool off while you're reading.

**FIGURING OUT FUNGICIDES.** Fungicides can be effective if LCOs follow several rules, pointed out Stephen Nameth, associate professor and associate chair, plant pathology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. "First, the right material must be selected – this depends on correct diagnosis and identification of the pathogen," he explained. "Second, the chemical must be applied at the right time of year and frequently enough to protect plant material adequately. Third, fungicides must be applied properly over plant surfaces. These three rules depend on making correct decisions based on correct knowledge. Too many people simply 'spray and pray' and are often disappointed with the results."

To understand the various types of fungicides on the market, LCOs must be able to decipher the terminology. There are two primary types of fungicides available: protective-contact and systemic.

Unlike a contact herbicide, a protective-contact fungicide does not enter the plant but rather acts as an exterior shield that protects the plant from certain fungi for a period of time, said Bruce Paulsrud, exten-



**T**he addition of an adjuvant to the fungicide spray mix may help improve coverage and slow residue loss. One may be led to believe that a spreader-sticker adjuvant should be added to the spray mix in all situations, however, there are some other factors to consider, according to Bruce Paulsrud, extension specialist, pesticide application training and plant pathology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, Ill.:

- Always read the directions (checking the fine print) for both the fungicide and adjuvant label.
- The fungicide formulation you selected may already have certain adjuvants included by the formulator. Additional adjuvants may increase runoff and decrease pesticide deposit, or cause other problems. Adding adjuvants to the fungicide during the formulation process is becoming increasingly popular. The label does not always make this addition obvious to the user (in these cases, adjuvants are considered secret inert ingredients). Read the label to find out what you may or may not add to the spray mix.
- Is the plant you need to treat difficult to wet (the tissues especially waxy or hairy)? Have you experienced poor coverage (due to poor wetting) in the past?
- Adjuvants may increase penetration of systemic fungicides and may cause phytotoxicity. If you can't find the answers to your questions, test the mix on a few plants and observe them for signs of injury over several days to weeks.

— Bruce Paulsrud

## Adding Adjuvants

sion specialist, pesticide application training and plant pathology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, Ill.

Then, there are systemic fungicides, which are absorbed and translocated in the plant, Paulsrud said. "They serve to prevent the development of disease at the site of uptake as well as in other plant regions," he remarked. "Local systemic fungicides are absorbed into the immediate area of application but are not translocated far from the site of uptake. They serve to prevent disease development at the site of uptake. Certain systemic fungicides are also known as curative fungicides, which have the unique abil-

(continued on page 86)

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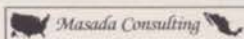
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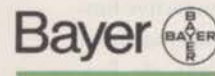
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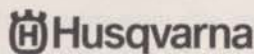
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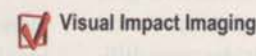
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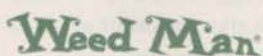
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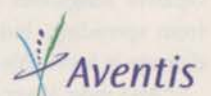
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## Fungicides

(continued from page 83)

ity to stop the progress of infections that may have occurred a few hours or days before the application."

Both protective-contact and systemic fungicides have advantages and disadvantages. With protective-contact fungicides, uniform spray coverage is vital. "How well does a shield work if it is filled with holes?" Paulsrud maintained, adding that the length of protection depends on many factors. "As with any pesticide, rainfall or irrigation within a couple of hours after application washes away much of the pesticide residue and reduces the protective value. Even after drying on the plant surface, protective fungicide residues may continue to erode from rain, dew vaporization, sunlight, etc. Furthermore, as plant tissues expand or are replaced, new tissue is left unprotected. For these reasons, protective-contact fungicides need to be reapplied more often and have a shorter application interval than systemic fungicides. The addition of a spreader-sticker adjuvant to the spray mix may help improve coverage and slow residue loss." (For more information on adjuvants, see page 83.)

On the other hand, systemics provide longer residual activity because they are absorbed by the plant and protected from wash-off and weathering, Paulsrud said. "They protect plant tissues, such as crowns and roots, that we cannot effectively spray," he said. "They also may control fungi that have already entered the plant."

One downside with systemics is that they are relatively new to the market and, therefore, more expensive, Paulsrud said. "And a bigger disadvantage of systemics has been the development of pathogen resistance or tolerance to these fungicides," he added. "Protectant fungicides tend to affect fungi in more complex ways compared to systemics. This makes protectant fungicides more difficult for the fungi to get around."

According to McIntire, using preventive fungicides is always preferable, even if it doesn't stop the fungus 100 percent of the time. "It limits the severity and, therefore, the turf loss," he explained, adding that curative fungicides may stop the disease from spreading, but resulting turf fungal damage is inevitable.

"And most lower cost contact fungicides only last about seven days and have to be reapplied weekly for extended control, while

In some ways, treating trees for disease problems is more important than mending fungus-ridden lawns, according to John Chiarella, Ultimate Services Professional Grounds Management, Wolcott, Conn. This is mainly due to a tree's high worth.

"Trees are expensive to replace," Chiarella explained. "For instance, a specimen oak that is 200 years old – a 100-foot grand oak – can add value to a property that makes the tree worth \$500,000. And certain tough diseases like anthracnose can really get inside a tree and not only make it look horrible, but resulting damage can decrease its value. And replacing a tree of that size and value is expensive."

At Ultimate Services, Chiarella said tree disease treatments range from three to four times in the spring and summer for normal trees, such as maple and dogwood, and are mostly preventive to thwart insects, from egg-stage to adult, and diseases. These include horticultural oils, a spring foliar spray and a summer foliar spray. Once a tree is diseased, Chiarella will use a microinjection treatment to manage diseases like dutch elm disease.

The company also treats orchard trees and rose bushes, but since they are more sensitive to disease, the number of sprays increase to 10 to 12 times during the spring and summer. "The biggest problem with roses and orchard trees is scab and leaf spot," Chiarella pointed out. "And heavy rain can make these sorts of fungi spread rapidly and become difficult beasts to control. These diseases make everything look awful – the destruction is very noticeable. We treat these roses and apple trees preventively every seven to 10 days for six months – it's the only way to stay on top of the diseases out there."

