

September 2004

Lawn & Landscape

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**Truck & Trailer
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**Special Focus:
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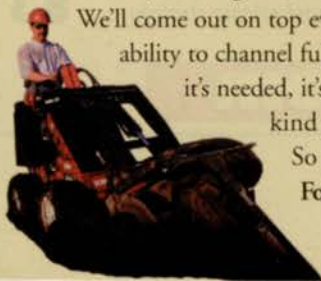
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TRUCK & TRAILER SUPPLEMENT



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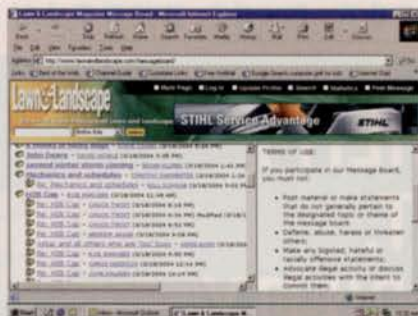
Lawn & Landscape is pleased to announce a change to the weekly Lawn & Landscape e-Newsletter. For your convenience, e-Newsletter subscribers are now able to access e-Newsletter articles without logging onto Lawn & Landscape Online!

After clicking on a link to a Lawn & Landscape news article, you will be directed to that article on Lawn & Landscape Online. From there, you can click the red link at the top of the page to log onto the Web site.

All other areas of Lawn & Landscape Online will remain password protected. However, subscribers who are having trouble logging in or who have lost their user name or password can call Lawn & Landscape's circulation department at 800/456-0707 for assistance.

Best of the Web

Check out this month's Best of the Web feature, "Damage Control." This Web-related article eavesdrops on what Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board users had to say about their employee regulations concerning broken equipment and/or job site damage. Company policies are intended to keep operations running smoothly when problems arise, but creating a policy that works is half the battle. Turn to page 44 to learn more.



ONLINE EXTRAS

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

- Visit Lawn & Landscape September Online Extras to take a look at more photos of dynamic deck designs from landscape contractors and deck manufacturers. Also, visit the Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board to chat with other professionals about working with deck subcontractors.
- Interested in learning more about this month's featured company – Pro Scapes? Then check out the September Online Extras section to learn more about how the company uses customer e-mail addresses to improve client communication and to find out their tips for forming long-lasting relationships with their H-2B employees.

WEB TOOLS DAILY NEWS

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

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

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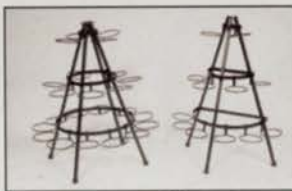
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Power Accounting

Roger Stanley is editor-in-chief/associate publisher of *Lawn & Landscape*. He can be reached at 800/456-0707 or rstanley@gje.net.



I'm not a big numbers fan. I took the minimum of math in high school and college. In fact, after being discharged from the Army I went to college planning to major in personnel management—but it required two semesters of calculus. Journalism turned out to be a better option.

But you can't avoid numbers in business. In an ad agency job I had to use Excel to track and report on my department's performance every month. I don't like Excel, but these reports showed if we were making money.

Writing for small businesses has given me an appreciation of accounting. Company owners who are on top of their numbers game are happier, have more free time, make better decisions and make more money.

Profitability is the biggest issue in any industry and the top reason for failure. Profitability is making money on the work you sell. Doing so requires basic "numbers management" skills. It's not rocket science, but it does require putting some time and effort into learning new things.

What I'm saying is that better bean counting could be the answer to your business problems if you are having a hard time making a profit.

Lawn & Landscape columnist Jack Mattingly is currently giving a series of seminars on "Growing Your Business" with the sponsorship of John Deere. I sat in on one recently and it struck me how important this education was, and while the room was full, it should have been a much larger room.

Here, in a greatly simplified form, is what Mattingly advises contractors to do in numbers management:

1. Get your books straightened out because you need accurate numbers as the basis. Get all the numbers. Put them in the right places. Your computer probably already has Excel on it. QuickBooks is easier to learn and does not cost much.

2. Track each job to find out if you made any money on it. Determine your break-even cost – the price you must charge just to cover your labor, materials and overhead for that job. Then add your profit margin. You can't afford to do a job for less, so walk away from one that does not meet your minimum and let a competitor who is going to join the ranks of failed businesses "win" the bid.
3. Gradually use the information from No. 2 to improve the accuracy of your estimating and to improve your production efficiency. Decide which jobs, and types of jobs, and which personnel are making you the most money. Find out why. Fix problems you can now identify.
4. Stop doing work that really costs you money. Try to do less of the work that only makes a little money, or make it more profitable. Do as much of the work that makes you a lot of money as you can. In fact, find out why and use that to market your company to get more of this work.

At the end of his seminar, Mattingly advised attendees not to go back to their companies and blow them up. He said implement change over time – six months or a year. But start now.

Mattingly is giving three seminars in October: in Washington, D.C. on Oct. 1; in Tampa, Fla., on Oct. 8; and in Boston on Oct. 15. If you need to get your numbers straightened out, go to www.lawnbiznumbers.com.

You can also get help from a local community college, a book, your accountant or your trade association. I strongly advise that you consider this. ■

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

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More Client Questions


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.



Successful sales people know the value of asking questions. In fact, I devoted an entire chapter in my book *The 9 Super Simple Steps to Entrepreneurial Success* to the power of asking questions. Last month, I gave you several questions to ask your prospects and clients to learn more about what they need and want. This month, I wanted to share some questions you should ask your clients after the sale. The answers to these questions will provide you with the information you need to make your organization an elite performer.

1. **Why did you choose to do business with us?** It may seem obvious but many times the reason you think your clients chose you are not the real reasons they did. Find out why you were picked and see if you can't uncover a strategy that you should implement into your selling process.
2. **How important was the salesperson in influencing your decision?** You need to know how much influence your salespeople have on the sale. In asking this question, you might find out you have a salesperson who needs some work or maybe needs to find another job. You also might find out that your salesperson is the main reason you are successful.
3. **What didn't you like about the salesperson on your account?** This may hurt, but in many cases you will get some great observations from your clients. On numerous occasions I have been able to show a salesperson exactly what they need to work on by sharing with them what a client said.
4. **What would you do differently if you were a salesperson for our company?** Your clients may give new techniques or ideas to improve your selling process.
5. **What would you change at our company if you were the president?** Clients are impressed by people who care to ask them what they think. I have made hundreds of small changes as a result of asking this question. When you do this, you are almost making your clients part of your company. And the more your clients feel attached to your company, the better chance you have of them being a customer for life.
6. **Did we deliver as promised?** Companies committed to delivering on their promises are the ones that make the money. You must make certain your clients are happy so they tell others. Word-of-mouth advertising is the most successful form of marketing for landscape companies.
7. **Would you recommend us to a friend or family member?** If they say "No," you have some work to do. Start by doing whatever you have to do to make this client happy.
8. **What are some services that we are currently not offering that you wish we did offer?** I have worked with several landscape companies all over the U.S. and Canada that were able to add other profitable services to their offerings just by asking their clients what else they could do for them.
9. **How was the attitude of the people who worked on your property?** Clients want to work with firms that show, by their words and their actions, they appreciate their customers. Think about a store or company that impresses you. How is the attitude of their employees? Call L.L. Bean sometime at 800/441-5713 for an example of a company that understands the value of a great attitude.
10. **Did you know we offer (insert the service of your choice)?** Your goal should be to sell more products and services to your existing clients before you go selling to new clients.

There are many other excellent questions you can ask your clients after the sale. Ideally, the company president will ask these questions of select clients, either on the phone or in person. Written surveys with an incentive, such as entering a name into a drawing for dinner or making a small donation to a charity of their choice, will dramatically improve your chances of getting feedback to help your company.

By the way, what challenges are you facing that I could help you with? E-mail your questions to nwisniewski@gie.net or fax them to Nicole Wisniewski at 216/961-0364, and we'll try to answer them in an upcoming column. 



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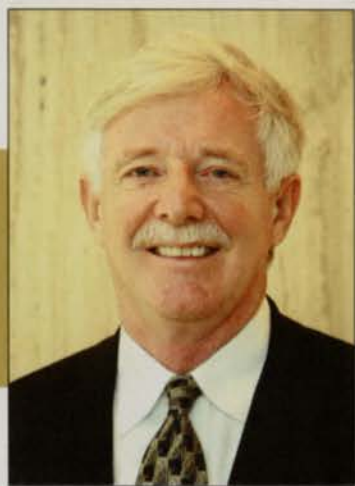
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The Operating Room

Estimating With Production Rates

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



All landscape contractors have challenges with estimating. Many contractors question if they have estimated jobs properly and many feel that there is a better way to estimate but are not aware of solid techniques. Here is some clarification on the subject of estimating that can help you develop your own useful estimating system.

First, remember that estimating is different than pricing. By estimating, we are essentially giving our best guess as to what materials we will use on a job, which subcontractors we will hire and the total man-hours it will take to finish the project.

ESTIMATING INSTALLATION. Looking at an easy landscape installation, we can put rudimentary estimates to the test. For this small project, we must establish production rates for installing each type of plant material. Looking at similar projects you've done in the past will help you compile a list of the various plant sizes, etc., and begin establishing a production rate for each size. For example, history may tell you the following production rates for specific plant sizes:

<u>Plant Size</u>	<u>Production Time</u>
1 Gallon	0.15 Hours
3 Gallon	0.30 Hours
2-inch Caliper	2 Hours
3-inch Caliper	3 Hours
Sod	150 Square Feet/Hour

Once you have established production rates, calculate the quantities of each plant type or size to determine the total man-hours estimated to complete the installation. Segments that do not lend themselves to production rates may still require guesstimates. Also, areas that should be itemized on estimate sheets but are often forgotten are travel time, loading, clean up, watering, dump fees and delivery. By listing these items, you will have a reminder to consider the man-hours for each.

In your calculations, list the materials you will use on the job along with the price you pay for those materials, including taxes. You need to mark up these materials to

recover a portion of your overhead. This mark-up percentage is a result of your pricing strategy. This percentage and the amount that you need to charge per man-hour all stem from analyzing your financial income statement and the projected overhead of your company. These rates vary widely by company and can be complicated to calculate, so don't hesitate to ask a consultant or industry colleague for help, if needed.

ESTIMATING MAINTENANCE. Emphasis on production rates also is very high when estimating maintenance accounts. Again, use your own calculations or historic information to determine rates like these:

<u>Equipment Type</u>	<u>Production Rate</u>
21-inch push mower	5500 square feet/hour
36-inch walk-behind	25,000 square feet/hour
61-inch riding mower	72,000 square feet/hour
Stick edging	10,000 linear feet/hour

Additionally, consider establishing subcategories that take difficulty into account. For example, mowing on a slope or around trees will be more difficult and take longer than mowing a ball field.

For functions such as pruning, it is difficult to establish a production rate per 1,000 square feet. I find that most contractors estimate these hours the old-fashioned way – by guessing. However, when you do this I recommend getting a second opinion from a field employee, as they are often the best estimators.

To calculate rates for other functions, use a stopwatch and a measuring wheel. Go into the field and time your employees using various pieces of equipment. Measure the square footage and/or lineal footage of the area and use those numbers to calculate the production rates. Use the same approach with your installation crews and time how long it takes to plant different materials, lay pavers, etc. This process will take time but you will never be comfortable with your estimates until you can transform them into production rates as much as possible. **LL**

Personnel Files: That's Confidential

Jean L. Seawright is president of Seawright & Associates in Winter Park, Fla. She can be contacted at 407/645-2433 or jseawright@seawright.com.



This month, Jean Seawright continues an in-depth look at managing personnel files with a discussion of handling confidential documents. See her July 2004 column for information on other documents to include in employee files.

As discussed last month, employees' personnel files contain documents such as application forms, performance appraisals and disciplinary notices that are used to make employment-related decisions. An extension of this file is the "confidential file," which should be kept separate from personnel files and should not be used to make employment-related decisions. Confidential files contain documents and information that could be considered potentially discriminatory, such as information referencing race, creed, color, sex, religion, age, national origin, disabilities or other protected classes defined by federal, state or local fair employment regulations. By removing this type of information from your personnel files, you can eliminate one source of liability and strengthen your compliance posture.

CONFIDENTIAL FILE DOCUMENTS. Your confidential files should contain the following documents:

- Criminal background records
- Motor vehicle records
- Reference check documentation (Although these documents may not contain protected information, many employers that allow employee access to the personnel file are sensitive about employees reviewing comments made by previous employers.)
- Drug test results
- Background inquiry release form
- Health or medical records or health histories (To limit liability, these should request only job-related information.)
- Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) forms
- Results of investigations related to the employee
- Workers' compensation claims and background checks
- Health insurance enrollment forms
- Life, disability, 401(k), profit sharing or other documents with birth date, race, sex and other protected information
- Pictures of employees for photo identification cards
- Copies of driver's licenses

FILE SECURITY AND PRIVACY. There is no federal privacy law covering the private sector, nor is there any uniform definition of what constitutes an invasion of privacy. Consequently, there is much debate over file contents, access to medical records, release of personnel file documents and information, and, lately, even requests for Social Security numbers, which are required for reporting taxes and for criminal background inquiries. To limit liability, employers should become familiar with and abide by any state requirements related to employee record-keeping and should implement a "need-to-know" policy that identifies persons who may have access to employee records.

Typically, companies allow personnel files to be accessed by human resource professionals, owners and managers who are responsible for conducting performance and/or pay reviews. Confidential file access should be strictly limited to only owners and human resource/benefit professionals. Both files should be retained in securely locked files.

Because of the recent sensitivity surrounding personal information maintained in employer files, many companies have implemented privacy and employee records policies that communicate what types of records are retained, how they are retained, who has access and how information is provided to legally authorized or company-authorized entities (for example, auditors). If you elect to implement a policy of this nature, it should be added to your employee handbook.

FINAL POINTER. No wonder there is so much confusion about personnel files. Even so, employment-related documentation is absolutely essential to meet the burden of proof required by government agencies and to justify your employment-related decisions. So what's the bottom line? Don't guess when it comes to your company's personnel file practices. Improper maintenance and retention of employee information can expose your organization to a variety of legal problems—and it's not likely that these regulations will go away. In light of growing privacy concerns, employers should anticipate expanded coverage. ■

INDUSTRY EVENTS

Legislative Day on the Hill: A Capital Idea

WASHINGTON, D.C. – There's nothing like an election year to bring the nation's political pulse to a collective boil. But neither is there a better time for advocates of any cause or industry to band together as a delegation with a worthwhile message.

That was the objective of more than 200 green industry professionals when they took to the streets and congressional offices of Washington, D.C., last month in the 15th annual Legislative Day on the Hill, organized by the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA). Armed with the legislative background and first-hand accounts of prominent industry issues, delegates from more than 30 states met with their senators and congressional officials to keep concerns including H-2B, association health plans, water regulations and industry-related funding top-of-mind for the coming year.

"The folks who come to our Legislative Day stand out as leaders in the industry and we know that there are a lot more of those leaders who haven't had the opportunity to come to the event and really experience how much we can do," says Tom Delaney, PLCAA's vice president of government affairs. "We've worked hard to get as many people as possible from as many states as possible so we can make an impact as smaller delegations and as a whole group."

Weed Man executive Phil Fogarty, who organized this year's Renewal & Remembrance portion of the Legislative Day, agrees with Delaney and notes that anxiety associated with congressional meetings can be valid but also exhilarating for industry folks who are hesitant to participate. "It's understandable to be nervous about coming to Capital Hill because you always have to be 'on' when it comes to talking about the details of the issues at hand," Fogarty says. "But at the same time, professionals in our industry deal with these issues hands-on day after day. They know the issues, they

know what the problems are that they face and it's those concerns that members of congress need to hear first-hand at these meetings."

As a Cleveland-area contractor, Fogarty and a group of industry delegates met with aides from the offices of Ohio Sens. Mike DeWine and George Voinovich, as well as with assistants of Rep. Steven LaTourette.

Joe Drake, president of J.F.D. Landscapes, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, also participated in these meetings – and came prepared. "The H-2B issue is really key for us to focus on this year because of the visa cap being reached and so many companies not receiving their workers," Drake says. "I brought dozens of application forms that were submitted to my company by people who were unemployable or didn't show up for work, and also a copy of a check I wrote out just a few days ago for the premium processing fee that's supposed to make sure we get our workers on time. We need laborers and we can't find Americans to work these jobs, and it's become almost mandatory to pay this \$1,000 premium processing fee, but now no one can be certain that we'll even get the workers we request."

In addition to discussing H-2B reform, Hill attendees urged their legislators to consider the benefits of association health plans, the 21st Century Water Commission and continued funding for the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program.

Of course, the Legislative Day on the Hill was not solely designed to benefit members of the green industry. Indeed, the two-day event began with nearly 200 lawn care, landscape and tree care professionals donating a day to beautifying the grounds at the Ar-



PLCAA President Jim Campanella addresses the Day on the Hill audience. Photo: Lauren Spiers

lington National and Old Congressional Cemeteries in Washington. This event marked the 9th annual Renewal & Remembrance Project associated with the Legislative Day on the Hill event.

"We wanted to give back to the armed forces and the American people," Delaney states. "We thought that helping to care for this hallowed ground would be a great way to do so."

The group pruned trees and shrubs, fertilized, sodded, mulched and performed other needed tasks to help improve the green spaces at Arlington National Cemetery. Sod was laid on the most recent gravesites.

The total value of the services and the products donated was more than \$100,000, and more than 235 acres were tended to during the four-hour event.

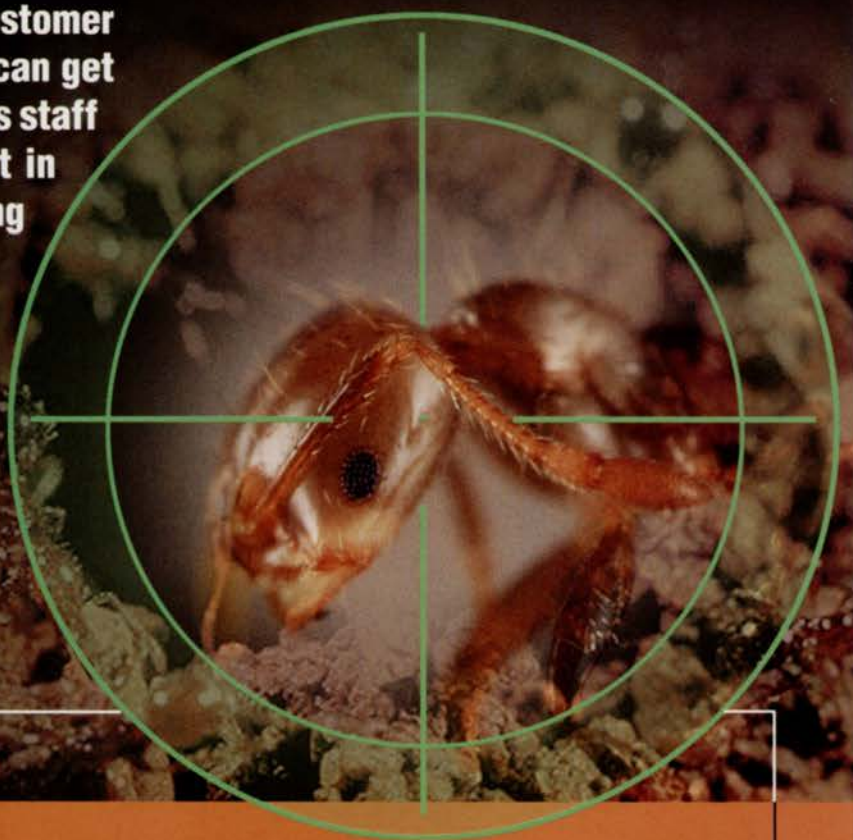
"PLCAA's Legislative Day and the Arlington National Cemetery project combine the opportunities of congressional visits by lawn care and landscape companies to secure their business futures and to volunteer our industry trade. It is an honor to pay tribute to this historical resting ground with our green industry knowledge," says Gary Clayton, executive vice president of PLCAA.

In addition to PLCAA, one of the co-sponsors of the event was the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. For more information on PLCAA, visit www.plcaa.org, and for more information on ALCA, visit www.alca.org. – Lauren Spiers

Fall Turf Problems Present a Sales Opportunity for Targeted Weeds and Pests

Fall can be an important selling opportunity for lawn care companies for a number of reasons. First, homeowners who have tried to do it themselves have failed and weed and insect pest activity has increased to unacceptable levels. Second, competitors may have failed in their service and the customer is ready to hire a company that can get the job done. Or, third, your sales staff may have more time to prospect in the fall than during the busy spring season.

There are good business reasons to make fall a selling season as well. Sales in the fall enhance your year or help you recover from a poor spring or summer sales season. Fall can also be viewed as the kick-off time for your coming season sales. And, with the right products, a fall sales push can help you get weed-infested turf in shape for normal maintenance under your spring program.



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Fall Lawn Rescue

Drought or other weather-related stress during the season can result in lawns that are clearly infested with crabgrass or broadleaf weeds by fall. Or the problem could be a lack of maintenance or poor maintenance. Regardless, the business opportunity is there for a rescue service.

Drive® Herbicide offers lawn care companies a number of fall business opportunities. It is labeled for cool- and warm-season grasses (except St. Augustine) and it controls crabgrass, other grassy weeds and broadleaf weeds.

Sold only to professional applicators, Drive® offers the advantage of allowing weed control without residual effects that prevent overseeding. With Drive® you can eliminate the customer's weed problem and then overseed immediately. You can also use it to treat weed problems on young turf.

Fall provides an excellent application window since weeds are growing and susceptible to control, and the growing conditions are excellent for seeding (as long as temperatures remain in the range for seed germination). Label directions show that Drive® can be applied either before or after seeding (see label for specific directions).

