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Lawn & Landscape

**Learn How to
Artfully Restore
Worn-Out Turf**

**PGRs: Regulation
Education**

**Browse
Insurance Basics**

**Explore Our
Annual Truck &
Trailer Buyers'
Guide**

**Roger Myers,
American Beauty
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*American Beauty
Landscaping Owner
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in revenue, anything
is possible.*

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Cover photo:
Joseph Rudinec,
Boardman, Ohio



COVER STORY

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TRUCK & TRAILER

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In this supplement, learn truck customization techniques, how to choose between open and closed trailers, the importance of driver safety and check out our buyers' guide. **T1**



Periodical Reading Room
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USE READER SERVICE #11

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Lawn & Landscape.com

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

ONLINE PRODUCT DIRECTORY

Lawn & Landscape Online offers a growing Product Directory. The multimedia tool allows Web users to learn more about green industry products, view photos of featured items and contact manufacturers for more information. New products are added to the directory each week, making it an evolving source of the latest product essentials. Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/product/ to browse the Online Product Directory.

TRUCKS 'N' TRAILERS

Look online for product information and news related to trucks and trailers. An upcoming issue of the product e-newsletter will feature some of the latest offerings from manufacturers of trucks and trailers. To sign up for the weekly product e-newsletter, e-mail Ali Anderson at aanderson@lawnandlandscape.com. And visit www.lawnandlandscape.com for access to news and views about the vehicles that keep your business moving. Specifically, look for a Web-exclusive story about custom-made trailers.



Lawn & Landscape ONLINE Extras

ONLINE EXTRAS

Browse Lawn & Landscape Online for a collection of exclusive Web stories relative to this month's issue:

- This month, visit *Lawn & Landscape* Online for a list of insurance terms and definitions that contractors may encounter when putting business insurance policies together.
- Learn how to keep customer service intact over the phone when you read about the telephone tactics of a contractor who may be considered a "phone-atic."
- Check *Lawn & Landscape* Online for detailed information about driver's safety programs.
- Look for our container supplier listing on www.lawnandlandscape.com.

WEB TOOLS

DAILY NEWS

Green industry news updates every day. www.lawnandlandscape.com

INDUSTRY EVENTS

A comprehensive list of conferences, trade shows and seminars for the landscape professional. www.lawnandlandscape.com/events

BUSINESS FORMS

A diverse collection of forms to help you run your green business more effectively. www.lawnandlandscape.com/tools

MESSAGE BOARD

The industry's most interactive message board. www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard

INDUSTRY LINKS

A user-friendly index of the green industry, containing categorized information about contractors, dealers and suppliers. www.lawnandlandscape.com/links

ASSOCIATIONS

An easy-to-navigate directory of local, state, national and international industry associations. www.lawnandlandscape.com/associations

PRODUCT DIRECTORY

A growing compilation of industry products, complete with photos and manufacturer contact information. www.lawnandlandscape.com/product

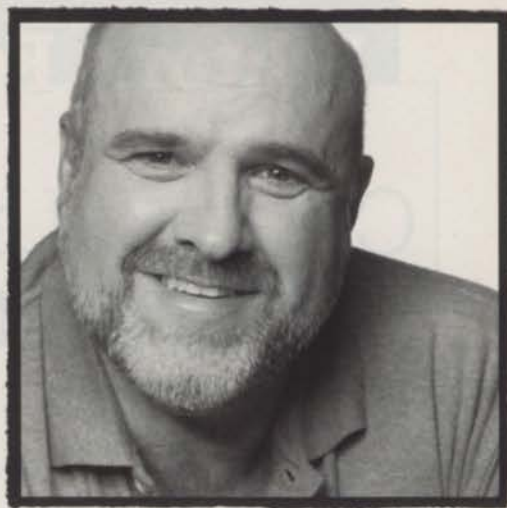
MARKETPLACES

An interactive listing of industry manufacturers and suppliers. www.lawnandlandscape.com/marketplace

ONLINE STORE

A one-stop shop for industry-related books, CD-Rom training programs and other educational materials. www.lawnandlandscape.com/store

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Brian Mapes
GrasSnipper
Lawn Maintenance
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"Fortunately, even if a low-cost producer wins in the short term, it's difficult for the low-cost producer to win in the long term. In many cases, the short-term winner is destined for a slow, lingering death." — Doug Hall, Jump Start Your Business Brain.

Creating Unique Differences

With the days of summer waning and 2004 seemingly around the corner, it's natural that business conversations and meetings have begun to focus on strategic planning.

What new services will you offer your customers next year? Will those services increase the bottom line? What kind of training will be necessary to bring your crews up to speed?

Even if you don't plan to diversify your service offerings, how are you evaluating your personnel and equipment needs? How many crews will you add? What new and replacement equipment do you

need to purchase? Will you buy or lease the equipment?

These and other decisions can make you weary, but they're absolutely critical to your continued business success. Planning and creativity are at the core of helping any business improve its effectiveness. And such content should center on developing customer-focused ideas that make a measurable difference on both top-line sales and bottom-line profits.

Before such ideas can take fruition, it's important that you have a deep understanding of your clientele and your marketplace. Rather than developing 10 new ideas and

hoping that one will stick, it's wise to gather some market intelligence, test your theories and focus on one or several ideas that can and will increase sales.

Generally speaking, customers are creatures of habit. And before customers will change, they must be convinced that your business offers a distinguishable difference from your competitors.

When you have a unique product or service to offer, you stand out in the marketplace.

Think about your drive to and from work. How many lawn and landscape trucks and trailers do you see on a daily basis? How many mowing crews dotted commercial and residential properties throughout your city? Were they remarkable? Probably not.

Creating unique differences in your business from that of your competitor is a long-standing value proposition and one that has helped avoid commodity pricing pressures. However, the importance placed on being unique is more important now than ever.

Dramatically different ideas do three things for a business:

- 1) They give your sales team legitimate news to share with your customers and prospects.
- 2) They result in customer "buzz" and word-of-mouth sales and provide motivation to your sales team and work crews.
- 3) And they provide your company and employees with a sense of mission.

The urgency to focus on this area of your business is based on whether you have an established company and whether or not you feel you have a strong level of uniqueness.

The professional lawn and landscape industry is comprised of entrepreneurs who have a strong sense of passion for the outdoors and the environment. Transferring some of that passion to the "business" side of the business is vital to your long-term success.

Developing a dramatic difference in your business is a never-ending proposition because the competition you face is never going to go away. But how you present and position your business within your marketplace will hopefully set you up as a market leader.

If you have a successful company, the marketplace will adjust to your business, rather than vice-versa.

Successful business planning takes a great deal of energy, but it's time well-spent away from the day-to-day chaos of business operations. **LL**

Cindy Code



Lawn & Landscape

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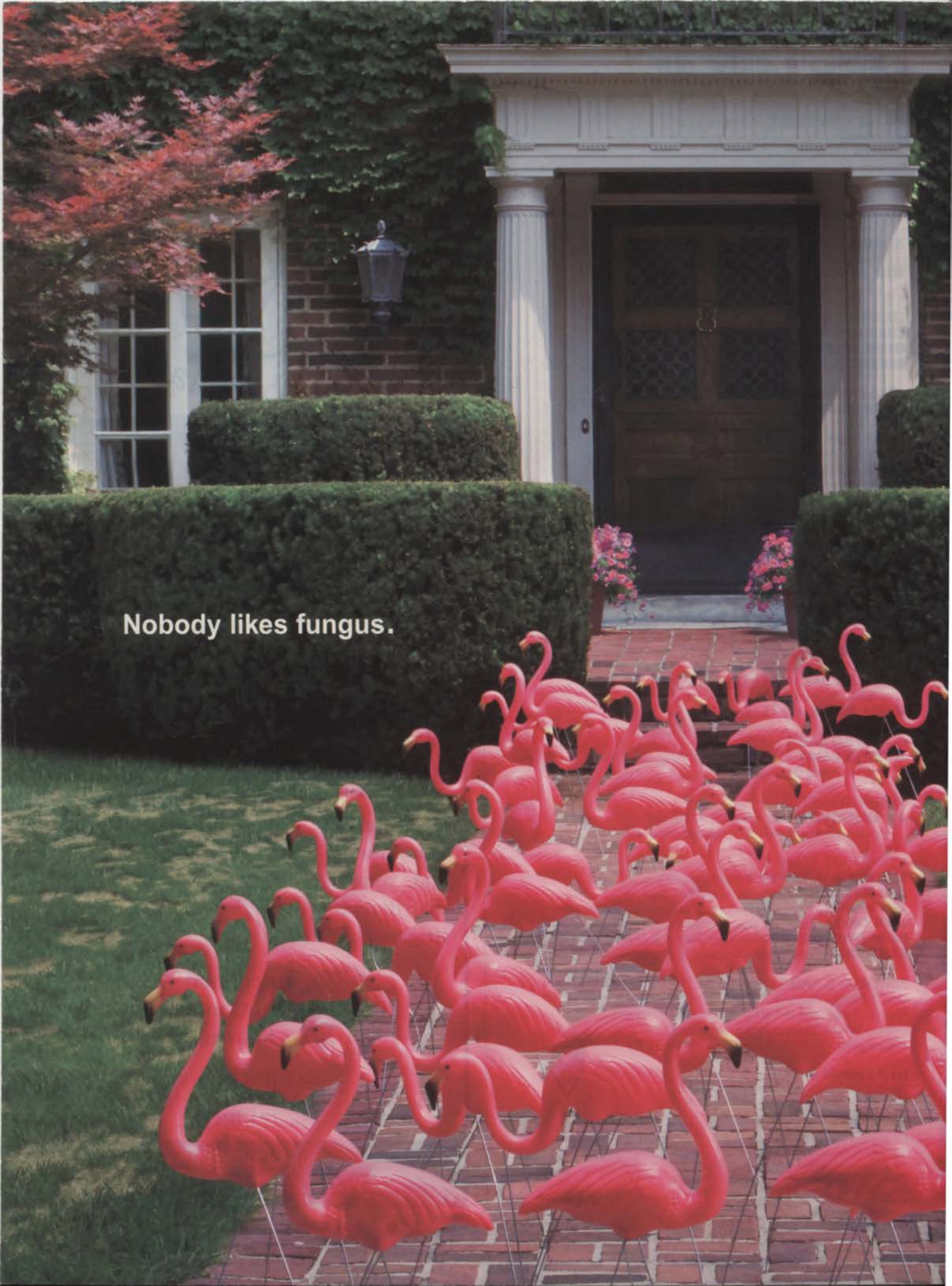
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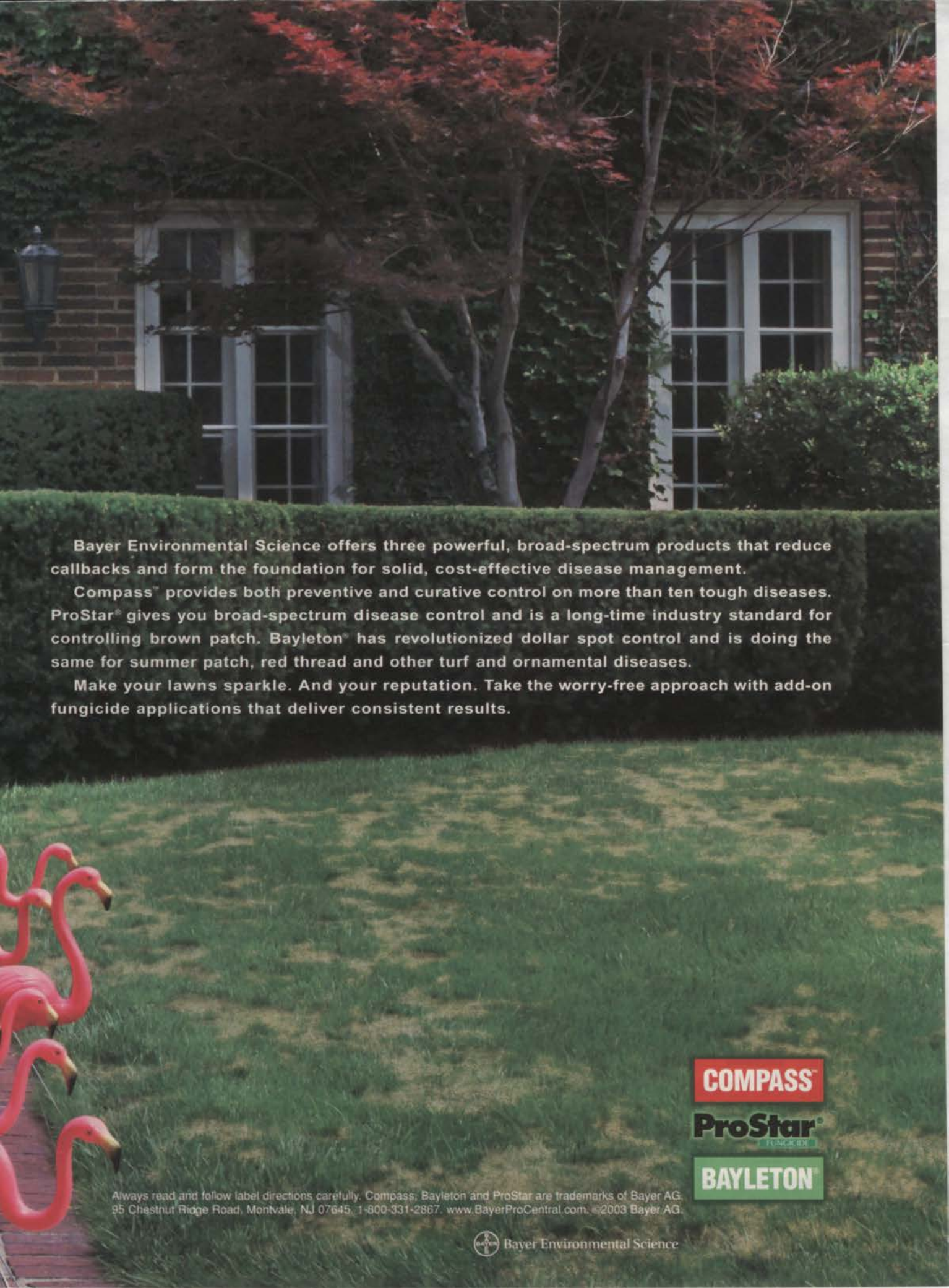
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Bayer Environmental Science

WEB NEWS

Lawn & Landscape Boosts MSDS Database

Lawn & Landscape Online has added nine new companies to its manufacturer database of MSDS product labels. The latest additions include:

- AgValue
- Albaugh/AgriStar
- AMVAC
- Drexel Chemical
- Dr. T's Nature Products
- Poulenger USA
- Riverdale Chemical Co. (Nufam)
- Sipcam Agro USA
- United Phosphorous

With 27 industry manufacturers now included, the searchable Web database features an additional 81 product labels. The recent additions bring Lawn & Landscape Online's product total to 417 – making it the largest online chemical product resource in the industry.

Web users have a variety of search options when browsing the MSDS database. Products are divided in categories ranging from useable locations and targeted species to application types and chemical names.

The popular online tool averages roughly 1,800 page views per month.



RESEARCH REPORTS

Mowing Matters

In order of importance to a landscape company's income and growth, does mowing rank among the top third, middle third or bottom third part of the business?

RESPONSE	% OF CONTRACTORS
Top Third	61%
Middle Third	21%
Bottom Third	18%

How are landscape contractors handling lawn clippings this year?

RESPONSE	% OF CONTRACTORS
Side discharge with mulching kit	39%
Mulch with mulching mower	34%
Collect and dump	15%
Collect and compost	12%

Source: Lawn & Landscape

INDUSTRY TRENDS

Managing Mosquitoes

One can't think of rain and the heat of late summer without thinking of the hoards of blood-thirsty mosquitoes that appear a few days later, points out Nathan Riggs, extension agent, Texas Cooperative Extension Service, Bexar County, Texas.

"Mosquitoes lay their eggs in watery tree holes, puddles, containers and any other site that could hold water for seven to 10 days," Riggs explains. "The eggs hatch into larvae that feed on algae and other microscopic plants. After two to three days, the larvae develop into a pupal stage and in another two to three days, adult mosquitoes emerge."

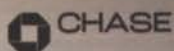
The adult males only feed on plant nectar – it's the females, who feed on blood from animals, birds and people, that homeowners, property managers and lawn care operators (LCOs) have to worry about.

Since the outbreak of the West Nile Virus in 1999, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has reported more than 4,100 human cases, including nearly 300 human fatalities in the United States. With the chances of getting bitten by a mosquito highest in late summer to early fall, homeowners and property managers are concerned about the spread of the disease to their families, tenants and employees.

Many LCOs are addressing their clients' worries by offering mosquito control services. For instance, Forest City Tree Protection, Cleveland, Ohio, provides a basic service that includes three applications starting in May and

(continued on page 16)





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Market Trends

(continued from page 14)

continuing through August. Their full-season program adds a fourth application extending protection beyond Labor Day into early fall. For most typical landscapes up to ½ acre in size, the cost for the basic program is less than \$150, while the full-season program costs less than \$200.

LCOs who offer the service focus on the perimeter of structures and yards up to a maximum 6 feet height, targeting shaded and humid areas that provide landing areas and harborage for adult mosquitoes during the day as they rest. For properties with significant wooded areas, applications will extend to a maximum depth of 20 to 25 feet, Forest City points out, adding that they've also offered clients "special event" applications on an as-needed basis for outdoor summer parties.

Even clients who may typically shun pesticide applications on their properties are welcoming mosquito prevention services, according to Robert Blendon, professor, Health Policy and Political Analysis at the

(continued on page 18)

People

Daniel Funk was promoted to vice president, general manager for Beacon Products.

The Care of Trees made two personnel announcements. **Scott Jamieson** was promoted to CEO/president and **Bruce Wilson** was appointed to the company's board of directors.

Kim Babins joined Biosafe Systems as marketing specialist.

Redexim Charterhouse announced the appointment of **Paul Hollis** to general manager of North American operations.

Beth Whitehouse was promoted to turf and ornamentals sales specialist for Dow Agrosciences.

At DeSantis Landscapes, **Tina Miller** was hired as a landscape designer and **Brian Clark** came on as maintenance account manager.

BASF announced the addition of **McGee Poole** as sales specialist for the Professional Turf & Ornamental Group.

Suichang Sun was hired as a consultant for Turf-Seed to represent products in their Asian market.

Patrick Ford and **Mark Williams** were recently hired as product managers for Nitterhouse Masonry Products.

TrynEx International promoted **Bruce Carmichael** to sales manager for its SweepEx division.



David Funk (top), McGee Poole (below)

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According to test results from Applied Technical Services Inc., Marietta, GA, the RedMax **EBZ4800** blower uses 35.5 fl oz/hr, vs 48.8 fl oz/hr for the Stihl BR420C Magnum. The 13.3 fl oz/hr difference adds up to an annual saving of **103.9 GALLONS** (4 hrs/day, 5 days/wk, 50 wks/yr=1,000 hrs). At \$2/gal for gas, the annual saving is \$207.80. Add two-cycle oil at 35¢/gal of gas and the total saving from one engine is **\$244.16 PER YEAR.**

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- Quiet: **65 dbA**
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- Dependable: Two-stage air cleaner
- Tube Throttle model available
- Free Flow™ system



BCZ2500S

- 25.4cc Reed Valve Strato-Charged engine
- Lightweight: 11.7 lbs.
- Carbon shaft and bike handle models available



CHTZ2500

- Blade length: 24"
- Lightweight: 11.9 lbs.



BCZ2400S

- 23.6 cc Piston Valve Strato-Charged engine
- Lightweight: 10.8 lbs.
- Heavy duty nylon head with metal insert tap knob
- Free Flow system



- 25.4 cc Reed Valve Strato-Charged engine
- Blade speed: 3.26 ft. per second
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- Lightweight: 12.1 lbs.

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Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

Harvard School of Public Health. A November 2002 Harvard School of Public Health survey shows that nine out of 10 people in high-mosquito areas of the country favor spraying against mosquitoes to prevent the spread of West Nile virus. Nationwide, 77 percent of Americans say they would favor special spraying to prevent the spread of West Nile virus if it appeared in their area.

For more information on mosquitoes, the spread of West Nile virus and tips for offering the service, visit www.westnilevirusfacts.org.

EQUIPMENT NEWS

Riding Mowers Forecasted to Sell, Walk-behind Sales Will Drop

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's (OPEI) economic forecast for commercial turf products indicated that the economy expanded by 1.2 percent (as measured by

Calendar of Events

TO ENSURE

that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to

Lawn & Landscape Calendar,
4012 Bridge Ave.,
Cleveland,
OH 44113.

SEPT. 7-11 51st Annual Florida Turfgrass Conference and Show, Tampa, Fla. Contact: 800/882-6721 or www.ftga.org.

SEPT. 12 Lawn & Landscape Business Management Seminar, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnandlandscape.com/events.

SEPT. 18 Lawn & Landscape Snow Management Seminar, Milwaukee, Wis. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnandlandscape.com/events.

SEPT. 19 Lawn & Landscape Business Management Seminar, St. Louis, Mo. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnandlandscape.com/events.

SEPT. 20 Lawn & Landscape Snow Management Seminar, Cleveland, Ohio. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnandlandscape.com/events.

SEPT. 21-24 American Nursery & Landscape Association Legislative Conference, Washington, D.C. Contact: 202/789-2900 or www.anla.org.

SEPT. 25 Lawn & Landscape Snow Management Seminar, Denver, Colo. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnandlandscape.com/events.

SEPT. 26 Lawn & Landscape Business Management Seminar, Chicago, Ill. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnandlandscape.com/events.

SEPT. 27 Lawn & Landscape Snow Management Seminar, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnandlandscape.com/events.

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LAWN & LANDSCAPE

Gross Domestic Product) during the first quarter of 2003. This growth has some implications for 2003 industry shipments.

In the commercial turf segment, riding mowers expect a 15.2-percent rise for 2003 and another 7.9-percent increase for 2004. Meanwhile, commercial intermediate walk-behind mowers are forecasted to drop by 15.7 percent in 2003 with a small turnaround of 4 percent expected for 2004.

CONSUMER RESEARCH

More Homeowners Expected to Buy Landscape Services

A recent survey conducted by Harris Interactive shows that more than 24.7 million U.S. households spent \$28.9 billion on professional landscape, lawn care and tree care services in 2002.

Researchers credit a slow economy and a housing market that has remained strong thanks to low interest rates for the increases, which include nearly 1 million more house-

holds using these services and a \$3 billion rise in spending over the previous year.

The study also estimates that 24.9 million households plan to purchase lawn and landscape services in 2003. This is a 200,000-household increase – about 1 percent – over 2002. Since 1997, more than 21 million U.S. households have spent more than \$14 billion annually on professional landscape, lawn care and tree care services. The 2002 expenditure of \$28.9 billion represents an 11 percent increase over the five-year average.

According to the study, the average

amount of money each household spent on lawn care and landscape services in 2002 was \$1,170. Thirty percent of expenditures came from households in the South, while the West, Midwest and East contributed 25, 23 and 21 percent, respectively.

Not surprisingly, landscape design/build accounted for the largest volume of green home improvements with \$11.2 billion, as well as the largest average amount spent on services – \$3,502. This segment also had the greatest participation with 19.4 million households contributing.

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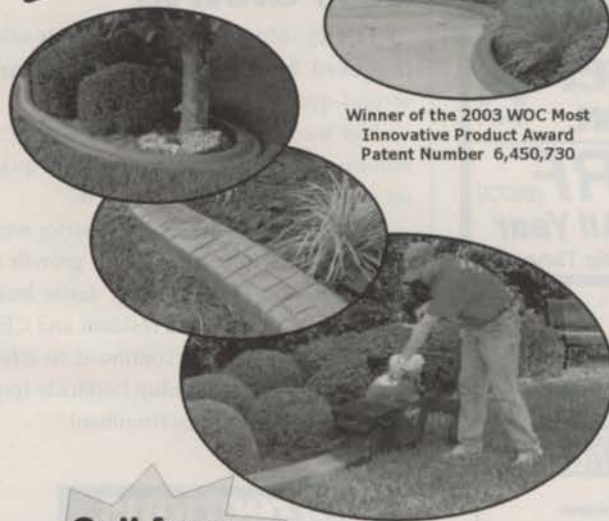
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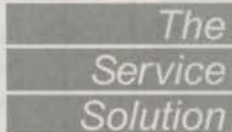
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USE READER SERVICE #21

Market Trends

SUPPLIER NEWS

Scotts Reports Third Quarter Results

MARYSVILLE, Ohio - The Scotts Co. announced adjusted earnings per share of \$2.85 or \$92.3 million in the third quarter compared with \$3.01 per share or \$95.6 million for the same period last year. The company also reaffirmed its outlook for double-digit adjusted net income growth for fiscal 2003.