Treating trees is a separate cost at Ultimate Services, and Chiarella said the easiest way to bill for the service is to charge by the amount of product used because fungicides can be expensive. "It's like pumping oil – you use so many gallons," he said. "The amount of product and active ingredient is particularly important because the cost of an active ingredient in a fungicide can range from \$88 a gallon to \$50 for 1 to 2 ounces. And when a client spent \$500,000 on trees, he shouldn't be surprised to get a \$3,800 bill for tree injection or feeding because this protects his investment."

Following proper cultural practices also can help prevent trees from being infected with diseases, Chiarella said. These include feeding trees with organic material and fertilizer, pruning dead wood, making sure mulch doesn't smother the tree and watching for cracks and lesions. – *Nicole Wisniewski*

## Treating Trees

more expensive, contact/systemic fungicides may last up to 30 days," McIntire continued.

**TREATMENT TRICKS.** Whether applying preventive or curative fungicide treatments, thorough coverage of both infected and non-infected turf is crucial, McIntire advised. "We recommend a light irrigation shortly after the treatment and then moderate mid-morning irrigation afterward," he added. "Customers with lawns that have fungal problems should not water in the evening when the grass will stay wet for extended periods and possibly increase fungal activity."



Preventive fungicide sprays, as well as proper cultural practices, can help keep trees disease free. Photo: Ultimate Services Professional Grounds Management

But not all LCOs do it this way. Stan McDaniel, president/owner, Healthy Lawns & Shrubs, Little Rock, Ark., uses liquid fungicides because he said they provide better coverage, and he suggested LCOs not water for 24 to 48 hours after treatment as not to ruin the product's effectiveness.

In addition to proper application methods, paying attention to timing can make or break fungicide effectiveness. McDaniel applies fungicide during the summer to zoysia and fescue lawns. Chiarella uses preventive fungicides in early spring to offer bentgrass and bluegrass-fescue mix turf a layer of protection.



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Check out this article online for more information on diagnosing different turf diseases.

In Atlanta, McIntire said the best time to apply fungicides is prior to the most active fungal season, and he has developed a unique way to determine when this occurs. "Our fungal season for brown patch on cool-season turf normally occurs from early June through August," he said. "We always see brown patch active in Atlanta by the Fourth of July and occasionally see it as early as mid-May. We think we can predict when it will go active in Atlanta by watching the weather. When the combination of nighttime temperature lows and humidity reach a total of 150 (for example, 75 degrees Fahrenheit and 75 percent humidity equal 150), we almost always see active brown patch."

Based on weather conditions, such as an extended period of warm nights and wet weather that promotes additional fungus activity and shortens treatment effectiveness, a second application may be required. When needed, these usually take place 10 to 14 days after the first treatment, McDaniel said.

To limit application failures, LCOs should educate clients on early fungicide applications and how they can increase product effectiveness with proper watering and mowing, McIntire said. "Typically, failure may occur due to the improper cultural care but, normally, most perceived failures are not failures at all – these occur when fungicides aren't applied until heavy damage has occurred. So, the fungicides worked by stopping the spread of the disease, but the resulting damage leaves the perceived appearance that they didn't work."

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customers, which have the worst fungal problems with brown patch and gray leaf spot, offering a two-treatment preventive program with the treatments to be done at 30-day intervals at mid-May and mid-June. These treatments are priced the same as our regular program treatments," McIntire explained. "Since curative fungicides are more expensive and we typically have to apply more product, we charge more – usually \$15 per 1,000 square feet. This curative pricing is for people who don't sign up for the preven-

(continued on page 110)

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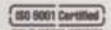


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## Irrigation Maintenance

by Kristin Mohn

*Supplementing current service selections with an irrigation division can increase value to the customer.*

Expanding into new territory can be an uphill battle. Venturing into the unknown means leaving the familiar behind and tackling unexpected challenges with gusto. Although the path of least resistance might be the attractive choice, traveling in a new direction can ultimately broaden horizons and create new opportunities.

Tackling new service options is one form of exploration, allowing contractors to expand their industry knowledge and extend a full-service package that epitomizes the meaning of one-stop shop. As one of these valuable add-ons, irrigation services complement landscape installation and design with the water resources that keep clients' yards healthy.

In addition, including irrigation system installation and maintenance in the current lineup simplifies clients' search for landscaping services. "People are looking to just make one phone call, and that's one of the reasons we picked up irrigation services," said Joe Goetz, president, Goetz Landscaping and Irrigation, Centerville, Minn.

Exploring uncharted waters usually means encountering a few obstacles along the way. However, contractors looking to incorporate irrigation can do so confidently with a little planning, experience and a taste for adventure.

**BON VOYAGE.** Stephen Nagle, president, Personal Touch Landscape and Irrigation, Destin, Fla., said that for him, venturing toward irrigation was simply "a matter of necessity." "Because of what the customers' needs were, they wanted to deal with a company that did both irrigation and landscaping," he said. "The customer dictated the decision, and we've lost jobs before due to not offering all the services they want. We can make it simple for them."

*(continued on page 92)*



*Contractors can expand their service value to clients by offering irrigation maintenance, which ultimately eliminates an extra phone call for the customer. Photo: Greg Mitchell*

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## Irrigation Maintenance

(continued from page 90)

When debating which irrigation components to offer – installation, maintenance, repair or all three – a decision usually comes down to what is most profitable, Goetz related. Thorough, detailed installation may initially establish the company's reputation, he said. Yet, the resulting services prove to be more profitable, since installation alone requires significant investment in equipment and parts. "Installation itself does not offer a good margin, unless you offer service after that," he said. "It's pretty cutthroat if you just do installation – it's better to have that as an added service for customers where you're already in charge of their landscaping projects."

For the contractor hoping to build client relationships while maintaining a financial balance, maintenance is an attractive stepping stone toward full-service, said Robert Kinnucan, president, Kinnucan Co., Lake Bluff, Ill. "Maintenance is a great opportunity to engender some client loyalty," he said. "It enhances your menu of services and

also allows you to get your feet wet, literally, with how it's going to work while you're able to minimize the capital outlay."

Maintaining older irrigation systems can create systematic headaches – particularly when other companies performed the installation – and oftentimes companies will automatically inherit properties with antiquated systems that necessitate updating, Kinnucan stated. "We would prefer to only service what we installed, however, it doesn't work out that way," he admitted. "Some old systems are nightmares because you have no records of where everything is, and you have to go out and search around and find the system."