As a part of your next season sales strategy, Drive® allows you to sell and take on new accounts in the fall, control the weed problem, establish new turf and begin your spring program using a preemergence herbicide. As a fall program, this allows the customer to begin the new growing season with an established lawn that only requires normal program maintenance.

For lawn care companies, Drive® offers an opportunity to visibly help customers in the fall when the problems are obvious, increase revenue and get a head start on new accounts for the coming year.

Fire Ant Control

Fire ant activity often picks up during the fall after the heat of the summer has passed. Fire ant control is an obvious business opportunity in the infested region of the United States, but fall presents an ideal option to gain control and sell new accounts.

The biology of the fire ant mound is an important element in your control and sales strategy. Research shows that the best control is

often gained in the spring or fall, and that applications done at the wrong time of the year can result in poor control and may actually only cause the colony to move the location of the mound.

Cool weather in the early spring or fall, ideally around 70 degrees F, means the workers are actively foraging and the queen is closer to the surface in the mound. In hotter weather the queen will move deeper within the mound, which can make it more difficult to control the queen. And controlling the queen is the key to eliminating the colony because a queen can lay thousands of worker ants per day.

Fall provides an excellent application window since weeds are growing and susceptible to control, and the growing conditions are excellent for seeding.

A major business decision is how to structure your fire ant control service. Some companies bundle it into their existing lawn service, while others make it a stand-alone service. Others may do both — make a part of their existing service for clients and sell it to prospective clients as a stand-alone service.

If your decision is to include fire ant control as a part of your lawn care service, then make sure your prices allow for the work and a profit.

Another important factor in this decision is that you are selling and pricing fire ant control as a maintenance service. University studies show that fire ants can never be truly eliminated from a yard or property because even if that is accomplished the area may be re-infested in a matter of months. Fire ant colonies compete with one another and thereby establish a limit for a given area. If that area becomes free of colonies, it is only a matter of time until new colonies will move into the open area.

Control options can be customized to fit the customer's need.

For corporate clients, liability concerns usually mean that an ongoing control and prevention program be in place.

For residential clients, service can range from a one-time treatment to eliminate the problem for an outdoor wedding or other event to a planned program approach that offers ongoing prevention. One-time treatments use a bait product like Amdro Pro® first then wait 24

hours and apply an insecticide drench application to reduce the population to where it is not a threat.

Treatments with Amdro Pro® Fire Ant Bait two or three times per year may be adequate to prevent fire ant colonies from establishing. A number of products are labeled for multiple applications per year to control fire ants, but one application in the spring and one in fall is standard. For applications that target prevention it is recommended that the entire yard be serviced even if only one mound is visible. Again, control of fire ants is difficult, so work to reduce activity.

Window since control, and for seeding.

Educating the customer about the insect biology, the need for control and your service options and benefits is a critical step in your sales program. Some companies produce door hangers or other literature based on their service philosophies and programs, then contact customers to schedule sales calls if they are interested.

Because there are numerous products labeled for fire ant control, including consumer products, consumers might be misinformed about a professional control program. Most fire ant products are granular formulations that look like they are easy to apply with a

hand-held or broadcast spreader. Due to timing or other problems, consumers might not gain the control they want, and by the fall fire ant mounds in their yard show they need professional help.

Many professional lawn care companies recognize the value of a two-step program for fire ants. Step one is to do a broadcast bait treatment around the area of the mound. The goal is to get the bait into the mound and kill the queen. Step two is to use a contact insecticide to eliminate foraging workers.

A two-step program can be accomplished by applying Amdro Pro® granular bait around the mound and the entire yard and giving the colony 40 to 72 hours to work. Slower-acting baits are effective because they can be distributed throughout the mound before any effect is noticed by the colony.

The second step is to apply a contact insecticide, such as Bifenthrin Pro®, to eliminate foraging workers. Bifenthrin Granular® can also be used to control workers.

An advantage of this program is that the input cost is limited. In comparison, retail fire ant products may cost \$20 to treat 5,000 square feet, while Amdro® granular costs \$3 or less for the same area. Amdro® also offers cost benefits in comparison to other professional products. This means that your service provides excellent control and can be highly profitable as a fall sales program or year-round. The options for successful fall sales programs are yours.



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CUSTOMER CONNECTION

Leave Me Alone!

Customers aren't happy with marketers these days. In fact, 60 percent have a much more negative opinion about marketing and advertising than they did a few years ago.



Source: Yankelovich Partners, *Entrepreneur* magazine

TURF SEED REPORT

The Grass Arena

Interested in knowing what the current supply and demand status is for various turf species? Gordon Zielinski, chief executive officer, Turf-Seed, Hubbard, Ore., has the answers. Following are some of his predictions for turf seed supply this fall:



Interested in knowing what the current supply and demand status is for various turf species? Gordon Zielinski, chief executive officer, Turf-Seed, Hubbard, Ore., has the answers. Following are some of his predictions for turf seed supply this fall:

Perennial Ryegrass – Perennial ryegrass acreage has been increased to address shortages in the markets. This spring's warmer than normal temperatures and reduced rainfall didn't help the situation since additional rain is needed to fill the crop to its fullest potential. "With the pipeline supplies being low, we expect perennial ryegrass to remain tight this fall," Zielinski says.

Tall Fescue – Tall Fescue acreage was reduced last year and supplies are now starting to come into balance, Zielinski explains, adding that newer varieties are tightening up. "To assure full supply, you will need to let your needs be known now," he stresses.

Kentucky Bluegrass – Kentucky bluegrass acres were reduced over the past several years and inventories are on the decline. Many varieties will continue to have tight supplies due to popularity.

Fine Fescue – Production of this seed has been down the past several years to due surpluses industry wide. "Low prices tend to drive markets toward common types, but now the surpluses have been used up and we are seeing supplies tighten again," Zielinski points out.

Colonial, Creeping and Velvet Bentgrasses – Production of these grass seeds has been stable.

Association NEWS

Green Earth Landscaping & Design, Inc. received the 2004 **Snow & Ice Management Association (SIMA)** "Award for Excellence in Business," \$1 million-plus category at the 7th annual SIMA Symposium.

Daniel Benner, president of Hydro Environmental, Marietta, Ga., was recently elected president of the **American Society of Irrigation Consultants (ASIC)** at the group's annual conference in Newport Beach, Calif. The ASIC also presented Clem and Mary LaFetra, who started the Rain Bird Corp. in Southern California in 1933, with the Roy Williams Award, the ASIC's highest honor recognizing significant contributions to the irrigation industry.

The **University of Illinois Extension** service announced plans for a new \$5-million facility. A groundbreaking date for the new facility has not yet been announced.

The **Association for Corporate Growth** has recognized Hunter Industries as the outstanding company for middle market growth in San Diego County, California.

The **Maryland Turfgrass Council** recently held its formal dedication for the building of its new Turfgrass Research Facility.

Dan Benner becomes ASIC president.



Market Trends

ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCEMENT

ALCA and PLCAA Reveal Intent to Merge



PROFESSIONAL
LAWN CARE
ASSOCIATION
OF AMERICA



tion that represents the entire range of lawn, landscape, and interior plantscape services and products.

"We are very excited about this new association," states Kurt Kluznik, the current ALCA president. "It brings together two powerful organizations that will now be able to provide even greater benefits and programs for our collective memberships."

The two organizations have worked successfully in partnership over the years on a variety of projects and programs, including their annual trade show – the Green Industry Expo – held each November. "We have benefited the memberships of both associations by working cooperatively on legislative issues and bringing members together

for greater regulatory impact," states Jimi Campanella, the current PLCAA president.

Final details on the new association are being developed, including a new governing body comprising ALCA and PLCAA leaders, unified membership and personnel, and a name for the new organization.

The consolidation between PLCAA and ALCA is consistent with the strategic plans of both organizations.

For more information on ALCA, call 800/395-2522 or visit ALCA's Web site at www.alca.org. ALCA represents approximately 2,800 members nationwide. For more information on PLCAA, call 800/458-3466 or visit PLCAA's Web site at www.plcaa.org. PLCAA is a national association representing 1,200 residential and commercial lawn care professionals.

HERNDON, Va., and MARIETTA, Ga. – After three years of discussions, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) announced that, pending ratification by their memberships, they will consolidate into a new green industry association on January 1, 2005. The result will be an organiza-

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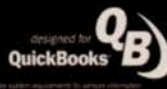


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Market Trends

REGIONAL REPORTS

Nevada Landscape Industry Boosts State's Economy

According to the Nevada Landscape Association, Nevada's green industry contributes \$1.3 billion to the state's economy.

The association's economic impact study also showed that the green industry is accountable for \$751 million in direct sales, supporting 15,736 jobs at more than \$355 million of personal income. Secondary impacts, focusing on the relationship between direct sales of businesses and households, creates an additional \$557 million, including \$202 million in additional personal income and supporting 5,461 additional jobs. Combined, the landscape and lawn care industry's impact to the state of Nevada is \$557 million in personal income, supporting 21,197 jobs.

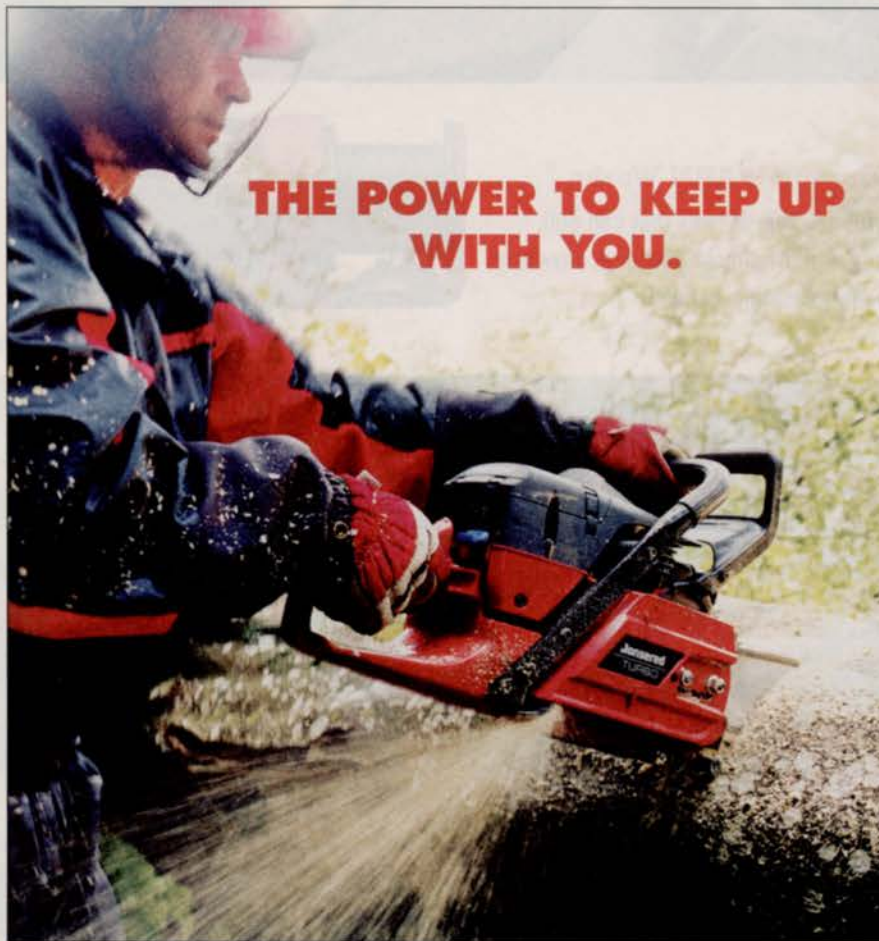


Odd/Even Lawn Watering Could Become New Jersey Standard

If legislation in New Jersey is approved, "Odd/Even" lawn watering could become an annual event for residential and commercial landscapes, golf courses and athletic fields across the state. The same bill was proposed last year, but did not make it past the New Jersey Assembly due to opposition from homeowners under Assembly Bill 2202. Violators of the Odd/Even lawn watering restriction would be subject to a penalty of \$500 to \$1,000.

The measure includes exemptions for landscape irrigation following a pesticide or fertilizer application, for revegetation, for establishing newly laid seed or sod during normal business hours and irrigation testing. The bill would also require a stipulation that an automatic rain sensor would be installed anytime property is sold with an automatic irrigation system installed before September 8, 2000.

View a copy of the entire bill at www.njleg.state.nj.us.



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USE READER SERVICE #17

Market Trends

People

John Currid joined *Lawn & Landscape* magazine as regional sales representative.

The Brickman Group recently announced the appointment of **Debbie Dobson** as vice president of human resources.

Dow AgroSciences made the following announcements: **Mike Donnelly** is the new national sales leader for specialty products; **John Price** will now serve as technical accounts manager for national formulator accounts; **Justin Gayliard** will replace Price in the role of sales representative for eastern Ohio, western and central Pennsylvania and western New York; and **Greg Culp** is the new product communications manager.

The Irrigation Station hired **Rod Murphy** as sales manager.

Swingle Tree & Lawn Care hired **Tom Dunlap** as manager of training and education.

Kristin Van Veen was introduced by RISE as its first full-time communications and public-relations manager.

LESCO promoted **Luke Stratton** to technical services manager and **Mike Maravich** to technical services representative.

Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting expanded its team with

the appointment of **Kevin Fulton** as direct sales manager for Idaho, Oregon and Washington, and **Brent Shacklett** to the Florida district trainer.

Bayer Environmental Science hired 10 new sales representatives, including **Joseph Robert Clemenzi II**, **Michael Owen**, **Foster McWhorter**, **David Crank**, **Mike Daly**, **Jennifer Remsberg**, **Ben Cicora**, **Pat Hickner**, **Jim Santoro** and **Greg Pagano**. Bayer also promoted **Jeff Weld** to programs manager.

Aquarius Brands announced the addition of **Alden Cleveland** as northern sales manager.

Patricia Blanco was promoted by Miramar Wholesale Nurseries to the position of assistant manager of the San Juan Capistrano Commercial Landscape Center.

Varon Lighting promoted **Perry Romano** to president.

Toro Co.'s irrigation division named **Tom Tootle** its new contract development manager. The company also promoted **Karen Bassett** to strategic account manager.

Tim Pogue joined United Green Mark's management team as brand manager for UGM irrigation in the eastern United States.

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Stephen Hillenmeyer,
Hillenmeyer Nurseries



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USE READER SERVICE #25

USE READER SERVICE #26

Innovations keep landscape drip contractors in the green.



Mike Scheck, Naturalistic Gardens

Anything that can help save time, conserve water, trim costs and increase reliability is bound to make landscape drip contractors sit up and take notice.

Rain Bird® has turned more heads than any other landscape drip equipment manufacturer, continuing the company's time-honored tradition of producing product innovations that make a contractor's job easier and more profitable, while using water intelligently. In the spring of 2004, Rain Bird introduced Easy Fit Compression Fittings (coupling, elbow, tee, adapters and a flush cap) that produce over 160 different configurations and are compatible with any manufacturer's 1/2" tubing (16-18mm outside diameter).



Just a few months after the industry welcomed the Easy Fit Compression Fittings, Rain Bird presented another innovation: Low Flow Control Zone Kits, designed specifically to work in low-volume applications. The kits feature Rain Bird's new Low Flow Valve, the only valve that always seals water-tight, despite particles that clog other valves. The Low Flow Valve not only prevents water waste that comes from weeping valves but also the loss of valuable time for contractors.

Mike Scheck of Naturalistic Gardens in Alpharetta, Ga., was immediately interested in the new Rain Bird Low Flow Control Zone Kits when he first heard of them. "I'm definitely one of the first to try a new Rain Bird product," he said. "I think they have the best quality products on the market."

Mike understands that the patent-pending, double-knife diaphragm is the key to the Low Flow Valve. It lifts higher to let more debris

through at lower flows, plus the double-knife diaphragm will seal completely, even if a particle is present. No other valve on the market will seal firmly at these low flows, and this gives Mike extra confidence on the job.

With the Low Flow Valve, tests prove that you no longer need to filter the water before it enters the valve. This means you can put the filter downstream of the valve, and no ball valve is needed. Mike sees this as a significant advantage, both in time and cost savings.

The other advantages to these Low Flow Control Zone Kits are their reliability, simplicity and convenience. Citing the complex installations that he handles on a daily basis, Mike said, "I think this is something that can suit every need."

The revolutionary Low Flow Valves are matched with Rain Bird filters and pressure



regulators that contractors already use and trust for optimum reliability. For added convenience, Rain Bird offers four different Low Flow Control Zone Kits, so there's one that is just right for any given installation.

"I'm very particular about the products I install, and Rain Bird is fantastic," Mike concluded. "If it wasn't, we wouldn't be using it."



From the first name in landscape drip irrigation.

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Patent-pending double-knife diaphragm always seals completely despite sand, sediment or other particles in the water.

Install Confidence: Install Rain Bird® Low Flow Valves.



Now Rain Bird Control Zone Kits are available with a new Low Flow Valve designed specifically for landscape drip installations. With an innovative double-knife diaphragm, this valve handles flow rates down to 0.2 GPM without filtration, and always seals completely. Fewer parts to install, too. Rain Bird's new Low Flow Valve won't waste water, and it won't waste your time.

RAIN BIRD®

Market Trends

Calendar of Events

SEPT. 9-10 Southwest Horticultural Trade Show & Conference, Phoenix, Ariz. Contact: 800/233-1234 or www.anza.org.

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

SEPT. 17 Iowa Nursery & Landscaping Association Landscape Troubleshooting Tour, Del's Garden Center, Spencer, Iowa. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnbizseminars.com.

SEPT. 24-26 2004 International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Expo, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 800/558-8786 or www.expo.mow.org.

SEPT. 25-26 Real Green Technology Fair, Walled Lake, Mich. Contact: 800/422-7478.

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

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

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OCT. 24-26 30th Annual Conference and Agri-Expo of the California Association of Pest Control Advisers, Anaheim, Calif. Contact: 916/928-1625.

OCT. 29-31 New Jersey Shade Tree Federation 79th Annual Meeting, Cherry Hill, N.Y. Contact: 732/246-3210 or njshadetreefederation@worldnet.att.net.

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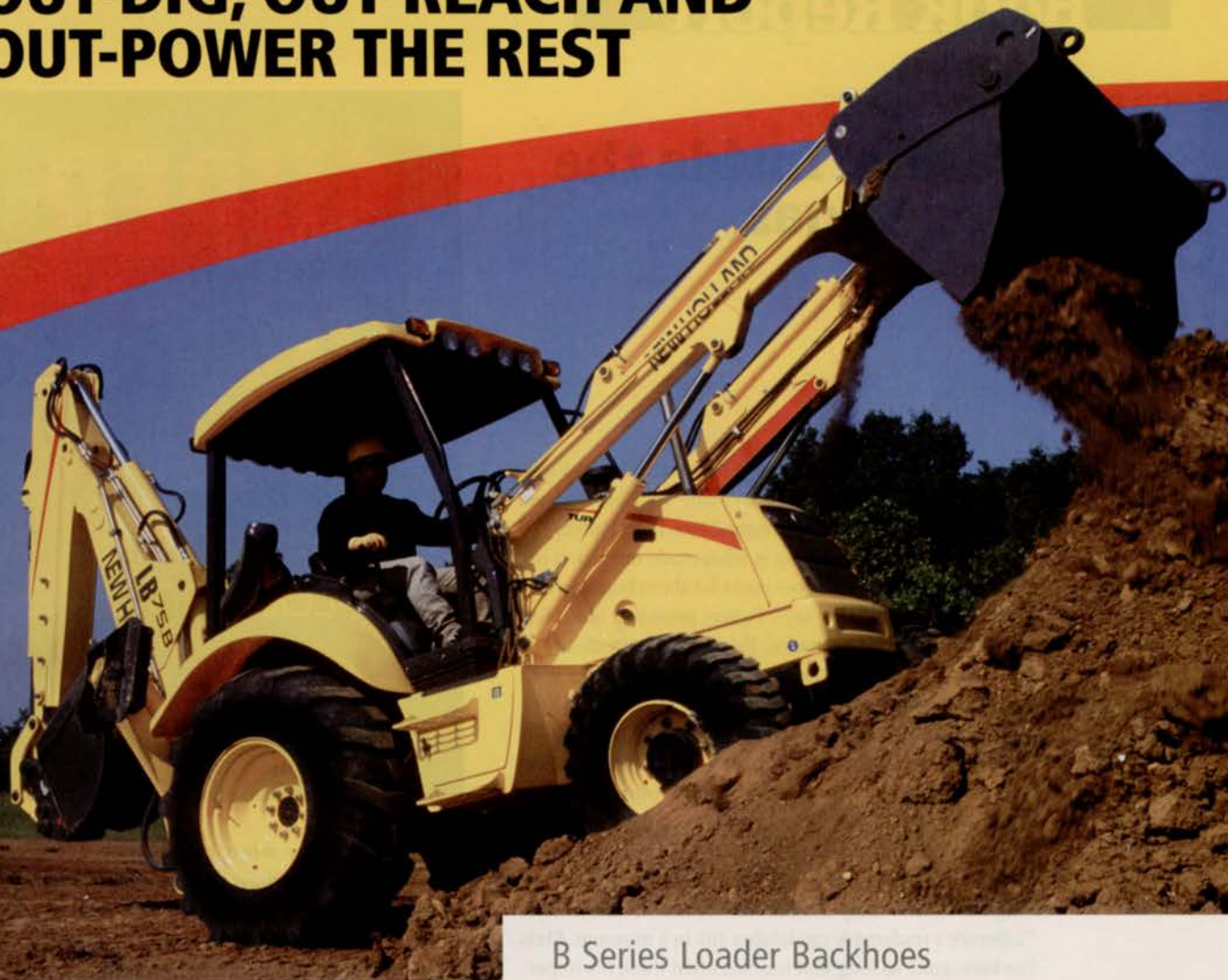
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Book Report

TODD PATTEN RECOMMENDS...

