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Cover photo: Jay Fletcher

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## Seeing Change

Roger Stanley is editor-in-chief/associate publisher of *Lawn & Landscape*. He can be reached at 800/456-0707 or [rstanley@gie.net](mailto:rstanley@gie.net).



Change is a good thing for companies that see it coming and take advantage of it. Change is unpleasant for companies that want things to stay the same. Since change is a constant, it's smart to watch trends and think about what they could mean for your business.

Your business can be affected by outside market factors, such as when a product's use is restricted or when new noise or water-use regulations are enacted. Change can also be driven from market factors within the industry – a new product is introduced or a critical mass of companies adopt a new technology that revolutionizes the way business is done.

Usually change comes from a combination of outside and inside factors. Smart companies watch for trends emerging, research the market viability of the trend and, if it makes sense, they are among the first to adapt their business to the emerging reality.

For example, at the "Environmental Guidelines for Responsible Lawn Care and Landscaping" conference in Texas in March the idea of taking soil tests before routinely fertilizing a lawn came up a number of times. The potential benefits of soil tests could include more efficient use of fertilizers, healthier lawns and reduced fertilizer runoff into waterways.

Outside market factors could make soil testing far more common or even a required practice, as it is in some agricultural situations. But what about the inside factors? Would a push to soil testing be a possible marketing opportunity? Yes, soil testing would take more time and add cost, but it would seem to fit within the larger trend of offering customers increasingly specialized services.

Another interesting concept was a permanent consumer demonstration of five lawns ranging from an all-turfgrass lawn to one with zero turfgrass and a walkway made of tumbled recycled glass. The opportunity I see in this would be to market a set of landscaping options based on a combination of cost, level of maintenance and environmental beliefs. No, this would not work for the

custom client, but there are a large number of customers who would appreciate having the basic options, features and benefits clearly laid out for them, rather than having to start from scratch. Offering basic options could create a marketing platform to help a company stand out from the local competition – similar to what homebuilders do when they market home models based on lifestyle and price brackets.

As mentioned in last month's column, pesticide use was a point of discussion throughout the meeting. Trends in pesticide use are difficult to track. On one hand, the hardline position by some to eliminate their use never seems to diminish. At the same time, the public's demand for the benefits of pesticides remains strong.

In the area of pesticide use, the internal market factors are as important as the outside factors. It's becoming increasingly difficult and expensive for manufacturers to develop new pesticides or to keep some registered ones on the market. The shift away from broad-use products to more specialized ones is a factor. The implications are huge in our industry. Consumer demands are strong for healthy and great-looking lawns, yet the number of tools available to do the job might be decreasing.

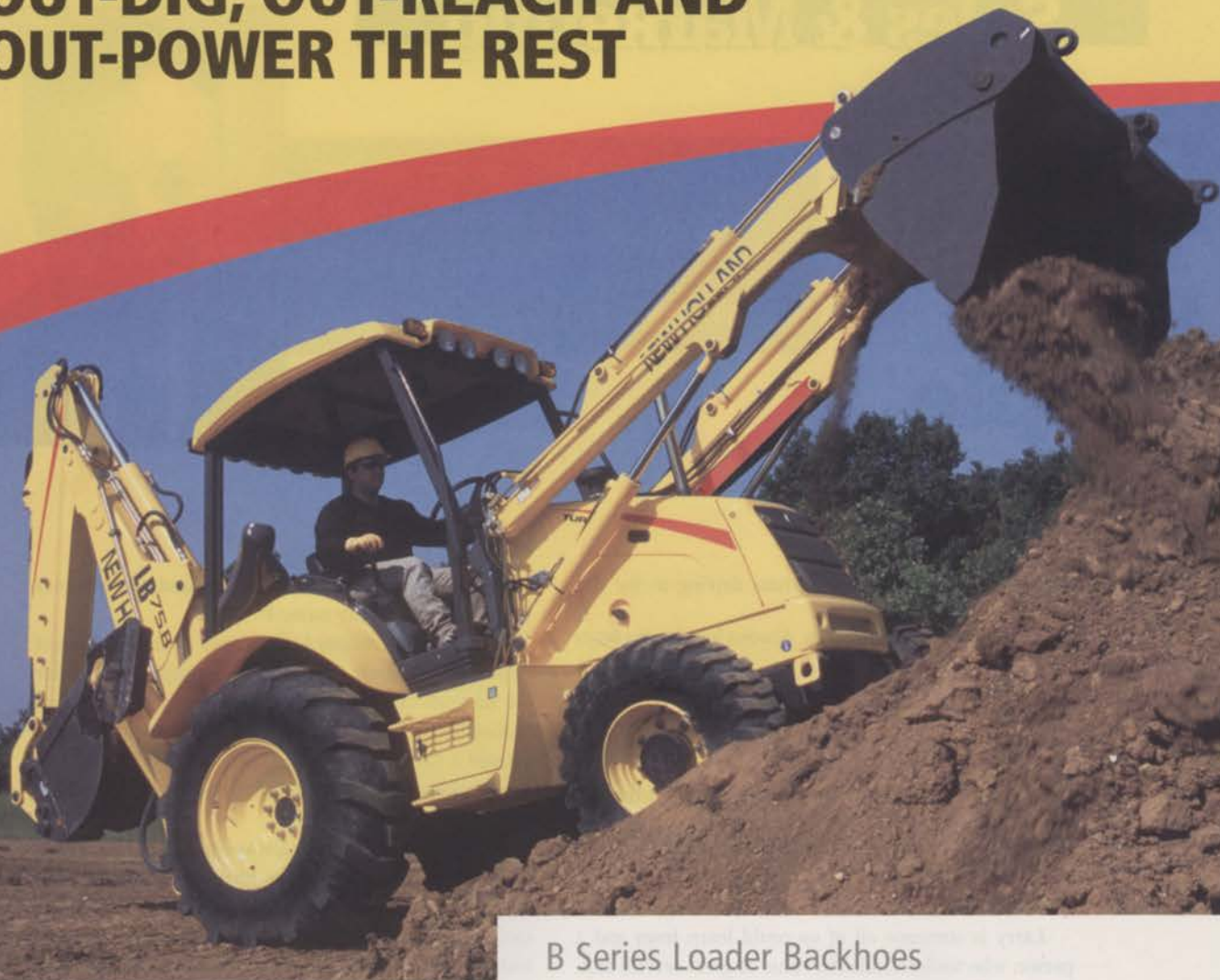
To create some industry discussion about pesticide use and trends, *Lawn & Landscape* is holding its first-ever Weed & Insect Summit in Chicago, August 18-20. The goal is to talk about some of the practical business aspects of this vital industry segment, but also to talk about the trends and their implications for lawn care companies, suppliers and consumers. If you're interested in this special conference, you can get more information at [www.weedinsectsummit.com](http://www.weedinsectsummit.com) or by calling Michelle Fitzpatrick at 800/456-0707.

The green industry should take action and educate themselves on these matters because homeowners need and demand our industry's services. It's smart to pay close attention to trends since what consumers want is what consumers will get. **ll**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roger Stanley".



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## Hire The Right People

Marty Grunder is a speaker, consultant, author and landscape contractor with Grunder Landscaping Co. He can be reached at 937/847-9944 and via [www.martygrunder.com](http://www.martygrunder.com).



For too many years, I wasted time driving to the dry cleaners to drop off my clothes. Always looking for ways to save time, I had noticed a home delivery dry cleaning service in our neighborhood. I asked my neighbor Steve about the service. He gushed with praise about the service and said, "You'll love Larry!" He was right; I would love Larry.

Larry is someone all of us could learn from and a person who understands the value of great service and, even more importantly, a GREAT attitude.

For the past 25 years Larry has driven the delivery truck for Gough Lamb Cleaners in Middletown, Ohio. But driving the delivery truck is not the only thing Larry does well.

As a very satisfied customer of Larry, let me share with you what he does. For starters, he is very dependable. On every Tuesday and Friday at 7:30 p.m., Larry knocks on our door to drop off clean clothes and pick up the dirty ones. In comparison, I'm still waiting for the cable guy who was supposed to be at my house three years ago. (Seriously, this is true. They never showed up and I never called. I just fixed the cable myself and, to the surprise of my whole family, my repair worked.)

In the few years we have worked with Larry, he has never made a mistake. No wrong clothes, no damage done to our clothes, and no lost clothes. In comparison, a few years ago a repair shop lost a lawn mower of ours; they gave it to someone else.

Larry knows all my kids' names, my name and my wife's name. In comparison, the gate agent at the Dayton International Airport who has taken my board-

ing pass and assisted me literally hundreds of times has no idea what my name is.

On several occasions Larry brings us small tokens of appreciation. Again, for comparison purposes, a vendor we have at our landscaping company that we spend thousands of dollars with annually has never so much as uttered a "Thank you" to me, even though I see him in church every Sunday. (Granted, their service is good, but a thank you would be nice.)

Finally, Larry's truck is always spotless. And, needless to say, Larry is always nicely dressed. He also smiles, is extremely pleasant and always thanks us for our business and wishes us a good day. Look around today as you drive; chances are you'll find more companies with dirty trucks than with clean ones.

What can we learn from this? Frankly, a whole lot. For starters, little things make a big difference. Nothing that I have told you that Larry does costs a lot of money. He's on time, he's dependable, he's conscientious, he pays attention, he cares, he smiles, he is clean, he is polite, he is enthusiastic and, most importantly, he loves his job.

And that leads to the message of this month's column – a great attitude is the best asset your company can have. Not only is it contagious, but it sells your services like crazy. Because of Larry doing all the little things so well, many, if not all, of my neighbors have decided to use his services. Think about what your company could do with a whole stable full of employees with great attitudes serving your clients. Spend some time hiring the right people – the ones with great attitudes – and then train them how to take care of your clients. While training, remember, the way you treat your team will clearly show them how to treat your clients. If you do, you'll have what Lovable Larry has – clients who love him and his service and are happy to find other clients for him.

LL

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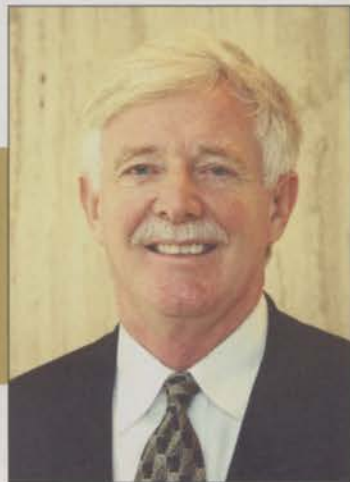
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# The Operating Room

## Watch Your Overtime

Jack Mattingly is a green industry consultant with Mattingly Consulting. He can be reached via email at [jkmattngly@comcast.net](mailto:jkmattngly@comcast.net), through his Web site [www.mattinglyconsulting.com](http://www.mattinglyconsulting.com) or at 770/517-9476.



Overtime can wreak havoc on your profits and also on your employee morale. For these reasons, contractors must keep overtime hours in check at all times. Let's take a look at a few considerations:

First of all, ask yourself if you actually estimate the overtime wage scale when you compile your job estimates. Are you sure you do this consistently and accurately? Remember that overtime pay is one-and-one-half of a given employee's regular hourly wage. Therefore, the halftime portion is probably an expense that you will pay the employee that you may not have considered or budgeted when you compiled your estimate.

For example, if an individual's regular hourly wage is \$12.25 for the first 40 hours worked in a week, for each hour after 40, the wage jumps to \$18.37 per hour. (Check your state regulations, as some states require you to pay time-and-one-half after eight hours each day.) In this situation, you end up paying an additional \$6.12 per hour plus appropriate taxes. This can add up quickly in the course of a year.

Using these wages, assume you have seven crewmembers who work an average of 50 hours per week for a period of 10 months (about 43 weeks). The overtime premium you will pay for this work equals a minimum of \$18,421. Further, assume that this manpower produces a total income for the company of \$450,000. With this figure, your overtime cost is approximately 4 percent of your entire profit.

The moral of this exercise is to be sure that the rate at which you sell your labor is sufficient to recover the premium pay you incur. If you are charging \$32 per man-hour but determined this amount without considering overtime expenses, this could explain why you are still not turning a profit even if you track indirect costs and your crews are meeting their budgeted hours. Remember, the cost in-

curred as the halftime portion – the \$6.12 as shown in the example above – is an overhead item and is not part of your direct costs. You must use "guesstimates" and/or historical information to calculate an hourly rate that will recover your overhead and, of course, generate profit. This is a detailed, disciplined process that you should go through each year.

I realize that many small companies do not develop a budget and pricing scenario, but consider the consequences and the dollars it takes away from your potential profits until you do. Try to raise your hourly selling and estimating price and control and monitor your labor. A great way to monitor overtime is to post a weekly hourly log sheet consisting of all employees' names in the first column and the days of the week in the remaining columns. Have crew foremen log hours at the end of the day for each crewmember. By Thursday, you will see who has how many hours and can make decisions as to whether or not to give more work to an individual who is approaching overtime. This is a great, simple tool that will help manage overtime through awareness.

On the employee morale side, I find that most companies do work overtime during the season. Many laborers thrive on extra work and if we do not provide some overtime, they may leave for a job that will allow the extra hours. If you treat your employees with respect and have good equipment for them to use, I find that a 45-hour workweek is acceptable in most markets. In other areas, 50 hours is common, but if I see a company that has its hourly employees working 60 hours per week, I almost wish I could be their competition as my labor costs and selling price would be appreciably less, allowing me to become the low-cost provider in the marketplace. Consider what your company could become if you were the low-cost provider in your area. You would grow, provide opportunities for your employees and even relinquish some of your duties to subordinates, leaving some time for yourself. **LL**

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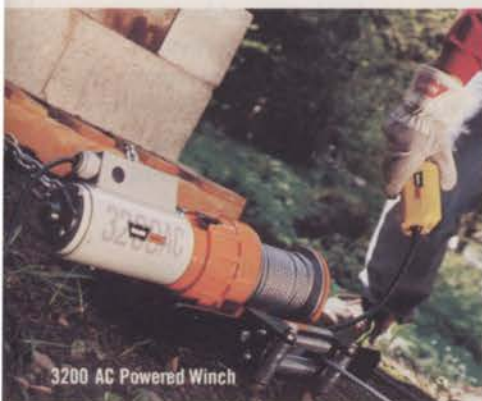


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## Executing Your HR Decisions

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*Editor's Note: Last month, we discussed two of the four components of making effective human resource decisions: Making the right choice and using the right words. We cover the remaining two this month.*

Making the right human resources decision continues to be one of the most difficult challenges for business owners and managers. Last month, my column included two of the four components for effective HR decision-making: Making the right choice and using the right words to convey your message.


Now, we'll provide you with the other two essential components to help you make smart HR decisions.

**THE RIGHT TIME.** This one can be difficult to control and, many times, human resource decisions are necessary in response to unrelated events. Some of the HR decisions of which we can control the timing (to some extent) include terminations, coaching, hiring, compensation changes, performance evaluations and conflict resolution. When possible, plan to execute your decision at the right time.

Let's say, for example, it is necessary and prudent to reduce the commission schedule for a position and you've eloquently prepared your communication. The question is: when do you deliver the news? (And I'm not talking about the difference between Friday and Monday.) Answer: Not when the employees are looking at their paycheck stubs! The proper timing would be well in advance of the effective date (normally, one to two months prior). Advance timing in this example may not be "legally" required, but failure to provide it can negatively impact morale, leading to a series of events that could be more costly than legal action. Choose your time wisely. There

can be a significant price to pay if you act too quickly or if you delay essential action.

**THE ABILITY TO EXECUTE.** This one relates to leadership experience and personality. Let me explain. I once had a client – a nice guy – who often called for HR advice. He had some tough issues on a regular basis. We brainstormed together and reviewed all of the facts and details. Eventually, I would carefully and specifically lay out my recommendations for action. I knew he was the kind of guy who needed details, so I painstakingly described every fine point and made sure he wrote it all down. Time after time, I would learn that our strategy did not play out correctly. Why? Because – and my client would admit to this – he simply could not execute the plan. He did not have the assertiveness, nor did he have the follow-through desire or ability to see the decision through to the end. It always fell apart about halfway. The reality was that this guy was a great technician-turned-business owner. Unfortunately, he did not have the passion or personality to implement the HR decisions. If you cannot or do not execute your decisions, your life as a leader will be stressful and the success of your business at risk. If you're one of these people, build your team with talented people who can help you execute effectively.

**CONCLUSION.** There you have it – make the right choice and then execute your HR decision using the right words at the right time – four simple sounding, but not always easy to implement, interwoven components to effective HR decision-making. In my experience, I have found that leaders with a void in any of these areas will be limited in their ability to develop the business. I apply these principles to every consultation and I am certain that if you do the same, you will enhance the quality and outcome of your people decisions. 



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Additional Syngenta resources available to you when implementing a Heritage brown patch program include pest outlooks and the 30-year disease mapping features on GreenCast™ ([www.greencastonline.com](http://www.greencastonline.com)). Utilize GreenCast to help you sell the Heritage brown patch program by determining when brown patch is most prevalent in your area and when to make Heritage applications.

For more information about how to increase your service offering—and bottom line—with a brown patch control program that incorporates Heritage fungicide, contact your local Syngenta representative.



### How to Spot Brown Patch

The symptoms of brown patch can vary depending on the grass cultivar, soil, climatic and atmospheric



conditions, as well as intensity of the turfgrass management. Brown patch typically causes rings or patches

of blighted turfgrass that measure 5 inches to more than 10 feet in diameter. It also causes leaf spots and "smoke rings"—thin, brown borders around the diseased patches that appear most frequently in the early morning. After the leaves die in the blighted area, new leaves can emerge from the surviving crowns. On wide-bladed species, leaf lesions develop with tan centers and dark brown to black margins.

Brown patch favors high humidity as well as temperatures of over 85 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and over 60 degrees Fahrenheit at night. Brown patch can be quite active at cool temperatures on warm-season grasses in the spring and fall. It also occurs in areas that experience more than 10 hours a day of foliar wetness for several consecutive days.

Brown patch infestation is more severe when the turf is cut to a height less than the optimum for the turfgrass being grown.



## FREE CD



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## LANDSCAPE TRENDS

### Water Gardens Gain Popularity

GREENVILLE, Va. – Just in case you haven't figured it out yet, water features can enrich clients' home in a variety of ways, including providing a spot for relaxation as well as a haven for birds and butterflies.

"Few landscape features are so versatile," says Keith Folsom, president of Springdale Water Gardens, Greenville, Va. "That can mean reflecting pools or fountains and waterfalls. You can put in formal (water) gardens or use designs mimicking and miniaturizing nature."

Residential water gardens began growing in popularity about a decade ago. Fountains, overflowing barrels, statuary and flower-fringed ponds have become commonplace in condominium courtyards, on suburban decks or around ranches and farmyards.

An estimated 16 million American households, or 15 percent, have incorporated water gardens into their landscapes, reports the National Gardening Association. Total water gardening retail sales for 2003 approached \$1.56 billion. "The water gardening category continues to be one of

the fastest growing lawn and garden categories seen over the past five years," says Bruce Butterfield, the association's research director.

Aside from their artistic value, water features offer homeowners a hefty payback. Landscaping properly done – especially a theme garden – adds anywhere from 7 to 15 percent or more to the value of a home, realtors say.

Many landscape contractors are even expanding clients' water gardens to include sculptural fountains, Folsom says. "People are going from a relatively small pond to 1,000 gallons or larger," he says. "That compares with just a couple hundred gallons a few years ago."

Some landscape contractors also may be reworking their clients' ponds because they are in the wrong location, such as too near some trees causing a lot of leaf debris in the pond or too far from where the homeowners spend the bulk of their outdoor time.

Self-sustaining gardens are in, meaning bigger is definitely better, Folsom adds.

"Bigger requires less per-square-foot

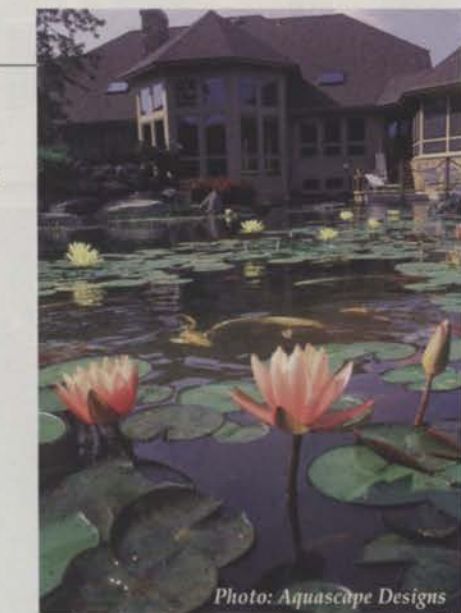


Photo: Aquascape Designs

maintenance," he notes. "You can grow bigger and better kinds of beneficial bacteria. That helps make the pond fully self-sustaining. More water means a more constant water temperature. That helps it stay cool and clear and that's what people are after."