However, Kinnucan has learned from these frustrating experiences. He now keeps accurate records of every system his company installs so he doesn't run into similar confusions when repairing and maintaining systems. "We try to create a record base of where everything is – how many zones, how many heads, etc. – and keep a database for

each client's irrigation system," he described. "We even write down a detailed turn-on/turn-off system."

Nagle said dealing with outdated systems pays off in the end if clients learn the value of quality. "If you educate customers on what your service is compared with what they already have, it's profitable."

Irrigation service mix decisions also require evaluating staff knowledge about installing, servicing and repairing irrigation systems. Exploration is one thing, but setting off without a map can be disastrous, Goetz related. "You can know everything about landscaping, but if you don't have technical expertise for doing irrigation, it's much harder to get that to grow," he said. "You really have to find key people to do that and that want to do that, if you don't have the expertise yourself."

Also, customers who already used top-notch landscape services will expect the same quality with irrigation installation and main-

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tenance, Nagle explained. "When you're looking to add irrigation as another service, you want it to be comparable to maintenance services," he said. "If maintenance is high-level, you want to keep irrigation at the same level, so it's a challenge to find people that are educated enough to bring on to your team."

Education can begin with training sessions offered by industry associations, Kinnucan pointed out. "We typically send people to the irrigation training seminars sponsored by the Irrigation Association (IA)," he said. Nagle also sends employees to IA events to heighten their irrigation awareness. "They learn about everything from hiring people to networking to finding the right questions to ask to training, and even information on setting up vehicles," he listed.

Jeff Kaufmann, owner, Jake's Lawn Care and Irrigation, Fort Worth, Texas, highlighted the importance of proper licensing before agreeing to offer clients irrigation choices. "The first thing employees need to

do is become licensed and that's going to require some schooling," he said. Irrigation licensing then amplifies the company's professionalism and hones employees' knowledge of installation, repair and general business sense.

Even though planning irrigation networks and syncing them with current landscaping elements can begin with training, licensing and trade show sessions, true education ultimately must happen in the field, noted Sidney Showalter, owner, Showalter Landscaping & Irrigation, Naples, Fla. "You have to have someone who's very knowledgeable about irrigation, and that just comes from time in the saddle," he said. "Our employees get hands-on training because we're right there beside them and we watch them until they know what they're doing." In addition, finding and keeping good employees is also a key ingredient to service expansion, so Showalter emphasizes fair employee treatment to minimize turnover.

Of course, in some parts of the country, irrigation peak season is only a few months long. Thus, retaining skilled irrigation employees means allocating their labor toward other parts of the business in the off-season, Kinnucan noted. "What we try to do is integrate our irrigation people into other divisions and look for people that can fill dual roles," he said. "For example, we put them in the snow division or the holiday lighting division during the winter."

Kinnucan added that he usually trains current landscape construction employees as irrigation technicians, since they have other services to fall back on when the irrigation season ends.

**ARE YOU PREPARED?** Once crews have brushed up on irrigation know-how, contractors need to ready their operation for the venture. This preparation requires tweaking equipment budgets accordingly for new purchases, Goetz reminded. "One of the key

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## Irrigation Maintenance

ingredients to starting in irrigation is a vibratory plow or something that will plow the system into the ground," he said. Although other irrigation system components are inexpensive, the plow is an investment, costing from \$15,000 to \$24,000, depending on whether the unit is new or used, he added.

In the early stages of service expansion, keep costs low by renting equipment instead of tying up capital with machinery costs, Kinnucan continued. "Oftentimes we just rent trenchers. We don't have large amounts of money tied up in plows and trenchers and we always have access to new equipment." Nagle reminded contractors to check that their trucks and trailers can accommodate large machinery such as trenchers.

If purchasing a vibratory plow or trencher seems unrealistic, contractors always can purchase a trenching attachment for a skid steer loader or compact utility loader, offering the ability to expand without the major cost setback, Goetz continued.

Of course, contractors must also have plenty of fittings, spray heads, controllers and other irrigation gadgets and gizmos on hand. Quality parts and equipment begin with dealer and vendor relationships, Nagle remarked. "I've always said three things that keep us going back to the same dealer: communication, price and education," he identified. "Sometimes you get yourself in a bind, and end up with a dealer that only delivers at certain times of the day, etc. You have to form a relationship."

In addition, mutually respectful vendor relationships ensure contractors will receive high-quality equipment and products on a timely basis, Goetz added.

To avoid overwhelming cash outlets when starting the new division, Kinnucan suggested growing the division slowly, picking up new accounts here and there so the division can eventually support itself. And, as companies begin locking in irrigation accounts, referrals will grow the division on

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a slow, yet dependable, basis, Kaufmann said. "Usually if you put in a system, you get a referral, and if you put a sign in the yard, you'll get two more people, and so on."

Exploring irrigation thus requires a balance of investment, education and the ability to ride out the highs and lows, Kinnucan said. "When you have the system working, you're a hero, and when it's not, you're the villain," he compared. "But customers are looking for service convenience, and including irrigation means one call does it all." ■

The author is Assistant Editor - Internet of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [kmohn@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:kmohn@lawnandlandscape.com).

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**USE READER SERVICE #44**



by Nicole Wisniewski

Light lines, dark spots, missed corners, neglected edges.

Sounds a lot like a bad paint job on a living room wall, but it's not. Just as faulty brushwork can cause color inconsistencies and unattractive ceiling spots, messy granular fertilizer applications can produce similar splotches on turf.

"Keep in mind the damage that can result with misapplications, which often shows up visually in the form of striping with fertilizer," explained Fred Kapp, technical director, Wayne's Environmental Services, Birmingham, Ala.

And if contractors are using granular insect or weed control, misapplication results in more than aesthetic displeasure – decreased product effectiveness and unhappy clients.

The spreader was invented as a means to provide faster, more efficient applications. But a spreader, though a quite simple machine, becomes more technical when placed in the hands of a lawn care operator (LCO). To fully grasp the concept of even application, LCOs must know more than what types of spreaders are available. They

must study equipment calibration, spreader maintenance and walking speed to achieve a uniform distribution pattern and proper product application rate, ultimately eliminating blotchy turf.