"While this landscape season was clearly impacted by cool, wet weather, we remained focused and overcame serious challenges in our busiest time of the year," notes Jim Hagedorn, Scotts chairman and chief executive officer. "Our confidence in producing earnings growth of at least 10 percent for 2003 speaks to the strength of this business, especially in a year in which we also are making significant long-term investments in the business and expensing stock options for the first time."

For the period ended June 28, Scotts reported sales of \$710 million, up 3 percent from \$689 million last year. Excluding the impact of foreign exchange rates, sales were flat to the prior year.

SECOND QUARTER INCREASES

Monsanto Sees Growth

ST. LOUIS - Monsanto Co.'s quarterly sales improved by 8 percent over last year's second-quarter results.

Net income for the quarter was \$295 million vs. \$147 million in the second quarter of 2002, the company reports.

"Our results in the second quarter were anchored by strong and steady growth in our seeds and biotechnology traits businesses," says Monsanto President and CEO Hugh Grant. "We also continued to effectively manage our Roundup herbicide franchise in a post-patent environment."

Corrections

On pages 88 and T10 of the August issue, *Lawn & Landscape* ran two photographs without the proper credits. The photograph on page 88 belongs to Ruppert Nurseries/Ruppert Landscaping and the photograph on the bottom of page T10 belongs to J.J. Mauget. *Lawn & Landscape* regrets the errors.

Market Trends

Mattingly's MESSAGE

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

"I want to make more money." What business owner or employee hasn't had this thought cross his or her mind? There is a way to accomplish this goal.

The way employees can make more money is to become more valuable assets to their employers. For instance, if you are a crew foreman it means managing your crew with a minimum of overtime, providing the best quality on your jobs every week and having your vehicles and equipment maintained and looking their best. Additionally, foremen should talk to clients and develop relationships. Do not go over the budgeted hours and always be the crewmember who is helping others with a good, positive attitude and volunteering for additional work. This type of foreman will be on a company owners' radar. He or she likely will make more money than other employees at that level, and will possibly be the next supervisor or manager.

On the employer's part, one of the biggest problems in our industry is that we do not develop our people in a timely manner to move them up the ladder and fill needed supervisory roles. We need foreman, supervisors and account managers and the best prospects for these positions often come from within our ranks, as opposed to hiring from the outside. Here are some steps employers can take to develop these individuals:

✓ *Create a "hit list."* The first step is to identify the individuals with potential. Ask other employees, managers and supervisors also to identify who they think has potential.

✓ *Assign a mentor.* Assign the chosen candidates to a mentor within your organization. This mentor can be anyone who is a step up the ladder from the person they are mentoring and is accountable for spending the time necessary to put the candidate's development on the fast track. Refer to your company's job descriptions to assist in determining the areas that need to be developed.

✓ *Discuss the improvements.* Establish a point at which the mentor will report back to the employer on the candidate's progress.

This mentoring, buddy system is an effective way to take an individual to the next level. And if you are the individual being mentored, remember, even when opportunity knocks, a person still has to get up and open the door. The results can include the employee's desired wage or salary increase, as well as increased employee morale and efficiency, which makes more money for the company.

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

MANUFACTURER UPDATE

ASV Boasts High Second Quarter Earnings

GRAND RAPIDS, Minn. – ASV reported an 80-percent increase in sales for its second quarter. Net sales for the period increased to \$26.4 million – the highest quarterly net sales figure the company has ever seen.

Net earnings increased to a record level of more than \$2.2 million or 22 cents per share, compared with \$1 million or 10 cents per share, for the second quarter of 2002.

For the six months ended June 30, net sales increased 96 percent to \$41 million, compared with \$20.9 million for the same

period in 2002. Net earnings increased significantly to just over \$3 million or 30 cents per share compared with \$647,922 or 6 cents per share for the same period in 2002.

BUSINESS BASICS

Bonanza Offers Sound Sales Advice

CINCINNATI, Ohio – Industry professionals who gathered for the *Lawn & Landscape Sales & Marketing Bonanza* learned how to beef up their bottom line.

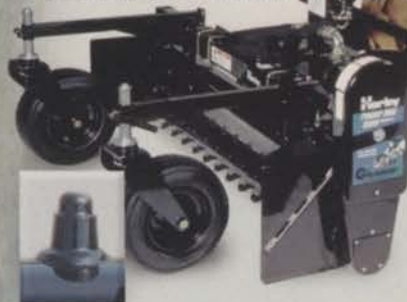
Marty Grunder, president, Grunder Landscaping, Dayton, Ohio, shared his industry expertise with attendees, teaching them successful sales specifics, including

(continued on page 24)

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Second Quarter Earnings

FAIR WEATHER INC. (NYSE: FWT) reported second quarter earnings of \$0.15 per share, or 15 cents, on revenue of \$1.1 billion, compared to \$0.14 per share, or 14 cents, on revenue of \$1.0 billion in the second quarter of 2007. Earnings per share increased 7.1% and revenue increased 9.1% over the second quarter of 2007.



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USE READER SERVICE #26

Market Trends

(continued from page 21)

these steps for improving the selling process:

- 1) Answer the phone in less than three rings; always be polite and don't screen calls. Set appointments on the spot.
- 2) Drive-by clients' sites to create prospective plans and drawings for initial meetings. Be early for appointments.
- 3) Try sealing the deal at the site when emotions are high and client interest is soaring.
- 4) Neatly prepare proposals and create detailed drawings. Spell out clients' desires and explain how proposed plans meet them.
- 5) Show a sense of urgency in beginning projects. Inform clients of open start dates.
- 6) Once jobs are sold, stay on top of them so you can be sure contracts are fulfilled.
- 7) After jobs are complete, stay involved with clients. Ask for referrals.
- 8) Send surveys to clients for honest feedback. Apply what you hear from clients.
- 9) Follow up with phone calls, unannounced visits, newsletters, e-mails, etc. to keep your company name in clients' minds for the future.



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Book Report

Why Employees Don't Do What They're Supposed to Do and What to Do About It

By Ferdinand F. Fournies

At one time or another, every manager may ask him or herself, "Why aren't my employees doing what I told them to?"

But if managers feel they ask this question too often without finding answers, then Ferdinand F. Fournies' book suggests that the employees may not be the whole problem. *Why Employees Don't Do What They're Supposed to Do and What to Do About It* tells readers that properly training employees, including providing explanations behind requests and reprimands, is the employer's responsibility.

The 19-chapter book features 16

reasons behind why employees don't perform at the level managers expect and offers specific interventions managers can undertake to deal with those problems.

"After reading this book, I realized that communication is a difficult thing," says Jim Binns, president, Earthworks Landscape Gardening, Fayetteville, Ark. "I am a perfectionist and so it takes time to demonstrate exactly what my end product needs to be. If an employee has done something wrong and I have not been there with him to show him how to do it properly the first time then I need to go back and show him what results I expect before getting upset." — Kevin McConville

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Nursery Market Report

TROPICAL TALK

Creating a Tropical Oasis

The lush landscapes of the tropics might seem unattainable on the average suburban or commercial property, but the lure is irresistible.

Actually, many plants regularly used in the landscape come from tropical climates – we simply think of them and use them as annuals.

The word tropical, though, conjures up visions of enveloping leaves, glistening with moisture, and enticingly fragrant flowers. Many of these tender plants grow successfully in containers so you can surround your clients with a lavish jungle on a patio or deck all summer.

Take the plants below – trailers, vines, perennials and annuals – as the beginning of your clients' tropical paradise.

ASPARAGUS FERN. Familiar as indoor plants, asparagus ferns add a green veil to a patio or deck when hung from eaves and an airy accent when put in containers on pedestals.

Two species, suited for U.S. Department of Agriculture Zones 10 and 11, are available as plants or seed. *Asparagus myersii* or *meyerii* produce stiff, rounded plumes, somewhat wiry in appearance. The plumes are



various shades of green and plants have a mounded habit.

Asparagus sprengeri plants have long, arching plumes. More readily available than *meyerii*, this asparagus is heat and drought tolerant and can be used as a ground cover in areas without frost.

Indigenous to South Africa, asparagus fern – the species and the Sprengeri group – is not a true fern. In fact, it is a member of the lily family. It is somewhat drought tolerant as

long as it grows in partial shade.

CANNA. Cannas grow from rhizomes but also can be started from seeds, especially Canna 'Tropical Rose' (a 1992 All-America Selections Winner). 'Tropical Rose' is a dwarf canna, reaching 2 to 3 feet tall. Soft rose blooms are produced on a spike held above the foliage.

All canna perform best when grown in warm soil with full sun and warm growing conditions.

Cannas have broad green, bronze or multicolored leaves with striking white, yellow, pink, orange or red flower spikes towering above foliage from midsummer to frost. Set tall plants in the rear of a border; use dwarf ones, such as 'Tropical Rose,' in containers.

Cannas need a lot of water and fertilizer and are winter hardy only to USDA Zone 8. They may survive winter in Zone 7 if landscape beds are mulched heavily.

CASTOR BEAN PLANT. *Ricinus communis*, native to tropical Africa, is a shrubby plant that produces large, palm-like leaves. The castor bean grows 6 to 8 feet tall and about 6 feet wide in one season – use as a specimen or background planting.

New leaves have an attractive bronze-red tinge to them. The clusters of small flowers are not very noticeable, but the spiny seedpods are.

Remember to inform residential clients who may want to cut plants for arrangements that seeds and all parts of the plant are toxic.

Give plants enough space to spread – 4 to 5 feet between them – as well as full sun, well-drained soil and a lot of moisture. They thrive in heat and in Zones 8 to 10 and grow as perennials.

COLEUS. Familiar as a plant for shade, coleus produces muted, as well as brightly colored variegated leaves,

(continued on page 28)

Grow Canna 'Tropical Rose' (above) in warm soil and full sun for best performance. The brightly variegated leaves of coleus (below) provide season-long interest on dreary landscape sites. Photos: All-America Selections



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Nursery Market Report

(continued from page 26)

which create season-long interest in what can otherwise be dreary sites.

From tropical Africa and Asia, coleus is an annual that fits perfectly in containers, alone or in combination with other annuals, as well as in the ground under deciduous trees and shrubs and as an edging for a perennial border. 'Rainbow' and 'Wizard'

ACTUALLY, MANY PLANTS REGULARLY USED IN THE LANDSCAPE COME FROM TROPICAL CLIMATES — WE SIMPLY THINK OF THEM AND USE THEM AS ANNUALS. MANY OF THESE TENDER PLANTS GROW SUCCESSFULLY IN CONTAINERS SO YOU CAN SURROUND CLIENTS WITH A LAVISH JUNGLE ON A PATIO OR DECK.

coleus can be grown from seeds or plants and need shade for best performance.

Most coleus branch best if tips of young plants are pinched occasionally. As the lavender-blue spikes form later in the season, cut them off as they detract from the foliage.

Some coleus are vegetatively propagated from cuttings. Many of these varieties

ies have been bred to be sun-tolerant, a plus for summer plantings in sunny spots.

MOONFLOWER. Gorgeous, large, fragrant white blooms open in the evening. The perfect place for this is near a patio or deck, where clients can enjoy the scent.

Widely distributed in the tropics and subtropics of Mexico and Central America,

moonflower, or moon vine, requires a sturdy support because the plants are vigorous and weighty, climbing 12 to 15 feet during the season with large, bright green leaves. Combine moonflower with its relative the morning glory for a dazzling, daylong display of blue and white.

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Extras to find suppliers of these plants to build your tropical landscapes.

Moonflower is a perennial in Zones 8 to 10; in other zones, treat it as an annual.

CARE CLUES. Remember to keep an eye, or a finger, on soil in containers. It dries quickly during the hot, arid days of summer. Check pots frequently and water when the soil feels dry to a depth of about 2 inches. Also, because plants outdoors grow rapidly, feed them regularly — especially those in containers.

Periodically flush the soil in pots to prevent fertilizer buildup by watering until the water pours out of the drainage holes. — *Eleanore Lewis*

The author is a writer with the National Garden Bureau, Downers Grove, Ill. For more information, contact aas.ngb@attglobal.net.

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Tree Care Tips

PROBLEM PESTS

Aphid Alert

Aphids are small ($1/16$ to $1/8$ -inch long), soft-bodied insects that range in color from green to brown, red, black or purple. Nearly every tree has at least one aphid species that attacks it. These small insects are masters of reproduction and are often found in great numbers on tree stems or leaves.

Lawn care operators (LCOs) can identify aphids by their sucking mouthparts, long, thin legs, long antennae, pear-shaped body and pair of tubelike structures (cornicles) arising from the posterior of the abdomen. Aphids may be winged or wingless and colonies often have both forms.

Aphids excrete a sugary liquid called honeydew, which drips onto plant foliage or other structures and provides a suitable place for black sooty molds to grow. Ants care for aphids in return for the honeydew, so when LCOs see ants running over trees, it's a sign that aphids may be present.

Aphids are tremendous reproducers and with their ability to fly can constantly reinfest trees. A complete aphid lifecycle takes only 10 to 14 days.

Each tree reacts differently to aphid attacks. Some trees show no response, while others produce distorted (twisted, curled or swollen) leaves or stems. Occasionally, aphids may kill trees since as they move from one plant to another, they transmit diseases through their sucking mouthparts.


CONTROL TACTICS. Most aphid attacks cause temporary aesthetic damage to trees. But when aphids get out of hand, LCOs can use these various methods for control.

Strategy 1: Syringing. Use a hard jet of water from a hose to dislodge the aphids. Periodic syringing will keep the populations from doing too much damage and allow the parasites and predators to build up to effective levels.

Strategy 2: Plant Resistance. Observe local plants to identify those that are annual "aphid food" and those that aphids never bother. Select the resistant types for clients' landscapes.

Strategy 3: Encourage Predators and Parasites. Lady beetles, green lacewings, hover flies and parasitic wasps control aphids naturally. If ants are tending aphids on a plant, place a ring of insecticide dust around the base of the plant. If spraying is necessary, use a material such as horticultural oil (1.5 to 2 percent) or an insecticidal soap. These materials tend to cause less harm to beneficial insects.

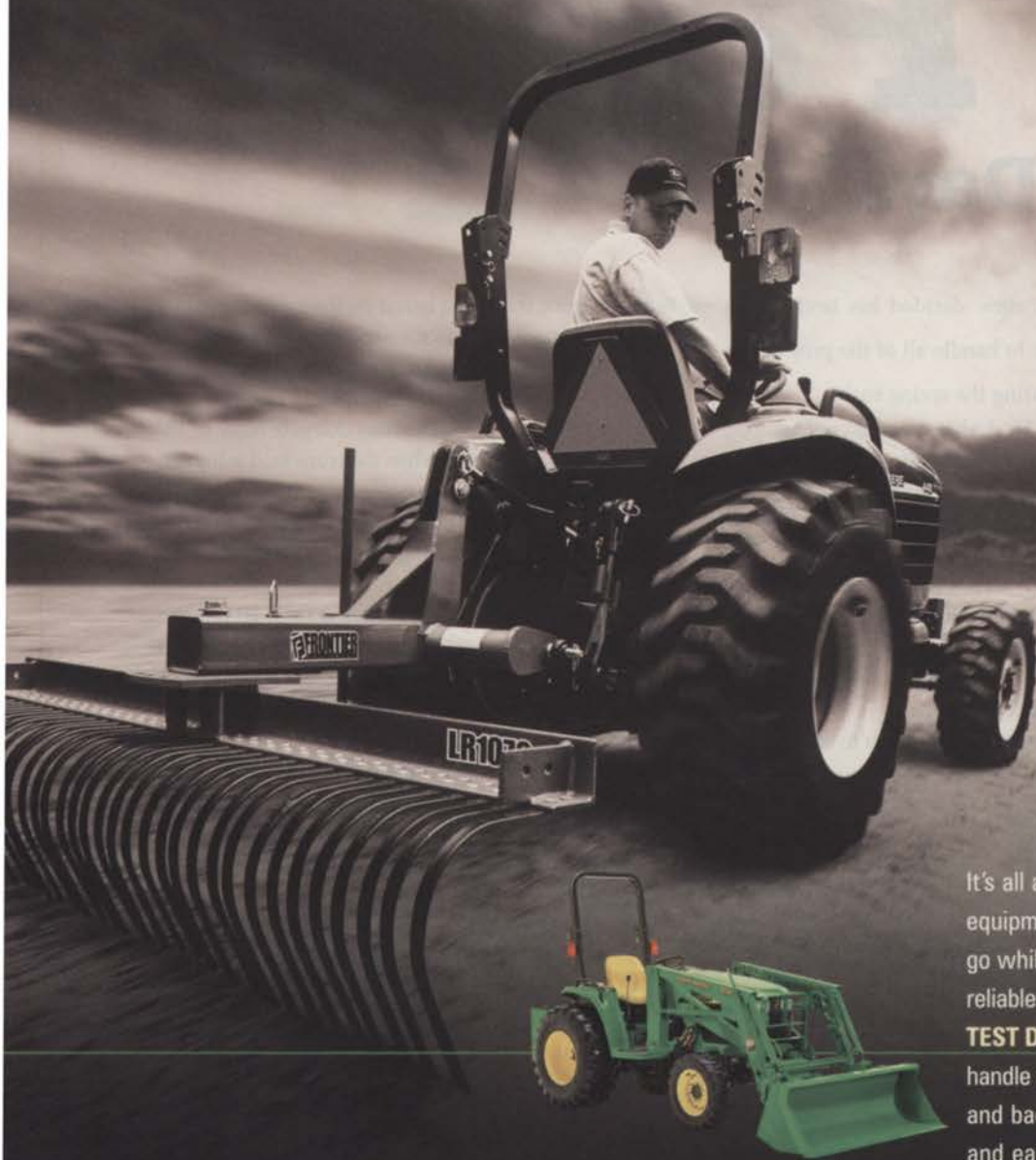
Strategy 4: "Soft Pesticides" and Contact Insecticides. Since most aphids are soft-bodied insects, horticultural oils, insecticidal soaps and contact insecticides seem to provide good control. Thorough coverage is needed since these products only have contact activity. Since aphids are often placed under considerable pesticide pressure, they may be resistant to certain insecticides and aphid numbers may only be reduced vs. eliminated. If you do not obtain reasonable control, consider rotation to another insecticide.

Strategy 6: Systemic Insecticides. Aphids have sucking mouthparts and are thus susceptible to pesticides located in a tree's vascular system. Systemic insecticides that are micro- or macro-injected or applied to the soil are less harmful to beneficial insects like ladybugs, which are natural aphid enemies. Macro- or microinjection is best done when the liquid movement within the tree's water-conducting tissues is highest, which is usually in spring or fall. Uptake occurs best when soil temperatures are above 45 degrees Fahrenheit and usually takes one to four hours, depending on the weather, the tree's age and health and soil temperatures. Also, for best control, inject material into affected trees before aphids start feeding. — David Shetlar 

The author is a professor of entomology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, and he can be reached at shetlar.1@osu.edu.

As sucking insects, aphids like this giant bark aphid adult can produce mangled tree leaves and stems with their feeding and spread tree diseases.
Photo: Louis Tedders, USDA ARS





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USE READER SERVICE #95



JOHN DEERE

On

Paper

Discount Days

Four years ago, Brian Labrie decided his landscaping crews needed more time to handle all of the projects his customers demanded during the spring rush.

Labrie, owner, B. H. Labrie Landscaping Co., Merrimack, N.H., says he needed to give his customers an incentive to postpone their planned landscaping jobs until after Independence Day, when "the spring rush is over and everything tapers off a bit."

The simplest solution – offer a price reduction. Labrie created a direct mail postcard offering his customers 10 percent off any of the projects the card offers, such as irrigation systems, brick patios or retaining walls, if the client postpones them until summer.

"This is an opportunity for the customer to take advan-

tage of a price reduction based on the availability of a larger labor pool [later in the season]," Labrie says.


During the off-season – summer through early fall – a customer can receive the same quality of work for a reduced price because Labrie can delegate more of his employees to a single job when the work load is lighter. Offering clients this discount also helps him maintain a consistency of work for his company throughout slower summer months while easing his employees' workload during the hectic spring.

"This took our hourly employees from 60 hours a week and brought them down to 40," Labrie says. "It helps our employees by giving them more hours a week during the off-season and it helps the company by generating more revenue."

However, the 10-percent-off card is not without its limitations. Only larger jobs requiring additional employees are part of the offer, such as those that include installing irrigation systems. "If you have a very small job you can't get 10 percent off," Labrie says. "But if its more than \$3,000 or \$4,000, we can work with it."

How long a customer is willing to wait on a landscape job is another of the discount's limitations, Labrie points out. "Fifty-percent of the people needed [the job] done yesterday and they really don't care what the price will be," he says. "Then you have the other 50 percent who plan on anything and those people take advantage of that."

The discount is only in place when the summer months are actually slower than the spring, Labrie adds. "This is not a guarantee every year," Labrie says. "It is really a game-time decision made closer to the Fourth of July."

Labrie offers the discount because it gives his company a constant flow of work throughout the summer, noting "it keeps the phone ringing throughout the whole season." – Kevin McConville 

The author is a Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at kmconville@lawnandlandscape.com.



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USE READER SERVICE #33

AMERICAN BEAUTY LANDSCAPING

HEADQUARTERS: Boardman, Ohio

FOUNDED: 1979

2002 REVENUE: \$1.4 million

2003 PROJECTED REVENUE:

\$1.75 million

OF EMPLOYEES: 15 year-round,
plus 15 seasonal

CLIENT MIX: In maintenance, 90 percent commercial and 10 percent residential. In design/build, 10 percent commercial and 90 percent residential. In snow removal, more than 90 percent commercial.

SERVICE MIX: 70 percent design/build, 20 percent maintenance, 5 percent lawn care, 5 percent irrigation

EQUIPMENT LINEUP: 8 trimmers, 8 blowers, 4 edgers, 4 chain saws, 10 hedge trimmers, 20 pruners, 14 vehicles, 1 spray vehicle, 2 walk-behind mowers, 4 riding mowers, 2 compact utility loaders and 2 skid-steer loaders

SUCCESS STORIES:

- Received 55 state, local and national design/build awards
- Was named a national finalist for the Better Business Bureau Award for Outstanding Ethics
- Chosen by the Ohio Landscape Association to host the 2003 facilities tour

FIVE YEARS OF GROWTH:

1997 - \$590,000
1998 - \$600,000
1999 - \$800,000
2000 - \$850,000
2001 - \$900,000

Nuts

Bolts

Business LESSON

Roger Myers taught seventh and eighth graders in Mahoning County, Ohio, for 17 years.

He spent his summers exploring various summer jobs - house painter, pool manager, retail worker - to supplement his \$4,800-annual teacher's salary. Then, after building a new home one summer, Myers spent the season designing and installing his own landscaping. The project, which was on a brand new street where other residents were also building homes and planning their landscapes, was a hit with neighbors.

"They kept asking me who did my landscaping and when I told them I did, they asked me if I would design and install their landscaping," Myers says, adding that during that summer, he rented a U-Haul, went to the local hardware store for supplies, drew designs and then installed his neighbors' outdoor spaces.

With a street full of references and a community connection via his teaching experience, finding additional work was easy. For seven years, Myers taught during the school year and landscaped from June through September. When he needed help, he hired fellow teachers or students as employees.

Business picked up so quickly that potential clients would start calling him before the school year was out and after the school year started again, asking about additional work. At one point, Myers was teaching and landscaping at the same time. "Doing double duty," as he calls it, wore him out. "I wasn't making a lot of money but I enjoyed the work."