Additionally, water gardens make more than a visual impact. The sound of running water is soothing and attracts a variety of wildlife. "Moving water is background music in a sense," Folsom says. "It gives people a chance to hide something they don't want to hear, like road noise."

## RESEARCH REPORT

### A Look At Lawn Care

MENDHAM, N.J. - Specialty Products Consultants recently released a research study of the U.S. professional turf and ornamental pesticide market.

The results show that professional lawn care operators are caring for about 3 million acres of residential and commercial turf. Nationwide, professional lawn care companies recorded average revenues of \$4.2 billion in 2003. TruGreen-ChemLawn, Memphis, Tenn, has about 22.4 percent share of this market.

Nearly \$700 million (manufacturer level dollars) was spent this past year on fungicides, herbicides, insecticides and plant



Photo: TPI

growth regulators in the markets analyzed.

The lawn care operators in this survey identified more than 200 different sources of supply. However, nearly two-thirds of the lawn care operators surveyed purchased

from just eight distributors, nationwide.

More than 1,000 golf course superintendents, lawn care operators and ornamental plant producers were surveyed for the report.



## MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

### Home Depot to Buy White Cap Construction

ATLANTA – The Home Depot has entered into an agreement to acquire White Cap Construction Supply, a distributor of specialty hardware, tools and materials targeting large- and medium-sized contractors. The acquisition is part of Home Depot's strategy to expand its professional customer market base.

Headquartered in Costa Mesa, Calif., White Cap will become part of The Home Depot Supply division. The agreement is anticipated to close by mid-June, and terms were not disclosed.

"We remain committed to finding new business opportunities for The Home Depot, and this acquisition adds new customer channels and product selling opportunities,"

says Frank Blake, executive vice president of business development, The Home Depot. "We were attracted to White Cap because of its position in the industry, and because its customers and product lines complement our existing business. White Cap represents another step in offering professional customers products and services for the entire construction process."

Founded in 1976, White Cap Construction Supply, operates 70 branch locations throughout the United States and employs 1,720 people. White Cap's estimated annual sales are approximately \$500 million.

Approximately 60 percent of White Cap's sales are delivered to the job site, while the remaining 40 percent are pur-

chased at the branch locations. The company offers a wide array of more than 65,000 in-stock products including brand-name construction materials, hand tools, fasteners, safety equipment, power tools and equipment, work wear and landscape lighting.

"White Cap is a leader in this highly fragmented market, and we're pleased that its leadership team will continue to play an integral role in the organization," says Jim Stoddart, president, The Home Depot Supply. "We believe this acquisition will be accretive to earnings, and we are most excited about the opportunity it provides for future growth. White Cap's expertise will help The Home Depot Supply more fully satisfy its customers' needs."

## REGULATION EDUCATION

### EPA Cracks Down on Diesel

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a new Clean Air Nonroad Diesel Rule, designed to cut and clean up emissions from the kinds of "off-road" diesel equipment commonly used in landscape management, such as tractors and loaders.

According to the agency, the new provisions will cut emission levels from construction, agricultural and industrial diesel-powered equipment by more than 90 percent. The new rule will also remove 99 percent of the sulfur in diesel fuel by 2010, resulting in dramatic reductions in soot from all diesel engines.

The EPA estimates, however, that the required changes to diesel-powered equipment and diesel fuel will increase the cost of both items. According to an EPA statement, "The anticipated costs vary with the size and complexity of the equipment but are in the range of 1 to 3 percent of the total purchase price for most equipment categories. While the estimated added cost for low-sulfur fuel is about seven cents per gallon, the net cost is projected to average about

four cents per gallon because the use of ultra-low sulfur fuel could significantly reduce engine maintenance expenses."

"We are going to make that burst of black smoke that erupts from diesels a thing of the past," EPA Administrator Mike Leavitt added.

This new rule complements the Clean Diesel Truck and Bus Rule (announced December 21, 2000), which was designed to cut emissions from heavy-duty trucks and buses. On-highway compliance requirements take effect with the 2007 model year.

According to EPA, "The Clean Air Nonroad Diesel Rule will result in the widespread introduction of emission control systems, a move comparable to the advent of catalytic converters for cars in the 1970s."

The new standards will be phased in over the next several years. Standards for new engines will be phased in starting with the smallest engines in 2008 until all



but the very largest diesel engines meet both NOx and PM standards in 2014. Some of the largest engines, 750+ horsepower, will have one additional year to meet the emissions standards.

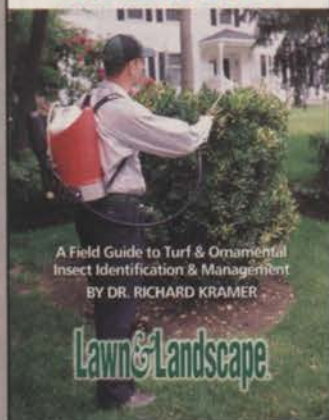
Diesel fuel currently contains about 3,000 parts per million (ppm) sulfur. The new rule will cut that to 500 ppm in 2007 and 15 ppm by 2010.

# Lawn & Landscape STORE

# CATCH UP

## ON YOUR SUMMER READING

### Technician's Handbook

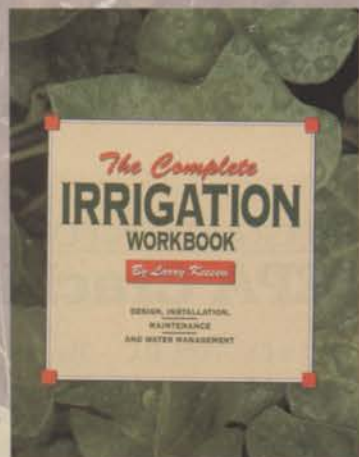


### LAWN & LANDSCAPE Technician's Handbook

A Field Guide To Turf & Ornamental Insect Identification & Management  
By Dr. Richard Kramer  
This hands-on fieldguide provides the technician with unequaled information on the biology, behavior and physical characteristics of more than 60 commonly encountered insect pests in both turf and ornamental. Also includes a full color photo identification section.  
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### The Complete Irrigation Workbook

Larry Keesen  
Cindy Code, Editor  
The workbook offers a comprehensive look at irrigation design, installation, maintenance and water management including practical hands-on techniques.  
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### Second Edition Destructive TURF Insects

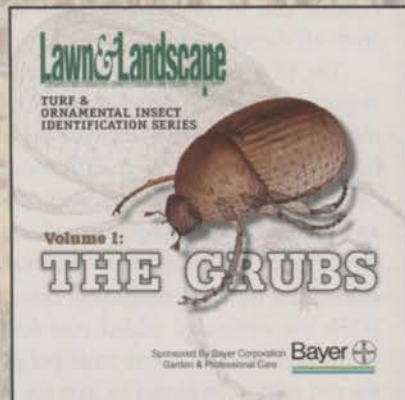


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David J. Shetlar, Ph.D.  
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Identification Series, Volume I: The Grubs  
David J. Shetlar, Ph.D., Technical Content Advisor & Project Photographer  
Cindy Code, Editor  
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# Market Trends

## REGIONAL NEWS

### Ash Tree Destruction May Be Only Way to Contain Borer

COLUMBUS, Ohio - Government officials are considering cutting down ash trees in a miles-wide swath across three states in an attempt to contain the infestation of a tree-killing beetle.

The goal is to create a natural barrier against the emerald ash borer that could extend in a semicircle south from Michigan into northwestern Ohio and north-eastern Indiana, according to state and federal officials.

The pesticide-resistant beetle has wiped out millions of ash trees in southeast Michigan and has been found in all three states.

In theory, the barrier would stop the beetle from spreading from its core infestation in Detroit by denying it food. No route has been determined.

The barrier would be three to six miles wide because it's believed the ash borer does not travel farther than half a mile on its own. U.S. Forest Service maps will be used to

determine the number of ash trees in the zone, officials say.

There were no estimates on the cost of creating the barrier. The U.S. Department of Agriculture plans to spend up to \$43.4 million on ash borer eradication efforts this year.


The zone could take up to eight years to plan and complete, says Bob Waltz, state entomologist for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

"The ultimate goal of all of this is to protect the ash (tree) resources of North America," Waltz explains. "When the emerald ash borer gets in the trees, it kills them. This insect takes no prisoners."


A native of Asia, the ash borer was discovered in the United States two years ago in Michigan. Officials believe it traveled to this country inside wood packing crates.

Lawn & Landscape wants to know who's who at your company. People and Association News press releases, including photos or digital images at 300 dpi can be sent to Will Nepper at [wnepper@gie.net](mailto:wnepper@gie.net) or 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio, 44113

## People



**Ron Lowy** joins GIE Media, Cleveland, Ohio, as the publisher of *Lawn & Landscape*, *Commercial Dealer* and *Snow Business* magazines. Lowy's experience includes having served as publisher and director of business development for Great Lakes Publishing, Cleveland, Ohio, and previously as the brand/marketing manager for Ameritech Advertising Services in Troy, Mich.



**Mike DiFranco** now serves as southeast regional manager of *Lawn & Landscape* and *Commercial Dealer* magazines at GIE Media, Cleveland, Ohio. He previously worked at Penton Media's Design, Engineering and Manufacturing group as a regional sales manager.

Aquarius Brands names **Craig Neagle** to the newly created position of southwest territory landscape sales manager.

Miramar Nurseries promotes **Debra Doyle** to manager of the San Juan Capistrano Commercial Landscape Center.

**Barry Diller** is vice president of sales and marketing at Nitterhouse Masonry Products.

From top:  
Ron Lowy,  
Mike  
DiFranco

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## Market Trends Calendar of Events

**JUNE 10-12** Snow & Ice Symposium, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: 814/835-3577 or [www.sima.org](http://www.sima.org)

**JULY 22** Green Industry Professional Field Day and Trade Show, Washington DC, Contact: 703/250-1368

**AUG. 5** Lawn & Landscape Growing Your Business Seminars - Managing Labor and Improving Profits, Detroit, Mich. Contact: 800/456-0707 or [www.lawnbizseminars.com](http://www.lawnbizseminars.com)

**AUG. 6** Lawn & Landscape Growing Your Business Seminars - Managing Labor and Improving Profits, Cleveland, Ohio. Contact: 800/456-0707 or [www.lawnbizseminars.com](http://www.lawnbizseminars.com)

**AUG. 11** Lawn & Landscape Growing Your Business Seminars - Managing Labor and Improving Profits, Nashville, Tenn. Contact: 800/456-0707 or [www.lawnbizseminars.com](http://www.lawnbizseminars.com)

**AUG. 13** Lawn & Landscape Growing Your Business Seminars - Managing Labor and Improving Profits, Houston, Texas. Contact: 800/456-0707 or [www.lawnbizseminars.com](http://www.lawnbizseminars.com)

**AUG. 18** OSU/OTF Turfgrass Research Field Day, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 888/683-3445 or [www.OhioTurfgrass.org](http://www.OhioTurfgrass.org)

**AUG. 18-20** Lawn & Landscape Weed & Insect Management Summit, Chicago, Ill. Contact: 800/456-0707 or [www.weedandinsectsummit.com](http://www.weedandinsectsummit.com)

**AUG. 26** 18th Annual Indiana Professional Lawn & Landscape Association Summer Field Day, Carmel, Ind. Contact: 317/575-9010

**AUG. 27** Lawn & Landscape Growing Your Business Seminars - Managing Labor and Improving Profits, Milwaukee, Wis. Contact: 800/456-0707 or [www.lawnbizseminars.com](http://www.lawnbizseminars.com)

**SEPT. 17** Lawn & Landscape Growing Your Business Seminars - Managing Labor and Improving Profits, Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 800/456-0707 or [www.lawnbizseminars.com](http://www.lawnbizseminars.com)

**SEPT. 24-26** International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Expo, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 800/558-8786 or [www.expo.mow.org](http://www.expo.mow.org)

**OCT. 1** Lawn & Landscape Growing Your Business Seminars - Managing Labor and Improving Profits, Washington DC. Contact: 800/456-0707 or [www.lawnbizseminars.com](http://www.lawnbizseminars.com)

**OCT. 1-2** Middle Tennessee Nursery Association Trade Show, Washington DC. Contact: 931/668-7322 or [www.mtna.com](http://www.mtna.com)

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# Nursery Market Report

## NEW PLANTS

# Vivid Varieties

With varied colors and textures, the new wave of varieties for 2004 has hit the market. In the May issue of *Lawn & Landscape*, we showcased varieties from A through L. This month, we spotlight M to Z, including applications from the National Garden Bureau.

Try one of these new varieties for summer sparkle: *Mimulus* 'Magic Yellow Flame'

(above),

*Portulaca* F<sub>1</sub> 'Sunseeker Red' and *Petunia* F<sub>1</sub> 'Limbo Violet' (page 24).

Photos:

National

Garden Bureau

## M

**Marigold 'Disco Red.'** *Tagetes patula* is a full-sun annual featuring bright red, 1½-inch blooms with yellow centers. The upright, 16-inch plant with a 12-inch spread suits container, landscape and mass plantings.

**Marigold 'Marvelous Orange.'** This marigold provides fully crested blooms measuring up to 3 inches in diameter. The 12-inch plants flower early and have a mounded habit.

**Mimulus 'Magic Yellow Flame.'** *Mimulus hybridus* produces yellow, 1½-inch blooms covered with small red spots. At 10 inches tall with a mounded, compact habit, this plant is suitable for containers, baskets or landscape plantings.

**Morning Glory 'Split Personality.'** *Ipomoea purpurea* has star-shaped, magenta, 2-inch flowers that are delicately split. This vine will cover fences and trellises, grow as a ground cover or hang in baskets. Provide full sun and this 7-foot annual will bloom from summer to fall frost.

## N

**Nicotiana 'Tinkerbelle.'** This nicotiana hybrid grows 35 inches tall with a mass of ¾-inch, rose-colored flowers. The unusual architectural plant is disease and weather tolerant. It thrives in full- or part-sun and shade landscapes.

## P

**Pansy 'Atlas Raspberry Mix.'** *Viola x wittrockiana* is a mixture of rose, pink and white 3- to 4-inch blooms on 6-inch plants. This full-sun annual tolerates heat, cold, frost and wind. Use in containers or mass plantings.

**Pansy F<sub>1</sub> 'Fama Peach Shades.'** This pansy was bred for weather extremes of heat and bitter cold. Pastel shades range from rosy pink to apricot on 3- to 3½-inch blooms.



This full- to part-sun biennial is 4 to 6 inches tall, and the series offers 20 colors.

**Petunia 'Easy Wave Salmon.'** Fast-blooming plants flower freely all season, creating a solid 8- to 10-inch mass of salmon pink, 2¼-inch blooms. The plant will spread 2½ feet in a full-sun container, basket or landscape planting.

**Petunia 'Hurrah Lavender Tie Dye.'** Multicolored 2½- to 3-inch, dark lavender-purple flowers mature to silvery blue. Early-flowering, compact, 12-inch plants resist stretching.

**Petunia F<sub>1</sub> 'Limbo Violet.'** Dark violet, 3-inch blooms appear on compact plants 6 to 7 inches tall. Blooms recover quickly from severe weather, and no deadheading is needed.

**Petunia F<sub>1</sub> 'Symphony Light Blue.'** Compact and free-flowering, this petunia has excellent after-rain recovery. Three-inch blooms appear on 12- to 15-inch plants that spread 18 to 20 inches.

**Portulaca F<sub>1</sub> 'Sunseeker Red.'** Fully double, red, 2-inch flowers stay open long into the evening. Grow this heat-tolerant annual in full-sun containers or landscape beds.

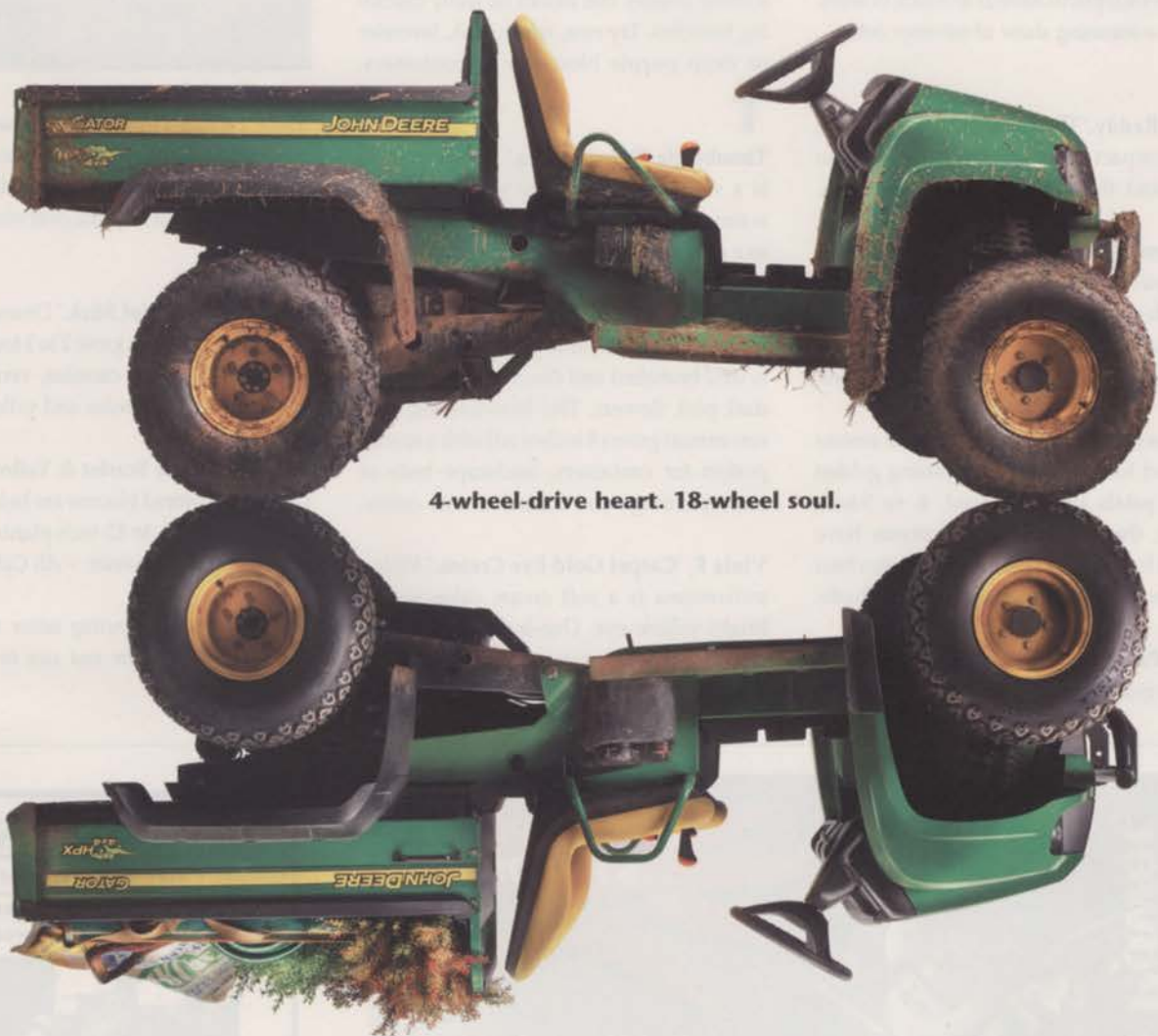
## R

**Rudbeckia 'Moreno.'** *Rudbeckia hirta* features 5- to 6-inch, bicolored blooms that are mahogany red with orange to gold tips. The compact, upright, 12- to 15-inch plants need full to part sun in mass plantings or containers.

**Rudbeckia 'Toto Mix.'** This mix includes 'Toto Gold,' 'Toto Lemon' and 'Toto Rustic.' Compact, well-branched,

(continued on page 24)





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# Nursery Market Report

(continued from page 22)

12- to 15-inch plants have 2- to 3-inch flowers. Use for a stunning show of summer color.

## S

**Salvia 'Reddy.'** This dwarf, bright red salvia stays compact. Plants will tolerate heat and wind, and they require full to part sun.

**Solanum 'Five Minute Plant.'** *Solanum atropurpureum* has purple-black stems and greenish-purple leaves. Small yellow flowers followed by green and white clustered berries contrast with the dark, 4-foot plant.

**Sunflower 'Pacino Cola.'** *Helianthus annuus* is perfect for pots. With contrasting golden yellow petals and dark-eyed, 4- to 5-inch blooms, these 12- to 16-inch plants have smooth leaves. This sunflower tolerates heat and drought and grows in full sun to shade.

**Sweet Pea 'Cupid Color Palette.'** *Lathyrus odoratus* grows 8 to 10 inches long, with sweetly

scented flowers that bloom on softly cascading branches. Try rose, white, pink, lavender or deep purple blossoms in containers.