**STUDYING SPREADERS.** There are two basic spreaders that lawn care operators use today: drop and rotary.

Drop spreaders, which release product through slits straight down to the turf, have been around for many years, but were more consumer-oriented machines then, pointed out Pete Thompson, senior product manager for equipment, LESCO, Strongsville, Ohio. "They were narrow band spreaders, so whatever width they were – typically 24 inches wide – is how much product you were able to put down since the distribution pattern is only as wide as the hopper," he said, adding that today these push spreaders drop up to a 4-foot swath of product. "Our industry needed something that could apply product quicker."

Hence, more than 30 years ago, push rotary spreaders were conceived, and Thompson said today they outsell drop

*(continued on page 98)*

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## Spreaders

(continued from page 96)

spreaders 95-to-1. With rotary spreaders, the granular product falls onto an impeller, which is broadcast to a swath of 8 to 12 feet.

Initially, both drop and rotary spreaders were walk-behind push machines. Seventeen years ago, hydraulic or self-propelled rotary spreaders were introduced to the lawn care market, the only difference being that the unit was motorized, taking the majority of the work off of the operator.

Though the different spreader types only vary slightly, their prices range from as low as \$100 to as high as \$1,800. Fifty-pound high-end consumer drop push spreaders cost between \$100 and \$125; 80-pound, professional rotary push spreaders cost between \$300 and \$550; 100-pound, self-propelled rotary spreaders cost between \$750 and \$850; and 100-pound, four-wheel hydrostatic, self-propelled rotary spreaders cost between \$1,600 and \$1,800, Thompson said, adding that more than 90 percent of the spreaders sold today are push rather than self-propelled.

**M**ore than a decade ago, manufacturers introduced combination ride-on or stand-on sprayer-spreaders so lawn care operators (LCOs) could offer two services with one machine.

The machine's advantages are similar to those of self-propelled rotary spreaders – they reduce technician fatigue and help the operator maintain a consistent groundspeed, explained Tom Jessen, president, Perma-Green Supreme, Crown Point, Ind.

But these machines are more than double the cost of a self-propelled rotary spreader, at \$3,800 to \$4,650 for a 150-pound, stand-on, self-propelled rotary spreader-sprayer. And the cost triples for a ride-on spreader-sprayer at \$9,500 to \$13,000, according to Pete Thompson, senior product manager for equipment, LESCO, Strongsville, Ohio.

"Though for some people, having two products in one with less to unload from a truck and having something that won't fatigue an operator as quickly makes the price become more of a bar-

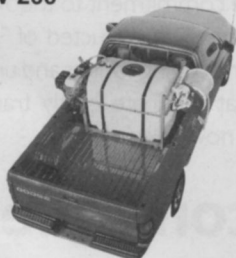
gain," Jessen pointed out, adding that his machine sales have grown 50 to 100 percent over the last four years. And Thompson said 5 percent of his national sales are generated from combination spreader-sprayer equipment. "It may not sound like much, but these machines are really growing in popularity," he said.

Operators maintain a consistent speed because these machines carry them, forcing them to sustain an even walking pace.

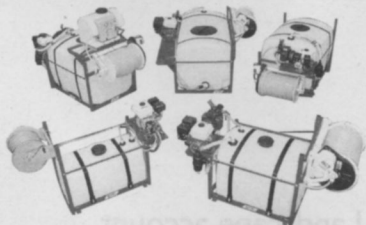
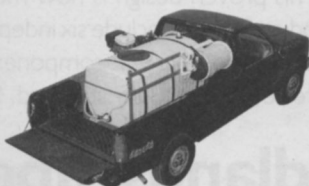
Combination spreader-sprayer machine speed is typically set in two ways. "Some machines have a hydrostatic drive where you have a separate throttle, so you can floor it or go half throttle and the engine rpms determine how fast the machine goes," Jessen explained. "So the technician can go faster or slower. Others have a gear and throttle, so operators can go at the maximum consistent speed, go in low gear for hilly areas or idle the machine. Some LCOs prefer to have more variation with the hydrostatic drive machine, while others will want to have a gear and throttle machine that forces them to stay at one speed."

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While the spreader function of the machine is comparable to a typical, self-propelled rotary spreader, the sprayer function of some of these machines is designed for more low-volume applications, Thompson commented. "Typical application rates require certain amounts of liquid per square foot," he explained. "When you look at a label and can use only so many ounces of product per gallon of water, this can range from 1 to 5 gallons and still be effective. In an area like Florida with sandy soil and a quick saturation rate, you have to stay on the high end of the spectrum – like 4 to 5 gallons. Up in the Midwest, you can use a lower rate and still have effectiveness because the liquid doesn't filter through the clay soil as quickly.

"A low-volume application is more like a mist rather than a typical spray, but you can cover a wide swath with this type of unit," Thompson continued. "These machines are good, but I don't look at them as a blanket coverage type unit – they are better for spot treating where you can put 2 to 3 gallons of liquid down per 1,000 square feet." – **Nicole Wisniewski**

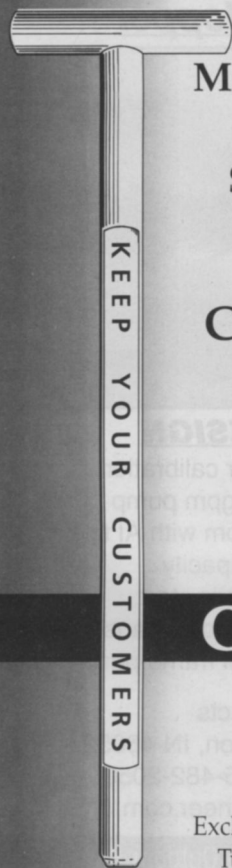
**COMPARE & CONTRAST.** In terms of accurate application, drop spreaders rank No. 1 "because you can control the swath width," Thompson said, adding that dropping product at turf edges is much more accurate with these models than with rotary spreaders because the product isn't being thrown off target.

But ensuring an even distribution pattern can be challenging with drop spreaders, pointed out Tom Jessen, president, Perma-Green Supreme, Crown Point, Ind. "Since the product is being dropped right underneath the machine, you don't have the luxury for a margin of error," he said. "If you're off by the width of the wheels, you could possibly miss a spot and with fertilizer this will result in a light green stripe. And if you over-apply, which tends to be the issue, you get a dark green stripe. These are typical application mistakes because following the same pattern 100 percent of the time is hard, especially on larger properties.