Then during the summer of 1979, Myers decided to begin landscaping full time. "It was time to take a chance," he says. "The worst that could happen is I fall on my face and have to go back to teaching. The roughest part of that first year was putting our name and services out there and then waiting for that phone to ring. Two weeks later, it did."

(continued on page 38)

American Beauty Landscaping

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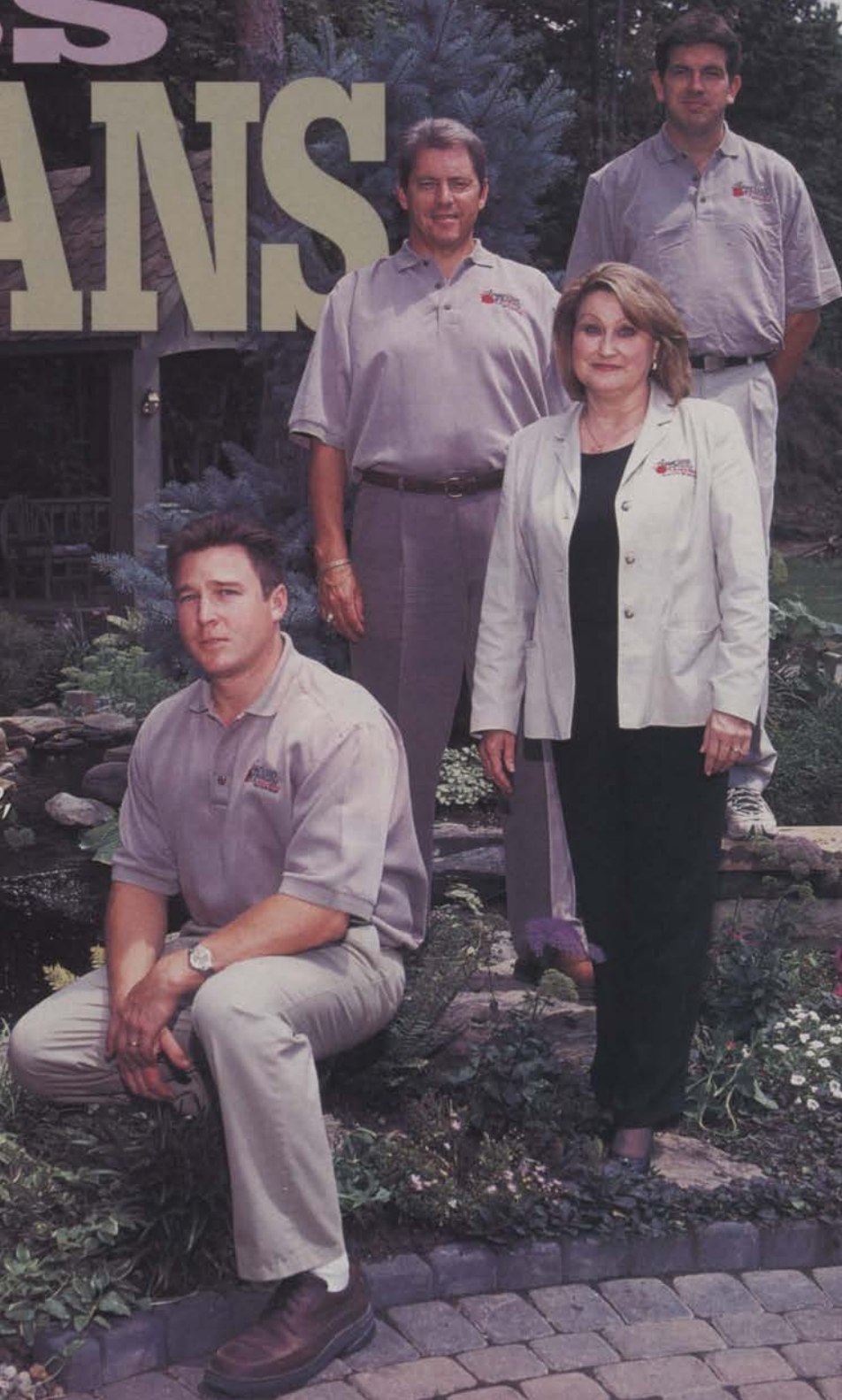
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The American Beauty Landscaping team from left to right: Chris Mickol, Roger Myers, Barb Coleman and Tom Ferguson. Photo: Joseph Rudinec

Business PLANS

*American Beauty
Landscaping Owner
Roger Myers learns
that after reaching
\$1 million in revenue,
anything is possible.*



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USE READER SERVICE #37

Cover Story

(continued from page 34)

THE \$1-MILLION MARK. In the beginning, American Beauty Landscaping did everything from mowing to installations. "We'd teach ourselves new services from do-it-yourself books and I worked in construction for five years while I was in college so I had some general construction, concrete and brick laying experience," Myers says.

But design/build is where Myers' passion lied. "The money was there – the jobs were larger and the cash flow was greater," he explains. "Maintenance was not my love – it was a necessity."

So in 1987, the company, which had a service breakdown of 75 percent design/build and 25 percent maintenance, dropped

its maintenance services all together. American Beauty Landscaping's design/build target customer became two-income professional residential families, which make up 90 percent of the business, and limited commercial sites like hospitals, office parks, fast food venues and schools.

As Myers continued his now design/build-focused business full time he started attending local and national seminars to network with other contractors and learn more about the business.

At one seminar early in 1992, the speaker asked all the attendees who were making more than \$1 million in revenue to raise their hands. One person's hand shot into the air. "The speaker told us the rest of us who hadn't raised our hands wouldn't know what true success was like until we made it to the \$1-million mark," Myers describes. "That left an impression with me."

That same year, Myers was watching late night television when he saw an infomercial from motivational speaker Tony Robbins. He ordered the tapes and started listening to them in his car. Two specific points gave Myers direction. "Robbins explained that if you saw a poor person on the street and gave him money, he'd be good for a day, but if you taught something to someone, they are good for a lifetime," Myers explains. "Then Robbins explained that you have to find what you want to do in life – your passion – and then figure out what you need to do to be successful at your passion."

From this, Myers decided that to be a successful landscape contractor, he must push growth to reach the \$1-million mark and that he must build a team of people to whom he can teach horticulture and landscaping. He numbered his priorities. His first objective was to build a new facility – which he did in 1996, and then he set a three-year goal to reach the \$1-million mark.

But the \$1-million mark eluded the company until 2002 – six years after setting the original three-year plan, which Myers now says was a little unrealistic. What finally pushed the company over its desired revenue mark was incorporating additional services to its roster.

"It was a whole new world," Myers says of being beyond \$1 million in revenue. "There is a magical barrier there. When you get to

(continued on page 40)

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Loader 18'	\$5,400	\$4,050
Loader 20'	\$5,700	\$4,275
Loader 24'	\$6,600	\$4,950
Loader 30'	\$8,300	\$6,225
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Backhoe 12'	\$3,700	\$2,775
Backhoe 14'	\$4,000	\$3,000
Skid-Steer 6'	\$2,000	\$1,500
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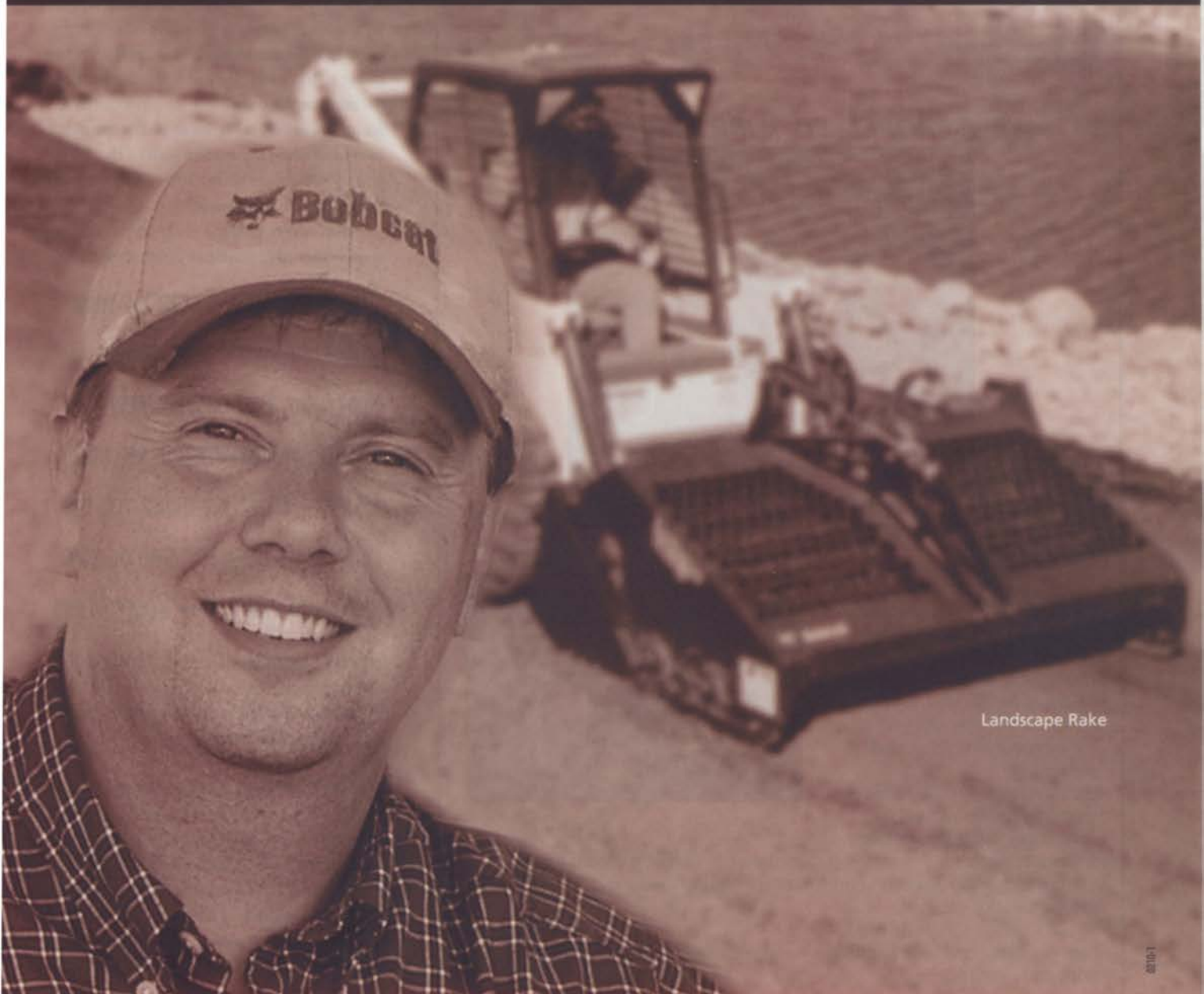
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USE READER SERVICE #35

An **IR** Ingersoll-Rand business

(continued from page 38)

that number, the rules of the game change."

After reaching \$1.4 million in 2002, Myers says he had to work at becoming more of a true manager instead of juggling all duties in the company. "One person can provide direction and leadership from one position to only so many people," he explains, adding that not only did he have to make sure he

had the people in place to promote them to higher positions, create a management team and extend this leadership, but he also had to establish systems for others to follow so that tasks he had set in place would be properly followed by the next level of managers and properly trained to the subsequent employee levels. "It takes years to get

these systems into place – it doesn't happen easily or quickly. And giving up some of my responsibilities was challenging."

What helped this transition was explaining to his new management team and employees that forming systems and creating structure and organization can only lead to increased profit. "If you don't have profit as your motive, then your work is just a hobby," Myers says. "The company reached a point where for me and my employees to survive, earning a decent living and wages, we were going to have to price ourselves for profit in the marketplace and improve productivity. So, next I set up a business philosophy and overhead recovery system – all of the things you don't think about when focusing on your passion and plants."

Also, Myers realized early on moving toward his goal that a company cannot spend \$1.2

"IF YOU DON'T HAVE PROFIT AS YOUR MOTIVE, THEN YOUR WORK IS JUST A HOBBY. SO, I SET UP A BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY AND OVERHEAD RECOVERY SYSTEM — ALL OF THE THINGS YOU DON'T THINK ABOUT WHEN FOCUSING ON YOUR PASSION OR PLANTS." — ROGER MYERS

million to get to \$1 million. He hired consultants to narrow his focus on spending wisely, retaining customers and gaining profit, resulting in a 15-percent profit margin today.

MAINTENANCE, AGAIN. With an average 10 to 15 percent growth annually, American Beauty Landscaping was comfortable doing some maintenance, such as bed work and pruning, but no mowing. That was until three years ago when it added maintenance back to its service roster.

"What I learned from networking with maintenance companies at industry seminars is that a maintenance firm draws more income than a design/build firm and the service makes a company more attractive to potential buyers," he says. "With a design/build company, clients usually want a

(continued on page 42)

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USE READER SERVICE #41



United
Horticultural Supply

Cover Story

(continued from page 40)

designer's expertise, but with a maintenance company, mowing is mowing is mowing."

The company targets mostly commercial maintenance clients, which make up 90 percent of this end of the business.

To organize the department better this time around, the company started an account manager structure. Each account man-

ager supervises up to six crews and is responsible for client satisfaction for the properties those crews maintain. The company currently has one account manager handling three crews, so as this department grows, staff will grow as well. Its first year (2002), the company had already generated \$250,000 in maintenance services alone,

Myers says, and this year the company expects to bring in about \$300,000.

To supplement these services, American Beauty Landscaping also started offering snow removal in 2001, which provides the company's employees with full-time vs. seasonal work and brings the business year-round cash flow. This service also brought an additional \$160,000 in revenue for the winter of 2002/2003.

Target commercial clients, such as hospitals, nursing homes and schools, for snow removal are those who prefer zero tolerance when it comes to ice - i.e. "a no slip and fall situation," Myers explains. "Every time the snow collects to 2 inches, we are plowing and we salt as we see fit to ensure that all clients see is pavement."

With these additional services, Myers is embracing what he calls the "cradle to the grave" theory, where he can take care of most of his customers needs for life, adding services to meet their continued needs. In addition to maintenance and snow removal, Myers also uses subcontractors to provide carpet and window cleaning and power washing services to clients.

Also, Myers has plans in the next couple of years to expand the business by establishing two branches - one in Salem, Ohio, and one in northeast Ohio. "Our market in Youngstown is difficult - we feel almost tapped out with design/build clients, but we still have a long way to go with maintenance clients," Myers says. "We want to take our business model that's working for us here and expand it into other areas where we are capable of finding additional clients who fit into our niche markets."

MARKETING MAGIC. Currently, Myers' passion in the business is marketing. With a company named after a popular red rose variety, finding interesting marketing images and ideas to reach out to clients is easy.

The American Beauty rose is on all company literature. And to thank clients for their business or for referrals, American Beauty sends out cookie bouquets with red roses mixed with some cookies that say "Thank You" or have clients' children's names on them that cost between \$30 and \$50 each.

Also, since the company name has a patriotic slant to it as well, Myers sends out 3-by-5 American flags that cost the company about \$20 each to clients on Fourth of July

(continued on page 44)

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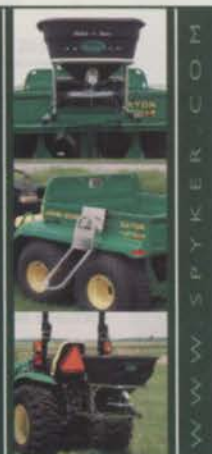
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USE READER SERVICE #44

(continued from page 42)

and Labor Day to thank them for their business and further extend the business name.

To garner client feedback, the company sends out surveys after completing landscape design/build jobs, asking about their experiences and requesting suggestions for improved service, Myers says, adding that response to these surveys runs about 20 percent.

PASSION FOR PEOPLE. To supplement its labor pool, American Beauty Landscaping hired Hispanic labor through the H-2B program for the first time last year, Myers points out, mentioning that the company added three employees via this program last year and 11 this year.

To boost communication in a multicultural workforce, Myers hired a bilingual office manager, Debbie Garcia, who translates all company newsletters and paperwork into Spanish so all employees can read and understand them. To ease this job, Garcia uses a translation software that Myers found for \$200.

Even with a growing and diversifying culture, American Beauty realized they needed to provide employees with incentives to promote growth and additional future company managers. About five years ago, American Beauty Landscaping started a points program where employees have to earn a certain number of educational hours – usually 38 – each year. “This can be done by going to a local industry show or signing up for special training,” Myers explains.

At the end of the year, employees receive bonuses, ranging from \$100 to \$1,000, based on the number of points they earned. Points earned also add up to increased job responsibilities or promotions, which also mean advanced salary levels as employees’ expertise levels increase. The company’s employee manual spells out the whole program to new hires so they are aware of their opportunities within the organization.

Programs like these are important to Myers because his main goal is to provide an

“[The \$1-million mark] was a whole new world. There is a magical barrier there. When you get to that number, the rules of the game change. And it doesn’t happen easily or quickly.” — **ROGER MYERS**

attractive environment for employees to boost growth and create additional opportunities. “The business and employees’ needs have changed,” Myers explains. “We’re going to need to grow to support the type of lifestyle the employees want. We will continue to move forward and raise the bar to ensure that this happens and I will continue using my teaching skills to enrich my employees’ lives.”

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

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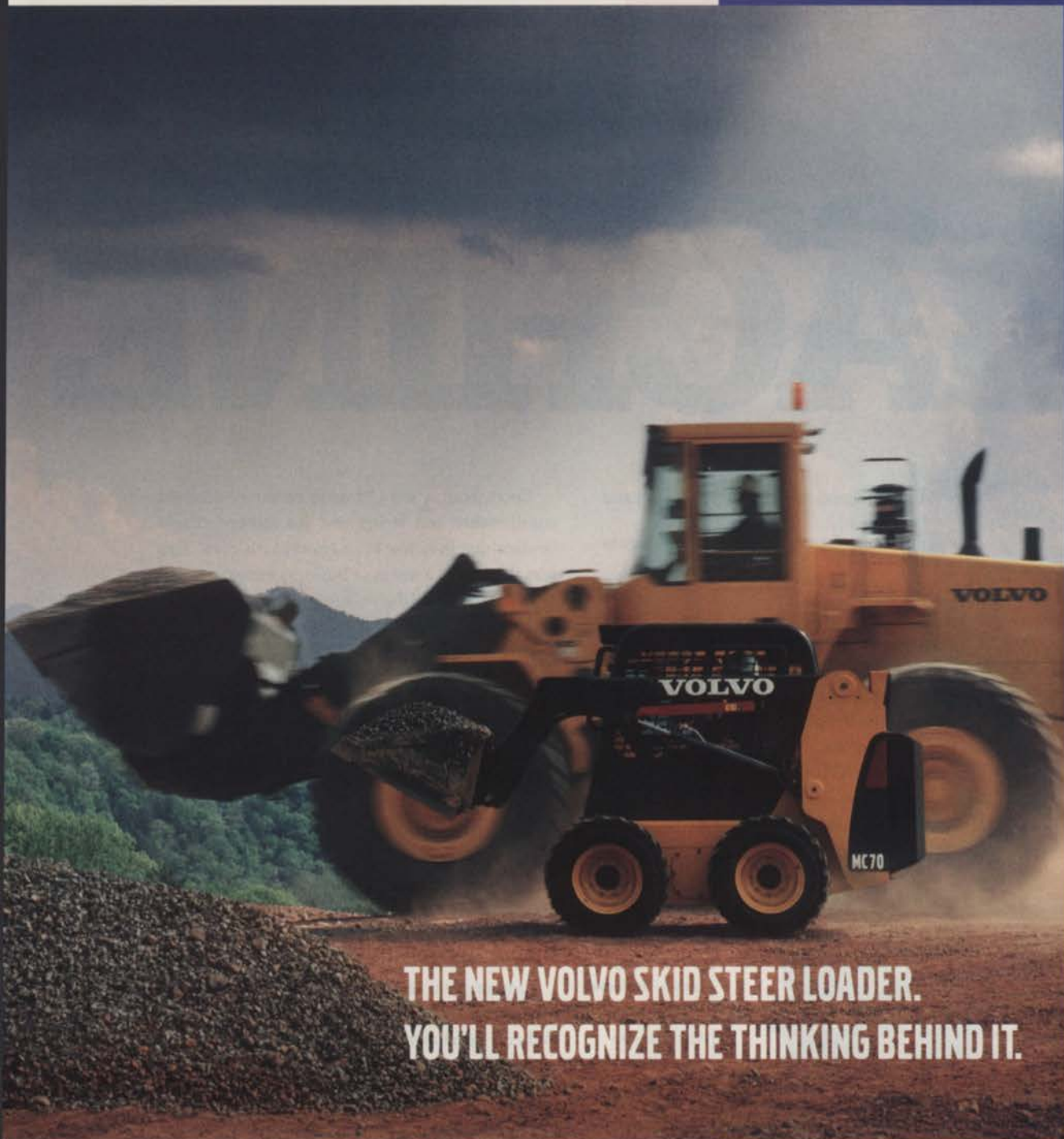
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Almost three decades of business experience has taught John Reffel how to do more with less.

Lean MACHINE

When John Reffel and his father started JLS Landscape & Sprinkler, "Landscape" was only a figurative part of the name.

"My dad and I started the business in 1975 and at that time it was an irrigation-only business," notes Reffel, who now owns the Sedalia, Colo.-based company. But landscaping and lawn maintenance edged into the picture during the pair's first five years in business.

"By the early 1980s, we were taking on full landscape contracts and hiring out the sod, rock and tree planting work to a couple of different subcontractors," Reffel recalls.

Soon though, the Colorado economy declined considerably and Reffel and his father brought landscaping in-house in an effort to cut costs. This was the first in a series of business endeavors that would teach Reffel the value of running an effective and efficient landscape contracting company.

CROSSING OVER. With the help of some educational opportunities and trade expos, Reffel and his father had little trouble incorporating landscaping and maintenance into their list of service offerings. Not long afterward though, Reffel made another business move that proved to be much more challenging.

"I purchased the company from my dad in 1986 and switching roles was hard for me," Reffel says. For him, delegating duties was a big step.

"My original responsibilities were in field operations and overseeing a small crew," he notes. "When I purchased the company and had to deal with everything on the business side of things too, the biggest challenge was trusting that my employees knew how I would respond to a client and would continue to keep that up."

Maintaining client relationships is a high priority for Reffel and it took time for him to delegate accounts to his crew leaders. To ease the load, his elder son, John, is taking on landscape and irrigation installation and snow removal and his younger son, Jeremy, handles estimating. Reffel's wife, Linda, currently manages the company's finances. With their help, Reffel still is able to spend time in the field while staying focused on running a business.

In 1998, JLS made yet another strategic business decision that allowed Reffel to spend more time in the field. "About five years ago we dropped all of

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John Reffel (left) reinforced his company's family business roots when he hired his son John (right) as a department manager. Reffel's son Jeremy (page 50) and wife Linda also are employees. Photo: JLS Landscape & Sprinkler

(continued on page 48)



Steve Leisring

*Vice President of Operations
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First Look

(continued from page 46)

our residential work," he says. This moved the company from a 70/30 percent residential/commercial split to a 100 percent commercial client base. "Residential jobs require a high level of detail and often a lot of hand-holding for the homeowners," he notes. "By becoming all-commercial, the people we were working with understood the routine and we were able to run a much more effective business."

With all commercial clients, Reffel's projects were larger and more prolonged and he saw the need for additional employees. He now hires several H-2B workers each year to increase manpower, though figuring out how many people to hire was a trick.

"For the first 15 years of business, I don't think we ever had more than five employees per year," Reffel estimates. "This year we have 17 and we've had 21 or 22 in past years. In late fall or early winter, we try to judge how many employees we'll need for the next season so we can work on bringing laborers

up through H-2B. This year we also have three local crewmembers and we keep four people on staff year-round."

This staff size helps JLS keep up with 16 commercial maintenance accounts, as well as landscape and irrigation installation projects for seven to 10 builders on the company's client list.

STREAMLINED OPERATION. JLS went through several changes in its 30-year history but the company maintained a slow growth rate during that time—until recently.

"In 2000 and 2001 we saw about 25 percent growth, but in 2002 Colorado's Front Range had the worst drought in 300 years and we saw a drop of 30 percent between the national economy and the drought," Reffel says. But business is currently on an upswing. "This year, the first two quarters have set records for us. We have had some good snow pack and spring rains and we went into spring with three large installation jobs."

