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Western Lawns**

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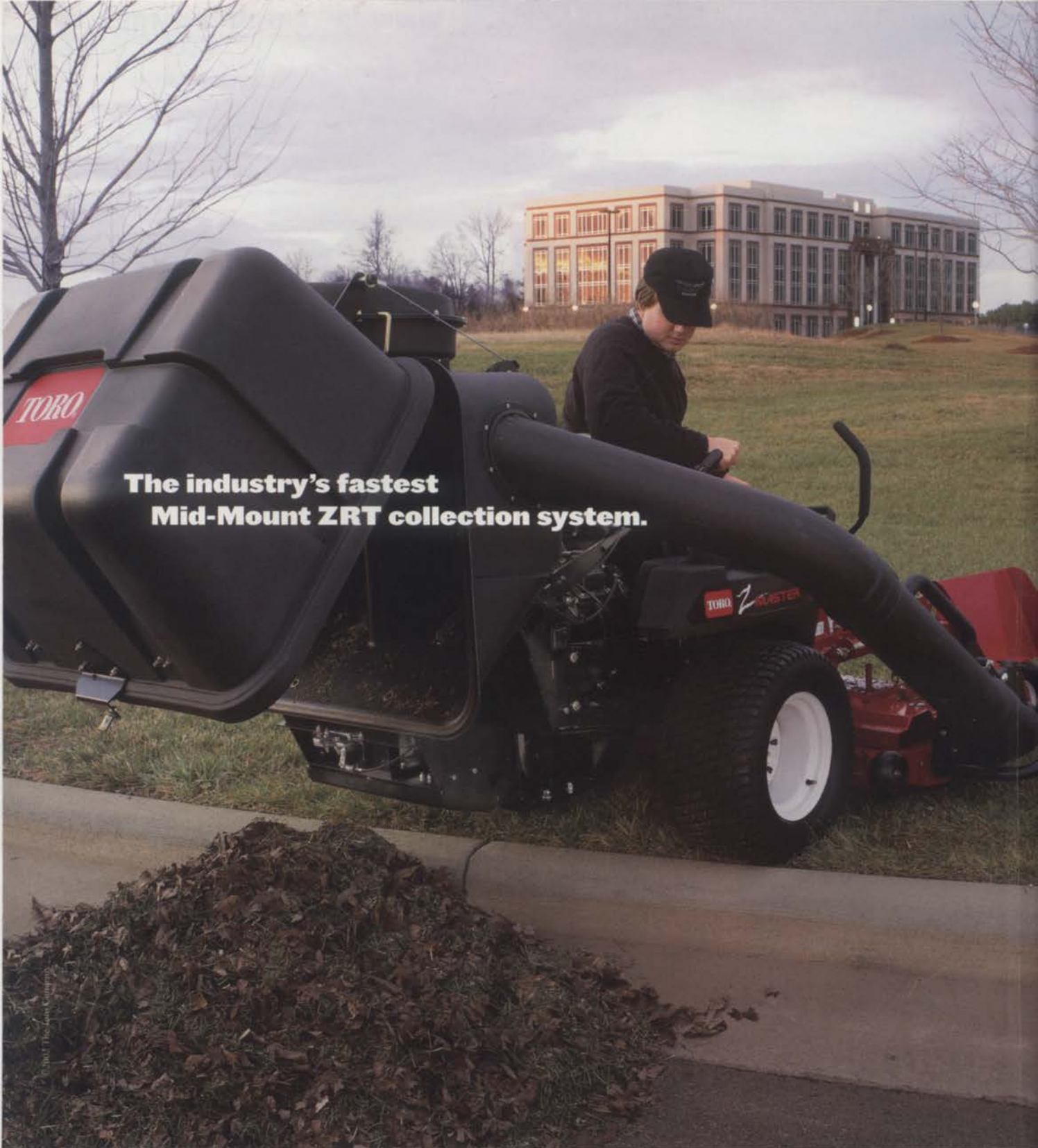
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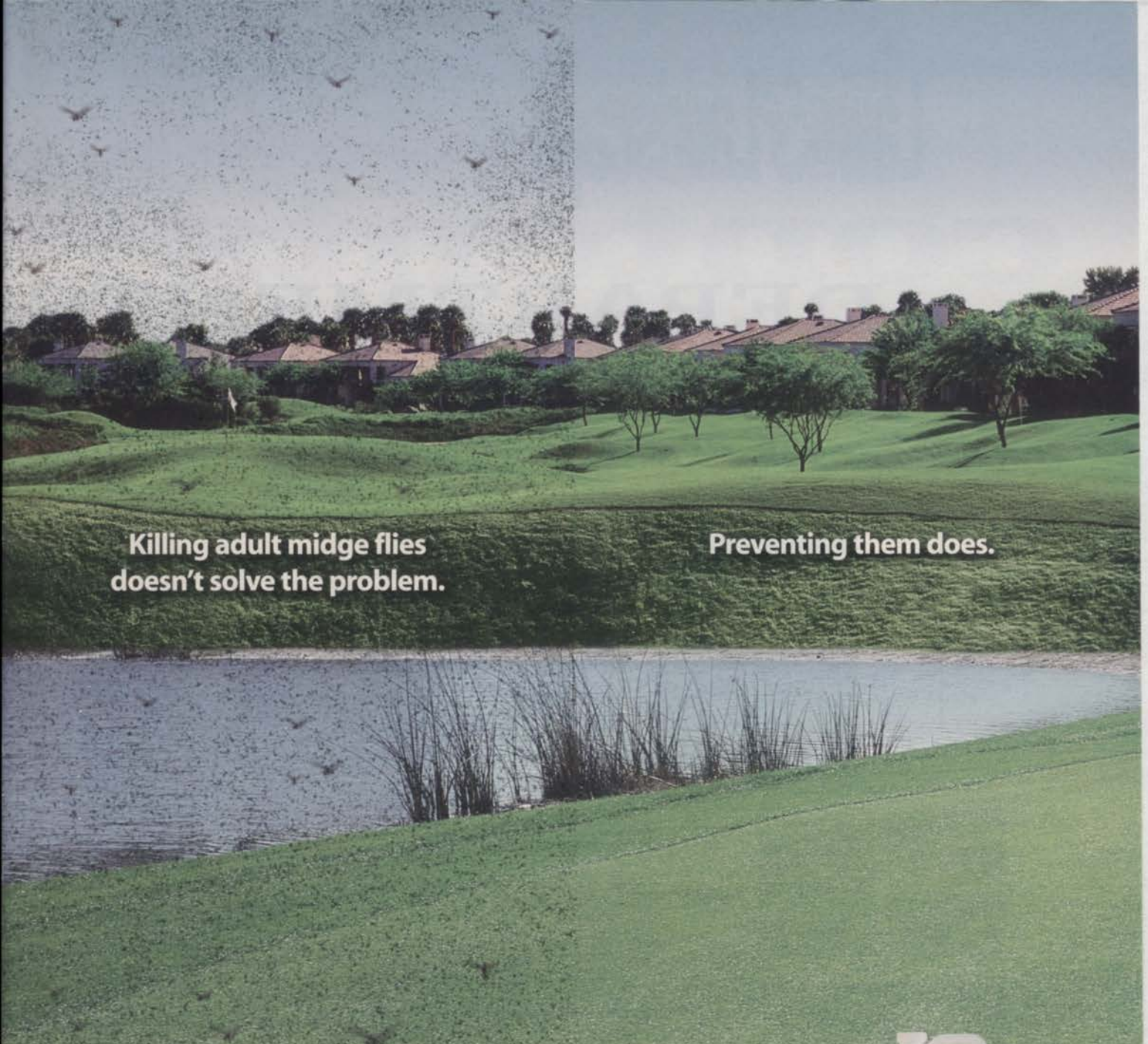


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Buyers' Guide

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Lawn & Landscape

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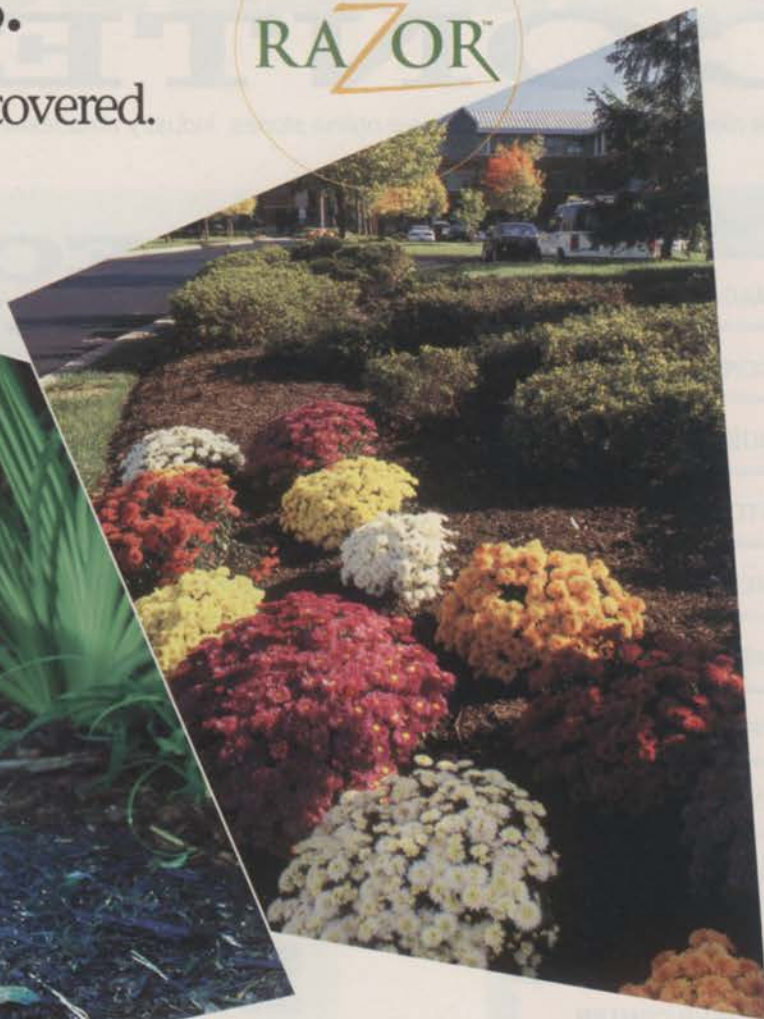
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"Any fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction."

— Albert Einstein

When More Results in Less

We live in an image-conscious society filled with ambition and often fueled by individuals' need to stand out in the crowd. Just look at our automobiles for an obvious example.

Luxury cars are no longer enough – now we've got luxury SUVs. And as soon as you think you've encountered the biggest vehicle on the road, you're certain to find an even larger model filling your rearview mirror. We truly live in the Age of Excess – jumbo jets, cosmetic surgery, second homes, and the list goes on because we're never truly satisfied.

The same is true for landscape companies, the vast majority of which started out as one-man bands

behind a mower. But that's not good enough for most of them anymore. Bigger equals better, right? That's what we're told nowadays, but is that necessarily the case? Many contractors believe it is, so they set out to be more than just a maintenance company. Maybe they get into irrigation or seasonal color or landscape installation.

Whatever the particular route, they're all trying to achieve the same designation – a full-service company. A *Lawn & Landscape* survey bears this out. On average, companies with less than \$100,000 in annual revenue offer four different services.

I've spoken to dozens of such business owners myself, and they all talk longingly of the same wonderful day in the future when their business will be able to meet the customer's every need. And their logic for pursuing this goal is justifiable: "Every time I let one of my competitors on one of my client's properties, I'm giving that competitor a chance to steal that client," they observe.

Perfectly sound logic, indeed. And I can live with that strategy if a company's goal is to create a market

niche for itself via its extensive menu of services. But what concerns me is when I hear from contractors who have just added one service and are already eyeing the next because such service expansion, they figure, is a sure-fire way to build a big business.

The truth is that there's no guarantee that more services will result in more revenue, and there's definitely no guarantee that giving customers more offerings to choose from will yield more profits at the end of the year, which should be your ultimate goal. Instead, the aforementioned survey indicates that the opposite is true because it shows that as companies grow they don't generally add new services. Survey respondents with annual sales in excess of \$500,000 still only offer an average of four services. Even those firms that crack the mythical \$1 million mark (so many contractors' fixation with that sales figure further illustrates the extent of our largesse love affair) only offer four services.

So if companies offer more services so they can grow their businesses when they're just starting out, why don't they continue this expansion? Landscape firms can easily offer six or eight basic services without having to foray into the niche world of firewood delivery or pressure washing. What causes companies to change their attitude somewhere around \$500,000?

I would argue that half a million dollars is a key point for businesses because that's where long-term viability kicks in. Companies generally only achieve this growth if they are run by businesspeople with a plan and an eye on the bottom line. Once they reach that level and no longer feel every day is a battle for survival, the short-term focus gets replaced by a long-range strategy. For most businesses, that means identifying those things they do the best and concentrating their energies in those areas. These managers and owners understand that while offering more services has surface appeal, it's also a way for more to ultimately equal less. ■



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SOLUBLE INSECTICIDE

In Minor's League

I am the president of a mid-size landscape company. How much time should I devote to creating and maintaining a positive culture in my organization?

This is a fantastic question and one that I perceive to be very intuitive. Most business owners do not understand how critical this issue is. Before getting to the specifics of the question, I would first like to address this concept of culture and why it is so important.

Let me start by sharing with you what I consider to be the ideal company. The ideal company is, first and foremost, profitable. It has margins that exceed its industry averages. The company is growing and is strong financially (i.e., it has a strong balance sheet). The ideal company has happy, satisfied customers and a happy satisfied staff. Certainly there are more characteristics, but this covers the ideal company in broad terms.

What is interesting about the ideal company is that the staff is what helps you grow, make money, become financially strong and keep your customers happy. That said, it is absolutely critical that you create an appealing environment for your staff. That begins with your culture. It is important that you understand that the associates of the 21st century want more than a paycheck. They want to be motivated, inspired and energized by their company's leaders. They want the ability to take the initiative and they want to be part of something great.

Unfortunately, many employers just do not understand this idea. They are insensitive to their associates' needs and wants, they continue to run their organization in an autocratic, dictatorial fashion or, worst of all, they give lip service about being sensitive and talk a good game regarding culture but they don't live it every day. They just are not passionate about making it happen.

What you as a leader have to understand is that associates will choose the employers with the best culture. They want employers who are caring and sensitive and who do the little things for their people. Furthermore, I think associates want to work in an environment that is fun and where they think their work makes a difference.

Because of this, it is imperative that you as a leader spend time creating and maintaining a great

culture. You will be rewarded many times over, because your organization will attract, optimize and retain the best talent in the marketplace. Your people will most likely win more business than the competition and be more responsive to your customers. The end result will be happy, satisfied customers, and improved financial performance for the company.

In addition, don't underestimate that your grapevine for employees will improve because people will line up outside the door wanting to work for you. Just look at the example of Southwest Airlines. Southwest is generally

What is **interesting** about the *ideal* company is that the **staff** is what helps you grow, make money, become financially strong and keep your customers happy.

recognized as one of the top 10 corporations to work for in America. Year in and year out, *Fortune* magazine proclaims Southwest as one of the best. Did you know that it is harder to get a job at Southwest than it is to get into Harvard Business School? That is an astounding statistic. It does not take a genius to figure out why. It is because they have created a culture that is the envy of most businesses – a culture that prospective employees want to work in.

Why can't your company be the Southwest Airlines of the landscape industry? There are many things you must do to get there – too many to cover in this article. What I can share with you here is the simple fact that you, as a leader, have to be committed. Creation of a positive culture starts with you. This is not something that you can delegate to someone else. You must convince yourself that this is important and that you are willing to commit to making this a long-term approach to doing business.

Again, this focus has to be at the top of your list because not only do you need to be committed but your managers need to be as well. Evaluate everything you do in the organization with goals and timetables to improve them. Understand that change does not happen overnight, but if you make the commitment, then your culture can be phenomenal.

How much time should you spend? That is a hard question to answer, but I will say this: Be passionate about creating an outstanding culture. Live that passion every day. Put it at the top of your list and I guarantee you will be glad you did. Just look at the success of those who do. **LL**



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. Rhyfel 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 215/961-0364 or e-mail them to bwest@lawnandlandscape.com.

Hire for Attitude, Train for Aptitude

Let's face it — you can't do it on your own. No matter how much energy or talent you possess, after a certain point, in order to grow your business or your department, you need people. And, it's impossible to manage people effectively without first hiring effectively.

You've probably heard the phrase coined by nutritionists, "You are what you eat." Well, in HR we say, "You are who you hire." True, isn't it? It stands to reason then, if you hire employees from hell, you will soon have a workplace from hell. What a concept! It's better to hire smart and avoid people in red suits with horns.

HIRING SECRETS. People are at their most productive when they're in a position that lets them draw on their natural strengths and allows them to be themselves.

When people feel the need to act unnaturally, they experience stress, which lowers productivity and leads to job dissatisfaction. You see, you don't need to know a lot about people's weaknesses, but you do need to know about their strengths. Why? Because building on strengths is much more productive than trying to correct weaknesses.

One way to find out about people's strengths is personality testing. Another is through in-depth interview questioning. Define the attributes that are needed for success in the position and then search for these with a structured interview process and good interview questions.

Too many interviewers make the mistake of overlooking traits that are essential for success in any position. These traits go beyond experience and previous work history and have become increasingly important as the workforce has changed. Take a look:

Work ethic. Work ethic is not something that comes with a long employment history. What we've found is that work ethic is developed at an early age and has more to do with feelings about work that formed in childhood. Ask what type of chores he or she was responsible for as a young adult. Did the candidate work for an allowance? Did he or she work through high school?

Loyalty. Does the candidate have any childhood friends? Is there evidence of long-term relationships that require loyalty?

Sense of humor. This is not the ability to tell a joke, but the ability to go through life's ups and downs and still keep a smile. It's the concept of seeing the glass "half-full" instead of "half-empty." Talking with the candidate about the different chal-

lenges he or she has faced will give you clues about this one.

Respect. One of the best tests of respect is how the candidate treated the receptionist. You can have the receptionist complete a form after meeting the candidate that zeroes in on how easily the candidate smiled and whether or not the candidate was polite.

Judgment. There's no replacement for an employee who exercises good judgment in decision-making. This one relates to common sense. Ask the candidate to give you examples of using his or her judgment and thoughts in making decisions.

Flexibility. A person who opposes change can have difficulty growing. Look for clues in the candidate's life and personal development — evidence that he or she has been open to change, both personally and professionally.


Integrity. The credibility of your company is at stake with every new hire. Only hire people with complete integrity. Cross-check information from the employment application, resume, reference checks and the interview.

Maturity. Maturity does not necessarily come with age. Spending ample time with the candidate talking about his or her past will give insight into the maturity level. Also, it has been said that maturity is the ability to delay self-gratification. If this is true, look for signs that the candidate has not given into every whim in his or her life.

Dependability. This can be verified by reference checking and talking with former employers about dependability.

Intelligence. It's no secret that intellect does not necessarily come from formal education. You can test employees for the ability to learn using formalized aptitude tests.

Initiative. This is difficult to assess during the interview, but easy to pick up on shortly after hire. Ask reference sources about initiative and look for signs within the first 90 days of hire. If you don't see it, then it's not likely to develop.


Enthusiasm. There is a name for people at our firm who are not enthusiastic — unemployed. Only hire people who believe in your company mission and philosophy. What's the bottom line? What people know is less important than who they are. If you hire for attitude and train for skill, you will be better off in the long run. Trust me. 

The author is president of Seawright & Associates, Inc., an H.R. management consulting firm located in Winter Park, Fla. She can be reached via e-mail at jpilleggr@seawright.com or at 407/645-2433.






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USE READER SERVICE #15

SEASONAL OUTLOOK

Bright Colors, Big Plants Top Gardening Trends

HILLEGOM, Holland – Super-sized plants and vivid flora are at the height of gardening fashion, according to a gardening trends report compiled by the International Flower Bulb Center.

Though pastels once dominated the garden, brights like hot pink, coral, yellow and blue entered the scene in the early 1990s. But today's trends embrace even bolder shades of chartreuse, orchid, orange and purple, the report revealed.

Larger plants that add major presence in the garden also are trendy, the report showed. Some plus-size foliage favorites include elephant ears, banana trees, castor bean plants, dahlias, ornamental grasses, cannas, large-flowered hibiscuses, sunflowers and hollyhocks.

But these plants aren't taking the stage in plain shades of green. Instead, just as basic black has long

(continued on page 20)



Regardless of company size or client profile, most lawn care operators surveyed by *Lawn & Landscape* allocated a generous portion of their budgets to pesticide expenditures in 2001.

Forty-six percent spent more than \$10,000 and 31 percent spent between \$2,501 and \$10,000. These expenditures increased for 62 percent of respondents from 2000 to 2001, while 30 percent said expenditures were steady.

Only 8 percent reported cutting pesticides from their budgets. For those who did report adjusting their expenditures between 2000 and 2001, the average increase was 14 percent, while decreases averaged 7 percent. Most of the money spent – 86 percent – went toward turf-related pesticide purchases.

Pesticide PURCHASES

What were your approximate annual pesticide expenditures for 2001?

EXPENDITURES	% OF CONTRACTORS
\$1 to \$1,000	6%
\$1,001 to \$2,500	8%
\$2,501 to \$5,000	17%
\$5,001 to \$7,500	14%
\$7,501 to \$10,000	9%
More than \$10,000	46%

Source: Lawn & Landscape

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

Internet Growing in Popularity for Landscape Businesses

More landscape contractors are climbing on the Web bandwagon, according to a Research USA survey conducted by *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

The report revealed that 79 percent of landscape contractors have Internet access. Eighty-six percent of those contractors use the Internet for e-mail, 76 percent use it for research, 44 percent explore the Web to gather news, 31 percent sell or buy items on the Internet, 7 percent use bulletin boards or chat rooms and, finally, 4 percent have another purpose for using the Internet.

But when asked if their companies had Web sites, a low 22 percent said yes.

Bizmove.com suggests that the Web can be a wonderful marketing tool for every company for these reasons:

1. A Web site is a fun and creative way of expression.
2. Anyone can have a Web site. Financially speaking, the Web is the great equalizer of the marketing world. While other forms of advertising and marketing, such as television, radio and print media, are often prohibitively expensive for small companies, anyone can use the Web to advertise and market their products or services for approximately the same reasonable rates.
3. A Web site is a direct reflection of the company. Each company controls its message and the image it wants to portray.
4. This is one time when it's considered OK to be a "work in progress." With the Web, a company is virtually unlimited.



Mattingly's MESSAGE

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

Hey, is your seat belt fastened? You are in the throes of spring, and it is wild and crazy, isn't it? With this activity you do not want your organization to forget your primary objective: Provide excellent customer service with quick response time and quality that surpasses your competition. If you can accomplish this you will have an assortment of ecstatic clients. Here are a few tips that might help you accomplish these important objectives:

In some arenas, seeing or even talking to all your maintenance clients on a regular basis is impossible. Establish performance expectations for your account managers and/or supervisors and provide them direction. First, determine various "classifications" for your clients such as 'A,' 'B,' 'C' and 'D.' Next, determine how you expect the account manager to relate with your clients.

Example:

'A' Client – Visit clients face-to-face a minimum of once a month and invite them to walk the site with you. In addition, call clients once every other week.

'B' Client – Call clients once a month and ask, "Are there any areas that you would like us to focus on in the coming month?" In addition, visit and walk the property once a month.

'C' Client – Call every 60 days minimum, and visit and walk the site once a month.

'D' Client – Call every 60 days and respond as necessary.

With this understanding, I think you will become focused on customer service. It also establishes criteria to hold your managers accountable.

Keep in mind that your clients expect you to recommend any improvements you observe that will enhance their properties. Here is what I suggest for all maintenance account managers/supervisors:

For all 'A,' 'B' and 'C' clients, submit a minimum of one enhancement (extra billable work) to clients once a month. This is in addition to the normal seasonal flowers and mulch that they request every year. You can always find areas on their sites that need improvements.

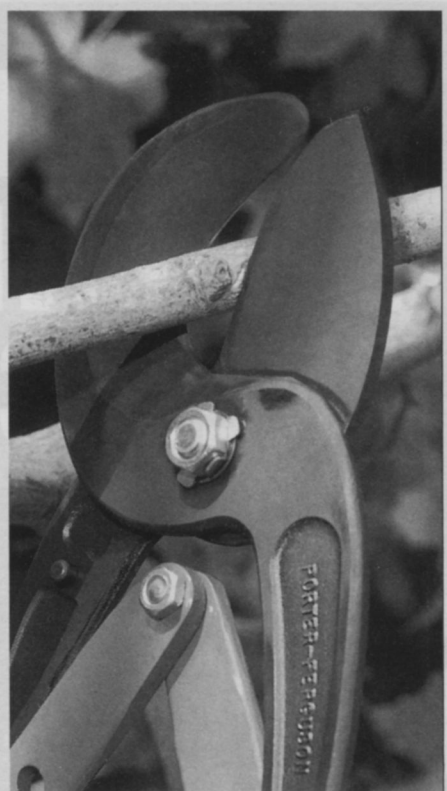
Further, track the activity of these submittals per account manager. Post the number of proposals submitted weekly. Include dollar amount and proposals sold. Do this on a wall so all can view it.

Landscape installation managers and supervisors also need to focus on service and quality. You should have a policy that you call the client at least three days before your arrival and inform them of your plans. In addition, don't be afraid to also submit "extras"/change orders during the construction phase. We should always be looking for enhancements to improve our quality.

As a policy, require your manager or supervisor to formally walk the site with the owner upon completion and obtain acceptance or a list of items to be attended to that will result in acceptance. Have the client sign such before you leave the site at the time of the walk-through. You should have a standard form for this and you should also advise the client in your sales presentation that this is your procedure. You will now not have a problem in receiving your money promptly.

Have a great season! Talk to your clients, sell extras, inspect your quality regularly and most of all, have fun.

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



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USE READER SERVICE #44

(continued from page 18)

been a fashion staple, the same dark trend takes hold in the garden, the report explained. This means bronze- and black-leaved cannas and coleuses, as well as purple heucheras and dark-leaved coral bells, create added landscape depth. For best results, plant swaths of black to create color blocks, since one or two plants alone have limited impact, and balance these blacks and purples with trendy shocking shades, the bulb center advised.

(continued on page 22)

People

Valley Crest named **Christina Briggs** to the position of vice president/national business development.

Netafim USA appointed **Igal Aisenberg** as the new president and chief executive officer.

Symbiot Business Group announced the addition of **Drew St. John** to its management team as vice president.

ProSource One hired eight new sales representatives. They are: **Mike Bailey, Virgil Beaven, Geer DuBose, Bill Gauwitz, Dan Jones, Theresa Luke, Brian McGuffin** and **Bill Plante**.

Agrisel USA hired **Jason Assad** as its director of business development.

ServiceMaster combined the offices of chairman and chief executive and elected **Jonathan Ward** as chairman.

Valent U.S.A. announced that **Masayo Tada** will return to Valent to lead the company as president.

The J. R. Simplot Company selected **Joel Barker** to lead its turf and horticulture business unit.