"The trick is to go over the lawn twice in perpendicular directions to minimize the chance of causing small stripes and to give you two chances to hit every square foot of turf," Jessen continued.

However, while drop spreaders may increase application accuracy, they don't improve productivity on the job like rotary spreaders do, Thompson stated. "On a typical 8,000-square-foot lawn, you can make about eight passes to get the job done, but with a drop spreader you have to make nearly 20 passes – application time more than doubles," he said.

Then there's the comparison between rotary push and self-propelled spreaders. With a rotary push spreader, maintaining a consistent walking speed, which affects impeller speed, is critical, Thompson emphasized. "If you increase your ground speed, you increase your impeller speed, which throws off your distribution pattern," he explained, adding that the most efficient walking and impeller speed for applying product is 3 mph.



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## Spreaders

"The same is true if you decrease your walking speed."

Kapp, who uses his rotary push spreader to apply preemergence herbicides, insecticides, fertilizers and lime, said contractors need to develop a technique for stopping and starting to avoid misses and over-applications. "It is best to make sure you are at the proper speed before opening the spreader," he advised. "Spreaders are fast, but can be less accurate due to wind and improper overlapping, which can lead to off-target applications. To prevent this, make sure you use a slight overlap, calibrate for pace, measure your volume and adjust as needed. Proper calibration is critical." (For more information, see *Calibration Competence* on this page.)

Also, Kapp keeps a hand-held spreader, which he said cost less than \$30, on his truck for smaller jobs or tight spots.

Self-propelled rotary spreaders have an advantage in the instance of fatigue, aiding the operator in maintaining a more consistent ground speed, Jessen said. "And they can be a

**S**preaders should be recalibrated for every product application, and calibration should be checked monthly or more often when the spreader is used frequently. To properly calibrate a spreader, check the discharge holes with the operating lever closed. If the holes are not fully closed, thread the upper jam nut on the operating lever rod further up. Tighten the lower locknut and recheck. Repeat this procedure until the holes are closed.

To check pattern uniformity, which is the pattern the product makes as it hits the ground, lay out shallow boxes in a row on a line perpendicular to the direction of spreader travel (11 boxes, 2-inches high placed on 1-foot centers work well). Begin with the pattern slide completely open and set the rate control arm at the suggested setting. Make three passes, pushing the spreader in the same direction each time. Evaluate the product caught in each box by weighing it and putting it in vials. Then set the 11 vials side-by-side in order to make the pattern variation visible. To reduce the amount of discharge, the pattern slide should be partially closed and the test repeated until the distribution pattern is uniform.

To achieve an accurate product application rate, set the rate control arm at the labeled setting. Make a single pass over the collection boxes to determine pattern width, which is twice the distance to the point where the rate drops to one-half the average rate at the center. For example, if the product in the vials from the center boxes averages 2 inches, count out to the vial that has 1 inch. If this is the fifth vial from the center and the boxes were on 1-foot centers, the effective pattern width is 10 feet (2 x 5 feet). Knowing the effective pattern width (10 feet), measure out a lineal distance to equal 1,000 square feet (10 feet x 100 feet = 1,000 square feet). Weigh 20 pounds of product, place it in the hopper and spread it over the distance necessary to equal 1,000 square feet. Then weigh the product left in the hopper and subtract this amount from the amount with which you started. The result is the application rate for this product in pounds per 1,000 square feet that your spreader is adjusted to disperse. Adjust the rate control arm as needed and repeat until the you achieve the correct application rate. — **LESCO**

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retention tool since technicians will wear themselves out less using a self-propelled machine vs. a push machine," he added.

But these machines are also more expensive – nearly triple the investment for a regular push rotary spreader, Jessen pointed out. "That's a big increase in cost for a machine that doesn't increase productivity all that much on a day-to-day basis and has more moving parts so it needs more maintenance," he said.

Also, manufacturers recently introduced combination rotary/drop spreaders, which cost about \$550, Thompson said. "This machine was created with both the accuracy of drop spreaders and the increased productivity of rotary spreaders in mind," he explained. "With today's rotary spreaders, the hard part is keeping products off the sidewalks and driveways and out of the flower beds, so you don't have to go back and sweep it up. This combination machine has a 24-inch drop mechanism to use next to these areas and then also has a rotary spreader application for wider expanses of turf."

**MAINTENANCE MATTERS.** In addition to proper use, keeping spreaders, and especially impellers, clean is vital to maintaining accurate applications. For instance, if the lawn is damp or wet, the spreader will get wet and product will build up on the impeller, so it may need to be cleaned off more often during the day, Thompson pointed out.

A clean machine also helps maintain an even distribution pattern. "An impeller is flat and equipped with fan blades," Thompson explained. "When the product comes out of the hopper, it hits the impeller and is flung off by a 90-degree angle blade. It's like the wedge of a golf club, and if the wedge has product build up on it, the product will not fly out straight – it may fly up in the air. This throws off your product distribution."

Additionally, impellers and impeller blades should be checked regularly to sustain on-target applications. "With impellers, the important thing is to make sure the gears don't slip, resulting in intermittent flinging of product," Jessen advised.

Worn impeller blades also negatively affect product distribution. These typically need to be replaced once or twice during the course of a season, and sometimes more frequently, depending on the product being used, Jessen said. "For instance, pelletized lime is essentially ground-up rocks, so it's like sand or sandpaper and wears blades more rapidly compared to something like granular urea, which comes in smooth round pellets that have a greasy feel and are slippery and less abrasive," he remarked. **□**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com).