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Check our September Online Extras for information on how John Reffel extends customer service over the phone.

In 2002, revenue for the company dropped to \$800,000 from \$1.2 million the year before, but JLS expects to recover their losses—and then some—with projected revenue of \$1.5 million for 2003.

One system to which Reffel credits this success is training his crewmembers across different business areas. "We cross-train all of our employees in both irrigation and landscaping so they can easily be moved back and forth," Reffel comments. "When we need to focus on getting one client's project done, cross-training lets us take workers off of an irrigation job to finish up a landscape installation somewhere else. Each crew can also help the others get caught up if they start to fall behind."

Because JLS's maintenance crews have
(continued on page 50)

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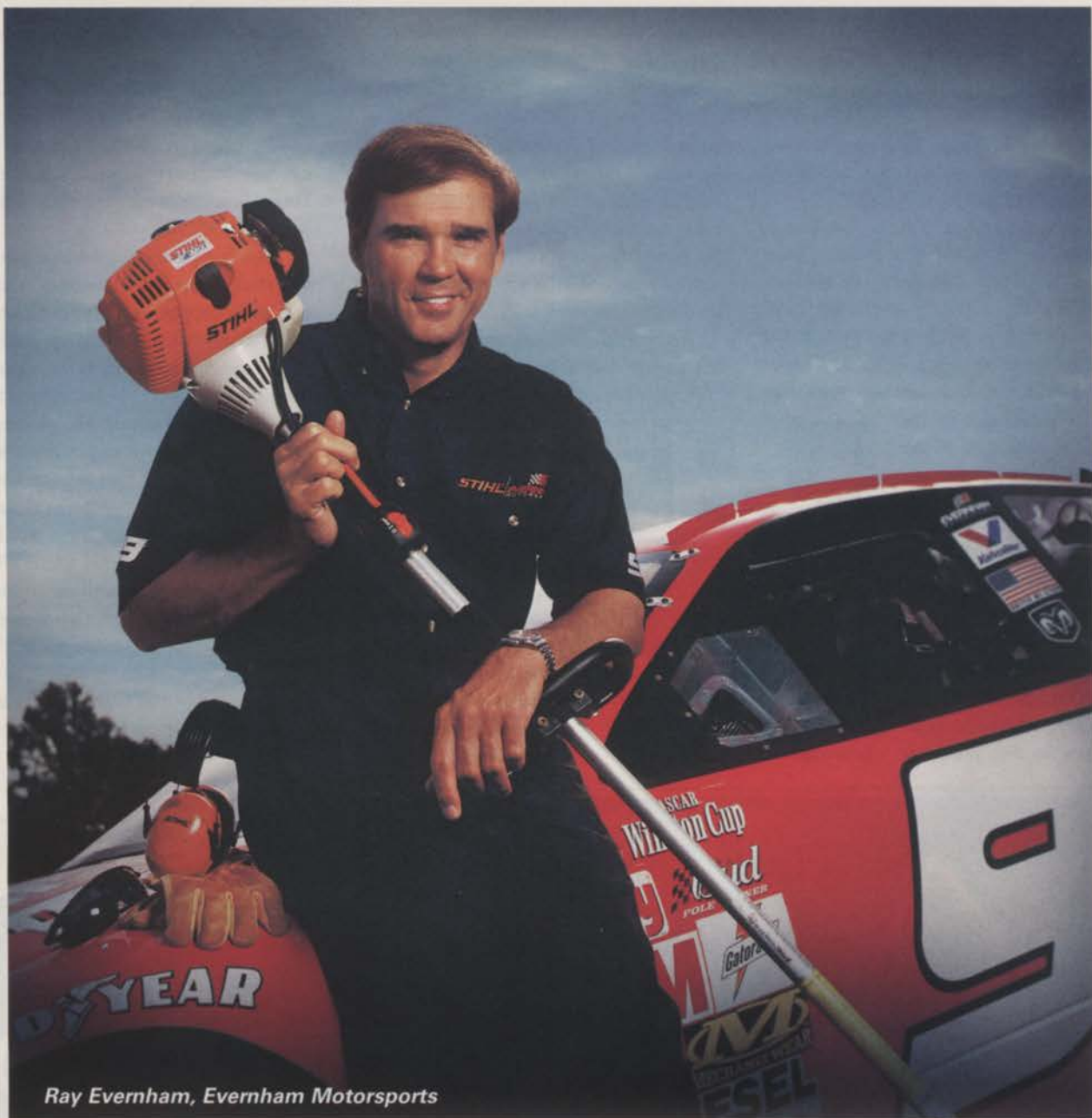
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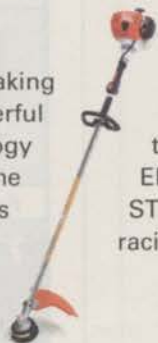
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First Look

(continued from page 48)

more regular schedules their work is fixed during the season, but landscape and irrigation crews are easier to reschedule.

"Sometimes a property manager will sit on a proposal for additional work until they want it done," Reffel says, referencing one manager who called him on a Friday afternoon to have him complete a project they bid by Monday morning. "His boss was coming for a walk-through at 11 a.m., so we sent two crews over Monday morning to do the job and completed the project in time for the walk-through. That situation cost us a little because of a hectic schedule, but I spoke with [the client] recently and he was thrilled—he'll remember that."

Reffel recently realized how much more efficient cross-training makes the company. "We're down employee-wise this year, but

we had a record first half at the same time," he raves. "When we forecasted [our revenue] last December, we didn't see a record year because there had been a drought and the economy was still down, so we didn't hire as many employees as usual. We ended up doing more work with fewer people."

Additionally, even though the company has grown from irrigation-only to a three-department operation, all paperwork still is routed through just one accounting department. "Everything's routed and coded so we know what invoices belong to each area," he explains. "Time cards come in through the managers and they're also coded as maintenance, or maintenance/sprinkler—with the specific department.



When he's not away at college, Reffel's son Jeremy handles the company's design and estimating. Photo: JLS Landscape & Sprinkler

"You need to handle paperwork as efficiently as you can without losing effectiveness but not be so effective that you lose efficiency," he continues. "Five years ago we had a form for everything to the point where paperwork was stacking up and it was hard to see what was really happening. We've cut a lot of that down so now we're really a lean machine."

Though the company is coordinated for maximum efficiency, Reffel intends to keep growth slow and steady. His plan includes some marketing to bring in more maintenance business, but will rely on customer service to drum up installation business.

"Five to 10 percent growth a year is more than enough for us," Reffel says. "We don't actively seek out new installation contracts to bid on because taking care of the people you're working for is much more important." ■

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at lsapiers@lawnandlandscape.com.



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Plant Growth Regulators

by Frances Richards

Beyond clipping and mowing reduction, plant growth regulators can boost plant health and save contractors time.

Regulation EDUCATION

Plant growth regulators (PGRs) have many names and formulations, but they all have one thing in common – the ability to control nature for the sake of profit and convenience. Think of PGRs as a tool that can reduce mowing requirements and clippings, save water, reduce machine wear and tear, and – most importantly – save contractors time and manpower.

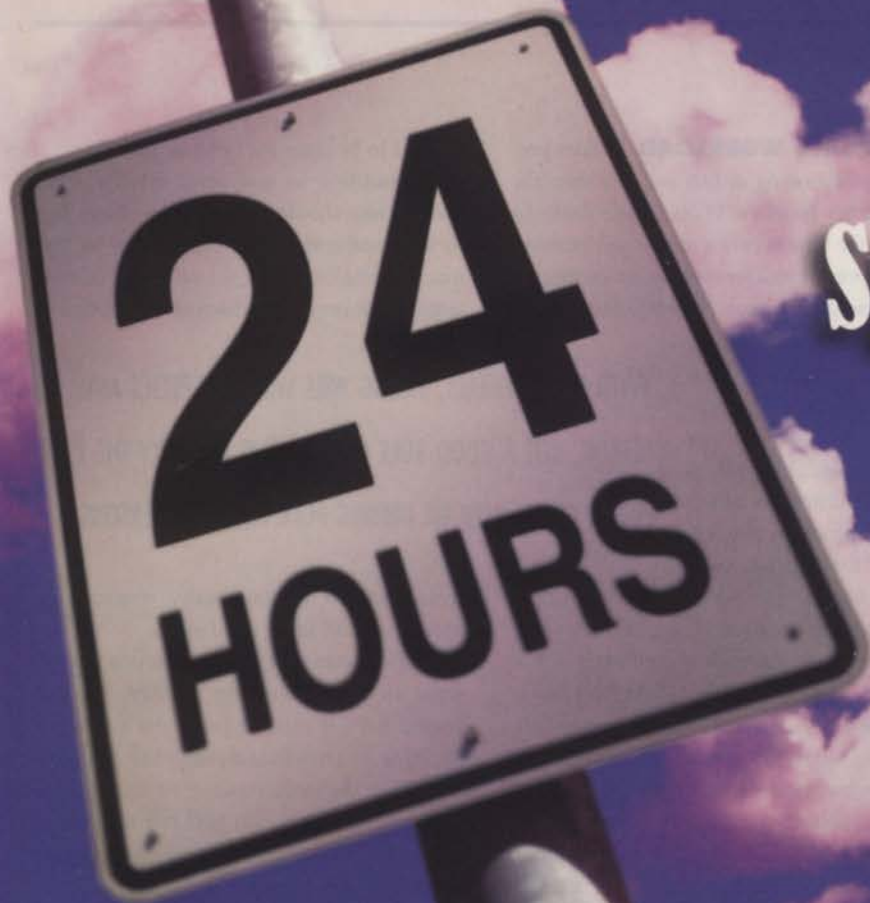
PGRs can be synthetic compounds that try to mimic naturally occurring plant hormones or they may be natural hormones extracted from plant tissue. Five major categories of plant growth regulating ingredients include auxins, gibberellins (GA), cytokinins, ethylene, and abscisic acid (ABA), and each group contains both naturally occurring hormones and synthetic substances. These hormones and regulators affect all aspects of plant life, from flowering, aging and root growth to the killing of leaves, prevention or promotion of stem elongation, and color enhancement of fruit. While these chemicals aren't for every situation, they can make life easier for landscape contractors and plants healthier and heartier in many instances.

A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY. A tiny amount of these substances can produce major growth changes, which is why applied concentrations are measured in parts per million (ppm) or parts per billion (ppb). With PGRs even more so than with herbicides and fungicides, carefully reading the label and following recommended application rates is important. This isn't a case where more is necessarily better, according to industry veterans.

"What we tell our customers is to start at the low end of the rate, measure the results and go up from there," says Chuck Buffington, lawn and landscape market manager for Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro, N.C. "In addition, we recommend adding a little nitrogen and iron in the tank with (the PGR), because it helps the turf grow better. You don't want nutrient hungry turf when applying PGRs [or this may alter the end result LCOs are trying to achieve.]"

WHY USE PGRs? Concerning PGRs for turf or ornamental control, the proper treatment depends on the effect a contractor is trying to achieve. "Think about what benefit you're seeking from the product as a starting point," Buffington says. "Are you after clipping reduction? Mowing frequency reduction? Reduction

(continued on page 54)



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USE READER SERVICE #54

Plant Growth Regulators

(continued from page 52)

of seed head emergence? Better wear tolerance? Preserving paint lines on a sportsturf field? What you want to achieve will determine the entire treatment sequence."

Once a contractor knows what his goal is, the next step is to apply the PGR. "It's important to apply on the front side of the growing season," Buffington says. "What you don't want to do is to wait for turf to be under stressful conditions such as drought, disease or extreme heat. The whole purpose of prestress conditioning is to prepare turfgrass for extreme conditions before they hit."

For turf that has been treated with a PGR, the result is a healthier, more durable blade with a higher tolerance to weather extremes, Buffington says. Turf also acquires a darker green color due to concentration of chlorophyll in the smaller, more compact blades. "If you miss the mark or start the application process later into the season, you won't get the benefits of prestress conditioning," Buffington adds.

MANAGING WORKLOAD. Besides prestress conditioning of turf and ornamentals, another key benefit of PGRs is their ability to extend the time between mowing or pruning – an important tool for evening out contractor workload during peak growth season.

"It has struck me for many years how underutilized and unappreciated PGRs are for trim-and-edge applications," Buffington notes. "These products are excellent for this situation and I don't think that contractors realize how much labor chemical edging could save. In many cases, contractors could skip time-consuming weekly edging if they applied a PGR correctly. It's all about managing products and labor. For example, if you have a client who requires one hour of mowing and 20 minutes of edging each week, think of the labor reduction if the edging only

needed to be done every other time."

In addition to man-hour savings, contractors also should consider savings related to wear and tear on equipment, gas, oil and machine maintenance, as well as reduced water consumption, which is an important

WITH ORNAMENTALS, TIMING WILL VARY BY SPECIES AND REGION, BUT A GOOD RULE OF THUMB IS TO APPLY THE PGR EITHER GOING INTO OR DURING PEAK GROWING SEASONS.

consideration among many community properties and large residences.

PGRs also may be used to give one type of grass an advantage over another. For example, a PGR can suppress *poa annua* by reducing its growth and competitive ability.

"While the largest use for (certain PGRs) is to limit *poa annua* on golf courses, we're

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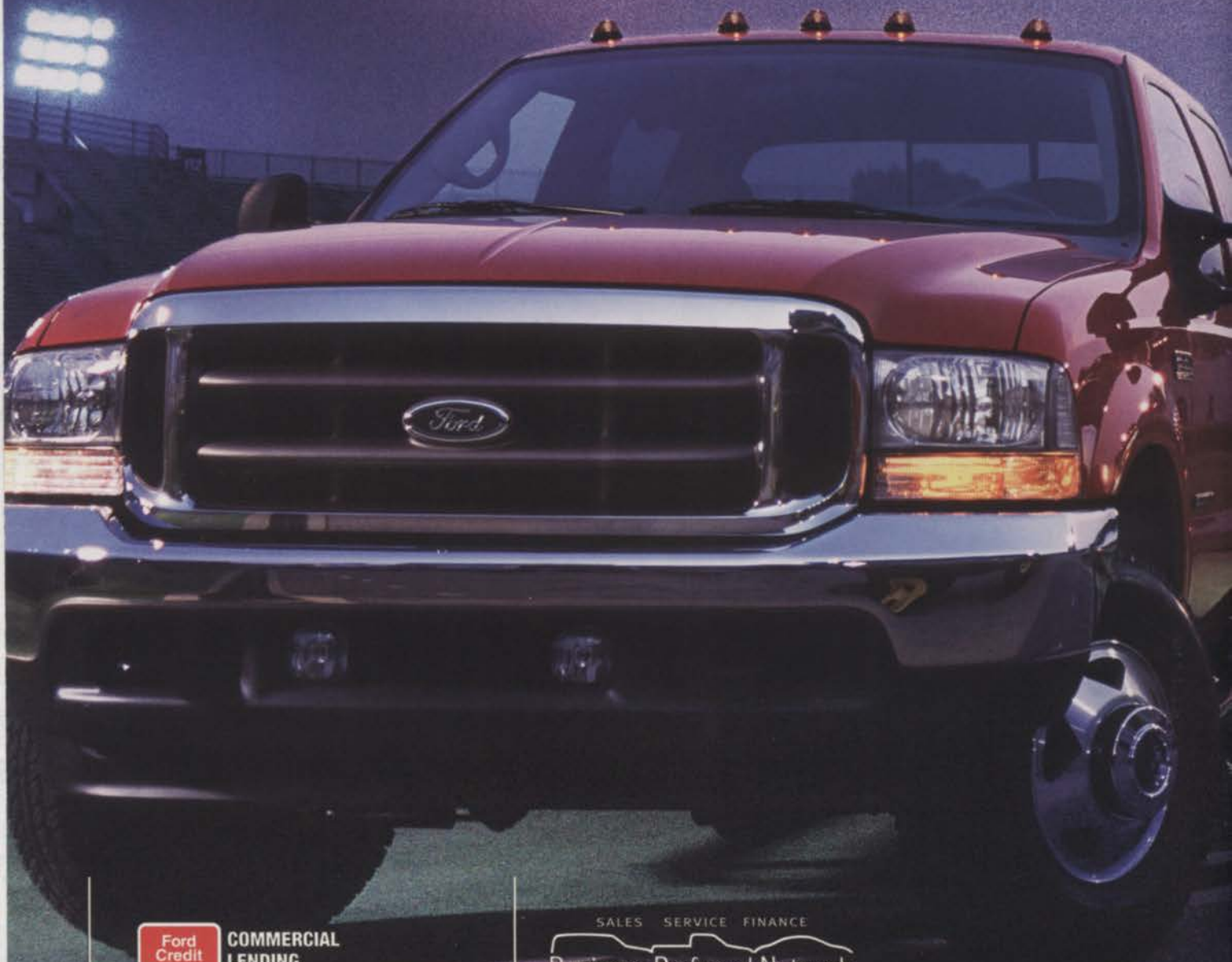
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USE READER SERVICE #57

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FOCUS ON: Trucks AND Trailers

by Kevin McConville

Truck customization increases in popularity for landscape contractors.

For a landscape contractor, walking through a dealership where every truck comes equipped to fit his or her specific needs is a common fantasy.

The reality is that contractors are almost never able to buy a company vehicle right off of the lot without customizing it to meet their business requirements first.

"No manufacturer really builds anything specifically for the green industry because it's small," says Wes Hadsell, president, HadcoServices, Bartlesville, Okla. "When I started this business many years ago, the only thing available out there was a truck with a stake-pocket on it. That is the reason why I customize trucks and I think that is the reason many companies do the same thing."

Uncustomized trucks are unsafe for equipment storage, increasing the risks of losing or damaging equipment, Hadsell says, adding that uncustomized trucks also look aesthetically unprofessional. Whether a company uses a clean, freshly painted truck with company logos on its paneling or an old and worn looking pick-up reflects on the company's credibility to current and potential customers, he explains.

Gerry McCarthy, president, Mac's Landscaping, Stoneham, Mass., agrees that company image is one of the main reasons for truck customization. "[Trucks] are the most advertised pieces of equipment [contractors] have," he says. "A truck is a moving billboard."

Tom Huppertz, program manager, GM, Grand Blanc, Mich., says landscape trucks are among the most customized segments of the professional pick-up truck market because there aren't many production options earmarked for contractors. But some manufacturers do offer contractors some special equipment options that are tailored to their job needs.



CUSTOMIZING CONSISTENCY. When customizing a truck, a contractor does more than simply have a decal placed on the vehicle's side. Often he must consider what options will be easily replaceable in case of damage and what additions will allow his crew to transport, store and track equipment effectively.

For contractors, using parts that are uniform with the rest of the company's fleet is important, McCarthy says.

Tricked-Out TRUCKS



Truck customization options include debris bins that sit behind truck cabs (left) and enclosed truck bodies for equipment storage and security. Photos: Super Lawn Trucks

Having similar vehicle components for all company trucks allows contractors to easily replace damaged parts or switch options between vehicles. "For instance, the back of all of our trucks have to be exactly the same to interchange trailers," McCarthy explains. "And trailer lights have to be exactly the same so they are interchangeable. This makes it easier to replace damaged components."

Using the same company logo on trucks and maintaining color and design also are crucial for maximum visibility, McCarthy says. For example, Mac's Landscaping uses red trucks with the company logo—a green tree and a house on a white background—popping out from the red.

In addition to truck aesthetics, manufacturers provide other industry-specific upgrades that contractors prefer. Paul Ganshert, owner, Ganshert Nursery & Landscaping, Madison, Wis., says the bulk of truck options that contractors select for their vehicles include toolboxes, racks and equipment storage areas. By adding built-in toolboxes and pruner sheaths to his

trucks, Ganshert can assign specific equipment to each truck and crew to keep track of supplies. "Usually there is a larger box for bigger hand tools and a smaller box for smaller tools, hand-pruners and similar things," Ganshert says. "All of our tools are marked for each truck to connect them with that truck. When [a crew] goes to leave a job and [a storage place] isn't full, then the crew knows they are missing something."

In the eastern part of Oklahoma, Hadsell opts for large-bodied, overhead cab trucks for hauling 16- to 18-foot trailers. But since his trucks have to drive through many hills in the eastern part of Oklahoma, some of the first trucks he used that had a dove-tail back—which meant that the truck's bed sloped downward or the tailgate dropped, allowing mower operators to drive equipment up and down the ramp for loading and unloading—would drag the ground and then push the equipment on the back of the truck against the tailgate because of the steep slope.

To solve the problem, Hadsell incorporating a hydraulically operated tail to his trucks to keep them level while driving down the road. This alleviated problems with damaged equipment and increased productivity by reducing equipment loading and unloading time as well as drive time.

PICK-UP POINTERS.

Despite the varying nature of what companies look for in their pick-ups many manufacturers offer factory-designed add-ons geared toward satisfying contractors' needs. Manufacturers examine what additions are most valuable to contractors and attempt to design options that can be purchased and easily attached to their vehicles. Some examples include dump bodies, irrigation bodies with pipe racks and storage for smaller items like sprinkler heads and hoses, water cooler racks, gas tank racks, shovel racks, split-tail gates and side-mount toolboxes of varying sizes. Heath Wood, sales manager, Middle Georgia

Freightliner-Isuzu, Macon, Ga., estimates that less than 20 percent of contractors want to customize their vehicles with an addition that is not already offered by a manufacturer.

A popular option with contractors is having additional fuel tanks for premixed and standard gas mounted under the side of their van bodies that cost about \$2,750, Wood says. These fuel tanks allow contractors to refill their equipment while they are at a job site, instead of traveling for more gas or taking up additional trailer space with loose gas cans.

Another popular feature with contractors is the pick-up truck camper shell, a hard fiberglass shell that covers the truck bed, Huppertz says. "Some contractors like these because they provide a little bit of protection for tools and other supplies that they want to carry in their bed," he explains. "They just don't want to leave their supplies open for someone to take."

For those who don't want to invest in a camper shell there is a folding hard truck bed cover that locks both at the truck's front and rear, Huppertz says. For con-

"NO MANUFACTURER really builds anything specifically for the green industry because it's small. When I started this business many years ago the only thing available out there was a truck with a stake-pocket on it. That is the reason why I customize trucks and I think that is the reason many companies do the same thing." — Wes Hadsell

tractors who like to take care of their expensive tools but don't want to pay for a trailer or an enclosed bed, a hard truck bed cover folds up from the tail of the truck, exposing 75 percent of the bed but still lockable to ensure equipment security on job sites.

Many manufacturers even offer graphics packages for contractors who want to boost the aesthetic nature of their vehicles.

PEOPLE MOVERS. When shopping for a truck, landscape contractors need to consider their typical crew size in addition to equipment storage.

For instance, crew cabs have become popular because they have two rows of seats for larger crews, Huppertz says.

The decision of whether or not to invest in an extended cab truck is directly influenced by how a contractor plans to move employees. McCarthy says his crews mainly consist of two workers for maintenance jobs and three to four employees for construction work. No more than three men fit into a truck, so he will send two trucks with two men inside each on days where he needs four-men crews.

Hadsell says last year his company weighed the pros and cons of an extended cab truck that would seat up to seven people but decided against the purchase because the truck bed would also have to hold enough equipment for seven people. This leaves a contractor with tricky decisions: Should crew space be limited? Should equipment be sacrificed? Or should a driver be saddled with a large and difficult to maneuver vehicle?

Hadsell says his decision was based on crew size – would a truck really need to sit seven people if the maximum number of workers traveling to a site was three? “It is difficult to put enough equipment on a vehicle to keep seven people busy,” Hadsell points out. “If we had one large property where [our crews] were going to be maintaining that property all day long, then a truck with seating for seven would be nice. We don’t have any properties that large so we decided that [the extended cab] was something that was neat but unnecessary.”

JUDGING ADDITIONS. When deciding what features to include in a company truck, contractors should make a wants vs. needs list.

Hadsell advises contractors to buy trucks that sit low to the ground. These vehicles make it easier for contractors to add customizations. Also, to avoid damaged axles and worn-down wheels, contractors should buy trucks that are able to handle the maximum load capacity needed for hauling their typical weight’s worth of equipment and tools.