Environmental Industries announced the appointment of **Judith Guido** to the position of chief marketing officer and vice president.



Christina Briggs (top), Igal Aisenberg

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USE READER SERVICE #16

Market Trends

(continued from page 20)

In addition to these fads, the gardening trends report said fragrant flowers continue growing in popularity, as well as container plantings to create gardens in places like decks, balconies and terraces or to accent doorways. Posh containers include the large, lightweight, winter-proof ones made of molded resins, fiberglass or plastic. Also popular are colorful, glazed containers from China and Malaysia.

IN THE NEWS

Bayer, Aventis Deal Gains Approval

LEVERKUSEN, Germany—The European Union (E.U.) Commission cleared Bayer's approximately \$6.5-billion dollar takeover of Aventis' agrochemical unit, pending "substantial divestitures" by Bayer, including the company's concession to sell to a single purchaser a group of Aventis insecticides and fungicides, most notably fipronil, its new insecticide.

(continued on page 27)



L&L Book Report

THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

by Joseph Pine II and James Gilmore

Asking simple questions often leads to innovative answers – solutions to refresh everyday operations. This is what Dale Micetic, president, Terrain Systems, Scottsdale, Ariz., discovered after reading *The Experience Economy* by Joseph Pine II and James Gilmore.

"The book stimulated me to ask what kind of experience we were offering our clients, and that, alone, is a good question," he related. "It gets you thinking about what you can do better."

In Micetic's case, the 206-page book challenged him to reassess his company's commercial design and sales process.

"The book pointed out that the highest

amount of value as a vendor or supplier of goods comes when you can involve the people in an experience as opposed to just selling them a commodity," he recognized. "We need to look at the whole process in which we sell, install and maintain landscapes and say, 'What is the experience that our clients are having and how can we make it an experience that is memorable and something that they can emotionally tie into?' And as they do, they will value our service more, which means greater loyalty or greater revenues because we can charge more for our services."

The book addresses a hierarchy of needs – satisfaction, sacrifice and surprise – and discusses the importance of exceeding clients' needs. The writing is analytical and the chapters thought-provoking – not a beach read, by any means. However, it relates to contractors' roles as valuable service providers.

– **Kristen Hampshire**

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Letters TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

I look forward to every issue of *Lawn & Landscape* because the content and information is relevant, timely and educational. Great job.

Thanks,

*Dave Daniell, Vice President, Heads Up Landscaping
Albuquerque, N.M.*

Editor:

Your Regional Forecast piece in the March issue of *Lawn & Landscape* (page 80) cites a comment that "Unless Mother Nature blesses the Midwest with extremely cold temperatures this winter, more grubs will result."

If extremely cold temperatures had a major effect on overwintered grubs, they would have long since been eliminated from regions such as northern Wisconsin or northern Michigan where the soil often freezes to a depth of 2 to 4 feet or more. Gerald Wegner's research on the Biology of the Black Turfgrass *Ataenius* showed that despite the fact that winter temperatures dropped to -27 F for two successive days, survival of overwintered adult beetles (which overwinter 3 inches deep in the soil) was 75 to 80 percent. Japanese beetle grubs frozen in soil

will often revive nicely when brought into warm temperatures. Think about it. If extreme cold were a major factor, there would be few (if any) insects (pests and non-pests) in the far north. Grubs occur in Thunder Bay, Ontario, and St. John, New Brunswick, Canada.

What is "bad news for grubs" (and some other insects) are winters where soil temperatures warm sufficiently to cause their metabolism-feeding to resume, and then fall quickly. Such starting and stopping of their metabolic-physiological processes can cause severe overwintering mortality. The effect of extreme cold is limited at worst.

Further, there is also a reference on page 82 that suggests, "Grubs...can be controlled with accurate watering this spring." Further, someone suggests "more frequent, light waterings vs. less regular heavy irrigation." I would be ever so grateful to see or know the source of data (even the anecdotal type) supporting claims that a watering regime can control grubs. However, I'm always willing to learn.

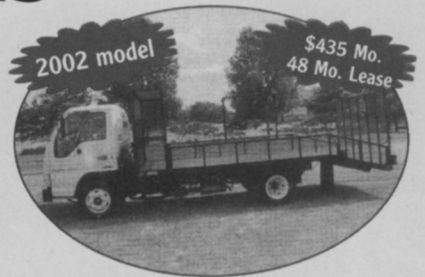
*Dr. Harry Niemczyk, turfgrass entomologist and professor emeritus,
OARDC/The Ohio State University
Wooster, Ohio*



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2002 ISUZU NPR: gas, 16' landscape body, auto., ac, am/fm, weedeater racks, water cooler rack, shovel rack, curbside gate folds down

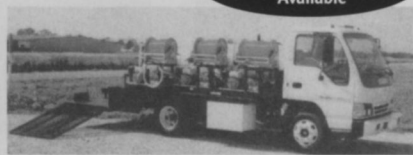


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USE READER SERVICE #48

Market Trends

IN THE NEWS

Weed Man Continues Strong Growth

CLEVELAND, Ohio – One of the emerging stories in the lawn care industry in the last few years has been the development of the Weed Man U.S. franchise network. In late 1999, Canada's largest lawn care company announced its plans to enter the U.S. market by selling subfranchises and franchises to lawn care companies, landscape contractors, structural pest control professionals and other qualified individuals.

The company has discussed its long-term growth plans since the outset, and rapid progress made in the last two years has established the firm as a growing force in the lawn care industry.

Weed Man finished 2001 with 28 operating locations serving 71 franchise territories, and total sales of \$6.5 million, according to Roger Mongeon, president, Turf Holdings, the company with rights to the Weed Man franchise for the United States. The company's goals for 2002 call for nearly doubling its annual revenue to \$11 million and increasing its presence to 41 locations.

Most importantly, however, Mongeon expects to sell Weed Man's remaining subfranchisor territories this year. The subfranchisor approach makes Weed Man unique as a franchise company as it sells rights for large areas to individuals who then assume responsibility for selling the actual local franchise territories. These subfranchisors then provide the ongoing support for their franchisees.

Weed Man went through last year with seven subfranchisors, and they are some of the lawn care industry's most respected names: Terry Kurth, Jon Cundiff, Phil Fogarty, Bob Ottley, Ken Heltemes and Chuck and Steve Russell, to name a few. This group recently expanded to include Merrill Landscape in Rexburg, Idaho, which bought the territory for Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana and Utah. In addition, Kurth expanded his territory by purchasing the rights to North Dakota and South Dakota, while Fogarty and Ottley grew their partnership when they bought all of New York other than the seven counties surrounding and including New York City. Oklahoma, Arkansas and North Texas were also gobbled up as Jon Cundiff brought in Joe Munie, president of Munie Outdoor Services, and the pair took on the rights for that part of the country.

Now, Weed Man is left with five remaining subfranchisor territories:

- Southern California
- Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico
- South Texas
- Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida Panhandle
- The remaining portion of Florida

Mongeon predicts these areas will sell in the next two to three years as the company continues its growth, and the company continues to focus its marketing efforts for subfranchisors as well as franchisees or landscape contractors looking to grow the lawn care portion of their business or offer a new service.

"What we want is for people to view us as a business consultant who may be able to come in and help their businesses grow," explained Mongeon. "If we don't think they're a fit for us, then we'll tell them that as well."



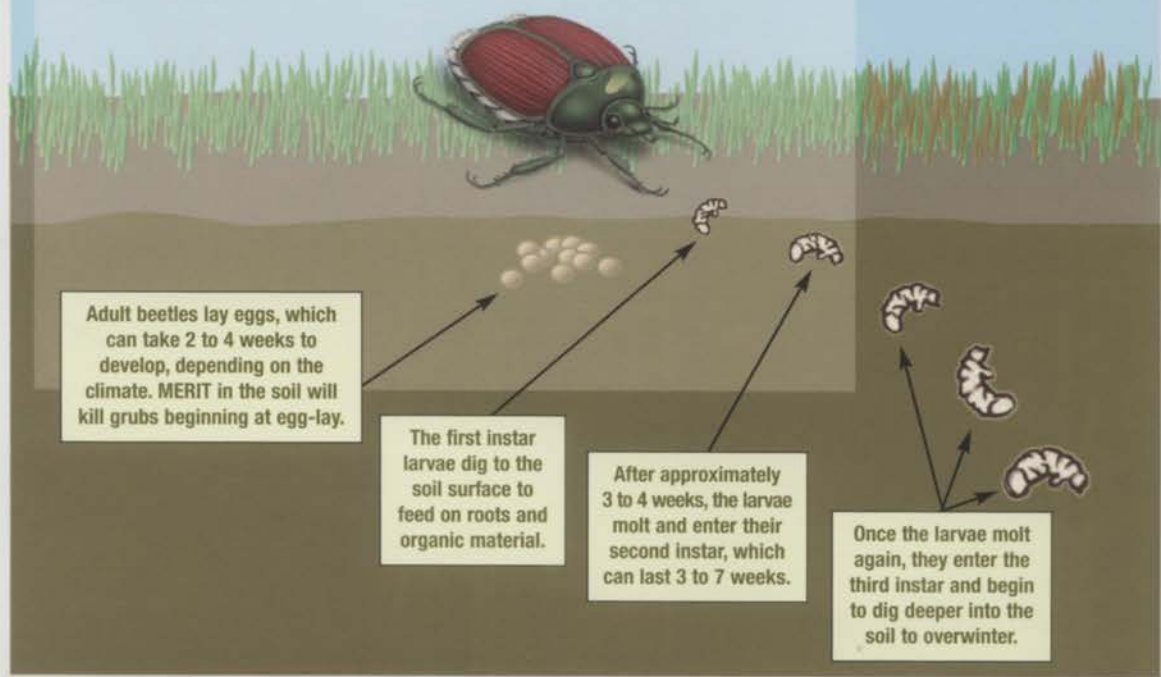
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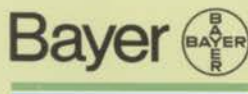
Grub Life Cycle

MERIT Application Window



MERIT: FEAR NO GRUB

Some fears are understandable. When something is rustling around under your bed at night, it's normal to be a little concerned. But, there's no reason to be afraid of grubs. Efficacy tests prove what we've known for seven years: MERIT offers the best pre-damage control of a broad spectrum of grubs. Trust MERIT and fear no grub – Guaranteed.



For more information, contact your authorized Bayer representative, visit online at BayerProCentral.com or call (800) 842-8020.



IF YOU'RE AFRAID OF THE BOOGYMAN, HOLD ON TO THAT OLD TEDDY BEAR - we probably can't help you. But if grubs are your biggest worry, then MERIT® Insecticide will help you conquer those fears. For seven years, MERIT has been the premier grub control product on the market. With MERIT, you can fear no grub - Guaranteed.

Need more proof to quell your fears? We've got the numbers, and while they may seem scary to the makers of thiamethoxam and halofenozide, they will put your fear of grubs to rest. Research proves it: MERIT offers the most effective grub solution from egg-lay to second instar.

DON'T WORRY - MERIT CONTROLS THEM

There are a lot of different grubs targeting your turf, and they're scarier than the monster

in your closet. But don't you worry - MERIT protects your turf from a broad spectrum of the toughest grubs, including superior control of the Big 5: Japanese and oriental beetles, european chafer, and northern and southern masked chafers (see figure 1). MERIT also controls green june beetles better than thiamethoxam (see figure 2). With MERIT, you have nothing to fear. Choose another insecticide, and you're on your own.

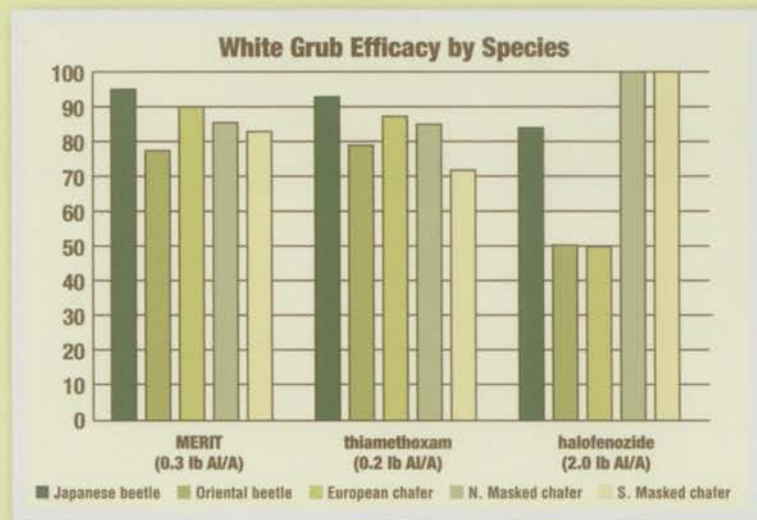


Figure 1
These numbers might scare the pants off of the makers of thiamethoxam and halofenozide.

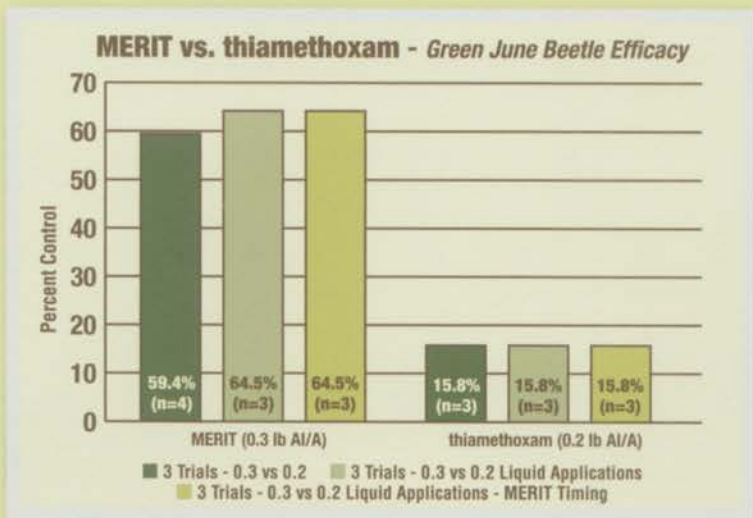


Figure 2
MERIT also outperformed thiamethoxam in green june beetle efficacy tests.

CONQUER YOUR FEARS WITH MERIT

In 1994, MERIT changed the face of grub control by offering an effective preventive treatment. Today, MERIT is known industry-wide as the best option for preventing grub damage. But, what you may not know is MERIT effectively kills white grubs when they are already present, feeding on the roots of your turf. That means MERIT offers unsurpassed

control of white grubs before signs of damage are visible, or pre-damage, from egg-lay to second instar, giving you a wide window for your MERIT applications (see figure 3). And, if you forget to apply MERIT and damage occurs, end the nightmare immediately with DYLOX® Insecticide, the fastest post-damage grub control around.

Figure 3
MERIT outperformed thiamethoxam in white grub efficacy tests.

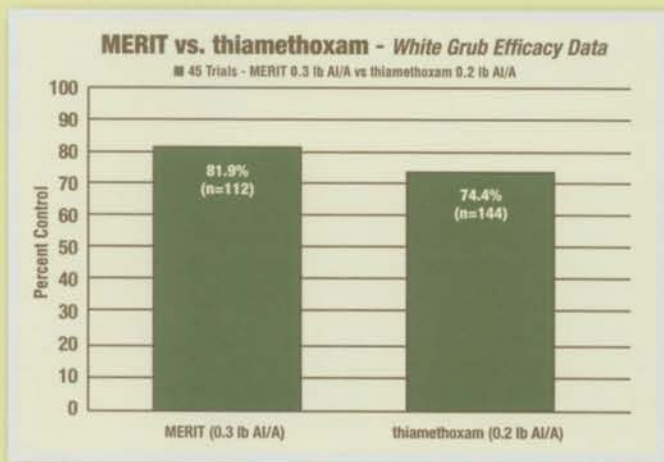
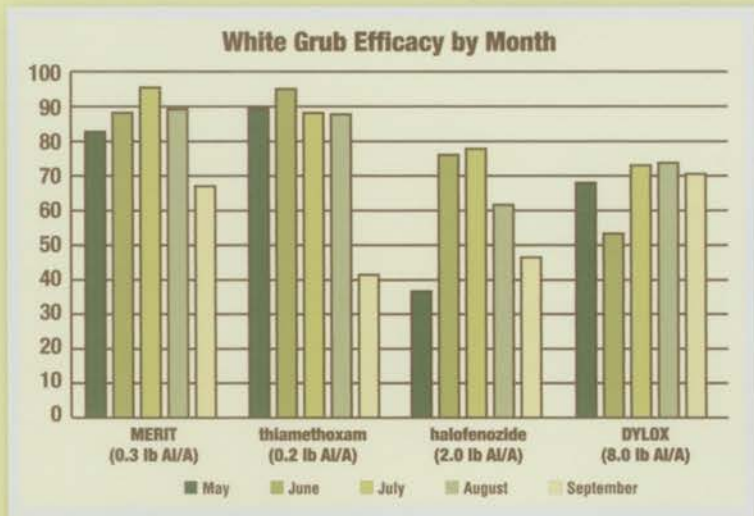


Figure 4

MERIT is the most effective solution for grub control from egg-lay to second instar.



A LOW USE RATE SQUELCHES YOUR WORRIES

The pre-damage grub control MERIT provides can't be beat, and it does it with a low use rate (see figure 4). In fact, based on recommended application rates, MERIT is effective at a use rate 85% to 96% lower than most currently registered soil insecticides for use on turf.

MERIT: FEARLESS ON TOP

When you're on top, someone always wants to take your place. In the seven years that MERIT has been controlling grubs, some tough guys have called us out. But, none has been able to take the leadership position MERIT has secured as the most effective grub solution, and efficacy tests show thiamethoxam

won't change that (see figure 5).

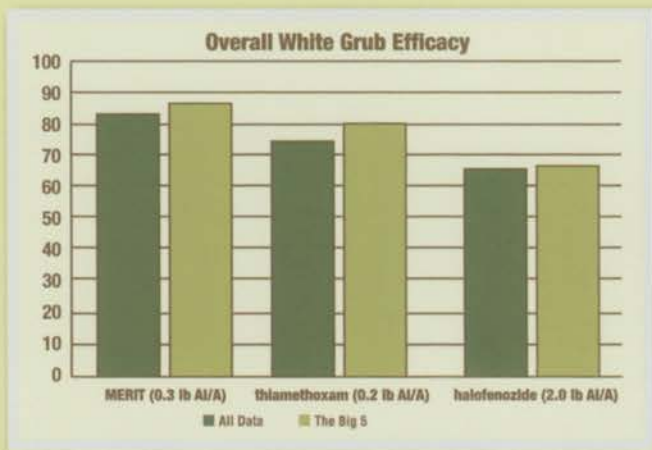


Figure 5

MERIT provides the best pre-damage control of the Big 5.

The Big 5 includes the Japanese beetle, oriental beetle, european chafer, northern masked chafer and southern masked chafer.

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Market Trends

(continued from page 23)

Under the agreement, Bayer will divest fipronil for seed treatment (agricultural) uses. However, Bayer will retain fipronil for all other environmental science uses, including lawn care and structural pest control, according to Bayer Spokesman Guenter Forneck. Fipronil is the active ingredient in Aventis' insecticide TopChoice.

Currently, Bayer, Aventis and Syngenta Professional Products are the major players in the seed treatment sector. Forneck said the E.U. Commission was concerned that Bayer's acquisition of Aventis would lead to market dominance in this sector by Bayer and Syngenta. Forneck acknowledged that Bayer had hoped to complete the merger without having to divest any products, but the com-

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.

JUNE 6 University of California Davis Extension Landscaping with Herbs, Davis, Calif. Contact: 530/757-8753.

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

JUNE 13-14 Tree Biology - Magnified: Dissection and Autopsy workshop, Portsmouth, N.H. Contact: 800/841-2498.

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

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

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 15-16 Chattanooga Association of Landscape Professionals Summer Express Short Course, Collegedale, Tenn. Contact: 423/886-8874.

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.

JULY 20-23 Convention of the Lawn & Garden Marketing and Distribution, Hilton Head, S.C. Contact: 215/564-3484.

JULY 22-23 PLCAA Legislative Day on the Hill & Cemetery Project, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/458-3466.

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

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

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

AUG. 9-11 ALCA Maintenance Symposium, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: 800/395-2522.

AUG. 13 2002 Michigan Turfgrass Field Day, East Lansing, Mich. Contact: 517/321-1660.

AUG. 13 Wisconsin Turfgrass Association's Summer Field Day, Middleton, Wis. Contact: 414/529-4705.

AUG. 14 Ohio State University/Ohio Turfgrass Foundation Research Field Day, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 888/683-3445.

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

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USE READER SERVICE #50

Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

pany made the concession to gain E.U. Commission clearance.

"We had hoped to have all products in hand, but the E.U. Commission argued that there should be a new competitor so that at least three strong competitors are in the market," Forneck said, adding that the list of conditions set down by the E.U. Commission relates to total product sales of about \$580 million. "This was the solution that was chosen."

The planned merger still requires the approval of U.S. antitrust authorities, and Forneck said Bayer expects clearance from the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the immediate future. Still to be determined is the future of Bayer's imidacloprid, the active ingredient in the insecticide Merit. Since Bayer will be able to retain fipronil for lawn care uses, many market analysts believe the company will have to license out imidacloprid for the FTC to approve the merger.

LAWN CARE NEWS

EPA Settles Lawsuit

SACRAMENTO, Calif. - The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is considering for the first time in a decade how 18 commonly used pesticides may affect endangered salmon and woodland plants.

Agency officials said the review is part of a federal lawsuit settlement that will be signed with three California environmental groups, which sued over the EPA's approval of the pesticides, used in fields, forests, orchards and to control weeds along highways and irrigation canals. Three of the pesticides - carbonyl, chlorpyrifos and diazinon - have been detected in waterways at levels that may be toxic to fish, the suit contends.

The EPA, working with the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, will analyze the pesticides' affect on seven salmon species and 33 endangered forest plants. The agency also agreed to find ways to minimize the pesticides' effects.

The settlement in the suit, filed in 2000, will become final after a public comment period. **LL**

On the WEB

Syngenta's GreenCast -	www.greencastonline.com
Wayne's Environmental Services -	www.waynesenvironmental.com
SeaScape Lawn Care & Tree & Shrub Care -	www.seascapeinc.com
National Truck Equipment Association -	www.nfea.org
Pursell Technologies -	www.polyon.com
Garden Art International -	www.gardenartint.com

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USE READER SERVICE #51

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USE READER SERVICE #18

Breaking News

CORPORATE ANNOUNCEMENTS

A New Day for LESCO



Michael DiMino (left),

Bill Foley (right)

The reality is that landscape contractors think more highly of LESCO than the stock market does, and that cost Bill Foley his job as the company's chairman and CEO in early April. Foley's plan for LESCO was for the company to assume a dominant national position in the green industry by building distribution locations that would have everything lawn care and landscape professionals need to do business.

Today, LESCO has 227 such service centers and more than \$500 million in annual sales, but growth and profitabil-

ity slid annually since 1998, dragging the stock down from \$25 a share in late 1997 to a low point of about \$6 last December. So the LESCO board accepted Foley's resignation and replaced him with Michael DiMino, who was hired as president and chief operating officer in December.

"As everyone knows, our company's financial performance and stock performance have not been acceptable over last couple of years," acknowledged Marty Erbaugh, the former Barefoot Grass and Davey Tree employee who took over as chairman of the board. "Michael has been a quick study and quickly learned the business. The board was particularly impressed with Michael's ideas relative to organic sales growth and expense and capital disciplines."

DiMino has some clear thoughts on how LESCO can strengthen its business, and one of his goals is to improve customers' experiences at LESCO. "When Jim FitzGibbon



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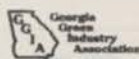
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USE READER SERVICE #53

USE READER SERVICE #54

Breaking News

and Bob Burkhardt began the company, they focused on all of the transactions to make sure the customer had an excellent experience," he observed. "We may have veered a little bit from that.

"When the customer wants to pay us for one of our products, we want to make that a wonderful experience," he continued. "Right now, we can make that difficult in terms of getting the customer the inventory, using too much paperwork and so on. Those things need to be modernized and brought up to a standard that's second to none in this industry so the customer thinks it's painful *not* to do business with LESCO."

At the same time, DiMino has regularly talked about the need for more "financial discipline" atop the company since his promotion. "We had some financial issues that I think just simply relate to discipline," he admitted. "We need to refresh our thinking, our strategic direction and our capital spending and overall expense control based on making sure the customer has an excellent experience with LESCO."


Such discipline means taking a closer look at where LESCO's products come from and whether or not the company continues its manufacturing efforts. "There are other ways to be profitably supplying the market-

**"We think we can
open 600 service
centers." – Bill Foley,
October 1997 issue of
Lawn & Landscape**

place with fertilizer and equipment product lines without manufacturing," DiMino observed. "The fertilizer side is profitable – it's one of our meat-and-potatoes areas. On the equipment side, our joint venture [with MTD] could be more profitable, but the whole strategic decision on equipment is tough."

In an exclusive interview with *Lawn & Landscape*, DiMino said it's "safe to say"

LESCO will enter into more distribution arrangements with current industry suppliers, similar to the deal it announced last year with Kawasaki. "We'll try to find people that really want to partner with us and let them have that category so they aren't competing with other people in our own shop," he explained, adding that the relationship with MTD to produce MTD Pro mowers will continue.