Super Casino, Inside the "New" Las Vegas

by Pete Earley

Who would have guessed that an in-depth study of Las Vegas history and lore could provide so many valuable business lessons for green industry managers? Not Todd Patten.

"Reading about gambling is what made me pick it up, but then I noticed how it goes into a lot about business that I found helpful," Patten says. Patten, president of Professional Property Maintenance, Fairfax, Va., attests to the fact that, in addition to being educational, the book is an entertaining read, especially if you've ever wondered how a place like Las Vegas grew out of the desert sand.

The book is written by former Washington Post Reporter Pete Earley, who takes an in-depth journalistic look at Sin City and filters it through first-person accounts and plenty of historical detail. Earley starts the book by claiming that Las Vegas is nothing like it used to be: "Howard Hughes is now only a historical footnote," he writes. "Liberace's trademark candelabra sits in a museum. Elvis has been gone so long that tourists often think his impersonators look more like the King than he did. The Old Las Vegas is dead."

The new Vegas, however, is very much alive, according to Earley. In two years of visits, with particular access to the Egyptian-themed Luxor Hotel, Earley gathers a comprehensive history of the city's "gaming" industry, including the biographies of such important figures as the Bellagio's Steve Wynn.

Patten says that one of the primary lessons taught by *Super Casino* is that sometimes risk taking pays off – but not necessarily in the poker-playing kind of way. "There's a lot about the huge risks that individuals took when they started opening some of these big newer hotels, and how it involved serious personal money."

Risk-taking of this sort is directly linked to customer demand, Patten adds, and *that* was a concept that spoke to him as president of a business. "There was a demand for more hotel rooms in Vegas and they recognized that demand and met it and ended up building an impressive business," Patten says.

Patten adds "attention to detail" as another concept that effectively crosses-over from the anecdotal printed page to something that he can put to work for his business.



Inside the
"New"
Las Vegas

PETE EARLEY


"They describe how when people walk into a casino, everything is set up to draw them in and get them to spend money. Every little detail is planned out, and that's a good way of grabbing a customer's attention. It essentially stresses the importance of giving a good first impression.

"It wakes you up and says, if you're not paying attention to your customers and their demands, you're not going to last very long."

Super Casino's primary take-away lesson for Patten however has to do with knowing your customer. "Try in any way you can to make them happy by listening to them, knowing them and knowing what demands to meet," he explains. "You have to pay attention to them, do what you say you're going to do. If you promise someone there landscape will look one way, you better make sure it ends up looking that way."

And if that's not enough for the business mind consider the Patten recommends *Super Casino's* inspirational story of a housekeeper who works his way up the chain to manager of a major hotel.

Finally, Patten says the book makes some good points about knowing when to quit. "You have to know what's making money, and if it's not making money, dump it...like I should be doing with mowing, but haven't yet."

Well, it takes time for some lessons to set in. – Will Nepper 

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USE READER SERVICE #30

Everything's Coming Up Roses

The rose is a classic beauty. In landscape beds or pots, it can add bright or subtle color and an inviting fragrance.

Though their thorns may intimidate, there are many plants that are not just good looking, but low maintenance.

All-America Rose Selections has single out these three top performers for 2004. Here's more on each.

MEMORIAL DAY. Representing the most popular class of modern roses – hybrid tea – this upright, bushy variety features full, spiraled blooms with more than 50 petals per flower. Clear pink flowers are accented with a lavender wash and grow to up to 5 inches in diameter. Rich green foliage accents the large blossoms, and stems

Photos: All-America Rose Selections



feature few thorns.

With a classic, strong damask rose fragrance, this vigorous and productive performer resists disease and loves hot weather, particularly for unfurling its commemorative rose petals. Plant these roses in groups of three to five for a colorful and fragrant statement.

Plants were introduced and are available through Weeks Wholesale Rose Grower of Upland, Calif.

DAY BREAKER. Day Breaker is an upright, rounded bush that grows to 3 feet by 3 feet, with bright, multi-shade blooms in yellow, blending to pink and apricot. From pointed and shapely buds, its spiraled blooms grow to 4 to 4½ inches in diameter, with 30 to 35 pedals per flower, each nestled among dark, glossy green foliage on a plant that reaches a medium height.

Day Breaker is an awakening of the senses, not only for its exquisite beauty, but also for its sharp moderate tea fragrance. The plant earns its floribunda classification with its brilliantly colorful, long-lasting clusters of flowers in a hardy, continuous bloom.

Because of its vigor and strength, disease-resistant Day Breaker makes a great addition to any landscape. Planted in groups of three to five, it provides an anchor for a border, a centerpiece or an accent area. It also can be planted as a bedding rose – the traditional use of Floribundas.

Hybridized by Gareth Fryer, Day Breaker is being introduced by Edmund's Roses of Wilsonville, Ore.

HONEY PERFUME. Honey Perfume is an upright and well-branched floribunda with apricot yellow blooms. Pointed, shapely buds open to reveal 4-inch blooms with petal counts of 25 to 30 nestled

among dark green, glossy foliage that accentuates its color.

Growing to about 3½ feet high and 2½ feet wide, Honey Perfume exhibits a spicy scent and resistance to disease, including rust and powdery mildew. Plant in groups or use as a border.

Hybridized by Keith Zary, Honey Perfume is being introduced by Jackson and Perkins of Medford, Ore. – Ali Cybulski

Nursery Market Report

You've tried annuals, perennials and perhaps even evergreens in containers, but how about roses? With greater availability of large containers, container rose gardening is becoming more popular. All-America Rose Selections offers the following guidelines for starting and maintaining containerized roses:

- Most rose varieties can be grown in containers. For full-size roses, choose a container at least 18 inches in diameter and 14 inches deep.
- Decay-resistant wooden tubs and boxes, terra cotta or glazed pottery, plastic pots and decorative fiberglass pots make good rose containers. Different materials have different characteristics, though. Porous terra cotta or clay pots allow air and water to pass through, but plastic does not. As a result, roses planted in terra cotta or clay will need more frequent watering than those in plastic pots. Plastic pots also can become extremely hot in the intense summer sun. To keep rose roots from becoming overheated, shade the plastic pot with smaller containers featuring complementary sun-loving plants.
- Whatever style of pot you choose, be sure it provides adequate drainage. Roses will die if allowed to continuously stand in water. There should be several holes in the bottom and cleats or feet to keep

the container from sitting in water.

- Plant roses using a soil-free mix or growing medium composed of sandy loam and organic matter, such as peat moss.
- Soil in containers will dry out more quickly and retain fewer nutrients than ground soil. Keep the soil evenly moist and feed regularly with liquid or time-release fertilizer.
- Roses like at least six hours of direct morning or midday sun. Good air movement (but not direct wind) also is important to keep foliage dry and discourage disease.
- Roses in containers are more susceptible to damage from extreme cold. In areas where the temperature is likely to drop below 20F, move containers to a frost-free, cool location when winter begins.



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USE READER SERVICE #31

PRO SCAPES

HEADQUARTERS: Jamesville, N.Y.

FOUNDED: 1978

INCORPORATED: 1987

MANAGEMENT TEAM: Rick Kier, president; Colette Gleason, vice president and office manager; Jeremy Oliver, operations manager; Penny Barrett, bookkeeper; Frank Tomasi, equipment manager

COMPANY PRIORITIES:

No. 1 – Safety of employees, customers, environment, equipment and the public.

No. 2 – Quality: Doing every job well and portraying a professional image.

No. 3 – Efficiency: Meeting goal times and using creative solutions to save time on jobs.

CLIENT MIX: 82 percent commercial, 18 percent residential

SERVICES MIX: Complete grounds maintenance including spring clean-up, mowing, edging, pruning, tree and shrub care, lawn care, deicing and snow removal

AVERAGE ANNUAL PERCENT PROFIT: 10 to 12 percent

AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH: 8 to 10 percent

FISCAL YEAR: April 1 to March 31 to include the snow season

2001/02 REVENUE: \$1 million

2002/03 REVENUE: \$1.1 million

2003/04 REVENUE: \$1.24 million

PROJECTED 2004/05 REVENUE: \$1.4 million

EMPLOYEES: 30, including six H-2B workers and five permanent staff members

Nuts

Bolts

For the Pro Scapes team, where there's a service, there's a system for getting the job done right and keeping customer relations front and center.

by Lauren Spiers

Systematic Success

Some people just have an affinity for all things handy. Install your air conditioner? No problem. Change your tires? Piece of cake. And as a teenager jump-starting a small business, Rick Kier remembers adding all manner of odd jobs to his early list of services offerings.

"I really was willing to take on just about anything from the get-go," Kier says, thinking back to his first customer – a little old lady on his neighborhood paper route. "She hired me to mow her lawn and I started doing odd jobs around her yard," he says. "She paid me to put snow tires on her car, wash her windows, clean out the basement. I think she would have paid me just to stand there and chat with her."

Talking with clients and listening to their landscape visions is a characteristic Kier continues to make a priority in his company, Jamesville, N.Y.-based Pro Scapes. The company's clientele, however, has veered from residential work to high-profile commercial accounts throughout the Syracuse area.

Since purchasing his first truck in 1978 at age 16, Kier has implemented a number of instructional, business-building systems at Pro Scapes. With management approaches that match crewmembers' personalities and track work hours to boost efficiency and teamwork, Kier and his staff have built Pro Scapes into a solid \$1.4-million company.

SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS. Though providing quality service to his 90-percent residential clientele was important to Kier early on, his business views became more sophisticated after his freshman year of college in 1983. That summer, Pro Scapes won a \$14,000 annual commercial maintenance contract for an area Pepsi distributor.

Over the next several years, Kier and his employees took on more commercial jobs, many of which were condominium complexes. "We were really attracted to the size of the condominium and HOA accounts because we knew they could help us bring in more revenue and increase our efficiency," he says. "We could have a crew spend half a day or even a whole day on one site, which meant a lot less driving time." By 1991, the



PRO SCAPES

company had grown to 15 employees and about \$500,000 in revenue due to the success of its commercial work.

"We discovered that residential, although it was very rewarding, required a tremendous amount of overhead," Kier notes. "You can spend two hours with a nice old lady and walk away with a \$60 sale, or you can spend the

same two hours or less with a commercial client and walk away with a \$6,000 sale. It really became obvious to us that commercial work gave us more opportunity."

Additionally, Kier took significant steps to focus the company's core services. "I came to the conclusion that if we were going to do something, we should do it all the

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Check our September Online Extras section for information on how Pro Scapes uses customer e-mail addresses and improves their relationships with H-2B employees.

time. And if we had something that we were not doing regularly, we probably shouldn't do it at all," he says. With that, Pro Scapes focused on complete grounds maintenance and stopped looking for installation work, saving those services for existing maintenance clients only.

EXPECTATIONS & EFFICIENCY. To handle approximately 500 clients across all company divisions, Pro Scapes has become a company of systems, the most important of which is the customer database. Though the system has been in place since the mid-1980s, its functionality is clearly long term.

"When we bought our first computer in 1985, we set up a database where the work orders we used to dispatch the crews would have all the customer requests and hot-buttons on them," Kier says. "Then, every year when a customer renews their contract, those details will still be on there. Mrs. Jones may have asked us five years ago to be sure to close the gate in the back yard so the dog doesn't get out and that note is still on every work order we print for her.

"That system is something we still use today and our customers really appreciate it," Kier continues. "By doing that, we keep our existing clients and they end up giving us more work and referring us to other establishments."

This early customer satisfaction system set a high bar for Pro Scapes' current employees, as well. "Our motto says 'We're big enough to do a good job, and small enough to care,' and our company goals and systems help us keep up with that," says Jeremy Oliver, Pro Scapes' operations manager. To consistently meet customer expectations Oliver says that a new white board system allows him and Pro Scapes' 12 crews to track goals and efficiency for each day's work.

"We've always given our crews hour goals, but we never had a really accurate way to track the numbers and make sure we were really in the ballpark," Kier says. "This year, we streamlined the idea by putting a white board system in place so each crew not only knows what's expected of them as they're going out the door, but they can track how

(continued on page 36)

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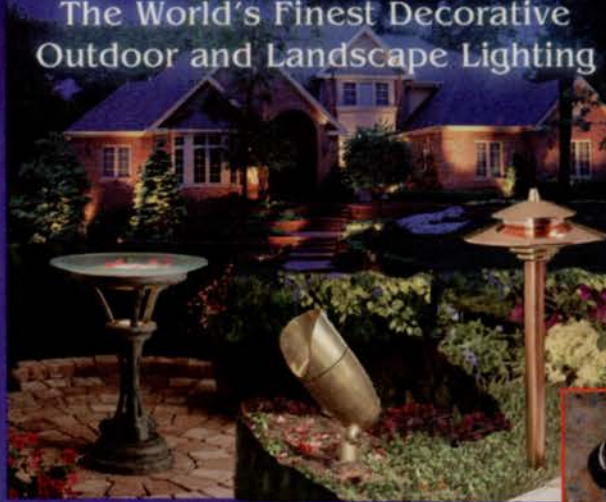
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Cover Story

(continued from page 34)

well we're meeting those expectations."

Oliver explains that two large dry-erase boards in the company conference room show each crew and their respective accounts for the current and previous weeks. As he schedules the upcoming week's work, Oliver writes the goal times calculated for each job on the white board so crews know exactly how long their workdays will be and how many hours are allotted for that day's work. The crew can read their work orders to see how much time is allotted to each job. At the end of the day, crews must update the boards by writing in their actual times next to the goal times – either in green for jobs that came in under budget or in red for days when the work took long.

"At the end of the week, I total up the goals and the actuals so people can see where the slow spots were every day," Oliver says. "Some guys don't realize that taking an extra five minutes in the morning can affect their goal times for the day. Other people realize that they've been mowing one way for so long and they always come in behind, maybe if they change their mowing pattern they'll get ahead. It really gives the crews ownership over their jobs."

Though Oliver notes that there was a minor slip in quality during the first two weeks that the white boards were in place, the urge to sacrifice a job well done for a green mark on the board quickly came to an end. "One of the checks that we have set up with the white board is that if the crews have to go back to fix mistakes on a property, that counts against their time also," he explains. Overall, Oliver says maintenance crew efficiency has gone up 20 percent across the board since the white boards went up at the beginning of the season, making the company available to take on more work.

COMPANY COLLABORATION. On the human resources side of the business, Vice President and Office Manager Colette Gleason knows that increased efficiency as seen on the white boards also stems from a high level of teamwork among Pro Scapes' crewmembers.

In keeping with Pro Scapes' nature, Gleason follows a hiring system that makes it easy for her to find the right people for open positions. "After someone turns in an application, I don't let them leave the office until I've had a chance to read through it and ask them a couple of questions to get a feel for their sincerity and if they really want the job," she explains, knowing that someone who's only halfheartedly looking for work won't be able to meet Pro Scapes' top priorities of safety, quality and efficiency.

After collecting several applications for crewmember positions, Gleason then schedules group interviews with six or seven prospective employees to get an initial feel for how each individual interacts with the others and, potentially, with the other members of Pro Scapes' staff. Individual interviews follow, at which point Gleason explains the company's history, expectations and drug-free workforce policy.

As it stands, Pro Scapes' hiring is very seasonal, beginning with the addition of six H-2B workers in April and about 10 temporary workers for seasonal color installations in mid-May. Gleason also is responsible for hiring seasonal winter employees for the snow division, though the company's regular staff only numbers about 30 people right now, including five office staffers.

"We used to be really exempt-employee heavy," Gleason says. "At one point we had four salespeople and a lawn care depart-

(continued on page 38)



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Cover Story

(continued from page 36)

(continued on page 40)

Known best for its cold and snowy weather, Syracuse, N.Y., may not bring thoughts of warm, sunny days to many people's minds. Thankfully, the team at Pro Scapes, Jamesville, N.Y., is brightening up that image one commercial contract at a time.

"We've done seasonal color in some form for about 15 years, but we really turned it into one of our fortes in 1997," says Pro Scapes President Rick Kier. "In our market, we don't have multiple change-outs, but we probably do more single installations than anyone in our area, and the quality of the work we do has helped us land several more contracts."

Not only does Pro Scapes do a quality job of planting begonias, impatiens and other attractive annuals, but the company's unique mass production installation technique streamlines the process among their 15 color accounts. "For every job that we have, I have drawings of the beds and I lay out the planting early on so I know in advance how many flowers will be in every bed," Kier explains, adding that photographs of each bed are placed in plastic sheets in three-ring binders to be used during installation.

Once the company has hired the 10 or more temporary workers required to handle the extra spring work, the real planting excitement begins. "Prior to planting, we rototill each bed so the soil is already amended," Kier notes. "Each bed is numbered, so when the jobs begin, we have a delivery truck drive from bed to bed dropping off exactly the right flowers for that planting. If bed six needs 10 flats of plant A and 8 flats of plant B, the truck will drop off exactly what the crew needs."

From there, the flower patterns are laid out on the surface before any holes are drilled. Yes, drilled. "Instead of hand-digging every hole, we use a generator and a ½-inch drill with a special 5-inch augur attachment we developed to literally drill planting holes into the bed," Kier says. With this system, a planting team can finish a job in a matter of hours, rather than taking half a day or longer.

To maintain quality during the short 14- to 18-day planting window, Kier works in the field alongside the crews and ensures that the plants used in the design are healthy and properly installed. "Quality is a function of plant selection, layout and planting technique," he explains. "Because we have a short window with a tremendous amount of ground to cover, I make sure that we have experienced installation employees working with our temporary crews so that all of our planting techniques are implemented correctly. I'm always out there during that time, getting my hands dirty and supervising the overall installation so that the designs are filled in properly and the client is satisfied."

Pro Scapes' color accounts vary from 200 flowers on small sites to 20,000 on their biggest account, Kier says. All the plantings take place in mid-to-late May and last until crews return to take the plants out for the winter. But despite the popularity of the service, Kier notes that most of Pro Scapes' color installations are break-even jobs.

"Color is becoming more and more popular for the company, but the service is still a loss leader for us," he explains. "We make very little, if any, profit on most jobs, and on some accounts we'll even lose money, but the benefit is that it attracts more clients. The potential customers we have in an area can see a visual representation of the quality of work we do and our attention to detail and that's what sets us apart from our competition." — Lauren Spiers

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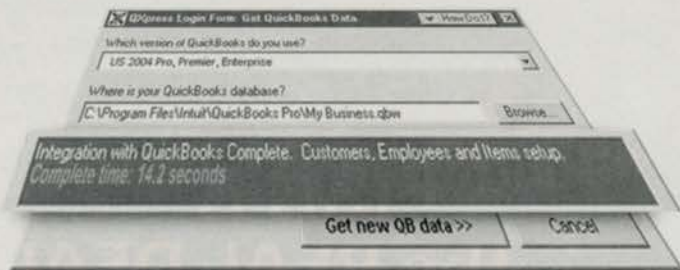
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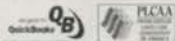
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USE READER SERVICE #39

Cover Story

(continued from page 38)

ment that was very disorganized – too many chiefs and not enough braves." To eliminate some overhead and become more profitable, in 2000 and 2001, the company reorganized responsibilities making Kier the only salesperson. The remaining office staff was reduced to Gleason, who handles administrative duties and manages the lawn care department; Oliver as operations manager, Penny Barrett as bookkeeper and Frank Tomasi as equipment manager.

Though Pro Scapes is running lean by many companies' standards, Oliver says weekly meetings on Monday and Thursday mornings help the entire management team communicate despite busy schedules.

Kier notes that the current company structure keeps everyone busy, but also helps the company stay profitable. "We had gone from .93 percent profit in 2000/2001 to more than 10 percent profit by the end of our 2002/2003 year," he says. "In the early days, we were making forward progress, but we had to rely on a credit line at the bank to meet payroll during the busy season. Now, we have money in the bank and we can use that as a cushion during the cash flow crunch."

Additionally, Kier adds that the company's systems help the staff to work more efficiently with fewer people. "Growing our company definitely means adding staff members and that will be one of our next big challenges," he says. "As a manager, it's my responsibility to pay attention to my staff and their workload to determine when we need to add another person. But at this point, the systems we have in place are helping us work at the top of our efficiency."

Now in its 27th year, Kier says Pro Scapes is experiencing nearly 11 percent growth for the first four months of the company's fiscal year started April 1. Kier acknowledges that Pro Scapes' future will likely include additional layers of management staff and better profits than the company is seeing even now.

"With the organization we have in place, we don't have to worry about having to start from scratch with every new customer," he says. "With those documented procedures and functions, in the next five to 10 years I envision Pro Scapes to be 100-percent commercial, as well as having the dedicated and talented staff to help us get there." **LL**

(additional sidebar on page 42)

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Ask Dr. Tattar

Q: Can microinjected fertilizers be more effective than soil applied fertilizers?

A: Fertilizers are mineral nutrients needed by plants. Some mineral nutrients may not be available from soil application because they remain tightly bound to soil particles. In cases where critical micronutrients, such as iron or manganese, are deficient, trunk microinjection application can be more effective than soil application to correct the deficiency. A soil test is recommended, and often a foliage tissue test is needed before an informed decision can be made on choice of fertilization protocol.

Q: How soon after injection can my customers expect to see the effects of microinjected fertilizers?

A: In cases where the deficiency has resulted in chlorotic foliage and the correct micronutrients are microinjected, you can usually see the return to green foliage within one or two weeks after application, if the tree is actively growing.

Q: How difficult is it to fertilize a tree using microinjection? How much labor and time is required?

A: Fertilizer microinjections are performed in the same manner as pesticide microinjections. The microinjection procedure requires only the drilling of a few, small shallow holes around the tree and placement of the injection capsules and feeder tubes into the holes. Someone experienced in microinjection can inject a 20-inch tree in less than 5 minutes.

Q: Can fertilizing my client's trees via microinjection be profitable for my business?

A: Since the time required to perform fertilizer microinjection is short, the cost of the product is low and microinjection can be performed while conducting other client services, it can most certainly be a profitable add-on service.