When looking for a new truck with customized additions, Hadsell suggests that landscape contractors not focus on

NEW VS. USED

CHOOSING BETWEEN new and used trucks can be a tricky proposition. On one hand, there is the benefit of saving money by buying a used truck. But is a contractor really saving money if he’s spending more than the saved amount on repairs? On the other hand, buying new trucks every other year also can deplete a company’s earnings.

Paul Ganshert, owner, Ganshert Nursery & Landscaping, Madison, Wis., prefers to buy new trucks because “for us it is more worthwhile to buy a new truck and minimize downtime, [which] costs you a lot more than a new truck will cost you,” he says. “And you have no idea with a lot of the used equipment that’s out there on whether or not it’s been used and abused, so you’re taking a risk despite the cost savings.”

Gerry McCarthy, president, Mac’s Landscaping, Stoneham, Mass., also buys new trucks because of the potential expense associated with purchasing a used vehicle. After buying used equipment, the new owner must pay to have the vehicle examined to ensure that all components – from the brakes to the clutch – are in working order. “You are buying someone else’s headache unless you can find a good deal,” he says.

McCarthy also only buys new vehicles because of three-year bumper-to-bumper warranties, which is something that doesn’t come with most used vehicles.

Whether purchasing a new or a used truck, contractors will only get the most out of their money if the truck is regularly maintained. Wes Hadsell, president, HadcoServices, Bartlesville, Okla., says he expects trucks to last the company 10 years because of the estimated \$500 worth of maintenance put into each vehicle every year.

“After 10 years, we evaluate [the truck] and if it is mechanically sound then we do a little painting and we keep that truck,” Hadsell says. “As long as they look good and are in working order, we try to keep our trucks as long as we can.”

McCarthy adds that his employees detail and clean their trucks at least once a week and every winter employees sand down and paint truck beds to keep them looking clean. Also regular maintenance activities, such as fixing windshield cracks, steam cleaning seats and ensuring that the engine and brakes are in sound condition, add years to a vehicle’s life, Hadsell advises. — Kevin McConville

how good a vehicle looks and try to keep their customizations simple and functional. However, remember that customized options can be both functional and aesthetic, such as racks for equipment that help a truck look organized, neat and more professional.

“You see some trucks going down the road and [they] have got shovels and rakes sticking up out of the truck and into the air,” Hadsell says. “I hate that look. I feel that those things all

should be in a place where they’re not sticking up and hitting trees.”

Hadsell says he has his trucks custom made to give every tool a location it fits into easily, which saves crewmembers time on job sites. “Everything has its place,” Hadsell says. “That’s very important.”

The author is a Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at kmconville@lawnandlandscape.com.

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by Kevin McConville

Tailor your TRAILER

Both open and enclosed trailers have their pros and cons, so contractors must examine their business needs when choosing one.

A good trailer can serve at once as a billboard, a warehouse, a means of transportation and an organizer. But these simple pieces of equipment can be a hassle if a contractor chooses the wrong one.

To avoid unnecessary headaches, contractors should exercise caution and focus on their business needs when choosing between an open or enclosed trailer. Every company has a slightly different service menu but to complete those tasks efficiently, a contractor needs a trailer that does more than simply move needed materials – it must also be convenient to load, unload and organize equipment.



DECISIONS, DECISIONS. Before finding a trailer that fits their needs, contractors should consider trailer storage, insists Monte Berger, sales manager, Unruh Fabrication, Sedgwick, Kan. “A lot of contractors want an enclosed trailer at first,” Berger says. “[The decision] comes down to the what it is going to cost to enclose a

trailer. If they have a shop where they pull that trailer inside every night anyway, the enclosed part might not be appealing to them once they see the cost.”

Berger estimates that an enclosed trailer costs 30 to 40 percent more than an open trailer. But if a contractor runs a relatively small business and doesn't have enough equipment storage space, spending the extra money on an enclosed trailer to create this area may be a good alternative.

A TOOLBOX ON WHEELS. An advantage of using an enclosed trailer is security. Whether it is parked on a jobsite or at the shop, all of the equipment in an enclosed trailer remains locked up and out of sight.

Mark Borst, president, Borst Landscape and Design, Wyckoff, N.J., says his company used open trailers for its first two years of operation but switched to enclosed because of a lack of indoor storage space. He says the ability to lock equipment in an enclosed trailer guards it not only from thieves but also from his company's other crews.

“Nothing can get stolen if we are on a site that is far away from the trailer,” Borst says. “Parked in a shop, open trailers tend to allow one crew to take things from another. Somebody needs a broom and all of the sudden the broom off of one person's trailer ends up in another's.”

By preventing crews from borrowing equipment, Borst says his employees are more likely to take care of their own tools. If a worker can simply pull whatever he needs from another truck before heading to a job site then he isn't going to be motivated to take care of it. Also, Borst felt that unloading open trailers every night wasted too much of his employees' time.

Because of the nature of their work, contractors also must often transport every tool and sup-



To choose the perfect trailer – whether open or closed – contractors must prioritize their needs, such as loading ease and storage space availability. Photos: HadcoServices, top, and Borst Landscape & Design

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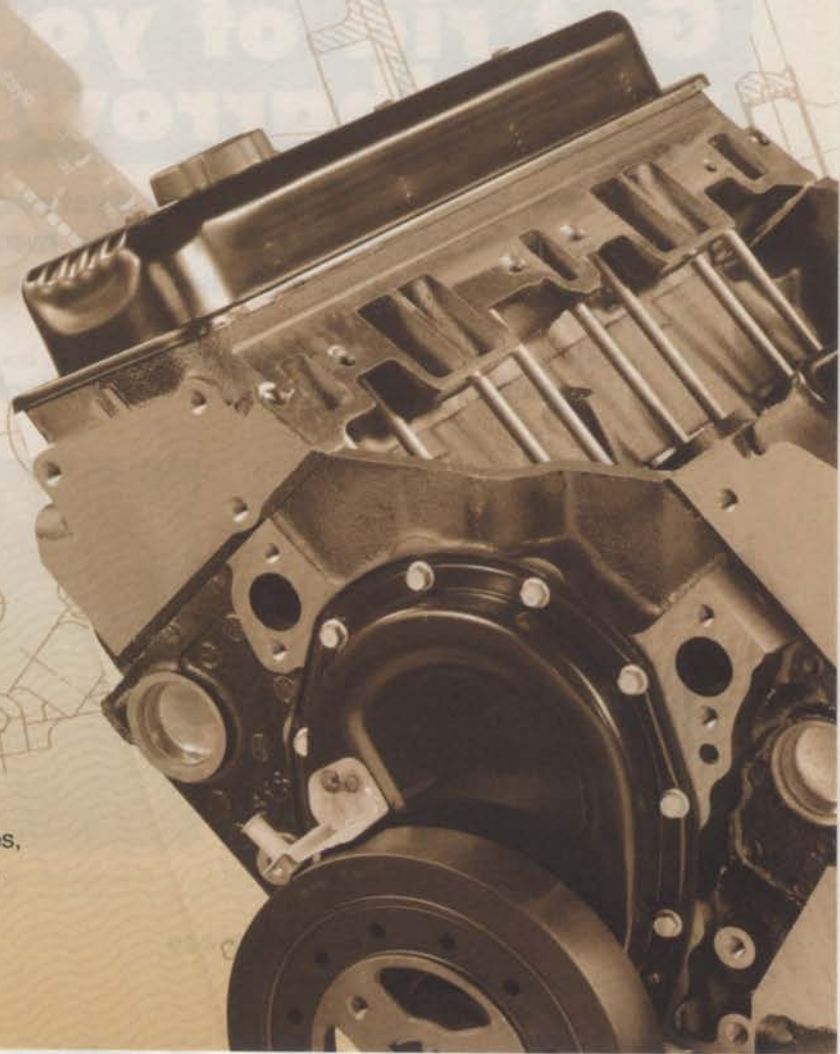
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FOCUS ON: Trucks AND Trailers

ply they need to each job during a normal day, says Tony Bass, president, Super Lawn Trucks, Bonaire, Ga. Instead of searching through piles of fallen shovels to find a rake, a contractor can save time on the job by using an enclosed trailer to organize tools and supplies. "If tools are thrown into the

back of a pick-up on top of one another then that's just a recipe for disaster," Bass says.

For this reason, open and close trailer manufacturers also design racks and storage compartments specifically to hold tools. Storage bins protect equipment from damage via sliding around a trailer and allow for

more accurate inventory keeping. "That way, a place for everything and everything in its place," Bass says.

However, many contractors who use enclosed trailers find it difficult to store and transport debris away from job sites because of the limited amount of space



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ENCLOSURE DISCLOSURE

PERHAPS the biggest problem any contractor is likely to have with a truck trailer, whether it is enclosed or open, is a driver's ability to maneuver it.

Tony Bass, president, Super Lawn Trucks, Bonaire Ga., says many contractors have difficulty training their drivers to steer a truck laden with a trailer through busy city streets and keeping the trailer from overtaking the truck on a steep hill.

Truck systems eliminate trailers and provide contractors with another option for equipment storage. These machines resemble short semi-trucks because they feature trailers like storage compartments connected directly to truck cabs, thus eliminating the dangling effect of a separate trailer.

Truck system customers configure enclosed trucks to meet their individual needs, similar to the customization options offered for separate trucks and trailers. Basic features, such as tool racks, mower storage bins and extra fuel tanks, are add-on options as well.

Mark Borst, president, Borst Landscape and Design, Wyckoff, N. J., says his company uses the truck system design, which has eased the strain of maneuvering a truck pulling a trailer. "[It] has served the same purpose as an enclosed trailer practically, without having two pieces of equipment," Borst says. "[This] way there is no education on how to back up a trailer or tow a trailer behind a truck. Two vehicles in one is how we look at it."

— Kevin McConville

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available. To alleviate this problem, some manufacturers now offer debris bins that sits behind truck cabs.

Other manufacturers also have found creative ways around the cons of using an enclosed trailer. Berger says his customers have the option of having a portable bathroom on enclosed trailers to save contractors the hassle of loading and unloading their own facilities.

THE GREAT WIDE OPEN. Despite the advances made to tailor enclosed trailers to landscape industry needs, open-bed trailers are still popular among contractors because of new designs, the trailer's cheaper price tag and simply because they are easier to load.

John Biehler, president, Suburban Landscape Management, Wichita, Kan., says open trailers are easier to unload than enclosed trailers because contractors can access equipment from all sides of the trailer, not just going through one side door or using a back ramp. "We have used enclosed trailers before but we just didn't want to spend the money on them so we opted to go with open trailers," Biehler says. "We don't need to have enclosed trailers for security reasons because our open trailers are completely secure and we have a facility where all of our trailers are fenced in at night."

Another advantage of open trailers is the various applications that contractors can use to alter them, such as dump truck bodies and hydraulic hoists that can be placed on flat bed trailers, says Bob Miller, vice president sales and marketing, Crysteel, Lake Crystal, Minn. "The main difference is in how you can fill, unload and haul materials in [the trailer]," Miller says. "[Closed trailers] force you to load palletized materials with a forklift through the rear of the body and you



Enclosed trailers offer contractors the option of locking up equipment at night to protect it from theft or vandalism. Photo: Borst Landscape & Design

have height restrictions on what you can put in them whereas an open top removes those limitations."

And where an open trailer shines is via increased visibility, Borst says, adding that a driver may have an easier time seeing around an open trailer than an enclosed one, which is tall enough to possibly impair a

Check our September Online Extras section to learn more about Suburban Landscape Management's custom trailer design.

driver's view of what is behind the truck. **L**

The author is a Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape and can be reached at kmccconville@lawndandscape.com.



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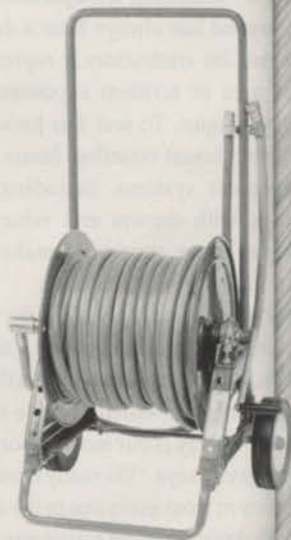
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USE READER SERVICE #60

Trucks AND Trailers

by Kevin McConville

Meetings, checklists and accident reports barely scratch the bumper as contractors make driver safety a part of corporate culture.

Brake CHECK

Maintaining a perfect driving record is a difficult task today with high traffic during rush hour in almost every state and road rage on the rampage. However, watching out for just yourself on the road is easy compared to the Herculean task contractors perform when ensuring all of their truck drivers are following transportation rules.

The road has always been a dangerous place, but for contractors it represents the largest area of accident exposure in their safety strategies. To seal this breach, some contractors invest countless hours in safety management systems, including regular meetings with drivers and vehicle safety checklists, in an attempt to make safety a part of their corporate culture.

Like many contractors, John Serviss, vice president and branch manager, ValleyCrest Tree Co., Farmington, Calif., feels that maintaining a safety-oriented attitude is vital in business. "Safety is our most important program," Serviss says. "We really have a strong commitment from everyone in the company and that starts from the top of our corporation and trickles down to the [workers] in the field."

Unfortunately, no matter how involved company employees are in a safety pro-

gram, the road is an unpredictable environment and the only real accident prevention while driving is an employee's awareness to the dangers.

"The road is a risk itself," says David Snodgrass, president, Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping, Portland, Ore. "No matter how well the driver is trained there are other people on the road who can cause accidents."

FINDING DRIVERS. Maximum crew safety when traveling to a jobsite depends entirely on the quality of the driver. But hiring the right person to move crews is just as risky as the road itself.

That is why Snodgrass says it is important for contractors to monitor their drivers by checking their driving records before they are hired and regularly afterward. "We try to set some rules and guidelines for people right when they start with us," Snodgrass says. "We have a procedure for qualifying new drivers and regardless of who we hire they are not allowed to drive until they have been qualified."

First, a residential, commercial or maintenance supervisor selects a potential driver and calls the state Department of Motor Vehicles for a review of the candidate's driv-



Truck drivers at ValleyCrest Cos. and Dennis' Seven Dees both have teams that run through safety checklists each morning with each vehicle to ensure smooth operation. Photos: ValleyCrest Cos. and Dennis' Seven Dees



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ing history, Snodgrass says. The applicant is dropped as a potential driver if he or she has had a DUI or three moving vehicle violations during the previous three years.

"The supervisor then takes the candidate for a test drive to make sure he or she is a safe driver," Snodgrass says. "A foreman then trains and supervises the new driver. [After training], the driver needs a final approval by the supervisor to demonstrate that they are a safe driver based on our criteria."

If the driver meets these criteria then he or she is given an orientation to the company's guidelines for use of company vehicles, Snodgrass says. Basic guidelines for vehicle use include: prohibiting usage of company vehicles for non-business related activities and not allowing people other than employees to operate or ride in them.

REINFORCEMENT RULES. Hiring and properly training a truck driver is only half the battle when trying to increase driving

safety. Contractors must also strive to increase safety awareness throughout their company to ensure that safe driving practices are always on drivers' minds.

Serviss says the best way to boost safety awareness is repetition. In 2002, Valley Crest Tree Co. received an award for safety because the company's drivers stayed accident free for the year. Serviss says that is partially because of weekly and quarterly safety meetings with the drivers. "Every week our drivers are somehow involved in a safety meeting or they read a safety topic," Serviss says. "We track all of this to make sure all of our drivers are reminded on a weekly basis about safety."

During quarterly meetings, drivers meet with their transportation manager and one of the company's safety officers to review any new safety concerns that have developed and any problems that have

occurred during the past three months.

Accidents, which include injuries members of the field staff suffer as well as driver accidents, are usually discussed at the weekly meetings. "One of the things we discovered about this program over the years is if you

"SAFETY is our most important program. We have a commitment from everyone in the company - from the top down to the workers in the field." - John Serviss

incorporate safety on a consistent basis it tends to capture the attention of the people you are trying to reach," Serviss says.

Snodgrass says Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping holds daily tailgate talks, during which all of the company's employees stretch together for 10 to 15 minutes and discuss a safety topic. "It can be a weather tip, an insurance statistic [from traffic studies], or anything that teaches employees an awareness to safety," Snodgrass says.

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The company safety committee decides whether or not an accident is reviewed at these meetings, Snodgrass explains. If the committee decides the accident needs to be discussed, the person involved in the accident will report it to the group and discuss why it happened and how it could have been avoided. "It is meant to teach everyone how to prevent that type of accident in the future," Snodgrass says.

STEP BY STEP. Contractors can put safety on the agenda at every company meeting, but repetition only works when combined with stringent safety checklists. Every morning, Serviss' drivers conduct a pre-trip safety check of their trucks before they leave the yard, similar to an aircraft crew before take-off.

Serviss says drivers run through a basic list of safety concerns, including seat-belt usage, tire gauge checking and brake checking. "Before they even drive their vehicle for

the first time, we do an orientation just to make sure they know how to do all of the aspects of checking the vehicle," Serviss says.

Snodgrass' drivers run through a similar safety-checklist before leaving in the morning. "Our crews don't show up for work, jump in a truck and drive out the gate," Snodgrass says. "Their daily routine includes a full walk around the truck and trailer, checking fluids, tires and lights."

Drivers also test how secure the equipment loaded in the trailer is and the trailer-hitch to avoid endangering other motorists and the costly lawsuits involved in such cases, Snodgrass says. They also check and adjust mirrors and windows for clarity and remove any loose stones from the vehicle and its load to avoid damaging other motorists' windshields.

Bob Layman, southeast regional safety manager, ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance, Tampa, Fla., says conducting periodic safety inspections of drivers and vehicles at

job sites is also important for company safety officers. The inspections give the company the opportunity to examine vehicle condition, whether it is safely used once in the field and if there are any problems that were missed on previous inspection forms.

When a manager or officer conducts a field safety inspection, the first thing he or she checks is whether or not a parked vehicle is exposed to other traffic or in a location that disrupts work on the jobsite. The jobsite inspection is conducted to see if drivers are following all of the company's parking guidelines, which include blocking the truck off with safety-cones, not leaving the keys in the ignition and securing the equipment. **LL**

The author is Contributing Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at kmconville@lawnandlandscape.com.

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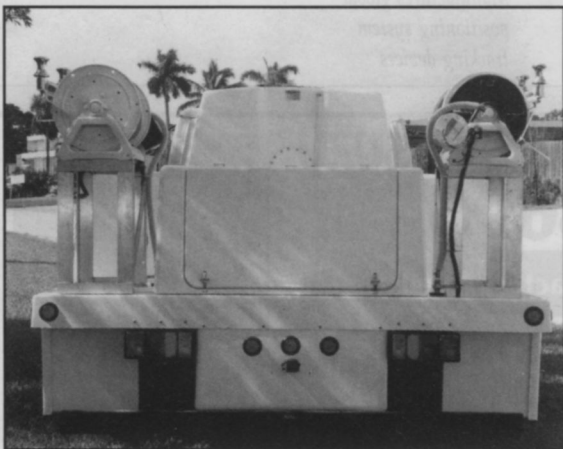
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
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Plant Growth Regulators

(continued from page 54)

also seeing it used on ballparks, high-end residential lawns and corporate properties lately," Buffington notes.

Besides turf control, contractors might turn to PGRs to enhance ornamentals. PGRs can promote branching, which creates a fuller and more compact shape while reducing trimming and pruning labor by 50 percent or more, according to company sources, notes Bill Brocker, vice president of marketing, PBI/Gordon, Kansas City, Mo.

In addition, certain PGRs can promote lateral budding, growth and branching, enhancing the appearance of otherwise gangly looking plants. "(PGRs can be) well suited for plants that require multiple prunings per season and for groundcover that needs quite a bit of trimming. It can offer a real labor savings in these situations," Brocker says.

Another innovative use for PGRs is to make a smooth transition between Bermuda base grass and annual ryegrass. For example, especially in the south, when the Bermuda

grass goes dormant in winter, it is overseeded with ryegrass, which offers a green lawn throughout winter. In spring, the rye and Bermuda grasses compete for dominance. PGRs then can be used to slow down the ryegrass while the Bermuda is coming out of dormancy. "Some PGRs can also be used in some specialty applications, such as holding down mowing frequency in steep or difficult-to-reach areas and for trim-and-edge control – saving labor with chemical edging," Brocker says.

But like any turf product, attention to instructions is crucial to achieving desired results. "If [PGRs] are overused, you might see some foliage lightening, so it's important to follow recommended label rates," Brocker stresses.

What's the best way for contractors to get the most out of PGRs? "Landscape contractors need labor and machines to handle their contracts," Brocker points out. "The best way they can use PGRs to their advan-

tage is as a tool that helps them even out workload. Treat ornamentals in a cycle, so that all the plants don't need trimming and pruning during the same week. The key is to cycle out projects to even out labor. Treat turf at the beginning of and during the peak growth season to give your crews some leeway on mowing and trimming duties."

With ornamentals, timing will vary by species and region, but a good rule of thumb is to apply the PGR either going into or during peak growing seasons. Landscape contractors may want to do some initial pruning to get the desired shape and then use PGRs to slow growth during the season. In addition, industry veterans emphasize that PGRs are not as easy to use as herbicides or insecticides because death is not the desired effect – growth regulation is. Successful application – adhering to label rates and using calibrated equipment – will go a long way toward achieving positive results.

(continued on page 82)

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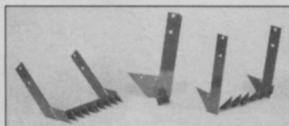
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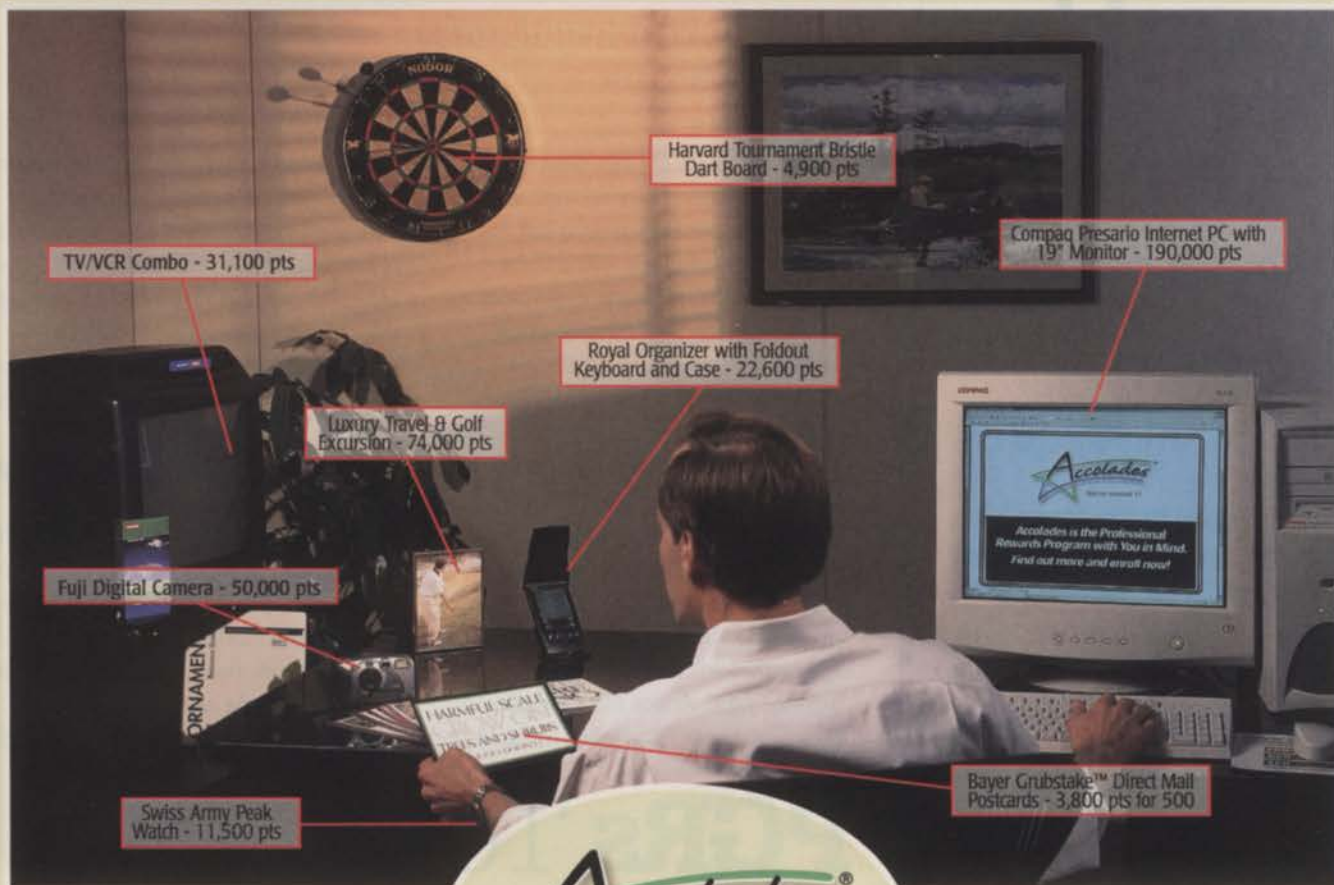
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USE READER SERVICE #71

Plant Growth Regulators

(continued from page 80)

The future of plant growth regulation may be anything but a formula. Genetic engineering just may be the next big thing, according to Dr. Richard Arteca, professor of horticultural physiology, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa.