DiMino also related that he sees the potential for adding as many as 90 stores in the future, but the immediate focus will be on doubling same-store sales growth and developing regional "super stores" with large warehouse capacity to improve the company's inventory management. "Those hubs don't exist today, but they will be a large store and they'll have warehouse capacity to supply the other stores in the area," he explained, adding that this plan is driven by LESCO's need to compete better against local or regional distributors. "Local delivery is something that we trip over right now, but this will help that." – **Bob West** 

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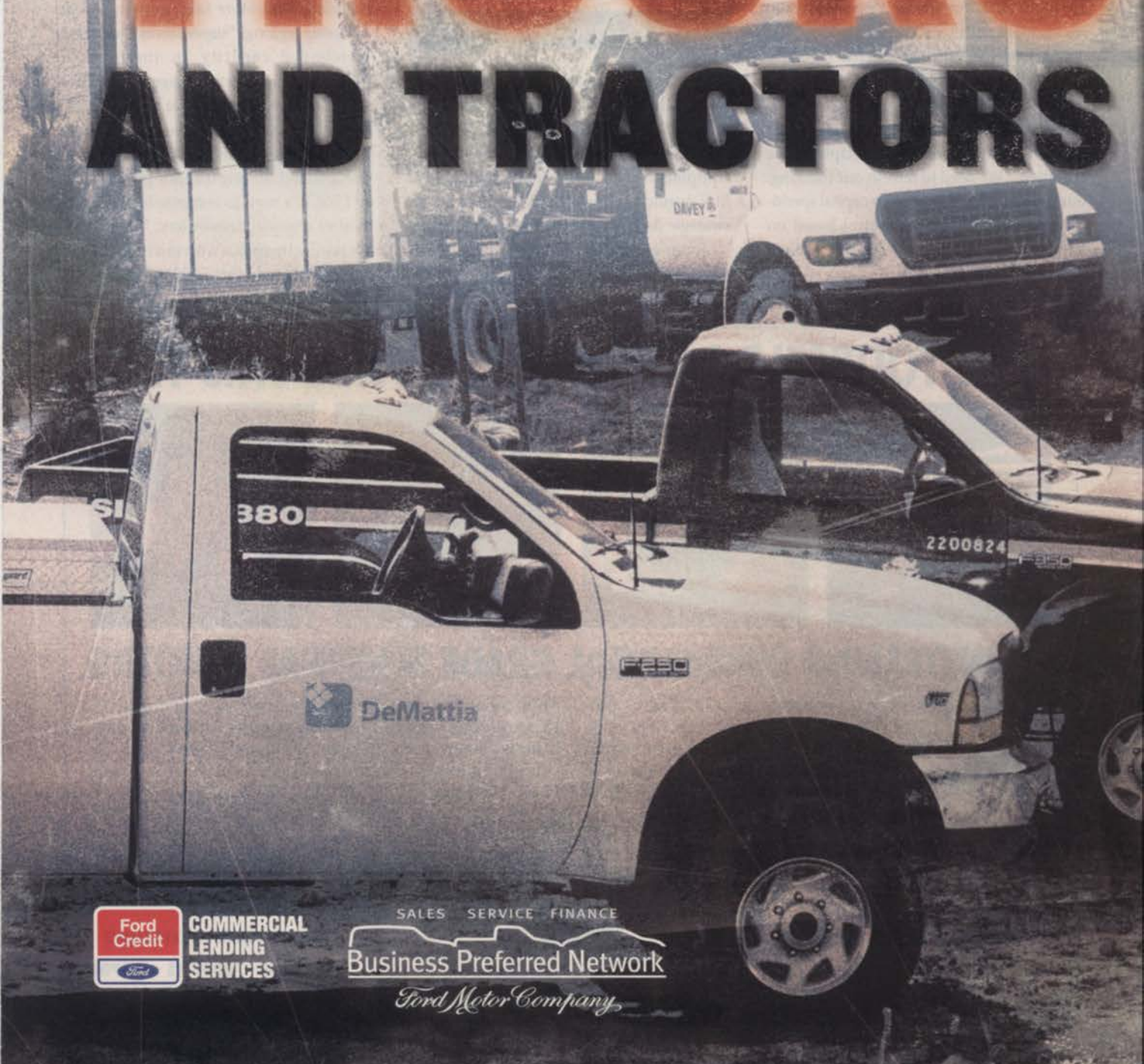
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USE READER SERVICE #19

Nursery Market Report

PEAK PERFORMERS

All-America Selections

For the past 70 years, All-America Selections (AAS) has strived to take the guesswork out of finding varieties that will be reliable, vigorous and show marked improvements over others currently available.



Rudbeckia Hirta 'Prairie Sun' (left) has large, 5-inch flowers with golden yellow petals. *Gaillardia 'Sundance Bicolor'* (lower left) features red and yellow blooms that are heat and drought tolerant. Photos: All-America Selections



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Plant breeders worldwide enter unsold varieties into the AAS trials, and professional horticulturists evaluate these entries in field trials. The new cultivars, labeled only with coded numbers, are grown side by side with the most similar varieties. There are 47 trial sites in 30 states and provinces of the United States and Canada. Testing in a variety of sites ensures that plants are suitable for growing in multiple zones.

Once test results are tabulated, the most outstanding varieties are nominated to receive provisional awards – within three years, the plant breeder or contracted seed company must be able to produce enough seed to supply the public.

AAS winners are one of a kind and recognized for their value internationally as plants with outstanding vigor, quality and productivity under a wide range of environmental conditions. Here are the latest AAS selections, which may be found through nursery and seed suppliers.

Agastache foeniculum 'Golden Jubilee.' Golden foliage gently modulates to lime green on the lower leaves. Dense spikes of lavender blue florets crown the plants and provide contrast to the gold foliage for a striking display. 'Golden Jubilee' performs well in full sun or partial shade and initiates buds during the long days of summer. When leaves are crushed, they emit a mint fragrance.

Carnation 'Can Can Scarlet.' The 2-inch, scarlet blooms have a heady spice fragrance and are long lasting. Plants will produce flowers from the dog days of summer through fall. Performing best in full sun,

Tree & Shrub

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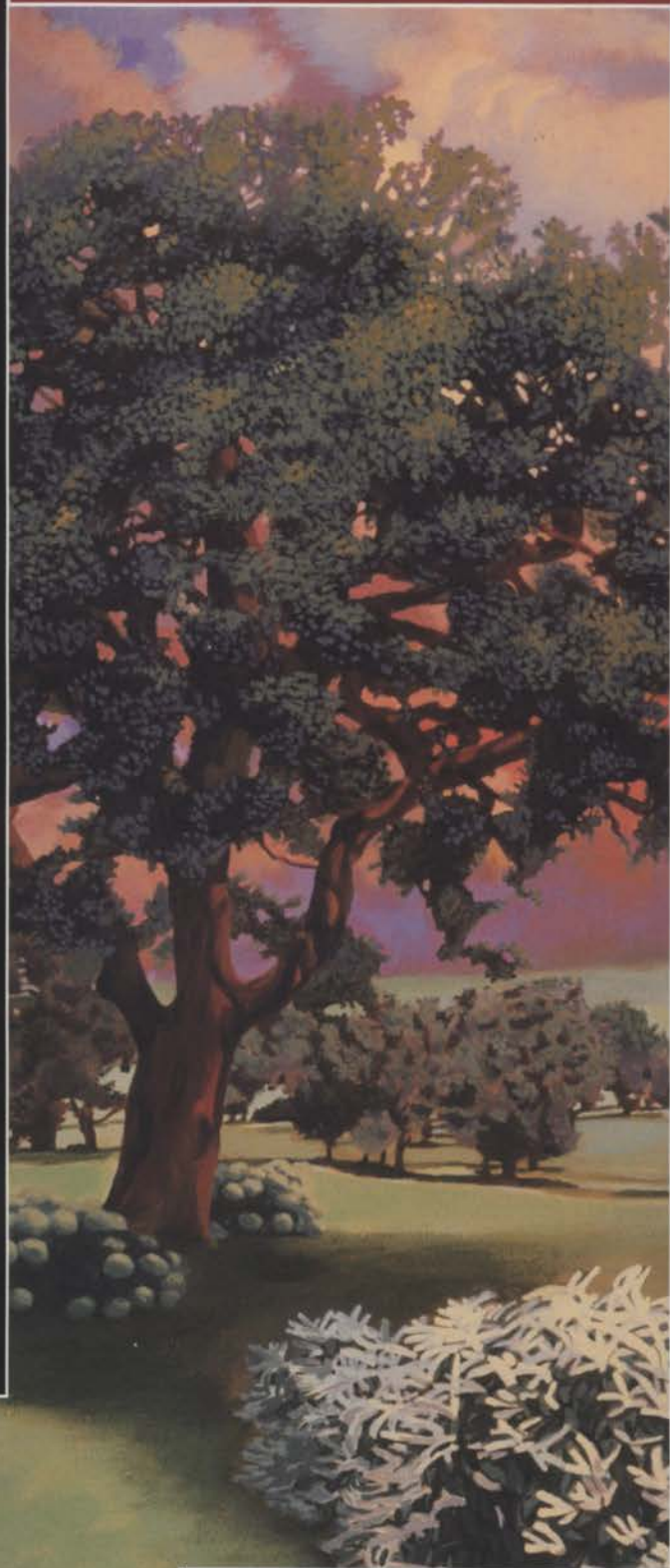
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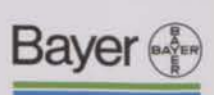


Table 1. Foliar Application Rates

PRODUCT	LABELED USE RATE
Merit 75 WSP	one water-soluble packet per 300 gallons of water
Merit 75 WP	10 teaspoons per 100 gallons of water

Soil Drench and Power Soil Injection Application Rates of MERIT:*

Selected Application Volume/Inch of DBH or Foot of Shrub Height	Place One 1.6 oz Packet of MERIT 75 WSP in the Following Volume of Water		Place One 2 oz Jar of MERIT 75 WP in the Following Volume of Water	
	For a Low Rate of MERIT	For a High Rate of MERIT	For a Low Rate of MERIT	For a High Rate of MERIT
1 pint	6 gal	3 gal	7.5 gal	3.75 gal
1 quart	12 gal	6 gal	15 gal	7.5 gal
2 quarts	24 gal	12 gal	30 gal	15 gal
1 gallon	48 gal	24 gal	60 gal	30 gal
2.5 gallons	120 gal	60 gal	150 gal	75 gal
5 gallons	240 gal	120 gal	300 gal	150 gal

* Soil injection applications in Long Island, New York, were recently removed from the MERIT label.

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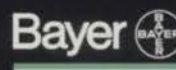
	MERIT 75 WSP (1.6 oz Packet)	MERIT 75 WP (2 oz Jar)
	TO OBTAIN THE SELECTED MERIT RATE, PLACE THE ABOVE IN THE SUGGESTED VOLUME OF WATER	
LOW RATE OF MERIT (use 1 oz solution/inch DBH or Foot of Shrub Height)	48 oz	60 oz
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Nursery Market Report

'Can Can Scarlet' will reach 12 to 14 inches tall and spread about the same distance. Gray-green foliage is attractive in the landscape.

For More Information

All-America Selections (AAS) can provide a complete list of AAS presidents, all AAS judges, the AAS trialing locations, AAS display gardens and recent AAS winners. See www.all-americaselections.org.

Dianthus 'Corona Cherry Magic.' This bedding plant has 2-inch flowers with a bicolor pattern in cherry red and lavender. 'Corona Cherry Magic' flowers freely throughout the growing season, and mature plants reach 7 to 9 inches tall with an 8- to 10-inch spread in full-sun locations.

Gaillardia 'Sundance Bicolor.' Globe-shaped, double flowers are an unusual bicolor containing mahogany red and yellow. 'Sundance Bicolor' is heat and drought tolerant and may bloom nonstop throughout the growing season. Mature plants are 10 to 11 inches tall, spreading 15 to 16 inches. They are recommended for use in mass plantings.

Ornamental Millet 'Purple Majesty.' Tall, dark and handsome, this plant reaches 3 to 5 feet and has wide, purple leaf blades. 'Purple Majesty' is embellished with 8- to 12-inch flower spikes that mature to reddish-purple seed spikes. Left on the plant, the spikes attract birds that snack on the seed. Plants tolerate heat and low moisture.

Petunia 'Blue Wave.' From planting to frost, 'Blue Wave' provides a steady stream of color with dark blue, 2-inch blooms. This petunia thrives in full sun and offers a spreading habit. In fact, 'Blue Wave' may spread 3 to 4 feet in one growing season, and mature plant height can be 4 to 7 inches. 'Blue Wave' plants are perfect for patriotic red, white and blue plantings.

Petunia 'Merlin Blue Morn.' The 2½-inch, single blooms feature a bicolor pattern with white that transitions to blue. For best performance, plant in full sun. 'Merlin Blue Morn' also performs well when grown with other annuals in a container. Mature plant height is 15 to 20 inches and spread is 18 to 30 inches.

A blue bicolor, *Petunia 'Merlin Blue Morn'* performs well in containers. Photo: All-America Selections

Rudbeckia Hirta 'Prairie Sun.' Large, 5-inch flowers decorate the lush, green foliage of this plant, which reaches 3 feet at maturity. The light green central cone of each flower blends well with the golden yellow petals that end in a primrose yellow.

Vinca 'Jaijo Dark Red.' The deep red, 2-inch blooms have contrasting white centers. With a compact, branching habit, 'Jaijo Dark Red' exhibited heat and low moisture tolerance in trials. Best performance occurs in full sun. Mature plants reach 12 to 15 inches tall and spread 15 to 20 inches. — Ali Cybulski

The author is Contributing Editor to *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

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USE READER SERVICE #56

DISEASES & INFECTIONS

The BLS Blues

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This month, *Lawn & Landscape* introduces a new monthly department that identifies various tree care-related issues landscape professionals deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Over the last 10 to 15 years, Bacterial Leaf Scorch (BLS) has been observed from southern New York to Florida. Since the disease is considered young, there is still research being done, however, it is important to recognize what we do know, as well as identify proper management practices. BLS threatens several species of oaks, such as the northern red oak, pin and scarlet oaks, as well as other urban trees such as sycamore and elm.

BLS is caused by the bacterium *Xylella fastidiosa*, which actually clogs the tree's xylem, or water conducting tissues. This stresses the tree by disrupting water absorption and inhibiting the transport of water to the roots, branches and leaves.

The bacterium is transmitted to healthy trees by spittlebugs and leafhoppers – insects that feed on the xylem. Further research is being conducted to detect other xylem-feeding insects that may also carry the bacterium. The insects acquire the bacterium when feeding on other infected trees and many herbaceous plants and riparian weeds that contain the bacterium. These riparian weeds, most commonly found along bodies of water, serve as an alternate host for the bacterium. The xylem-feeding insects then infect the host. The most recent research has



found a higher concentration of BLS along rivers and streams, yet BLS is still a widespread disease.

The only way to positively identify the bacterium in the vascular tissue is to detect it through microscopic tests. However, there are symptoms you can look for to identify the presence of BLS. Symptoms appear mid-summer and continue through fall. Leaves on infected trees will begin to dry

along the margins and progress towards the middle of the leaf. There is a very blatant distinction between the infected and healthy tissues of the leaf. Finally, the entire leaf will turn brown and die.

Throughout the first few years of infection, only isolated branches will be affected. Over the course of time, the bacteria will move throughout the entire crown of the tree. Typically, depending upon the size of the tree, it will decline over a four- to 10-year time span. The size of the tree and management practices will determine how well it withstands BLS.

Currently, there is no known cure for BLS. Injecting trees with antibiotics can help slow down the disease's development, but this will not eradicate the pathogen. This can be a costly protocol and must be done every year. Further research is being conducted to determine this method's efficiency. It has also been noted that even distribution of the antibiotic has been inconsistent.

The best BLS management practices include removal of infected branches, proper watering and mulching the tree correctly to reduce drought stress. There is no evidence of the disease moving from tree to tree. Therefore, removal of a tree at the first signs of BLS is fruitless. Instead, protect the tree from drought stress, but don't remove it unless the tree becomes a hazard.

No research has been done on whether fertilization benefits trees stricken with BLS. High nitrogen fertilizers will force new succulent growth, making the tree more attractive for xylem-feeding insects. Studies are being conducted on the impact of high and low nitrogen fertilizers and their role in BLS.

BLS is a problem throughout the landscape that needs to be addressed. Until further research develops a cure, responsible professionals can be aware of the symptoms and signs of BLS and educate the public on how it can be properly managed. – Mike Sisti

The author is owner of Alpine Lawn & Tree Care in Freehold, N.J., and can be reached at 732/625-3929 or alpine@optonline.net.



BLS-infected leaves begin to dry along the margins, first, and then this drying progresses toward the leaf's center. Over a four- to 10-year time span, the bacteria will move throughout the tree's crown, causing browning and then death. Photos: Ann Gould, associate extension specialist, plant pathology, Rutgers University

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USE READER SERVICE #20

Managed Care

Proponents of the Best Management Practices (BMPs) for the protection of Florida's water resources may soon be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. After several months of negotiations, discussions and research, cooperating associations have prepared a draft version of BMPs for the country's southernmost state.

Discussions about developing a set of BMP guidelines for Florida have been underway for the past couple of years, explained Norm Smith, assistant executive vice president, Certified Pest Control Operators' Association, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. The current manual consists of approximately 75 pages, highlighting BMPs regarding new developments and construction, irrigation, mulching, mowing and pruning, fertilization and pest control. The booklet also targets cultural practices for healthy turf and water

and care of existing turf and landscapes, including construction activities, irrigation, nutrient management, and pest management."

Water management guidelines such as these are particularly important based on the country's ongoing battle with drought, said Erica Santella, immediate past president, Florida Turfgrass Association, Orlando, Fla. "The water quantity issue is huge," she said. In addition, planning the manual has brought pertinent environmental issues to the forefront. "Regulatory ordinances, total maximum daily loads, best management practices - these are terms that were never talked about before," she said.

Opening the lines of communication between industry associations has been the most daunting challenge to completing BMP guidelines, Santella added. "Our biggest issue was getting the industry together so we didn't have associations fighting," she said. "The first few meetings were awkward, because all of the sudden you're seeing [competing associations] as people. But the educational process on all sides has been phenomenal."

For example, the BMP manual highlights situations such as new housing development construction, which has a great impact on a community's water basin, and the subsequent need for drainage systems. Discussing these topics industry-wide has helped alleviate the lack of knowledge about such issues, Santella said.

After the BMP manual is published, Smith hopes an outreach program will further spread the word about proper water management practices in Florida. "Our next big hurdle is to educate the municipalities and counties," he identified. "All of us are very optimistic that these outreach programs will be put into force."

In addition, Smith discussed the potential for a model fertilizer ordinance so that Florida municipalities have a standard to follow for fertilizer applications. "A spin-off of the BMP process is the model ordinance, which is in line with the BMPs and uses their theories and practices as applied to a local ordinance," he said.

The BMP manual itself should not be interpreted as a strict set of guidelines, according to the draft.

"This manual should be used to *enhance* the professional qualifications and judgment of the turfgrass and landscape manager, and should not be viewed as a regulatory standard to be rigidly applied in all cases."

management as well as various tactics for Integrated Pest Management.

Currently, the manual is under legal review and is also making the rounds through various state organizations and environmental groups, Smith said. According to the manual, the publication is partly funded through a non-point source management program grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

"The purpose of this manual is to provide information and guidance on turfgrass and landscape management practices to conserve and protect Florida's water resources," the manual reads. "These practices cover both establishment of new turf and landscape

"This manual should be used to enhance the professional qualifications and judgment of the turfgrass and landscape manager, and should not be viewed as a regulatory standard to be rigidly applied in all cases," the draft reads. "Turfgrass and landscape managers should use this manual as general guidance, but specific situations may require more restrictive measures to protect sites that are at particularly high-risk for adverse effects upon surface and ground water." The state of Florida provides a unique water management atmosphere because the state's residents live right on top of their water supply, Smith noted.

While the BMP draft purportedly will improve the state's water supply use, Santella said the increased communication industry-wide as a result of the BMPs is a victory in itself. "Once we got to know the other organizations and understood where they were coming from, we could come to an agreement," she said.

And, even in cases where industry representatives may not agree, the communica-

GUIDELINES & GOALS

BMP Guidelines

The goals of the Green Industry Best Management Practices (BMPs) are to reduce non-point source pollution and promote efficient use of water as follows:

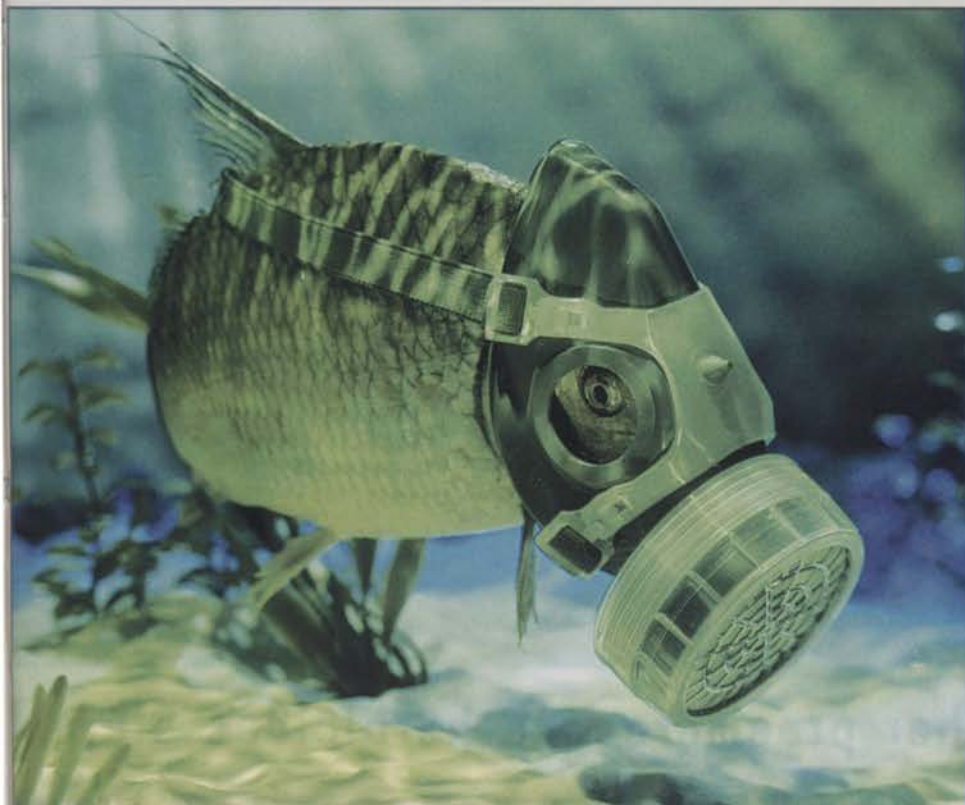
- Reduce off-site transport of sediment, nutrients, and pesticides through surface or ground water.
- Use appropriate site design and plant selection.
- Use appropriate rates and methods of applying fertilizer and irrigation.
- Use targeted pest management techniques to apply the appropriate amounts of synthetic products.

EDITOR'S NOTE: These guidelines appear in the draft version of the *Florida Green Industries' Best Management Practices for the Protection of Water Resources in Florida*.

tion about Florida Best Management Practices paves the way for future discussions, Smith pointed out. "These are portions of the industry that have never even talked to each other before," he said. "These people meet

and may not agree but at least they respect each other." — Kristin Mohn **LL**

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



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On

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Simple Solutions

In 2001, Beary's Landscape Management Co. grew 35 percent – a jump that Michael McKee said he had to run to catch up with. “We grew so fast last year that I had to learn a lot the hard way,” explained McKee, the Orland Park, Ill.-based company’s maintenance supervisor.

Simplifying the business’ job cost/time sheet was one way McKee was able to wrap his arms around speedy growth. The form was once split in two – one for fertilization and one for regular maintenance – and had spaces for codes to identify what tasks were performed on properties. “The only problem was that no one had the list explaining what each code meant, so when a client called to ask me what was done on their site, I had no way to know if something was done, how much was done or if they didn’t do it at all,” McKee said.

So, in spring 2001, McKee designed a new form, merging fertilization and other maintenance duties into one and eliminating special numbers and codes. Since Illinois state law requires landscape contractors to provide clients with information explaining fertilizer products used on their properties, the form includes yellow and pink carbon copies. After the job is done, the foreman fills it out and gives one to the client, one to the company owner and then places one in the client’s file.

Not only does the new form help McKee provide clients with the right answers, but it also simplifies his man-hour, cost and inventory records. “We have a budget for each property on how many hours we’re supposed to be at and we set aside a percentage of how much fertilizer should be used on each property, so this form helps me track my costs and make sure certain crews aren’t spending too much time on a site or using too much product,” he remarked. “It also helps me keep track of the inventory – so if we used 20 bags of fertilizer today and we only have 20 bags left, I know I need to buy more.”

Since crews pick up a new sheet every morning before they visit properties, McKee also gets an opportunity to circle specific tasks that are important for crews to complete on a certain day. “I can mark it down instead of telling them verbally so they can remember it when they are on the site,” he explained. – Nicole Wisniewski

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine. If you are interested in seeing your form featured here, contact Nicole at 800/456-0707 or nwisniewski@gie.net.

Job Cost/Time Sheet

Client Name _____ Date: _____ Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri
 Jobsite Address: _____ Salesman _____ Sat Sun
 Subdivision: _____
 City: _____
 Directions: _____

FUNCTION	# MEN	HOURS	% COMPLETED	QTY OF MATERIAL
Grass Cutting/Line Trimming				
Sidewalk Edged				
Cultivating				
Mulch Turned				
Leave & Branch Cleaned Up				
Weeds Sprayed or Pulled in Beds				
Tree/Bush Trimming				
Fertilizing / Turf				
Weed Control / Turf				
Roundup				
Aeration				
Tree/Shrub Fertilizing				
Tree/Shrub Spraying				
Misc.				

Employee Name	Start or Travel to	Begin at Job	Finish	Lunch	Total	Signature

SUPPLEMENT TO:

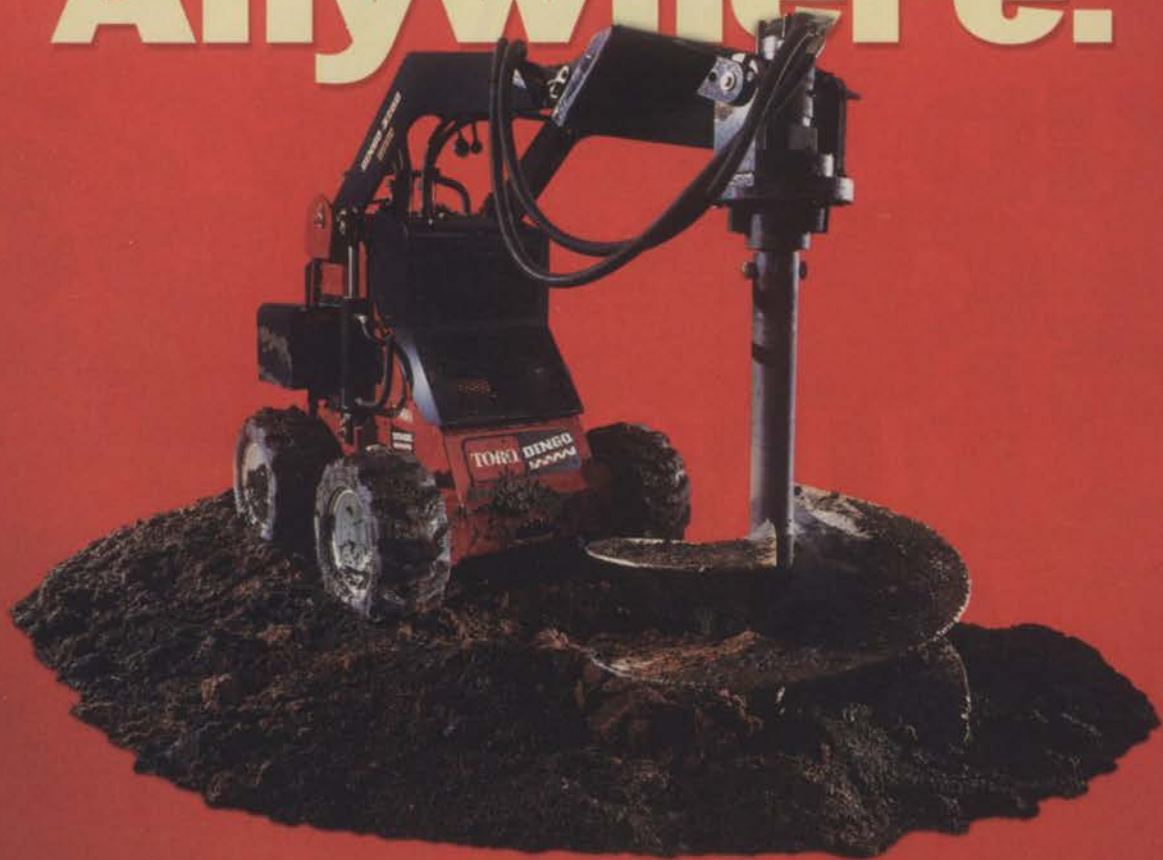
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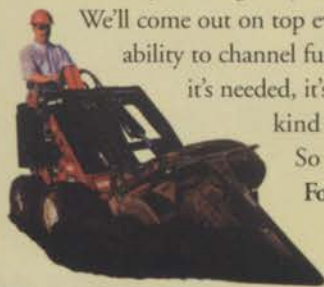
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MAY.02

New & Improved

The multitude of models available on the market cover contractors' needs. Photo: Caterpillar



This year, skid-steer loaders get makeovers both inside and out to appeal to their operators.

by Kristen Hampshire

Contractors constantly seek new-and-improved machines to ease their workloads. "They are always looking for what's new and different that will make their jobs easier," noticed Doug Laufenberg, business analysis manager, John Deere, Moline, Ill.