Dr. Terry Tattar, Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Microbiology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA

Cover Story

(continued from page 40)

Once again, combining systems and teamwork, Rick Kier knows that a training staple at his company has influenced the small staff's high efficiency. "I learned early on that you have to set expectations and teach people how to do things according to your standards," says the president of Jamesville, N.Y.-based Pro Scapes. "When the business had grown to the point where I couldn't be the one personally doing all the work, I created a library of forms and documents for every service that Pro Scapes offered."

The company's library includes company procedures on everything from how to prune properly to crewleader and crewmember duties, Kier says. "I started doing this in the early 1980s and since then we've been able to add photos and captions illustrating the job steps by using our digital camera," he notes.

To capitalize on the training Pro Scapes how-to library offers, Operations Manager Jeremy Oliver notes that he is currently implementing an in-house certification program that will make employees' training credentials easier to track.

"We have a training program in place now where people get certified on certain tasks before they can perform them on their own, but we're going to have an across-the-board training program in place by next year," Oliver says. "What we're doing is developing a computer program that will let us look up who's certified for the job that needs to be done, which will make it easier for us to determine who we're going to send to a job without worrying if they're ready to handle the work."

Oliver adds that the certification program will include classroom time and book work to learn company procedures, followed by a few weeks of on-site, supervised training. "Our training sessions usually last about half a day depending on how many people are in the group and what the topic is," he explains. "Our average group size is six or seven people and we'll spend about an hour in the classroom going over worksheets and watching a training video, and then we'll go outside and do some hands-on work where we'll actually plant a tree or shrub using the techniques we just studied, or if it happens to be a mowing class we'll get the crewmembers on the mowers and practice the techniques."

Because crewmembers, crewleaders and trainers are paid for their time, Oliver notes that a half-day session could cost about \$500, though having a larger class could add to that amount. "We could be training 12 guys for four hours and that means the price goes up compared to if we were training six people for that same time," he explains. "Also, we could be training on a task like planting a shrub that may require us to buy the planting materials so we can show them how to plant the tree or shrub properly."

However, Oliver comments that the cost for training Pro Scapes employees is offset by the high quality of work that results from the classes. Moreover, the career opportunities that employees gain through training keeps crewmembers coming back for more. "We have a lot of employees who will approach me and say they're really interested in learning how to mow or how to do another service because they know that being trained in that area will give them a chance to get more experience and pick up more hours of work and make a little extra money," he says, adding that occasionally changing training approaches keeps employees interested.

"We like to make the classes interactive so the guys are actually getting to use the equipment or and they're asking questions along the way," he says. "For classes that a lot of our employees attend over and over again, such as a mowing refresher course, instead of just showing the video and doing the worksheets, I've gotten a game going where I'll toss a ball to someone and that person has to share an experience they've had while they were mowing or a technique they've used. It really keeps everyone attentive during the class."

Oliver says that the new training program will likely include other incentives for employees, including the chance to train other crewmembers in areas where they've earned certification. "If one of our employees gets company certified in a certain area and they're really good at a particular task, we'll be able to give them the chance to pass on what they learned to other employees," he says. "Not only will that give them a chance to earn a little extra money, but it's encouraging because it shows that we as managers recognize the good job they're doing and appreciate their hard work." — **Lauren Spiers**

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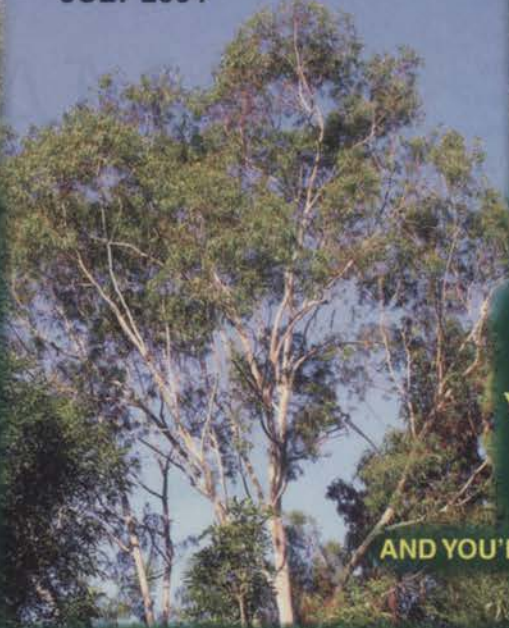


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One recent thread on the *Lawn & Landscape* message board touched on employee policies. Specifically, participants shared opinions on how to deal with employees who break or damage equipment. Here's what industry professionals have to say on the topic.

"If something is damaged, do you require employees to tell you about it within a certain amount of time?" asks Andrew Aksar, owner, Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md. "I'm thinking I need to implement a new policy where when an employee damages equipment, materials or any property, they must report it within 30 minutes."

Matthew Schattner, owner, Mat'z Snow & Lawn, Kansasville, Wis., says one-half hour is too soon. "I say have them report damages at the end of the day when they check in back at the shop," he explains. "We've had some minor boo-boos, and the clients usually call you that evening if there is a problem. So, if you have them report before they leave, it still gives you time to formulate an answer for the customer."

Aksar writes that he began considering such a policy after an employee caused some minor damage to a client's property. The incident happened a week before Aksar found out. Aksar spent two hours buying materials to repair the damage. "If they fail to notify me, then they pay for all costs associated with the damages. Anyone have any policies regarding property damage?" Aksar questions fellow board participants.

Sal Mortilla, owner of Long Island, N.Y.-based Landscaping Unlimited, responds by writing: "I don't think the law will allow you to recover repair and damage costs from an employee. That's what insurance is for."

However, Mortilla explains that when a

(continued on page 46)

BEST OF THE WEB

The *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board is a hotbed of green industry chatter and professional dialogue. Playing host to a diverse collection of opinions and ideas, the online forum often bounces between detailed discussion and dynamic debate.

To better educate readers, *Lawn & Landscape* will expand upon a Message Board discussion each month and offer forum-related insights from professionals in this "Best of the Web" section.



DAMAGE Control

Company policies are intended to keep operations running smoothly when problems arise, but creating a policy that works is half the battle. Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board users debate the pros and cons of establishing employee regulations.

by Jonathan Katz



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Best of the Web

(continued from page 44)

claim is less than \$500 the company usually absorbs the cost as part of the overhead to avoid increased insurance rates. "So far, we have not had any damage done to a property, so I'm not sure how I would react," he says. "I guess it depends on the circumstances."

But Aksar says he is more concerned about accidents being reported than the lost dollars. "These guys need accountability," he writes. "If they'd simply tell me when it happens, then it's usually no big deal. But to let days go by and I discover it on my own—that's not good."

Contractors should require the foremen to note any damages on work orders when they occur, suggests Chad Stern, owner, Mowing & More, Chevy Chase, Md. But sometimes keeping a close eye on equipment can also help catch damages early on, Stern says. "I do a lot of monitoring so sometimes I just find out that stuff by myself," he writes. "I usually inspect equipment and job sites to see if something is wrong."

Sometimes contractors need to accept the damages for what they typically are —

accidents, says Bill Schwab, owner, Naturescape Landscape Co., Solana Beach, Calif. "Every person we have here is trained on the equipment they use as well as what clients expect of our company," Schwab writes. "We have had a few mishaps, but you can clearly see how sorry they are about the damage, and we all learn from it and move on. I can't remember the last time something was destroyed negligently."

Some message board participants suggest giving bonuses to foremen for completing projects early and then deducting pay from those bonuses when damages occur.

But Aksar says early-completion bonuses can backfire. "Doing bonuses based on early completion or timely completion is, in my eyes, a big no-no," Aksar explains. "In this industry, someone is estimating these jobs, and this requires competency and experience. There is no way that a human being can accurately estimate production hours on every single job. If a job is under estimated, then this means the foreman does not get his or her

bonus. Is it their fault some pencil pusher was way off with his or her calculations?"

Besides, Aksar adds, finishing a job early could result from overestimating. "It all goes back to job cost calculations," he writes. "I don't want my guys rushing through a job. That's not how our success is derived, and that's not what drives us."

But Schwab disagrees that "beat-the-budgeted-hours" incentives can have a negative effect, adding that it's been an integral part of his company's growth. "If we had a revolving door with employees, as many companies with a flat hourly rate have, we would have had to place focus on getting workers rather than the crux of the business," Schwab explains. "Those bonuses keep the guys around for more than the money. They stay because we provide a pleasant work environment that has no boundaries when it comes time to earn and learn. Flat rates or hourly pay did not do that for us. With bonus incentives for beating budgeted hours, employees can work up and exceed their potential." **LL**

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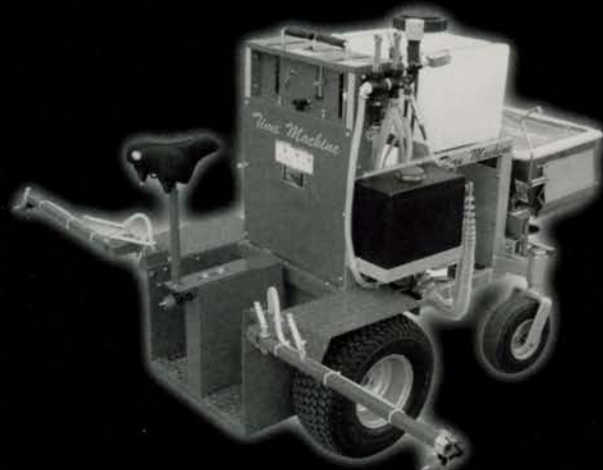
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This winning strategist and visionary is my 2½-year-old son, Theo.

I offer this example about Theo because I think it is appropriate for the subject of strategic planning, and we all can learn from the simplicity of a child. I want to share with you not only lessons I have learned from Theo, but methods I used in setting up a strategic plan to help you with your 2005 planning process.

STRATEGIC PLANNING DEFINED. The word "strategy" is a bit of a fuzzy term – one of those words many of us use but, when asked, don't really know the meaning. For our purposes, the word can be defined as "a course or plan of action to accomplish a specific goal." A strategic plan or action plan has real value when it helps you chart your course so you end up where you want to be. Having a plan gives you alignment in your thinking and actions. If this is what it's like to have a plan, not

(continued on page 50)



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Strategic Planning

(continued from page 48)

having one is like a ship adrift at sea without a destination, allowing the tides and weather to chart the course.

The first step to setting up your strategic plan is figuring out your intention. Is your intention to be really successful, somewhat successful or not successful? What are you creating? Many new owners go into busi-

ness for themselves to become "boss-free." Another may want a sizable and profitable business to support his or her lifestyle. A third type of owner wants to build a large valuable asset. Which one are you? Many owners want to grow their businesses between 10 to 15 percent each year – is that your goal? But first, ask yourself if your

salary has grown that amount as well? Are you working harder but making less? Has the value of your business grown? Do you have more freedom now as an owner or less? These are good questions on which to reflect.

A strategic plan is all about creating what you want and being purposeful and intentional, and it doesn't matter what stage of development your company is in. If you own or work in a landscape company, then your business will fall into one of four categories – forming, storming, norming or performing. Each of these business cycles will have their own set of strategies. For instance, in the forming and storming part of a business, most landscape owners work at least 2,500 hours a year. Doesn't it make sense to invest at least 1 percent of that time in planning the next 2,500 hours. That's just 25 hours of planning to ensure your financial future.

A STRATEGIC RETREAT. To set up a 2005 strategic plan, first you need to gather your key employees together for an off-site strategic retreat. An event like this will help you stop and take a step back so you can reflect on the past, assess the present and plan the future.

There are three things you need to address at this retreat first before setting a specific plan – your vision, your mission and your values.

A vision is what you want. I'll use an example from my son, Theo, to describe this. He'll say, "Daddy, take me to the park now, please." Simple, Clear, Direct, Honest. His vision, as yours should be, is stating only what you want.

Once you establish a vision, write it out. A vision is only a dream until it is written, so as part of your strategic retreat, think about and decide what type of business you want. Do you want a small, boutique company that gives you an excellent lifestyle with sufficient cash and independence? This might be a company of sales in the \$1-million range. Or do you want to create a larger company – about \$2 to \$3 million – that affords you an excellent living, supports a retirement plan and has plenty of supervisory personnel so you don't have to wear all of the hats and can take time off when you need to. A third example is the owner who wants to create a more substantial business asset. With this

(continued on page 54)

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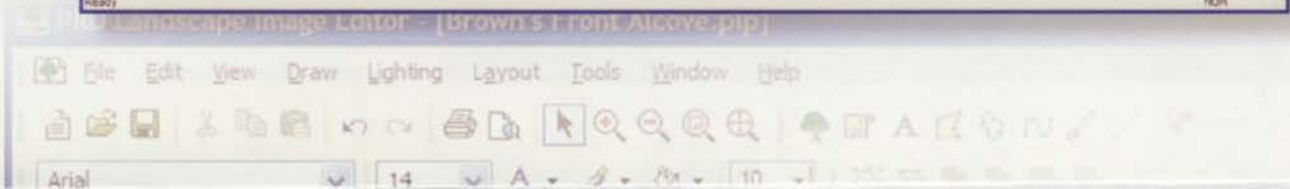
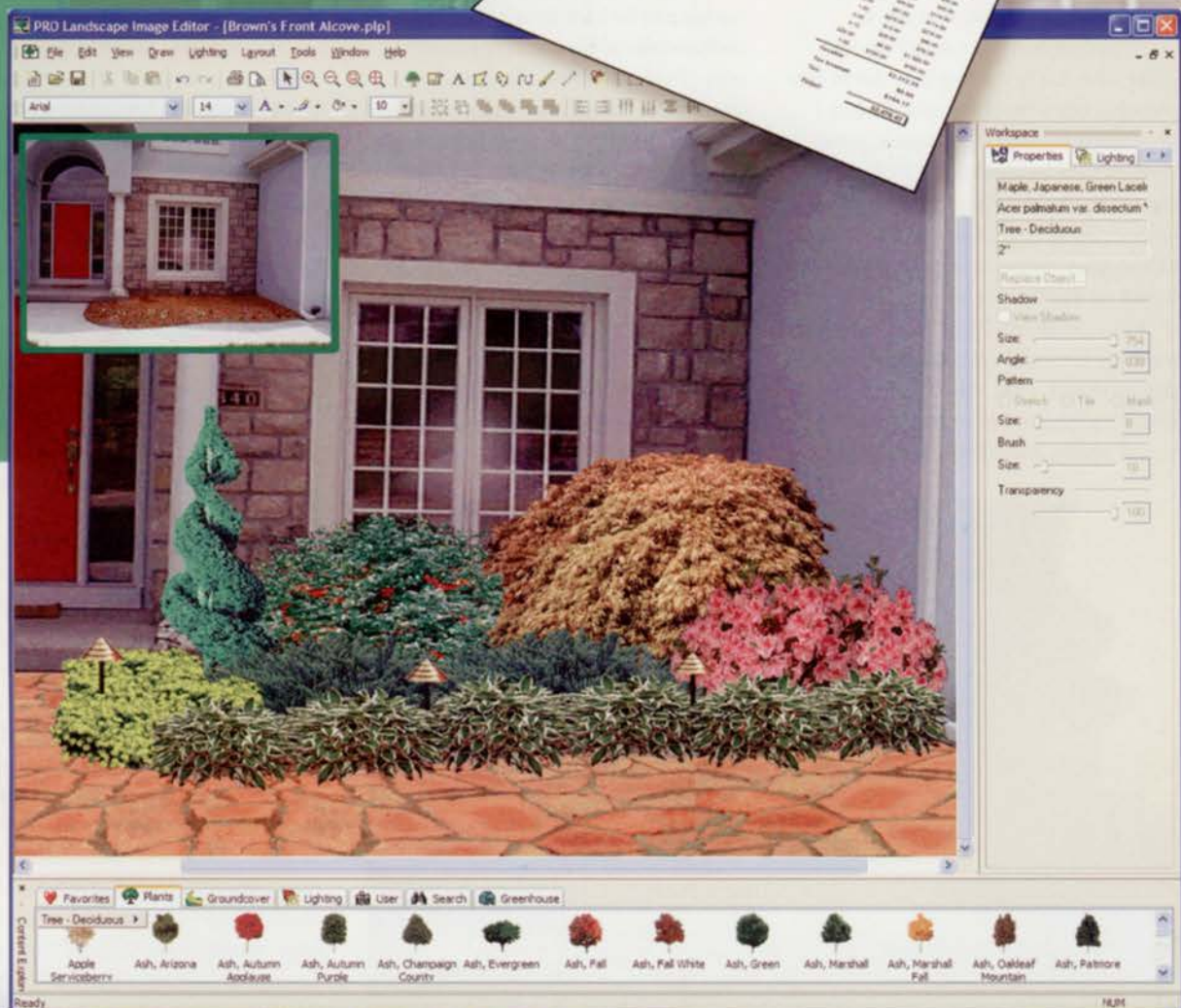
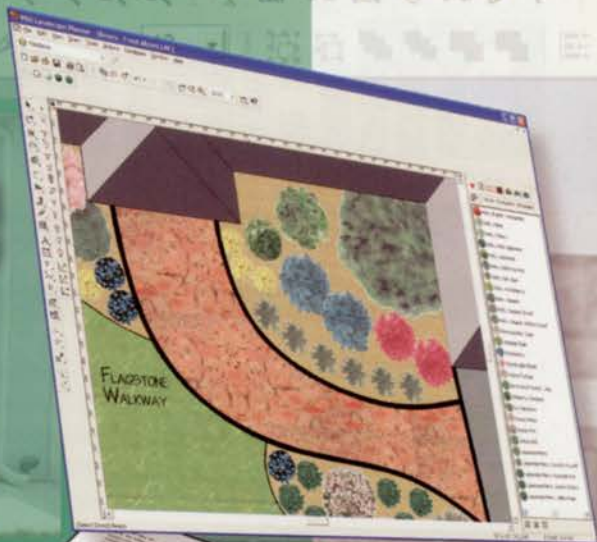
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PRO Landscape Software

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Efficiency Boost

PRO Landscape Software saves landscape contractors time and improves job productivity.

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, software companies have tried to convince landscape contractors that they need to implement technology in their businesses.

"But we know we don't need to clue you in to technology," says Pete Lord, president, Drafix Software, Kansas City, Mo. "You are implementing technology in your businesses naturally everyday and it's been making your lives easier and more efficient."

And when it comes to efficiency, PRO Landscape delivers, according to landscape contractors who use it.

"This program has helped me sell more jobs due to the fact that clients can visualize what I'm going to do before I do it," explains Bob Konigsmark, president, Accent Landscapes, Lincoln, Neb., describing the Imaging feature that shows clients images of their finished landscapes. "After I bought the software, it paid for itself in one month."

PRO Landscape has three integrated modules to meet landscape contractors' design needs. First, the Image Editor creates a life-like before and after landscape picture, including growth projec-

tions, shadows, perspectives and lighting. Second, the Planner lets contractors design a 2-D site plan that accurately represents plant, irrigation system and hardscape placement, giving the installation team the information they need to get the job done. Finally, the Proposal feature automatically generates accurate estimates from the landscape image or CAD plan, simplifying the process of going from a completed design to a customer-ready proposal.

"Our extensive research into this market told us contractors faced a lot of inefficiencies and frustrations," Lord says. "First, and foremost, their close rate was much too low. They could literally spend eight to 20 to 40 hours working on a proposal only to find out they didn't get the job. So, we created a software product that could both dramatically increase the close rate as well as save the designer time in putting together a proposal."

And PRO Landscape has saved contractors a lot of drawing time.

"A to-scale drawing by hand on one of our typical residential properties

takes me about a good seven to 10 hours," explains Marcos Barrera, president, A&M Lawn Care, Evansville, Ind. "But I can do the same thing with the digital design feature of PRO Landscape software in about an hour."

The software saves Michael Sarowsky, president, Michael Sarowsky Horticulturist, Harwich, Mass., an average of two hours of drawing time on each job, and it's also helped him grow his business to four or five times the size of what it was just two years ago. "It brought my business five fold from what I used to gross," he says, adding that jobs he's sold using the software range in price from \$300 to \$20,000. "Clients can see their house and what it looks like with new plants and flowers and mulch and even brick or flagstone walkways. I bought the program in June and by August it was paid for."

Many PRO Landscape users report saving more than 75 percent of the time that they had previously spent with antiquated design processes after purchasing and using the software. "Not only is the actual design process much faster, but also any inevitable editing that must be done is just a mouse click away," Lord shares. "Projects that used to take more than five hours to design are now being finished in less than one hour. Many of our customers have found that the time savings and increased revenue per job have allowed them to grow their businesses, or in some cases to not increase their number of customers but rather increase their revenue per customer and, therefore, their bottom line."





Most contractors don't put a reasonable value on their own time and are therefore shocked to find out how much time and money they can save using PRO Landscape Software.

"ONCE YOU OWN THE TOOLS, you have the flexibility to use the appropriate tool or tools for a specific job," says Pete Lord, president, Drafix Software, Kansas City, Mo. "The result is a professional looking sales presentation that can include pictures of the job before and after the landscaping, a scaled drawing that can be printed to any size, and a professional, accurate estimate of the work you are going to perform."

The following three modules – or PRO Landscape tools – are fully integratable and come standard with the software. As Lord explains, "for

Design Toolbox

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ways,
buying PRO
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like buying a
new set of
tools.

a given project, you decide which tool or tools are needed to increase your chances of closing the job, maximizing the revenue and saving you the most time."

• **IMAGE EDITOR** – This module allows you to show your customer exactly what their landscape project will look like when it is finished. This can include not only plants, but also hardscapes, water features, night lighting and even holiday lighting. The design can be completed in your office or even at the client's home on a laptop computer. This eliminates all of the guesswork for your customers.