"We're always trying to find new ways to dwarf plants," Arteca says. "At this point, the technology is there to genetically engineer just about anything. It's now a matter of legalities and ethics."

Arteca says litigation will most likely involve who owns the technology. "Can you patent DNA sequences? That's the sort of issue that will be decided," he notes.

In the past, Arteca says, crossbreeding was the main focus when trying to

introduce new, desirable traits into plant species. Now, it's simply a matter of inserting a certain gene into a plant that the plant then tries to read backwards. If it's a gene that pertains to growth – for example, the gene in charge of producing the growth hormone gibberellin – the plant can't read that gene and so it doesn't grow as big.

Arteca says that Environmental Protection Agency regulations, extremely rigid only 15 years ago, have become more relaxed lately, which will allow the development of more genetic engineering, with results eventually finding their way into the market. "Grasses are trickier to genetically modify, but it can be done," Arteca says. "With enough money thrown at it, anything is possible."

– Frances Richards

PGRs Tomorrow

PGRs IN PRACTICE. Despite the advanced formulations of today's PGRs, the majority of contractors don't use them. Why? Many lack knowledge about how to use them to their best advantage, while others cited uncertainty about the product's cost and effectiveness, as well as plant health.

However, the PGR landscape may be changing. Growing constituencies of contractors swear by PGRs for slowing the spring growth surge, keeping mowing programs and miles of hedges under control, and the ability to cut down on pruning.

Phil Fred, president, Philip's Lawn and Tree Therapy, Mooresville, Ind., used to offer PGRs to a limited degree, but hasn't had any requests for such products in the past few years. "We added (a PGR) as an option for homeowners with large properties – 5,000 to 10,000 square-foot lawns – who wanted to mow less frequently," Fred recalls. "But, it was kind of pricey for the results. In evaluating the cost-benefit situation, we decided it wasn't really worth it. We had priced it about the same as grub control."

However, companies that offer maintenance might benefit from this offering, Fred adds. For a full service lawn maintenance company, the cost justification and labor reduction may make more sense.

What about a client who wants his lawn to look like Fenway Park?

Kevin Cooper, senior vice president of Cooper's Landscape Management, Virginia Beach, Va., uses PGRs on such a property. "This client has a one-and-a-half acre lawn and he's invested in a \$20,000 golf course mower," Cooper describes. "He has a hybrid Bermuda grass in the back yard, which is in full sun and often windy. What I do is hit the property with a lot of fertilizer to green it up and get it growing. Then, about two weeks later, I add seaweed, humus, some iron and a PGR to the lawn. This slows the top growth, keeps the lawn green, and redirects energy to the root system. The result is a beautiful lawn that's stronger, healthier, darker green and slower growing, which the mowers love," says Cooper.

While the PGR is an initial expense, the usage rate is low, and with monthly treatments one gallon lasts all summer, Cooper says. "I don't charge extra for this service, I just build it into the contract," he notes. "Our customer is happy and is seeing the results he wants." **LL**

The author is a Contributing Editor to *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached via khampshire@lawnandlandscape.com.

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Turf Renovation

by Lauren Spiers

Damaged lawns are blemished masterpieces that require the right tools and techniques to restore them to their original glory.

If the "Mona Lisa's" smile began to fade, the chances of the Louvre calling in someone to repaint it are slim to none. On the contrary, an experienced art restorer would take the job and bring the portrait's coy heroine back to life.

However, if the Louvre itself began to crumble, the museum would hire architects and builders to replace fallen plaster or rebuild damaged columns.

In the construction world, restoration and renovation are similar approaches to mending and beautifying buildings in disrepair. The same goes for lawn care. Whether a weakened lawn calls for core aeration or a full resodding, equipment manufacturers offer several pieces of equipment – and some advice – so contractors can choose the best remedy for troubled turf.

CONSIDERING THE CANVAS. Reasons for having to restore a lawn that otherwise looks like a work of art are essentially the same reasons contractors tend to lawns in the first place.

"Lawns will thin out for a number of reasons," comments Bob Brophy, director, lawn products division, Turfco, Minneapolis, Minn. "Insect infestation, weeds, heavy thatch, a pesticide spill or weather-related grass loss are the main reasons," he lists.

Ross Richardson, landscape architect, Dunn Lawn and Land, St. Louis, Mo., names undesirable weeds and excessively compacted soil as additional problems ne-



Power raking is a method of dethatching that helps open up a lawn for restoration. Some restoration equipment is available with a bagging option to collect thatch during renovation. Photo: Bluebird

cessitating renovation. And Ron Monroe, president, Hayward Distributing, Columbus, Ohio, mentions that lawn problems may not stem from the turf itself.

"When people have older [properties] with very mature trees on the lawn, those trees always get their moisture, even if they have to pull it from the nice, young grass shoots," Monroe says. He adds that even a new lawn could be in danger if it's planted on a lot with mature trees.

Quite often, lawns experience combinations of these problems and contractors and manufacturers agree that the most important step in turf renovation is knowing exactly what caused the grass to thin out or die in the first place.

"There's some reason that lawn died and you have to find out why," Brophy emphasizes. "Is there too much thatch? Insects? Mold or disease? It may be a good idea to do a soil test to see if it's high acid or salt."

(continued on page 86)

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Turf Renovation

(continued from page 84)

Richardson agrees that soil tests can tell a lot. "If the client has dogs, for instance, that are burning up the yard, you'd need to decontaminate the soil and go on with a complete renovation." Solving problems like these – decontaminating the soil, eliminating insects and grubs, etc. – ensures that once a lawn is renovated, the new grassplants won't succumb to their predecessors fates.

Trained lawn care operators and landscape contractors can easily identify what insect, disease, fungus or other problem is the culprit on a damaged lawn, but knowing whether to repair the problem by pesticidal or mechanical means is a different skill.

For turf problems caused by insects or other pests, most contractors might lean toward finding a chemical solution first. "You don't need to use a chainsaw where just a little pruning would suffice," says Bob Busch, president, R. Busch & Sons, Oak Forest, Ill. "If there's a relatively small area that has devas-

(continued on page 88)

When you step onto a client's lawn and feel that telltale sponginess beneath your feet, your immediate diagnosis is excessive thatch. "The thatch layer is the organic material on the ground that's not growing anymore. It's made of the fibrous part of the plant – the stems, roots and rhizomes," defines Bob Brophy, director, lawn products division, Turfco, Minneapolis, Minn. This layer holds in noxious gases and keeps out food, water and light, causing grass to suffocate and die. It's also a breeding ground for other turf terrors like insects and mold.

But when it comes to overseeding or slit seeding, is it possible that a little thatch is good? According to Brophy, the answer is, "Not exactly."

"When you're seeding, you *do* have to cover up the seed for a couple of reasons. One is to keep the birds away. The other is to keep out the ultraviolet rays for the first 24 to 48 hours to protect the seeds," he says. "After that time, they'll be able to grow and break through the canopy." But Brophy explained that part of an overseeder or slit seeder's job is to break through the thatch layer. "Once you pull it up, it's no longer thatch. It tends to break up and will start decomposing very fast."

As it sits on top of the grass and shades the seeds, this fluffed up material, though no longer thatch, keeps newly sown seeds safe. In this respect, "thatch" has a good side, but as Brophy put it, "the best use for thatch is on roofs in Ireland – not lawns in America." – *Lauren Spiers*

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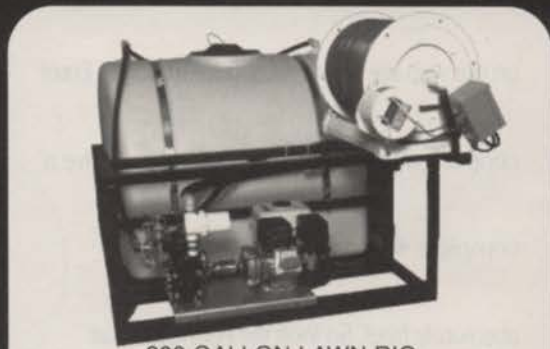


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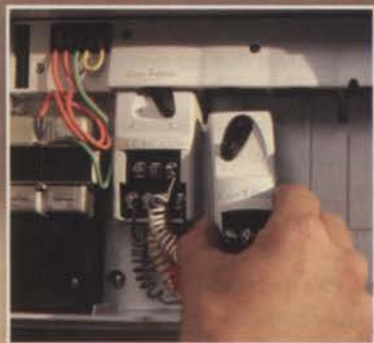
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USE READER SERVICE #79

Turf Renovation

(continued from page 86)

tation to it, it's important that the contractor only treat the areas that are necessary."

Brophy's advice to contractors is to estimate how much of the lawn is damaged before choosing a solution. "If 50 percent of the lawn is still looking good, instead of going in with an overseeder and ripping up the rest of the lawn that's still alive, use an aerator, loosen it up, fertilize it, give it a little TLC for a few weeks and it'll come back," he says.

Of course, contractors and manufacturers both know that, occasionally, pulling out the heavy machinery is necessary.

CHOOSING THE BRUSH. A little warm, soapy water won't bring a faded painting back to life, and for lawns, contractors need to have the right restoration tools, as well.

Depending on the size and type of problem, contractors can choose from a wide variety of turf renovation equipment: Core aerators, dethatchers and power rakes, spreaders, slit seeders, sod cutters and the list goes on. But

Quick TIP

For clients who want dead or bare spots on their lawns filled in immediately, using a sod cutter in the renovation process is the best way to go. But instead of cutting out the damaged areas and purchasing new sod to fill them in, contractors may be able to save some legwork and bring in extra revenue at the same time.

"You can actually transplant healthy turf or soil from one part of the yard to a different area that needs new sod," points out Mark Schueller, marketing manager, Bluebird, Charlotte, N.C. "If clients want a new plant bed in the front yard, contractors can take the sod from there to fill in dead areas and create the area for the bed at the same time." Not only does this help ensure that the patched areas will blend with the rest of the lawn, but with turf problems fixed and a lovely new enhancement to boot, contractors and clients both walk away happy. — Lauren Spiers

having all of these pieces of equipment on hand isn't necessary.

Core aerators seem to be the most popular machines, because many contractors offer restorative aeration in their maintenance packages. "Core aeration and power raking

are frequently offered as maintenance to your lawn to get rid of the thatch layer and keep the soil from being overly compacted," Richardson explains. By removing large plugs of compacted soil, aerators loosen turf,

(continued on page 90)

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Turf Renovation

(continued from page 88)

allowing it to take in more nutrients. Similarly, power rakes and dethatchers rid the lawn of dead, matted organic material so water, food and light can reach the soil.

But in instances where problems have gone untreated for too long and lawns are overrun by insects or disease, after curing the problem, contractors may want to consider using a slit seeder or overseeder to fill in bare patches. "Slit seeders actually cut little rows into the soil, and tubes are lined up behind the blades to drop seeds right in the rows," explains Mark Schueller, marketing manager, Bluebird, Charlotte, N.C. Once the seeds are sown into the freshly cut rows about ¼ inch deep, a flap on the back of the slit seeder covers the seeds to ensure good soil contact and a high germination rate.

For clients who want instant gratification or whose active families would track mud into the house while their new grass is growing, manufacturers offer sod cutters to remove dead spots one chunk at a time and

fill them in with new, healthy pieces of sod.

Generally, these turf renovation machines are all user-friendly, but there's always wallet-friendliness to address as well. For the most part, prices for aerators can run anywhere from \$1,400 to \$2,000 while sod cutters cost about \$2,700. Additionally, prices for dethatchers can range from \$800 to \$1,300.

"Lawn renovation is a highly profitable part of the business," Monroe comments. "You can take your existing customer base and increase the annual revenues you get from it. Because of that, you can recover equipment costs pretty quickly, with one exception being the slit seeder."

On the pricier side, slit seeders can cost in the \$1,500 to \$4,000 range for a high-



By offering core aeration as a maintenance service, contractors can bring in extra revenue while opening up clients' compacted lawns. Photo: Ryan

quality model, though some price tags can read as high as \$10,000. Manufacturers advise contractors to consider frequency of use before buying any piece of equipment.

"If [contractors] are renting a piece of machinery 10 times per year and it's under \$5,000, they're much better off buying it," Brophy calculates. "But if

it's over \$5,000 and they're only using it two or three times per year, renting is better. You'll have to pay for some driving time [to pick up the machine] and rental fees, but you're not going to have a \$6,000 piece of equipment sitting on the books." Additionally, Brophy notes that renting can be a good way to "test drive" different renovation equipment and models.

(continued on page 92)

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Turf Renovation

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Schuller notes that, depending on the rental outlet, aerator rental fees can usually run about \$25 to \$75 for half-day or full-day rental, respectively, while dethatchers can go for \$50 to \$75. Half-day and full-day prices for dethatchers run about \$25 and \$40 respectively, with slightly higher prices of \$30 and \$45 are common for slit seeders.

CREATING THE MASTERPIECE. With the proper equipment in hand, contractors can draw from their palate of techniques and knowledge for effective lawn restoration. That is, after they consider the weather.

"Reseeding with an overseeder or slit seeder is best during the early spring," Brophy comments. "After you seed, those areas need to be watered everyday for about three weeks. You want to get that done before the summer heat."

Busch agrees, adding, "it's not always possible to water turf as often in hot weather. Without watering, seeding just won't work. A sod replacement tends to be something that we

do in the hotter months - July, August, or sometimes even September."

Brophy explains that sod has a better chance of surviving in hot weather because the plant is already mature and can better handle ultraviolet rays and less water.

Of course, reasonable minds can differ. "The best time to renovate is in the fall," Richardson says. "The temperatures are more nominal and the moisture content in the soil is more constant." Additionally, Richardson advises offering fall core aeration services for maintenance packages.

After establishing the best time to renovate, putting down the seed or sod comes next. For sodding, the process is relatively easy. Contractors should use a sod cutter to remove the damaged turf and underlying soil layer, and then fill in the area with new sod. Busch recommends watering everyday for about two weeks to establish the sod.

Without a doubt, seeding takes significantly more time because of the several steps

involved. "If you want a completely new stand of seed, you first need to kill the lawn with a [non-selective herbicide]," Monroe explains. "Then you can cut it very short with a lawn mower - to about 1 or 1½ inches. From there, you can go in with the overseeder and put the new seeds down on the lawn."

Monroe and Brophy both insist on overseeding lawns twice, with the second pass at a 30- to 45-degree angle to the first. This practice gives the lawn better coverage by eliminating any spots that a single pass would miss, they explain. The resulting diamond-shaped pattern keeps seeded lawns from looking like a farmer's field with very even planting rows. This illusion of a filled-in lawn keeps clients happy. After seeding, lawns should be watered everyday for three weeks so the seeds take hold and grow properly. **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at lspiers@lawnandlandscape.com.

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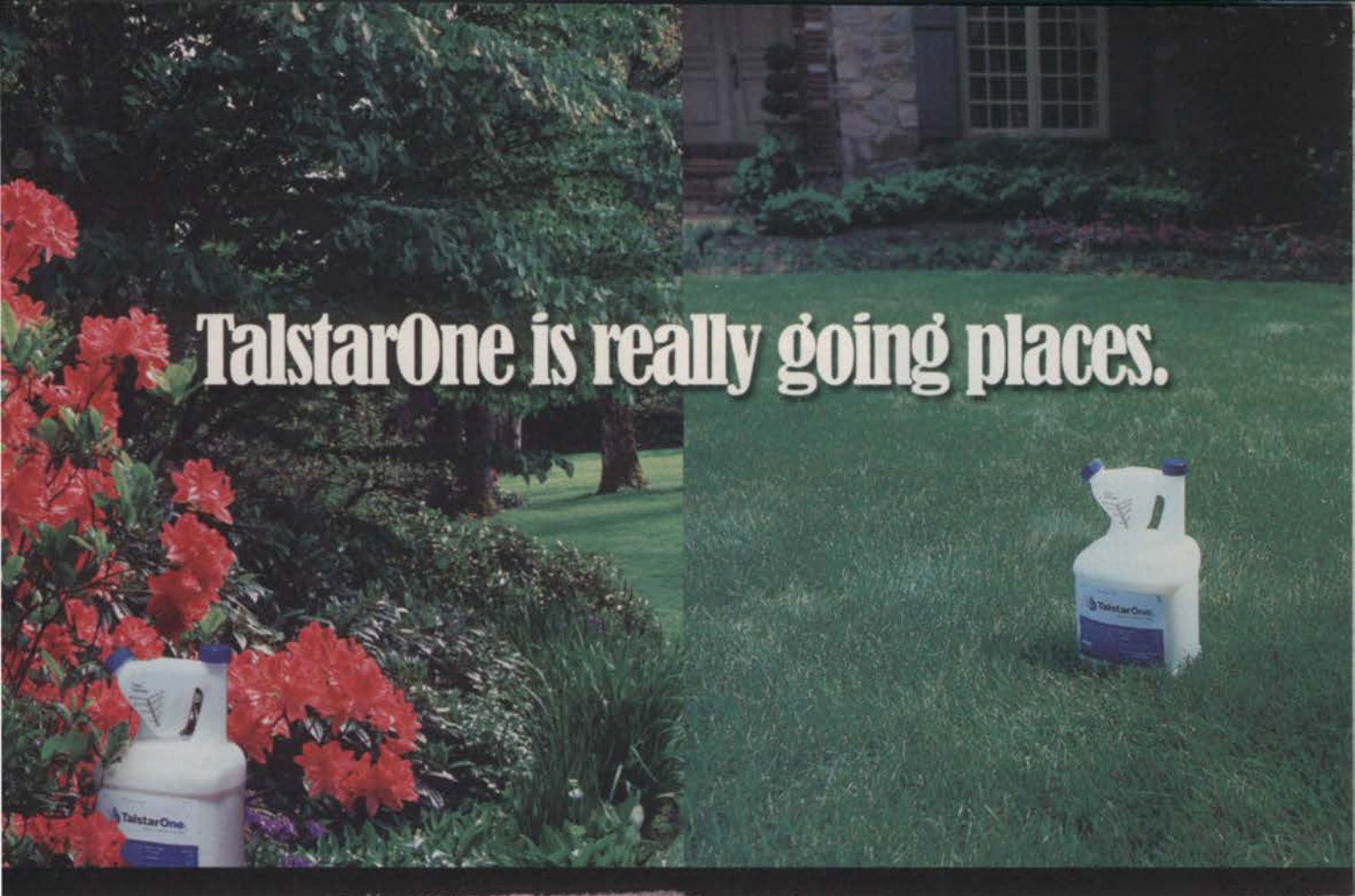
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Insurance Basics

by Lauren Spiers

Paying for insurance is a business necessity. Learn how to effectively and economically protect yourself and preserve your employees' livelihood.

An interesting phenomenon in the professional world occurs as hard workers gain increasing amounts of responsibility over time: They begin to question themselves.

What if the client doesn't accept my proposal? What if I can't keep my crew on schedule and under budget? What if the neighbor's dog digs up the impatiens I'm planting and the customer blames me?

Rational or irrational as these worries may be, playing the "what if" game can have a negative impact on the overall mood of a company and the presence it puts across to its clients. However, no amount of positive visualization, hard work or effective systems can protect a business against the "what ifs" of property liability or employee safety. To protect against those business uncertainties, company owners must invest in the right types and amounts of insurance for their operations.

COVERING THE BASES. "Insurance provides a level of comfort for when we can't get the results a customer wants or something else happens because of factors beyond our control," comments Dwight Wolfe, owner/operator, Weed Man, Albany, Ore. "We're given the opportunity to correct or be reimbursed for certain situations without sacrificing the entire business because of incidents we can't foresee."

Though regularly shelling out cash for insurance may seem like a waste of money for owners who never need to file a claim, paying monthly premiums is like money in the bank should any catastrophic damage occur. But insurance for green industry businesses can be quite different from the average homeowner's property, auto or health coverages. Having the appropriate types of coverage – even for small companies – is essential.

"A fledgling landscape contractor [or lawn care operator] must have certain basic insurance in order to conduct business," insists John Hodapp, senior vice president, Hortica Insurance, Edwardsville, Ill. "The most basic coverages would include property insurance on buildings, their contents, equipment, etc.; business liability insurance for slip-and-fall situations or other damage; business auto insurance; and workers compensation insurance that meets state requirements."

To create a more comprehensive safety net to cover employees and equipment, Michael Weisburger, president, B. & D.A. Weisburger Insurance, White Plains, N.Y., also suggests considering the following types of insurance:

- "Umbrella" coverage from which a business owner can draw in the face of a catastrophic liability loss.
- Equipment "floater" to cover equipment while it is away from the company's office.

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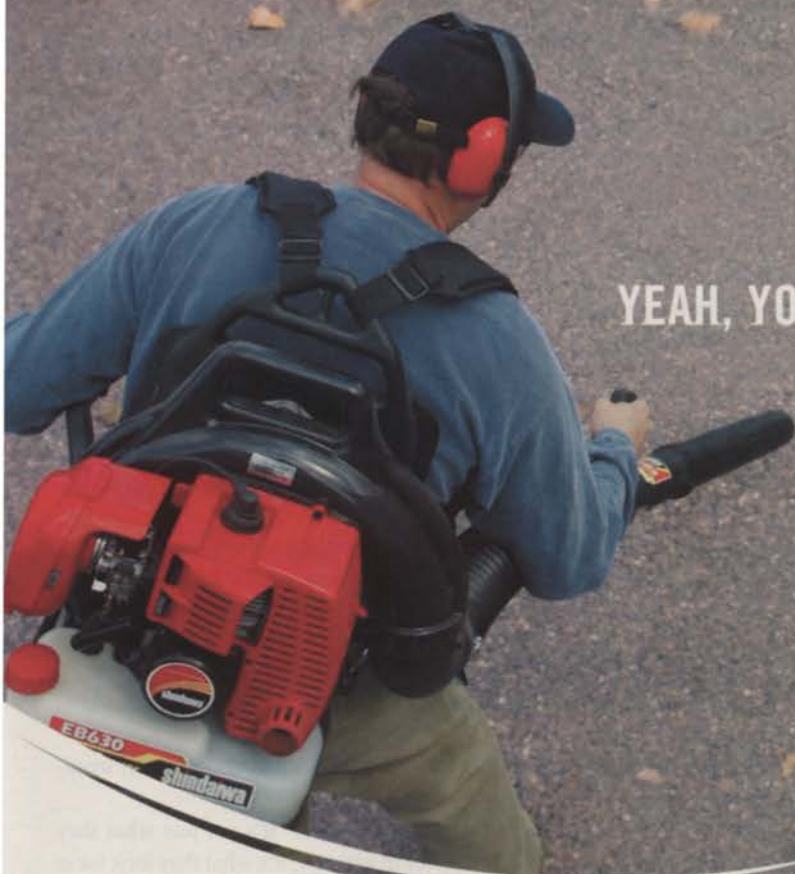
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Insurance Basics

(continued from page 94)

- Spill/over-turn coverage to assist in clean-up costs if chemicals are spilled in transit.
- State disability coverage in states where it's required.
- Worker's compensation coverage where it's required.
- Group health insurance to provide health care benefits to employees.