More comfort with controls, air conditioned cabs, more power with two-speed options and larger, heavy-duty models, and more convenience with hydraulic quick-attach and service plans dress this year's new-and-improved machines. "Skid steers are still evolving and the things customers are still asking for and manufacturers are responding to every year are increased performance, increased reliability and increased comfort," Laufenberg observed.

And though the stock market might be down, manufacturers aren't shying away from new introductions that meet these needs, added Scott McGuigan, sales manager, Briggs Construction Equipment, Racine Wis. "The smart people get ready when it's darkest so when the sun comes out they're ready to go," he pointed out.

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FOCUS: SKID STEERS & LOADERS

CREATURE COMFORT. Rugged work sites take a toll on operators, and many manufacturers are tweaking equipment to improve ergonomics, so jobs that are rough on the outside are comfortable on the inside where operators control the machine.

Air conditioning is a luxury some skid-steer loaders offer – one growing in popularity among contractors, pointed out Larry Foster, business analysis manager, John Deere. A few manufacturers

offer this feature today, and he suspects this number to grow in the next 12 months as demand increases. “One way to keep an operator in a skid steer is to maintain a clean environment – one where they can have four seasons of temperature control, where they can climb in clean at the start of the day and at the end of the day they are just as clean,” he identified. “Noise abatement is another big one. This is something manufacturers are working on.”



Track loaders' low ground pressure allows them to travel well over both new construction sites and established landscapes. Photo: ASV

Comfort extends into ease of operation and servo-assisted controls, where an electronic module monitors the hydraulic flow for the hand valve, McGuigan said. “Instead of having a rod down in the hydraulic valve that opens and closes the valve, the operator wears controls on their wrists and arms to run [the machine], which is easier on a day-in and day-out basis,” he said. “Pretty much the whole industry has gone to the servo-assisted controls, although other manufacturers use pilot controls – one joystick that controls the whole function.”

POWER & PERFORMANCE. Speeding around job sites isn't always a priority for skid-steer loaders, but when contractors want to move about quickly, two-speed travel can double the 6- to 7-mph pace, noted Doug Johnston, sales manager, skid-steer loaders, Caterpillar, Peoria, Ill.

“If you are moving a fair amount of distance, like transporting pallets across a yard or moving material a half- or quarter-mile, people like to travel at higher speeds,” Johnston pointed out.

Performance also includes durability, which is always on consumers' shopping lists, added Marc Bowers, marketing manager, Toro Sitework Systems, Bloomington, Minn. “When they are in season, they're out there hard,” he remarked. “[Manufacturers] are making the equipment bullet-proof so you can do the job in any environment you are working in.”

Laufenberg agreed. Durability always tops the to-do list when tweaking equipment, and some contractors are asking for larger-class equipment to handle construction jobs. “We responded to customer feedback that they need larger, more powerful machines that have lots more breakout force and lifting and carrying capabilities, and that still fits into the contractor/landscape contractor-type segment,” he said, adding that one new machine in Deere's largest class did not increase in dimension from other sizes, but the boom placement allows for more maneuverability.

Furthermore, hydraulic quick-attach combines comfort and performance, as manufacturers that

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offer this quality realize that operators boost efficiency and reduce fatigue when they aren't manually changing attachments, Laufenberg noted. "You can stay in the cab all day and snap on and off between bucket and pallet forks," he explained. "It's easier, faster, safer and more comfortable."

SIZING IT UP. While some manufacturers extend their product lines by bulking up machines, others explore equipment that caters to tight jobs. Compact mini-wheel loaders can "bridge the gap from the skid-steer loader and the big wheel loader," Johnston explained. "[It is] very close in horsepower to the skid-steer loader line, but it is a bigger machine with greater breakout force and greater reach capacity."

Flexibility and maneuverability characterize skid steers' smaller cousins, the compact utility loader. "Compact utility loaders are designed to get into tight spaces where previously only hand-labor could fit," Bowers noted. "If you look at your financials and you have a piece of equipment that replaces some hand labor, that saves money in your most expensive area of your profit and loss statement."

RIGHT ON TRACK. Skid steers notoriously eat up tires – they are rough machines working on rugged terrain. Manufacturers offer a slew of tire options for each model, in most cases, but some are tapping into a new type of tread: rubber tracking.

The reduced ground pressure these hybrids offer is appealing for those who traverse existing landscapes, Johnston added, comparing 3½ pounds per square inch (psi) of ground pressure on a track loader to the 10 to 20 psi ground pressure on traditional skid-steer loaders. "The advantage is also in soft underfoot conditions," he pointed out. "[Track loaders] can go in places where skid steers might get stuck."

In the last year and a half, track loaders have steadily gained popularity among landscape contractors, Bowers reported, adding that these rubber-band looking models offer them flexibility on the job site. "If you are working in new construction and you still have open trenches, you can cross them at an angle," he said. "The wider track reduces ground pressure and damage to existing landscapes. You also get greater ground force, so if you are going on slopes, you have better traction and stability."

While track tires are more expensive, driving up the cost of the machine, this doesn't sway interested contractors from choosing this option. "They are especially strong in the industry this year," Bowers noticed.

RELATIONSHIPS. Little things still count with contractors – like service point accessibility,

mentioned John Van, vice president, chief operating officer, Briggs Construction Equipment. "The cab tilts forward so it is easier to work on equipment," he said. "We made it simple to do daily lube checks, hoping that it will reduce maintenance costs."

Consumers are also shopping for service agreements, finance options and warranties, Bowers agreed. "Service and serviceability are getting to be big issues," he observed. "People don't want down-

time, so we work with our dealers to have zero down-time programs and loaner equipment for contractors while they are doing maintenance. This demand is not new. It's just an example of customers pushing back on the supply chain and asking for greater service." LL

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

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Look online at this story for pros and cons of full-size skid steers and compact utility loaders.

Do the best things really come in small packages? Proponents of compact utility loaders think so, highlighting the access and attachment advantages of smaller equipment. Still, many contractors stick to the idea that bigger is better, since full-size skid-steer loaders offer superior strength and lifting capabilities.

Ultimately, compact utility loaders and full-size skid steers each have their place in the spotlight, depending on the application and the contractor's needs. In many cases, it can be beneficial to be open to both, stated Brad Claus, competitive product coordinator, Bobcat, West Fargo, N.D. "Sixty percent of the owners of mini skid steers also have a full-size loader," he admitted. "They take mini skid steers into smaller areas where full-size loaders can't perform, and this gives them the opportunity to expand their services."

SITE SPECS. With this in mind, contractors should be aware of the key differences between compact skid steers and their full-size "big brothers." For instance, site specifications often determine the most appropriate type of equipment, said Jim Lafferty, Tri-state Kanga, Philadelphia, Pa. "With large skid-steer loaders, one of the problems is you may go in and 'turf up' the area," he pointed out. "If you're on an existing job site – not new construction – with nice new grass, you don't want to rip up the lawn and spend more money on maintenance."

On the other hand, Lafferty reminded that on large, new construction sites, full-size loaders offer an advantage because of their ability to move large amounts of soil at one time.

In addition, measure the entrances of a site before choosing equipment, Claus suggested. "When you're getting through fences in back yards, you have to stay in the lower spectrum," he said. "When you want to get into tight regions, you have to look at the physical size of the machine."

In cases of particularly narrow access, the difference between full-size skid steers and compact utility loaders is "like the difference between night and day," Lafferty compared. "Before contractors had mini skid-steer loaders, they had to take the fence down and then repair the lawn and the fence," he said. "Some places you just cannot get into with a regular skid-steer loader, and then you end up going back and forth all day with wheelbarrows to pull the dirt out."

However, when contractors have clear site access and will be tackling large installation jobs, full-size skid steers rise to the occasion, Claus noted. "Full-size skid-steer loaders offer faster cycle times, greater breakout forces as far as lift and tilt, greater lift heights, faster travel speeds and better digging performance, for example, if you're digging a small pool," he listed.

BUYING DECISIONS. After tackling site considerations, contractors may also want to consider financial differences. Dan Kilgas, marketing category manager, Ariens, Brillion, Wis., remarked that he has seen a trend toward compact utility loaders because of their lower price and ability to save labor costs. "The mini skid steers are very popular because they are much less expensive than the full-size unit," he said. "They can replace the manual labor of two to three people, allowing the job to be done faster at a higher profit margin."

Claus continued that compact utility loaders can often be purchased as a package with a variety of attachments for the

Compact or full-size? The options for skid-steer loaders can be overwhelming, but taking the time to research equipment features will pay off with the right decision.

by Kristin Mohn

Selecting Sizes



Compact utility loaders offer advantages in terms of site access, price, attachment capability and training. However, full-size skid steers can handle larger applications and offer greater lift heights and capacities. Top photo: Toro Sitework Systems, Bottom photo: Kanga.

same price as a full-size skid steer without attachments. The value in a variety of attachments – and the resulting expansion of services – often attracts contractors looking to diversify their businesses. “The machine is used as a tool carrier rather than just a machine to dig with,” Claus stated. “We’ve seen the demand for a smaller-sized machine with exceptional attachment performance.” (for more on attachments, see story on page S12.)

And, compact utility loaders can boost profit margins by cutting down on transport time and equipment, Claus added. “Because of the lighter weights and smaller sizes, compact loaders are easier to transport,” he said. “The machine weighs less and then you can fit more on the back of a trailer.”

HANDLE WITH CARE. Access and financial considerations aside, the true test of equipment occurs in the field. Lafferty identified easy maintenance as a top selling point for most compact utility loaders. “Obviously, you have to routinely maintain the machine: check the hydraulics, hoses, etc.,” he said. “This is easier to do with the mini loader because everything is right there. Also, because the machine is smaller, you’re not using as much fluid and the filters aren’t as big, so maintenance-wise you’re saving a lot of money.”

For a contractor new to the skid-steer loader, compact utility loaders may appear easier to operate, Claus identified. “A lot of people like the fact that you don’t have to get into a cab and you can walk on and walk off quickly,” he said. Further, smaller machines offer increased visibility, especially toward the rear of the machine, so users can back up with confidence and avoid hitting or running over people or objects, Lafferty said. “With the skid-steer loader, it’s a larger machine, No. 1, so you have trouble seeing behind you,” he related. “You have to turn all the way around and you also can’t see in front of you. With the mini skid steer, you’re standing up and can see everything.”

Yet, the elimination of a cab and a seat belt poses a potential risk for the compact utility loader user, while larger skid steers incorporate these safety features, Claus continued. “We make sure contractors are well aware they don’t have a seat belt to keep them in or a cab to keep debris from coming in on top of them,” he noted. “We took time to add a reverse stop panel, so if your body comes into contact with the panel, the machine stops and the levers return to neutral.” Also, Claus described a “lift and tilt” lockout safety feature, so if operators accidentally leave the lift arm in the up position and turn off the machine, the arm is locked into place and won’t crash down unexpectedly.

Other safety considerations include keeping the restraint bar down and backing skid-steer loaders up a hill rather than driving forward, listed Kelly Moore, product manager, Gehl, West Bend, Wis. And, be sure to take the time to read the owner’s manual before operation, he stressed. “Go through the motions of the machine with the manual in hand,” he said. “Most people can learn to operate any given skid steer machine in a couple of hours.”

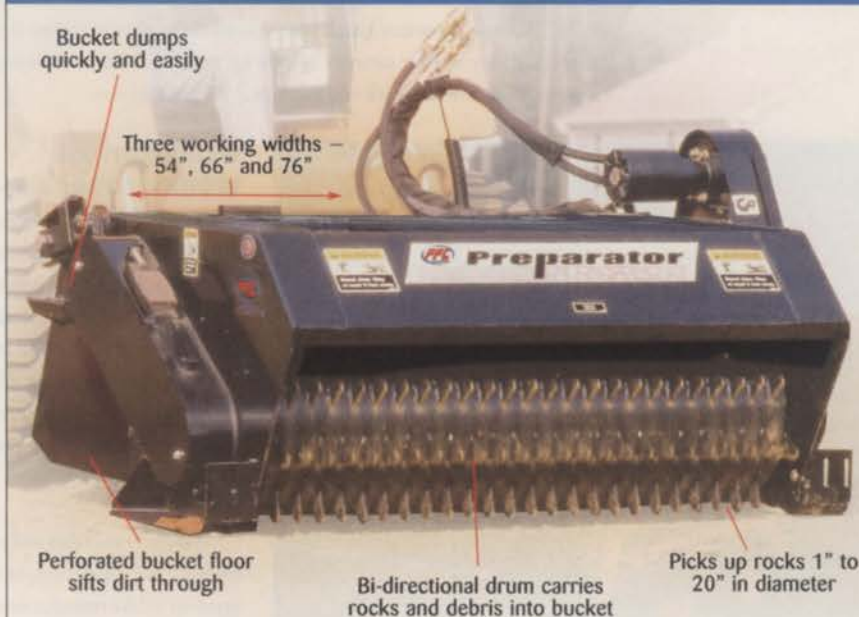
When it comes time for the final decision, remember that each type of equipment has its pros and cons, and one doesn’t take precedent over the other, Claus stressed. “A mini skid steer doesn’t replace a full-size skid steer,” he said. “They complement each other.” **LL**

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



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Skid steers can save labor and turn grueling tasks into profitable projects.

Switch

to a

Skid

by Kristen Hampshire



Rake over rocky soil, trench a line for irrigation pipe, dig holes for trees, haul pavers to the right place – and don't even think about switching machines. A skid-steer loader's versatility multiplies with each attachment, allowing landscape contractors to work through projects from beginning to end with one piece of equipment.

"Skid steers are more of a power unit than anything," remarked Mike McPherson, vice president sales, Glenmac, Jamestown, N.D. "You fix an attachment on the piece of equipment and it will do anything."

This flexibility – the appeal of a jack-of-all-trades tool – interests those who offer diverse service mixes to their clients, agreed Pam Gruebnau, director of marketing, FFC Attachments, Lee, Ill. Besides, one man and one machine cuts down labor needs, slashing a project's overhead and boosting profitability. "With a soil preparator attachment that takes the place of two to three laborers, you don't have to stop the project to wait for someone to show up, and if someone doesn't show up you won't get behind because you can do the task with one machine," she pointed out.

Attachments make these machines a multi-tasking asset for contractors. Photos: Gehl (bottom, left), ASV (top) with a Glenmac Harley Box Rake attachment.



WORKOUT: Rake

WORK-SAVER: Soil preparator, landscape rake

New construction sites require clean-up before green-up, but this doesn't mean contractors need to dedicate hours to labor-intensive hand raking. A preparator attachment connected to a skid steer can do the job, Gruebnau said. "It removes debris, but also has teeth so it fluffs the soil and then grades the land so you have a smooth surface without all the curve," she described.

Power rakes, another option, grade, remove rocks and debris, and dethatch and spread fill or soil, she noted. "A power rake can do the whole job in one pass, saving time and money," she said.

George Forni takes soil preparation to a different level. His Alamo, Calif.-based company, Aquatic Environments, is heavily involved in lake remediation efforts and dredging, which churns up mucky, but nutrient-rich, soil. He turns this soil into usable material by letting it dry out on flat land and blending it with a skid-steer loader attachment. "We use an auger made for mud that aerates [the soil], pitches it and makes a windrow out of it," he explained. "The material dries out and we repeat this step two to three times."



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Pallet fork attachments allow contractors to more easily haul plants and other essential materials to their work sites. Photo: Bobcat

WORKOUT: *Shovel*

WORK-SAVER: *Auger, bucket, tree spade*

Mike Hennessey can install a Bradford Pear tree in 45 minutes. "I pulled up to the job, put a set of forks on the skid steer, unloaded the tree from the truck, put the auger attachment on, and then dug the hole," recounted the owner of Hennessey Landscape Services, Plainstow, N.H. "I took the auger off, put the bucket on, rolled the tree into the hole, backfilled it, mulched it, and the process took 45 minutes from start to finish."

Hennessey's own employees were surprised at this time-saver, but they certainly weren't new to using skid-steer loaders for back-breaking work. Planting trees takes between three to six man-hours using a shovel and some elbow grease. "Now, using a skid-steer loader, we're basically down to one man-hour per tree," Hennessey reported.

Different-sized auger attachments accommodate various tree sizes, and partnering them with pallet forks or buckets to transport trees from the truck lessens the load even more, Hennessey added.

In addition, compact utility loaders can access tight spaces like fence gates and cramped landscape beds – situations that otherwise might require hand-labor. Hennessey has even seen some contractors crane skid steers onto rooftops to spread aggregate. On the lower end of the spectrum, the machines can dig out basements in homes before pouring concrete, he suggested.

Besides these installation ups and downs, skid steers can remove stubborn vegetation instead of digging out rootballs and carrying away the plants in a wheelbarrow, Forni added. He downsized crews and increased profitability on a project to remove noxious vegetation, which originally was bid as a hand-removal operation. "We convinced the agency to allow us to go in with skid steers and use a bucket to uproot the plants," he said. "We cut 10 bodies off the payroll by replacing them with two skid-steer loaders."

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FOCUS: SKID STEERS & LOADERS

WORKOUT: *Shovel, backhoe unit*

WORK-SAVER: *Trencher, vibratory plow*

Backhoes can disturb soil, but hand-digging trenches takes valuable time. Hennessey used to assign backhoes to irrigation installation projects, but now he relies on a trencher to install irrigation lines. "We were disturbing a lot of soil," he said. "The trencher attachment gets into tight areas, digs the trench and backfills it very quickly. So, instead of digging this huge hole – a 3- or 4-foot pit – we're doing a neat, clean straight line with a trencher. Not only does it take less time, it's less invasive."

What one employee could accomplish in a day with a shovel, Hennessey's crew can finish in less than an hour, he noted. In addition, labor-saving qualities of skid steers with their attachments allowed him to slim down crew size. "Instead of having a five-man construction crew, we're down to two guys," he compared. "There is working smart and there is working hard."

WORKOUT: *Wheelbarrow*

WORK-SAVER: *Pallet fork, bucket*

Pavers, bricks, trees – these materials aren't so light weight if your employees are lifting and moving them manually. Wheelbarrows make carrying them easier, but then the project shifts to a chore.

"If you use a skid-steer loader with a pallet fork to get materials to where you need them, it saves time," pointed out Doug Laufenberg, business analysis manager, John Deere, Moline, Ill.

Besides pallet forks, buckets also take the load off of employees, Gruebnau added. "You can have people move gravel over by hand or you can move it with a bucket," she said. "You can also use the bucket to position bushes and trees – or you can use specialized attachments like tree spades that open up to place the trees." Buckets are also a skid-steer basic, she noticed. "It's like having a wheelbarrow – you just need a bucket."

Once contractors have these staple tools, they can diversify their service options to clients. They can even take advantage of all four seasons, using snowplows and snow blower attachments on their skid steers, Gruebnau pointed out.

Also, small companies can market themselves to large-scale clients when their machines can handle more intense workloads, McPherson pointed out. "Managing labor is the difficult part of many jobs, and if [contractors] are managing equipment they operate themselves instead, they can do large jobs," he figured. **LL**

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



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Rated Operating Capacity (lb/kg)	1,400/635	1,500/680	1,500/680	1,750/793	1,750/793	2,000/907	2,000/907	2,000/907	2,250/1020	2,500/1134
(with optional counterweights)(lb/kg)	1,500/680	1,600/726	1,600/726	1,795/813	1,850/839	2,047/928	2,100/952	2,100/952	2,300/1043	2,550/1156
Operating Weight (lb/kg)	5,490/2490	5,645/2560	5,843/2650	6,459/2930	6,860/3111	6,481/2940	7,036/3191	7,338/3328	7,615/3454	7,655/3472
Flywheel Power (hp/kW)	48/36	54/41	54/41	48/36	59/44	54/41	74/55	74/55	59/44	74/55
Hinge Pin Height @ Maximum Lift (ft/mm)	9'3"/2845	9'3"/2845	9'3"/2845	10'0"/3046	10'2"/3099	10'0"/3046	10'2"/3099	10'2"/3099	10'7"/3244	10'7"/3244
Width Over Tires (in/mm)	54", 60", 66"/	60", 66"/	60", 66"/	60", 66"/	60", 66", 72"/	60", 66"/	66", 72"/	66", 72"/	66", 72"/	66", 72"/
	1372, 1524, 1676	1524, 1676	1524, 1676	1524, 1676	1524, 1676, 1829	1524, 1676	1676, 1829	1676, 1829	1676, 1829	1676, 1829

* Standard machine with optional 10 x 16.5 6 PR tires and 60"/1525 mm Dirt Bucket.
 ** Standard machine with optional 12 x 16.5 10 PR tires and 66"/1676 mm Dirt Bucket.
 † Standard machine with 12 x 16.5 10 PR tires and 72"/1829 mm Dirt Bucket.
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EDITOR'S NOTE:

Lawn & Landscape made several attempts to contact all manufacturers for this Buyers' Guide. The inclusion or omission of any company should not be taken as an endorsement or criticism of its products.

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FOCUS: SKID STEERS & LOADERS

MODEL:	RATED OPERATING CAPACITY (IN LBS.):	TIPPING LOAD (IN LBS.):	HYDRAULIC PUMP CAPACITY (GPM):	LENGTH/WIDTH/HEIGHT (WITHOUT ATTACHMENT, IN INCHES):	HEIGHT TO BUCKET PIN (IN INCHES):	ENGINE MAKE/HP:	MACHINE WEIGHT (IN LBS.):
COMPACT UTILITY LOADERS							
FINN CORP.							
Eagle 254	600	1,200	13.3	L: 65.5, W: 40.5, H: N/A	71.25	25-hp Kohler	1,515
Eagle 204	500	1,000	10	L: 65.5, W: 40.5, H: N/A	71.25	20-hp Kohler	1,500
Eagle 200D	600	1,200	13.25	L: 65.5, W: 40.5, H: N/A	71.25	20-hp Kubota	1,600
GRAVELY							
Skidster 200	300	600	10.5	L: 77, W: 38.5, H: 92	67	20-hp Honda	1,430
Skidster 200	460	1,040	10.5	L: 77, W: 38.5, H: 92	67	20-hp Kubota	1,540
KANGA LOADERS							
KK113	1,162	440	6	L: 51, W: 30, H: 45	48	13-hp Honda	942
G520	1,980	1,100	10.5	L: 59, W: 37, H: 49	67	20-hp Honda	1,430
G524	2,030	1,100	10.5	L: 59, W: 37, H: 49	67	24-hp Honda	1,480
DL520	2,130	1,200	10.5	L: 59, W: 37, H: 49	67	20-hp Kubota	1,580
MERTZ							
Boxer TL224	530	1,060	20	L: 76.4, W: 29.5 to 41.5, H: 53.5	75.2	24-hp Honda	1,900
RAMROD EQUIPMENT							
550TG	550	1,325	8.5	L: 61, W: 31, H: 50	65	16-hp Briggs	1,450
750TG	750	1,510	8.5	L: 61, W: 35, H: 50	65	16-hp Briggs	1,583
750TD	750	1,600	8.5	L: 61, W: 35, H: 50	65	20-hp Kubota	1,780
900TG	900	1,820	8.5/2.9	L: 61, W: 41, H: 50	65	23-hp Kohler	1,683
900TD	900	1,910	8.5/2.9	L: 61, W: 41, H: 50	65	20-hp Kubota	1,842
910TG	900	1,820	8.5/2.9	L: 61, W: 41, H: 50	65	23-hp Kohler	1,958
910TD	900	1,910	8.5/2.9	L: 61, W: 41, H: 50	65	20-hp Kubota	2,117
944TG	900	1,820	8.5/2.9	L: 61, W: 41, H: 50	65	23-hp Kohler	1,760
944TD	900	1,910	8.5/2.9	L: 61, W: 41, H: 50	65	20-hp Kubota	1,920
THE TORO CO.							
Dingo 420 TX	500	1,427	11.2	L: 70.7, W: 33.7, H: 46	65.8	20-hp Kohler	1,830
Dingo 425 TX	500	1,427	11.2	L: 70.7, W: 41, H: 46	65.8	25-hp Kohler	2,010
Dingo 322	515	1,030	12.1	L: 62, W: 40.5, H: 48.7	66	22-hp Kohler	1,567
Dingo Kubota diesel	515	1,030	12.1	L: 62, W: 40.5, H: 48.7	66	20-hp Kubota diesel	1,722
Dingo 220	515	1,030	12.1	L: 62, W: 40.5, H: 48.7	66	20-hp Kohler	1,440
Z LOADER CORP.							
300 DX	1,050	1,500	16	L: 102, W: 65, H: 76	78	30-hp Yanmar	2,900
SKID-STEER LOADERS							
ASV							
RC-30	800	1,600	10	L: 91, W: 46.5, H: 71	80.3	31.5-hp Caterpillar	2,935
RC-50	1,500	3,000	15	L: 100, W: 60, H: 77	115	50-hp Caterpillar	4,750
R-50	1,500	3,000	15	L: 100, W: 60, H: 77	115	50-hp Perkins	4,750
2800	2,350	4,700	19/25	L: 125, W: 69, H: 82.5	109	70-hp Isuzu	7,450
2810	2,350	4,700	19/25	L: 112, W: 69, H: 82.5	109	83-hp Isuzu	7,450
4810	2,950	5,900	19/30	L: 134, W: 69, H: 82.5	114	105-hp Caterpillar	8,640
BOBCAT CO.							
463	700	1,421	10	L: 75.5, W: 35.4, H: 71.4	94.5	15.7-hp Kubota	2,708
553	950	1,953	8.6	L: 88.1, W: 47, H: 72.5	103.7	22.5-hp Kubota	3,664
753	1,300	2,600	15.9	L: 96.3, W: 60, H: 77	109.1	43.5-hp Kubota	4,740
763	1,500	3,000	16.7	L: 101.7, W: 66, H: 77	114.5	46-hp Kubota	5,368
S175	1,750	3,900	16.7/27	L: 101.8, W: 66, H: 76.3	118.2	46-hp Kubota	5,808
S185	1,850	3,900	16.7/27	L: 101.8, W: 66, H: 76.3	118.2	56-hp Kubota	5,808
863	1,900	3,800	20.7/30.7	L: 106.9, W: 72, H: 82.3	121	73-hp Deutz	7,045
S250	2,500	5,000	20.7/30.7	L: 114.5, W: 72, H: 80.9	124.3	105-hp Deutz	7,674
963	3,000	6,350	26.2	L: 122.3, W: 87, H: 89.7	128	105-hp Perkins	9,900
T190	1,900	5,430	16.7/27	L: 101.8, W: 66, H: 76.3	118.2	56-hp Kubota	7,244
T200	2,000	5,715	20.6/32	L: 106.9, W: 72.8, H: 82.3	121	73-hp Deutz	8,080
A220	2,200	4,400	20/31	L: 106.9, W: 74.2, H: 82.3	N/A	73-hp Deutz	7,745
A300	3,000	6,000	20	L: 114.5, W: 79.3, H: 80.9	N/A	73-hp Deutz	8,350
CASE CORP.							
40XT	1,500	3,000	19.1	L: 100, W: 49, H: 75.5	114.6	60-hp Case	5,716
60XT	1,800	3,600	21	L: 103.9, W: 52.6, H: 76.7	121.5	75-hp Case	6,562
70XT	2,000	4,000	21	L: 103.9, W: 52.6, H: 76.7	121.5	85-hp Case	6,906
75XT	2,200	4,400	21	L: 103.1, W: 60.9, H: 79.7	119.7	75-hp Case	6,700
85XT	2,400	4,800	25.1	L: 103.1, W: 59.7, H: 80	122.4	80-hp Case	8,057
90XT	2,450	4,900	25.1	L: 105.5, W: 64.5, H: 80	124.5	85-hp Case	8,950
95XT	3,150	6,300	27.6	L: 110.6, W: 64.5, H: 80	125.5	85-hp Case	9,050
1825B	885	1,770	9.6	L: 84.8, W: 39.3, H: 70.1	98.2	30-hp Kubota	3,107
CATERPILLAR							
216	1,350	2,600	15.1	L: 99, W: 60, H: 76	112	49-hp Cat	5,740
226	1,500	2,710	15.1	L: 99, W: 60, H: 76	112	54-hp Cat	5,830
228	1,500	2,840	30	L: 99, W: 60, H: 76	112	54-hp Cat	6,030
232	1,750	N/A	15	N/A	119	48-hp Cat	6,400
236	1,750	3,440	22	L: 110, W: 66, H: 80	122	59-hp Cat	7,030
242	1,900	N/A	15	N/A	119	54-hp Cat	6,500
246	2,000	3,650	22	L: 110, W: 66, H: 80	122	74-hp Cat	7,200
248	2,000	3,830	33	L: 110, W: 66, H: 80	122	74-hp Cat	7,500