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  - Leads readers through steps, including goal setting, finding your service niche and networking, among others
  - Reality check sections offer simple suggestions and advice and make
  - Book is 185 pages
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## PBI/Gordon Blade Herbicide

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- Bug Barrier Tree Band enables green industry professionals to practice adhesive pest management
- Sticky material physically traps insects,



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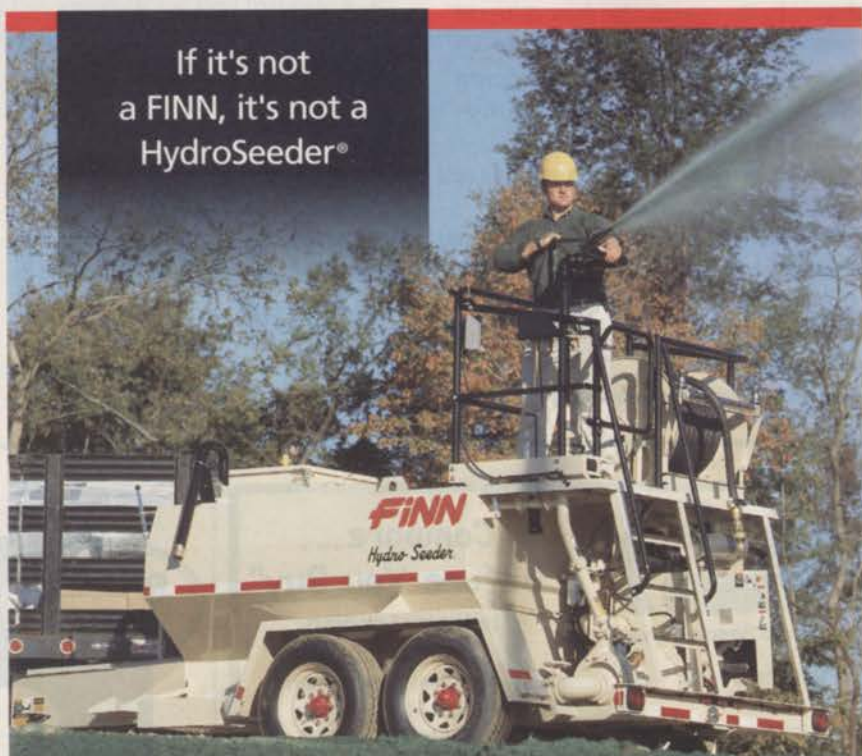
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takes two to five minutes, and removal takes 30 seconds

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# Products

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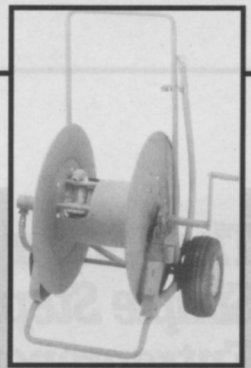
- Allows turf professionals to combine the tasks of dethatching, sweeping and flail mowing into one machine
- Features unique, floating head that can be adapted by the operator for three different operations
- Offers quick switch from one function to another by means of an easy-to-reach, forward-facing access panel
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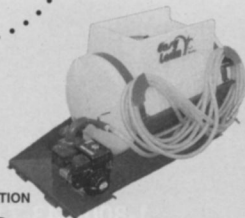


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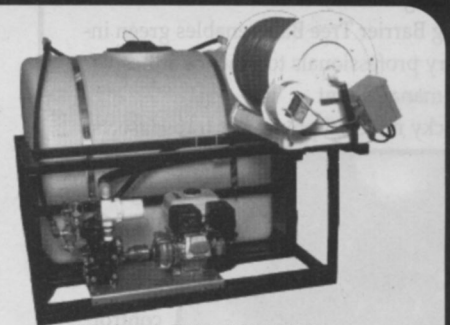
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# Products

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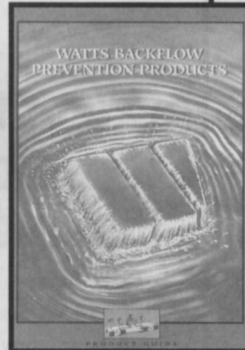
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- Includes 3-gpm pump with variable pressure from 0 to 40 psi
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# Products

## Hunter ICR Long-Range Remote Control

- Allows operational access to irrigation systems within a 2-mile radius
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## Hustler Z Mower



- Mower now available with a 72-inch side discharge deck
- Hustler Z features an integral park-brake system incorporated into the steering system
- Foot-operated, spring-assisted deck-lift system simplifies trailering and cutting height changes

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- Displays all models, along with complete specifications and ordering information
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## Cover Story

(continued from page 54)

categories, like special projects and seasonal color, instead of having one maintenance manager do it all. "When you do it all, you are spread too thin and you get swamped, and make mistakes or fall short of clients' expectations," Bartels explained. "By splitting people up, we can be more ahead of the curve in specializing in areas customers are concerned about."

By having specialists, Bartels admits the investment in additional personnel is large, "but when we filled these specialized positions, the branches started to perform better as a team and the extra cost combined with the added productivity cancelled each other out."

Maintenance doubled in the last five years as a result of these changes and, today, assumes 45 percent of the business revenue, compared to installation's 55 percent.

For this decade, Bartels said strategic plans include focusing on maintenance expansion and starting a fourth branch. "This service is something we could structure as

a means of making additional profits for the company, stabilizing it and giving employees more growth opportunities," Bartels said.

Despite the success Northwestern has had by running each division as a separate entity, this approach does have its drawbacks, Bartels confessed. "Since each department is focused on growing itself, we don't do a lot in terms of overall marketing," he said, adding that the business lacks fancy brochures and an enticing Web site. "We need to improve client relationships – get in front of them with some marketing materials and find out what projects they have coming up. If we marketed better, we could get better results."

Even though the late 1990s is considered the age of technology, Bartels admits this is another company weakness. "We have e-mail at each operation, but not at every desk," he stated. "We want to be networked between the branches and be able to use laptops in the field to be more efficient. Customers are driving this – they want online billing and to communicate with us through e-mail."

Bartels plans to address this weakness

and set up an improvement plan. "We'd like to be on the cutting edge instead of one step behind," he said.

The company president will get a chance to focus on future planning now that his role as owner is changing. Instead of running the day-to-day company operations the last three years, Bartels has been able to focus on developing and growing the business. "My main goal is to support the senior management team and continue to educate myself and observe other successful companies."

After moving full circle from part-time landscaper to full-fledged business owner and now to strategic planner, Bartels admits he's enthusiastic about Northwestern's next decade. "We have matured and evolved a lot over the years, but we still have a long way to go and a lot to learn and improve on," he said. "We have the momentum and the potential to make the next 10 years great. We are focused and committed to growth, diversifying services and adding new branches. We're just beginning in my eyes." **LL**

*The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com).*

## Fungicides

(continued from page 87)

tive in advance and get a fungal problem."

McIntire said about 5 percent of his customers take the preventive program and another 5 percent need the curative. "A lot of our customers treat disease problems themselves due to the cost, so the number of people who request this service is low," he said.