Additionally, Hodapp mentions that some customers – especially large commercial accounts – may require a certificate of insurance showing at least these basic coverages before a contractor can work on their premises.

"Contractors may also find that if they have higher limits of coverage, particularly general liability coverage, they may be more likely to win larger commercial accounts," Weisburger adds.

Though many general insurance carriers will provide the fundamental lines of coverage for small businesses, some agencies also provide green industry-specific insurance that contractors should be aware of. Spill/over-turn coverage is one example, and some carriers offer coverage for companies whose technicians apply pesticides, as well.

"If a pollution claim should occur for which our insured is liable, applicator liability coverage would respond," explains Terry Stevens, assistant vice president of casualty underwriting, CNA insurance, Chicago, Ill. "This would usually be for situations in which a third party – a homeowner or neighbor, for instance – is adversely affected by a pesticide application."

Stevens also mentions a "design services liability endorsement" that carriers with green-industry clients may offer. "This is a type of coverage that protects against errors and omissions in designs or landscape displays," he notes. "It protects against professional liability exposure and our clients who are contractors really see the value in that."

With so many important lines of coverage available to contractors, developing an appropriate insurance policy for a given company requires the know-how of an experienced insurance agent.

BROKER BASICS. The majority of landscape contractors and lawn care op-



Between writing contracts and printing job costing reports, legalese and computer-ese are just two "languages" business owners must learn to operate their companies effectively.

Another business area with lots of confusing lingo is insurance, but sorting through the perplexing verbiage is necessary to keep a company safe. By working with an experienced broker and using the list below, provided by United Agencies Insurance, Pasadena, Calif., contractors can better understand what their insurance policies say.

ACTUAL CASH VALUE: The sum of money required to pay for damages or lost property, computed on the basis of replacement value, minus depreciation by obsolescence or general wear.

BUSINESS LIABILITY: Describes the liability coverages provided by the Business Owners Liability Coverage Form. Includes liability for bodily injury, property damage, personal injury, advertising injury, and fire damage.

COMMERCIAL GENERAL LIABILITY (CGL) COVERAGE PART: General liability coverage, which may be written as a monoline policy or part of a commercial package.

FLOATER POLICY: A policy under the terms of which protection follows moveable property, covering it wherever it may be.

HAZARD: A specific situation that increases the probability of the occurrence of loss arising from a peril, or that may influence the extent of the loss. Slippery floors, unsanitary conditions, congested traffic, and uninspected boilers are hazards.

HIRED AUTOMOBILE: Autos the insured leases, hires, rents or borrows but not autos owned by employees or members of their households.

LIABILITY INSURANCE: That insurance that pays and renders service on behalf of an insured for loss arising out of his responsibility, due to negligence, to others imposed by law or assumed by contract.

PROPERTY INSURANCE: Insurance which indemnifies a person with an interest in physical property for its loss or the loss of its income-producing ability.

REPLACEMENT COST: The cost of replacing property without a deduction for depreciation.

UMBRELLA LIABILITY POLICY: A liability policy designed to provide protection above and beyond that provided by standard liability contracts. – *Lauren Spiers*

Insurance: Defined

erators encourage their potential clients to hire them based on the quality of their services, rather than seek out the least expensive offer in town. This also should be the guiding principle when contractors are choosing an insurance agency.

"Today there are plenty of brokers who specialize in the green industry," observes Mark Shipp, senior vice president, Ogilvy Hill Insurance, Santa Barbara, Calif. "What the insurance consumer in the green industry wants to do is select a broker who has a multitude of experience in the green industry; it's someone the contractor should see as an extension of their management team."

Additionally, Shipp encourages business owners to specifically choose an insurance agent rather than an insurance company. (See "Insurance Interview" on page 98 for

questions to ask when choosing an insurance agent.)

Stevens agrees. "It's not just what they look for in a carrier, it's what they look for in an agent," he remarks. "The insurance agent should be accessible and should understand the customer's business."

Those attributes were at the top of Wolfe's list as he searched for a broker. "I was looking for someone I trusted and who was familiar with my line of work," he says. "I chose an agent who was affiliated with a provider that the Professional Lawn Care Association of America recommended. It's important to find an agent who is easy to contact and quick to respond – especially in this day and age of phone, fax and email. Finding someone who's responsive and who you can really talk to about your business is critical."

By hiring a broker who is familiar with green industry businesses and how they work, contractors are able to put more trust

(continued on page 98)

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USE READER SERVICE #90

Insurance Basics

(continued from page 96)

into that individual with respect to important insurance policy decisions.

"When you find a broker that fits your business, they'll build a scenario around your company so you can develop a policy that best represents your business," Shipp details. He explains that a broker who becomes a company's "trusted advisor" will work hard to put a contractor's insurance dollars in the right place.

"For example, if an automobile is old, it's probably not very expensive to have physical damage coverage on it, and there's a reason for that," Shipp continues. "There won't be a high pay-out for the automobile if it's totaled, so the company has to ask itself if that's something they're willing to self-insure. If that's the case then you can either take that premium out or put it towards an umbrella policy or an additional layer of umbrella coverage that will safeguard the more important or expensive aspects of the business."

Just as you would interview prospective employees to fill a position, interviewing prospective insurance agents is essential to find the right person to help you protect your business.

"Typically, you should ask open-ended questions so as to elicit the most information available about the broker and his or her company," comments Mark Shipp, senior vice president, Ogilvy Hill Insurance, Santa Barbara, Calif. "You want to make sure you'll be working with someone who understands both the insurance industry and the green industry."

Shipp offered the following list of questions to ask when choosing a broker:

- Tell me about your experience in the green industry?
- What kind of services does your agency provide?
- What makes your agency unique from other insurance carriers?
- Tell me about your claim handling process?
- What are your favorite insurance markets? Why? How are they doing?
- Can you give me some references of other clients you've worked with?

Insurance Interview

Nearly all insurance providers advise business owners to sit down with their agent at least once per year to review and revise each insurance policy.

"At a minimum, a policy should be reviewed on an annual basis," Hodapp confirms. "Of course, whenever there are sig-

nificant changes, such as the acquisition of new property or equipment, or changes to the business, such as venturing into new areas or service segments, significant growth or hiring more employees, a contractor would be well advised to meet with his or her

(continued on page 100)

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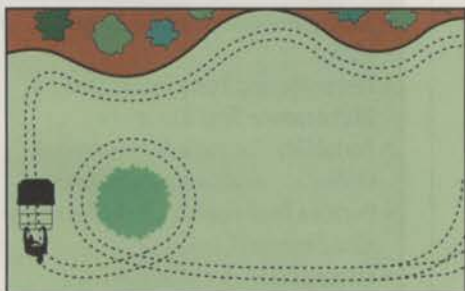
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USE READER SERVICE #93

Insurance Basics

(continued from page 98)

insurance agent to discuss the changes the business is undergoing and any potential insurance implications."

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY. Because green industry professionals work in an industry with a certain amount of risk involved – especially those who work with pesticides, heavy machinery or potentially hazardous areas like tree care – finding an insurance company willing to cover that risk can be challenging.

Additionally, recent economic situations in the United States have significantly lowered insurance companies' incomes from stock market investments.

"In an environment where stock market investments aren't enough to provide the appropriate returns and capital, insurance companies are taking it upon themselves to be very selective as to where they want to provide coverage and which lines they're willing to write," Weisburger notes.

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Carrier Contacts

Business owners, however, have a couple of options in order to make themselves more attractive prospects to potential agencies.

"It all boils down to two words: Risk management," Stevens asserts. "Having some kind of documented employee safety plan in place is key to keeping down insur-

ance costs by keeping claims to a minimum. Companies who have fewer claims will have lower loss dollars and those with lower loss dollars will, by and large, have more economical insurance premiums."

For exactly this reason, Wolfe carries a

(continued on page 122)

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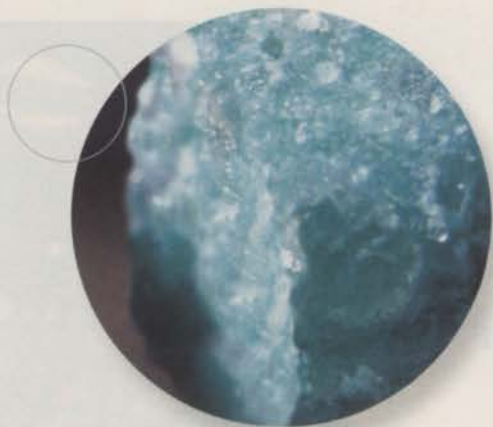
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USE READER SERVICE #91

USE READER SERVICE #92

Work with Control

by Nicole Wiatrowski



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USE READER SERVICE #94

by Nicole Wisniewski

Contractors enhance exterior spaces with landscape containers. Scan this section to learn design, plant selection and maintenance tips.



Photo: Kerstin P. Ouellet

THE Container CONNECTION

Forget bland expanses of concrete void of color. Contractors don't need heaps of soil and sprawling outdoor spaces with room for annual beds to boost landscape vigor. Just add containers and watch a garden erupt from decorative pots and planters.

Containers give landscape contractors flexibility to spruce up clients' sites because they come in various sizes, materials, colors, groupings and uses. Containers are more than just small space solutions – they enhance almost any exterior element.

"The magical part of containers is that they adapt to virtually all outdoor environments," points out Annie Huston, partner, Columbine Design, Englewood, Colo.

For instance, containers are perfect for adding softness and color to diminutive courtyards or ter-

aces, Huston suggests. And in large spaces like patios and swimming pool decks, containers can separate a section into smaller, more inviting nooks. Additionally, "window containers can display colorful or formal compositions," Huston says, "while containers with annuals and vegetables or herbs for culinary use and fragrance can frame a French door by a kitchen."

Containers hidden within perennial borders add an eclectic element and water gardens in containers bring a tropical feel to the landscape, Huston adds, just as framing entrances or large estates with formal stone or concrete containers gives otherwise empty spaces height, interest and texture.

CONTAINERS ADD CLASS. Container gardens are growing significantly in popularity, says Kerstin Ouellet, president, Pen & Petal, Fallbrook, Calif. In fact, according to the National Gardening Association, containers are the

(continued on page 104)



Photo: Ball Horticultural Co.

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USE READER SERVICE #100

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fastest growing consumer lawn and garden sales category. "But that's no surprise, especially if you've been watching container gardens gain popularity in Europe over the last 15 years," Ouellet points out.

The reason containers are all the rage is because they allow homeowners to extend landscapes into entertainment areas, such as patios, decks and near pools. They also are easy to move around if they get in the way, can be quickly planted and require no weeding, Ouellet says. "You can also change their design very quickly – much faster than if you had to replant an entire flowerbed."

Though Huston doesn't use containers in every client's landscape when she first installs projects, she says they are almost always incorporated later to augment various areas. "We usually give the homeowners time to live with their outdoor spaces and get a feeling of exactly how they are using them," she remarks, adding that her client base is made up of primarily residential customers. "Then we usually go back the following year and assess the different areas where containers would add relief, color or interest in general, without restricting traffic flow."

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COLOR Clues

here are several ways to use color to boost container garden interest, according to Terri Starman, department of horticultural sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. Two common ways are using color echoing and the different color harmonies.

Color echoing is repeating color from one cultivar to another, Starman says. "For example, using a white flower to echo the white in green and white variegated foliage," she describes. "Repetition of any design element adds rhythm and leads your customer's eye around and around the design, not letting them take their eyes off of it."

Concerning color harmonies, there are five main hue groupings contractors can use to create the right effects in clients' landscapes.

- 1. MONOCHROMATIC** – While lightness, darkness or strength of color may vary with this harmony, only one color is used to give a quiet and soothing effect.
 - 2. ANALOGOUS** – Use colors closely related to one another to provide a slightly more dramatic effect.
 - 3. COMPLEMENTARY** – Use colors opposite to one another to demand attention.
 - 4. NEUTRAL** – With this scheme, contractors use shades of black, gray and white to add depth to the composition. Neutral colors make other colors look brighter and deeper, divide colors that clash, tone down complementary color schemes in daylight and glow in the dark.
 - 5. POLYCHROMATIC** – This harmony incorporates a mixture of many colors.
- Nicole Wisniewski



Photo: Kerstin P. Ouellet

CONTAINER Design Principles

Just because contractors are installing plant material into containers doesn't mean they don't need design experience or inspiration. "There are several design principles contractors should take into consideration when planning their clients' container gardens," insists Terri Starman, department of horticultural sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. Here are the basics:

FOCUS – This is the point or area where the eye is drawn first. Place the focus below the tallest point to achieve balance. Develop focus by using large, coarse or bright-colored plant material in that area. All plant material should radiate out from the focus.

FORM – Vary the form of the plant material you choose. Use tall linear species to add height, mounded species to add mass and low growing, cascading species to fill in, add depth and soften container edges.

BALANCE – This produces a feeling of stability. Symmetrical balance is equal, almost identical elements on each side of a central axis, with the highest point over the center. Asymmetrical balance is when the two sides of the central axis are not mirror images but have the same visual weight.

TEXTURE – Add coarse-, medium- and fine-textured plants together. Use variation and gradation of form and texture – three to five species will achieve an adequate assortment.

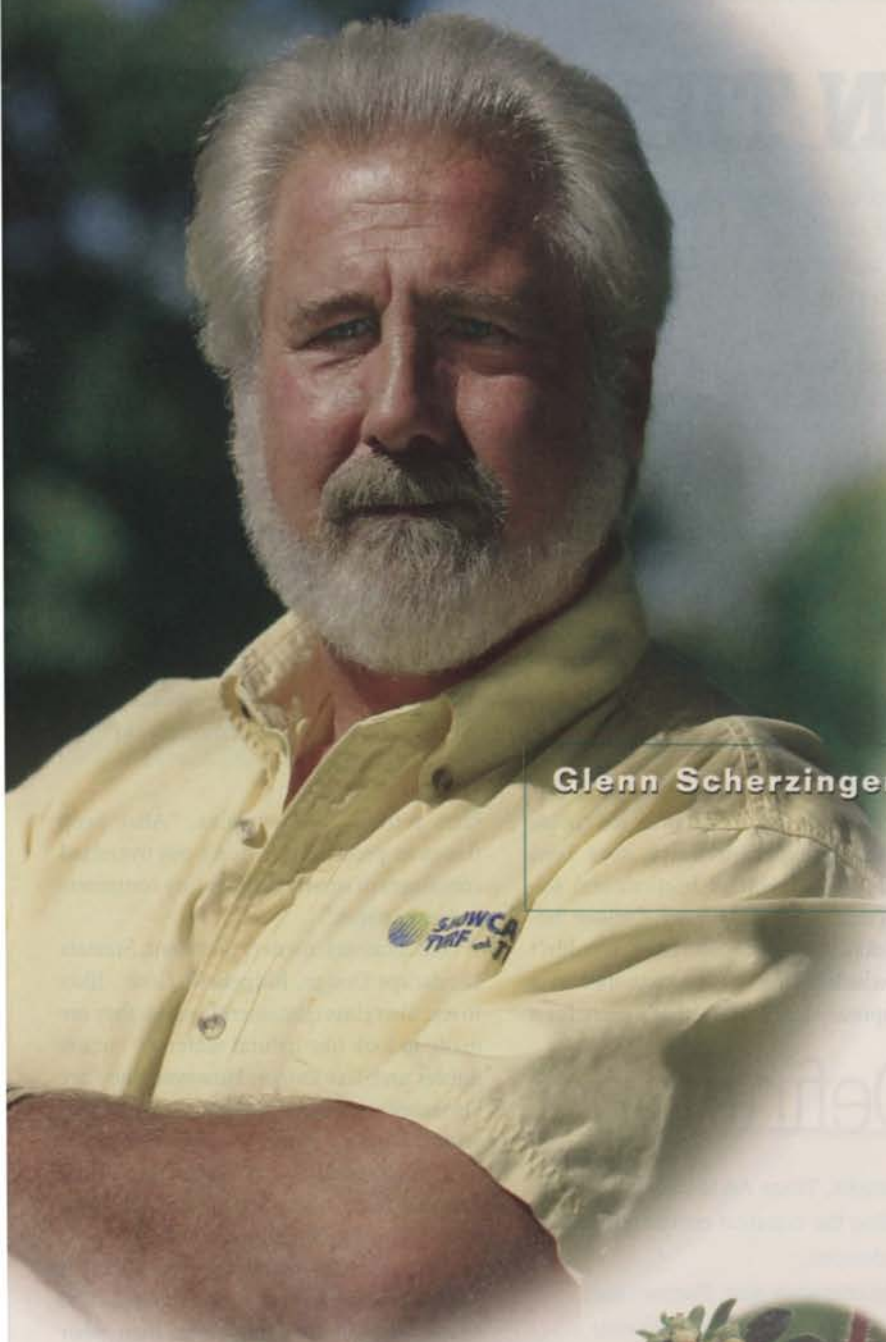
RHYTHM – Repeat color at regular intervals around the outside of a round container or along the length of a long rectangular container. Repeat color in several containers to tie them together. Graceful lines of plant leaves add flow and rhythm.

PROPORTION – Use larger plants and/or more plants in larger containers, and less and/or smaller plants in small containers. The rule of thumb is the height of the tallest plant should not exceed one to two times the height of the container excluding pedestals. It's visually best to use odd numbers, such as one, three, five or seven plants or plugs of each cultivar.

– Nicole Wisniewski



Photo: Kerstin P. Ouellet



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Quick DESIGN TIPS

Even when presented with design principles, color blending tips and plant positioning ideas, contractors can still be nervous about planting in unfamiliar and restricted soil, such as that in containers. For that reason, Terri Starman, department of horticultural sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, recommends contractors keep in mind these eight proven container design tips when creating their next eye-catching plant pots.

1. Mix plants with at least three textures of foliage to make a container garden interesting.
2. Use plenty of foliage plants in your designs. In most cases, foliage color, leaf shape and texture are just as important as the flowers themselves. Some proven foliage contrasts include: downy with glossy; dark with gray; small with large; yellow with violet.
3. Use colorful foliage (like Coleus) to "echo" the color of flowers in the container.

4. Vary flower shapes in container gardens to add interest.

5. Bicolor flowers are becoming more available and are great for color echoing.

6. Sometimes you just have to do some "snipping and tucking" of faster growing plants when they are mixed in with slower growing ones. Otherwise, you will lose the slower ones and destroy your designs.

7. Vegetative annuals mix well with other annuals, perennials, tropicals and bulbs. Everything and anything goes as long as it is pleasing to the eye of your customer.

8. Nothing lasts forever. Container gardens need to be maintained. Contractors should trim, deadhead and replace container garden plants as necessary. — *Nicole Wisniewski*



Photo: Ball Horticultural Co.

CONTAINER CHOICES. Containers are available in a wide range of materials and styles to match clients' homes or planting schemes. Some are natural looking like stone or terra cotta, while others are shiny and metallic for more modern, contemporary landscape settings.

Choosing the right container for clients just takes an experienced eye, says Terri Starman, department of horticultural sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. "A good contractor wouldn't put a whiskey barrel type container in a contemporary landscape — that's more for a

farm setting," she explains. "Also, keep things in proportion — don't put oversized containers in small spaces or tiny containers in large spaces."

B.B. Stamats, owner/president, Stamats Landscape Design, Ridgefield, Conn., likes to use fiberglass containers because they are made to look like natural materials but are lighter and last longer. However, they are also more expensive — an 18-inch tall, 20-inch wide fiberglass container may cost about \$120 and last for 10 years, while a thermalite-sprayed foam container of the same size costs \$35 or \$45 but may not last as long.

Fiberglass, thermalite-sprayed foam and polyurethane-sprayed wood containers will sustain winters outdoors better than other materials like terra cotta that are less able to handle freezing temperatures.

However, contractors have a wider materials selection in warmer climates like Colorado, where Huston uses terra cotta and concrete most frequently. "We try to stay away from the plastic containers that do not look good by themselves, but if we have to plant them, we use a lot of trailing annuals so that the unappealing containers will be covered and hidden in mid-season," Huston explains. "We sometimes match the containers to the surrounding architectural materials or we use containers that will offer a

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POSITION Definitions

Terri Starman, department of horticultural sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, says that understanding the common container plant positions can help contractors create better potted designs.

Depending on container size, Starman says contractors can install plants in the following four different positions.

CENTER — This position provides compact, upright growth to fill the container's crown.

FILLER — Plants in this spot also have compact, upright growth, but they are meant to round out the top of the container.

CORNER — Plants placed here grow well over the container's edge and benefit from a corner position where they have maximum elbowroom.

EDGE — Materials planted on container edges drape over the sides, softening the look of the

container and filling the space between its corners. — *Nicole Wisniewski*



Photo: Ball Horticultural Co.

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USE READER SERVICE #107

(continued from page 106)

sharp contrast. When in a very windy location, we use heavier material. When using terra cotta, we try to stick to Italian terra cotta, which is usually of a better quality than the Mexican clay containers. Some Chinese containers have provided a good option as well."

The reason contractors want to incorporate the most durable materials into clients' properties is because of their ability to add four-season interest and extend landscape life. For instance, "after one summer, they can be planted with pansies for the fall and early spring," Huston points out.

For year-long container interest, Stamats starts with bulbs, annuals and perennials mixed with "edgers" like Elysium and ivy in the springtime. In the summer, annuals like Coleus and potato vine provide maximum color—Stamats current favorite is chartreuse. Then, during fall, she incorporates ornamental kale, mums and pumpkins. To round out the year in winter, she adds needled and broadleaf evergreens.

"Containers are now so varied and beautiful that they become a permanent fixture in the landscape and not just a seasonal element that ends up in the garage after one summer," Huston explains.

PLANT POINTERS. Though easy to plant, containers don't maintain themselves, especially through the changing seasons.

For extended container life from the start, add topsoil to the mix to enrich it, Stamats suggests, advising that contractors also add super absorbent gel beads to the soil to help pots retain moisture. "These beads look like salt or tapioca beads and swell to 200 times their size when water is added to them," she says. "Then these beads release water back into the soil over time, helping containers maintain a more constant water capacity vs. drying out completely and then having to get wet again—that's the worst thing for containers."

Another key tip for containers is ensuring that adequate drainage exists, Stamats says.

lawndandscape.com

Visit the September issue online for a list of container manufacturers and their contact information.

On her favorite types of containers—fiberglass and thermalite—Stamats drills in her own drainage holes. For pots less than 22 inches in diameter, she puts a quarter-size hole in the middle. For containers that are more than 22 inches in diameter, she puts the same hole in the center but adds a few pencil-sized holes around that for additional drainage. Then, Stamats incorporates a weed mat into the bottom of containers before adding soil to ensure drainage holes don't clog.

When choosing container size, Ouellet reminds contractors that smaller pots dry out faster than larger ones. "Generally, sizes of 14- to 20-inch outside dimensions are popular for private residential properties because they are still manageable if they have to be moved around," she says. "Larger ones are hard to

MAINTENANCE Matters

Just because containers limit plant growth doesn't mean they need any less maintenance than a regular landscape bed.

"And containers must look their best at all times because they are often in prime locations," explains B.B. Stamats, owner/president, Stamats Landscape Design, Ridgefield, Conn.

To promote long container plant life, Stamats suggests the following year-long maintenance schedule.

SPRING—As weather permits, remove most mulch from bulbs in pots for spring display. When planting, pinch perennials and annuals to promote bushiness. At the end of May, move clients' indoor container plants outside and move potted winter conifers and broadleaf evergreens to less prominent spots in the garden, top dressing and repotting if necessary. Add shims. Shape, prune or shear container shrubs and trees.

SUMMER—Initiate 14-14-14 slow-release fertilizer by mid-July (applying the product at 10- to 14-day intervals), shear edging plants and petunias and spray for pests (white flies, aphids, etc.). Check that all pots drain well and still have sufficient mulch on soil surfaces. Water wisely.

AUTUMN—Stop feeding perennials, shear annual edgers

again and feed with fertilizer high in nitrogen. Repot plants if necessary and bring clients' indoor plants into their homes at the beginning of September. Refresh some containers with fall material and by mid-

November, change to winter hardy plants or put evergreen pots back in fall/winter locations. Use cold water when keeping pots wet. Dry and store corms, tubers, etc. Pre-pot bulbs and/or plants directly into pots for spring. Water and mulch well. Remove shims.