## T

**Thunbergia 'Spanish Eyes.'** *Thunbergia alata* is a vigorous annual vine with a range of warm sunset-colored, dark-eyed flowers. Use as a ground cover, screen or hanging basket.

## V

**Vinca 'SunStorm Pink.'** *Catharanthus roseus* is well-branched and covered with 1¾-inch dark pink flowers. This heat-tolerant, full-sun annual grows 8 inches tall with a spread perfect for containers, landscape beds or mass plantings and comes in nine colors.

**Viola F<sub>1</sub> 'Carpet Gold Eye Cream.'** *Viola x williamsiana* is a soft cream color with a bright yellow eye. One-inch flowers born on short, flowering stems create a carpet of color that stands out even in the dark.



**Viola 'Patiola Violet with Yellow Face.'** This super-sized viola with 2-inch flowers has a dense, compact, well-branched habit. The free-flowering, 6-inch biennial overwinters easily.

## Z

**Zinnia 'Peppermint Stick.'** Dramatic 3- to 5-inch striped flowers grow 2 to 3 feet and come in blotched scarlet, carmine, vermilion, orange and rose on cream and yellow blooms.

**Zinnia 'Swizzle Scarlet & Yellow Bicolor.'** Double, bicolored blooms are held closely to full, upright, 10- to 12-inch plants. Plant in a sunny bed or container. — Ali Cybulski

The author is contributing editor to *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at [acybulski@gie.net](mailto:acybulski@gie.net).

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## Cover Story

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70 percent design/build, 30 percent maintenance

**CLIENT MIX:**

80 percent residential, 20 percent commercial

**2002 REVENUE:** \$5 million

**2003 REVENUE:** \$7.5 million

**PROJECTED 2004 REVENUE:**

\$9 million

**PERCENT OF REVENUE SPENT ON MARKETING EACH YEAR:**

3 percent

**SCAPES' CORE PURPOSE:**

To improve the quality of people's lives through landscaping.

**SCAPES' VISION STATEMENT:**

Scapes will become the most well-known landscape brand in the southeastern U.S. The Scapes brand will become a lifestyle statement that projects image, success and excellence. Through the development and empowerment of self-managed teams, effective branding and a commitment to the protection of our core values, we will create exceptional quality of life for our clients and teams.

**BUSINESS MANAGERS:**

Ken Thomas, managing partner; Pete Wilkerson, partner and vice president of design/build; Evan Rogers, partner; and Steve Krumnaker, vice president of landscape maintenance

*by Nicole Wisniewski*



*Photo: Jay Fletcher*

**Nuts  
&  
Bolts**

In 1998 and 1999, when Atlanta-based businesses Scapes, Lifescapes and Landscape Techniques were sold to TruGreen LandCare, its employees thought it was a done deal. After all, TruGreen-ChemLawn was expanding its residential lawn care business to cover commercial and residential maintenance and design/build, and these companies were a good fit.

But when TruGreen LandCare sold its entire commercial construction business to ValleyCrest Cos. in October 2001 except for a couple of its branches, specifically two Atlanta-based branches, which were mostly residential design/build, these same employees started to worry.

Pete Wilkerson and Evan Rogers, who had been past managers at Lifescapes and Scapes, respectively, and became TruGreen LandCare branch managers after the sale of their businesses, became concerned

Rogers began discussing their options – the best of which was buying their businesses back from TruGreen. “But we didn’t have the financial resources to do this by ourselves,” Rogers explains. So the duo contacted old friend Ken Thomas, who had sold his business Landscape Techniques to TruGreen in December 1998 and went on to pursue other interests after remaining with TruGreen for one year.

Thomas was interested in the opportunity and became the lead dealmaker and negotiator of the trio. And TruGreen, knowing the residential design/build service segment wasn’t the best fit for their business, was willing to work with them. “The biggest challenge was coming up with the right deal,” Thomas says, adding that an idea that started in the fall of 2001 wasn’t completed until March 15, 2002.

Since that time, Scapes and Lifescapes merged their businesses under the more brandable name – Scapes – and focused on their core business – residential design/build. Though their spring start-up in March 2002 was rushed, the \$5-million business managed to grow to \$7.5 million in

# Scapes' Second Chance

*After buying their business back from TruGreen LandCare, Scapes revitalizes its core residential design/build business with a new systems focus.*

that their service segments might also be up for sale. “If TruGreen didn’t see a fit for commercial construction, how could they see a fit for residential design/build?” Wilkerson wondered. “We knew there was going to be some change – either they would shut us down because the residential design/build business didn’t mix with their maintenance or lawn care businesses, or they would try to make it work.”

But, in Wilkerson’s situation, the harder he tried to improve the numbers, the faster his branch decreased – from \$6.2 million to \$5 million to \$4 million due to changes in the business focus. “No matter how hard we worked, the TruGreen model just didn’t fit our residential design/build businesses,” he says.

As their branches continued to be challenged, Wilkerson and

2003 and is planning to hit \$9 million by the end of this year. Their key to success: implementing a systems-focused business with self-managed teams while still maintaining client focus and relationships.

**SYSTEMS-BASED.** Since Scapes and Lifescapes were operating independently of each other, the most challenging part of the initial transition was integrating the businesses and maintaining a smooth workflow. “In spring 2002, we had to make sure we kept producing the revenue we needed to pay the bills and keep cash flow going,” Thomas says. “By August, we were determined to bring the two administrative teams together so we moved all of them into one office so we could operate as one entity.”

*(continued on page 30)*

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## Cover Story

(continued from page 27)

This enabled the company to have a corporate office and a production facility. From there, the TruGreen experience came in handy, Thomas says. "We were able to work with and learn from a lot of landscape companies during the TruGreen LandCare acquisitions – we gained solid exposure to how these successful companies managed

their businesses," he shares. "We were able to adopt some of the best practices we learned from that experience and pinpoint other areas where we could improve upon."

Essentially being given a second chance to start over – except with a base of resources instead of from scratch – the company decided on a systems-based operational style

to avoid any inconsistencies from service area to service area.

One of the first structures the company established was a lead generation system, where through the phone leads are documented and tracked so the company can apply the earned revenue to specific leads, allowing Scapes to make smarter marketing decisions. "For instance, if we have a garden show in the area and it cost us \$10,000 to have a booth there, and we sold \$300,000 worth of business off of that investment, then we can formulate a return on that investment," Thomas explains. "We have worked to become professional marketers and monitor and measure what we're doing."

The system starts with the office manager answering the phone. Based on the potential client's question, the office manager transfers that call to a sales team (if no a specific sales person isn't requested, then the call is transferred to each team on a rotation), which has the obligation to qualify the lead, report where the client heard the Scapes' name in a customer information database and convert that lead into a sale. In the system, teams can track the sales activity proposed, pending and sold. Once a job is sold, the sales person sets up the client in the production and delivery system to ensure he or she gets what was promised. At the same time, budgets for plant material, labor, etc. are generated and the product operations manager is made aware of the job so it can be added to the schedule.

"We've created a system so that nothing is passed down the line by chance and there's a minimal chance for error," Thomas says. "If we have four design/build teams funneling jobs to one production department than he receives one set standard of work order from each team. The expectation is set. Then all of these operational procedures are described and written out in different manuals for each department."

Design/build teams were set up to avoid an assembly line approach where a project goes from sales to the designer to the estimator to the production manager. Instead, these teams, which are made up of sales, design and product management components, work on projects together from the beginning. Scapes has four design/build teams and each is responsible for a certain gross margin dollar amount based on the company's

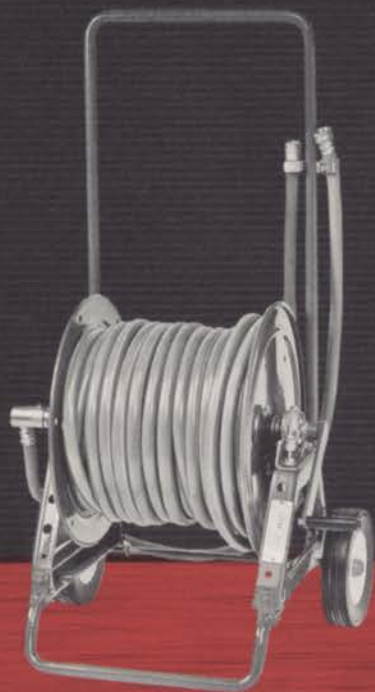
(continued on page 32)

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(continued from page 30)

annual budget. "For instance, each team has a goal and they need to produce their expected gross margin," Wilkerson explains.

Gross margin is a pool of dollars that is leftover after direct expenses are paid on a job.

The company encourages its sales people to focus on gross margin in addition to sales because instead of having these teams worry about fixed costs they can't control, it keeps them focused on the costs they can control, such as job estimating and production.

**EMPLOYEE BUY-IN.** Setting up systems was vital to Scapes developing its second goal – a self-managed team concept vs. the old hierarchy where managers are at the top, making all the decisions and earning the most money. "We wanted to flatten out that overhead so individual teams could earn a higher rate of return on the work they put out and have the opportunity to grow further than they could have in a traditional set up where there's a bottleneck at the manager positions," Thomas explains, calling it a flat, team-based management style instead of a pyramid-based style where the owner is on top.

The design teams (mentioned above) are a good example. Though in each team, one person is responsible for sales, another for design and another for product management, the whole team is aware of the project details and

has the opportunity to learn one of the other roles and expand their knowledge or take over for another team member when that person is on vacation or out of the office, Wilkerson explains. "In the past, we had estimators and designers, and the process happened via an assembly line approach," he says. "Then, people were operating as individuals who will eventually reach the cap of what they can do and won't be able to progress. By going to design teams, there's backup for each person on the team and each team member learns other responsibilities besides their own."

Also, design team members are given the opportunity to take control over their own salaries, earning more money once their gross margin budgets are reached. "We offer a 50/50 split on contributions above the target for that team for the year," Thomas explains. "For instance, if a team has a \$3-million sales goal and a gross margin contribution of \$1.2 million (which is 40 percent of their sales goal), anything above that contribution would be split evenly between the team and the company. Then it becomes like they are running their own business."

Bonuses are also given to residential design/build crew foremen and workers. If the company beats its budget, each worker has the opportunity to earn 25 percent of his or her base pay again as a bonus. "For instance,

if the overall company net profit goal was 7 percent, and we beat that, small bonuses would be given out," Thomas says. "The more we beat that budget and add to the bottom line, the more an employee can earn."

In addition to a self-managed team concept and bonuses based on profit goals, Scapes also asks each new employee to read and sign a personal commitment pledge, stating that the employee will respect the Scapes' vision and conduct him or herself in a respectful manner to teammates, being honest, dependable, quality-driven and accountable to his or her team. "This is part of our branding strategy," Thomas explains. "This corporate signature represents our commitment to quality, excellence and integrity and each employee should know that and know they are signing on to that when they are hired here."

Back when the TruGreen deal was done, Wilkerson and Rogers left with seven landscape construction crews, five landscape architects/project managers and three administrative employees. "The hardest thing I had to do was lay off nine people right after the deal was made, but we had to get lean so we could start emerging back as a viable company," Wilkerson says.

Though they ran lean in the early days, their concept on growth has changed. "If we're running lean and growing fast, typically people

(story continued on page 107)  
(additional sidebar on page 34)

**S**capes' goal is to win the majority of the market share in Atlanta.

To do this, the company decided that it has to establish and secure its brand, so it hired a group to conduct a brand architecture study that included a survey of clients the company did and didn't get as well as an attempt to figure out what percent of the market the company currently holds.

Ken Thomas, Scapes' managing partner, says the survey cost the company \$15,000, but was well worth the cost for the insight the results provided.

Also, to solidify its marketing efforts, Scapes hired an in-house marketing manager (Daisy Watson) this year, whose first goal is to help increase the company's referral base, which is its best new lead generator, according to the survey. "Daisy is our customer service liaison and is working with the outside marketing group to help build the Scapes brand," Thomas explains.

The goal is to increase client referrals, which the survey revealed as the company's top client generator. The first step is thanking clients for their referrals – for instance, this year, each client who

referred someone who turned into a customer received a \$100 gift card to a nice Atlanta restaurant, shares Pete Wilkerson, Scapes' partner and vice president of design/build.

Another recent client thank-you event Watson managed was a customer appreciation day, where the company invited 300 clients to a local Smith & Hawken store, a high-end garden product distributor. At the event, Scapes had a garden book author do a presentation on creating small gardens, a local chef conduct a cooking demonstration on preparing a garden dinner party, a grill distributor cook bratwurst and giveaway a grill to entrants, and Scapes also did a presentation on how to bring light and warmth to a garden. The company served wine and refreshments and received media attention for the event. The overall event only cost the company about \$10,000, since they worked with sponsors and other local companies to bring the event to high-end clients, who are also potential prospects for these sponsors.

Watson is currently tracking any leads that come from the event, which happened in April, to figure out if it was a worthwhile marketing effort.

"In this market, all of our competitors put pretty landscape photos in ads in Atlanta magazines, so you don't get the same credibility and effectiveness in doing that anymore," Thomas says. "We want to separate ourselves and build a presence in the market so our brand really stands out from the rest."

– Nicole Wisniewski

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## Cover Story

(continued from page 32)

Atlanta, Ga.-based Scapes takes design fees seriously. "After all, when you hire an architect to custom design your house for security and to fit your tastes, they don't do it for free," explains Scapes' Partner and Vice President of Design/Build Pete Wilkerson.

Scapes charges clients an hourly fee for designs, and most fees can range from \$500 to \$2,800, depending on the difficulty of the project.

To get clients to understand design fees, Wilkerson relates it to other industries that normally charge an hourly fee, such as building architecture or computer programming. "You can't be afraid to talk about money," Wilkerson stresses, sharing a recent job story. "I just lost a project because the client didn't want to spend the money on the design," he says. "I gave them a \$900 design proposal on a \$55,000 to \$60,000 job, and they said they would do it if we could decrease the design fee to \$200. If they are going to spend that much on the project and then have a problem with a \$900 design fee for a design that help make that project shine, that's not our type of client, and we have to be prepared to walk away from that."

Discussing fees and overall project budgets is something Wilkerson believes should be brought up very early in the client discussions, adding that he usually uses a bracketing technique to get shy clients to share their budgets. "If a client doesn't want to talk budget, I'll either give a range of what I think the project we're discussing will cost or say something like, 'So, this project with these specifics can cost up to about \$100,000.' If that amount is more than they wished to spend, I find they immediately pipe in and say, 'We were only looking to spend \$30,000.' And then we can move forward and design a landscape that better fits their budget and needs."

The company also isn't interested in just doing designs. "We try to screen clients before we begin the process so that we know they aren't only hiring us for a design," Wilkerson says, adding that the company generally closes installation work on 90 percent of the jobs it designs. "If they say they need a design and have a person to install it, we'll say we're not interested. We want to stick with our niche - which is full-service design/build." - *Nicole Wisniewski*

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## VOLVO

## Design/Build Project

By Nicole Wisniewski



# Tranquil Pools

*Scapes showcases one of its signature design/build projects.*

**T**he \$600,000 residential project presented many challenges to Scapes, the Atlanta-based residential design/build company that managed the job from start to finish. Here are the top challenges of the project and how Scapes' crews overcame them.



**CHALLENGE # 1: DRAINAGE** – The home has an 8,000-square foot footprint, so the main drainage goal was to deflect water away from the house. Also, Scapes' crews had to install a system to disperse the energy of the draining water prior to it reaching and causing damage to any adjacent properties.

**SOLUTION** – Scapes' crews installed a combination of pipes and catch bases around the home, as well as swales, secondary swales and check areas to dissipate the water prior to it reaching neighbors' landscapes.

**CHALLENGE # 2: ELEVATION** – The 50-foot grade change across the length of the property presented a challenge because the homeowners wanted to essentially eliminate that grade change so they could walk out to their back yard from the main floor of their home. They wanted to have a level area for the presentation of the home's facade and also for the living area in the back without the appearance of major retaining walls encasing the property.

**SOLUTION** – Scapes constructed the pool and blue stone terraces in fill soil. The Scapes' crew had to engineer retaining walls and install piers into the undisturbed grade to hold all of this soil and support the pool. To do this, they built the retaining walls in tiers so they blended into the surrounding area for functionality and aesthetics. – *Nicole Wisniewski*

## Challenges & Solutions



After building a 16,000-square-foot home in the center of two odd-shaped lots, homeowners John and Sherry wanted to design a landscape as livable as their new interior.

Since the Atlanta landscape has many grade changes, most homes have exposed basements that lead to the backyard and pool area, meaning a homeowner has to walk downstairs before walking outside. But these homeowners wanted to exit their house on the main level to access their backyard patio and swimming pool, which posed some challenges for Scapes, the residential design/build firm the couple hired to work with their 2.5-acre space.

The project's biggest challenge was manipulating the grade changes and controlling the retaining walls, according to Scapes' Partner and Vice President of Design/Build Pete Wilkerson. "Across the entire space from the upper right property line to the lower left property line, there was a 50-foot elevation change," he explains. "And the homeowners didn't want massive retaining walls everywhere to control the grade changes – they wanted smaller 2-, 4- and 5-foot walls that didn't steal the show from the main landscape areas."

Along with the elevation challenges came drainage issues, which were solved by the installation of pipes and catch basins around the home.

Another goal of the project was to provide a nice view of the landscape from inside the house for the homeowners as well as provide them with large usable spaces. "So we made the water feature and pool

very visible to the home's living area via the French doors," Wilkerson shares. "We created a lot of water movement in the 18-foot-by-36-foot pool to pull the eye back. We also installed a rounded arbor in the back to pull the eye out and make the yard feel as big as possible."

The plant material used was elegant, conservative and meshed with the Georgian architectural style of the home – simple and southern, Wilkerson points out. Two large evergreens (cryptomeria) were used in the front of the house to scale down the columns, in addition to large 5-foot boxwoods and low foundation plantings. "We didn't want to cover up the home, we just wanted to add a few large pieces and then stair step it down so it wasn't overdone," he says.

In the back, container plantings were essential to bringing color to the hardscaped areas. The homeowners asked Wilkerson to help them select containers for these spaces and the Scapes' crew installed drip irrigation into all the pots to make them low maintenance.


Though the project totaled \$600,000, the design and management fee made up \$8,000, the landscape and irrigation portion of the bill was \$180,000, and the rest was used for hardscape and pool construction, fencing, lighting and driveway installation. Wilkerson and his team managed seven subcontractors throughout the project's installation. **LL**



*The author is managing editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [nwisniewski@gie.net](mailto:nwisniewski@gie.net).*

by Lauren Spiers

# Princely Properties



Adding color can boost curb appeal – and sometimes occupancy rates – on property-managed commercial accounts.  
Photo: Davey Commercial Grounds Management

*Good communication is key to making relationships with property managers a commercial company's crowning glory – instead of a royal pain.*

If a man's home is his castle, then property managers' accounts are their palatial estates throughout expansive empires. And in these realms of homeowners' associations and office parks, landscape contractors are property managers' loyal aides who use polished techniques to maintain the grounds and keep landscapes trimmed and tidy.

But life isn't always a fairy tale around such stately properties. Landscape contractors often find that property managers can be very particular about landscape maintenance. Moreover, with stringent budgets, expertly grooming everything from turf to trees often leaves little funding for landscape enhancements. And the challenges multiply when industry turnover becomes a problem.

Among contractors who have significant experience working with property managers, the No. 1 piece of advice to remember that communication is key.

**THE ROYAL TREATMENT.** Arguably, the biggest challenge that landscape contractors face when working with property managers is that they're all different. "Every property manager has their own opinions and viewpoints of what quality is and they're all different in their knowledge of landscapes," says Tom Heaviland, owner,

Heaviland Enterprises, Vista, Calif. "Some are more hands-on and some want you to handle everything for them. You have to develop the relationship and know what their expectations are."

For example, Heaviland says he works with some property managers who like to formally walk through properties on at least a monthly basis, while others simply ask to be updated on any challenges or new developments on the property and require little contact. For contractors, identifying and respecting these requests is essential to maintaining good working relationships.

"It's critical to understand what property managers want and need," explains George Gaumer, vice president of commercial service, Davey Commercial Ground Management, Kent, Ohio. "We have to understand what kind of challenges are being placed on them by their customers and help make them successful."

To give property managers the royal treatment, many landscape contractors build relationships by identifying property managers' preferred methods of communication at the outset. "For the most part, our property managers prefer to communicate via e-mail," Heaviland says. "From our standpoint, face-to-face communication is usually the best because if you're stopping in and seeing that property manager on a frequent basis, you're going to develop a stronger relationship. But e-mail is certainly an easy and quick way to keep everyone updated."