Also, many customers don't understand fungicide costs and think the service should be added to their regular program, McIntire remarked. "We try to explain that to add it to the program, we would have to go up 20 to 25 percent on their basic costs and they might be paying for a service they may not need depending on the weather," he said.

Healthy Lawns & Shrubs has a similar service approach. The company's five-step annual program includes applications of pre and postemergent herbicides, granular or liquid fertilizer, spot sprays to treat broad-leaf weeds, shrub inspections, insect control where necessary, tree and shrub fertilizer, spot soil testing and lime application. For the five-step program, prices vary based on lawn measurement, terrain and turf variety. This can range between \$38 per application

for a 3,000-square-foot lawn to \$56 for a 6,000-square-foot lawn to \$80 for a 10,000-square-foot lawn. Clients who request less than four of the five-step application program during one year will be charged an additional \$3.50 per application.

If a disease problem is found on turf or shrubs, there is an additional cost per treatment, McDaniel said. "We price it per 1,000 square feet," he pointed out.

Ultimate Services Lawn Care offers its fungicide service differently than TurfPride or Healthy Lawns & Shrubs. The company's standard program is a four- to six-application program that includes fertilization, insecticide, herbicide and preventive fungicide control. But the program is customized to fit each client's needs. "If a blight or fungus is spotted, fungicides are applied immediately," Chiarella explained, adding that 90 percent of his company's clients are high-end residential. "This can be needed one to five or six times during a season. For customers with bentgrass putting greens or tennis courts, we apply fungicides weekly."

The cost of the fungicide service for Ultimate Services' clients depends on the disease, problem intensity and product used. "You can spend \$100 an application to \$1,000

an application," Chiarella explained. "If you are working with a 5- or 6-acre site and the product is \$100 per bag, it adds up quick."

Additionally, Chiarella employs horticulturists who have been in the business more than 30 years and have experience diagnosing disease. These employees are paid \$60 to \$65 per hour, so that adds to the service cost.

No matter how an LCO's service is set-up, the key to offering fungicide applications is to determine what aspects of the program are important: profit or meeting client needs. "If it is profit, then price it high and let those who can afford it take it," McIntire said. "If it is to provide a needed service that most of your customers will take as needed, then it may be necessary to accept that it will be non-profitable. We did \$15,000 of fungicide treatments last year and probably bought close to \$12,000 of fungicides to do the treatments. Since it is non-profitable for us, we take a passive approach to sell this service. We send out a letter in advance of the season and from then on we just sell it as problems are identified." **LL**

*The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com).*



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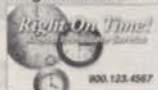
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Lipinski Landscape Irrigation, Inc., located in South/Central New Jersey, is seeking qualified personnel to join our team of professionals. We are currently one of the top 20 contracting firms in the nation and are very diversified and quality-oriented. We are looking for dedicated, hard working and knowledgeable individuals in the following areas: Production Managers, Sales Managers, Nursery Managers, Designer/Sales, Drafting Supervisors, Construction and Maintenance Forepersons. Excellent compensation packages. All interested candidates please send letter of interest along with resume to: Doug Cook, Operations Dir. Lipinski Landscape Irrigation, 100 Sharp Road, PO 1340, Marlton, NJ 08053. Fax 856/983-0500 or email Dcook@lipinskiland.com EOE M/F/D/V.

## CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

We are a 26-year-old, established, up-scale, retail store and landscape company on the east end of Long Island committed to using only organic products. We have the following career opportunities available for the right person!

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## LANDSCAPE PRODUCTS SALESPERSON

Seaboard International Forest Products is a leading wholesale broker of commodity landscape products. We are adding to our sales staff, and seek sales-oriented people with a background in mulch, top soil, manure, salt, landscape timbers, or a knowledge of the industry's dealers and suppliers. Applicants must be able to demonstrate interest in sales to lawn & garden retailers. The job is a telephone sales position based in Nashua, NH, in tax-free southern New Hampshire. Please contact:

John B. Heroux

Marketing Manager

Seaboard International Forest Products

Box 6059

Nashua, NH 03063

FAX: 603/598-2280

E-Mail: john.heroux@ftg.com



# Classifieds

## Industry Web sites

### LAWNCARESUCCESS.COM

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LawnCareSuccess.com

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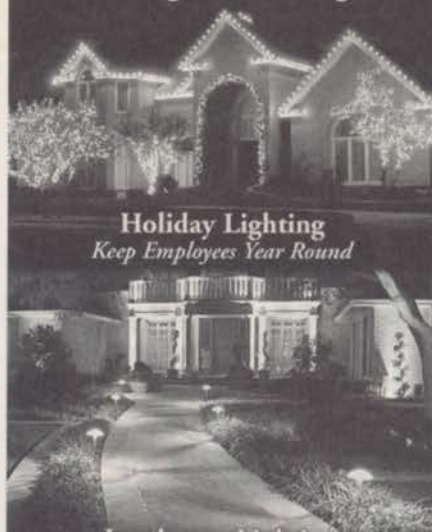
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"Route Rite" Legend desktop routing and accounting software for Lawn and Irrigation services companies. Customer History, Routing & Scheduling, Accounts Receivable, Inventory, Diagramming and links to Quickbooks round out this easy to use 32 bit dynamo. Free Demo at [www.gopst.com](http://www.gopst.com) or call 800/624-8244.

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## How We Do It

# Design Fees & Rebates at Wayside

The design process at Wayside Landscape Services begins with a client interview and site evaluation. Based on the information gathered, one or more preliminary plans are produced and presented to the client for review and analysis, which usually leads to a final plan and proposal.

The design process can be more or less involved, depending upon the client's circumstances and desires. Because of all these variables, Wayside charges \$75 per hour, plus related costs (blueprints, working copies, photos, etc.) for its design/consultation services. Travel time is considered a necessary part of the design/consultation process and is billed at the same rate, which is guaranteed through the current calendar year. The minimum design/consultation fee is \$200. Basically, not much can be accomplished in less than eight to 10 hours – between 16 and 24 hours of design time would be more typical for our average projects. Design fees are invoiced monthly and a \$500 retainer is collected at contract inception.

We feel so strongly about the importance of the design process in the development of a landscape that we rebate design fees when we complete a job. This is done to remove the concern over design fees from the decision whether or not to employ a professional landscape designer.