FOCUS: SKID STEERS & LOADERS

MODEL:	RATED OPERATING CAPACITY (IN LBS.):	TIPPING LOAD (IN LBS.)	HYDRAULIC PUMP CAPACITY (GPM):	LENGTH/WIDTH/HEIGHT (WITHOUT ATTACHMENT, IN INCHES):	HEIGHT TO BUCKET PIN (IN INCHES):	ENGINE MAKE/HP:	MACHINE WEIGHT (IN LBS.):
252	2,250	4,600	22	L: 110, W: 66, H: 81	128	59-hp Cat	7,615
262	2,500	5,100	22	L: 110, W: 66, H: 81	128	74-hp Cat	7,655
COYOTE LOADERS							
C100	882	992	8.5	L: 102, W: 29.5, H: 75	82	17-hp Lombardini	1,590
C170	2,425	2,700	8.1	L: 119, W: 43, H: 78	115	29-hp Perkins	3,550
C265	3,260	2,645	11	L: 128, W: 50, H: 86	118	34-hp Lombardini	5,225
C5	2,300	3,525	12.5	L: 156, W: 53, H: 90	108	27-hp Deutz	5,500
C7	3,500	5,525	10.5	L: 137, W: 65, H: 95	129	40-hp Perkins	8,820
C8C	3,500	6,575	10.5	L: 160, W: 68, H: 102	119	38-hp Deutz	9,590
C9	4,000	7,275	16.1	L: 161, W: 70, H: 101	132	49-hp Deutz	10,210
C10B	4,000	7,606	12.5	L: 174, W: 71, H: 102	124	50-hp Deutz	9,590
DAEWOO							
1340XL	1,300	2,602	12.1	L: 90.4, W: 58.5, H: 76.1	112	42-hp Yanmar	4,907
1550XL	1,500	3,869	15.8	L: 99.3, W: 58.5, H: 76.1	114.8	52-hp Daewoo	5,849
1760XL	1,700	3,593	22.4	L: 98.7, W: 65.4, H: 79.3	119.1	62-hp Daewoo	6,594
2060XL	2,000	4,338	22.4	L: 98.7, W: 65.4, H: 79.3	122	62-hp Daewoo	6,900
GEHL CO.							
3635	1,050/1,150	2,100	14.3	L: 88, W: 48, H: 70	108.1	36-hp	4,400
3935	1,260/1,360	2,720	14.3	L: 90, W: 48, H: 72	110.1	36-hp	4,600
4635	1,425/1,575	2,850	19	L: 89, W: 62, H: 76	115	44- or 57-hp	6,060
4835	1,625/1,775	3,250	19	L: 93, W: 62, H: 76	115	57-hp	6,240
5635	1,900/2,200	3,800	23	L: 100, W: 66, H: 79	122.75	60- or 80-hp	6,960
6635	2,350/2,650	4,700	23	L: 106, W: 66, H: 79	122.75	80-hp	7,365
7600	3,150	6,300	29.5	L: 117, W: 80, H: 81	142	90-hp	9,745
7800	3,600	7,200	40	L: 117, W: 80, H: 81	142	110-hp	9,952
HYUNDAI CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT							
HSL610	1,350	2,700	9.8	L: 127.9, W: 60, H: 77	77	41.4-hp Yanmar	5,250
HSL810	1,790	3,880	14.5	L: 136.6, W: 67.3, H: 78.7	78.7	70-hp Yanmar	7,230
IHI COMPACT EXCAVATOR SALES							
IC-30	5,500	N/A	N/A	L: 124, W: 60, H: 62	N/A	32-hp Isuzu	4,620
IC-45	8,800	N/A	N/A	L: 175, W: 89, H: 98	N/A	115-hp Mitsubishi	12,760
IC-70	14,300	N/A	N/A	L: 209, W: 99, H: 104	N/A	204-hp Mitsubishi	20,680
IC-100	22,000	N/A	N/A	L: 233, W: 113, H: 106	N/A	260-hp Mitsubishi	29,040
JCB							
160	1,322	2,646	14.5	L: 126.5, W: 54, H: 76	110.3	44-hp	5,310
170	1,543	3,086	15.9/30.4	L: 121.5, W: 63, H: 76	115.3	47-hp	5,532
190	1,985	3,748	20/32	L: 138, W: 67, H: 78	123	70-hp	7,717
190T	1,985	5,821	20/32	L: 138, W: 73, H: 80	123	70-hp	8,214
1110	2,426	4,851	20/32	L: 138, W: 67, H: 79	123	82-hp	9,702
1110T	2,250	6,439	20/32	L: 138, W: 80, H: 80	123	82-hp	10,198
JOHN DEERE WORLDWIDE COMMERCIAL WORKSITE PRODUCTS							
240	1,500	3,400	14.6/25.4	L: 102, W: 64.1, H: 75.4	114	53-hp John Deere	6,195
250	1,750	3,600	17.6/30.1	L: 102, W: 68.9, H: 76.8	115.2	64-hp John Deere	6,250
260	2,400	5,000	21.3/33.1	L: 115, W: 76.2, H: 82.9	127	72-hp John Deere	8,250
270	2,800	5,600	21.3/34.9	L: 115, W: 76.2, H: 82.9	127	82-hp John Deere	8,500
280	3,200	7,000	28/41.5	L: 115, W: 77.2, H: 82.9	127	90-hp John Deere	9,200
KOMATSU UTILITY							
SK714	1,350	2,860	16.1	L: 126, W: 61, H: 77	112	47-hp Komatsu	5,565
SK815	1,550	3,100	16/26	L: 132, W: 68, H: 70	115	47-hp Komatsu	5,785
SK815	1,550	3,100	16/26	L: 132, W: 68, H: 77	115	54-hp Komatsu	5,785
MUSTANG MANUFACTURING							
1,050	2,100	8 gal	L: 88, W: 48.3/58.1, H: 70.3	108	36-hp Yanmar	4,400	
2032	1,250	2,500	8 gal	L: 90, W: 48.3/58.1, H: 72.3	110	36-hp Yanmar	4,600
2044	1,450	2,900	11.5 gal	L: 95.2, W: 58.8/64, H: 76.5	112	43-hp Yanmar	5,600
2054	1,650	3,300	11.5 gal	L: 96.8, W: 60.4/65.7, H: 76.5	115	49-hp Yanmar	6,050
2064	1,900	3,800	25 gal	L: 102, W: 66.5/70.8, H: 82.5	119	62-hp Isuzu	7,300
2074	2,250	4,500	25 gal	L: 106, W: 66.5/70.8, H: 82.5	119	75-hp Isuzu	7,450
2095	3,150	6,300	15 gal	L: 117.5, W: 79.5, H: 80.8	142	90-hp Yanmar	9,425
2105	3,600	7,200	15 gal	L: 117.5, W: 79.5, H: 80.8	142	110-hp Yanmar	9,475
NEW HOLLAND							
LS120	600	1,200	7.5	L: 64.7, W: 35.2, H: 69.4	93.5	16.5-hp Linamar	2,050
LS125	700	1,400	7.5	L: 67.5, W: 35.2, H: 69.4	93.5	18-hp New Holland	2,185
LS140	1,250	2,565	10.8	L: 92.8, W: 58.6, H: 73.4	110.2	32-hp New Holland	4,395
LS150	1,350	2,565	11.9	L: 92.8, W: 58.6, H: 73.4	(ht. to hinge pin) 114.3	38-hp New Holland	4,500
LS160	1,500	3,500	15.5	L: 98.2, W: 64.6, H: 75.3	(ht. to hinge pin) 115.1	42-hp New Holland	5,534
LS170	1,700	3,530	17.7/26.2	L: 98.2, W: 64.6, H: 75.3	(ht. to hinge pin) 115.1	52-hp New Holland	5,540
LS180	2,200	5,110	18.5/32.3	L: 112.1, W: 71.3, H: 77.8	(ht. to hinge pin) 124.7	67-hp New Holland	7,193
LS190	2,800	5,684	20/33.8	L: 119, W: 76.4, H: 79.6	(ht. to hinge pin) 125.6	83-hp New Holland	7,860
POWER EQUIPMENT CORP.							
730	1,300	2,600	16	L: 121	114	37-hp Kubota	4,800
770	1,700	3,400	23	L: 129	123	48-hp John Deere	5,800
805	2,050	4,100	23	L: 136	125	70-hp Isuzu	6,940
825	2,250	4,500	23	L: 136	125	70-hp Isuzu	8,200
865	2,650	5,300	26	L: 146	143	80-hp Isuzu	9,860
925	3,250	6,500	26	L: 157	146	100-hp Isuzu	10,380

FOCUS: SKID STEERS & LOADERS

MODEL:	RATED OPERATING CAPACITY (IN LBS.):	TIPPING LOAD (IN LBS.):	HYDRAULIC PUMP CAPACITY (GPM):	LENGTH/WIDTH/HEIGHT (WITHOUT ATTACHMENT, IN INCHES):	HEIGHT TO BUCKET PIN (IN INCHES):	ENGINE MAKE/HP:	MACHINE WEIGHT (IN LBS.):
POWER HOUSE EQUIPMENT							
Prodigy	825	1,200	7	L: 79, W: 29.5 to 41.5	74.5	24-hp Honda	1,880
Prodigy	220	440	2	L: 52, W: 30	46	13-hp Honda	942
SCHAEFF OF NORTH AMERICA							
SKS-633	4,000	9,240	16	L: 200, W: 73, H: 105	124	60-hp Perkins	11,035
SKL-823	4,620	8,000	9.9	L: 190, W: 73, H: 103	126	50-hp Perkins	9,100
SKL-824	N/A	11,731	17	L: 187, W: 73, H:		60-hp Deutz	11,731
SCL-515	2,260	4,520	10	L: 170, W: 61, H: 90	120	50-hp Deutz	7,400
TAKEUCHI							
TL130	1,620	4,630	18	L: 108, W: 62.2, H: 83.4	119.3	Yanmar	7,487
TL150	2,470	7,056	23.4	L: 122, W: 73.2, H: 86.8	126.1	Yanmar	10,692
THOMAS EQUIPMENT LTD.							
25G	475	950	8.5	L: 61.3, W: 39.9, H: 39.9	68.3	25-hp Kohler	1,500
85	850	1,800	8	L: 83.5, W: 36, H: 71.4	93.5	19.8-hp Kubota	2,983
105	1,000	2,000	8.7	L: 91, W: 50.8, H: 71	102.5	33-hp Kubota	3,700
135	1,300	2,600	15.8	L: 103.2, W: 53, H: 73	109.5	43-hp Kubota	4,800
153	1,500	3,000	16.6	L: 104.4, W: 57.5, H: 73.5	110	50-hp Kubota	5,520
175	1,700	3,500	16.6	L: 110.3, W: 68, H: 83	133.3	59.5-hp Kubota	7,000
225	2,200	4,800	20.5	L: 119.5, W: 70.8, H: 84	123.8	90-hp Kubota	8,000
245	2,400	4,800	20.5	L: 119.5, W: 70.8, H: 84	123.8	90-hp Kubota	8,000
TOWN & COUNTRY LTD.							
Patriot 1545	1,500	3,000	15.1	L: 101, W: 61, H: 78	118	46-hp Isuzu	5,390
VOLVO CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT							
ZL 402	N/A	4,050	8.5 std./14	L: 177, W: 63, H: 98	117	36-hp	7,500
L 30 B	N/A	5,710	13.7 std./25	L: 204, W: 76, H: 106	126	58-hp	10,472
L 35 B	N/A	6,810	18.4 std./25	L: 209, W: 76, H: 107	131	70-hp	12,566
L 40 B	N/A	8,270	28 std./35	L: 229, W: 85, H: 115	118	86-hp	16,094
L 45 B	N/A	9,645	28 std./35	L: 237, W: 97, H: 115	144	100-hp	17,593

For a LIST of attachments

available from these and other skid-steer manufacturers, check out the **May issue** at

www.lawnandlandscape.com

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Cut Out Cancellations

"You're fired."

These two words can kill morale and feed frustration, at the very least. Truth is, contractors need to care for customer relationships just like they cut, prune and primp their properties.

But just because clients exercise their freedom of choice in another company's favor doesn't mean they aren't prospects for future work or can't be persuaded to stay on board, noted Jeff Mariola, president, Rentokil Tropical Plant Services, Riverwoods, Ill.

"Customers who cancel your service are six times as likely to buy from you in the future," Mariola estimated, based on statistics he read. "You have to get out there and address it."

Cancellations are inevitable, no matter the company, no matter the client, pointed out Janice Thomas, vice president, grounds maintenance, Doerler Landscapes, Crosswicks, N.J. You can't keep them all

"No. 1, [cancellations] do happen – you don't retain everyone for 10 years," she said. "When it does happen, find out why so you can either correct the problem internally or you know how to re-approach that person and say, 'We've adjusted this internally to handle the problem, could you give us another shot?'"

In the meantime, try these basic cancellation-savers.

The price isn't right. Companies can't avoid cancellations just as clients can't resist those low, low prices.

Most of the time, however, cost adjustments aren't realistic solutions for landscape companies, Thomas said.

When a client cancels because of price, Thomas measures services with competitors' to make sure it's an "apples to apples" comparison.

"If I want to hang on to that contract, I will try to see if we can reduce some services to stay in the price range they are looking for," she said. "If they say, 'We can get this service for 10 percent cheaper,' rarely do I say, 'I'll match that price.' That's a dangerous snowballing effect – there will always be someone cheaper."

Price is a factor in many cancellations – especially now that consumers are more price conscious, added Larry Ott, operations manager, Chapel Valley Landscape Co., Wood-

bine, Md. "Clients are increasingly cost-sensitive and, in some cases, they've turned to lower cost providers – they are shopping for price rather than quality," he noticed.


Why ask why? Because this simple question can preserve your future relationship with the client, that's why. "The first thing I want to do is go to them and find out why they cancelled," Mariola said. "The first answer is usually, 'We felt like making a change.' People don't really like to tell you why they quit."

More reason to continue the conversation. Never assume causes for cancellation – always ask. "It could have been poor service, or it could even be the office manager bugging them about a bill, or maybe they saw one of the technicians smoking in the driveway," Mariola listed.


Eventually, most customers are fairly straightforward about why they made the switch, and quite frankly, they don't always mind venting about it. At this point, companies might win back their business. "Say, 'Is there any way we can get a second chance to prove ourselves to you,' or 'Is there any way we can move on from this?'" he suggested. "But, you can't ask that until you apologize and get to the heart of the matter. It has to be face to face."

Hit it off from the start. Nip potential problems in the bud by establishing a strong relationship with clients from the beginning. "A good rapport will save you through some minor skirmishes," Thomas said. "If you don't have that, you are not going to be in good shape if the customer gets really upset."

Thomas frequently checks up on new accounts and will either call or stop by properties to make sure they are satisfied with the service and to address any concerns. Also, the company issues questionnaires to its clients on a regular basis. Most people return them, and concerns are confronted immediately, she said.

This two-way conversation is imperative for customer retention, Ott added. "Customers are usually not experts in grounds maintenance, so information must be provided to them about the services and conditions in their landscapes," he said. — **Kristen Hampshire** 

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

lawnandlandscape.com 

Check this story online
for tips to win back
former clients.

A man in a grey work shirt is sitting in the driver's seat of a car. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. He is holding a clipboard and a pen, appearing to be taking notes. The background is slightly blurred, showing the interior of the car and some outdoor elements.

Cover Story

by Kristin Mohn

Lorne Hall is taking the time to streamline operations, such as the company's pay for production system, before facing the next growth spurt.

Photo: Jerry Hymer

Rites of PASSAGE

Lorne Hall and the Western Lawns staff recognize the value of growth – one step at a time.

Growth spurts are normal, yet overwhelming, parts of human nature. One day you are just beginning life's adventure, experiencing daily highs and lows for the first time, growing slowly but surely. Then suddenly, you've grown overnight, facing new sets of challenges and the daunting task of adapting to your new skin. No one ever labeled growing up as an easy experience.

Lorne Hall can relate to growth spurt stress. His Oklahoma City, Okla.-based company, Western Lawns, has journeyed across 14 years, from clumsy toddler to gawky teenager to the \$5-million-success-story it is today. With three regional locations and 43 percent growth in last year alone, Hall has experienced immediate expansion, proving that maturation can be an overwhelming experience for people and businesses alike.

A few years ago, Hall brought these frustrations to a trusted friend who offered some sound advice. "He said, 'The successful company on the outside might appear that it's constantly growing,'" Hall noted. "But the really successful companies grow in stair steps – a rapid time of growth followed by leveling off, allowing everything to catch up before growing again."

With these words echoing in his head, Hall decided to control his company's growth – not through denying the forces of nature, but simply managing the transformations that come his way. "Every time we want to plan for slower growth areas, something big gets dropped on our plate," Hall admitted. "We just need a different focus to the growth of our company."

ALL OR NOTHING. When Hall enrolled in Southern Nazarene University in Oklahoma City to pursue an accounting degree, his ambition didn't immediately parallel with his landscaping interests. But Hall knew his career choice would ultimately help him mold a successful business. "In our industry, at the lower levels, a little bit of professionalism will grow a business in a hurry," he said. This proved true as he started collecting his initial maintenance accounts during college.

In fact, Hall's business grew so quickly that he took an extra year to simultaneously finish his degree and balance his fledgling business. And, after graduating in 1987, Hall tackled his first growing pain: heading the company on a full-time basis.

As time passed, subsequent rapid growth periods continued. In 1988, a strictly residential basis was supplemented by a few commercial accounts. In 1997, the company opened additional branches in Fort Smith, Ark., and Tulsa, Okla. And as the years passed, Hall supplemented his own business know-how by hiring trusted partners, friends and fellow Southern Nazarene University alumni: Frank Flemmons, vice president of operations and Neal Roberts, vice president of finance.

Today, Western Lawns has blossomed into a full-service operation, offering maintenance, weed control and fertilization, land-

WESTERN LAWNS

HEADQUARTERS: Oklahoma City, Okla.

BRANCH OFFICES: Tulsa, Okla., Fort Smith, Ark.

2001 REVENUE: \$5,027,244

2002 PROJECTED GROWTH: 10 percent

SERVICE MIX: 40 percent commercial, 40 percent residential, 20 percent government/municipal

EMPLOYEES: 40 year-round, 70 seasonal

EQUIPMENT: 45 trimmers, 45 blowers, 45 edgers, 4 chain saws, 8 hedge trimmers, 25 maintenance vehicles, 4 spray vehicles, 10 walk-behind mowers, 30 riding mowers

THE COMPANY

MISSION STATEMENT: Improving the environment in which we live and work through providing quality, profitable landscape services.

CHALLENGES: Replacing overwhelming "growth spurts" with consistent, planned business expansion.

PRESIDENT: Lorne Hall graduated from Southern Nazarene University in Oklahoma City with a degree in accounting, which provided him with the savvy business sense to start the company and hit the ground running after graduation.

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS: Frank Flemmons earned a degree from Southern Nazarene University, spending time with the United Parcel Service before joining Western Lawns to help launch the weed control/fertilizer division.

VICE PRESIDENT OF FINANCE: Another Southern Nazarene graduate, Neal Roberts rekindled his friendship with Hall after working 10 years in the corporate world, eventually heading up projects such as grounds maintenance for the Oklahoma State Capital.

At a
Glance

Western Lawns

1131 Enterprise Ave., #22B
Oklahoma City, Okla. 73128
PH: 405/943-4242
FX: 405/943-4270

scape design/build, and irrigation to residential and commercial clients, he explained.

However, Western Lawns tries not to define its clients as solely commercial or residential. Hall maintained that one of the company's greatest struggles throughout its life span has been choosing the right cus-

tomers – someone who takes pride in his or her lawn and values the full-service focus. "Our typical customer hires a company that will protect the investment he or she has made in the property," he asserted.

This philosophy in part helped spur Western Lawns' focus on a weed control/



L-R: Frank Flemmons, Rogelio Montoya Piña, crew leader, and Neal Roberts stand on the Oklahoma State Capital property. Photo: Jerry Hymer

fertilizer division. The company initially started offering the services in 1989, hoping to differentiate itself from run-of-the-mill area landscaping companies. As a key aspect of the program, clients are expected to purchase the seven-step program as whole, rather than choosing one or two applications.

This highlights Western Lawns' investments in full-service customers, Hall remarked, adding that the program starts in January with resulting applications scheduled about six weeks apart. "We turn people away when they want one or two applications," he said. "It costs so much to get a new customer, we make sure they are the right customer to begin with."

Hall stated that this division has grown to attract about 3,000 clients that strictly buy weed control services, in addition to 1,500 that purchase the program as part of a full-service package. "We've grown that part consistently over the last 12 years and we've run a heavy marketing campaign," he said.

For example, the company utilizes radio commercials to target the weed control niche. Radio spots usually last for 60 seconds, offering valuable lawn care tips to residential customers and focusing on the benefits of the weed control program. Hall stressed that these commercials establish Western Lawns as an educated, proactive, professional source, while avoiding annoying telemarketing calls.

"We don't want them calling because all of the sudden they have weeds in their yard,"

(continued on page 72)

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FIRST TO START. LAST TO QUIT.

(continued from page 70)

he said. "The analogy I use there is, one weed application will not produce a yard of the year, just as one night of running will not prepare you for the Boston Marathon."

Hall added that the company supplements its educational focus through involvement in industry organizations such as the Associated Landscape Contractors of

America (ALCA) and through certifications – Hall, Flemmons and Roberts are all certified landscape professionals (CLPs). "There's no doubt in my mind that our affiliation with a national association and the fact that we have certified landscape professionals on staff have been keys to our success," Hall admitted.

EAGER EVOLUTION. As Western Lawns matures, Hall views periods between milestones as opportunities to more selectively qualify customers. "As larger things have come our way, it's been hard to say no – we're constantly battling that," he said.

Therefore, Western Lawns has implemented a control tool to help buffer the company during its expansion – a customer rating system. This process was implemented in mid-2001 and is used to rate customers in four areas – full-service capability, profitability, pay history and the "hassle factor," Hall listed.

As a result of the rating system, clients are labeled with grades, ranging from A to D. The grades allow account managers to effectively manage clients. While A and B clients will continue to receive top-notch service and attention, managers might meet with C

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the Boston Marathon."

– Lorne Hall

and D clients to determine how Western Lawns might be able to better serve these customers. The company also looks at the grades when determining pricing increases for the following year, although the exact amount is up to each individual account manager. "We've used it to help us grow without having to add a lot of equipment or labor," he maintained.

Thus, the company can make room for its devoted customers, which usually score an A or B, and take a closer look at where they may be dropping the ball with C or D clients. So far, Hall has been pleased with the number of A or B clients – about 75 percent, he said – on his service list. These clients that typically utilize full-service landscape services, he noted. "Usually when we fail it's because we're not doing what we know best, which is full-service," he said.

USE READER SERVICE #59

Another area of concern as Western Lawns curbs its growth lies in service consistency. "Sometimes we feel that we're running a \$5-million-dollar company on \$2.5 million in procedures," Hall noted. "When you have these big growth years, you end up telling someone to do something without telling them how to do it."

However, Hall recognizes that a strong company image means more than answering the phone with the same "Western Lawns" greeting. Case in point: coordinating systems at the Oklahoma City location with those at the Fort Smith and Tulsa branches means clear, consistent communication with account managers at all three sites. "We need to make sure that everything happening in Oklahoma City is also happening [in Fort Smith and Tulsa]," he said.

For instance, the company recently ordered new jackets for the Oklahoma City employees, accidentally overlooking the branches. Although a small point, the image produced by the jackets translates to a common message for clients and competitors. "Sometimes when systems are not polished off, you're giving mixed messages to customers," Hall pointed out, adding that to streamline branch performance, he spends Wednesdays at either branch location.

READY, SET, GO. Client grading systems and consistent communication help streamline company operations, but an idea is just words on paper if it is not carried out correctly, Flemmons pointed out. "Implementation is our biggest hurdle," he said. "We have great ideas and great systems, but it's actually implementing them and getting employees to follow and believe in them that's a challenge."

Western Lawns noticed this lack of motivation among employees who were frustrated by a lack of input into business improvement. As a solution, the company adopted a pay-for-production system, offering workers the satisfaction that they are paid for the work they do, and not just how many hours they put in each day.

As motivation increases, production receives a boost, which in turn helps boost Western Lawns' performance category on customer surveys, Hall related. "If a guy is assigned 40 hours a week for production, he gets paid for it," he said simply. "But the

more they work and the more they produce, it directly affects their wages."