*(continued on page 40)*




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# Working With Property Managers

(continued from page 38)

Additionally, Heaviland Enterprises employs several account managers and a customer relations manager who communicate with property managers directly (see *Getting to Know You* on page 42.) "Our account managers have to have great communications skills, they have to be flexible and they have to be very patient," Heaviland comments. "You're dealing with a lot of different personalities and you're not going to make everyone happy, but you have to be able to adjust to specific situations."

Likewise, account managers on Doug Smellage's Lawns of Dallas staff divvy up commercial accounts and strengthen relationships through frequent communication. "Our account managers try to get to their sites and meet with their people weekly," says the owner of the Dallas, Texas-based company. "And on large accounts where we have multiple crews working, not only do we have a representative that deals with the property manager during the course of the

week, we have another representative who handles all of the crews."

In the midst of this diversified method of communication, Smellage says Lawns of Dallas creates consistency by providing property managers with a single point of contact – an account manager – who then informs crews of the property managers' requests. "That creates a bond that moves down through the chain of communication so nothing gets missed," he notes.

Frequency of communication with property managers also is important. "We try to meet with all of our customers on a six- to eight-week basis," says Bruce Bachand, chief operating officer for Carol King Landscape Maintenance, Orlando, Fla. In addition to regular contact with property managers on that schedule, Randy Bachand, Bruce's brother and maintenance manager for the company explains that account managers turn in weekly reports on any intermittent visits they made to property managers.

"If the property manager sends an e-mail with a request for service on the property or just a visit, the account manager may take a copy of that e-mail with them and visit the property itself or go to see the property manager in his or her office," Randy explains. "They keep track of everyone they visit and on Mondays the account managers will turn in a contact sheet saying who they visited and what the problem was, and they note that it was taken care of. Moreover, account managers are responsible for following four to six crews on a daily basis to ensure that work and hour goals are being met. We try to keep the same account manager with the same crews so they all get to know the properties very well and the property manager can depend on that consistent communication."

## KING'S RANSOM OR PAUPER'S PAY?

Though continual communication helps solidify relationships with property managers,

(continued on page 42)

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**USE READER SERVICE #30**

# Working With Property Managers

(continued from page 40)

landscape contractors have another hurdle to jump: Budget constraints.

"Many times, property managers on the commercial building/industrial building/shopping center side have tight budgets that can change from year to year as occupancies rise and fall or the economy impacts what they're doing," explains Bruce Bachand. "You either have to change and adapt with them or they're going to find someone who will."

Heaviland agrees. "The range of budgets we have to work with all depends on the economy and what's going on there," he com-

ments. For instance, one of Heaviland Enterprises' clients is the campus of a golf manufacturer's headquarters. Because the golf industry was in a recession for a few years, the company's landscape budget was reduced accordingly. "They were looking to save and reduce their expenses, so we had to be sensitive to that," Heaviland says. "On the other side of the industry, you're working with homeowners' associations, which are great arenas for enhancement sales because homeowners are looking to increase the value of their properties. Depending on

the situation, you could have small contracts of \$1,000 per month that will add tens of thousands of dollars in enhancements, vs. large accounts that are much more stringent."

Though the amount of money allotted to landscaping varies by property and region, Diane Crouse notes that the budgets on properties she manages range from 20 to 25 cents per square foot per year. This averages out to about \$8,700 per acre annually. "Each property owner has a different financial objective that they want to accomplish," says the se-

(continued on page 48)

**W**hat do you know about your best friend? Their middle name? Their birthday? The password to the tree house you shared when you were 12?

Now what do you know about your best property manager clients?

According to Michelle Holmquist, customer relations manager, Heaviland Enterprises, Vista, Calif., there are a few choice pieces of information that contractors should learn about the property managers they work with. "What we want to do is identify our property manager clients' preferred method of communication and once that's established, I try to connect with them on a level they appreciate," Holmquist says. "The information we collect is personal, but not so personal that someone would hesitate to give it. It just helps us add a personal touch when we acknowledge the property managers we work with."

To keep track of property managers' favorites, Holmquist has property managers fill out a simple "Getting to Know You" form (right) and then enters that information into a database. When special occasions like birthdays or work milestones pop up, she can put together an inexpensive gift basket that's tailored to that particular property manager.

"For example, one property manager had a birthday recently and just by looking at his 'Getting to Know You' information, I saw that his favorite drink is Coors Light, his favorite candy is Dots and he likes light jazz and country music," Holmquist says. "Then I can just go to the grocery store or Target and get some of their favorite stuff and package it nicely for them. It's a great, fun way to connect with our customers."

Holmquist says she usually spends about \$30 on a "Getting to Know You" gift and also puts special seasonal gifts together for the company's best property manager clients when holidays or other special occasions roll around.

## Getting to Know You

### GETTING TO KNOW YOU:

**Client:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Contract Start Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Preferred Method of Communication:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Site Visits YES/NO Phone Calls YES/NO E-mail YES/NO**  
**Years of Service at Firm:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Birthday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Spouse's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Wedding Anniversary:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Kids' Names:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Pets:** \_\_\_\_\_  
1. \_\_\_\_\_ 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
**Hobbies:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Movies/Theatres Attended:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Favorites:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Sports Teams:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Color:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Beverage:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Candy:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Snack:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Music:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Flower:** \_\_\_\_\_ **TV Show:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Fitness/Sports Activity:** \_\_\_\_\_

Additionally, in her capacity as customer relations manager, Holmquist regularly gets in touch with clients through phone calls, e-mails and site visits, which helps her gain a better knowledge of clients' needs and expectations. "My job is to establish a relationship and get a sense of how the property managers we work with want this partnership to play out," she says. "We work hard to accommodate our customers' requests and these personal touches are just another way to show them that we really care about our partnership with them." — **Lauren Spiers**

# The 5 P's Of Insurance Sanity

**Insurance rates in the lawn and landscape industry have climbed 30 to 50 percent in the past three years.** Driving these higher

rates are two factors. First, a down stock market decreased insurance industry earnings on investments. Second, underwriting losses that had been trending upward prior to 9-11 were accelerated by that tragedy and the remaining security threat has caused insurance carriers to take a conservative and realistic approach in setting rates since.

The good news is that rates are beginning to level off. The bad news is that they are leveling off at a higher historic level. For lawn and landscape companies the challenge is to get the protection you need while getting the maximum value for your investment. While few company owners are experts at insurance, the following five steps can help you take greater control of your insurance investment:

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## 1. POLICIES — BUY ONLY WHAT YOU NEED

Strategies to reduce your insurance begin by limiting the policies to those that are most necessary. At a minimum in most states, that would require Workers' Compensation, auto and liability insurance. Companies doing commercial work often need excess or umbrella liability insurance above and beyond their state's minimum. Health insurance, insurance against theft of equipment and environmental insurance may also be necessary depending upon your company's needs.

Deciding what insurance coverage you need means thinking about what risks you are willing to bear. An attitude that insurance is to protect your company from any loss or errors can be costly. A more value-driven attitude is to consider insurance as protection against financial disaster. Buying an insurance policy can be thought of as effectively "renting" the insurance carrier's assets in the event of a claim. The more coverage you rent, the higher your payments.

Another strategy to reduce insurance costs is through going to higher deductibles, the trade-off being lower premiums against higher direct costs if there are any claims.

Regardless of what actions you take, discuss the options with your insurance carrier.

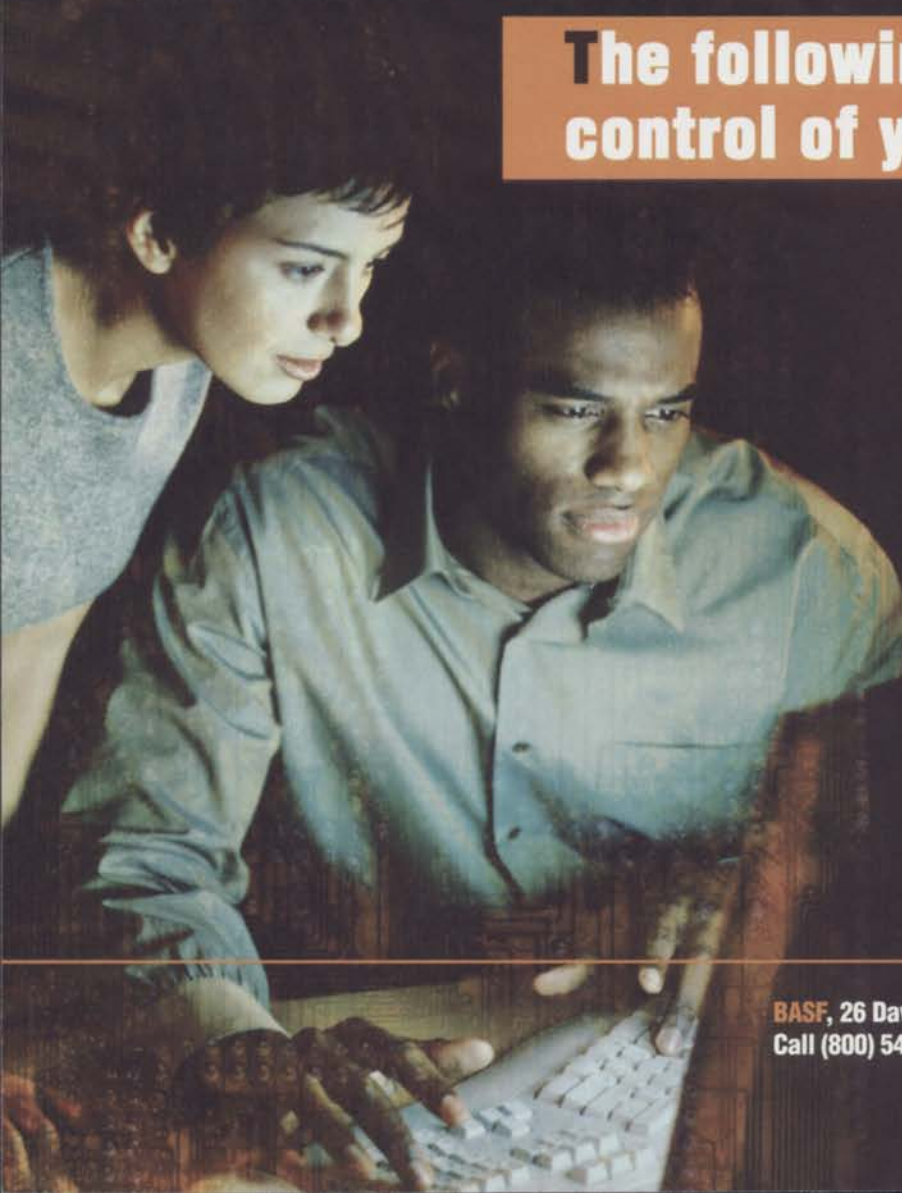
## 2. PEOPLE — YOUR BIGGEST RISK

People are the most important asset for most companies, but they are also the biggest single factor involving claims and losses. Insurance rates are based on risk and the insured company's claims record. For those reasons, employee selection can directly impact on your rates. Increasingly, companies are investing in drug and alcohol, and motor vehicle screening as a normal part of the employee selection process.

In a number of states companies certified as a drug free workplace can save significant money in Workers' Compensation insurance. In the south-east, for example, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee and South Carolina will reduce Workers' Compensation payments by 5 percent for companies certified as drug free. Georgia and Colorado offer even greater discounts. Becoming certified as drug free involves a written program, testing and management training, but the savings make the effort worthwhile.

Another way to reduce Workers' Compensation costs is to match each employee's job description to a corresponding Workers' Compensation classification in your state. For example, maintenance work, landscape installation, irrigation work and tree work typically all have different Workers'

**The following 5 steps can help control of your insurance invest**

A photograph showing a man and a woman in a professional setting. The man is seated at a desk, looking intently at a computer monitor. The woman stands behind him, also looking at the screen. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, creating a focused and serious atmosphere.

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Compensation classifications based on the risks for each job. So, it can be costly if the Workers' Compensation rates you pay for all of your employees have been based on the highest risk classification for the work your company does. You do not want to pay Workers' Compensation rates for office and sales employees based on the landscape construction work rate classification. By matching job descriptions for each employee to a corresponding Workers' Compensation classification, you can save significant money. The only caution in doing this is that each employee must be rated at the highest premium category for the work they do. For example, if an employee does landscape work 95 percent of the time, but sometimes works on a tree maintenance crew, then his Workers' Compensation rate must be based on the tree work (the highest rate classification category that the employee works in). The Industry Scopes Manual lists Workers' Compensation classifications with a brief description of the work for each.

A further benefit of matching each employee's job to a corresponding Workers' Compensation classification tends to make you more attractive as a company to insurance carriers.

## you take greater investment:

### 3. PERFORMANCE — KNOW YOUR RISKS

Major exposure risks in the Green Industry include vehicle accidents involving liability, Workers' Compensation and theft of equipment from vehicles. Traffic accidents can involve employee negligence or simply being hit by someone else. Slips, trips and falls are a hazard from climbing onto trucks or working on wet grass. Muscle strains are an issue with lifting and operating equipment. Safety violations, whether stemming from refusal to wear safety equipment or to follow company safety procedures, often causes losses. And for companies doing lawn care work, misapplication of materials is not a frequent loss, but it can be a serious loss from a per incident cost perspective.

While industry-wide risks are a useful guide for understanding your potential risks, tracking your company's performance is most useful. Track accidents, near-accidents and types of injuries to determine problem areas. Consider the risks involved in the type of work you do. Consider risk from having a facility in a high crime area. What risks are involved from having

personnel who do multiple tasks vs. specialized tasks. Does your company have a lot of turnover? Do you have experienced managers?

Violations by DOT, EPA or OSHA are also red flags. Insurance carriers view compliance with regulations as the bare minimum of good performance and any violations put you in a higher risk category. Insurance carriers have different rates for companies based on performance. Your performance impacts your rate and can make you a more attractive company to the insurer.

### 4. PREVENTION — THE BEST SOLUTION

Loss control is a broad term used to describe actions taken to protect you and your company against accidents, claims and payouts due to negligence or accidents. The principle is that once you have identified risks you want to reduce, action can be taken to reduce the incidents that lead to real losses. Loss control includes training, use of proper equipment, maintaining equipment, company policies, security systems and any other means to reduce mishaps and accidents.

One principle of loss control is that the more specific the program to the risk the better. Some companies require training specific to each responsibility. If a laborer is going to be asked to operate a skid steer loader, for example, that individual could be required to first watch a video and then complete actual training on the equipment.

Because employee negligence and judgment errors can be a component of liability, documented training is important. After an employee completes training on safety, proper procedures and company policy, have them sign and date that they have completed the training. Better still, have each employee take a written test to show they understood the material, and to verify that they have passed a demonstration test or do a combination of both.

Another loss control practice is unannounced field inspections, either by you or an independent individual hired to do this. Training employees is important, but so is making sure they are doing what they have been trained to do.

### 5. PARTICIPATION — KNOW AND BE KNOWN

Most lawn care companies under-communicate with their insurance carrier and the result is that they under-utilize the resources available. All insurance companies offer claims help, but many also offer safety and loss control programs and advice. Talk to your insurance representative at least once every three to six months. Make sure he or she knows you and your business, and ask them what services they can offer to help you get the coverage you need, reduce your costs and reduce your risk and loss.

#### Sources/More Information:

George Jehlen is a loss control consultant with W.S. Pharr & Co., is an Atlanta, GA-based insurance firm with Mike Breedlove, Joe Mendenhall and Van Hoots specializing in the green industry, and George Jehlen providing loss control and safety services. They can be reached at 800-817-2244 or [www.wsparr.com](http://www.wsparr.com).

Michael Weisburger is president of B. & D. A. Weisburger Insurance, a White Plains, NY, Insurance Managing General Agent specializing in lawn care and pest control, and offering an Internet-based loss control program, Safety Strategies. He can be reached at (800) 431-2794 or at [maweis@weisburger.com](mailto:maweis@weisburger.com).

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# Working With Property Managers

(continued from page 42)

nior property manager, Crescent Resources, Lake Mary, Fla. "On a monthly basis we produce financial statements for the property owners and from there we're absolutely tied to budgets. We have to be able to justify any variances, and most of those are within a 5-percent range from the monthly budget."

Indeed, a 5-percent margin of error isn't much to work with, so many contractors find creative ways to meet property managers' expectations without breaking the bank. "No. 1, you have to prioritize," Gaumer says. "Cost is always an issue because they have to meet or beat bottom-line budgets. For that reason, we have to prioritize our recommendations and make sure we sell the benefits. We have to show them there's value in adding a certain enhancement to the bid or how we can reengineer the service on the property to offer more bang for the buck."

For example, Gaumer notes that recommending more landscape beds for color and curb appeal is one way a contractor can help

property managers increase interest on a property with low occupancy.

Another approach may be to redistribute the amount or level of service a property receives in order to stay within budgets. "Sometimes we have to look at the quality of the service and see if we need to pull it back a little bit," Bruce Bachand says. "How can we value-engineer their maintenance program so that the property manager can accomplish the majority of their objectives and then meet a budget? This can be as simple as changing a chemical program, less frequent mulching, fewer annual flowers, less frequent irrigation maintenance – you just find ways to pull from the more peripheral parts of the landscape program in order to keep the whole contract in line."

Heaviland adds that working with strict budgets almost always goes back to staying on top of client communication. "We should be in a relationship where we sit down with the property manager and work out a bud-

"AS SOON AS WE HEAR THAT THERE'S BEEN A MANAGEMENT CHANGE, WE TRY TO GET IN FRONT OF THE NEW PROPERTY MANAGER WITHIN A DAY OR TWO AND LET THEM KNOW THAT WE'RE THERE TO WORK WITH THEM AND TO CHANGE OR TWEAK THE PROGRAM TO MEET THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS."

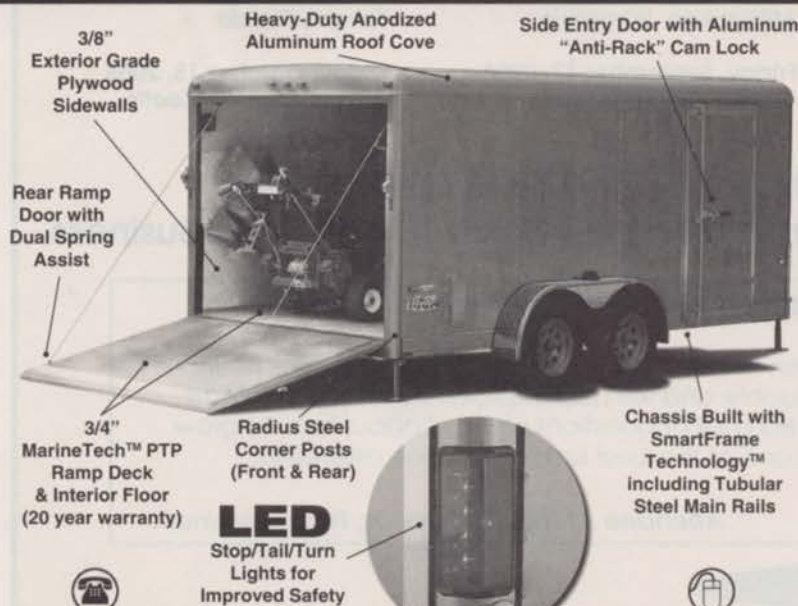
— BRUCE BACHAND

get scenario with them," he says. "We have a sheet we use for that, which breaks down our maintenance budget, tree trimming budget, annual color replacement and irrigation repair costs for January through December. By planning out the year based on what they have available we're always going to have that information up front, rather than after the year starts and we find out that they don't have the money for any enhancements."

(continued on page 50)

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## Working With Property Managers

(continued from page 48)

**CHANGING OF THE GUARD.** With good communication and workable budgets, contractors can begin to bring joy to their property managers' manors. That is, until borders between these dominions begin to blur.

"What's difficult is that you develop the relationship, get a feel for what the property manager's looking for and then the board

changes and wants to hire a new property manager or this manager leaves and goes to another firm," Heaviland comments. "You get things just where you want them to be and all of a sudden you've got a new person or company you're dealing with."

Indeed, because of consolidation and career advancement, landscape contractors

are bound to experience turnover within their property manager clientele. Thankfully, this type of regime change can be positive if contractors effectively manage the situations. The Bachands take preventive steps early on to ensure that relationships can withstand such stresses.

"We try to communicate with a representative of a board of directors or a landscape committee chairperson on homeowners' association accounts, especially, to build relationships both ways, if we can," Bruce says. "The property manager often serves at the whim of the board of directors and they can be instructed to make changes to their vendor lists without warning."

Gaumer adds that creating multiple bonds on a property can put contractors in good positions if turnover occurs. "If you have a good relationship with the current property manager and a good relationship with the owner, an incoming property manager may

**"THIS IS WHAT PROPERTY MANAGERS DO FOR A LIVING AND WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT KIND OF CHALLENGES ARE BEING PLACED ON THEM BY THEIR CUSTOMERS AND HELP MAKE THEM SUCCESSFUL." — GEORGE GAUMER**

be asked to keep you on as a contractor. That's the best scenario. Plus, the outgoing property manager may take you to some of their new sites, as well."