We will rebate design fees up to 5 percent of the regular price of materials or services purchased from and installed by us for the purpose of completing the design. The work must be completed within 12 months of the proposal submission date to be eligible for rebate. In some cases, this results in a 100-percent design fee rebate. This rebate is not applied to subcontractor fees, is never larger than the actual design fee, and is applied to the final project invoice.

## FIVE KEYS TO Design Fees

1. Charge an hourly rate for design expenses.
2. Set a minimum design/consultation fee.
3. Invoice design fees monthly and collect a \$500 retainer at contract inception.
4. Rebate design fees at a rate of 5 percent of installation materials and services costs.
5. Only rebate work completed within 12 months of the proposal submission date.

\$1,530 Total landscape design fee  
-\$30 Non-rebatable design expenses  
\$1,500 Potential rebatable design fee

\$35,000 Landscape installation purchase price  
-\$10,000 Non-rebatable subcontractor fee  
\$25,000 Price basis for rebate calculations

\$25,000 Price basis for rebate calculations  
X .05 Rebate percentage  
\$1,250 Actual design-purchase rebate

\$17,500 Phase one purchase price  
-\$10,000 Non-rebatable subcontractor fee  
\$7,500 Phase one price basis for rebate calculation

\$7,500 Phase one price basis for rebate calculation  
X .05 Rebate percentage  
\$375 Phase one rebate

\$17,500 Phase two purchase price  
X .05 Rebate percentage  
\$875 Phase two rebate

## Add It Up

Here's an example of how the rebate works:


Mr. and Mrs. John Doe hire us to design their landscape by signing a design contract and paying a \$500 retainer.

One of our designers spends 20 hours working for the Does. The designer has outside expenses totaling \$30. The total design bill for the Doe project is \$1,530 (20 hours at \$75 per hour = \$1,500, plus \$30 for outside expenses). This bill is due at the conclusion of the design work.

Of the total design bill, \$1,500 is eligible for rebate because outside expenses are not rebated. Wayside's price for completing the Doe landscape project is \$35,000. Wayside intends to use a subcontractor for \$10,000 of the work. Because the rebate is not applied to subcontractor fees, only \$25,000 of the total project cost is used as the basis for calculating the rebate. The maximum rebate the Does are eligible for is \$1,250 (5 percent of \$25,000).

The Does want to phase the work, doing half this year and the other half in two years. Wayside invoices the Does for \$17,500 after completing phase one. Of this amount, \$10,000 was subcontracted. This leaves \$7,500 as the base amount for calculating the rebate. A total of \$375 (5 percent of \$7,500) of the \$1,500 design fee is rebated in the form of a credit on the phase one invoice. Because the Does won't complete the project within the next 12 months, they will not be eligible for any further rebates on this project.

But if they change their minds and want to complete the project during the first year, then they will be eligible for an additional \$875 rebate (5 percent of \$17,500) in the form of a credit on the final project invoice. In this case, 82 percent of all design fees would be rebated.

As you can see, the rebate amount depends on many factors. For many of our projects, the design fee is completely rebated. – *Andy White* 

The author is president and majority owner of Wayside Landscape Services, Asheville, N.C. and can be reached at [waysidelandscape@mindspring.com](mailto:waysidelandscape@mindspring.com).



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



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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

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.



MOUNT HIM NEXT TO YOUR PHYSICS PH.D. GUESS WHICH ONE PEOPLE WILL TALK ABOUT?

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

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\*Tundra test date: 4/30/01. Trucks evaluated to date: 4 (40-mph 40% frontal offset crash test). Ratings are only meaningful when comparing vehicles in the same weight class. ©2001 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc. Buckle Up! Do it for those who love you.

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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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BUT NO, you say. "My choice of a reliable fleet of trucks from Toyota (blatant sponsor plug) has put me here today and I'm going to stay on the nice boat with my sandwiches and sodas. With my support crew who'll get whatever I need on a whim. Enjoying the sweet salt air and the crystal-clear blue cobalt waters." And so the conversation goes between you and Stan from the Galapagos Islands. Minutes go by. A half hour. Forty-five minutes later you're totally spent and you're thinkin' this Stan is quite an arguer, when he finally agrees to join you on the boat. And while you know the ache in your arms will go away someday, you'll always be grateful that your fleet of Toyotas freed you up to spend some quality time with Stan.





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- HAS SUCH CREDENTIALS.



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- "Much more growth above and below ground than when fertilizers used alone." — Another leading U.S.D.A. scientist (each of them heading large agencies, using and volume-buying SUPERthrive™.)

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## FREE TRIAL TO SEE FOR YOURSELF

why so many thousands of garden center operators – some now third generation – know that you really cannot operate at so high a level without SUPERthrive™.

Since SUPERthrive™ has not had salesmen – and many retailers have not come to national trade shows – this is a try to reach some of you whose distributors have SUPERthrive™ for you without your knowing why, and others of you whose distributors have not yet responded to your need for SUPERthrive™.

After a half century of unchallenged \$5000,-Guaranteed best, 5 ways – it is more than time for every garden center to have SUPERthrive's™ benefits.

Ask about NEW liberal ad allowances, for fair ads featuring merit, rather than price reductions.

### CHOOSE ONE FREE TRIAL. MAIL THIS

(One ounce makes 500 cups or gallons. 1/4 teaspoonful per gallon, 3 ounces per 100 gallons, (or, constantly, a drop a gallon, 1 ounce per 500 gallons.)

- FREE \$6.20 2-ounce bottle, with 16-ounce \$29.40 size purchase. (RETURN pint for full REFUND if not delighted with 2-ounce bottle effects.)
- FREE \$9.98 4-ounce bottle, with 32-ounce \$51.60 purchase. (RETURN quart for full REFUND if not happy with free 4-ounce bottle new life.)
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DEALER resale trial, FREE bottle with each dozen: DEDUCT 40% IN CHECK FOR DOZEN(S)

_____ dozen ½-ounce \$3.30 sellers;	_____ dozen 1-ounce \$4.65 sellers;
_____ dozen 2-ounce \$6.20 sellers;	_____ dozen 2-ounce \$9.98 sellers;

Firm Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
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If your distributors already have SUPERthrive™ for you, buy trial gallon and dozen(s), etc. from them. Same offers. Send copy of invoice or date and number for "baker's dozen" and other free bottles, direct. OTHERWISE,

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