• **PLANNER** – This module allows you to quickly and easily create a scaled (or CAD) drawing of the landscape plan. One of the unique features in PRO Landscape is the ability to go automatically from the Imaging to CAD. If you have created one or more image files, PRO Landscape will automatically lay out all of the plant material. This improves your accuracy as well as saves time. The Planner Module also has huge advantages over hand-drawn plans. The software will automatically calculate the square footage areas and even the volume of specific areas, such as a mulch beds. In addition, callouts, dimensions, and even a legend can be added in seconds.



• **PROPOSAL** – This module allows you to quickly create accurate, professional looking bids. No more hand written estimates or duplicating efforts by creating a plan and then re-entering all of the material into a spreadsheet or bidding program. Simply go through a wizard and your bid is created. Once it is finished you can export the bid to programs like QuickBooks or CLIP software.



For a free demo of PRO Landscape software, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/prolandscape or call 800/231-8574.



PRO LANDSCAPE SOFTWARE offers superior functionality along with what many landscape contractors desire: ease of use.

"Couple our learning facilities with a program that was designed for the technical novice, and it makes for a very quick learning curve," explains Pete Lord, president, Drafix Software, Kansas City, Mo.

In fact, most PRO Landscape users utilize the imaging module within the first hour of installation and are proficient using the entire package within a few days.

"I learned it almost immediately," shares Michael Sarowsky, president, Michael Sarowsky Horticulturist, Harwich, Mass. "Once

you get into moving plants around and finding them in the plant library and then learning how to give contours to beds and walkways, it just comes naturally."

It took Bob Konigsmark, president, Accent Landscapes, Lincoln, Neb., only 10 to 15 hours to get proficient using PRO Landscape. "In that amount of time, I could perform all of the basic tasks," he says. "And in another couple of days, I was able to crop, edit and pull plant images off of other Web sites and add them to the plant database."

The software is so simple to master that a large number of users, like Marcos Barerra, president, A&M Lawn Care, Evansville, Ind., have in fact never used a computer before learning PRO Landscape. "I didn't have any real software experience, but I learned it in about one week," he says. "You don't have to be a rocket scientist to work with this program."

To get a user started, PRO Landscape comes with self-paced training in the form of a Tutorial CD, which takes a contractor through a sample project from start to finish. "The user simply watches a series of one- to three-minute videos right on their computer screen," Lord explains. "After watching a video, the user can immediately switch to the software and mimic the steps covered in the tutorial. If they struggle with any part of it, they can watch any or all of the video again. When they are comfortable with that step, they move on to the next one. In just a few hours, they can be to the point where they are ready to start using the software on their own jobs."

Additionally, a 300-plus page User Manual accompanies the software, providing users with a tutorial and illustrated examples, not to mention the prolandscape.com Web site, which has a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section providing tips and tricks to getting the most out of the program. PRO Landscape also comes with free technical support by phone, e-mail or fax – there is no limit to the number of questions users have.

**Many
landscape
contractors
have become
proficient using
PRO Landscape
software
during only a
few days of
practice.**

Easy as 1-2-3

ONE OF THE HUGE ADVANTAGES to being able to show a customer exactly what the finished landscape will look like with PRO Landscape is the opportunity it provides for upselling services to clients.

"A customer might ask for black plastic edging, but the contractor can say, 'Let me show you what brick edging or a rock wall will look like,'" says Pete Lord, president, Drafix Software, Kansas City, Mo. "The customer will almost always like the improvement. The result is a more satisfied customer and also more money in your pocket."

One such add-on service is landscape lighting. "We've heard from contractors who have doubled their revenue in less than a year and attribute much of their success to the implementation of the PRO Landscape software package into their businesses," Lord shares. "One contractor recently reported that he added more than \$30,000 to his business by offering lighting services. This idea was spawned because with PRO Landscape he could show his potential customers what their projects might look like with light fixtures and spot-lights turned on and off – thus a lighting division was added."

This scenario also happened for Bob Konigsmark, president, Accent Landscapes, Lincoln, Neb. "I increased my lighting business 150 percent since I got PRO Landscape," he says. "I drive to houses that I think would benefit from landscape lighting and do a quick drawing of their house with the lighting and mail it to them with an estimate. I would say out of every 10 of these I mail, four customers call me back and say they want me to do the job."

For customers who have the money to spend on cosmetic improvements to their homes or commercial locations but just can't visualize the end result, PRO Landscape software makes it easy. "A customer needs no convincing when they see their project with water features, paver patio patterns and even light fixtures turned on and off," Lord says. "The process might take an extra two minutes to layout with PRO Landscape, but it pays for the software twice over. Upselling means more money for every project, which increases your efficiency. The glory days of the low-bidder are no

Upselling Advantages

Why sell only landscape plantings when PRO Landscape software allows you to upgrade clients to hardscapes, as well as night and Holiday lighting.



On a typical job, a landscape designer can spend one hour on-site and end up with a signed contract using PRO Landscape, while the traditional approach might require two to three meetings and a few hours at the drawing board. Plus, additional services, such as night or holiday lighting, can be added to the plan and sold in minutes.

longer – persuasive selling is definitely the new mantra."

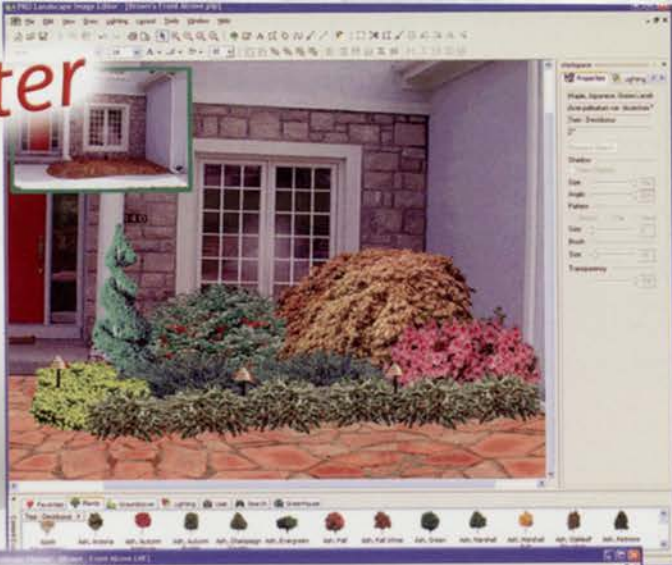
This year, Drafix Software released Version 10 of PRO Landscape Software – the Anniversary Edition, which has the same key features PRO Landscape users have grown to love, but also includes holiday lighting capabilities, new cloning tools and more high-quality images.

"We have found that many landscape contractors are selling and installing holiday lighting to keep their crews busy through the winter months," Lord says. "The holiday lighting features allow users

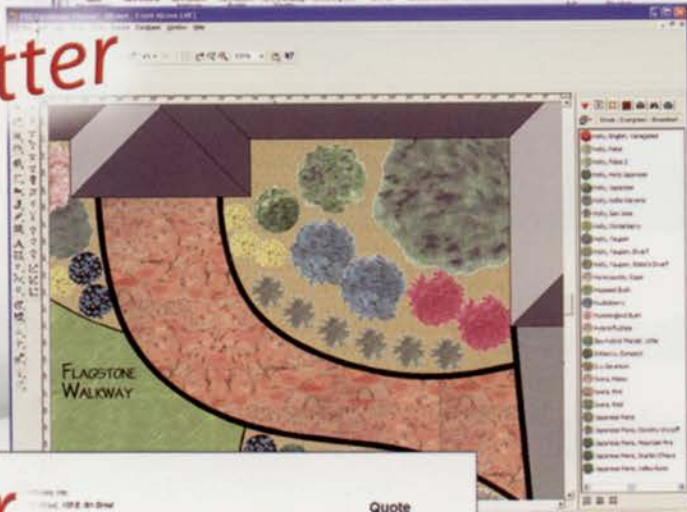
the same efficiencies they currently have with their landscape designs or the night lighting – that is, a higher close rate, shorter sales cycle and more satisfied customers because they know exactly what you are going to deliver."

All in all, PRO Landscape offers efficiency and growth in a practical and simple way. "Contractors are growing their businesses because of the functionality that we provide," Lord says. "For anyone looking to save design time and become better sales people, PRO Landscape is the answer."

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Terms:
Project Name: Beauty From Above
Project #:
2010-01



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PL0201	8aH	Shrub: Forsythia Excelsa	5.00	\$19.00	\$95.00
M0002	3-D	Shrub: Hibiscus Shrub	1.00	\$95.00	\$95.00
SA0114	2.5a	Acacia: Pita	2.00	\$85.00	\$170.00
SA0101	2.5a	Lonicera: Blue City	2.00	\$87.50	\$175.00
999104	2.5	Tree: Vaccinium canadense	1.00	\$275.00	\$275.00
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		Flagstone	1.00	\$180.00	\$180.00
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Strategic Planning

(continued from page 50)

vision, you are independent both financially and operationally. You work on the business and not in it. This owner sees the potential of not only the present value but of the future – when the business will be sold for substantial dollars.

Once your vision is settled, determine your mission and values.

Your mission really has to do with your purpose. Why do you go to work every day? To decide my mission, I assembled my entire management team and a facilitator. We agreed that we didn't just come to work for the money because we could do other things but we had all devoted our careers and our lives to "making great looking places." Your

mission can be as simple as this.

The last area to consider is your values. What are you willing to do to accomplish your vision? The owner – the leader – sets these unbendable standards. What are the values you live by? Write them down and make them known. With these in place, you will be respected not only by your customers but, more importantly, by your team members.

PLAN COMPONENTS. Now that you more fully understand yourself and what you want, it's time to move into the components of a strategic plan.

The trick is to keep the plan as simple as possible yet complete enough so it has meaning to move your company to fulfill your objectives and goals. With some preliminary research, a pretty good plan can be put together in about two days for a medium-sized company. How far in advance should you try and look into the future? My advice is not more than three years because the future is changing so fast.

The following is the plan outline I like to use covering five major business areas:

A. LEADERSHIP

1. Vision – Mission – Values
1. Business Outlook
2. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
3. Goals
4. Objectives (to achieve goals)
5. Strategy implementation

B. MARKETING

1. The industry
2. Customers
3. Competitors
4. Demographics
5. Psychographics

C. OPERATIONS

1. Technology
2. Equipment
3. Workflow

D. PEOPLE

1. Organization chart
2. Roles and responsibilities
3. Training and development

(continued on page 56)

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VOLVO

Strategic Planning

(continued from page 54)

E. FINANCIAL/ADMINISTRATIVE

1. Historical and financial forecasting
2. Legal and tax structure
3. Equity analysis

To accomplish all of these tasks, consider bringing in a facilitator experienced in this type of planning process to help, especially if this is your first time. Next, prepare an agenda and review it carefully with your facilitator. A well thought out agenda is important so the meeting will flow smoothly and stay on time. In order for the meeting to be meaningful and productive there is work to be done prior to the session. Make a checklist of information that will be prepared in advance of the meeting. This would include information about your competitors, the general business outlook in your area, new equipment and technology, demographics, (the characteristics of your market segments),

1. Don't wait, set a date.
2. Don't have the session at your office, but instead at a comfortable neutral place.
3. When you have finished your strategic planning session, reduce the action part of your plan to one sheet of paper.
4. Decide who will monitor the plan and have a review meeting every quarter.
5. Make the plan part of your everyday thinking.
6. Set aside time each year to update the plan for the next 12 to 36 months.

— Ed LaFlamme

6 STRATEGIC PLANNING Tips

psychographics (why people in our area are buying what they buy), and the industry in general. It would be a good idea to give everyone three months or so in advance to research this information.

The most important part of your meeting will be toward the end where you create your "game plan." Make sure you don't rush this part. Reserve all afternoon or a second day, if possible, for this segment.

As I illustrated with the example of Theo, make your plan simple, clear, focused and intentional — because it works. **LL**

The author built and operated a landscape company in Connecticut before selling it in 1999. Now, he is a consultant, speaker, author and president of Grass Roots Consulting, X, Conn., and can be reached at 203/225-0807 or ed@grassrootsconsulting.com.

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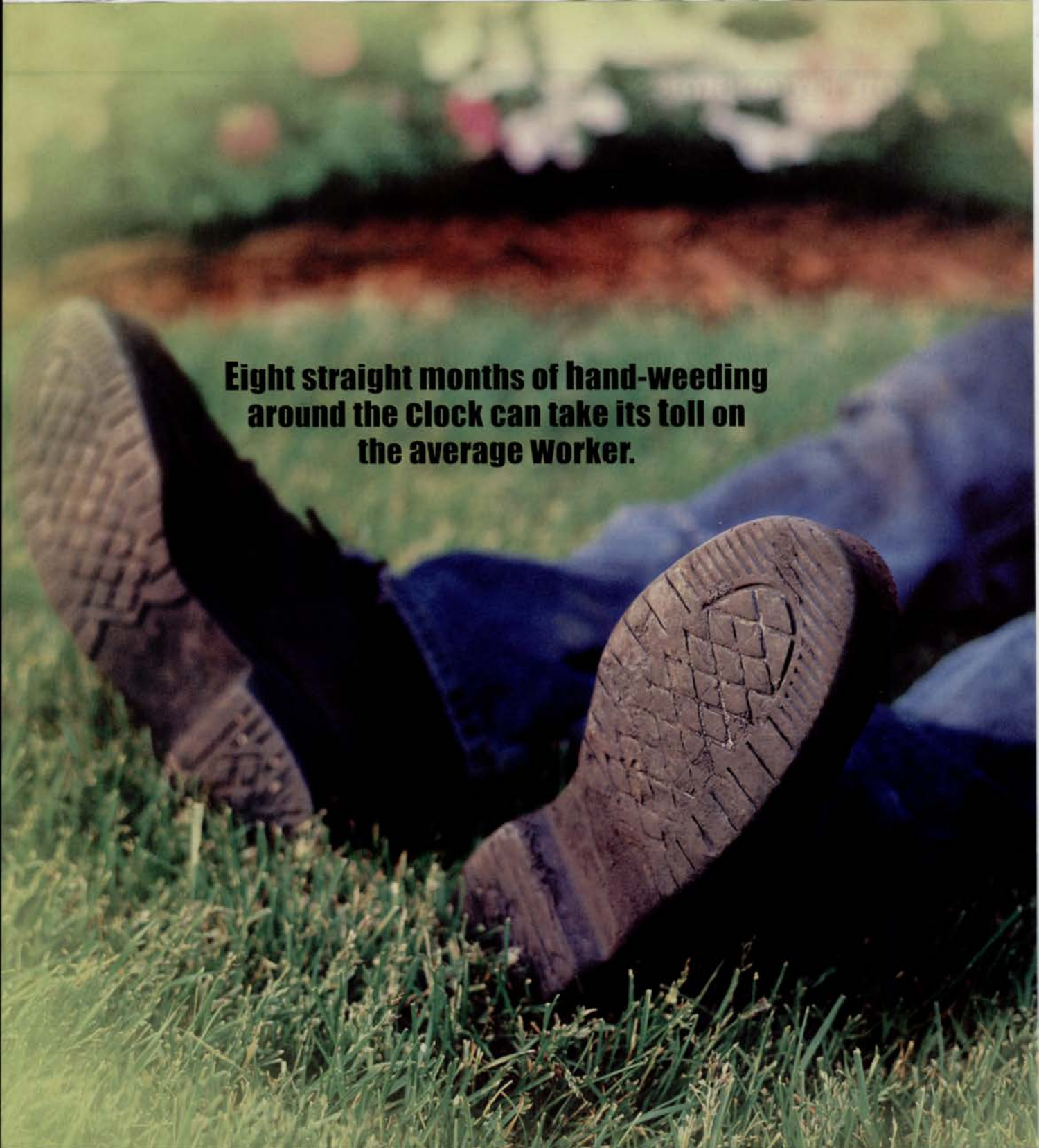
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Mowing Pains

By being mindful of ergonomically friendly mower advancements and following some safety tips, contractors can limit daily aches and pains.

by Jonathan Katz

Photo: Exmark



Mowing lawns can be a bone-rattling experience. At some point, every landscape contractor has bounced over protruding tree roots, bumpy rock-hard soil or fallen tree branches. Whether on a riding, walk-behind or stand-on mower, vibrations and repetitive motions can cause short- and long-term physical effects.

Though more mowers today are being built for comfort, little research is available on how ergonomics affect the landscape industry. "The landscape industry is very uninformed of ergonomics," says Brian Roberts, director of ergonomic services, CNA Financial Corp., Chicago, Ill. "They look at it and say, 'How can that apply to me?' I think the first thing contractors have to do is educate themselves and ask for help to begin understanding ergonomics and cumulative trauma."

ERGONOMICS EDUCATION. When it comes to ergonomics, the landscape industry is about 25 years behind manufacturing, according to Roberts. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which is the federal agency responsible for researching prevention of work-related injuries, has studied the effects of heavy mining and farming equipment on operators, but no information is available on landscape equipment, according to Thomas Waters, supervisory safety engineer, NIOSH.

"NIOSH is the research arm of OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), and if they're not doing research, there's not a whole lot of research you're going to find on it," Roberts says, adding that research may be lagging in this area because landscape contractors and associations haven't embraced ergonomics as a necessity.

(continued on page 60)

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— Harry Turner,
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USE READER SERVICE #57

Eye on Ergonomics

(continued from page 58)

Landscape contractors may want to pay more attention to how ergonomics affects their operations because back injuries can cost a company anywhere from \$500 to \$1 million depending on severity, Roberts says. That includes workers' compensation costs and indirect costs, which are typically four times the direct costs, according to Roberts.

In other words, a \$10,000 back-claim injury may cost a contractor \$50,000 in the end. Indirect costs include hiring a replacement worker and lost productivity and efficiency, Roberts explains.

Insurance rates can also increase if a company has a long history of injuries, Roberts says. A company with few injuries may

have an experience modifier of 60 percent, which means that contractor will receive a 40-percent break on the standard premium. A company with several injuries could have an experience modifier of 110 percent, which would equal the standard rate plus 10 percent, Roberts explains.

FIT FOR COMFORT. Manufacturers have made strides toward helping contractors reduce these ergonomic-related costs. They've modified equipment to lessen the strain caused by vibration and other movements. The most vulnerable body parts to aches and pains during extensive mower use are the hands, wrists, forearms, back and legs. In the landscape industry, mower vibration is often the culprit for back injuries.

"If you're going over any bumpy terrain or uneven surfaces, it's going to create a jolt or a jar, and that can create large impact forces that are transmitted right up the spine," Waters says. These repeated jolts sometimes force the spinal disks to rub together resulting in nerve irritation, Waters adds.

Full-suspension seats with shock-absorption qualities can reduce the chances of back and nerve problems associated with excessive vibration. "There's really not any hard numbers or solutions other than to try to get a tractor that has good vibration-absorption qualities or has good seats that absorb a lot of vibrations, and try to use anti-vibration shocks," Waters explains.

With some full-suspension seats adding \$300 to \$400 to the cost of a mower, slight enhancements in comfort may not sway all contractors. "It can't be uncomfortable," says Kevin Lund, commercial mowing product manager, John Deere, Moline, Ill. "If it's uncomfortable, or if there's particularly bad visibility, that's going to be a problem. But if it's reasonably comfortable, it's hard to say that there's someone with a particular advantage. In other words, I don't see operators paying a lot more for a machine that's a bit more comfortable."

Vibration is broken down into two categories: segmental and whole-body. Whole-body vibration is usually associated with riding mowers because the vehicle distributes vibrations through the entire body. Segmental refers to localized vibrations in areas such as the hands or arms. This type of

(continued on page 62)



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Eye on Ergonomics

(continued from page 60)

vibration is more common with hand-held equipment.

Mower manufacturers are now designing shock-absorbent seats to lessen the impact of vibrations on landscape contractors. In the past, seats were supported by a metal pan with a back cushion and a seat cushion consisting of foam and metal springs. Now, several mower manufacturers have added a shock-absorbent spring device that is adjustable by turning a knob, says Deven McGhee, project engineer, Encore Manufacturing, Beatrice, Neb.

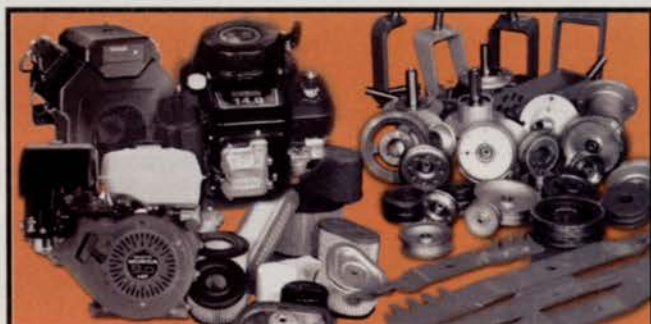
"Operators are asking to go faster and faster all the time," McGhee says. "Well, the faster you go the harder some of those jarring movements are going to be because you're hitting at a higher speed. So you're trying to combat that with better seats and full suspension to try to take away from some of that jarring."

Some mower seats now even consist of an

(continued on page 64)



Photo: Exmark



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(continued from page 62)

elastic material that helps dampen vibration, according to Garry Busboom, director of engineering, Exmark, Beatrice, Neb.

"We've gone to a different type of seat suspension that is an elastomeric material – it's not metal springs, and what that does is it reduces the vibration that's transmitted through the seat to the operator," Busboom says.

Full-suspension seats can raise the cost of a mower by 3 to 4 percent or an additional \$360 to an \$8,000 mower, according to McGhee. There are also add-in suspension seats, which contain a shock-absorbent system placed between the frame and board instead of being built in like the full-suspension seats.

Seats today are also equipped with adjustable armrests that provide a bridging point between the driver's elbow and hand when gripping the handles, according to McGhee. This helps reduce arm pressure. Some seats are now molded to fit the con-

"THE LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY IS VERY IGNORANT OF ERGONOMICS. THEY LOOK AT IT AND SAY, 'HOW CAN THAT APPLY TO ME?' I THINK THE FIRST THING THEY HAVE TO DO IS EDUCATE THEMSELVES AND ASK FOR HELP TO BEGIN UNDERSTANDING ERGONOMICS AND CUMULATIVE TRAUMA."