Still, even with solid relationships, new property managers may have preferences of their own in terms of contractors they like to work with. "You'd like to think that the quality of your performance will speak for itself, but if a person comes from another property management firm, it may not matter," Smellage says. "They usually have someone they like who they've worked with before and may persuade the ownership to transfer because of convenience and comfort on their part."

To prevent problems like these, Smellage likes to set up multiple year contracts on some accounts like private schools and churches that they handle. Also, the company tries to identify

(continued on page 52)

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USE READER SERVICE #37

## Working With Property Managers

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**M**ost landscape contractors have been through the process of hiring an employee, whether for a managerial position or to supplement a crew. At the same time, contractors are regularly interviewed by prospective clients who are looking for the right companies to handle their landscapes.

For work on the commercial side of the industry, this often involves being sized up by property managers of potentially large accounts. But what are those property managers looking for in their landscape contractors? Though preferences change depending on the property manager, there are some bright line issues that are always important.

"When I'm looking to hire a landscape contractor, the most important things to me are how the management is structured and what kind of education is there," says Diane Crouse, senior property manager for central Florida, Crescent Resources, Lake Mary, Fla. "I want to be sure that when I have questions as to why a plant material is failing or whether plantings are in appropriate areas, they can tell me."

Moreover, in terms of management, Crouse wants communication between herself and the contractor to flow smoothly. "It's so important to be comfortable with your contact and I've had vendors change contact people to the point where we didn't have a compatible relationship anymore," she comments.

In some cases, Crouse, who is a member of the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), takes vendor recommendations from colleagues in that organization, which makes having good relationships industrywide even more important for contractors. "BOMA is a terrific organization for networking with other property managers and knowing vendors that they use and who they're happy with or not so happy with," Crouse comments. "For a landscaping company, poor performance is hard to hide and clients are likely to mention that to other people."

Crouse also says she looks for a company that will be a one-stop-shop for her landscaping needs. "When I look for a landscape contractor for one of my properties, I want the arbor care and the turf maintenance all in one place – one contractor to do it all," she says. "However, I do have a situations on one property that has retention ponds and my particular contractor doesn't handle pond cleanups. Instead, I'll work through them and they'll subcontract that job to another company. This still leaves me with one contact, which is really important to me, and it reinforces the trust that I have in my contractor to hire a qualified company to do the other work."

In many respects, Crouse explains that this element of trust is very important when she hires a landscape contractor. "Landscaping is one of the most important issues on a commercial property because it's your first impression," she says. "Even though I like to make certain plant selections, I want to know that my selections are going to work because I definitely am not the expert. I have to depend on the contractor's expertise."

– Lauren Spiers

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## Postemergent Products

by Jonathan Katz

Pricing postemergent herbicide applications can vary depending on which way the wind blows. For instance, in Texas where warm winters are common, herbicide applications may be more expensive than in the Midwest where cold winters typically halt weed growth.

"You see a big fluctuation of herbicide rates in Texas than maybe in Ohio because you don't have as much weed pressure there," says Gary LaScalea, owner of GroGreen, Plano, Texas.

Lawn care operators (LCOs) should take several factors into consideration when pricing postemergent applications. Time, labor, weather conditions, grass type and customer loyalty all come into play.

New Milford, Conn.-based YardApes typically charges customers \$5 per 1,000 square feet for its broadleaf weed control program, which is mixed with a preemergent crabgrass control product, points out YardApes President Shayne Newman.

Most lawn care operators make it a general practice to combine the two types of herbicides, says LaScalea. "If someone's not mixing them together, they're wasting a lot of labor," he says. "I know some people spray preemergent, and then come out again and spray postemergent. Why do both at separate times when you can spray them together? They work better as a synergistic effect than they do separately."

YardApes charges \$15 per gallon if it must return to properties for postemergent crabgrass applications because these products are double the cost of their preemergent counterparts, Newman says. But YardApes will sometimes throw in spot spraying of postemergent applications for long-time customers who have a pre-paid maintenance program.

Also, labor costs are a big issue when it comes to pricing, LaScalea says. LCOs also have to factor in the type of education these technicians require to do the job right. As a result, labor costs for herbicide applications are nearly double in cost compared to other general labor, such as mowing, because of the time involved with record keeping, calibrating sprayers and applying the product, Newman says. For this reason, YardApes marks up its herbicide and pesticide treatments by about 70 percent, according to Newman.

Rockingham Turf Care, Exeter, N.H., has a similar pricing plan. The company charges \$6 per 1,000 square feet and \$14 to \$16 per 1,000 square feet for postemergent crabgrass control, according to Rockingham Owner Roger Nownes. The company uses a postemergent product, which Nownes says costs about \$480 per gallon. Then the company factors in 25 percent chemical costs no matter what – whether it's a large or small-sized job – to ensure profitability, Nownes says.

LaScalea takes a slightly different approach to pricing.

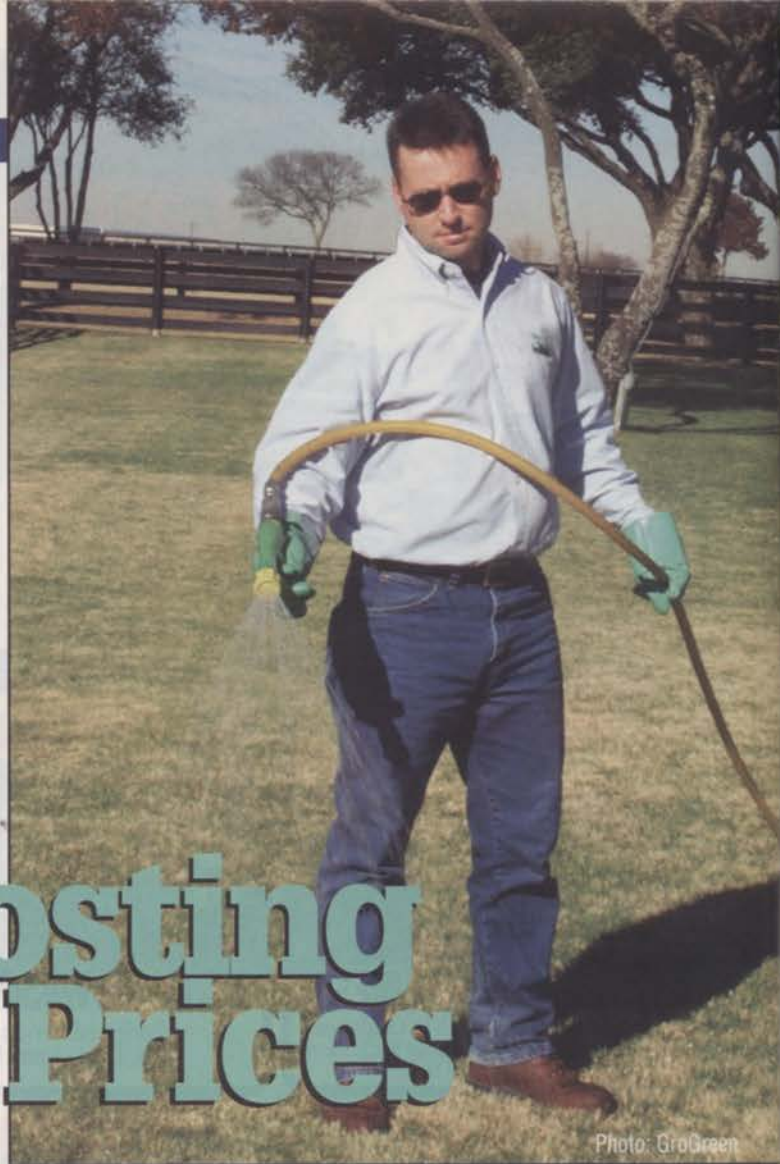


Photo: GroGreen

# Posting Prices

*Pricing postemergent herbicide applications can vary depending on weather, turf type and other factors.*

GroGreen sets a minimum charge of \$29.95 for up to 5,000 square feet for its residential post- and preemergent applications. The company then charges ap-

proximately \$6 per 1,000 square feet after the minimum price. Its commercial prices average between \$125 and \$150 per acre. However, those rates can change depending on the difficulty factor (if a particular property has many obstacles, such as steps and walkways, for example), grass type and overall condition of the lawn. Even weather can affect pricing. For instance, during the winter in Texas, herbicides tend to work slower, so more product must be used.

Proper site maintenance also comes into play when pricing postemergent applications. If the lawn is not watered and the LCO has to make a return visit, prices may increase, LaScalea says. Newman tries to only treat lawns that YardApes cuts to ensure the lawn has received proper care. "We do get calls from people who want us to (only) fertilize and get rid of weeds, but we feel that to have a healthy lawn you have to put everything together," he says. **□**

*The author is associate editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [jkatz@gie.net](mailto:jkatz@gie.net).*

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USE READER SERVICE #39

*Some turf species are running short this year. Experts share tips on how contractors can get through the season.*

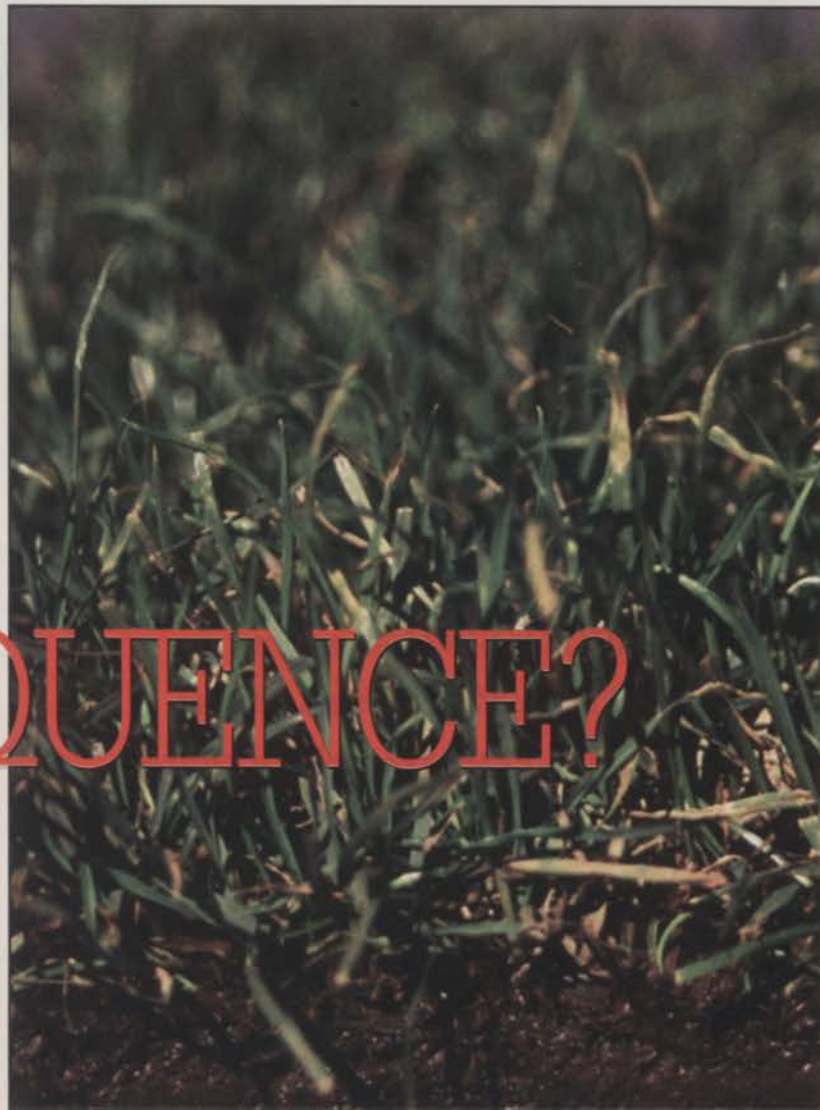
# Turf or CONSEQUENCE?

by Lauren Spiers

**F**rom gasoline to Tickle-Me-Elmo, the world economy operates on a supply vs. demand basis and in a perfect world, demand is always a little bit greater than supply. After all, would the world want more giggling Elmos than it really needs?

At the same time, many contractors currently are being hit by dramatically increased gasoline prices as a result of decreased supplies. A leveling off in this area, would be a welcomed reprieve from paying \$2 per gallon at the pump.

But in terms of the global turf seed market, the industry seems to be caught in a tug-of-war between surpluses in some species and shortages in others. This year, perennial ryegrass supplies are on a downturn and contractors can expect to pay more for their stockpiles than they may have planned. But this may not be a bad thing, according to some industry experts. Turf seed producers and distributors offered their insight on how this shortage will play out and what other aspects of the seed industry might feel its effects.



**BYE-BYE, RYE.** In 1995, seed company AgriBioTech (ABT) initiated a plan to rapidly consolidated smaller seed companies, striving to reach a goal of 45 percent marketshare. Though the plan was to create a network of seed companies with strong research and development resources, the ABT consolidation came to a halt in 2000 when the company filed for bankruptcy.

After the company's downfall, the organization was left with 100,000 acres of turf seed in production that growers had no choice but to harvest. The result: a glut of turf seed that had to be sold at low prices until supply and demand evened out a bit.

That evening out is occurring right now.

"A combination of factors has led to a shortage of

*(continued on page 58)*

*To compensate for shortages, contractors may have to lower the percentage of perennial ryegrass (above) they use in blends or mixtures in favor of other turfgrass types like Kentucky bluegrass or fine fescue. Photo: Turfgrass Producers International*





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## SPECIAL FOCUS: Turf Seed

(continued from page 56)

several major turfgrass species," notes Steve Tubbs, president, Turf Merchants, Tangent, Ore. "Several years of overproduction, coupled with the ABT bankruptcy in January of 2000, caused massive inventory problems that led to record low prices. Even the growers who were not directly impacted by the ABT bankruptcy bore the brunt of the low cost of production, mostly in perennial ryegrass and turf-type tall fescue."

Producers knew that the ABT seed excess would run down eventually, but Tubbs notes that the ever-unpredictable Mother Nature added to that reduction in inventory.

"We entered the 2003 harvest with the lowest production acres of perennial ryegrass we had seen in more than 10 years – more than 30,000 acres less than in 2000," Tubbs says. "But wouldn't you know it – we had a bad crop. Excessive, above-normal heat at the critical time of pollination reduced yields by 25 to 35 percent in some cases."

As a result, contractors can expect seed

prices to climb. "It is predicted that prices will be about 10 percent higher for turf-type perennial ryegrass in the fall of 2004 compared to the fall of 2003," says Evelyn Dennis, seed project manager, LESCO, Strongsville, Ohio, adding that increased prices may not be a bad thing. "The higher prices do have some advantages. They will encourage production companies and seed growers to maximize the quality and yield of their crops, as well as continue growing regrass into 2005 and beyond."

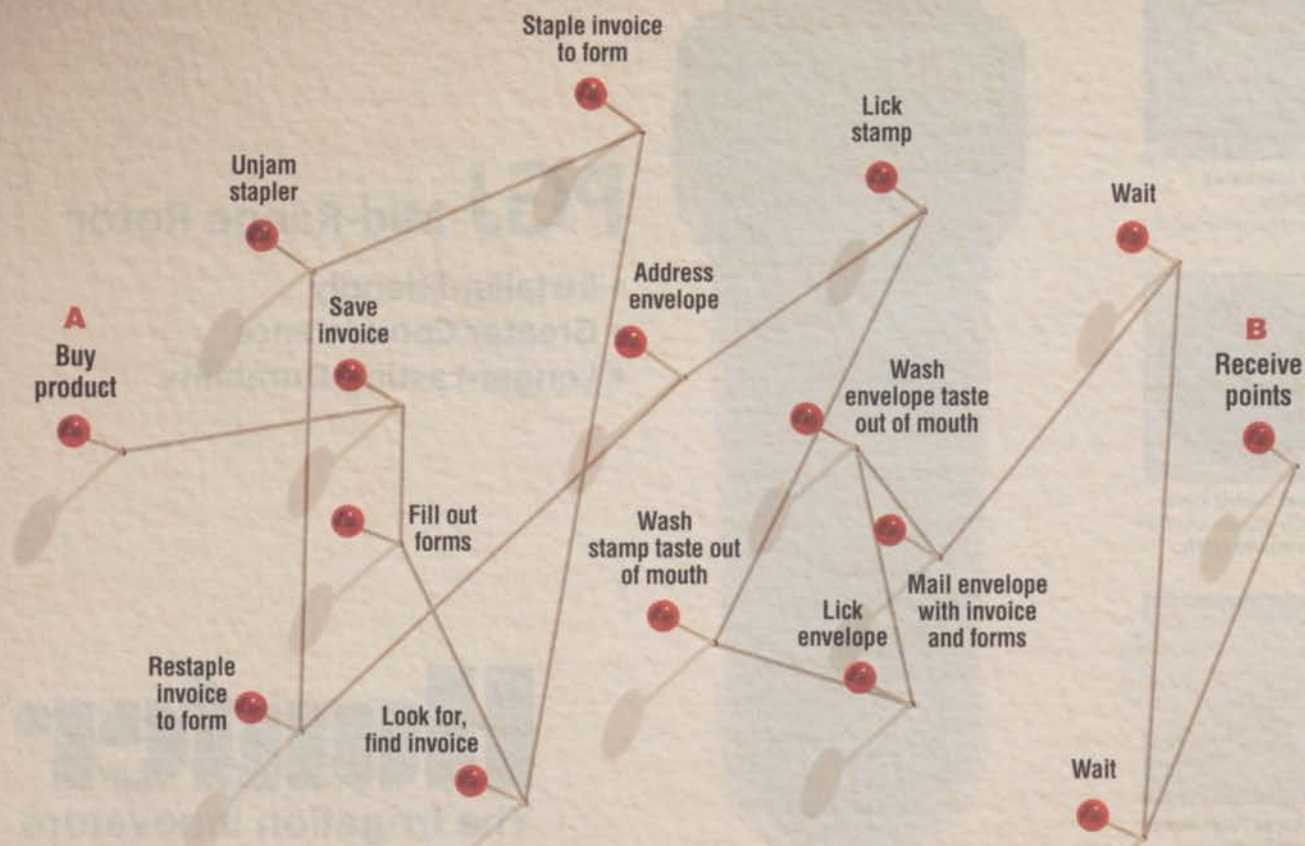
**PLAN FOR DEMAND.** While these increases actually bring turf seed prices back to levels seen in the mid-1990s, producers understand that the price spike will come as a shock to some contractors. "When you have a spike, particularly after two or three years in a row of prices being flat or less expensive than before, people get used to that," comments Bill Dunn, general manager, Seed Research of Oregon, Corvallis, Ore. "It's

"EXCESSIVE, ABOVE-NORMAL HEAT AT THE CRITICAL TIME OF POLLINATION REDUCED PERENNIAL RYEGRASS YIELDS BY 25 PERCENT TO 35 PERCENT IN SOME CASES."

— STEVE TUBBS

very much like the low interest rates that homeowners are seeing now. They're rising to 6 percent and that's seen as a big increase because it's no longer 5.25 percent, even though 6 percent is still historically low."

Still, to take the edge off the higher price tags in shortage situations like these, some producers see landscape contractors using modified seed mixtures on clients' lawns. "Industry response to the shortage has been formulation shifts where contractors use more of another species in blends



and mixtures," Dunn says. "If they use a Kentucky bluegrass/fine fescue/perennial ryegrass mix, for instance, they're probably going to use a higher percentage of fine fescue in the ratio and pull back on the ryegrass a bit."

Dennis agrees. "There are many alternatives to turf-type perennial ryegrass," she says. "Turf-type tall fescues, Kentucky bluegrasses and fine fescues are in good supply and prices are stable. Seed customers should consider these alternatives, which in today's market, may offer better prices and a higher quality product."

Also, producers recommend that contractors work closely with their suppliers to keep future shortage possibilities at bay. "Contractors should order and purchase their seed as soon as they know what they need," comments Susan Samudio, plant breeder, Jacklin Seed/J.R. Simplot Co., Post Falls, Idaho. "Their suppliers will be able to let them know if what they request is not

available and give alternative options."

Also, "Some distributors will allow contractors to book seed for a season as a way to lock in prices so the contractor will know their price is flat through a period," Dunn says. "The key is to work with your distributor and communicate."

Though Dunn notes that more people are paying closer attention to inventories and buying just the seed they need, Samudio notes that buying seed in advance is an option in some cases. "Seed can be purchased in advance and stored with little change in seed quality for a year or two if the purchaser's warehouse has controlled temperature and humidity," she says. "If not, contractors should only purchase what they can use in a few months."