New programs mean new expenditures, and the company uses time between growth spells as an opportunity to create more stringent cost controls, Roberts offered. "We're reducing materials costs and taking some steps to reduce labor expenses," he related.

So far, the pay for production system has allowed Western Lawns to reduce materials costs 2 to 3 percent and labor costs about 3 percent, Hall said.

To further offset equipment costs, the company has explored rental options as an alternative to spontaneously buying machinery.

(continued on page 76)

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USE READER SERVICE #23

Cover Story

(continued from page 73)

ery, he added. "Even though we'd like to have certain equipment, will we use it on a regular basis so it justifies itself?" he asked.

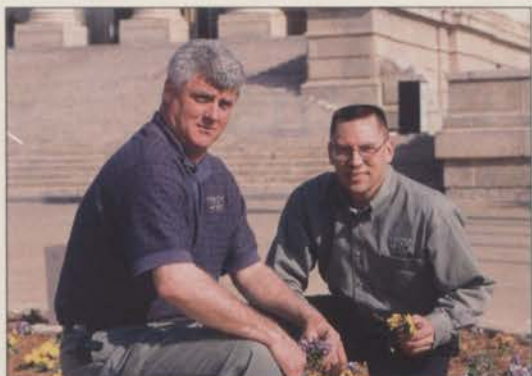
Western Lawns also has been allocating costs to the human side of the business, Hall said. Since referrals drive business, investing in relationships pays off in the long run. "We doubled the amount of money each account manager and salesperson can spend on the current customers," he said. These

extra funds allow account managers to reward loyal customers with a dinner out or similar thank-you gestures, which then create referrals, Hall said.

Shifting costs, despite an uncertain economy, are key strategies to position the company for its next growth spurt, Hall realized. Since Oklahoma City economically lags in relation to the East and West Coasts, Hall feels his area will avoid the peaks and valleys of recession and recovery. "My concern for the economy is not really high - I'm just trying to be prudent and plan," he said.

These plans include growth, but on a modest level: 10 percent annually across 2002, 2003 and 2004. Meanwhile,

L-R: Frank Flemmons and Neal Roberts. Photo: Jerry Hymer



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See this story online for information on pay for production and client surveys.

the company will continue to modify systems and realign its industry message, Hall continued. By 2005, he wholeheartedly expects to embrace the next expansion.

As in real life, however, growth spurts cannot be planned, and despite best laid plans, upheaval and evolution inevitably occur. Hall is cognizant of this fact, and he knows that sometimes, intentions to take steps one at a time are eclipsed by a mad rush to reach the top. "Every time we plan for a low growth year, it picks up anyway," he said, laughing. "But like all entrepreneurs, I will try to make it happen." ■

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

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Mauget

by Kristen Hampshire

Grayson South may not be built for speed, but it knows when and where to accelerate.

Slow and steady wins the race, so the grade-school fable goes.

This is why Michael Neese doesn't mind moving at tortoise speed, especially if gradual growth allows him time to deliver consistent quality service to clients and establish stable systems – a hard shell to withstand tough economic times. When it comes to building his business, the owner of Grayson South, Charlotte, N.C., won't hurry like Aesop's Hare.

"A lot of people go in with the goal to hit \$1 million as soon as possible, or they want 25 people working for them," he noted. "I sat down and said, 'Here is my game plan and here is how we're going to accomplish it.' We set realistic expectations based on what I thought we could manage."

Don't mistake this mindset for a half-hearted or hesitant approach – Neese's method is slow, but not pokey. He's running the same course and hitting the same speed bumps as his competitors, but his sure-footed gait secures his bottom line in the end. "I wanted to set up the company so it would be profitable," he reasoned. "The way you do that is by creating an atmosphere that is enjoyable to work in and training employees, which in turn leads to greater customer service. Everything revolves around the other."

Grayson South

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SERVICE SEQUELS. Neese's financial background working as an investment planner for eight years molded his panoramic outlook on business development. Before starting Grayson South in 1999, he realized that running a landscape company required not only green knowledge, but numbers know-how.

"A lot of people can go out and know what needs to be done in the yard, but when you are managing people, financials, budgets and man-hours, there is more that goes into that than horticulture," he related.

Small steps build successful businesses, and he sticks to this mantra in each facet of growth, from adding services to training employees. "You have to go in with a detailed plan and follow

(continued on page 80)



Michael Neese said most owners fall short because they don't have business plans – one of his keys to success.
Photo: Paul Williams III

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it from start to finish," he identified. Neese's primary goal – profitability – is more than a lofty idea, as the company increased revenue 16½ percent in 2001 and plans to hike up this number another 15 percent this year, further stabilizing the company's position in the \$250,000 to \$500,000 revenue bracket.

How did Grayson South manage this healthy boost? An emphasis on cash-flow friendly services like maintenance anchors the company during an economically stressful time. Also, Neese added departments to the mix, filling out the service circle. Now, the company offers irrigation, lawn care, basic pruning, and landscape design and installation along with its maintenance services.

"Parts of the business are more profitable than others," he noted. "Irrigation has higher margins than maintenance, but I wanted to start a company where I could hire people to work full-time and I didn't have to worry about drumming up business.

"I built the business on a maintenance base first, and once I had that core built, I added the niche services to compliment that base," he added. Since Charlotte weather allows for 12-month maintenance contracts, his seven full-time, cross-trained employees work in the field all year, so maintenance constitutes nearly 60 percent of Grayson South's business, 10 percent of which is commercial work. And Neese plans to keep it this way.

"People tightened up their pocketbooks, but at the same time, we were comfortable that we would still have the regular, monthly business," he said. "We built it on the defensive mix to grow it from there. If you're in a recession, people aren't going to write a check for a \$10,000 landscape, but they will pay for basic maintenance."

INCHING AHEAD. This gradual method of integrating new services extends into training and hiring practices. Call it tortoise train-

Michael Neese thinks free time is pretty important – his employees agree. When Grayson South, Charlotte, N.C., switched to four-day work weeks one year ago, morale lifted, efficiency leaped and jobs closed on time. How did the company manage to cram at least five-days-worth of work into a streamlined schedule? It's a matter of give and take between the employees and the company, the owner replied.

"In business today, it's important to have a culture that is focused and goal-driven with what we do, but at the same time lets employees know they have flexibility," Neese noted. "If they want to have a long weekend, we do everything possible to schedule it."

This doesn't mean workers are free to blow town for the beach every day, but it does reward hard work with play time. "They can take the time off, but they understand that the next week they have a job to do and they have four days to do it," he remarked.

The Grayson South workweek runs Monday through Thursdays with a crew meeting on Wednesday mornings. During this time, Neese evaluates the schedule, the projects' progress and employee availability. Then, he can redistribute crews the rest of the week if necessary to complete jobs. With the new schedule, man-hours generally fill 40 to 45 hours per week – five hours less than the traditional schedule due to tighter routes that decrease drive-time and cut out downtime in the morning since crews are working one less day, Neese reported. Now, Friday is a "make-up" day for crews to finish necessary work.

"That way if it rains one day, we have Friday to finish up vs. finishing the yard on Saturday when employees want to be with their families and clients want to be outdoors," he said. "We still have some maintenance planning on Friday, or we spend that day getting equipment up and running or working on special projects. The guys like it, the customers like it and it has created efficiencies. All those things compliment each other to help us get our job done." – *Kristen Hampshire*

Long Weekends

Check this story online for Grayson South's tips on training and tailoring an efficient service route.

ing – a thorough orientation that includes spending significant in-field time with Neese and Maintenance Manager, Spencer Jordan.

"The crews never go by themselves until they've had time working with a manager or another employee that has been with the company for a long time," Neese explained, adding that he trains himself by picking up tips from peers and working beside his sub-contractors on technical jobs.

And before employees even make it to "basic training," Neese tests them with a few hiring tricks to determine their dedication to the job. He requests all applicants meet him at 6:45 or 7 a.m. This early interview time weeds out those not motivated to rise and shine for the opportunity, he pointed out.

"My time is valuable, and if you're going to work for me, you need to respect time," he said, placing tardiness atop his pet peeve list. "It shows hunger. It shows if they want to work or if they just want a paycheck."

This is especially important since Neese doesn't want to run his business – he wants to share it. "The company is a bigger organization than just me – it's Grayson South where everyone has a part," he stressed.

But even the cautious – the slow and steady – find surprises along the way. Like any emerging company, Grayson South struggles with managing growth, recruiting talent to add to his crews and communications issues. He will continue to stick to his core maintenance focus no matter the success of other divisions, and he'll manage the jobs that end up on the work schedule. Most of all, he'll stick to what the old tale's Tortoise advised: "Plodding wins the race."

Or, perhaps Neese puts it better. "On day one we wanted to get our name out in the marketplace and we had a small focus," he remembered. "Now, we can do much larger jobs, bid on larger work as well as be a one-stop shop for our customers. They call us, and they know we can handle the majority of their needs." **LL**

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



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by Nicole Wisniewski

Catching design/build clients is like fishing — you have to use the right bait.

Extreme SALES

To win sales, design/build landscape contractors must "distill their client pools," and fish for the clients that match their specific service offerings.



Charter boat captains possess a certain mystique. They don't offer credentials that prove they know where all the good fish swim, yet people trust them to steer the boat in the right direction and pay them for their knowledge on weather, location, tides and lures.

Just as fishermen trust charter boat captains to provide vital fishing facts, clients should respect design/build contractors for their horticultural knowledge, said Gary Kinman, president, Kinman Associates, Dublin, Ohio. Contractors also must learn how to use the right bait to catch the right clients — similar to how fishermen discover with experience that fresh mackerel can snag them more snappers.

"The majority of the industry is casting blind into the big landscape pond," Kinman remarked. "If a charter boat captain can take you to a specific spot in a big, wide ocean and help you catch the fish you want, why can't you fish for jobs in a pond that only has the jobs you want in it? You have to ask yourself, 'Is your business on a charter boat or are you going it alone?'"

When landscape businesses are on charter boats, sales resources are not wasted and greater value and profits result from the increase in

satisfied clients, Kinman said. With the right visual bait presented in a professional manner and packaged with a little landscape education, design/build contractors can bring home a charter full of clients.

A SCHOOL OF CLIENTS. To steer the sales charter in the right direction, contractors must select jobs that complement their skill sets. They must establish their market niches and identify the types of clients they fancy.

"It's like the fish," Kinman said. "You can't go out there fishing for sharks and all different kinds of red and yellow and blue fish — you'd never be in the right spot at the right time to catch them all. Instead, you have to pick the jobs that match you. And then weed out the interference from other types of jobs that don't match. You have to distill the client pool."

Once contractors distinguish their clients from the rest, they can track their general locations, spending habits and hobbies. "Now you can drop your fishing hook in front of the jobs you want, wasting little marketing and sales efforts on dead-end jobs," Kinman stressed.

Then, fostering relationships becomes a crucial design/build sales component because "in the design/build business, you live and die by repeat sales and customer referrals," stressed Charlie Bowers, president, Garden Gate Landscaping, Silver Springs, Md.

(continued on page 84)

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Design/Build Clients

(continued from page 82)

To maintain these repeat sales, design/build contractors need to constantly pursue sales, added Tom Lied, president, Lied's Landscape Design & Development, Sussex, Wis. "Every time you finish a job, you need to sell another, which is why design/build contractors must constantly focus on the sales process and client relations," Lied said.

Unfortunately, the initial sale precedes the repeat sale, and requires client rapport. A successful relationship, like a friendship, takes time and many positive exposures, explained Joe Skelton, former owner of LifeScapes, Atlanta, Ga., adding that the standard sales spiel won't work. "People can smoke out a cheesy salesperson in a heartbeat," he said. "There are givers and takers in a relationship and it doesn't take long to tell who is who."

Skelton recommended contractors assume the "giver" vs. "taker" role in these relationships, being a volunteer and offering time and knowledge to connect with potential clients. "But be careful not to sell your-

According to Charlie Bowers, president, Garden Gate Landscaping, Silver Springs, Md., these are the most effective methods a new design/build salesperson can use to attract clients:

- Stay in touch with your database
- Join organizations and clubs
- Give talks to anyone who will listen (talk about the industry and about bettering the environment)
- Send out post cards
- Contact current clients' neighbors
- Get published every chance you can
- Send out press releases with photos
- Post job signs on all projects
- Give gifts to customers and others who influence sales

The Sales Source

self or your business," he warned. "If someone likes you, they'll ask you about it because they are genuinely interested."

The best way contractors find and build relationships is by enhancing awareness of their surroundings whether they are at work or at play. "Remember, the person you meet

is not necessarily the person who will become your customer," Skelton stressed (for Skelton's list of best places to find and build relationships, see *Relationship Central* on page 90). "Relationships can begin almost anywhere and are much more successful if they

(continued on page 86)


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A man with a beard and a brown cap is shown from the chest up, operating a piece of machinery. He is looking towards the camera with a focused expression. His right hand is on a large black handle with a red and white Exmark logo. His left hand is on a control lever. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky. The overall tone is professional and emphasizes the man's control over the machine.

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Design/Build Clients

(continued from page 84)

are built around mutual interests rather than around your business."

Once a rapport is formed, patience is essential. "Some relationships develop quickly, but more often it takes a long time before you see any real results," Skelton said, adding that he can name five relation-

ships that, over time (in one case, four years), resulted in more than \$14 million in design/build work, not including the maintenance afterward that pushed that number to more than \$20 million. "Stick with it and don't quit if you don't see work right away."

Meeting the right people is part skill

Fostering **relationships**

becomes a **crucial sales**

component because

"in the **design/build**

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by **repeat sales** and

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— *Charlie Bowers*

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and part luck, Skelton added. Practice improves results. "The more hooks in the water, the better chance you'll catch a fish," he said, building on Kinman's fishing analogy. "The more people in your company who are out there making relationships, the more likely you'll find some that really pay off in the future."

And when there aren't enough association or church meetings to attend, Bowers suggested contractors schedule events of their own to meet people and build relationships — "maybe an open garden tour at a few of your best clients' homes," he advised.

To track success, Bowers recommended contractors measure what works and doesn't work. Then, reward those who refer business. "Personalize letters and notes to people thanking them for their referral—never send a form letter, it's impersonal," he said. "I also try to give gifts for referrals, whether it's flowers, subscriptions to *Southern Living* magazine or a gift certificate to their favorite restaurant. It's a nice way to say thanks and show the person you value the relationship and want to keep it."

But while building relationships, contractors should remember that client connections alone cannot sell the work. "Even the best of friends won't do business with you unless the quality and value of your work speaks for itself," Skelton maintained.

To sustain long-lasting associations, contractors must exhibit a high degree of professionalism, be dependable and reliable, and constantly build client trust. "You cannot fail in your commitments," said Bill Lincicome, president, HighGrove Partners, Smyrna, Ga. "You cannot have a bad reputation of not showing up or not doing what you said you were going to do."

(continued on page 88)

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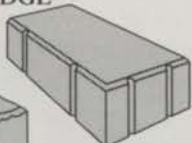
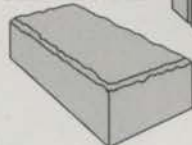
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Design/Build Clients

(continued from page 86)

BAIT 101. Once relationships lead contractors to potential sales catches, clients – like fish – need to be enticed. Design/build contractors must lure them to the sale by dangling a desirable landscape vision in front of their faces, tempting them to bite.

To do this right, contractors should whisk clients away from common distractions, like work, children and phone calls, by inviting them to their office for initial meetings. A design/build contractor's environment should have exterior and interior nooks that flaunt landscape features through framed job photos and actual hardscape and garden elements around the workplace. A professional office is essential for successful meetings, stressed Rick Doesburg, president, Thornton Landscape, Maineville, Ohio.

Kinman echoed the importance of office presentation. "Our job is to create pleasing, fun environments for people," he pointed out. "So, use an out-of-the-box approach and make your office like a studio environment where clients can get ideas and inspiration."

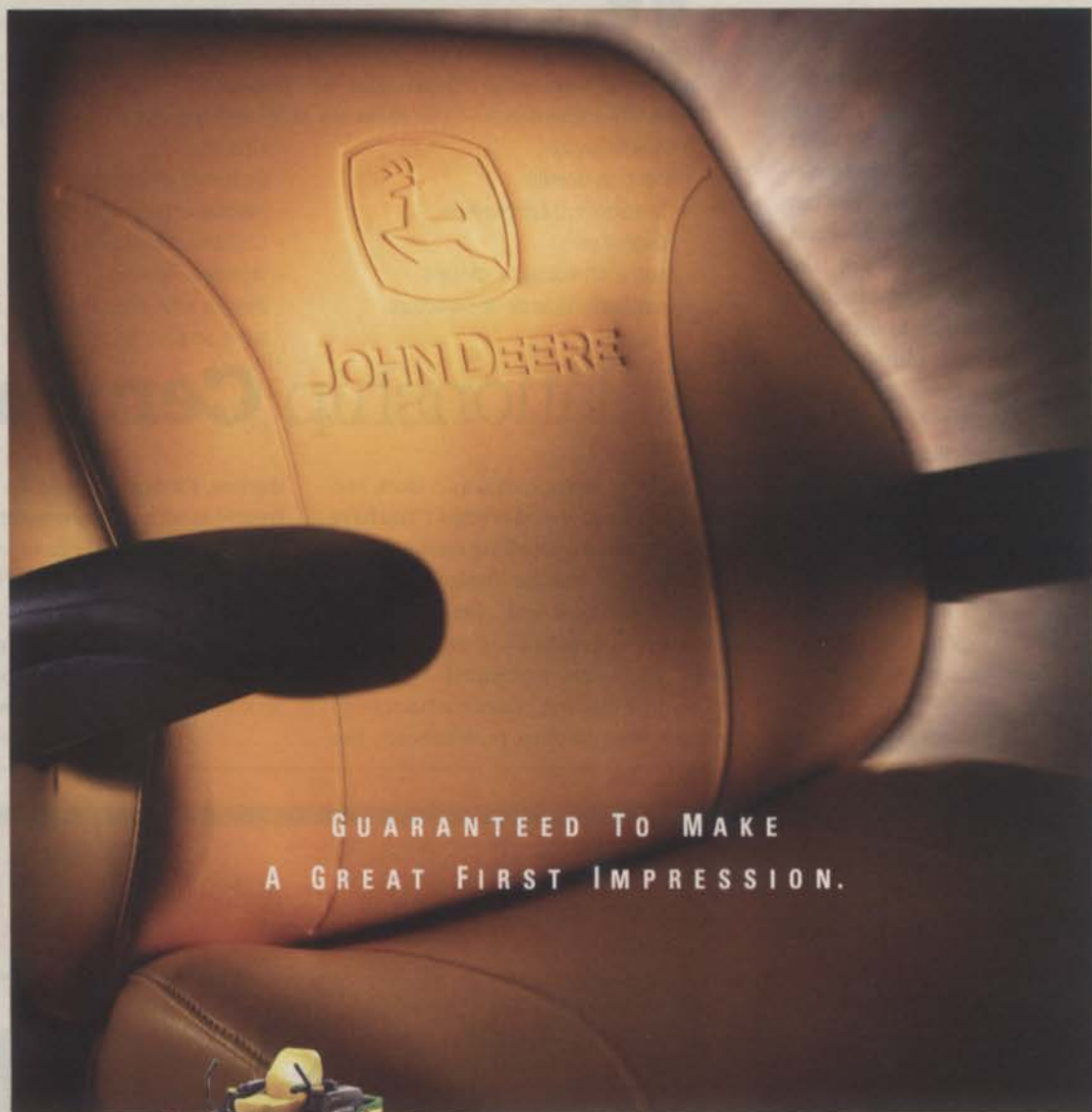
To kick off a well-planned meeting, contractors should welcome clients. "Put a sign at the front door that says, 'Welcome Mr. Client,'" Doesburg advised. "Then, be sure your secretary knows your clients' names and when they will be coming so she can greet them properly."

After the preliminary greeting, Doesburg takes clients into an exterior garden on his office grounds to explain the company history and philosophy. "I highly recommend you make an investment in your office area if you do design/build," he said, describing the numerous water features and other hardscape elements displayed in the company's garden retreat. "You can bring people to it to show them what you can do, and it pays off."

While seated in the garden, Doesburg said contractors should take advantage of the scenery and ask clients to list their landscape wants and needs. "They are now in a beautiful garden so their original ideas may already have changed because they are inspired by the surroundings," he said, adding that the meeting should be relaxing, but not too long – maybe 15 minutes.

"Then, bring them inside to a conference room with designs and photos plastered on the wall and give them a before and after

(continued on page 90)



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USE READER SERVICE #29

Design/Build Clients

(continued from page 88)

slideshow, showing them the work you've done," Doesburg said. "Change images quickly so they don't get bored. And have an extra projector set up in case they want to see images of specifics, like certain lighting elements or retaining walls. That way you can instantly provide visuals." The slideshow and overall service education should not take more than 45 minutes, Doesburg advised.

The visual bait adds value to the entire process, Lincicome stressed, adding that he constantly uses simple sketches, photos and imagery with clients. "It gets the process down to details and gives clients a feeling of what we are trying to accomplish," he said.

Next, take clients on a tour of the facility so they can see design and production areas. "That way they become familiar with what a preliminary drawing is vs. a final drawing," he said. "And you can explain soil preparation and show them your plant inventory and workshop."

To end the meeting, return to the confer-

Where are the best places to find and build relationships with clients? According to Joe Skelton, former owner of LifeScapes, Atlanta, Ga., this can happen almost anywhere, including through casual acquaintances, fellow members of groups or organizations, and friends of friends. Here are some of Skelton's suggestions on places he has built relationships that have turned into sales:

- Direct friends
- Existing clients
- Chambers of Commerce
- Neighbors
- Men's or women's groups
- Corporate Boards of Directors
- Church
- Spouse's coworkers
- Service organizations
- Children's schools
- Business groups
- People who share personal interests, such as golf, fishing, tennis or hunting

Relationship Central

ence room to stress company values and restate the design/build process. "You have to give the client compelling reasons to use your company and the design/build approach, build trust and ensure a quality outcome - and not fail in your commitments," Lincicome commented.

This first meeting places contractors on the same level as other professionals, like

doctors, Kinman stressed. To continue to be treated as such, Kinman recommended a few additional tips. "They have to come to me," he explained. "And we can't always meet when they get out of work - they have to schedule an appointment during our business hours. And, I charge a consulting fee - \$600 minimum. Since my jobs are high-end,

(continued on page 92)

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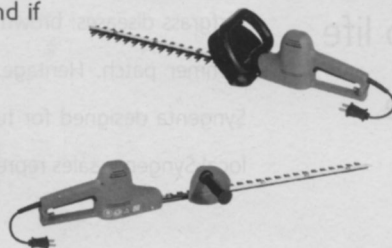
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Design/Build Clients

(continued from page 90)

Quick TIP

Rick Doesburg, president, Thornton Landscape, Maineville, Ohio, recommended a few key selling sentences that contractors can use to lure clients:

- "After this project is complete, you will have greater pride in your home ownership."
- "This will add as much as 15 percent to the value of your home."
- "As the landscape grows over the years, so does its value."

this reduces my risk and wasted time greatly. Only clients who know the value of your service will treat you like a professional and come see you when it's convenient for you and pay for your knowledge."

From the first meeting, clients should walk away with a better understanding of what design/build jobs entail. This is particularly important for contractors who charge for designs and focus their businesses on high-end clients who want to buy the whole process – from concept to creation.

"There is an unrealized, unfulfilled potential out there because we don't place value on what we do," Kinman stated, explaining that some clients still stereotype contractors. "Clients get the idea that design/build contractors sell plants and they just want to buy stuff from us. But we're not design/plant – we're design/build.

"And contractors can't wait to give their services away and are willing to allow customers to dictate projects," Kinman continued. "Instead, contractors need to educate clients on the outdoor landscapes they plan and build. They need to explain that a design/build project is more like a form of art, instead of a commodity."

(continued on page 94)

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Design/Build Clients

(continued from page 92)

Doesburg agreed. "Plants are only a tool – the wrapping on the package," he said. "We design and create spaces and we work with texture and color and contrast to do so. If clients are not here to buy the whole process, then they can go get their red sunset maple somewhere else. The value lies in the total process."

If the first meeting is successful, contractors should schedule a second appointment at the client's home before they leave, Doesburg said, adding that this meeting should excite clients even more. "When you're at the client's home, bond with the client and make it an enjoyable, fun experience," he said. "Review their needs and interests and don't be afraid to disagree with them when they suggest ideas that won't work in their yard."

The second meeting is also when budget should be discussed. "Once you know what they are interested in and you have the details to know how much it's going to cost, set a budget and ask them how that sounds – then, shut up," Bowers suggested. "A lot of times, clients have no clue what something is going to cost so they don't know how to set a budget. And the reason you keep quiet after you state your recommended budget is because you don't want to go screwing it up by downplaying services or justifying cost. Be confident in your offer."

For clients who seem shocked at the initial budget, James Martin, president, James Martin Associates, Vernon Hills, Ill., said contractors should be prepared to show clients other concepts that illustrate how much a project could cost – whether more or less than the original stated price – based on various design changes.

However, contractors have to be careful with this approach, warned Steve Pattie, president, The Pattie Group, Novelty, Ohio. "Sometimes multiple concepts confuse clients," he said. "So, we will show them different options initially and then one idea always seems to stand out as the main one they are impressed with. Then, we stick with that."

But this isn't the end of the sale. There are other tools – preliminary drawings, phased implementations and design fees – that can be used during the sales process to lure clients. See the June issue of *Lawn & Landscape* for the sequel to *Extreme Sales*. **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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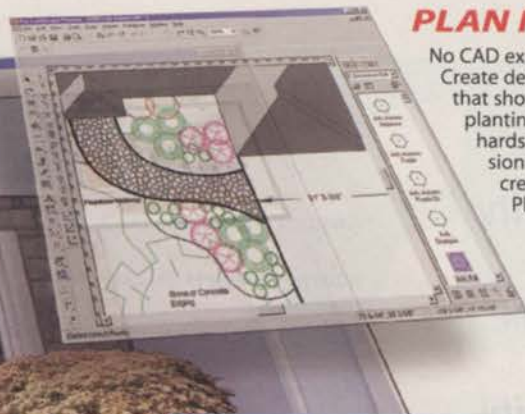


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by Bob West

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put a couple of guys in a truck and tell them where to go cut grass. What could be simpler than that?

Unfortunately, many landscape maintenance companies are born because mowing seems so simple. But the reality is that being in the business and succeeding in the business are two vastly different objectives. And success requires a great deal more thought, planning and management than simply selling a service. And that's even true for something as seemingly simple as mowing someone's lawn.

Send the right crew with the wrong equipment or the wrong people with the right machines and money goes down the toilet because, at the end of the day, landscape maintenance companies sell their time. Wasted time equals wasted money, and inefficient crew setup tops the list of such offenders for maintenance companies.

THE NUMBERS GAME. Every crew starts with one person. And in an ideal world, Mike Mitchell's mowing crews wouldn't include any more people than that one. "I can't figure out why you wouldn't want to have crews be as small as people," related the vice president of operations at Signature Landscape, Olathe, Kan. "A one-man crew is as efficient as you can get, and we'd go with all one-man crews if we could afford the equipment costs."