— BRIAN ROBERTS

tours of the body rather than exaggerating a flat board. "I know in the early years one of the huge complaints were the shoulder areas because your arms were always constantly out there forward, and I think adding armrests have helped," McGhee says.

Another new design that helps reduce

vibration is a "rocker front end," that pivots separately from the frame and the operator, McGhee says. This allows the two front wheels to rock, reducing the amount of shock that is sent back through the operator.

"What that means is that if that one wheel is deflected a certain distance, it's only going to deflect the center half of that distance," McGhee explains. "You're not sending as much movement through the operator by reducing the amount of shock-loading movement that the operator sees due to potentially rough terrain," McGhee explains.

In addition to back problems caused by excess vibration, hands, and more specifically the fingers, are sometimes stressed when squeezing traditional pistol-grip drive levers. Mower manufacturers have redesigned the position of some controls to prevent hand and wrist problems such as carpal tunnel syndrome, but Waters says the disorder is not as widespread as

(continued on page 66)

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(continued from page 64)

(continued on page 68)

Most mower operator injuries result from strenuous repetitive motions. Changing your routine throughout the day can help diminish some of this risk, according to Thomas Waters, supervisory safety engineer, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Washington, D.C.

"Anything you do to reduce the amount of exposure is a good solution, such as cutting down on the amount of time or repetition you're exposed to," Waters says. "For instance, if you're going to use a string trimmer in the morning, maybe you won't use it in the afternoon. Do the mowing in the afternoon instead. Job rotation is a pretty good recommendation." — **Jonathan Katz**



Photo: John Deere

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FIRE ANTS:

A Market Opportunity for LCOs



DuPont Advion™ Fire Ant Bait works fast to control one of the nation's most serious public health pests.



The miracles of science™



Introducing DuPont & Advion™ Fire Ant Bait

While new to the lawn care industry, DuPont has long been recognized as one of the world's most forward-thinking business enterprises, introducing such well-known products as Teflon® resins, Kevlar® brand fiber and Mylar® polyester film to customers throughout the globe. A Fortune 500 company with more than 75,000 employees worldwide, Dupont prides itself on being a science-based company dedicated to innovation with the ability to adapt to rapidly changing market conditions.

Perhaps because of its strong foundation in science – with an emphasis on discovery – change is very much a part of the DuPont culture. The ability to transform and reinvent itself several times during its history is an important reason why DuPont continues to be a competitive global company two centuries after it was founded.

One of the most recent changes at DuPont has been its decision to enter the lawn care industry with an innovative new chemistry – indoxacarb – that is generating much interest among lawn care professionals.

Indoxacarb is a proprietary insecticide discovered and developed by DuPont. We're excited about indoxacarb for several reasons. First, it's a new class of chemistry (oxadiazines) with a novel mode of action. Second, it is effective at low use rates against a broad spectrum of pests. And, third, it has been awarded "reduced risk" status by the EPA. For all these reasons our plan is to introduce and develop a full line of indoxacarb-based products starting with Advion™ Fire Ant Bait, which we're pleased to feature in this editorial supplement.

Our ability to adapt to change and develop innovative products like Advion™ Fire Ant Bait has enabled DuPont to become one of the world's most innovative companies. Yet even in the face of constant change, innovation and discovery, our core values have remained constant: commitment to safety, health and the environment; integrity and high ethical standards; and treating people with fairness and respect.

That's what you can expect from the team at DuPont Professional Products, a company with more than 200 years of experience bringing groundbreaking products to consumers

throughout the world, and a company that is excited about its entry into the lawn care industry with Advion™ Fire Ant Bait. We're looking forward to working with you.

Regards,

Mike McDermott
Global Business Manager
DuPont Professional Products



Two Centuries of Innovation

DuPont begins the manufacture and sale of powder.	President Thomas Jefferson becomes a DuPont "spokesman."	First investigation of synthetic fibers launched.	Fundamental research program launched, laying the foundation for many products; start of the 20 th century "materials revolution."	Researchers discover DuPont Teflon® fluoropolymer resins and DuPont Lucite® acrylic resins.
1802	1804	1811	1903	1909
The company is founded in Wilmington, Delaware, by Eluthère Irénée du Pont de Nemours. It is capitalized on \$36,000 with 18 shares at \$2,000 each.	Experimental Station established; DuPont begins to transition to a diversified chemical company.	During World War I, DuPont supplies 1.5 billion pounds of military explosives to Allied forces and provides U.S. industry with 840 million pounds of dynamite and blasting powder – half of the nation's total requirements for mining and heavy construction.	DuPont researchers Arnold Collins and Wallace Carothers discover a successful general-purpose synthetic rubber, neoprene. Just two weeks later, researcher Julian Hill discovers the first synthetic fiber, a precursor to nylon.	DuPont develops DuPont Mylar® polyester film, a durable plastic film with use ranges from recording tape and shrink-wrapped packaging to electrical insulation.

FIRE ANTS



DuPont: A History of Innovation

Celebrating more than two centuries in business, DuPont is one of the oldest continuously operating industrial enterprises in the world. The company was established in 1802 near Wilmington, Delaware, by a French immigrant, Eluthère Irénée du Pont de Nemours, to produce black powder. E.I. du Pont had been a student of Antoine Lavoisier, the father of modern chemistry, and he brought with him to America some new ideas about the manufacturing of consistently reliable gun and blasting powder. His product ignited when it was supposed to, in a manner consistent with the hoped-for results. This was greatly appreciated by the citizens of the fledgling republic, including Thomas Jefferson, who wrote du Pont, thanking him for the quality of his powder, which was being used to clear the land at his beloved Monticello. Many other heroes of early America owed their success, and lives, to the dependable quality of DuPont's first product, which generated \$15,000 in business that first year.

In the two centuries since E.I. du Pont set up its first manufacturing facility in Delaware, the company has metamorphosed many times, evolving far from its original business while retaining the commitment to consis-

tent high quality and the "miracles of science"™ as DuPont enters its third century in business. In the 19th century, DuPont primarily was an explosives company. In the 20th century it became a global chemicals, materials, and energy company. Today, the firm generates more than \$24 billion in annual revenues and employs 78,000 people worldwide.

Its future will be as a broad-based science company drawing on strengths in chemistry, biology, physics, engineering and information technology, according to Mike McDermott, global business manager of DuPont Professional Products. "Constant innovation – that's always been the key to DuPont's success," he said, "and it will continue to be the key to its success in the future."

The ability to transform and reinvent itself several times during its history is an important reason why DuPont continues to be a competitive global company two centuries after it was founded. "We're proud of our past," McDermott said, "and very excited about our future."

The DuPont oval logo, The Miracles of Science and Advion are trademarks or registered trademarks of DuPont or its affiliates.



DuPont Lycra® brand elastane fiber is introduced.

DuPont Corian® surface material is developed.

Global competition hits home; DuPont emphasizes marketing as well as creating better things for better living.

DuPont scientist Dr. George Levitt discovers sulfonyleurea class of herbicides.

Dr. George Levitt is awarded the 1999 National Medal of Technology by President Bill Clinton for his discovery of sulfonyleurea class of herbicides.

1959 1960s 1969 1970s 1971 1975 1982 1990 1993 2002 2004

DuPont introduces Lycra spandex fiber, electronic materials for microcircuits, Nomex® and Kevlar® aramid fibers for fire and police protection, among many other products.

Bullet-resistant vests of DuPont Kevlar® brand fiber are tested by 15 police departments.

DuPont Pharmaceutical Company is formed.

The company and Merck agree to form a joint venture, DuPont-Merck Pharmaceutical Company.

DuPont celebrates its 200th birthday.

DuPont introduces Advion™ Fire Ant Bait.



Indoxacarb: In A Class By Itself

Designated a "reduced risk" pesticide by the EPA, indoxacarb is a member of a new class of insecticides (oxadiazine) that is proving highly effective against imported fire ants, a rapidly expanding market for lawn care professionals throughout the South.

"It's a brand new class of chemistry with a unique mode of action," according to Dr. Chuck Silcox, global technical manager, green industry, DuPont Professional Products,



"There are no other compounds on the market that exhibit this mode of action."

— Chuck Silcox,
DuPont's global
technical manager

Wilmington, Del. "Unlike some insecticides, which stimulate the sodium channel in the insect's central nervous system, indoxacarb shuts it down, resulting in paralysis and death. There are no other compounds on the market that exhibit this mode of action." Since indoxacarb — the active ingredient in Advion™ Fire Ant Bait — is most effective when consumed, it's well suited as a bait formulation. "Upon ingestion, the insect converts indoxacarb into an active metabolite which then binds to the sodium channel," Silcox observed. "That's why it's so effective as a bait."

Yet it's not the *only* reason Advion™ Fire Ant Bait is showing so much promise as a fire ant control agent. "The thing that is so remarkable about the product is its speed of action," Silcox said. "It is very fast acting, decimating fire ant colonies within 24 to 72 hours after treatment. But it doesn't work *too* fast, allowing foragers sufficient time to distribute

the toxicant throughout the colony before they die, thereby eliminating the queen, which is critical to the success of any fire ant control program."

Other attractive attributes of indoxacarb include its environmental profile, low-use rates, broad-spectrum control and ease of use. In addition, it is virtually insoluble in water, so there is little risk of surface or groundwater contamination. "That's one of the reasons the product has been granted reduced risk status by the EPA," Silcox said. "Lawn care professionals will find Advion's environmental profile very attractive."

Advion™ Fire Ant Bait is a valuable solution for treating home lawns as well as large tracts of land surrounding office parks, condominium complexes and health care facilities.

For additional information about Advion™ Fire Ant Bait, contact your local distributor or a DuPont Professional Products sales representative in your area.

Novel New Chemistry

It isn't very often that a new class of insecticides is introduced in the lawn care industry. That's why DuPont Professional Products is so excited about the future of indoxacarb, a novel chemistry that works by inhibiting sodium ion entry into nerve cells, resulting in paralysis and death of the target pest.

"Indoxacarb is part of a new class of chemistry called oxadiazines," said Dr. Clay Scherer, global technical manager, pest management, DuPont Professional Products. "It has a unique mode of action that shuts down the sodium channel. There are no other compounds that exhibit this mode of action."

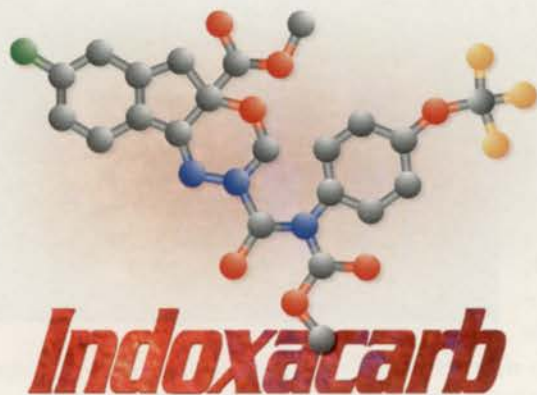
Major Insecticide Classes

Chlorinated hydrocarbons
Organophosphates
Carbamates
Pyrethroids
Insect growth regulators
Avermectins
Neonicotinoids
Phenylpyrazoles
Oxadiazines

FIREFANTS

Features & Benefits of Indoxacarb

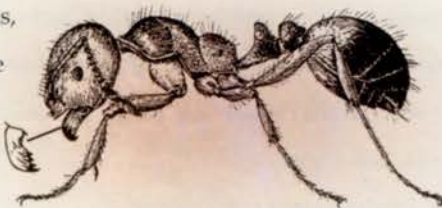
Indoxacarb, the active ingredient in Advion™ Fire Ant Bait, has a number of features and benefits that make it an attractive insecticide for the landscape industry. "For lawn care professionals, what's most impressive about the active ingredient is its speed, efficacy and residual control against fire ants," said Mike McDermott, global business manager, DuPont Professional Products, Wilmington, Del. "In both laboratory and field trials with key insects it has exhibited superior performance." Other features and benefits of indoxacarb include:




- New class of chemistry (oxadiazine)
- Novel mode of action
- Awarded "reduced risk" status by EPA
- Virtually insoluble in water
- Low acute toxicity
- Speed of control
- Broad spectrum activity
- Effective at low use rates
- No chronic toxicity
- Ideal bait insecticide

Public Enemy #1 In The South


The red imported fire ant, *Solenopsis invicta*, infests all of the southern states from Florida to Texas, and as far north as southern Oklahoma, Arkansas, Virginia and Tennessee. It has a two-segmented petiole and a stinger. The clypeus has three teeth, a key identifying character. The body is nearly uniform dark reddish-brown in color. They are best known for their painful sting. To sting, the ant grabs the victim's skin with its mandibles for leverage, then curls its abdomen to insert the stinger. The venom contains piperidines, which can cause a burning sensation, and proteins, which can cause life-threatening anaphylactic shock in a small percentage (less than 1%) of the population. The sting causes a white pustule to form on the skin.



(Source: Handbook of Pest Control, 9th Edition)



Imported Fire Ants: A Market Opportunity



Fire ants are a growing problem throughout much of the South, representing a significant market opportunity for lawn care professionals interested in expanding their service offerings and enhancing their bottom lines. However, to properly control fire ants, one must first have a thorough understanding of the biology and habits of this potentially destructive pest.

Description.

Four species of fire ants can be found in the United States, all of which have the same basic identifying characters. The most common species is the red imported fire ant, *Solenopsis invicta*, which was first discovered in Mobile, Ala., in the 1930s. Other species sometimes en-

countered by lawn care professionals include the southern fire ant, *S. xyloni*; tropical fire ant, *S. geminata*; and black imported fire ant, *S. richteri*.

Why Are Fire Ants So Difficult To Control?

There are a number of behavioral and biological reasons imported fire ants have become a serious pest in the United States, particularly from Texas to Florida where a growing number of lawn care professionals are offering fire ant control services. Here are some of the reasons this seemingly ubiquitous pest has gained such a foothold in the United States.

- Produce large populations
- Lack of natural enemies
- Little pest competition
- Produce large numbers of reproductives
- Aggressive behavior
- Thrive in disturbed habitats
- Newly mated queens can fly as far as 12 miles

Fire ant workers vary in size, ranging from $\frac{1}{16}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in length. They are yellow, black or dark red-brown in color, depending on the species. The thorax lacks spines, and the petiole has two nodes. They have a stinger at the tip of the abdomen and 10-segmented antenna, which is tipped with a two-segmented club.

Biology/Habits.

Worker ants are wingless, sterile fe-

FIRE ANTS

males. They protect the queen by defending the nest from intruders, by feeding the queen only food that the workers have eaten first, and by moving the queen from danger. They also forage and care for the developing brood. The brood is made up of cream-colored eggs, larvae, and pupae of all the castes.

The winged forms, or reproductives, live in the mound until their mating flight, which usually occurs in the afternoon soon after a rainy period. Mating flights are most common in spring and fall. Males die soon after mating, while the fertilized queen alights to find a suitable nesting site, sheds her wings, and begins digging a chamber in which to start a new colony. Sometimes, several queens can be found within a single nesting site.

A newly mated queen lays about a dozen eggs. When they hatch 7 to 10 days later, the larvae are fed by the queen. Later on, a queen fed by worker ants can lay more than 2000 eggs per day. Larvae develop in 6 to 10 days and then pupate. Adults emerge in 9 to 15 days. At maturity, a fire ant colony can consist of more than 500,000 ants. Queen ants live 7 years or more, while worker ants generally live about 5 weeks, although they can survive much longer.

There are two kinds of red imported fire ant colonies – the single queen (monogyne) and multiple queen (polygyne). Workers in single queen colonies are territorial. Workers from multiple queen colonies move freely from one mound to another, which has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of mounds per acre. Areas infested with single queen colonies contain up to 150 mounds per acre (rarely more than 7 million ants per acre). In areas with multiple queen colonies, there may be 200 or more mounds and

40 million ants per acre.

The red imported fire ant builds mounds in almost any type of soil, but prefers open, sunny areas such as pastures, parks, lawns, meadows, and cultivated fields. Mounds can reach 18 inches in height, depending on the soil type. Often mounds are located in rotting logs and around stumps and trees. Colonies also can occur in or under buildings.

Colonies frequently migrate from one site to another. The queen needs only half a dozen workers to start a new colony. They can develop a new mound several hundred feet away from the previous location almost overnight. Flooding causes colonies to leave their mounds and float until they can reach land to establish a new mound. Colonies also can migrate to indoor locations.

The Future. Fire ants are among the most prolific insects found in the southern United States, providing valuable growth opportunities for lawn care professionals interested in breaking into this rapidly expanding market or expanding their current fire ant offerings. In either case, the staff of DuPont Professional Products is ready and willing to lend a helping hand, offering sales support and technical expertise to lawn care professionals eager to grow their fire ant business.

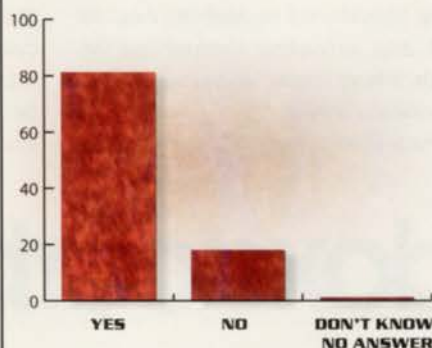
(Sources: Texas Imported Fire Ant Research and Management Project; *Technician's Handbook* and *PCT Field Guide For The Management of Structure-Infesting Ants*, USDA/APHIS/PPQ, University of Florida)

Texas Poll Illustrates Scope of Fire Ant Problem

Eighty-one percent of Texans have been stung by fire ants and 76 percent of the state's residents have treated their yard for this serious public health pest, illustrating the scope of the fire ant problem in the "Lone Star State." The telephone poll, conducted by the Scripps Research Center in the summer of 2003, has a margin for error of plus or minus three percent.

Ouch, That Hurts!

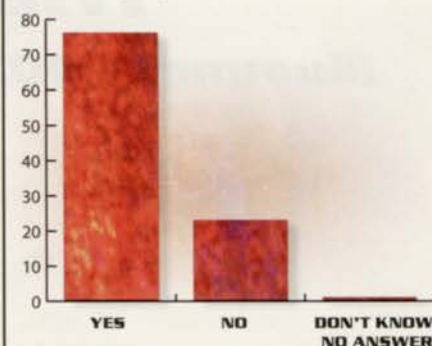
Have you ever been stung by a fire ant or ants?



(Source: Scripps Howard Texas Poll)

A Growing Problem

Have you ever treated a yard for fire ants, or had someone else treat it for you?



(Source: Scripps Howard Texas Poll)



Researchers Impressed With Indoxacarb

A number of prominent industry researchers have conducted field studies to determine the efficacy of indoxacarb against imported fire ants and they've come away impressed, including Dr. Richard Patterson of the University of Florida; Dr. Roger Gold of Texas A&M University; and Dr. Charles Barr of Texas Cooperative Extension. All three researchers appeared at a two-day conference sponsored by DuPont Professional Products held earlier this year at the Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort in Naples, Fla.

Kicking off the program was Dr. Richard Patterson, who provided an historical overview of the imported fire ant problem, pointing out the pest originated in South America before being introduced in Mobile, Ala., in 1929, and spreading throughout the South, where it now infests more than 321 million acres.

Patterson's research focused on

summer and fall applications of granular indoxacarb for red imported fire ant control in north Florida. He applied four tablespoons of Advion™ Fire Ant Bait around individual mounds, along with a broadcast treatment of 1.5 pounds per acre. "Plots were evaluated three, seven, 10, 14, 28, 42 and 56 days post treatment or until the product failed," he said.

"Both summer and fall applications were very effective in northern Florida," according to Patterson. "Indoxacarb applied as a bait showed very quick knockdown in three days and good residual control for up to four to six months."

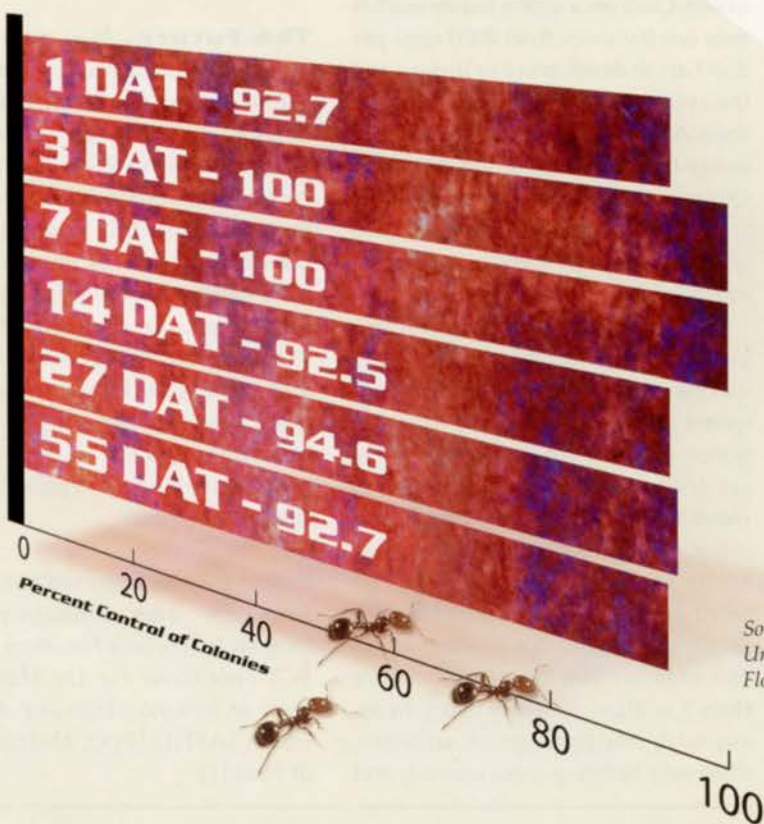
In another study at a city cemetery in Gainesville, Fla., where the turf is mowed and watered regularly, broadcast applications of Advion™ Bait was applied at the rate of 1.5 pounds per acre. "In 24 hours, indoxacarb knocked down the population very

quickly," he said. "And because of the quick knockdown, you don't get as much mound movement with indoxacarb as you may get with other products." In this study, Patterson said, "Indoxacarb looks extremely good."