But contractors shouldn't have to worry about offsetting higher seed prices for too long, according to Dennis. She expects the shortage of perennial ryegrass in particular to be relieved later this year. "Major seed

producers have expanded production of turf-type perennial ryegrass by about 20 percent for the 2004 crop," she says. "If the weather cooperates and the harvest meets or exceeds estimates, the shortage of turf-type perennial ryegrass should end in August or September of 2004."

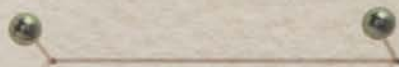
Likewise, Dennis adds that the worst of the shortage will come between June and July while the industry waits for the new crop to be harvested. This means that contractors should already have on hand any seed that they plan on using this summer, but it also means that the industry is already headed for greener pastures.

Samudio agrees. "Producers are trying to get seed production more in line with demand," she says. "This summer, they should be closer to achieving this." ■

*The author is associate editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at lspiers@gie.net.*

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# Seeds of CHANGE

by Lauren Spiers

*Breeding for color is so 1999. Find out about the newest trends in turf seed advancement and how they can strengthen your clients' lawns.*

Every five years, a certain species of turf seed has its day. This year, when perennial ryegrass is called up for its National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP), breeders will bring scores of new and old varieties to testing sites where seedlings can sprout and shine – and be subjected to a myriad of stresses, such as drought conditions, winter kill and insect and disease damage.

Though new turf seed varieties are researched and developed under ideal laboratory conditions, the true test of a new cultivar comes during NTEP and other national, regional and university trials. If varieties get good marks in these venues, breeders can confidently bring their products to market where contractors can benefit from their demonstrated improvements.

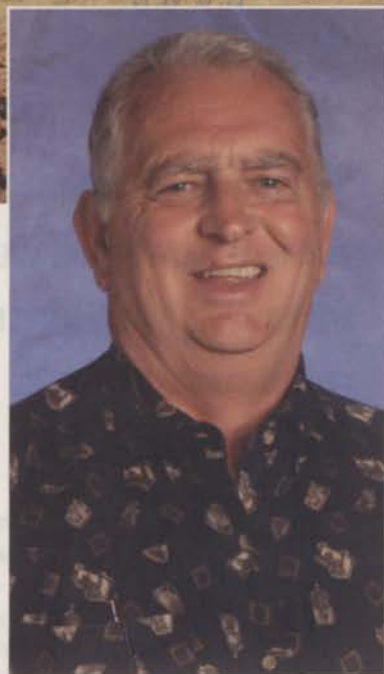
“Climate change and conditions change – there are always negative aspects to an environment, so we’re always breeding new grasses to adapt to those things,” explains Devish Singh, research director, Barenbrug

*(continued on page 62)*

*The Pacific Northwest – in Oregon in particular, is an ideal region for growing turf seed due to good rainfall through the winter months and dry summers that provide good pollination. These conditions are advantageous to breeders as they develop new turfgrass species.*  
Photo: Jacklin Seed



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USE READER SERVICE #68

## SPECIAL FOCUS: Turf Seed

(continued from page 60)

USA, Tangent, Ore. "There are always challenges ahead of you. New diseases appear or existing diseases change strains, the use of recycled or reclaimed water increases – you have to keep up with all of that, which is why turfgrass advancements are so important."

As such, turfgrass breeders are continually striving to create varieties that will be

sustainable in stressful environments. Currently, salt, wear and drought tolerance are driving the research and development for many producers.

**PASS THE SALT.** A little salt is good for turf, such as in fertilizer applications that help lawns become fuller and better estab-

lished. But too much salty fertilizer can burn up turf, as well as too much salt – as in excess deicing material, which contractors in northern states know all too well. Moreover, as water restrictions tighten up around the country, many states and counties are turning to reclaimed or recycled irrigation water, which often includes residue from both fertilizer and road salt, not to mention a plethora of other saline scoundrels.

"Right now, one characteristic that a lot of companies are emphasizing in their grasses is salt tolerance because we're using more effluent water," says Leah Brillman, research director, Seed Research of Oregon, Corvallis, Ore. "It's becoming more important in the grasses used for overseeding and in grasses used for permanent turf because we're having to use more marginal water sources."

Singh notes a couple of different approaches

**"CLIMATES CHANGE AND CONDITIONS CHANGE — THERE ARE ALWAYS NEGATIVE ASPECTS TO AN ENVIRONMENT, SO WE'RE ALWAYS BREEDING NEW GRASSES TO ADAPT TO THOSE THINGS." — DEVISH SINGH**

to breeding salt-tolerant species. "We may apply a salt treatment in laboratory situations – maybe by trying to grow grass in salty water – and then we select it that way," he explains. "Or we also have a university colleague who is working on using city water that is high in salt and applying it to turf plots. In both of those situations, we'll continue to cross the varieties that do well and develop a new variety that has both salt tolerance and good turf quality."

Maintaining quality – as in, good density, uniformity and texture – is key when developing a new turfgrass variety, Singh says. "For instance, there are some grasses like salt grass or alkali grass that are very salt tolerant, but don't have a lot of turf quality," he explains. "But tufted hairgrass is a new turf species that is salt tolerant, but also has very good turf quality, so it works out quite well."

**ALL DRIED UP.** Going hand-in-hand with salt tolerance is drought tolerance for

(continued on page 64)



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## SPECIAL FOCUS: **Turf Seed**

(continued from page 62)

turfgrass species in areas where water restrictions apply. "There's a high level of importance in this area with the scarcity of water in several of our metropolitan areas and the urban areas around them," Singh explains.

Brilman adds that some research into drought tolerance has gone toward warm-

season grasses. "Bermudagrass has much more salt and drought tolerance than many of our cool-season grasses, so in areas where drought or water usage is a real concern, these need less water," she says. "You may not have them green quite as long during the year, but you can really reduce the amount of water used in a year and you can

have them much further north than before."

Singh explains that breeding for drought tolerance is often as easy as providing the different varieties with less water and seeing which ones thrive. Along those lines, Brilman adds that contractors must consider how the turf is managed if they're looking at different varieties at a turfgrass trial.

"If you start looking for varieties that are developed for better drought tolerance, these might not look as good if people are practicing high maintenance in those trials and irrigating and all of that," Brilman explains. "They'll look better in trials that are really looking at drought stress and providing less irrigation. Overall, you have to identify the level of management at the trial and see which ones are performing best at that level."

**WEAR IT WELL.** Speaking of performance, when coaches and fans head to a sporting event with their teams, it's often the athletes' performances that are measured more than that of the turf. However, turf varieties that are "wear tolerant" or perform well in high traffic areas like sports fields and parks are of great interest to breeders right now.

"The more we examine wear, the more we realize that it's really complex and how the turf will perform depends on when your wear is going to be applied, what sport is going on, etc.," Brilman explains. "Little kid soccer players will put tons of wear from little feet over a field many times during a day. In other areas where football is more common and people stop playing at a certain time of year, it may be a different sort of wear pattern that we need to simulate on wear machines."

Singh agrees. "Even on high school playing fields or city parks, when you have a lot of people walking around or football players wearing cleats and tearing up the grass, having high-wear turf is important," he says, adding that maintaining quality is important in this area, as well.

"These grasses have to maintain a good playing surface all the time," Singh continues. "Sometimes people don't like to use tall fescue because it grows in clumps and doesn't provide a uniform playing surface, so at the same time that you're looking for wear tolerance, you're looking for something that has to be playable."

(continued on page 66)

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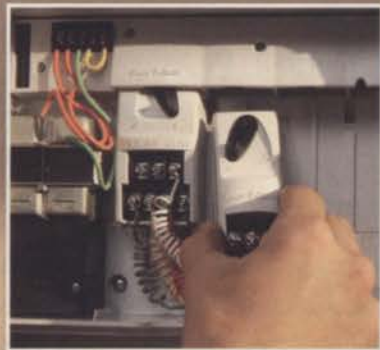
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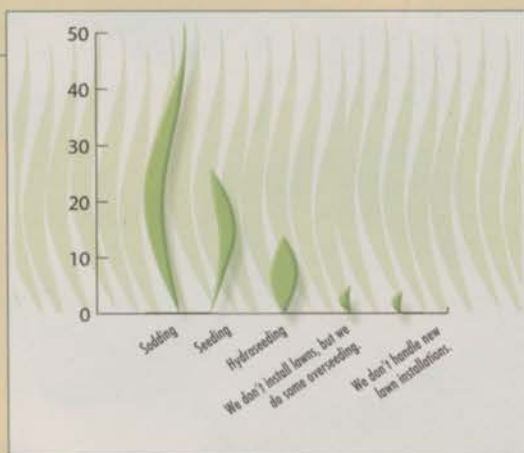
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ASTA ESTIMATES

According to the American Seed Trade Association, the United States produces an estimated **23 million metric tons** of turf seed annually. This figure encompasses **1,000 varieties** and has an export value of **\$70 million**. Source: [www.asta.org](http://www.asta.org)

TURF SEED TRENDS

A recent *Lawn & Landscape* survey asked contractors about their purchasing habits. Of 432 respondents, 51.2 percent said they purchased turf seed in the previous 12 months and 42.4 expected to make turf seed purchases during the next 12 months. Among those purchasing turf seed, the average expenditure on such supplies was \$3,122. Source: *Lawn & Landscape*



Source: *Lawn & Landscape Online*

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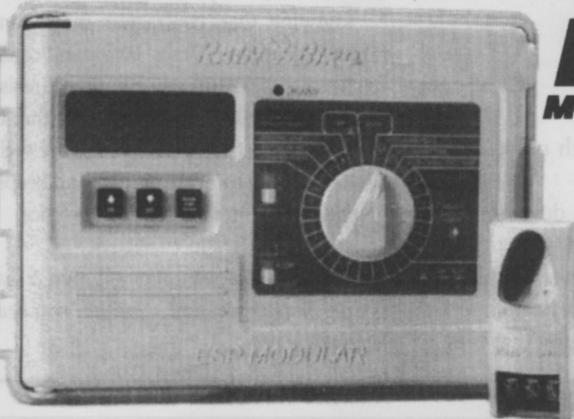
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## SPECIAL FOCUS: Turf Seed

(continued from page 66)



Brilman notes that tall fescues, perennial ryegrasses and bluegrasses are all subjects of current research on wear tolerance. In many cases, the traffic and compaction of sports fields and the like is simulated by pulling a machine fitted with two cleated drums over the playing area. Many seed

producers work directly with universities for sports field access.

With seed research and development going on in so many areas, new varieties are becoming available all the time, though varieties new to the market have been in testing phases for years. "We figure that if ev-

*Constant monitoring and crossbreeding of turfgrass species allows turf producers to develop new varieties that are resistant to specific stresses.*  
Photo: Jacklin Seed

everything goes right and we're not starting with something that's not very well adapted to a certain characteristic already, it takes probably six to seven years to bring a variety to market, and even longer for species like Kentucky bluegrasses that are harder to breed," Brilman says, though she notes that all that time and energy produces an important result. "We're coming up with new varieties all the time that have better density, color and resistance than what was planted in lawns even 10 years ago," she explains.

Knowing that, contractors may want to take a look at their clients' lawns and consider freshening up the turf with new, more resistant species. Doing so can show clients that their lawn and landscape professionals are well informed on new turf care options and keeps the greenest grass on their side of the fence. ■

*The author is associate editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [lsapiers@gie.net](mailto:lsapiers@gie.net).*

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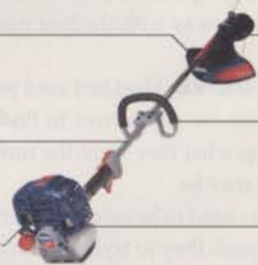
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*Contractors are in the driver's seat when they apply a car-shopping mentality to turf seed purchases.*

**T**here's more to buying a car than just heading to a dealership and handing over a down payment.

Smart car shoppers first identify what they want their new vehicles to do for them and then cruise down the highway on test drives. Ultimately, someone who thought they wanted to take a sporty convertible with bucket seats to the beach every weekend may realize that their ideal auto is actually a trendy SUV with room for their beach chairs and a hitch for their jet skis.

Though it may not seem like cars built for asphalt have much in common with seeds tailored for turf, contractors need to approach turf seed selection similarly to the way they would buy a new car. Not only will research help narrow down their ideal turf seed selections, but contractors will find that identifying the right blend for jobs like overseeding will keep turf from looking like a mismatched paint job.

The following tips from seed producers can help contractors drive away with the best possible blends.

**LICENSE TO DRIVE.** Most turf seed producers agree that the first step for contractors to find the right turf seed is knowing what they want the turf to do – or not do, as the case may be.

"Contractors need to be sure of what they're looking for and what goals they're trying to accomplish," says John Walters, vice president of turf products, Barenbrug USA, Tangent, Ore. "If they don't tell their supplier that the place they're going to put the seed has a limited water supply or receives some extreme amount of wear, then they could easily choose the wrong blend or mixture." In these cases, Walters explains that identifying the need for drought- or wear-tolerant seed helps contractors narrow down their seed options significantly.



# Green means GO

*by Lauren Spiers*

Steve Tubbs agrees, adding that even within a relatively localized area, appropriate turf seed selections can vary greatly. "Every turfgrass user needs to consider the environment for the area of use," he says. "Water, elevation, maintenance and soil type are all major considerations that make it difficult to prescribe one species for any given area."

Southern California is a good example of a region where environmental differences impact turf seed choice. "You would think that Los Angeles would only use one type of grass," Tubbs comments. "However, if you're coastal you would probably use turf-type tall fescue, which has the appearance of bluegrass but the heat and

*(continued on page 72)*

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USE READER SERVICE #52

## SPECIAL FOCUS: Turf Seed

(continued from page 70)

drought tolerance of tall fescue. But if you're in an inland desert, you would probably grow Bermudagrass and overseed with ryegrass when it goes dormant for a green winter lawn."

Moreover, Tubbs adds that areas at higher elevations within that region may even be able to sustain a bluegrass lawn because of the colder winters. Knowing this reinforces the need to detail an area's environmental factors before diving into a seed purchase.

**ROAD TEST.** In addition to environmental research before purchasing seed, contractors must also do some field testing – literally. Both new and old turfgrass varieties are field tested by organizations like the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP), as well as universities and extension services. These trials help determine seed quality and performance and can help determine if a cultivar is well adapted to a local area or level of turf maintenance.

"It's best to look at data from close to

where you are or from your region," explains Leah Brilman, director of research, Seed Research of Oregon, Corvallis, Ore. "Also, some of that data is subdivided into the level of management, so if the contractor is looking for seed for a home lawn situation, they're going to want to look at the data for something that's managed more like a home lawn." Likewise, Brilman notes that if the seed will be planted in an area where the turf will not be irrigated, areas in the trial data will describe how the turf was managed so contractors can specify varieties that performed well in non-irrigated situations.

But in the same way that crash tests don't tell everything about a car, contractors shouldn't depend on NTEP data alone when choosing turf seed. Field days on testing sites are good opportunities for test driving turf. "Contractors should use field days as opportunities to walk over the plots themselves because what they think is important for an application may be different from

what the person who's rating the trial thinks is important."

For instance, Brilman explains that good color is often a key characteristic that evaluators look for during turfgrass trials, and certain varieties may get extra points and, thus, higher ratings, if they have particularly good color. However, a contractor's main concern may be density or disease resistance with color as a secondary point. In these situations, even if the contractor chooses a variety that's a shade lighter in color, the disease resistance is what will limit customer callbacks.

**SHOP AROUND.** Seed producers also recommend that contractors get second opinions from sources beyond research trials. For instance, seed distributors are good sources of information and can put contractors in touch with other people who have used certain turf seed varieties. "A distributor might be likely to say that his or her

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**F**or many contractors and their clients, one of the most important characteristics of established turf is its uniformity over a lawn area. But this doesn't necessarily mean contractors need to install plantings using just one seed type. However, when using blends, having the proper amounts of each type of seed is important.

For example, "one of the mistakes contractors tend to make is mixing too much perennial ryegrass in with their Kentucky bluegrass because they get coverage much quicker," notes Leah Brilman, research director, Seed Research of Oregon, Corvallis, Ore. "There are more bluegrass seeds per pound, so people may tend to put in more perennial ryegrass thinking it would come out even, but we find that the ryegrass is so vigorous that it shades out and overdominates the stand." For bluegrass/ryegrass mix-

tures, Brilman recommends using no more than 15 to 20 percent ryegrass in the blend.

In established lawns, Brilman adds that overseeding with a different variety of seed is also OK and even advisable. "You can use the same turf species if you want the appearance to stay the same, but you can also introduce new species as long as you make sure to do it over the whole area," she explains. "This helps you update the varieties that are in the lawn. As long as the new variety is better adapted to your environment and has better stress resistance, the old variety will start to be crowded out over time."

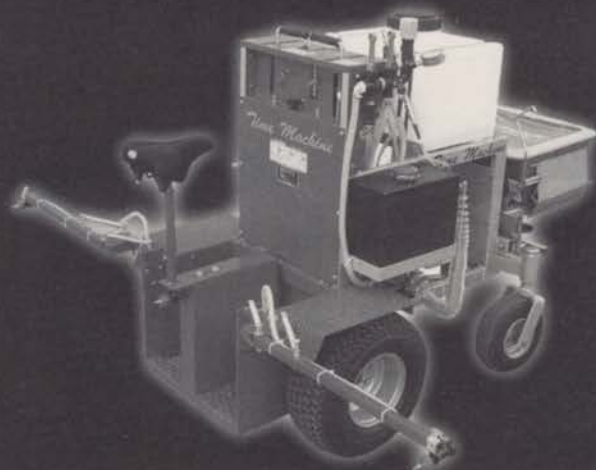
Brilman notes that landscape contractors may have to seed one or two times for this type of turf update to take hold, but that an updated lawn can often be stronger than existing turf types. — **Lauren Spiers**

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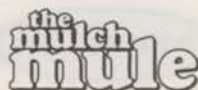
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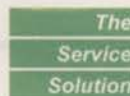
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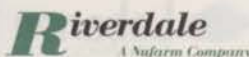
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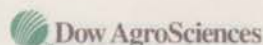
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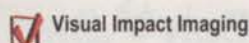
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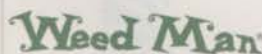
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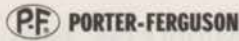
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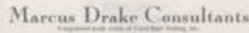
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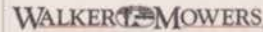
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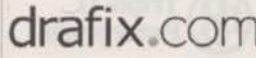
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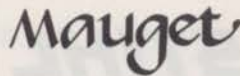
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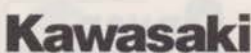
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(continued from page 73)

turfgrass species is the best, but they can also provide information on end-users who have already used certain products," Brilman says. "The contractor can find out who else in the area is using this variety or blend and can actually go look at it and get a feel for how it will function over a large area."

Tubbs agrees. "Contractors have many informational sources other than just NTEP," he says. "One of the best sources is his or her local sod grower. Turfgrass Producers International has members in every major market and these professionals depend on growing the right sod for the right area."

**SWITCHING GEARS.** After learning about the different varieties suitable to their clients' lawns, contractors should identify their top 10 to 20 cultivars and prepare to be flexible among those choices.

"If the contractor selects 10 varieties that they like, they may find that they're owned by eight different companies," Brilman explains. "Some of those companies may sell to each other to create blends and some won't. So unless the contractor is willing to blend the seeds himself, he may have to go with a selection a little farther down on his list."

Moreover, having multiple options from which to choose can help increase a blend's overall strength. "If someone's looking for bluegrass, they may come up with their list by choosing the five top-performing varieties from the trial," Brilman says. "But those top five may be almost the same genetically and you don't want a blend of things that are that similar. Without some genetic variability, they'll have the same strengths, but they'll also have the same weaknesses."

**BUYER BEWARE.** For many homeowners, keeping up with the Joneses is a matter of having the best stuff on the street – and that includes both cars and lawns. If Mr. Smith buys a vehicle that makes his or her neighbors point and stare – and not in the good way – he's likely to hide the car in the garage with a bruised ego or head back to the dealership for a conversation with his salesperson.

But if the wrong type of turf seed is chosen, not only will Mr. Smith have nowhere to conceal his gossip-inducing lawn, but his lawn care contractor will bear the brunt of his irritation. "If you choose the wrong variety, it may die, it may get disease

and you may have to spend more money on herbicides, fungicides and watering," Brilman says. "All turf varieties will require different levels of maintenance depending on the environment they're planted in. In the cases where environmental stresses are very high, it increases your overall costs."

By using producers' advice, contractors

will have better experiences in turf seed showrooms and can avoid unnecessary client callbacks. It's all green lights from there. **LI**

The author is associate editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at [lspliers@gie.net](mailto:lspliers@gie.net).

(sidebars continued on page 78 and 80)

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USE READER SERVICE #58

**P**art of choosing the right turf seed is properly reading a seed label. Every bag of turf seed is legally required to carry a seed analysis tag, which gives end users information about the ingredients. Here are explanations of 11 important pieces of information listed on the sample seed label below.