Since the equipment expenses would be prohibitive for a slew of one-man crews, Mitchell resigns himself to adding people, but he's quick to point out that more people doesn't necessarily equal faster crews. "We've noticed through time studies a three-man crew really isn't any more productive than a two-man crew," he pointed out, adding that Signature Landscape focuses primarily on commercial properties. "Some of the efficiency issue has to do with downtime or windshield time. Plus, at the site, a well-organized two-person crew doing the different tasks in a specific order lets you divide the work easier."

Of course, some jobs call for more manpower than a two- or three-man attack. Such larger properties – typically commercial facilities or homeowners' associations –

(continued on page 98)

Handling time-consuming trim work efficiently is a key factor for many contractors' crew set up.

Photo: Roger Mastroiani

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USE READER SERVICE #72

Crew Productivity

(continued from page 96)

where a crew spends most or all of its day, may require teams as large as five or six people. And that brings up new concerns.

"The challenge with a big crew is finding a crew leader who can keep people focused and efficient and then get work done himself," explained Mitchell, adding that crew-cab trucks are a must to tackle larger jobs without spending too much on equipment.

Greg Servello, owner, Servello & Son, Orange City, Fla., witnessed the power of a one-man crew himself last year, and now he's a believer. "Our one-man crew was really productive last year," noted Servello, whose company primarily mows small commercial properties and apartment complexes. "He got to know his properties really well, which made him even more productive. But the key is knowing your people. You have to put the right kind of person in this

(continued on page 102)

Contrary to popular belief, estimating a maintenance job doesn't just involve knowing the time required to get the job done. The number-crunching estimator also factors in a cost for drive time to figure the job's total cost. Contractors who don't think about how the crew gets to and/or from the site give away profit.

"Our clients pay for one-way travel," explained Mike Mitchell, vice president of operations, Signature Landscape, Olathe, Kan. "We try to route the furthest job from the office first each day because they should get the biggest travel charge since they are so far away. Then the second job of the day is billed for the time it takes the crew to drive from the first job to the second one."

Of course, some driving still must be done once the crew visits all of the clients, and Mitchell said the company views that time spent driving back to the shop at the end of the day as overhead for each crew.

Since labor hours represent the basis for all of the costs on a maintenance job, Mitchell emphasized that contractors have to cover this expense. "We're trying to expand our market, but it has been difficult because of the travel time factor," he admitted, adding that the company was pricing its work too high because of the time its crew spent behind the wheel heading into this new area. "So we have one crew that reports to a small building in the new area, and that's where they start their day. This really eliminates most of the driving time."

- Bob West

Dealing with Drive Time



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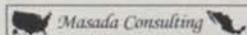
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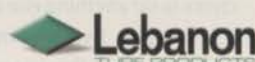
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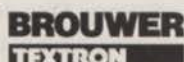
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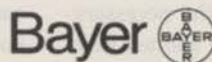
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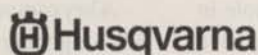
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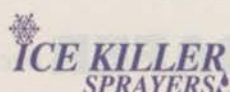
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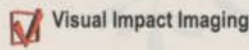
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Crew Productivity

(continued from page 98)

situation—someone who likes working alone and manages himself really well.”

Such task focus is a must for all crews, agreed Mitchell. “Getting the maintenance crews to do anything else is suicide,” he noted.

Nature’s Expressions created its first mowing crews this year to meet customers’ requests for the primarily design/build company to maintain their properties as well. David Miller, one of three partners at the Nicholasville, Ky.-based firm, said the company typically runs two-person crews, but he sees benefits to adding a third crew members. “We go with two people right now because we’re able to get the necessary amount of work done in the allotted time with two people, but the third person can help with customer service issues that need to be addressed or any sales opportunities with the next-door neighbors,” he remarked. “In those instances, it’s nice to have someone who can get off their mower for awhile and talk to them.”

CREW COMPOSITION. Figuring out how many people to put on a crew certainly doesn’t end these deliberations, however. Assigning responsibilities to each crew member ensures that everyone understands his or her specific role and knows who is ultimately in charge.

“You have to have someone who is clearly in charge every time the crew goes to a property,” maintained Mitchell. “First off, that means they’re responsible for driving the vehicle and getting all of the paperwork turned in accurately and on time. But you also want this person to be someone who has some judgment ability so they can decide how to organize the crew on the job. Then we try to leave as much responsibility in their hands as we can.”

In addition, the crew leader is typically the most competent or responsible employee on the crew, and that’s a valuable role in certain instances. “I think you need to have the crew members changing their responsi-

bilities from job to job so they don’t get too bored, but sometimes you need that crew leader to handle particular areas on a property because they’re points of interest or the client is sensitive to them.”

“We have crew leaders and then gardeners or crew members on each crew,” added Servello. “We also try to have two guys with a driver’s license on each truck—one who is the crew leader and one who is learning to be a crew leader. That protects us in case one guy calls in sick.”

Servello encouraged contractors to do whatever necessary to keep a crew together all year for maximum efficiency. “You don’t want to deal with the learning curve of putting new people on a crew in July or August,” he noted. “We all get enough turnover with our employees, so why make it worse by moving people around?”

A key component of crew setup at Servello & Son is getting the most out of the company’s

(continued on page 104)

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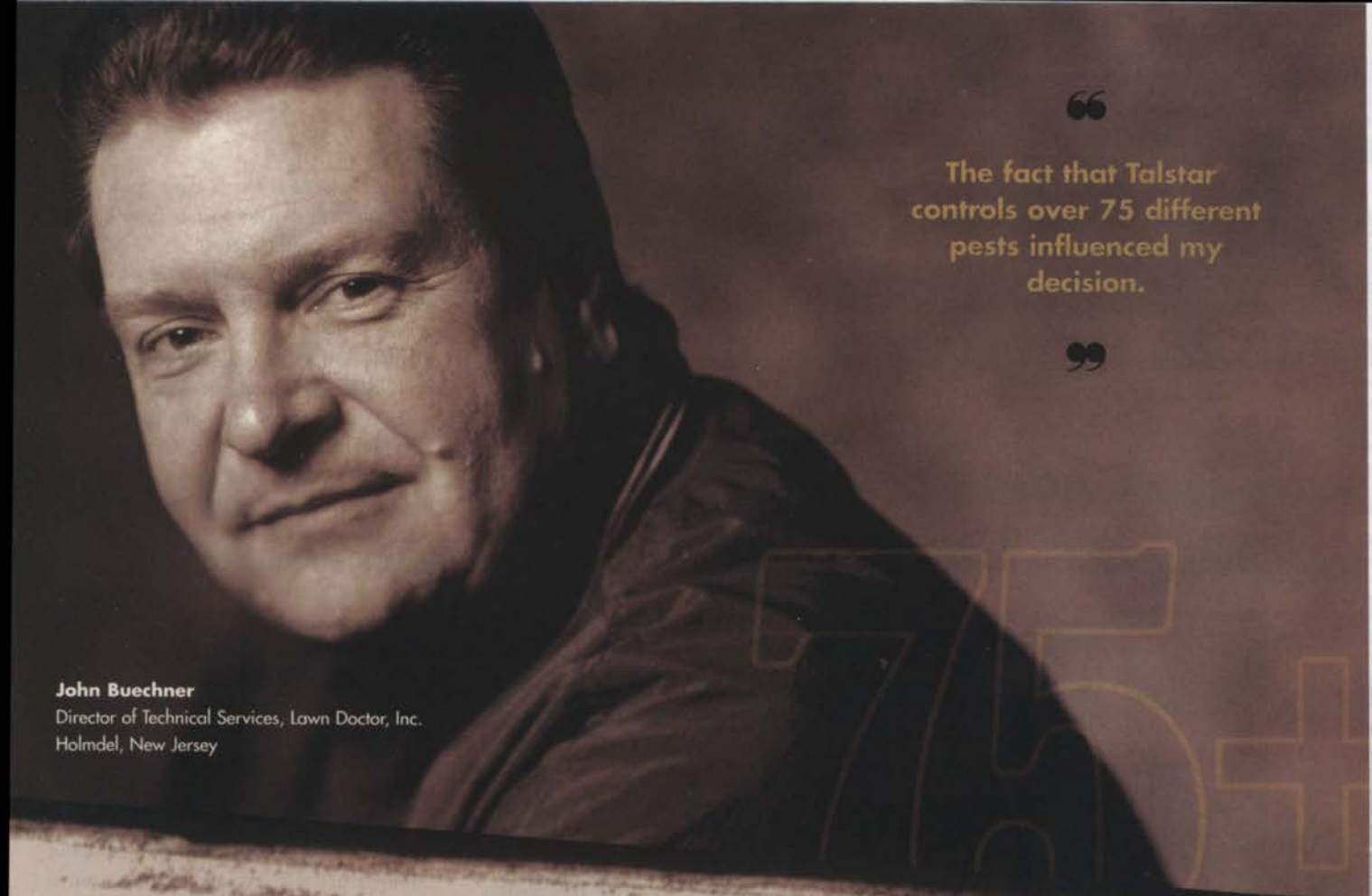
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Crew Productivity

(continued from page 102)

equipment, which led Servello to set up his crews in a manner he never saw until he moved from Massachusetts to Florida. He splits up the maintenance responsibilities between two crews – one does nothing but mow while the other handles all of the additional maintenance work on the job.


"We have a lot of mileage between jobs down here, and on a typical apartment complex we used to send three men out there with two mowers," he shared. "Those guys would mow for four hours and the equipment would just sit on the trailer for the rest of the time while they trim, edge, blow and

so forth. I wanted to get those mowers on more jobs, so we went to a dedicated mowing crew and a detail crew."

Now, Servello routes his crews so the mowing crew gets started first each day. That crew arrives on the job, mows the areas it can handle with the riding mowers and then moves on to the next job. The second crew follows the same route as the mowing crew and shows up on the job to finish up the work. "We had to add some more men, but our total man-hours are the same and we were able to pick up some more work without adding any extra equipment," Servello related.

Mitchell said he has seen other companies take this approach, and he suggests they pay particular attention to specifying each crew's duties. "I would worry about such a setup from an accountability standpoint," he shared. "If something is wrong, I want to know who is responsible and I don't want to worry about two crews pointing fingers at each other."

One lesson that Servello learned about this approach is that you have to be sensitive to how the crews react to the repetitive nature of the work. He also pays attention to the types of jobs they work on. "Two people is the most productive detail crew, but they can get beat up and develop a 'can't do it' attitude on larger, commercial properties," he explained. "We had one crew assigned to just our biggest jobs last year, but this really beat them up because they were outside all day and they didn't get those little breaks that come from driving from job to job, which is especially important down here (Florida) in July and August. We're trying to mix that up more this year."

Of course, being sensitive to your clients' needs makes a lot of sense when scheduling crews as well. Miller explained that Nature's Expressions strives to take care of its residential mowing on Thursdays. "That way we're mowing later in the week so people can enjoy a freshly cut lawn on the weekend, but we've still got Friday in case it rains" he pointed out. "Our residential customers, especially the high-end ones, don't want to see us in their yard, so they don't want us there late in the evenings or on the weekends when they're home." 

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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by Harry Niemczyk, Ph.D. and David Shetlar, Ph.D.

In this excerpt from their book *Destructive Turf Insects*, two entomologists offer their views on preventing grubs and other pests.

Moving TARGETS

The preventive programs for lawns outlined here are presented with the view that one pest (i.e., chinch bug, billbug, etc.) or group of pests (i.e., grubs, cutworms, mole crickets, etc.) is often the primary, but not necessarily the only, concern or focus of treatments directed by the lawn care operator. We call this the primary target. The impact of the programs and treatments on other pests that also occur at the time of application (i.e., secondary targets) is also considered. Remember, turf insects rarely, if ever, occur one at a time at only one time.

The target may be grubs, but billbug larvae (left) and/or chinch bugs (right) that may be present at the same time can also be controlled or suppressed with a well-timed application. Photo: Destructive Turf Insects

NORTHERN LAWNS. In our view, an insecticide or other form of insect control should be applied only when its use is justified. The major justification for following a preventive approach program should be a past history of infestation and/or damage and confidence that damage from insect pests will reoccur. Such history is based on previous years' experience(s), observations, monitoring and knowledge of the seasonal spectrum of pests occurring at any specific location.

Consideration of the impact of a treatment on not only the primary target, but the spectrum of potential secondary pests as well, can reduce the number of applications needed to achieve the objective.

Primary Target - Grubs. If grubs (Japanese beetle, masked chafer, European chafer, Asiatic garden beetle or Oriental beetle) are the primary target, and a preventive approach is selected, late April through May is the optimal time to apply imidacloprid (sold by Bayer as Merit). Label directions regarding application rates should be followed carefully. In addition to providing seasonal control of grubs, the systemic activity of the material should also provide season-long control of billbug larvae, greenbug aphid, and as least suppression of chinch bug below damaging levels. Little or no control of overwintered sod webworm larvae is expected and influence of succeeding sod webworm generations is unknown.

Mid- to late-June application of imidacloprid provides season-long control of grubs, but probably will not provide adequate control of billbug larvae. The impact of this treatment on the first generation of chinch bug and sod webworm is not

(continued on page 108)



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Turf Pest Management

(continued from page 106)

known at this time. Application from July to mid-August will prevent annual grubs (including green June beetle), but is probably too late to impact other secondary pests in the spectrum (though this is unknown).

Our experience has shown that May application of thiamethoxam (a new product from Syngenta called Meridian, still awaiting EPA approval) provides season-long control of Japanese beetle and masked chafer in Ohio. Studies in other states have shown similar control of European chafer and Oriental beetle. Infestations of billbug and sod webworm larvae also can be controlled by May applications, but no research has been performed to determine the effect of a May application on future generations of sod webworms.

June application of halofenozide (sold by Dow AgroSciences as MACH-2) provides season-long control of Japanese beetle and masked chafer. Control of European chafer and Oriental beetle has been maximized when halofenozide is applied at egg laying.

Infestations of billbug and sod webworm larvae existing at application time may also be controlled with treatment. Application from July to early August prevents infestation of Japanese beetle and masked chafers and controls existing sod webworm larvae. Treatments applied from mid-August through mid-September also control these grubs.

Primary Target – Billbug. Billbugs are the most common cause of damage to lawns. Damage is often misdiagnosed as drought or sod webworm injury.

Labeled pyrethroids (i.e. bifenthrin, beta-cyfluthrin, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin and lambda-cyhalothrin) applied between mid-April and mid-May kills overwintered billbug and chinch bug adults and sod webworm larvae (fluvalinate is another pyrethroid that is for billbugs and chinch bugs only). Treatment at this time prevents development of a first generation of these pests. Application after mid-May could result in some billbug damage if significant egg laying occurred before the application.

Primary Target – Chinch Bug. At locations where chinch bugs have one generation each year, a labeled pyrethroid applied between mid-April and early May should provide season-long control. In areas with two generations of chinch bug, the need for a second treatment depends upon the abundance of rainfall or irrigation during development of the second generation. Further, if adjacent lawns were not treated for chinch bugs, there is a higher risk of this pest migrating into the treated lawn.

When moisture for good turf growth is adequate during late August and September, a fungus disease, *Beauveria*, infects and kills many chinch bugs. In many, if not most cases, the population can be reduced to the point where a second insecticide application is unnecessary. The fact that most northern lawn care programs include a fertilizer application at this time also helps the turf withstand feeding from the second generation.

(continued on page 110)



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Turf Pest Management

(continued from page 108)

tion. Application of fungicides significantly reduces *Beauveria* effectiveness.

If August or September are dry (a condition under which chinch bugs thrive), reinfestation limited to the border can be caused by chinch bugs moving from adjacent untreated turf. Some border damage from first- and second-generation migrants is possible under such circumstances. If the adjacent turf has been treated or has a low level of infestation, reinfestation is very unlikely since the source of reinfestation is not there. In this case, the spring treatment could take care of the chinch bug problem for the year.

SOUTHERN LAWN. Regions with Bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, centipedegrass, bahiagrass and St. Augustinegrass have general pests (e.g., mole crickets, grubs, armyworms, chinch bugs and fire ants) and turfgrass-specific pests (e.g., Bermudagrass mite, spittlebugs and ground pearls.).

Again, an insecticide or other form of insect control should be applied or implemented only when justified. Preventive treatments can be timed to simultaneously control the primary target and secondary pests, thereby reducing the number of applications necessary for control.

Primary Target - Mole Crickets. When previous experience indicates mole crickets to be a perennial pest problem in a lawn, a preventive control program is warranted. At this time, fipronil (sold by Aventis as Chipco TopChoice) is not registered for mole cricket control on home lawns.

At present, imidacloprid can be used on lawns as a preventive treatment. For most mole cricket zones, imidacloprid should be applied within the first three weeks of mole cricket first egg hatch. The calendar time of this period varies considerably from south to north in areas where mole crickets occur.

For example, tawny mole cricket egg laying may begin as early as late March in

south Florida, mid-April in northern Florida and mid-May in South Carolina. Egg hatch occurs about 20 days later. Generally, each major biological event in the life history of mole crickets is delayed by one week as one moves 100 miles from south to north. Mole cricket populations in coastal or island areas are often ahead in development when compared with inland populations.

A single surface application of imidacloprid (at the highest label rate), made within three weeks of first egg hatch (as determined by occurrence of the first nymphs), should effectively prevent damage from tawny and southern mole crickets. Imidacloprid applied during this period should also control secondary pests, such as masked chafer or annual species of May/June beetle grubs that can appear 60 to 90 days after the application. Spring applications also appear to control hunting billbug and suppress southern chinch bug populations.

Though neither labeled nor thoroughly




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tested, thiamethoxam should also control mole cricket nymphs as well as a broad spectrum of secondary pests when applied at the same time as outlined for imidacloprid.

The key to successful use of imidacloprid (and possibly thiamethoxam) is to determine when mole crickets in an area are ready to lay eggs.

Lawn care providers who have used a preventive program for mole crickets should still warn clients that such applications will neither stop migration of nymphs from surrounding lawns nor stop incoming flights of new adults in late fall and early spring. If fall or spring migration of adults produces unacceptable tunneling, curative materials or baits may need to be applied.

Primary Target - Grubs. If grubs (southern and southwestern masked chafer or annual May/June beetles) are the primary target, and a preventive approach is selected, May to early June is the optimal time to apply imidacloprid. In addition to providing seasonal control of grubs, the systemic activity

of the material should also provide control of secondary targets, such as hunting and Phoenician billbug larvae, and some suppression of early generation southern chinch bugs and fire ants. Control of first generation armyworm and tropical sod webworm larvae should also be achieved for 20 to 30 days after application, but will not prevent late season outbreaks.

Late June to early July application of imidacloprid provides season-long control of grubs and will provide some control of billbug larvae. This late application will likely have little effect on the secondary targets, southern chinch bug and mole crickets, but development of armyworm and tropical sod webworm populations should be suppressed for 20 to 30 days.

May, June or July application of thiamethoxam will control grubs in southern turf and secondary targets, similar to the activity spectrum of imidacloprid.

A June preventive application of

halofenozide provides season-long control of masked chafers and *Phyllaphaga crinita*. Control of *Phyllophaga latifrons* (the species common to south Florida) is limited. Infestation of the secondary targets, billbug, armyworm and tropical sod webworm larvae existing at the time of application may also be controlled with treatment at this time, but do not expect extended residual control.

Application of imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, or halofenozide from July to early August will also control southern grubs as well as the green June beetle, but this is too late for control of early generations of billbug, armyworm and sod webworms. The impact of treatment at this time on sod webworms that will overwinter is unknown.

Primary Target - Fire Ants. Control of fire ants generally requires both curative and preventive approaches in lawns. While the two-step or ant-elimination method can be used, most clients prefer the ant-elimination strategy since it reduces the chance of hav-

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ing contact with fire ants in the landscape.

Two-step approach: This method includes a bait-formulated insecticide application over the entire lawn once (spring) or twice a year (spring and early fall), and it's more effective if entire neighborhoods cooperate with residents making similar applications.

In step one, baits are broadcast over the entire lawn. Unfortunately, baits act slowly on the fire ants within their nests. Some baits take three to five weeks to achieve maximum effect, while others produce maximum control four to nine months after application. After one to three weeks, many of the smaller fire ant mounds will have disappeared or become inactive. Where fire ant mounds are located in high use areas (nuisance mounds) or if larger mounds continue to persist, step two is to treat nuisance and persistent mounds directly. These mounds should be treated directly with drenches, dusts, granules, or an aerosol injection. A range of insecticides is registered for this purpose.

Once fire ants in an area have been brought under control, the two-step program can be used every year to prevent extensive build up of fire ant colonies. This is best done by applying the baits in the fall (September or October) and treating remaining mounds in the spring. In founding becomes extensive, reapply baits.

Ant-elimination approach: A bait-formulated insecticide is broadcast over the entire turf area or the bait is spread around individual mounds. After two to three days (to allow foraging fire ants to pick up the bait), a contact insecticide is applied to the entire lawn. Depending on the number of foraging fire ants, the contact insecticide may need to be applied every four to eight weeks. The goal is to reduce mounds (baits) but minimize encounters with fire ant workers (contact sprays). When acephate or a pyrethroid is used as the contact insecticide, the secondary targets, cutworms, armyworms and sod webworms will also be con-

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trolled. If these applications are made when mole cricket eggs are hatching, many young mole cricket nymphs can be killed. **ll**

The authors are professor emeritus, department of entomology, The Ohio Agricultural & Development Center, The Ohio State University, Wooster, and associate professor, department of entomology, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mention or omission of specific product names is neither an endorsement nor criticism of such products by Lawn & Landscape magazine or this article's authors.



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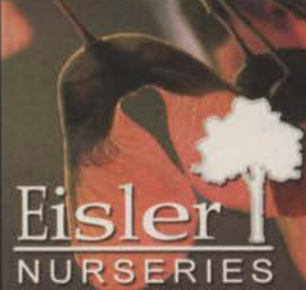
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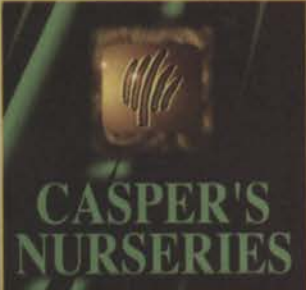
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Dealing with Drainage

by Kristen Hampshire

Poor drainage rarely wears a disguise. Most homeowners notice symptoms of sappy foundations in their wet basements or diagnose their own mushy, marshy back yards. Soaked plants get sick, soggy turf thins and dies out, and smelly soil indicates rotting.

If anything, muddy shoes tell the truth and, chances are, the neighbors won't hesitate to offer their own assessment when they find their driveways serving as catch basins for excess runoff.

These signs can leave homeowners knee-deep in drainage dilemmas.

But that doesn't mean their landscape plans are sunk, or that their grounds are destined to remain waterlogged. Fact is, contractors need to consider drainage on all properties before installing or designing plans, pointed out Bill Eiserman, production manager, Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill. "You have to deal with [drainage] on every site, and if you don't, you will end up with a long-term problem," he warned. "It might not show up right away, but eventually it will."

ASSESS THE MESS. Drainage issues aren't contained within property lines, so contractors need to "think big" when assessing sites and offer solutions that aren't short-sighted.

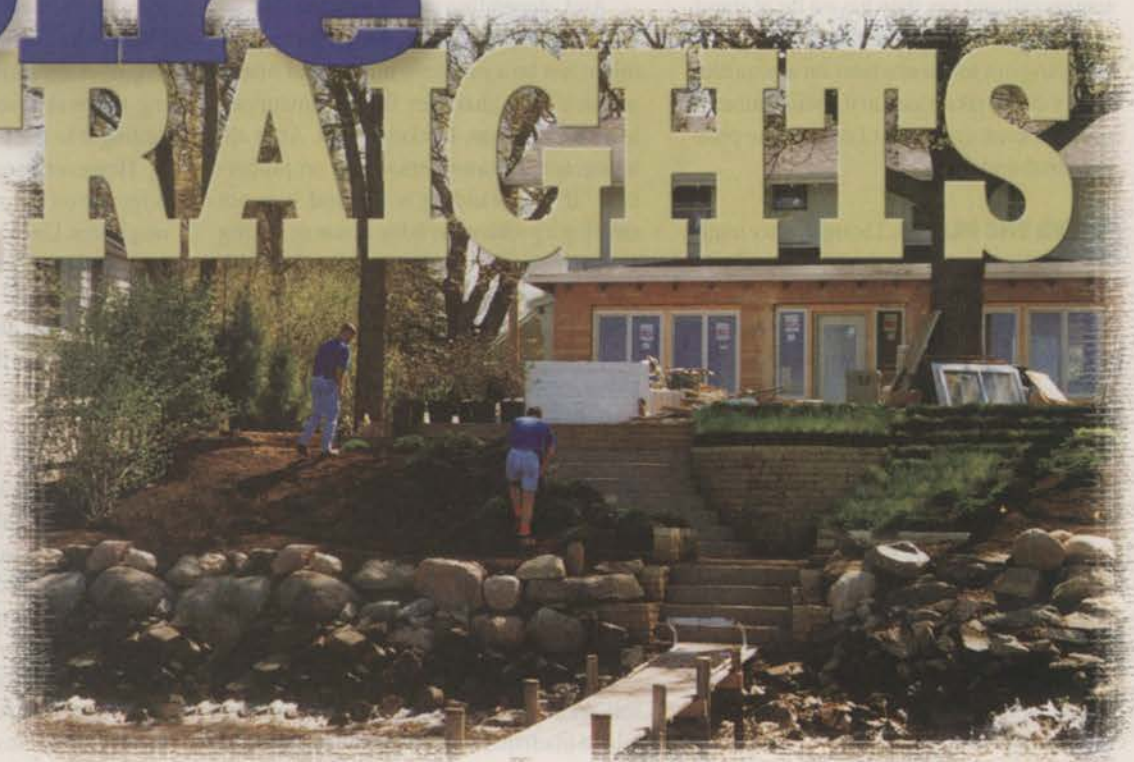
"There are two different systems," Eiserman identified. "There is a global system and a site system. You have to drain each differently, and if the whole subdivision drains into one lot and you're working on that one lot, it will be difficult to keep that area dry."

Problematic, perhaps, but not impossible. The lay of the land is the first clue: Does the property slope toward or away from the home? Are downspouts directed away from the home's foundation? Does the back yard slope into a ravine? How does the property's grade compare to others nearby? Where is the water running?

*Pull the plug
on drainage
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Dire STRAIGHTS

Retaining walls offer one solution for properties with drainage difficulties.



Dealing with Drainage

An eyeball assessment of the property offers a rough draft diagnosis for drainage issues, but contractors shouldn't stop there, advised Ross Richardson, landscape designer, Dunn Lawn & Land, St. Louis, Mo. "Contractors should look at more than what is being asked of them," he said. "The homeowner is only seeing one issue and you might find another that hasn't come up."

This is why careful site evaluation should precede drainage solutions, otherwise, what seems to be the answer might spur another problem – in a different area.