Dr. Roger Gold, endowed chair holder at Texas A&M University's Center For Urban and Structural Entomology, said fire ants are serious business in the Lone Star State, where they represent an important quality of life issue. "Fire ants have a significant economic impact on the state, costing Texas billions of dollars in lost revenue," he said. "They're also an important pest medically," posing a serious health risk in and around schools, health care facilities, homes and apartments, and other sensitive accounts.

Gold has conducted a number of field trials with Advion™ Fire Ant

Indoxacarb Imported Fire Ant Broadcast Trial [Summer 2003]



DAT = Days After Treatment

Source:
University
Florida

Getting The Most From Baits

Bait in recent years, investigating the product's mode of action, field performance and environmental impact. On all three counts, he's impressed.

"We like the fact we're dealing with a new active ingredient that represents a new class of insecticide," he said. "It's an active ingredient that is extremely active against fire ants. After four days, most test results exhibited more than 90 percent control of fire ant populations. The efficacy is excellent, meaning we're seeing results in one to three days. And the colony is being controlled. We're not just killing foragers, but reproductives as well.

"Some products only move mounds around," Gold added, "but in this case you're eliminating colonies. Ants may come back around the periphery of the treated area, but it's controlling them in the test area."

Gold also indicated the product has an attractive environmental profile, an important consideration in these pesticide-conscious times. "It already has a number of registrations in agriculture," Gold said, "so that should give us some comfort."

Dr. Charles Barr, program specialist for Texas Cooperative Extension, conducted a series of field trials featuring broadcast treatments of indoxacarb at municipal airports throughout Texas. The test sites, quarter acre plots where the treatments were replicated four times each, gen-

Bait is an effective tool in the lawn care professional's ongoing battle against imported fire ants, but it's a technology that must be used properly. Texas Cooperative Extension offers the following recommendations when using bait to control this potentially destructive pest:

- Apply baits when ants are foraging. To see if ants are active, place a small amount of bait or suitable food (i.e. hot dog) next to a mound. If ants begin removing food within 30 minutes, it's a good time to treat.
- In summer, apply baits in the evening. Ants forage during the cool of the evening and will quickly discover and carry off baits. Baits applied during the day, in extreme heat, quickly lose their effectiveness. Ants do not forage during the day in hot weather.
- Use only fresh bait, preferably from an unopened container. Once opened, baits should be used quickly. Opened containers may last only a few weeks. Unopened containers stay fresh for up to two years.
- Test baits for freshness before using. Apply a small amount next to an active mound. If the bait is fresh, ants will begin removing it within 30 minutes.
- Apply baits when no rain is expected for at least eight hours. This reduces the risk of the pesticide being washed away.


erated a wealth of valuable information. What did Barr discover? "We're knocking out foraging fire ants overnight," he said. "That's very encouraging for lawn care professionals," particularly when one considers the importance of controlling fire ant populations around homes and other sensitive locations where rapid control is essential.

"When it comes to fire ants, it's all about speed of kill," he said. "It's the fastest acting broadcast bait I've seen in 14 years doing broadcast work. It produced nearly 100 percent colony elimination in three days."

Interestingly, the speed of control is "nearly identical" in summer and fall applications, according to Barr.

"It's a very robust product. It's a product that should satisfy the consumer's need for speed," a sentiment reinforced by Dr. Charles Silcox, global technical manager, green industry, DuPont Professional Products. "The thing that immediately jumps out at you when looking at the data is how quickly Advion™ Fire Ant Bait works," Silcox said. "It provides excellent speed of control. And it maintains 90 percent control over 60 days, so it has quite an impressive performance profile."





LCOs Speak Out About The Fire Ant Market



On the final day of the two-day Fire Ant Symposium hosted by DuPont Professional Products, attendees were asked their thoughts about the fire ant market. Here's what they had to say:

"Fire ants make the phone ring in Texas. When the economy crashed in the 1980s, my business kept growing because fire ants were such a serious pest problem." – **Bobby Jenkins, ABC Pest & Lawn Services, Austin, Texas**

"We mow our clients' lawns and detail their beds weekly. When we see a fire ant mound while we're there, we treat it immediately. In Florida, all of the employees who use pesticides must be certified, so if someone on the crew at the property isn't certified, then we send someone right away who is certified to take care of the fire ants on that client's property." – **Barry Troutman, ValleyCrest Cos., Orlando, Fla.**

"A lot of people have given up on fire ant control in southeast Texas. They simply accept them as a part of life. We need some good, inexpensive solutions that will make life better for homeowners." – **Charles Barr, extension agent, Texas Cooperative Extension, College Station, Texas**

"Our advertising doesn't promote a public health message, but a 'take your yard back' message. Our message is that we'll allow your children to play in the yard again without the fear of being injured by fire ants." – **Bobby Jenkins, ABC Pest & Lawn Services, Austin, Texas**

"One of the challenges of fire ant control is educating the customer on the programs we offer and what results they can expect from them. We have a marketing piece detailing this information written in layman's terms that we can hand out to clients at any given time during the year to aid in this educational process." – **John Buechner, Lawn Doctor, Marlboro, N.J.**

"Fire ants cost \$5 to \$6 million annually for damage control and population management, making it a big problem and an excellent business opportunity for lawn care operators." – **Richard Patterson, professor of entomology, University of Florida, Gulfport, Fla.**

FIRE ANTS



"It's the type of service that makes the customer pick up the phone because it can do harm to children and pets. I want people to know I'm an expert on fire ants so they call me first if they have a problem." – **Bobby Jenkins, ABC Pest & Lawn Services, Austin, Texas**

"Customer education will play a vital role in the long-term management of not only fire ants, but other ants as well." – **Richard Patterson, professor of entomology, University of Florida, Gulfport, Fla.**

"For fire ant services, marketing is crucial. Many lawn care companies used to do regular lawn care services and then throw in fire ant treatments for free – they didn't realize what a profitable service it could be. As a result, it has become a difficult service for those companies to sell. My advice to lawn care operators adding this service to their mix is to market it well with direct mail pieces so clients understand the value you are providing." – **John Buechner, Lawn Doctor, Marlboro, N.J.**

Baits Prove Effective Against Fire Ants

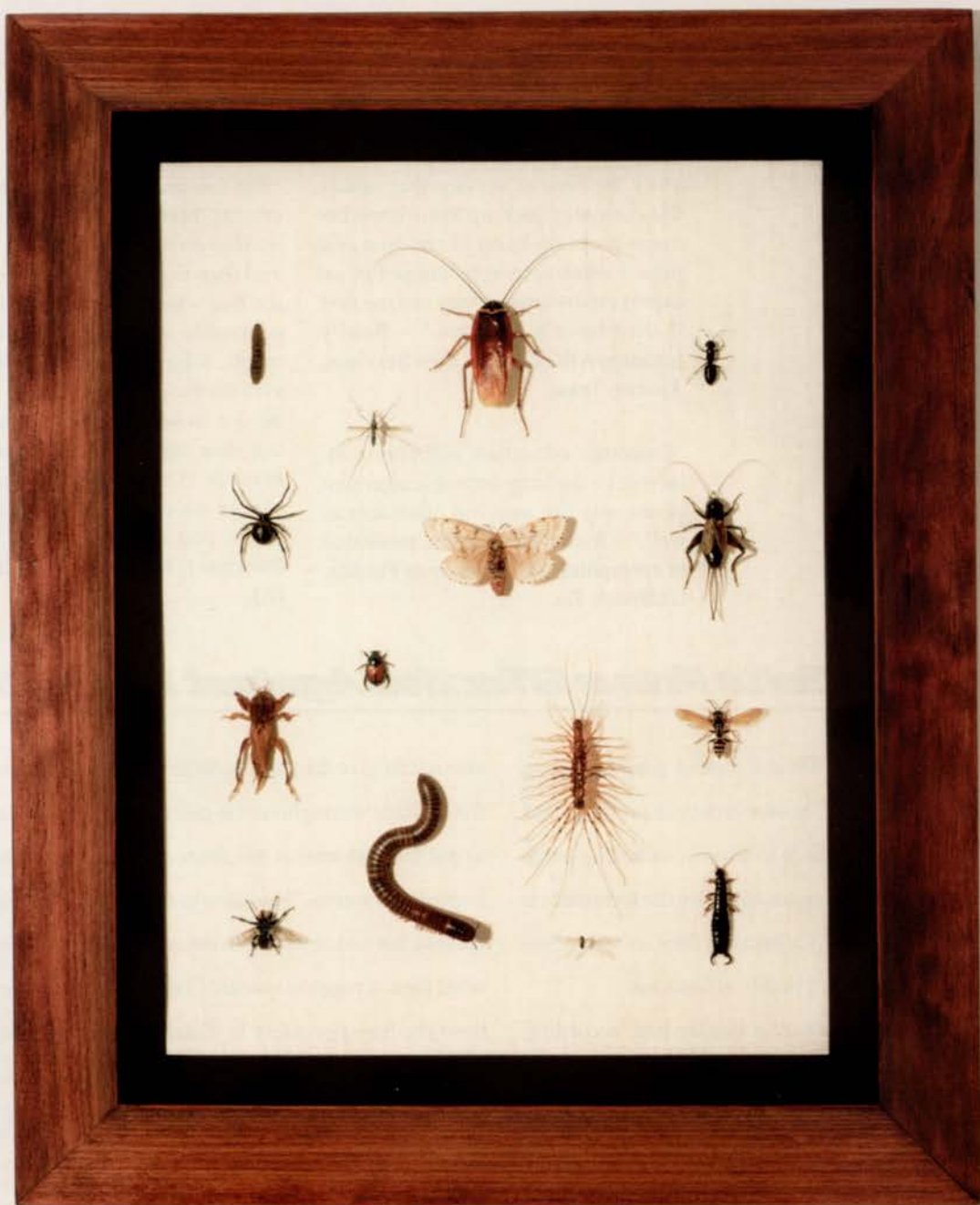
When developing a fire ant control program, lawn care operators (LCOs) have a variety of products and formulations from which to choose, including baits, liquids, dusts and granules. Baits are the formulation of choice for many LCOs because they are cost effective, easy to apply and highly efficacious.

The key to formulating quality bait, according to Dr. Roger Gold of Texas A&M University, is "you must have an acceptable bait matrix" that ants find attractive. "If something is attractive, ants will move to the site to pick it up, which is important." Next, the product must be palatable, prompting ants to pick up the material readily. "The worst characteristic you can have in a bait is if it's repellent. The bait matrix must be palatable," he said.

The next thing that is important is the speed of activity," according to Gold, who spoke at a Fire Ant Symposium sponsored by DuPont Professional Products earlier this year. The bait must be slow acting

enough to give foragers sufficient time to distribute the toxicant throughout the colony, but not too slow to put the customer at risk from delays in controlling imported fire ants. "You have to make sure the foragers take the toxicant back to the colony and you don't want them dying too quickly," he said. "They have to have the time necessary to distribute the toxicant to other members of the colony through trophallaxis."

Gold said Advion™ Fire Ant Bait exhibits all of these characteristics, making it well suited for a variety of control situations. "Consumers will be very pleased with the speed of performance of this product," he said. Yet he is quick to remind LCOs that there is no silver bullet when it comes to imported fire ants. "While we have an active ingredient (indoxacarb) that is extremely active against fire ants, it's important to remember that there is no perfect insecticide on the market," he said. "It still must be applied properly."



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- How to sharpen your financial management practices with QuickBooks.
- To save labor hours by buying the proper equipment.
- How to develop an overall system to manage and schedule labor.

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Thursday, August 5, 2004
Detroit, Michigan

Friday, August 13, 2004
Houston, Texas

Friday, October 1, 2004
Washington D.C.

Friday, August 6, 2004
Cleveland, Ohio

Friday, August 27, 2004
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Friday, October 8, 2004
Tampa, Florida

Wednesday, August 11, 2004
Nashville, Tennessee

Friday, September 17, 2004
Kansas City, Missouri

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Eye on Ergonomics

(continued from page 66)

back injuries. Only 2 percent of costs associated with occupational injuries nationwide are associated with carpal tunnel syndrome, he says.

Pistol grips have traditionally been designed like scissors in which the bottom lever moves away from the stationary handle, Busboom says. This does not allow the operator to evenly distribute pressure among all fingers. Some controls are now being positioned topside and inward, allowing the operator to use the entire hand, according to Busboom.

Also, on riding mowers, some handles are now placed in a more natural or neutral position that places less stress on the ligaments, Busboom adds.

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— JIM BARBEE

happy at Realiscape, Wake Forest, N.C., says company President Jim Barbee. "With the way they sit all day long, being able to reach for the controls comfortably is vital," Barbee says. "Having a bad back for years, I can tell you that's very important."

Some mowers now have the parking brake

incorporated into the steering handles as well to prevent excess bending, according to Ryan Crumly, design engineering manager, Auburn Consolidated Industries, Auburn, Neb. The brake is automatically set when the operator moves the handles to get off of the machine, Crumly says.

When searching for an ergonomically friendly mower, the best way to decide whether the machine is right is to test it out.

To do this correctly, first take a seat and then turn on the mower, says Deven McGhee, project engineer, Encore Manufacturing, Beatrice, Neb. Test the seats for support and positioning and check to see whether the controls are adjustable. The foot pad should give you a comfortable place to put your feet, and you should feel safe in your position on the mower, says McGhee, adding that the operator should feel comfortable as the mower moves forward, backward and turns.

Mower operators often overlook seat adjustment, adds Ryan Crumly, design engineering manager, Auburn Consolidated Industries, Auburn, Neb., and ensuring proper seat positioning is an important safety solution whether operators are testing out machines or riding them daily on the job.

"People don't take the time to adjust the seats," Crumly explains. "They just jump on it and go. The first thing they should do is slide the seat forward or backward to match the leg room they need to operate the deck lifts."

Contractors should adjust the seat so their legs are slightly elevated from the cushion to relieve pressure, according to McGhee, adding that the feet should touch the ground and not be dangling.

The second thing operators need to do is adjust the tension on the suspension seat, Crumly suggests. The tension knob adjusts to the weight of the operator, and it should be adjusted so the seat isn't too soft because it doesn't offer enough back support that way, Crumly says. "But it also can't be too stiff or you lose the suspension," he adds. "Sometimes you may need to test the equipment for five or 10 minutes before finding the right adjustment."

Next, operators should check for good visibility around the mower, which is "probably the No. 1 thing to look for from an ergonomic and safety perspective," says Kevin Lund, commercial mowing product manager, John Deere, Moline, Ill. "You want your operator to be able to see everything he's going to be cutting, and any landscapes he's going to be cutting up against, so visibility is primary."

The operator should be able to see the front wheels and the outside edges of the deck, McGhee says. The ideal seat height for optimal visibility on smaller mowers — those with a cutting width below 60 inches — is 26 to 28 inches from the ground to the top of the operator's cushion, according to McGhee. On larger mowers, the operator should be 30 to 32 inches from the ground or 36 to 37 inches on a full-suspension seat, he says. Full-suspension seats tend to have deeper decks, sacrificing 3 to 4 inches, adds McGhee. — **Jonathan Katz**

TEST Drive

Eye on Ergonomics


Overall, mid-mount zero-turn mowers are becoming more popular because the control efforts are extremely low, and visibility is increased, according to Lund. The mid-mount mowers put the operator in a better position relative to the edge of the deck, which reduces the number of blind spots, Lund says.

From an ergonomic perspective, improved visibility lessens the chances that the driver will have to make sudden twisting and turning movements to adjust controls. Also, more hydraulic, foot-operated and electric deck lifts are replacing hand-controlled deck lifts, according to Lund. "Instead of the hand-operated deck lifts where you had to bend at the waist and pull it back with your back, now you've got a little more ergonomic-friendly foot assist lift or electric or hydraulic lift assist," he explains.

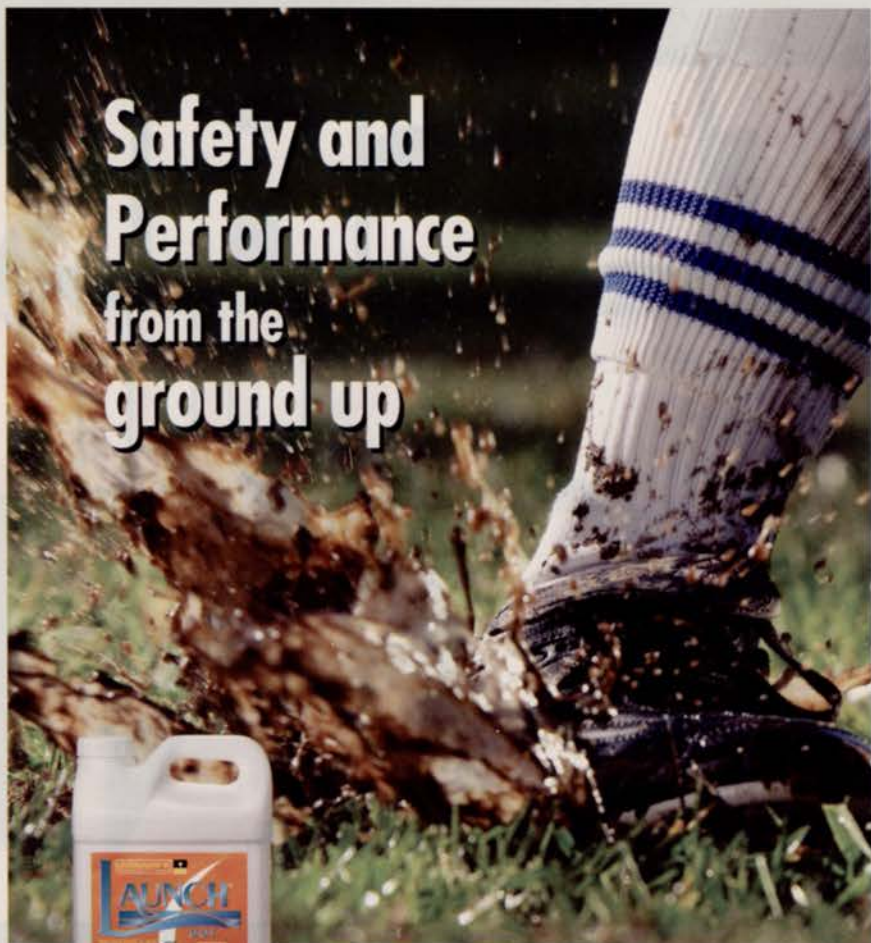
FUTURE MOVEMENTS. While cost is a factor for most contractors, health usually comes first. "It doesn't matter how much money you make if you hurt yourself," Barbee says. "You don't want an employee to get hurt - you don't want them to wear themselves out. You want to push for comfort and safety. I think that makes our employees happier, and that shows on the job, and I think our customers can sense that."

As far as future mower ergonomic standards are concerned, the topic is still relatively new in the industry. Advancements have been made mostly in response to customer feedback, Busboom says.

And most contractors are first interested in durability and speed, according to McGhee. Ergonomics is usually third in level of priorities. Last would likely be aesthetics, McGhee says.

"Ergonomics is a real concern," McGhee says. "It is something we look at a lot, but many times one of the things that keeps us from really pushing the envelope in machine design is cost. You can't just throw things on there to throw them on there, and yet, you want to be able to produce a machine that people are going to be able to sit on for three or four hours at a time without having issues. We're doing things much better than we did five or six years ago, and most of that is market pressure." 

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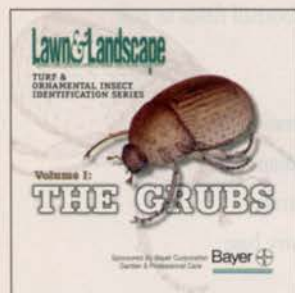
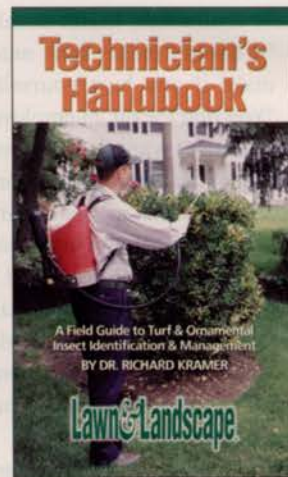
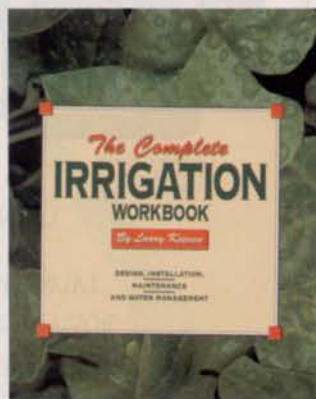
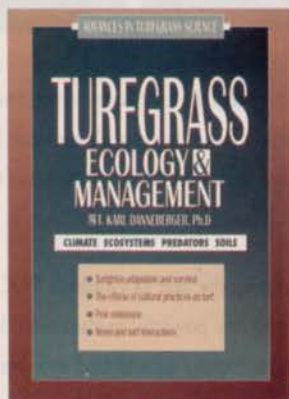
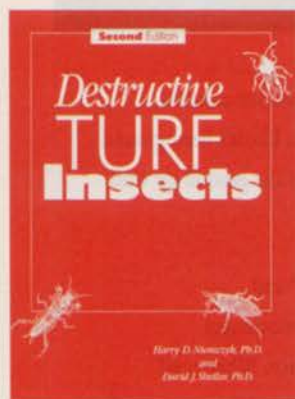
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Brush up on your fall fertilization of cool-season grasses with these contemporary strategies.

by Cale Bigelow

Cool-Season

CLUES

Except for the deep South, most U.S. homes and office complexes have cool-season turfgrass lawns because most cool-season turf stays green much longer than warm-season turf, which turns brown and goes dormant after the first killing frost. Often these species remain brown for six months or more, which is undesirable to many clients. Therefore, lawn care operators need to continually refresh their knowledge of contemporary fall fertilizer strategies for cool-season turf to maximize plant health, minimize mowing requirements and limit nutrient losses.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE. Twenty years ago the standard fertility programs for a cool-season lawn consisted of applying nitrogen (N) to match seasonal shoot growth. This philosophy was very much analogous to the way farmers fertilized row crops like corn. Corn, however, is a warm-season grass and benefits from summer N applications. Unlike row crops, turf managers are not trying to

maximize yield in order to ensure profits. Slowly, the shortcomings of this strategy became evident. Landscape managers began to notice there was an overabundance of growth in the spring months, which necessitated frequent mowing. Additionally, many cool-season lawns declined dramatically during the summer months, especially under drought conditions. Turfgrass scientists began researching how turfgrasses grew and responded to different fertilizer programs. Their discoveries evolved into the industry's current fertilization recommendations.