1. **Kind** – Type or variety of seed in the bag.
2. **Contact Information** – Full name and address of the person or firm who labeled the

seed or who sells, offers or exposes the seed for sale within the state.

3. **Purity** – Percent by weight of the particular cultivar seed.
4. **Cultivar** – Look for specific cultivar names, rather than only "Kentucky bluegrass" or "tall fescue." Named cultivars are superior in many traits to common types.
5. **Germination** – Percent of pure seed that germinates under ideal conditions. Avoid

seed with germination of less than 70 percent.

6. **Origin** – The state or foreign country where the seed originated.
7. **Inert Matter** – The percent by weight of material such as chaff, corn cobs, sand or soil. Look for a value of less than 4 percent.
8. **Other Crop** – The seed of any other commercially grown grass crop. High quality turfgrass seed should contain no more than 1 percent of other types of seed.
9. **Weed Seed** – The percent by weight of any seed that is not pure or crop seed. Look for a value of less than 1 percent.
10. **Noxious Weeds** – Weeds that are difficult to control and are declared noxious by some states. It is illegal to sell seed that contains noxious weeds. If noxious weeds are present, they must be listed by name.
11. **Date Tested** – The date the seed was last tested. Look for seed that was tested within the previous 12 months. – **Lauren Spiers**

XYZ Lawn Mixture <sup>1</sup>			
XYZ Seed Company, 123 Main Street, Anywhere, USA <sup>2</sup>			
Pure Seed <sup>3</sup>	Cultivar <sup>4</sup>	Germination <sup>5</sup>	Origin <sup>6</sup>
75%	Mackinac Kentucky bluegrass	90%	Michigan
23.25%	Traverse City Perennial ryegrass	87%	Michigan
1%	Inert Matter <sup>7</sup>		
0.5%	Other Crop <sup>8</sup>		
0.25%	Weed Seed <sup>9</sup>		
Noxious Weeds <sup>10</sup> : None		Test Date <sup>11</sup> : 11/01	

Source: "Purchasing Quality Turfgrass Seed: Read the Label," by Kevin Frank, department of crop and soil sciences, Michigan State University.

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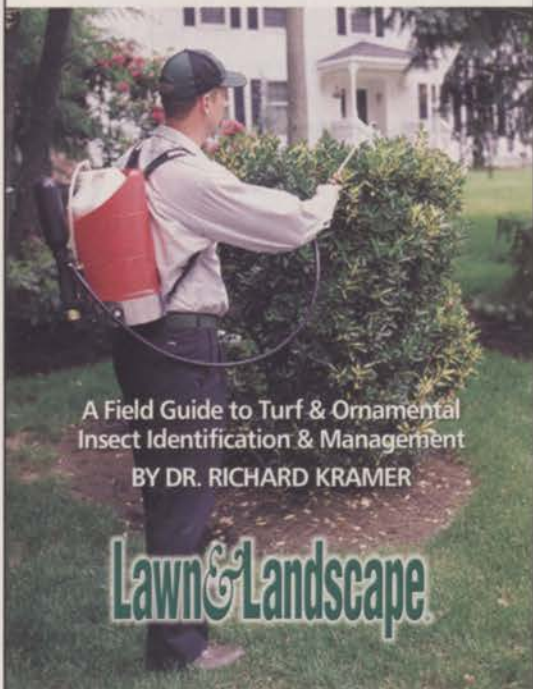
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*(continued from page 78)*

**T**hrough annual trials of hundreds of turf varieties, the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program provides ratings for turf seed based on varieties' performances under certain conditions.

But what, exactly, are researchers looking for in those trials, and how do they know when they find it?

As the "Guide to NTEP Turfgrass Ratings" explains, turfgrass evaluators are trained to notice visual differences in all areas of turfgrass quality and use a scale of 1 to 9 to rate each variety in several categories, doing their best to eliminate the subjectivity that can creep into the evaluations. To do this, evaluators are asked to conduct visual evaluations on cloud-covered days when shadows and reflections are minimal.

Here is some background on the specific characteristics evaluators look at and how those characteristics are rated.

**1. Quality.** Turfgrass quality is based on a 1 to 9 rating scale with 9 being ideal turf and 1 being poor or dead. A rating of 6 or above is generally considered acceptable.

Within a species, quality ratings are relative; among species, they are not. For example, an acceptable rating of 6 or above within tall fescue cultivars is not relative to the same value among Kentucky bluegrasses. Quality ratings are based on measures of color, density, uniformity, texture and disease or environmental stress.

**2. Color.** *Genetic Color.* Genetic color reflects the inherent color of the genotype and is based on a visual rating scale with 1 being light green and 9 being dark green. Genetic color ratings are collected while the turf is actively growing and not under stress.

*Winter Color.* Winter color assesses overall plot color retention during the winter months. A rating of 1 equals straw brown or no color retention, while a rating of 9 equals dark green.

*Seasonal Color/Color Retention.* Seasonal color can be used to differentiate color based on damage caused by pests, nutrient deficiency or environmental stress. Also, color retention reflects the turf's ability to hold its color as seasons change. This is especially useful in quantifying the response of warm-season grasses to temperature changes or frost occurring in fall. This category also rates overall plot color as 1 being straw brown and 9 being dark green.

**3. Spring Green-up.** Spring green-up measures the transition from winter dormancy to active spring growth and is based on plot color rather than genetic color. The visual rating of spring greenup is based on a 1-to-9 rating scale with 1 being straw brown and 9 being completely green.

**4. Leaf Texture.** Turfgrass texture is a measure of leaf width. The 1-to-9 texture rating scale holds 1 as coarse and 9 as fine. Visual assessment of texture is difficult imprecise; however, physical measurement is time consuming and labor intensive. Evaluators take care to measure leaves of similar age and stage of development while the turfgrass is actively growing and not under stress.

**5. Density.** Turfgrass density is a visual estimate of living plants per unit area, excluding dead patches. On the rating scale, 9 signifies maximum density, which can be determined by counting shoots in a specified area. This is time consuming and labor intensive, so visual turfgrass density ratings are highly correlated

to counts and require much less time and labor input. Density ratings are collected in spring, summer and fall to account for seasonal variation, particularly with cool-season turfgrasses.

**6. Living Ground Cover.** Living ground cover expresses the amount of damage caused by disease, insects, weeds or environmental stress by identifying the percentage of surface area covered by the originally planted species. This is often measured in the spring, summer and fall, which allows evaluators to track the turfgrass response to various stresses during the growing season.

**7. Seedling Vigor/Establishment.** Seedling vigor or establishment is a visual estimate of the percent ground cover, plant height, etc., that reflects the relative speed at which a variety develops into mature sod. Seedling vigor is rated on a 1-to-9 scale with 9 being maximum vigor. Establishment is rated by the percent of coverage.

**8. Disease or Insect Damage.** Using the 1-to-9 rating scale, 1 equals no resistance to disease and insects or 100-percent injury and 9 equals complete resistance or no injury. Evaluators usually identify disease and insect genus and species in their reports.

**9. Drought Tolerance.** Drought tolerance is assessed as wilting, leaf firing, dormancy or recovery. A 1-to-9 visual rating scale is used with 1 being complete wilting, 100 percent leaf firing, complete dormancy or no plant recovery and 9 being no wilting, no leaf firing, 100-percent green (no dormancy) or 100 percent recovery.

**10. Frost Tolerance/Winter Kill.** Direct low temperature (winter kill) and desiccation injury are generally expressed as a visual estimate of the percent damaged ground cover. Frost injury is expressed on a 1 to 9 rating scale with 1 equaling 100 percent leaf injury and 9 equaling no injury.

**11. Traffic Tolerance.** Traffic tolerance is a combination of wear and compaction stress that occur whenever turf is exposed to foot or vehicle traffic. NTEP reports traffic tolerance as a visual estimate of turfgrass tolerance using a 1-to-9 rating scale with 1 being no tolerance or 100 percent injury and 9 being complete tolerance or no injury.

**12. Thatch Accumulation.** Thatch depth is measured by collecting four 5-centimeter plugs of turf, removing the verdure and placing a 1-kilogram (2.2 pound) weight on the surface of the thatch. The compressed thatch is then measured in millimeters.

**13. Seedheads.** Certain turfgrass species can produce significant numbers of seedheads in turf. These are generally considered unsightly and reduce the quality of the turf stand. Seedheads are rated from 1 to 9 with 9 equaling no seedheads.

**14. Poa annua Invasion.** *Poa annua* can either be rated as a percentage of the total coverage of each plot or on a scale of 1 to 9 with 9 equaling no *Poa annua*.

**15. Mowing Quality/Steminess.** This rating reflects the uniformity and cleanness of cut exhibited by some grasses. On the rating scale, 1 equals poorest mowing quality/most steminess and 9 equals cleanest cut/no steminess. — **Lauren Spiers**  
Source: [www.ntep.org](http://www.ntep.org)

## NTEP In Depth




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# Adventures



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## In Trenchers

*Trenchers have been streamlining the irrigation installation process for years, but many contractors are digging beneath the surface to find that trenchers are versatile in multiple landscape applications.*

### *Can you dig it?*

In the half-century that trenching technology has existed, landscape contractors have incrementally developed new ways to make it applicable to their profession. Initially viewed as irrigation installation hardware, the scope of trencher use has widened to include everything from curbing to laying wire for invisible dog fences. Today many landscape contractors have adopted the trencher (or a trencher attachment for a skid-steer loader) as a fundamental tool in their equipment arsenal.

Landscape contractors may be surprised by the range of tasks a trencher can conquer. However, landscape contractors who decide to invest in trenching technology have many factors to consider before reaching for their wallets. Rent or purchase? Stand-alone or attachment? Power or price? All of these are important decisions to be made before purchasing a trencher.

**ENTRENCHED IN HISTORY.** "The first trencher with an inclined chain and bolt-on digging teeth was designed more than 50 years ago," explains Brent Bolay, senior product manager of trenching products, The Charles Machine Works, a division of Ditch Witch. "The first service line trenchers before this time were much smaller and their design was focused on providing a machine that could dig a utility service line to a home," he says, adding that the market's growth in the 1960s and 1970s provided the opportunity for trenchers to become the mainstay tool for obscuring utility lines underground and out of sight.

Those early trenchers would seem monolithic and severely antiquated to the modern eye, but as Greg Barreto, president, Barreto Manufacturing, LaGrande, Ore., explains, it wasn't long before the

*(continued on page 86)*

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## Product Spotlight

(continued from page 84)

trencher's evolution began to hit its stride. "Back then they were all mechanical drive," Barreto explains. "Then some of the bigger ride-on machines started utilizing hydraulic technology in the late 1980s and early 1990s and that technology kept coming down in size."

"Things have changed a lot," adds Brian Kenkel, Vermeer Manufacturing, Pella, LA. "Now many of those belt-driven or chain-driven machines wouldn't be considered reliable. The industry has gone almost exclusively to hydraulically-driven machines." Modern trenchers can now be differentiated by power and size. "We typically categorize them by horsepower (hp)," Bolay explains. According to Bolay the general breakdown places trenchers into three classes:

- Pedestrian (or walk-behind) trenchers - 0 to 20 hp
- Compact riding trenchers - 20 to 50 hp
- Heavy-duty riding trenchers - 50 to 130 hp

"Pedestrian units are built narrow to get in and around confined areas but they have limitations on depth, width and the soil conditions they can handle," Bolay explains. "The landscape market generally goes with the walk-behinds because they're doing small jobs and don't have to go down very deep. And with regard to speed, it's going to be pretty fast. For shallow trenching, they're more maneuverable and can get inside gates, into backyards and are a little handier to haul around. You can put them in the back of a truck or trailer."

Kenkel refers to the low-end horsepower pedestrian units (between 4 and 8 hp) as "ground-scratchers that cut a ditch somewhere between 4- and 12-inches deep and a couple of inches wide. There's generally no ground drive in one of these machines and your foot moves the plow."

The next classification of pedestrian trencher, according to Kenkel, generally is in the 11- to 15-hp range and will have either a

mechanical or hydrostatic ground drive. "That machine is going to cut anywhere from 12 to 24 inches down," he says.

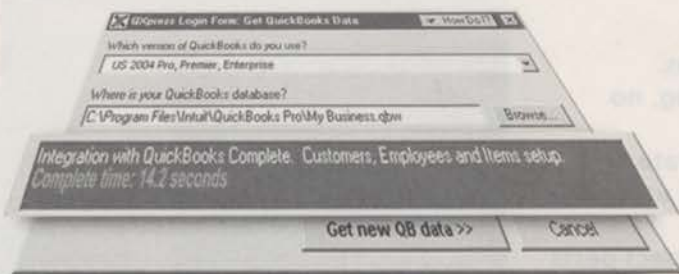
"The next class, between 18 and 20 hp, is still in the pedestrian category but now you're talking about being able to cut a ditch anywhere between 24- to 40-inches deep," Kenkel says. "You're fully hydrostatic at this point and you usually have a steerable axle."

Concerning compacting trenchers, Bolay says these machines have more capabilities. "Because they are physically larger, however, they have some space limitations."

"The bigger ones are certainly faster," Barreto adds. "They use more horsepower and require more room to maneuver, but the advantage with the bigger machines is that you can go deeper. In the north country where contractors need to dig 4 feet to get below the freeze line, they're not going to be able to do that with too many walk-behinds."

(continued on page 88)

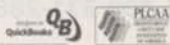
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USE READER SERVICE #64

**I**t just doesn't make sense for a contractor to go out and spend \$12,000 on a dedicated trencher that will only see use about once a month. The alternative, of course, is not buying one at all but finding a reputable local rental dealer who can supply you with the right trencher for the right job at the right time.

Greg Barreto, president, Barreto Manufacturing, LaGrande, Ore., says that he believes there are more people renting trenchers than in the past. "I think a lot of people are realizing that if you're a contractor with a pickup truck, a mower and a shovel, you can go ahead and begin a landscape business and rent every piece of equipment you would need to do the work," he says. "Of course you still have the people that have all of their own equipment, whose philosophy is, 'Why rent when I can own?' But I think by and large you're seeing more people renting trenchers today than you were 10 to 20 years ago."

Part of the reason for this may be the trencher's very specific utility as a tool. Because dedicated walk-behind trenchers are

generally built for trenching exclusively, unlike skid-steer loaders or other attachment-accepting equipment, their versatility is still limited, primarily, to digging trenches in the ground. (However, Monty Porter, marketing and customer service, EZ Trench, Loris, S.C. adds that there are riding trenchers on the market that also accept attachments.) If this type of work is not a major element of a contractor's service, renting a trencher, as needed, may be the way to go.

A factor that makes renting an attractive prospect for professionals is generally reasonable rental prices. "A standard 13-hp walk-behind trencher will run anywhere from \$120 to \$200 a day, though it varies across the country," Barreto points out.

Porter adds that he's observed machines renting for \$45 to \$65 a day on smaller trenchers to larger ones that rent for \$70 to \$100 a day. "Many of the larger ride-ons rent for \$150 to \$300 a day, depending on the machine," he adds. — *Will Nepper*

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## Product Spotlight

(continued from page 86)

**VERSATILITY AND ABILITY.** There are plenty of tasks trenchers can accomplish. "Primarily, the walk-behinds are used for irrigation systems or lines going to outbuildings for either electricity, water or gas," Barreto says, adding that some contractors have found their own new uses for these trenchers. "We've been told they are also great for curbing. You can unlock either wheel from it and it can go down a foot deep, 6-inches wide, and travel around a yard following the curvature of the lawn and putting in trenches for curbs. It may not have been designed for that, but it's certainly something it can be used for."

In addition to these functions, pedestrian trenchers can also be used for preparation for a retaining wall. "They can also cut footing in for new driveways or concrete flower beds," Kenkel adds. "Irrigation systems are probably the most common use for them simply because of how labor intensive it is to cut that

much ditch, but we're also seeing them used for any kind of remote electrical system like a lighted flower bed or driveway lights."

Some trencher design innovations have even made the work easier on laborers, says Monty Porter, marketing and customer service, EZ Trench, Loris, S.C. "Some machines actually cut the trench, place the wire in the bottom of that trench and then backfill the trench - all in one pass," he says. "This makes it perfect for landscape lighting and irrigation control wires."

"Another innovation is from a single-belt drive to a dual-belt one," Porter says. "The single-belt drive has a pulley attached to the engine and one belt to drive the blade, while the dual belt allows for a better transfer of power."

Porter adds that new models feature clutch drives that provide a better mechanism for rougher terrain. "If you hit a rock - instead of those belts slipping, the clutch is bathed in oil and it's a lot more durable," he says.

**CONSIDER THIS.** Despite trencher innovations, to the untrained eye most trenchers may seem relatively interchangeable. This can make shopping an intimidating process for contractors looking to incorporate one into their services. This is why many manufacturers suggest that a contractor do their homework before making the investment.

Bolay explains that contractors should take into consideration the job or jobs they intend to accomplish with their new piece of equipment. "The number one consideration should be the depth and width of the trench that is needed," he says. "This will help determine the size of trencher you need. No. 2: How intensive is the work that contractor will be doing? Will they be trenching every day or just once or twice a month? This will help them determine utilization and the performance requirements of the machine."

Barreto adds that ground type should

(continued on page 109)



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USE READER SERVICE #41

by Johnathan Katz

# A Premium Price

*Without a comprehensive plan, cheap insurance premiums can sometimes cost more in the end.*

**T**his year's Easter weekend was a tough one for the owners of Columbus, Ohio-based Five Seasons Landscape Management. When they returned to work the following Monday, they discovered about \$150,000 worth of equipment and supplies had been stolen from their storage facility. Fortunately for them, within 24 hours the company's insurance covered most of their losses. Five Seasons Vice President Steve Woods attributes the quick recovery to finding a provider who knows the landscape industry and its needs rather than simply going with the lowest bidder.

"The lowest premium wasn't really a factor," Woods says. "I think it's the relationship. It's having someone who's going to be there for you, who's going to go to bat for you and give you the right advice."

Although cost is always a consideration, there are other key issues to inquire about before deciding on coverage. Does the provider specialize in coverage for the landscape industry, or are they at least familiar with it? What other services do they provide? Are they going to reduce total risk cost rather than simply offer low premiums?

"If you're going to look at an iceberg, for example, what you see sticking out of the water are the products and price," says Mark Shipp, executive vice president of Ogilvy Hill Insurance, Santa Barbara, Calif. "What you see below is everything that we focus on."

Below the surface is the insurance provider's ability to act as an advisor who is familiar with a company's infrastructure, regulations compliance and employee work habits, according to Shipp. Training, such as power tool safety, responsible driving and following Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines can dramatically reduce risk.

"It's the attitude of your employees that bears out in loss ratios," Shipp explains. "If you have poor loss ratios, there's something wrong with your culture because it's people who are doing it – not only from a worker's compensation perspective but a general liability perspective. If the employees don't care, they're going to get into dumb accidents. They need to understand the global issues of the green industry as a whole."

**"THE LOWEST PREMIUM WASN'T REALLY A FACTOR. I THINK IT'S THE RELATIONSHIP. IT'S HAVING SOMEONE WHO'S GOING TO BE THERE FOR YOU, WHO'S GOING TO GO TO BAT FOR YOU AND GIVE YOU THE RIGHT ADVICE." — STEVE WOODS**



## Product Trends

**BIDDING WARS.** When contractors seek out an insurance provider, they sometimes pit one broker against another in a bidding war to reduce the price, according to Shipp. But that can sometimes backfire because the contractor often settles for lower quality. Besides, brokers today are more focused on writing business than generating quotes, Shipp says. "There's a saying in our business that there is no practice quoting, and insurance carriers are looking at the same methodology because if they're quoting 10 different accounts and only getting one, then 90 percent of their efforts are on things that they're not able to garner any results on," he explains.

The end result can mean less coverage and greater liability for the contractor when only price is being considered, according to Michael Weisburger, president of B. & D.A. Weisburger Insurance, White Plains, N.Y.

"My biggest fear is that when we speak to contractors looking for coverage that they're only looking for the lowest price and that all these other factors really don't come into play," Weisburger says. We realize that price is important, but you should be looking for a good and fair value. The real value is when you have quality coverage at a fair price, and when you have a claim, the claim is treated fairly and

*(continued on page 94)*

Over the last three years, insurance rates have nearly doubled, but insurance professionals say the market is beginning to level off.

"We're seeing a little waxing in the market right now because insurance carriers have more capital," says Mark Shipp, executive vice president of Ogilvy Hill Insurance, Santa Barbara, Calif. "Over the last few years they've increased pricing, so their balance sheets are looking better."