"You think you're solving a problem in one spot, but all you might be doing is redirecting it to another," said James Arch, designer, Impullitti Landscaping, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, describing a common mistake he calls "moving the water around the yard." A transit level helps determine site grade so contractors can accurately map out water flow, and soil percolation tests also indicate poor drainage points. By filling a pit with water, contractors can locate slow-straining soil. If a foot-deep pool drops less than 1 to 2 inches per hour, the soil will most likely prevent proper drainage.

Besides consulting these quantifiable measures, Arch conducts his own real-time analysis. "Problems are most evident after a big rainstorm, and that's usually when customers call and say they have a lot of standing water in an area," he noted. "Instead of me going out to the site later on a beautiful, sunny day to take a look at it, I will wait until the big rainstorm so that I can see the problem firsthand."

FILTER THE PLANS. Though water might collect in only one spot, there is generally far more than one fix for sappy soil. "The best way to solve any drainage problem is to get the water to run over land where it's supposed to go," Eiserman simplified. However, this option is easier said than done. Some situations don't allow for regrading or creating swales to direct water to storm drains, streets or other community-designated collection areas.

"The first thing we do is we get a grading plan," Eiserman noted. "If it is an old property, we get the plan from the original construction or the most updated plan. If that doesn't exist, we do a grading plan ourselves, which then goes to the city or community for approval."

Newly developed areas and urban housing communities often insist that landscape contractors present the board or homeowners' association with a plan detailing how water will be handled, Eiserman pointed out. Codes vary depending on the location, so designers should check into red-tape requirements before breaking ground.

"You also need to discuss all the ramifications with the homeowner," Eiserman added. "You need to have them understand that you are basically moving water from one spot to another. If they have the conception that you will make it go away, they will be unhappy with the end product."

Some clients' expectations aren't so refined – they are content with a little wet grass. Others want completely dry results. The complexity of the solution can depend on homeowners' standards, Arch added. "A question we ask a lot of clients is, 'Is this your forever home?' That dictates what they are willing to spend to improve a property."

Eiserman agreed that serious clients will drop more dollars into long-term drainage designs. "If they have young children or a yard they like to entertain in, they will be willing to spend money to find out what the problem is," he figured, adding that budgets can range from \$1,500 to \$20,000 depending on site size and situation.

And, depending on the location and severity of the wet land, the swampy area might not be a problem, but instead one of nature's little character flaws – unappealing, but harmless, Deckman said. After all, topography creates personality on properties. "If it is standing water and it is not creating a problem with the house or having a negative impact on the site, it's not considered a drainage problem – it's an ecosystem," he reasoned.

NEW CONSTRUCTION QUAGMIRES.

With houses crammed into tightly-woven, planned communities and properties' lines carefully mapped out to the square foot, most homeowners don't view poor drainage as an interesting everglade. They don't have room on their lots to ignore the soggy corner of the yard, so instead they see an eyesore and an inconvenience.

Most often, homeowners discover soaked soil around the foundation of their homes, where inadequately compacted backfill has

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short-sighted.

settled and formed a downward-sloping grade. "A year later, you can see settling in those areas with loose backfill, so you have water at the foundation, which can eventually find its way into the basement," Arch described. "In those situations we seal the foundation and build up the soil so there is positive drainage away from the structure."

Arch also suggested checking downspout connections to make sure they are tight and water is directed away from the house. "These seem basic, but more often than not, they are where problems begin," he commented. Attaching additional piping to the downspout encourages water to flow away from the foundation, and ensuring that piping drains into a lower grade will prevent it from seeping back toward the home.

Again, make sure the solution doesn't recreate the problem. "Where is the water problem and where do you want that water to go?" Arch asked. "Make sure you are taking the water you want to get rid of and getting it to the point."

However, sometimes the problem doesn't originate on the property – it comes from the neighbors. Unruly land grades present problems that aren't so cut-and-dry when back yards collide and the property grades differ.

Since water generally gets trapped at the property's edge, it pools and must be drained with more technical measures. Here, and in situations where water collects in the middle of bowl-shaped back yards or prairie-flat properties, contractors might install a French drain or catch basin, Richardson suggested. Both options require digging a hole, installing a pipe, and dispersing water back into the soil or pumping it into a designated collection area.

While catch basins can pump out water via a sump pump, French drains allow water to seep back into the soil through a perfor-

rated, concrete pipe, Richardson explained. "You create a trench, fill the trench with stone, and within the stone is a perforated drain tile – a pipe with slots in it so the water can seep into it and then flow out of it," he detailed. "The weakest point where water can flow through is the stone, since there are more openings in that than in the soil. After the water goes into the stone and into the pipe, it accumulates and flows away."

These options offer drainage solutions when regrading or creating swales in the land – subtle trenches that carry away water – are not feasible options. These methods also might hike up prices, although each situation differs.

Besides back-yard clash, homeowners also need to consider their neighbors when installing patios, driveway additions and swimming pools, Eiserman added. He said site adjustments cause most drainage issues on Mariani Landscape's projects. "Anything that increases or speeds up the runoff that happens

on a site can cause problems," he said. "All of that water needs to go somewhere. You've taken the water, collected it, and now you're running it to a certain point on the site."

Hardscapes create runoff highways in a sense, so when contractors make these additions to clients' properties, they should notice where water collects and plan for drainage systems if necessary, Eiserman added. After all, the neighbors won't be so eager to swim in the new pool if they find their own natural version in the form of puddles on their lawn. This is a common mistake. "If you bring your water someplace to where the neighbor wasn't used to having it, that will bother them," he said simply.

SLOPE AND SLIDE. Wetlands and wilted plants are sure-fire signs of soil that won't strain water, but drainage issues are two-fold. Sometimes, water doesn't sit on top of soil, but instead, it speeds quickly across slopes and causes erosion.

Richardson considers slopes masked drainage difficulties. "They aren't drainage problems, but with drainage issues, they pose erosion problems, which can develop into drainage problems," he clarified. "Water has an extreme force, even when it moves slowly. Much how a small stream cut the Grand Canyon, the same thing can happen on a back yard that slopes down toward the house or away from the house so you're collecting water in one area."

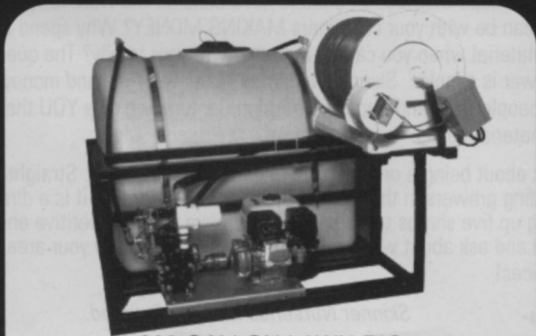
Depending on the severity of the erosion, contractors can opt for a variety of fixes, from retaining walls to vegetation to dry creek beds. While plant material offers an aesthetic answer, the slow-growing groundcover might not offer immediate results to handle extreme situations, Richardson said.

Retaining walls offer visual appeal while still taming some wild waters, Richardson noted. "Retaining walls create terraces instead of a slope," he illustrated. "Water moving over the top is moving in a shorter sec-



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Dealing with Drainage

tion instead of one big area, so that breaks up the ability for the runoff to do damage."

However, this type of construction can require landscape redesign in some cases, he added. In Missouri, retaining walls higher than 3 feet require engineering profiles since they call for reinforcements, he said.

For the most part, retaining walls on residential properties don't need this outside expertise, however. "Typical stone or block wall doesn't typically need to be approved," Richardson said. "But check with your community. If a wall is of a certain type or size, it might require a permit before building."

Furthermore, retaining walls can't manage drainage problems without the hardware. They, too, need systems to make sure water doesn't build up behind the walls and collapse the material, Richardson added. "They need to be constructed per a manufacturer's specification that calls for drain tiles that collect the runoff that may get trapped behind walls, and that can be

dumped into a common area or a swale to carry the moisture away," he said.

But looks don't always win the crown. Slopes might fall into an area of flat turf that gathers water, like one property Arch remembered. "You might have to pump the water uphill," he mentioned. This case required a subsurface drainage system with a pump to force water to an appropriate area.

Arch's own property slopes downward and erosion is limited by two swales on either side of the slope that collect water. Some scenarios might call for dry creek beds – essentially, swales filled with rocks or material to slow water's force. Not the most attractive option, this still controls water flow. If erosion is a problem during construction, contractors should consider using silt fencing to station soil, Deckman offered.

Of course, drainage assessments entail more than the basic ups and downs, and each case presents unique site challenges – its own set of drainage dire straits. Identify-

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Check this story online for questions to ask home inspectors to find out about a home's drainage.

ing these characteristics and prescribing corrections comes with experience and a panoramic perspective of property layouts, Richardson stressed.

"If you are only going to look at one scenario when assessing a drainage problem, you are missing the bigger picture," he said. "It's a lot like landscaping. If you are only dealing with the plant around the front door, but you don't consider the shade trees overhead, you are missing the big picture. If you're only going to look at the downspouts and determine that's the problem, you're missing it. Don't leave yourself short-sighted." **LL**

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

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Plant Purchasing Simplified

by Nicole Wisniewski

Most aquatic gardens host at least a few water lilies, common pond plants known for their floating heart-shaped leaves and multi-petaled, pearl-, eggshell-, lemon- or blush-colored flowers that glide above the surface like dancers swathed in silk scarves.

Yet water lilies are only a fraction of the pond plant bounty. Among them is an enticing treasure trove of water blossoms, each with their own purpose in the garden.

Planning a water garden is a lot like designing a traditional flower border – plants are chosen based on how they complement each other in color, height and bloom time. But just as each member of a flying trapeze team must master precision or risk upsetting the balance of a high-flying stunt, each pond plant has a specific chore that ensures a stable, thriving ecosystem.

VISION & VARIETY. Aquatic plants are necessary pieces in the pond puzzle. They provide natural cover and oxygen for fish and add beauty, pointed out Elaine Hinson, sales representative, Sparkle Water Features,

Beaufort, S.C. "Without aquatic plants, an ecosystem cannot function properly," she stressed. "Aquatic plants take their nutrients from the water, not the soil. They feed on nutrients provided by aquatic animals and compete with algae for food. Without aquatic plants, Mother Nature plants algae in a pond. Enough aquatic plants will naturally minimize the availability of food for algae and starve it out."

To balance a pond, aquatic plant material should cover nearly 50 percent of the pond's surface, suggested Bonnie Hale, plant expert, KoiVet.com.

There are four common pond plant categories: lilies, floaters, marginals and oxygenators. "Each enhance a pond's beauty as well as contribute to its environmental balance," Hinson said.

Hardy and tropical water lilies with their colorful blooms and broad leaves are a pond's crown jewels because they are noticeable and assume daily duties. "Lilies have broad leaves that provide shade from the sun's heat to help cool the water, and they offer fish a welcome retreat from predators," Hinson stated.

Hardy water lilies are perennial and can be planted from zone 3's northern reaches to zone 11's

Aquatic plants not only add beauty to a water garden, but stability as well.

Spring fertilization can enhance water lilies' beauty by ensuring blooms. Photo: AquaScape Designs

Delicate BALANCE



Aquatic Plants

subtropical, southern areas. "In the winter, hardy water lily foliage dies back and retreats to the pond's bottom, but new shoots arise from their embedded rhizomes in the spring," Hinson said. "After the first frost, cut off the stems a couple of inches above the base and let the rhizomes have a long winter's rest."

Tropical water lilies are more colorful, ranging from basic shades of white and yellow to vibrant lilacs, copper-oranges and scarlets. "And some of them bloom at night instead of just during the day," pointed out Wes Herring, partner, Quality Ponds, Columbus, N.J.

But tropical lilies only winter over in zones 8 through 11, so they are treated as annuals in northern U.S. regions, Hinson said.

No matter the zone, all contractors agree that spring fertilization ensures flowering and enhances most lilies' beauty.

Marginal plants, also known as bog plants, grow on the shallow margins around a



Hardy water lilies range in color from vanilla to lemon-yellow to light pink.
Photo: AquaScape Designs

pond's edge and are native to temperate regions. "They provide a smooth transition between terrestrial plants surrounding the pond and aquatic plants," Hinson said, adding that they also provide color, foliage and bloom variation. Some examples of aquatic marginals are sweet flag, with iris-like leaves and tiny green flowers; cattail, known for its erect, tight seed head that resembles a cat's tail; sedge, with long, narrow leaves and inconspicuous flowers in shades of green and white; and arrowhead, which has arrow-shaped leaves. Tropical marginal plants,

like parrot's feather with pink stems clothed in bright green feathery foliage, are not perennial in regions that experience winter frosts and freezes.

Besides framing the pond, marginals provide shelter from wind and shade and remove excess nutrients from the water that might otherwise feed algae, Herring said.

If the water garden is in an area of the country that experiences winter conditions, Rich Damko, president, Landscape Professionals, Chesterland, Ohio, suggested contractors cut back marginal plants to just above the water's surface in the fall and transplant them to larger pots annually.

Floater plants are placed on the water's surface to float around, Damko said. The foliage of tropical floater plants like water hyacinth with round, fleshy-leaved rosettes and blue-purple flower spikes, and water lettuce, which has 6-inch-wide leaf clusters resembling lettuce heads, rests above the water while their roots dangle below the surface.

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"[Floater plants'] roots hang freely providing small fish with a place to hide," Herring said. "The long roots also draw nutrients from the water while they collect floating debris that would otherwise become algae food."

While floaters benefit a water garden, they also can multiply rapidly and two or three of them in full sun can completely cover the surface of a pond in weeks, Herring warned, adding that to control them contractors need to thin them out regularly. Some floaters like fairy moss, which looks like a rich, green carpet of tiny flowers and turns pinkish-red in cool weather, spread rapidly and will become too aggressive unless koi can snack on them and knock back their vigorous growth, Hinson advised.

In the winter, floaters need to be removed from the pond and replaced each spring since they are annuals and will not survive the colder temperatures.

Many contractors recommend oxygenators for a well-balanced pond. Their roots

and leaves live underwater and, like sponges, they absorb carbon dioxide and minerals and help starve algae, Hinson said.

Common oxygenators include Canadian pondweed, which has small dark green leaves that blanket brittle stems, and hornwort, with slightly brittle, mid- to dark green foliage. Hardy oxygenators tolerate warm water, but become frail in hot climates.

But Paul Holdeman warned contractors of oxygenators' nature to dominate a pond. "They are thick underwater shrubs that pull in nutrients like the coral reef," explained Holdeman, owner, The Garden Gnome, Peoria, Ariz. "They pull food from the water so they keep it clean, but they can take over. That's why having fish is important. Koi love to eat these plants and these plants provide good cover for the fish."

As with traditional garden plants, the right-plant-in-the-right-place rule applies to ponds. Plants should be chosen based on pond location and size, and fish type and size. For example, as koi grow, they tend to enjoy tear-

ing at pond plants, Herring said. "So, put sturdy and tough-rooted plants in the pond, like rushes and irises, if you have large koi - or plan to," he said. "Don't use water lilies and plants that are fragile and easy to rip apart."

In terms of cost, aquatic plant prices vary from a few dollars for floater plants to more than \$40 for some water lilies, Damko said. According to Herring, they range from \$5 to \$7 for small plants to \$25 to \$35 for potted lilies.

PLANTING POINTERS. Contractors use various foliage installation methods based on the flora's characteristics and whether clients have concrete- or rubber-lined ponds.

In rubber-lined ponds, contractors should include plant pockets in the liner and add enough gravel as a base to install some marginal water plants around the perimeter of clients' ponds and cover the entire liner base for a natural look, Damko suggested.

Herring agreed, advising contractors to

(continued on page 122)

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MAY.02

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Aquatic Plants

(continued from page 119)

install marginal plants in one-third of the pond's circumference. But since they grow tall, Herring recommended contractors plant these in the back of clients' ponds so their view isn't blocked. Since marginals are shallow, the pond water should be no more than 2 inches over the soil of the pot, Herring said.

Marginals should be planted in gravel because their roots can take nutrients from the substrate where fish waste and other organic debris settles, Hinson said, suggesting contractors plant them in no more than 2 inches of gravel with a few rocks around them to provide support until the roots take hold.

"Avoid planting marginals in pots," Hinson stressed. "Since their job is to filter the water and keep algae under control, they

will take root in the gravel, extend their roots out horizontally and do a much more efficient job of filtration than if they were in pots. In addition, koi just love to root around in pots and turn them over."

For oxygenators, the type of material will determine the planting method. Many oxygenators, like hornwort, do not root and need to be anchored to the pond base with a stone or small lead weight, Holdeman said.

In terms of planting, water lilies have the most options and need the most care. "Since they have a greedy root system, it is important to plant water lilies in a large container with a soil depth of 6 inches or more," advised James Allison in his book *Water in the Garden*. "Start containers off with support underneath so that there is only 6 to 10 inches of water over the crown. As the leaves reach the surface, lower the plant slowly into very deep water - 3 feet or more. Lowering a lily too rapidly will cap growth, resulting in small leaves, poor flowering or even death."

This container method is used mostly in concrete-lined ponds or in rubber-lined ponds until the lily can be lowered to the pond's natural depth.

In rubber-lined ponds, dig lily pickets in the ground under the liner, punch the liner into the pockets, add some soil, the lily and about 3 to 4 inches of gravel, Hinson described. This planting method ensures growth room for plants and prevents them from becoming root-bound, Holdeman said.

Depending upon the climate and the amount of sunlight, hardy and tropical lily blooms should start to appear in early or mid-summer (at temperatures more than 65 F), Allison stated.

Lotus, which is considered a lily-like aquatic, is the only plant Hinson recommends contractors install in a container in a rubber-lined pond because of its aggressive nature. **ll**

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

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Equipment Notebook

HAND-HELD EQUIPMENT:

Get in Line

The spring season is here, and new trimmer line fashions have blown in with the lilting breezes. However, sifting through the various types of string trimmer line can be as overwhelming as following the latest style trends.

Ultimately, contractors should choose a style that suits their equipment and their application to a "T." "Everyone is looking for a new trend," said John Foster, product manager, Shindaiwa, Tualatin, Ore. "But trimmer line selection is really up to individual preference."

TRY IT ON FOR SIZE. The first step in trimmer line selection involves looking in the mirror and determining which size of line will best fit the equipment, noted Kent Hall, product manager for power tools, Stihl, Virginia

Beach, Va. "Each manufacturer uses a different type of trimmer head, and you need to match line characteristics with the engine characteristics," he said.

Using the appropriate line diameter for the head is a crucial consideration, Hall added. "If you have the wrong diameter, you won't be able to wrap the line properly on the spool, and it won't perform properly. Be sure to read your owner's manual."

Size isn't everything, however - contractors must also consider trimmer line shape. From diamonds to stars to the basic circular shape, trimmer line choices run the gamut, even though most lines are manufactured from a universal polymer plastic material.

Foster noted that some of the sharper-edged lines provide a cleaner cut, while basic shapes offer a consistent performance. "The square shape has an edge on it, which offers a clean cut, and it lasts longer," he said. "But



Contractors have many choices when it comes to string trimmer line. Reading the owner's manual and matching lines to applications help ensure cutting success.
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the round line is the best trimmer line on the market. Shapes come and go, but round is always there."

Even though some shapes may claim to reduce line fraying or breakage, the simple physics of an alternate shape can alter the equipment's entire cutting system. "Certain shapes affect the cutting performance and the engine running power, and coupled with the diameter and length of line, you may rob the engine of power," Hall said.

Foster said that star-, square- or diamond-shaped lines also may provide an exceptionally clean cut when they're new, but like many fashion statements, their effect tends to fade with time. "If you're using these lines against buildings or other edges, the shape tends to go quickly," he said.

Still, every line type has its pros and cons, and even as manufacturers try to develop lines that withstand breakage, other flaws may be highlighted in return, Hall said. "You may develop a line that won't break, but then it might weld together more easily with the heat of the machine," he said.

As a rule, however, heavier-duty, higher-quality line can be run for a longer period of time without breaking, and ultimately creates less downtime, Foster asserted.

A trendy fashion statement will fall flat unless it is worn properly and on the right occasion. Similarly, trimmer lines that claim to provide a smooth, efficient cut will fail if not installed in the correct manner. Heidi Fowler, marketing specialist, Robin Outdoor Power Equipment, Winston-Salem, N.C., said to pay particular attention to the wrapping

of the line on the trimmer head. "Wrap the line in the opposite direction that the head turns," she said. "Also, try not to cross over the lines when wrapping."

In addition, when replacing trimmer lines, be sure to run the line in the same direction as it ran before, Foster noted. Otherwise, the line may not be released correctly from the trimmer head. He added that contractors need to clean out the head when refilling and reloading the line. "Also, look for damage to the trimmer head, and don't use it if it's damaged," he stated.

Trimmer line choices range from the basic to the bold, but contractors can reduce their frustrations by simply choosing a line style that provides the most efficient – and comfortable – fit for the equipment's use. "Some users and some manufacturers claim that different lines cut better," Fowler said. "But it all depends on the application." ■

– Kristin Mohn

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

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Smaller-diameter trimmer line (.095-inch) works well for general, low-impact grass trimming, while larger diameters (.110- or .125-inch) are meant for heavier applications. – Heidi Fowler



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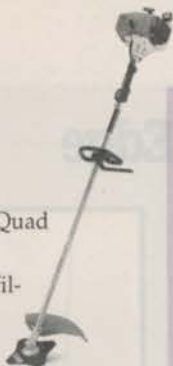
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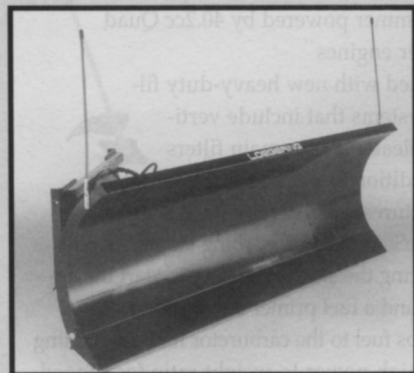
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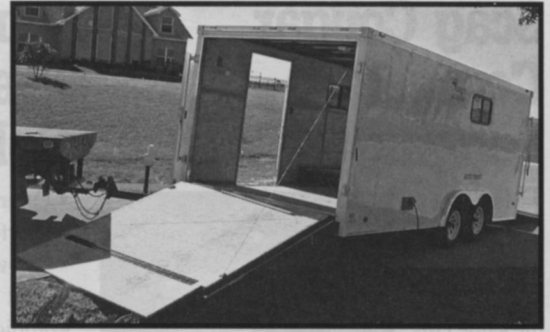
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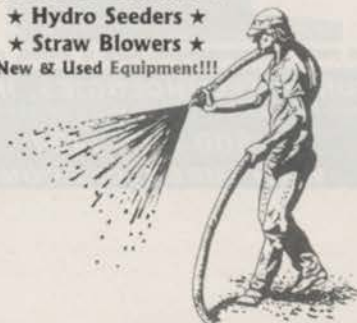
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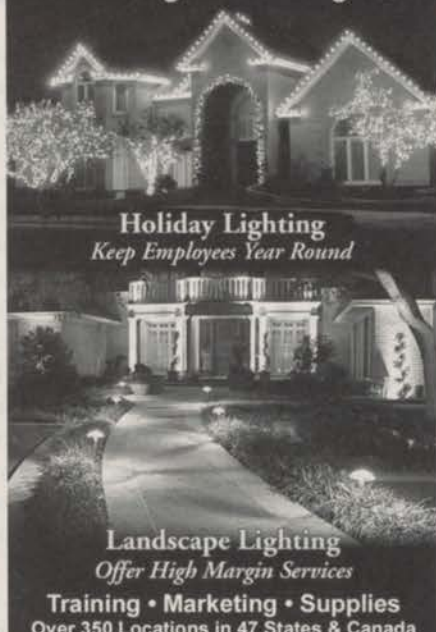
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Creating a Marketing Plan at Wallace Landscape Associates

When I decided to go into the landscape design/build business in 1979, I was virtually unknown, so my first challenge was to find customers.

I designed a flier and enlisted the help of my teenage children to deliver it door to door in neighborhoods that looked prosperous enough to afford my services. I got all the projects I could handle in my first season from that simple flier. It created the impetus for the multi-million-dollar business Wallace Landscape Associates has become.

When I look through my scrapbook of early advertisements, I shake my head at the lack of sophistication they demonstrate. But those early attempts still brought in calls from prospective customers.

From the very beginning, I have allocated 2 percent of our sales revenue to marketing. During economic downturns, I increase it to 3 percent or more. In the past, I advertised in local magazines, symphony and playhouse programs, *Yellow Pages*, charity event brochures – anywhere prospective clients (high-end professionals who spent their free time at the symphony, etc.) would see ads. Leads came in. We got so many calls our designers were overworked trying to respond to them.

We carefully tracked the source and outcome of each lead by filling out a questionnaire with every call and making sure the client answered the 'How did you hear about us?' question. Then, each designer would compile their leads and report their findings to the company. Our lead analysis showed us that few of those calls actually resulted in sales. I had to do some soul searching and decide whether this was an investment in ego development or business growth. Business growth got my vote, so I started studying marketing in a serious way.

I decided I needed a more focused approach to marketing. I asked each of our designers for a list of their "A" clients. Then I interviewed the designers for the specific characteristics of those people. I created a profile of the

type of people we want to reach with our advertising, which was more specific than my original interpretation of our typical clients. For instance, I pinpointed neighborhoods where the "A" types were concentrated, their typical ages, which is between 45 and 60, and their average home values. Then, I studied the demographics of our three main market areas.

In interviewing the designers, I learned that our best clients were active on charity boards and involved in fund raising for these organizations. I also learned that tennis, golf and horseback riding were favored activities. I sent out a survey to both clients and non-clients in our target market.

From the survey I learned that even our best clients had trouble remembering the name of our company so I changed it from Landscape Services to Wallace Landscape Associates. I commissioned a graphic designer to develop a strong, easily recognizable logo. The next step was to clearly communicate throughout our organization who and where our best clients were and what their values are. We already had clean trucks; neat, uniformed technicians; a courteous person answering the phone; a streamlined, timesaving process – all of which, the survey indicated, were important to our target market.

I also studied customer retention and referral strategies. More than 80 percent of our work comes from repeat business or customer referrals. Our attractive site signs and truck signs contribute another 10 percent.

We still advertise. We sponsor our local public radio station and our ads appear in regional issues of *Architectural Digest* and *Town & Country* magazines because our clients read these publications. We also send narrowly targeted, seasonal mailings of postcards showing our work to prospective clients that fit our client profile. We receive far fewer leads today, but a high percentage of them result in profitable sales.

We realize that everything we do is marketing. It's not only the bold logo on our clean, white trucks. It's the courtesy with which our foremen drive, it's the way we honor our guarantee, and it is our support of charitable and community activities. Our advertising program is an important part of our marketing plan, but there is more to it. I have learned that a well-designed and executed marketing program is essential for growth in this business. – Terry Wallace

The author is owner of Wallace Landscape Associates, Kennett Square, Pa., and can be reached at 610/444-6161

FIVE KEYS TO Targeted Marketing

1. Have designers keep a list of "A" clients and track their specific characteristics.
2. Pinpoint the neighborhoods where "A" clients live.
3. Survey clients and non-clients in the target market.
4. Use survey responses to develop a plan aimed at clients' needs.
5. Study customer retention and referral strategies.

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