WINTER—Continue to water pots with cold water all winter until strong freezes occur. Store non-freeze-resistant pots in a dry place. Use anti-desiccants on broad-leaved evergreens, repeating in six to seven weeks. Wrap deciduous shrubs/trees as needed. Decorate clients' potted evergreens with festive holiday lights. —Nicole Wisniewski



Photo: Ball Horticultural Co.

Quick TIP

For commercial clients who want added security in front of their offices, flank building facades with 3 to 4 feet wide, heavy stone containers to boost safety as well as aesthetics, advises B.B. Stamats, owner/president, Stamats Landscape Design, Ridgefield, Conn.


Contractors have increased this type of service since 9/11, when additional security in front of commercial building entrances became a higher business priority, Stamats says. — Nicole Wisniewski

move and smaller ones dry out faster and have fewer design possibilities because of the limited space. Large commercial properties often have larger containers. Keep in mind that some container manufacturers list outside dimensions, while others list inside dimensions, and the rim is often 1-inch thick or more.

Before choosing plant material for containers, contractors should think about placement — whether in full sun, full shade or part-sun/part-shade. “Full sun containers will be a lot more colorful, fun, exotic, showy and will offer a greater variety in colors, textures and heights than the shady containers,” Huston says. “On the other end, even though the palette for shady containers is reduced and the colors are less vibrant, they offer the great advantage of being very elegant, understated, detailed and refined.”

For shade containers, Huston’s favorite plants are red or pink begonias, white impatiens, lime Ipomoea, sweet potato vine and New Guinea impatiens. In sunny spots, she prefers verbenas, lantanas and Wave petunias.

When selling containers to clients, Columbine Design presents their customers with an extensive portfolio showing the different containers available to them, empty and planted, Huston says.

“We then make recommendations based on where they intend to have these containers in their yard,” Huston explains. “We always stress the point that no matter what we do in the containers, they will need to be maintained and watered in order to bloom and be healthy. If they are too far in the garden or in a difficult place to water, we know that the customer will not water as regularly as necessary and the containers will not perform for them. So ease of access for the customer to water is very important. Entrance containers will be a lot more formal in their material and the plantings than back yard containers. We like to recommend larger containers rather than smaller ones. Larger containers are easier to keep watered and offer more flexibility in the plants we use for the design. A mistake [contractors] often make is to use containers that are too small to make a statement and get lost in the scale of the surroundings.” 

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

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USE READER SERVICE #106

PART II:

The Death of Business Ethics?

Editor's Note: Corporate America is facing an ethical dilemma: job seekers, recruits, and even current employees are questioning companies' ethical standards and practices. In light of this, no organization can afford to ignore the liabilities born out of unethical behavior.

This column is the second in a two-part series addressing corporate ethics. Part one appeared in the August issue.

ETHICS TO THE TEST. Are you prepared to demonstrate your company's commitment to ethical behavior? Find out how your company measures up by analyzing responses to these questions.

- Are screening and hiring practices based on your company's business values, ethics and integrity?
- Is integrity emphasized in your training?
- Is there a toll-free employee hotline for your employees to anonymously report potential ethical, immoral, illegal or fraudulent behavior? (Don't confuse ethics with legal issues. What is legal is often unethical.)
- Do people with integrity and positive moral values advance in your company?
- Do performance measurements consider how people perform against your values?
- Are employees rewarded or given positive recognition for ethical behavior?
- Are bonuses or pay plans based in part on ethics?
- Do board bylaws require full disclosure of potential ethical dilemmas? Are your board members free from any real or perceived conflicts of interest?
- Do your company systems and processes (billing, financial, and others) inadvertently encourage unethical behavior or do they conflict with your values? (For example, do you preach about quality or customer service, but then demand that employees "hit the numbers," forcing them to compromise quality or service standards?)

REVISIT YOUR POLICY. If you haven't reviewed or updated your company policy on ethics, don't delay. Many employee handbooks spell out ethical business practices in a code of conduct or code of ethics. At a minimum, make sure your policy contains these components:

- A statement about the company's values and commitment to integrity, with a strong warning that the company

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



will not tolerate lying, cheating or stealing.

- The company's position on maintaining or engaging in outside business or financial activities that conflict with company interests.

- A requirement that employees and members of the employee's immediate family (define this) not give or accept gifts, favors, entertainment, special accommodations or gratuities worth more than a token value (\$50) to or from anyone with whom the employee conducts business.

- A statement that the company will not tolerate disparaging remarks about the organization, its employees, products, services or customers.

- A requirement that employees conduct their personal and noncompany affairs in such a fashion that their duties and responsibilities to the company are not jeopardized and ethical and/or legal questions do not arise with respect to their association or work with the company.

- A prohibition from giving or receiving anything that could be construed as a bribe, kickback or other illegal or unethical payment.

- A requirement for employees to report any possible violations of ethical business practices to a manager or the owner of the company.

- Anti-retaliation provisions that protect workers who report violations from harassment, demotion or termination based on the report.

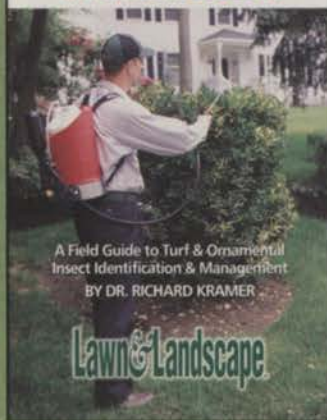
Other activities relating to ethical conduct such as moonlighting, soliciting while at work and noncompete requirements should be spelled out in separate policies or documents.

BE PREPARED. Today, if a potential new hire questions your business values, philosophy or practices and you're uncomfortable with the questions, don't be surprised if the candidate moves on. An unwillingness to openly share information about your company's ethical practices and policies signals shortcomings. It's a two-way street. You demand ethical behavior from your employees and they demand the same from you. **LL**

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Technician's Handbook

A Field Guide To Turf & Ornamental
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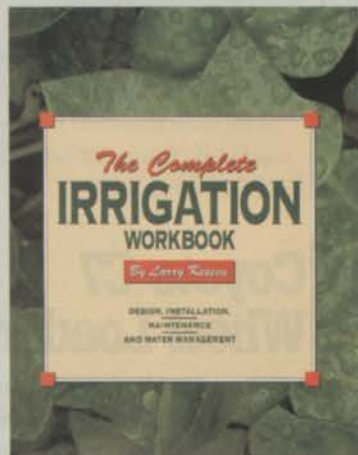
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Cindy Code, Editor

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Coyote C7 Wheel Loader

- One-yard loader features Deutz diesel 40-hp engine with oil-over-air cooling
 - Includes hydraulic rapid changeover system and comfort cab with access from both sides
 - Automatic differential locks on front and rear axles allow for easy operation and simple serviceability
 - Comes standard with quick-change coupler and additional skid loader attachments
- Circle 201 on reader service form**

Grass Catcher System

- Easy on, easy off for greater flexibility
 - Affordable
 - Durable, heavy-duty construction
 - Fabric bags are easy to remove and replace when dumping
 - Available in two- and three-bag models
 - Low-profile design does not restrict the operator's rear view
- Circle 202 on reader service form**

Hiniker HDX Snowplow Line

- Incorporates a number of new design features to handle wet, heavy snowfalls
- Uses a split trip edge with a 9-inch pivot point to provide protection from higher obstacles



- High-density polyethylene moldboard reduces friction and provides a corrosion-free plowing surface
 - Two versions: conventional power-angling design and C-Plow configuration
 - Handheld joystick provides easy, convenient control
- Circle 203 on reader service form**

Red Max EBZ4800 Blower

- Strato-charged backpack blower
 - Exclusive FreeFlow non-clog air intake
 - Extra-large diameter blower tubes for leaf and debris movement
 - Air-conditioned, full-sized, contoured back pad for operator comfort
- Circle 204 on reader service form**



DFS Vac Collection System from Toro

- PTO-driven vacuum bagger
 - Delivers powerful vacuum suction to rapidly draw debris materials into the hopper
 - Top-mounted design protects fan from sand, debris and impact-related damage
 - Impact-resistant, high-strength polyurethane hopper and tube are puncture- and wear-resistant
 - Quick-attach bagger design allows easy conversion from bagging to side discharge in minutes
- Circle 205 on reader service form**

Meteorlite LED Self-contained Directional Warning Lights

- A bright alternative to standard strobe lights and accessories
- Do not require any external power supply materials



- Offer low amp draw
 - Rated at 100,000 hours of life
 - Come in grommet mounted oval or mound head
 - Self-contained
 - Add safety to your equipment
- Circle 206 on reader service form**



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- When in place, secures the ball placement or ring hole, preventing hook-up and theft of your trailer
- Priced affordably

Circle 207 on reader service form

Listo Products' Self-watering Planter

• Includes an internal saucer system that retains excess water and eliminates the risk of exposed water in a separate saucer



- Works as a reservoir, accumulating excess water under the disk in the base of the planter
- Water is stored and absorbed by the plant as needed, which prevents overwatering
- Available in a variety of decorative styles

Circle 208 on reader service form

Echo PB-650 Power Blower

- Offers reliable, commercial-grade power with a comfortable, easy-to-operate design
- Features Echo's 63.3 cc Power Boost engine delivering a maximum air speed of 201 mph and 625 cfm at the pipe
- Diaphragm carburetor ensures the proper mix of fuel and air for optimal engine performance
- Heavy-duty commercial air filtration system eliminates harmful debris from entering the engine
- Special features include the customer's choice of tube- or hip-mounted throttle positions with cruise control that provides for easy and convenient speed adjustments
- Padded backrest conforms to the operator's back and provides good air circulation to help keep the operator cool
- 68-oz. fuel tank
- Standard electronic ignition
- Two-year warranty
- Standard helper handle

Circle 210 on reader service form

Ruud Directional Flood Lights

- Contemporary landscape lighting for a variety of applications
- Top housing cover and gasketing increase the effectiveness of the seal between the filter and cover for the in-ground mount
- Improved seal gives maximum protection from environmental elements
- Die-cast aluminum construction
- Four housing sizes accommodate a range of metal halide, incandescent or low-voltage lamp types

Circle 211 on reader service form



Little Wonder's Extended Reach Hedge Trimmer

- 180-degree blade rotation makes it possible to trim and shape the tallest hedges from the safety of the ground
- Available in 36-inch shaft and 60-inch shaft models
- Works great for hard-to-reach hedges, cutting at different angles
- Fast blade adjustments and ease of use
- Extension shaft extends the 36-inch shaft model to a 60-inch shaft

Circle 212 on reader service form

Eagle Compact Skid Steer from Finn

- Rugged frame construction and 25-hp engine
- Superior ergonomics
- Can propel through 36- and 48-inch gates
- Universal faceplate allows compatible use of all standard mini skid steer attachments on the market
- Skid, zero-turn and differential steering

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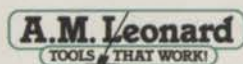
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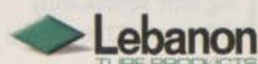
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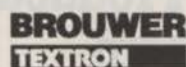
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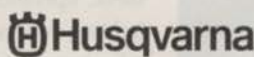
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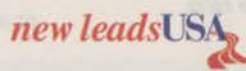
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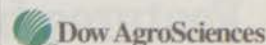
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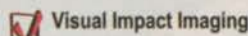
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Ariens Zoom 2252

- Zero-turn mower designed to cut mowing time significantly
- Features 22-hp Briggs & Stratton OHV twin engine
- Qwik Step Lift System helps reduce operator fatigue
- 52-inch steel deck

Circle 213 on reader service form

MS2000 Single Wheel Sulky

- Heavy-duty steel construction
- Large pneumatic tire
- Powder-coated finish
- Large platform with extra footspace
- Easily attaches in minutes to most mid-sized commercial mowers
- Available in short arm (15 inches) and long arm (18 inches)

Circle 214 on reader service form

Easy-to-install Water Features from Replications Unlimited

- Pre-manufactured streams and cascades
- Stream series includes a dozen different



- modular sections that can be combined in a variety of ways
- Molded from real rock formations to appear realistic in shape and color
- Can be added to an existing pond or as a stand-alone unit
- Various shapes, sizes and colors available

Circle 215 on reader service form

DynaTec Water Garden Pumps

- Ideal for waterfalls, streams, large fountains and filter systems
- Each pump has a unidirectional impeller for increased head height and flow
- Three models are available, pumping 1100, 1500 or 2200 gph
- Motors are fully epoxy-encapsulated to protect from water intrusion and overheating
- Three-year limited warranty

Circle 216 on reader service form

John Deere X-Series Mower Line

- Models range in deck size from 48 to 62 inches
- 25-hp engine
- Available with 4-wheel drive or all-wheel steering



- Recently recognized as one of the best new products by the American Society of Agricultural Engineers
- More than 28 implements fit the versatile series

Circle 217 on reader service form

Woods MX Deck

- V-baffle design accelerates airflow, creating a vacuum that forces grass to stand taller
- Allows a more precise, even cut on all types of grass
- New deck choice for the front-mount, zero-turn radius Mow'n Machines
- Decreases downtime and maintenance required
- 5-inch-deep deck handles a larger volume of grass than previous models

Circle 218 on reader service form

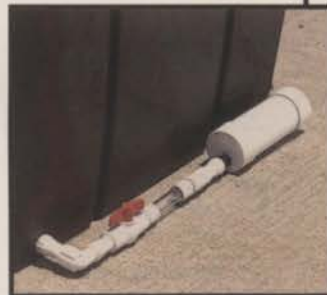
Solid Brass Lighting Products Catalog from Fii Focus

- Designed to meet the functional, aesthetic, operational and economic needs of lighting contractors
- Features a variety of maintenance-free, easy-to-install fixtures
- Includes acid-treated fixtures, raw unfinished brass items, power coat products and other offerings

Circle 219 on reader service form

Ultra-SelfBailer from Storm Water Products

- Allows water to passively drain while filtering devices remove any oil or other hydrocarbons
- Can be connected to almost any outdoor containment system
- PVC components can be assembled in a variety of configurations for easy installation and repair
- Filtering canister is easily removed and replaced
- Manual valve allows instant shutoff



Circle 220 on reader service form

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Win a Husqvarna 165BT Back Pack Blower



The Husqvarna 165BT Back Pack Blower has a 59.2 cc engine that will blow 190 miles per hour with an air volume of 530 cfm at the tube. The blower is also equipped with a comfort foam hip pad, reducing the stress on the shoulders and back. Other features include sound baffling for quiet operation and a translucent 4.6 liter fuel tank.

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Products

MegaGro

- Plant growth stimulator designed to trigger plant growth by stimulating the plant cells directly
- Contains gibberellic acid
- Safe for use on all outdoor foliage and flowers
- Available in a ready-to-use spray bottles or concentrated solution

Circle 221 on reader service form

King Innovation Grips and Wire Mesh Grips

- Designed for pipe pulling and boring pull-backs
- Offer easy coupling and quick-release option to save time and money
- PVC and poly pipe compatibility
- Plated for rust prevention
- Fit all pipe pulling equipment

Circle 222 on reader service form

Hustler 6400 Hillsider

- Combines traction, stability, safety and productivity for slope mowing
- Six-wheel drive
- ROPS for maximum operator protection
- Low center of gravity
- Zero-degree turning
- Trims close to buildings with an excellent quality of cut

Circle 223 on reader service form

FMI Precision Fluid Control

- Model STRH
- Enables precise fluid control in analytical and process instrumentation
- Integrates FMI's patented CeramPump valveless piston pumping principal with precision stepper control

- Ideal for applications requiring both frequent and highly accurate changes in dispense volumes or flow rates
- Low dead volume pump head design ensures maximum bubble clearing
- Head design provides a typical stroke to stroke precision of 0.5 percent or better
- Easy to install
- Affordable

Circle 227 on reader service form

Kobelco ED150 Blade Runner

- Combines the excavator and bulldozer into one machine
- Short radius excavator technology incorporates new methods of counterweight design that result in no tailswing beyond its tracks while maintaining lift capacity
- All dozer functions are controlled by a single lever

Circle 224 on reader service form



EMAS V-Plows



- Allow safe, fast and easy snow removal, even in restricted areas
- Feature multi-positioning wings to divert, collect, stack and blow through snow
- Include high/low sharp blade curvature for less resistance to the carrier
- Optional reinforced rubber, Duraboard edge ensures safe operation in delicate, hard-to-reach areas
- Suitable for skid steers, utility carriers and loaders

Circle 225 on reader service form

Load-n-Lift Hydraulic Trailers from TerraMarc

- Multi-purpose trailers for low-clearance, compact and mobile equipment
- Trailers completely lower the deck to the ground for easy loading and unloading



- An electric hydraulic or manual hand pump makes operation a one-person job
- Available in two models: single axle and double axle
- Deck bed is constructed of treated wood

Circle 226 on reader service form

New Fall Dates

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The Florida Boys — FREE gospel concert, Oct. 19, 5:15 pm



The only show with 3 days of demos.

Insurance Basics

(continued from page 100)

higher deductible on his insurance and covers the costs of small incidents himself. "I've set my deductible as high as I can – at \$1,000 – which lowers my premiums, but it also causes me to think about whether I want to file a claim with the insurance agency or not," he explains. "With that high a deductible, I would end up having to cover most smaller or incidental claims anyway, so the fewer claims I turn in, the more attractive I remain to the insurance agency."

Shipp also advocates risk management and recommends that small businesses create an effective safety program in their organization. "We provide seminars for our clients and our prospective clients to train them on how to have a properly documented and working safety program," he notes. "The seminar teaches supervisors that they're accountable for the safety of the crew, but that everyone is responsible for their own safety and that of the crews that they work on.

Should an injury occur, we also provide a step-by-step manual on how to properly file a worker's compensation claim."


Not having a risk-management plan in place is one mistake insurance agencies say many contractors make, but also note that working with uninsured subcontractors is a huge – but frequently overlooked – liability.

"Many times, a contractor hires a subcontractor to do a job only to find out that the subcontractor is uninsured, doesn't have adequate insurance or has exclusions in their insurance policy regarding subcontracted work," Stevens says. "All of those situations will increase the probability that, if a loss occurs by action of the subcontractor, the general contractor is going to get a law suit."

To this end, having a solid insurance policy that covers both a contractor's work and his or her workers can make their company more attractive for possible subcontracting work, and also to potential clients.

lawandlandscape.com

Check our September Online Extras section for more definitions of common insurance terminology.

"We explain to all of our customers as we're promoting our business that we're fully insured for liability and damage to any of the customer's property," Wolfe says. "Having an insurance policy that keeps everyone safe really gives us more credibility than other companies and makes us look a lot more professional. Insurance is one of those things that you don't know how much you need it until something happens and you don't have it. Even though it's an expense, it's always better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it." 

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at lsapiers@lawandlandscape.com.



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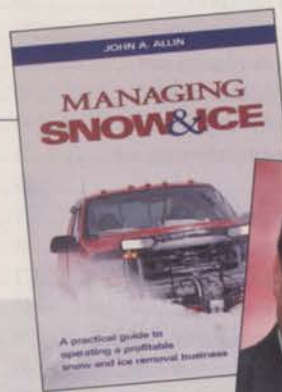
MEDIA GROUP

SNOW MANAGEMENT SEMINARS

FEATURING JOHN ALLIN, AUTHOR OF *MANAGING SNOW & ICE*

FIVE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD REGISTER

1. Learn how to improve operational efficiencies – routing, dispatching and working with subcontractors.
2. Sharpen your financial management practices and add more to your bottom line.
3. Identify strategies for improving your marketing efforts to secure additional contracts or how to add snow management to your existing service offerings.
4. Network with fellow snow management professionals and build important relationships.
5. Return to work ready to apply what you have learned and raise the quality and effectiveness of your snow management services.



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Thursday, September 18, 2003

CLEVELAND, OHIO

Saturday, September 20, 2003

DENVER, COLORADO

Thursday, September 25, 2003

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Saturday, September 27, 2003

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Thursday, October 2, 2003

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

Saturday, October 4, 2003

Seminar Time: 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
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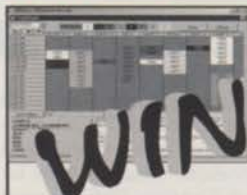
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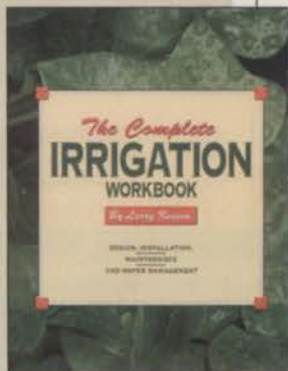
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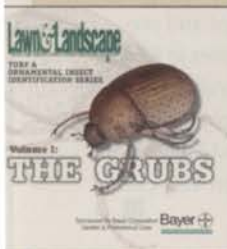


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Developing a Bilingual Newsletter at The Groundskeeper

The Groundskeeper has published "Crews & News," our internal bilingual (English/Spanish) newsletter for about seven years as a way to keep employees informed of company developments. Initially, we had only a few articles translated into Spanish but about three years ago we realized that making "Crews & News" completely English/Spanish would be even more beneficial.

Throughout the company's six production locations and the corporate office, we have approximately 530 employees; about 75 percent are Spanish-speaking. The majority of our Spanish-speaking team is bilingual, but having the newsletter 100 percent English/Spanish ensures that all employees benefit from its content.

"Crews & News" focuses on safety, promotions, quality standards, recognition and awareness. Initially, only managers were participating. We now receive articles from all divisions of the company with topics ranging from storm clean-up to new techniques. We recognize several individuals and properties in each issue by printing customers' letters and listing employees who earned a company- or industry-recognized certification.

We try to publish "Crews & News" twice a year and we establish a deadline for producing the newsletter. We send out requests to managers to encourage their area to submit an article, and try to have all of the upcoming

issue's content to our human resources department two to four weeks before the printing date.

Translation of all the submissions is done in-house. There are a number of individuals who contribute their time and talents to our publication, which helps keep the costs of the newsletter to the layout and printing expenses only. During the newsletter's first years, we paid bonus money (about \$50) to employees who translated articles. However, people soon offered to translate without receiving additional compensation. Because The Groundskeeper is an employee-owned organization, employees realized that this additional compensation came out of the bottom line, decreasing contributions to the Employee Stock Ownership Plan. We have extensive training about being employee owners, so all individuals are more willing to think of newsletter contributions as part of their job descriptions.

The "Crews & News" bilingual format has the English and Spanish articles side-by-side on each page. Pictures accompany many of the articles, so it's important that the articles are together. Each issue averages 10 to 12 pages of double-sided printing. The printer we use to produce the newsletter is the same company that produces our external client newsletter, business cards, letterhead and other company printing projects.

The cost for each issue fluctuates based on the number of pages and the amount of art we have to include. A bare-bones, text-only issue runs about \$500, but we allot about \$1,500 of our HR budget to each issue to cover all expenses. Another practice we found that reduces our cost is having the masthead and final cover pre-printed since they contain color. Printing these pages in advance also helps our publication stay uniform and recognizable from issue to issue.

"Crews & News" has pulled together our company by providing real employee involvement and promoting employee-ownership. A common thread throughout the "Crews & News" is acknowledgement and recognition. Employees read through the newsletter to find their name, what training or certification is available, or what new techniques they may be able to apply to their own routes. By publishing in both English and Spanish, all employees can appreciate this recognition and can benefit from good practices. — Laura Bird

The author is Human Resources Director, The Groundskeeper, Tucson, Ariz., and can be reached at 520/318-6760.

5 KEYS TO Developing a Bilingual Newsletter

1. Determine whether human resources, marketing or another department will oversee the production of each issue. Ensure that the individuals involved are not spread too thin by these added responsibilities.
2. Encourage employees at all levels and in all branches of the company to submit news, articles, story ideas or personnel information for publication.
3. If possible, keep article translation in-house to minimize costs. Employees can be compensated differently and less expensively than an outside company.
4. Pre-print the front and back covers or other unchanging pages to keep costs down.
5. Circulate the newsletter to all employees to keep them up-to-date on company and industry developments.



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