Since the 9/11 attacks, rates have climbed 40 to 50 percent, according to Michael Weisburger, president of B. & D.A. Weisburger Insurance, White Plains, N.Y. Rates are expected to remain steady if the stock market continues to improve and if insurance companies are profitable with their investments. Insurance companies typically make their money from underwriting profits, which is the difference between what they charge and what they pay in claims, plus or minus their investment gains, according to Weisburger. When the stock market is up, insurance rates often go down because the companies make money from investments, Weisburger says. During a weaker market, insurance companies focus more on earning underwriting profits.

After 9/11, insurance companies made most of their money on underwriting instead of investment gains, Weisburger says. "The insurance market has gone in cycles and will continue to go in cycles," he says. — **Jonathan Katz**

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**Wednesday, August 18, 2004**

- 1:00 – 6:00 p.m. Registration  
2:00 – 3:30 p.m. **Trends and Impact of Weed & Insect Management**  
*Moderator: Roger Stanley, Lawn & Landscape*  
*Panelists: John Buechner, Lawn Doctor*  
*Jim Campanella, The Lawn Dawg*  
*Barry Troutman, Valley Crest*
- 3:30 – 4:30 p.m. **The Economic Value of Landscapes**  
*Speaker: Dr. Parwinder Grewal, The Ohio State University*
- 4:30 – 5:30 p.m. **Invasive Insect Pests In Trees and Ornamentals**  
*Speaker: Dr. Deb McCullough, Michigan State University*
- 5:30 – 6:30 p.m. Welcome Reception

**Thursday, August 19, 2004**

- 7:30 a.m. Registration  
7:30 – 8:00 a.m. Continental Breakfast  
8:00 – 8:30 a.m. **Market Report: Lawn Care By The Numbers**  
*Speaker: Gary Curl, Specialty Products Consultants*
- 8:30 – 9:45 a.m. **What's New In Research**  
*Speakers: Dr. Rick Brandenburg, North Carolina State University*  
*Dr. Karl Danneberger, The Ohio State University*  
*Dr. Dave Shetlar, The Ohio State University*
- 9:45 – 10:15 a.m. Break  
10:15 – 11:15 a.m. **Teaching Proper Insect Identification To Field Staff**  
*Speaker: Dr. Richard Kramer, American Pest Management*
- 11:15 – 12:00 noon **Tips For Subcontracting Tree Work**  
*Speaker: Chris Klimas, The Davey Tree Expert Co.*
- 12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Group Lunch  
1:15 – 2:00 p.m. **Effective Pre- and Post-Emergent Treatment Strategies**  
*Speaker: Dr. Karl Danneberger, The Ohio State University*
- 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. **Delivering Effective Perimeter Insect Treatments**  
*Speaker: Joe Welch, Middleton Lawn & Pest Control*
- 3:00 – 3:15 p.m. Break  
3:15 – 4:00 p.m. **How To Maximize Grub Control Profits**  
*Speaker: Jack Robertson, Robertson Lawn Care*
- 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. **Packaging Lawn Care Programs For Maximum Profit**  
*Moderator: Roger Stanely, Lawn & Landscape*  
*Panelists: Terry Kurth, Weed Man*  
*Lee Schaber, Scotts Lawn Care*
- 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. Networking Reception

**Friday, August 20, 2004**

- 7:30 a.m. Registration  
7:30 – 8:00 a.m. Continental Breakfast  
8:00 – 9:00 a.m. **Generic Products: Pros and Cons**  
*Moderator: Roger Stanley, Lawn & Landscape*  
*Panelists: Leading Product Distributors*
- 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. **Target Marketing Strategies Of Lawn Care Services**  
*Speaker: Bill Leuenberger, Chalet*
- 10:00 – 10:15 a.m. Break  
10:15 – 11:30 a.m. **Keeping Up With Safety & Pesticide Compliance**  
*Speaker: Dr. Fred Whitford, Purdue University*

It's been labeled in the media as the "next asbestos." The recent frenzy over health risks associated with black mold has resulted in increased litigation against construction and landscape contractors. Whether warranted or not, landscape contractors must decide whether to insure themselves against mold lawsuits. However, most insurance companies do not provide coverage for mold claims, according to Michael Weisburger, president of B. & D.A. Weisburger, White Plains, N.Y.

"Allegations against contractors concerning their responsibility for mold conditions have skyrocketed, and while we believe that more often than not our policy holders have no responsibility for these situations, there is a possibility that they can be brought into lawsuits, and most insurance companies have excluded coverage for these types of claims entirely, or at a minimum, reduced the limit

of coverage to a very

small amount," Weisburger says. "Many people think the lawyers have found a new friend in mold. There was asbestos, then there's radon, and now there's mold."

Allegations typically arise when a client believes the mold growth was caused by a contractor's negligence to moisture conditions.

Weisburger suggests that landscape contractors ask insurance agents if they provide limited coverage for mold claims. Contractors may also consider buying separate coverage for mold-related claims but that can add approximately \$5,000 to a company's premium.

"If they can get the coverage at a reasonable price without having to buy a separate policy," Weisburger advises, "then they should do it because the customers they're working with may request it." — **Jonathan Katz**

## THE MOLDY Menace

you have open access to your agent, the company and the claims people to be sure that they're holding up their end of the bargain. I would recommend that you consider paying more for your coverage if the coverage itself is better and it's backed by a more financially strong carrier."

When premiums are a concern, there are steps companies can take to reduce their current rates. Five Seasons invites its insurance agents to training sessions to show they are taking steps to make a safer workplace, and every Tuesday the company sends a copy of its training agenda to its insurance provider, Woods says.

A company can also ask a provider if it can reduce premiums by accepting more risk. But keep in mind that claim payments will increase in this situation, Weisburger points out.

**PLAY DETECTIVE.** Contractors should ask questions and do a little of their own investigative work before choosing an insurance provider. Check out a company's rating through rating services, such as A.M. Best, Weisburger advises. A.M. Best assigns "financial strength ratings" of A++ to S. Weisburger suggests contractors look past the agent and select a carrier with an A rating or better. Once a plan is selected,

contractors need to accurately tell the agent the scope of their work. The agent needs to know the type of work contractors are performing to evaluate risk and to determine the proper coverage, explains Weisburger.

"For instance, on workers' compensation the contractor needs to give the insurance company correct payroll information because if they don't, they're apt to get socked with a large additional premium when they're audited if they haven't provided their payroll accurately," Weisburger explains.

Contractors also should ask potential insurance providers what they see as possible pitfalls in the risk management area, Shipp suggests. "Ask what the company's focus should be, and where it should start," he says.

When Five Seasons wanted to switch from a provider that specialized primarily in homeowner's insurance to one more familiar with landscaping, Woods says he contacted his current provider's references. He also made sure the company understood liability issues for his industry, including chemicals, vehicles and machinery.

**A SECOND GLANCE.** Evaluating your insurance program annually is also a good

idea. For instance, Five Seasons meets once a year with its provider prior to the policy's expiration. At the meeting, they review the entire policy from vehicles to liability issues. The company then makes adjustments, depending on its needs.

"There's something to be said for maintaining a long-term relationship with your provider, but it's still probably appropriate to reevaluate coverage on an annual basis," Weisburger stresses.

Companies that are growing dramatically may want to conduct quarterly reviews of their policies, according to Shipp. Companies that are fairly static should examine their contracts every six months to a year.

"What you want to review are consistency of equipment values," Shipp says. "Does it make sense? Where does it make sense for me to carry some of my own risk? Because the more risk you carry, the lower your premiums are going to be. Gone are the days when you can use your insurance program as an HMO type of vehicle. It's not something for maintenance. It's meant for that type of catastrophic loss that you're not able to withstand yourself." ■

The author is associate editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at [jkatz@gie.net](mailto:jkatz@gie.net).

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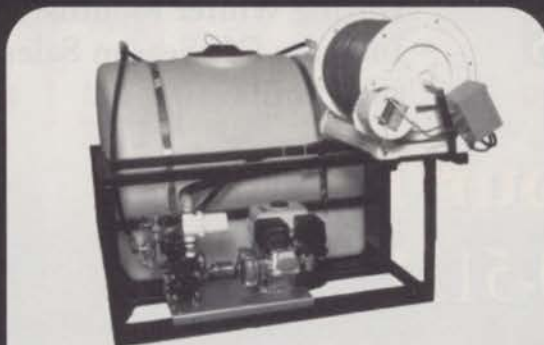
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# Classifieds

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**Sales Arborist:** seeking qualified Sales professionals to grow & maintain an established sales territory in Westchester County, NY or Bergen County, NJ. Ideal candidate will have a passion for caring for clients & their trees, & possess a 2 or 4-year business or green industry related degree. A minimum of 2 years sales experience with established skills. A desire to network and prospect for new business. Candidate must be highly motivated, well organized & enjoy a fast paced work environment. Excellent people/communication skills combined with a positive "can do attitude" a must. We will provide the framework, structure & on-going training for your success. Comprehensive compensation package including: 401K with company match, profit sharing, medical, dental & more.

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# Classifieds

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## Cover Story

(continued from page 32)

will get burnt out quicker," Thomas shares. "We decided we couldn't sustain that kind of pace and expect people to be content. After seeing how TruGreen worked, we decided to take the risk and hire good, quality people when we can get them, taking on the additional overhead, and then as we reach our growth goals, we have the people necessary to do the job."

**ADDING MAINTENANCE.** Scapes' focus this year is to be a \$2-million commercial maintenance company, a \$1-million residential maintenance company and then have design/build still be the core business at \$6 million.

Maintenance is a growing focus of the company's three-year strategic plan. The company wants to grow the division at about 20 percent a year, according to Steve Krumnaker, the company's vice president of maintenance.

"On the residential side, we are doing this by giving current design/build clients incentives to refer customers," Krumnaker says. "On the commercial side, we are branding the company and network within the commercial building industry."

For instance, one of Scapes' commercial sales representatives is a member of the Allied Committee of the local Building Owners and Managers Association, as well as a Community Service Committee member of the local Cleveland Real Estate Women association. He attends monthly luncheons, committee meetings and fundraisers for these groups to network and spread the Scapes name to their members.

Overall, the company's five-year goal is to be a \$20-million business by 2008. Scapes plans to do this by focusing on building strong relationships with its referral base, adding more self-managed teams and maintaining a systems-based business.

"We've covered a lot of ground in last two years," Thomas shares. "This year will be a benchmark for us, depending on how the budgets to actuals turn out and how we perform from a gross margin standpoint and how the team structure works out. We really want to pull off this new kind of business model. Until we really feel that it's happening then we are still in transition, but I feel we're close to getting over that hump." ■

The author is managing editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at [mwisniewski@gie.net](mailto:mwisniewski@gie.net).

# Ad Index

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## Working With Property Managers

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loyal property managers before taking on an account. "We try to find customers who will give us the opportunity to help them," he comments. "Once you find people who are willing to let you work with them, it's a great situation."

Smellage says that property managers who have been with their firms for a while are usually loyal to their vendors as well, and that his company stays away from accounts like apartment complexes because of less property manager loyalty and lower-dollar returns.

In cases where contractors are confronted with a property manager switch, Randy Bachand notes that contractors must be proactive in meetings with the new manager. "When we hear that there's been a management change, we try to get in front of the new property manager within a day or two and let them know that we're there to work with them and to change or tweak the program to meet their specific needs," he says. "Each individual may have different hot-button areas, so we let them know that we're going to be accessible to them and do whatever is

necessary to start building a relationship."

Crouse agrees that contractors must pay attention to those "hot-button issues" in order to start off on the right foot. "All property managers look at different things on a site," she says. "For instance, I want rounded shrubbery, so I always look for that. But if there hasn't been as much attention paid to other areas, I try to be fair to the situation. Poor performance is obvious, but you need to look at the reasons – were there budget constraints? Who's responsible for that level of performance and how can we bring it up to our standards?"

To meet this challenge, Heaviland recommends documenting every maintenance task performed on a property and the reasons behind their execution. "You may have a property manager who says, 'As long as the grass is green and there's no weeds, that's fine,' but that may not be acceptable to an incoming property manager," he notes. "They're going to want to know what's been going on and you really need to communicate and document – with notes and with photographs – that these

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Visit the June issue online for insight into property walk-throughs and handling last-minute work requests.

were the expectations of the previous property manager. That way, you can show that this level of service was acceptable then, and if it's not acceptable now, then together you need to make some adjustments either in price or man-hours to bring it up to the next level."

To create strong relationships that extend over multiple properties and withstand frustrating budget constraints, contractors simply must communicate with property managers, either face-to-face or electronically. Working closely with property managers can help create peace throughout commercial lands. ■

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should also be an important factor when deciding on the right trencher for their purpose. "I'd ask myself, 'What is the ground like where I'll be working?'" he says. "If you are on rocky ground, I'd go all hydraulic because that would lower your maintenance costs considerably."

Manufacturers also consider durability, as a top priority. However, if you've had limited exposure to this particular type of hardware, gauging durability may be difficult. Kenkel offers these tips: "Look for a good quality weld and look closely for thickness of steel," he advises. "Examine how things are bolted together."

But if you don't know how to recognize a quality weld or other elements of durable structure, Porter suggests going to the real expert. "The way I'd gauge durability is by going to the local rental store and asking the owner which small trencher he feels holds up the best," he suggests. "They see a tremendous amount of use and abuse in that market so they should know which trenchers are the toughest. And naturally I recommend that the machine they choose offer the applications they need while being cost effective too. Contractors should make sure that they are getting what they are paying for."

**PENNY PINCHING.** According to Bolay, prices for trenchers depend on the options selected at the time of purchase, but he offers these general ranges:

- Pedestrian trencher – \$4,000 to \$12,000
- Compact riding trencher – \$20,000 to \$35,000

Kenkel says that approximately 80 percent of the trenchers Vermeer sells to irrigation and landscape contractors have either an 11- to 15-hp mechanical drive or a hydrostatic drive. "Those machines will range between \$7,500 and \$12,000."

Any number of issues can influence a trencher's price but the fundamental factor according to most manufacturers is power. "If you go up in horsepower, you're going to go up in price," Barreto says. "And with more power, the machine has to be more durable to handle the horsepower as the machine goes deeper into the ground. And if you go up in horsepower, you'll get into the range of the steerable-type trenchers. You pay extra for the machines that will power steer themselves, but you'll also get greater depth out of those machines in most cases."

After evaluating the work that needs done, a contractor may find that it's simply not worth the extra cost to purchase a dedi-

cated trencher for his company. If the trencher is not being used daily, or at least several times a week, one might find it more cost-efficient to rent the equipment from a local rental dealer (see *Why Buy?* on page 87).

Another alternative for contractors who have limited use for trenchers are trencher attachments for their skid-steer loaders.

Bolay estimates most trencher attachments prices range from \$3,000 to \$11,000, depending on their size and capabilities.

Bolay says that he has seen an upswing in trenching attachments this year over last year. Sales of stand-alone trenchers are also up from last year, according to many manufacturers. "Overall, our trencher sales are up approximately 30 percent," Bolay says.

Kenkel also reports growth in trencher sales – a 20-percent increase over last year. "Many of our trenchers have become very popular with the less-than-five-man crews this year. Some of the larger landscape companies across the country have been buying multiple units this year as well – a sign that the economy is getting better."

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## Product Spotlight

# Placemat Marketing at Just Gardens Landscaping

**M**y landscaping company of 10 years, Just Gardens Landscaping, does commercial and residential landscape design and installation. We don't offer snowplowing, so I spend my winters thinking about new and better ways to market my business. Some of my favorite marketing approaches include landscape seminars, home shows, display gardens in malls and, this year, our first ever "Landscape Makeover" contest. All of these projects generate significant word-of-mouth marketing for the company. Another approach that has been highly successful is marketing with placemats.

While reading an issue of *Lawn & Landscape* a few years ago, I came across the idea of creating restaurant placemats as a type of advertising. I had placed an ad on a placemat the year before. The ad was the size of a small business card, poorly done and surrounded by 20 other small, poorly done ads. The idea of doing my own placemat intrigued me.

My first step to try the full-scale placemat approach was to find a printer. I knew I wanted high-quality graphic art and a color scheme that used my logo color of burgundy, as well as something catchy and attractive to look at. I shopped around a bit but ultimately chose a printer based on a rare service he provided. He would come to me for meetings and delivery of the finished placemats rather than leaving me with all the legwork.

Based on my objectives for the placemat marketing my

printer and I decided to go with one run of 25,000 placemats the first year, which turned out beautifully. The cost to me was only \$800, though this price can vary depending on the type and size of paper used, as well as the number of colors used in the design. To help pay for the placemats, I went to some of my better commercial clients and suppliers and offered them one quarter of the placemat to advertise their own businesses for a quarter of the printing cost (approximately \$200). For the most part, that was the same price that they would pay for a small business-card-sized ad on a less professional-looking placemat.

All of the clients and suppliers I approached jumped at the opportunity when they saw the quality of the finished product. The ads ended up being good, inexpensive marketing methods for everyone involved, and many of the companies I've cooperated with still request space on my placemats well in advance. Most of my clients want ads on both runs and I request payment up front, which makes my printer happy and willing to take care of my needs quickly because he gets paid right away.

By charging suppliers to "rent" space on my placemats, the only cost to me is the time it takes to come up with a design and acquire digital pictures of my clients' places of business for the placemat. I also distribute the placemats myself, which takes less than a week before the season starts, usually in late February or early March. When the printer delivers the placemats to me – about two weeks after placing the order – I deliver them to five or six preselected restaurants that have agreed to work with me. I try to choose sit-down family type restaurants where people will actually have the time to look at the placemats. The restaurants pay nothing for the placemats and are eager to get them. I now have restaurants that wait on my placemats and ask for as many as I can give them. I distribute them throughout the county to target all the areas of the businesses on the placemats.

Placemat marketing has been a highly successful method of getting my company's name out. The work to create them requires my time and effort, but no cash output when my season is slow. I have received several new clients with this form of advertising, and my suppliers have been happy with the responses they get from their ads. With such a good response, we are considering increasing to a run of 75,000 placemats in 2005. – Julie Cole

The author is owner, Just Gardens Landscaping, Jefferson, Ohio and can be reached at 440/576-7711

## 5 KEYS TO Successful Placemat Marketing

1. Find a printer who you trust and who will work with the ideas you have in mind. Remember that good service may be worth higher printing costs.
2. To cover the costs, offer advertising space on your placemats to loyal clients and suppliers for a fraction of the printing costs.
3. Collect artwork, copy and payment early to keep the printing process timely. Work with your printer via e-mail to avoid scheduling time-consuming meetings.
4. Secure venues to distribute your placemats by contacting local restaurants early on. Ensure that the restaurants you use cover your suppliers' areas as well.
5. Deliver placemats yourself to keep distribution costs down.

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 5. Irrigation Contractor  
 6. Landscape Architect  
 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Landscape Lighting  
 7. Hardscape Installation  
 8. Water Features

- Landscape Maintenance  
 9. Landscape Renovation  
 10. Turf Fertilization  
 11. Turf Aeration  
 12. Tree & Ornamental Care  
 13. Tree & Stump Removal  
 14. Irrigation Maintenance  
 15. Erosion Control

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8. In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks

### Pesticide Application

16. Turf Disease Control  
 17. Turf Insect Control  
 18. Turf Weed Control  
 19. Tree & Ornamental Pesticide Application

### Other

20. Mowing  
 21. Hydroseeding  
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 23. Interior Landscape Services  
 24. Structural Pest Control  
 25. Holiday Lighting  
 26. Other

### 3. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?

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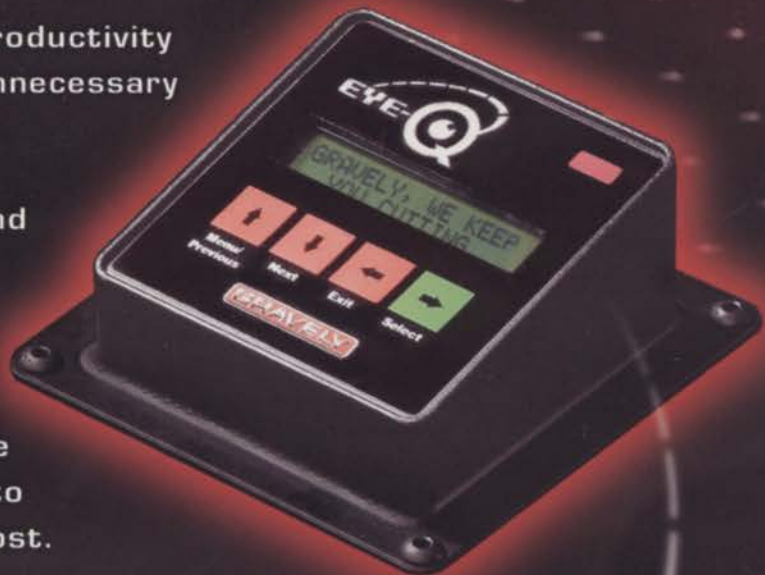
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