For a high-quality established lawn, this consists of light N applications (<1 lb. of actual N) in the late spring and almost no N during summer, unless the area is irrigated and clip-

pings are removed. The majority of N (60 to 75 percent) is applied from late summer until the plant goes dormant, sometime between Nov. 1 and Thanksgiving. The annual N required may range from 1 to 5 pounds per 1,000 square feet. The goal of these fertilizer applications is to supply just enough N after the spring growth flush to keep the turf from becoming yellow or chlorotic and minimize stored carbohydrate use and conserve the root system. The summer goal is to minimize disease incidence and the late-summer/fall goal is to promote maximum root growth and carbohydrate storage.

Ultimately, this program enables a healthy, mature plant to emerge from dormancy with plenty of carbohydrates avail-

(continued on page 74)

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SPECIAL FOCUS: Fall Fertilization

(continued from page 72)

able to regulate foliar growth during spring growth and ensure maximum summer root system survival.

TIMING TIPS. While it is difficult to predict specific environmental conditions from year to year throughout the cool humid region, some general N application guidelines can be made. These guidelines may vary by about two to three weeks depending on yearly weather conditions and when the first hard frost or freeze occurs in a particular region.

Regardless of geographic location, the most important time to apply N to cool-season turfgrasses is late summer/early fall. In most regions, this will occur sometime around Labor Day. Throughout the region there are still at least 60 to 90 days of optimum growing conditions. During this time the less intense sun, shorter days, more favorable air and soil temperatures combined with adequate available N, allow the turf to recover from summer stress. Additional benefits to fertilization dur-

ing this period are that the turf greens with a minimal unwanted growth surge, density increases and the plant stores carbohydrates.

With fall fertilization, there is a common misunderstanding between late-summer/early fall fertilization and late-fall fertilization. Technically, fall does not begin until the third week of September and lasts until late December. Environmental conditions change dramatically through this period, which affects the turfgrass plants response to fertilization. The second most important time to apply N is about one week after the final mowing for the season, normally between November first and Thanksgiving, depending on geographic location. This is referred to as late fall fertilization. At this time, relatively heavy quantities of water soluble N (1 to 1.5 pounds of N per 1,000 square feet) are recommended. The major benefit to this application is that the leaves are still green and the plant is still photosynthesizing, but carbohydrates are rapidly stored rather than being used for shoot growth. Other ben-

efits include prolonged winter color retention, earlier spring green-up without a large growth flush, and maximum root growth.

With increasing water quality concerns, the late-fall N application is being more closely evaluated with respect to rates and timings. Although the soil is still relatively warm at this time of year and roots are still active, it is unclear exactly how efficient different turf species are in extracting soluble N. Therefore, in the future expect to see some modifications in late-fall fertilization recommendations with respect to timing and rates. In the meantime, however, 1 pound of a water soluble N source like urea applied no later than the first week of November is probably more responsible than 1.5 pounds applied in late-November.

NITROGEN SOURCES. Traditionally, N sources have been divided into two broad categories, quick-release or readily water soluble and slow-release or water insoluble.

(continued on page 76)

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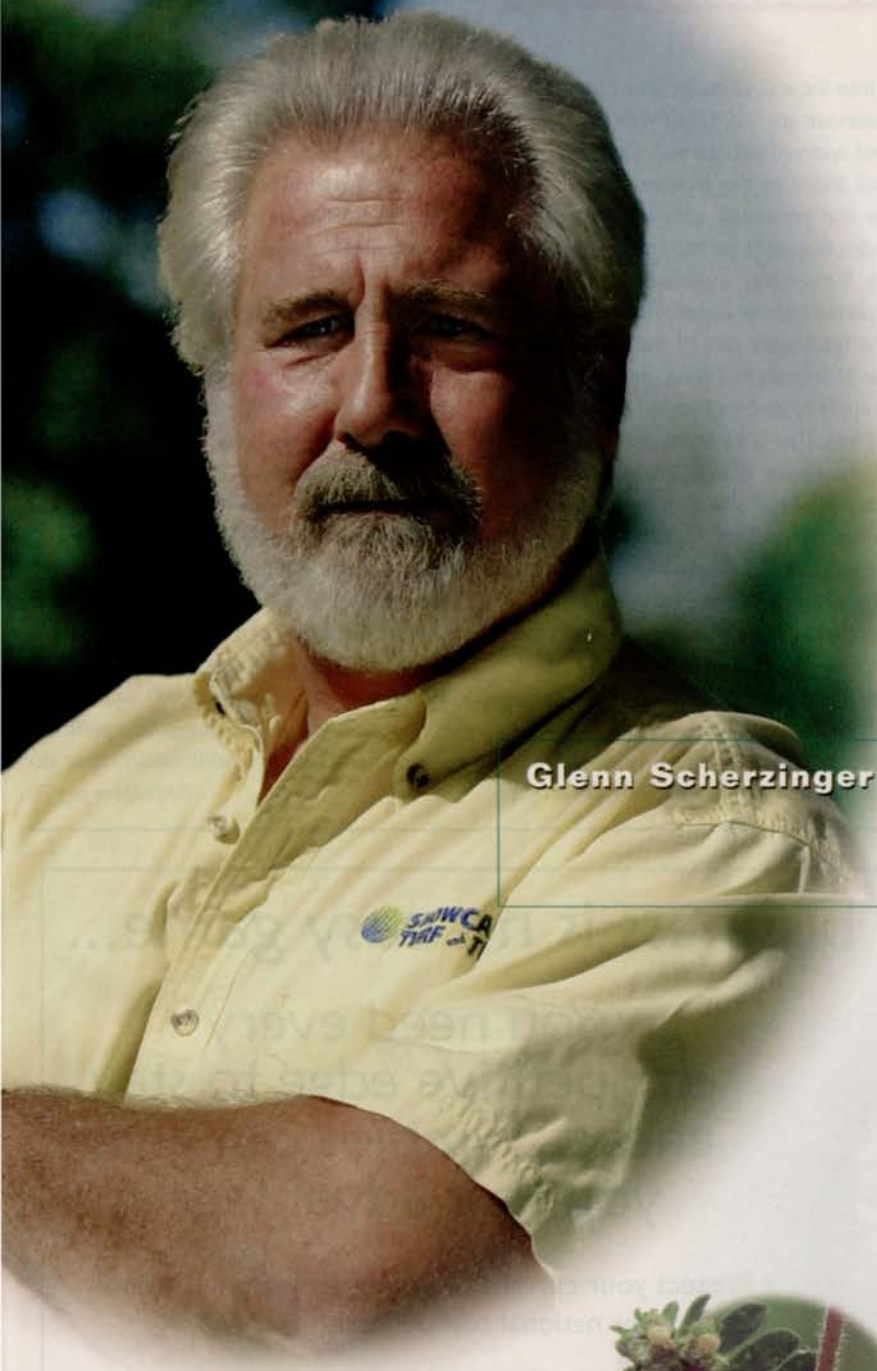
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SPECIAL FOCUS: **Fall Fertilization**

(continued from page 74)

Quick release N sources like urea or ammonium sulfate dissolve easily in the presence of water, and a rapid greening response may occur in a matter of hours as the N is translocated from the roots to the shoots. These N sources cause a short-lived growth flush that normally lasts only a few weeks. Compared to the slow-release sources, quick-release N sources are rather inexpensive, which explains their preference.

Anytime water-soluble N sources are used, one thing to consider is the turf burn potential. If you apply too much in one application essentially what happens is an osmotic stress. When used at relatively high application rates, the soluble salt level in the soil around the turf plant can increase dramatically, resulting in decreased water uptake, which may cause the plant to shrivel. These symptoms are very common during August and September, especially in dry years on seedling and drought-stressed turf. To minimize injury and maximize plant uptake, water fertilizer applica-

tions into the soil. Damage may occur when fertilizers are applied to turf with heavy dew and not watered into the soil. Depending on the salt index of the fertilizer, ammonium sulfate and potassium nitrate have a higher salt index than urea, tip burn may be minor to severe. Remember, anytime foliar burn occurs, photosynthetic capacity is reduced.

The traditional rule of thumb for quick release N sources has been that you should never apply more than 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet. This guideline was established to avoid significant growth surges, minimize burn potential and also limit unwanted environmental losses. With this in mind, quick-release fertilizers by themselves are best used at reduced rates, applied frequently or as a smaller part of a fertilizer blend used at other times of the year.

The slow-release N sources include, sulfur coated urea (SCU), polymer coated urea (PCU), methylene ureas, isobutyl diurea (IBDU) and the natural organics. Slow-release N sources

require more than just water to release their N. Several mechanisms like microbial decomposition, slow particle solubility and protective coatings all control how quickly the N is available. Thus, if you are trying to encourage rapid growth and carbohydrate storage in the late-season it is important to make sure that N source being used does not rely on microbial release. The N in organic sources will not be available when soil temperatures fall below about 50 degrees F. SCU or IBDU could be used instead, but they are controlled-released products and may not release enough N at this time to be effective. Additionally, these products will continue to release N so long as soil moisture is present, which may contribute to environmental N loss during winter when turf roots are not actively growing. Slow-release N sources can be applied at higher N application rates, 2 pounds of N per 1,000 square feet without the risk of foliar burn or significant environmental losses. Additionally, they do

(continued on page 78)

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SPECIAL FOCUS: Fall Fertilization

(continued from page 76)

not cause rapid greening but provide extended feeding, often for two to three months, which sometimes make them more economical than the quick-release sources due to less application labor costs. Regardless of the N source used, plants take up two main N forms from the soil, nitrate (NO_3^-) and ammonium (NH_4^+) and roots do not discriminate between a natural organic fertilizer, SCU or urea N. Ultimately, your choice of N fertilizers should be made based on your intended growth and aesthetic goals, application rates and desired release characteristics.

Frequently, in middle to late fall you may see bags of "winterizing fertilizers." These products combine water-soluble N sources with higher percentages of phosphorous and/or potassium, than traditional maintenance fertilizer products. A common fertilizer analysis for a maintenance fertilizer might be 16-4-8, or 28-3-7 vs. an 18-0-18 which might be marketed as a winterizing fertilizer. Companies that sell these fertilizers claim the additional

nutrients enhance winter hardiness. This is true if you have a soil nutrient deficiency but in most cases where the turf is mature and healthy the additional nutrients are unnecessary. The only way to know if you have a phosphorous or potassium deficiency is to sample the soil and send it to a testing laboratory. Between potassium and phosphorous, potassium is more likely to be deficient in a mature turf system since, like N, it can leach with heavy rain or frequent irrigation. Where potassium deficiency is a concern, supply about one half the quantity of N applied. So, if you are applying 2 pounds of N annually you should also supply 1 pound of actual potassium.

FALL IS THE TIME. As a rule of thumb, if you can only fertilize an established lawn once per year, the late-summer/early fall timing with a mixed N source product at 1 to 1.5 pounds of N per 1,000 square feet will give you the most benefits. Late-fall fertilization, although beneficial in most situations may not

be appropriate for all turf areas. For instance, turf areas that stay rather wet during the spring, may perform better without late fall N. The early spring growth flush might necessitate frequent mowing and the extra traffic may do more harm than good. In these circumstances, use lower annual N rates and use late-spring and again in the late-summer timing.

For all the benefits of fall fertilization it is important to mention there are some risks. Occasionally, increased disease incidence from snow mold or winter desiccation are reported, but faster recovery is also associated with turf that was well fertilized during the fall. Overall, most experienced turf managers will attest that the benefits of two to three fall N applications are worth the very minor risks. **LL**

The author is an assistant professor of agronomy at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind. His research specialty is in turfgrass soils and developing management programs to promote sustainable turfgrass systems.

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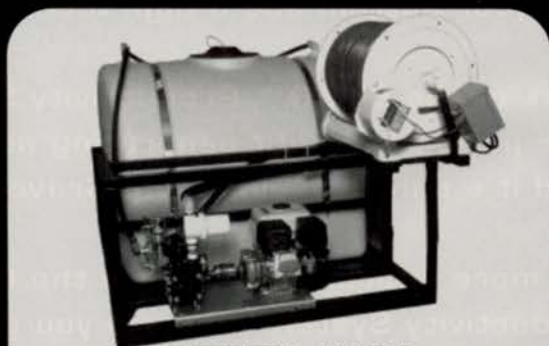
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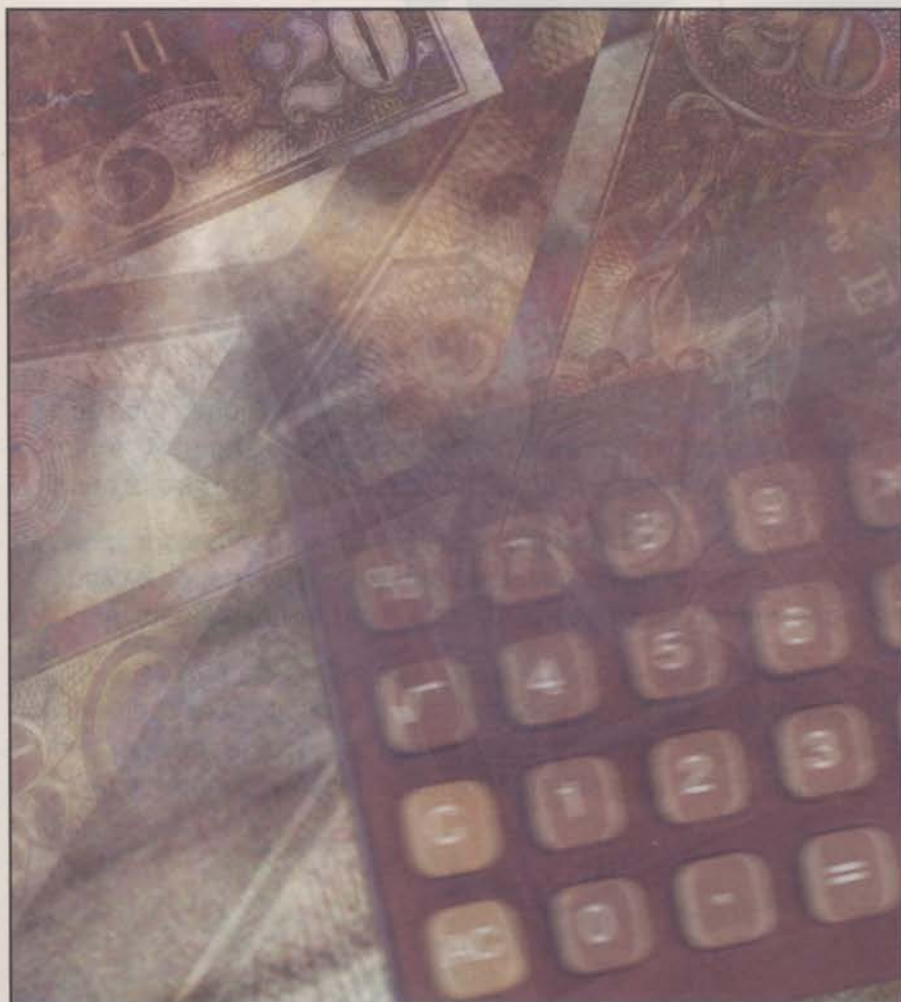
FACT

Finding the delicate balance between turning a profit, covering costs and not gouging your customers is always tough. Pricing fall fertilization can be especially difficult for lawn care operators (LCOs) who are new to it. After all, it's never easy for the untrained eye to gauge how much labor and man-hours will be poured into a project from simply eyeballing it.

Fiscal Fundamentals

Pricing fall fertilization services accurately means considering more than just product costs.

by Will Nepper



What's more, spring and fall fertilization can involve different variables, which can translate into different expenses for the LCO and, thus, a different pricing structure.

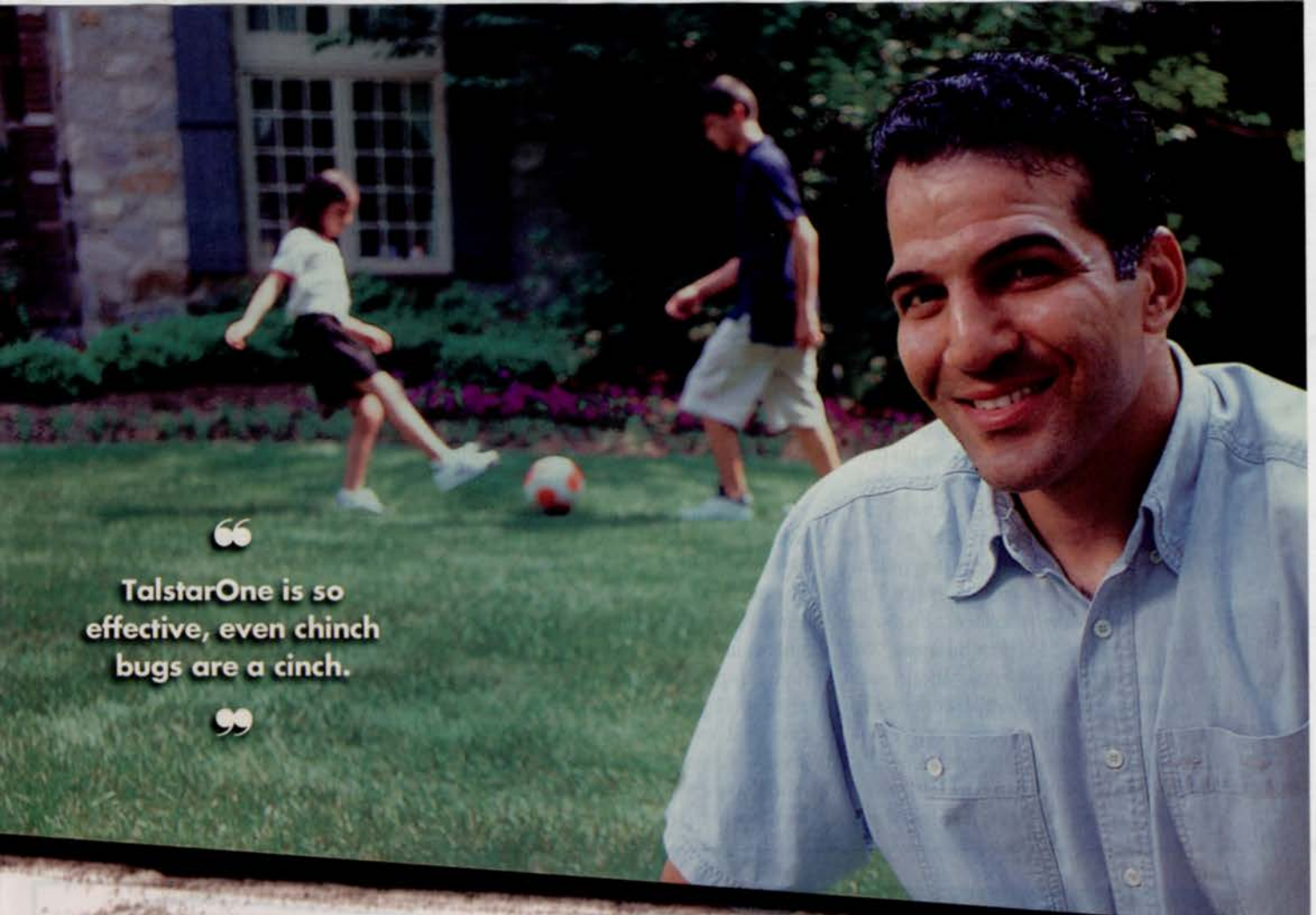
Many lawn care technicians, like Rusty Stout, vice president, Complete Lawn Service, Vienna, Va., believe that fall is the best time for fertilization. "Most of the energy goes to the roots in the fall and there's less top growth," Stout says. "In our area, we probably put down two-thirds of our fertilizer in the fall and then just a little bit in the spring, a little bit more in the late spring and nothing in the summer."

Gary Borobich, vice president of U.S. Turf Control in South Burlington, Vt., asserts that fertilization should occur all year, but recognizes the differences in the method and application. "Obviously you're changing the nutrients that you put down in the fall vs. what you're doing all throughout the summer. We use almost straight potassium during what we call our late fall fertilization, which is near the third week of October."

But despite the differences in spring and fall applications, his company's pricing structure for both is the same. Borobich's pricing strategy is measured by the square foot. His 90-percent residential customer base receives a price break as square footage increases. "So for our smaller sites it's about \$5 per 1,000 square feet," he explains. "Then for our larger sites, which would be around 20,000 square feet, we have a built-in stop charge, which starts at \$30 to \$35."

"Obviously we can't go treat a 3,000-square-foot lawn for \$15, so for properties less than 20,000 square feet we have estab-

(continued on page 82)



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USE READER SERVICE #70

SPECIAL FOCUS: Fall Fertilization

(continued from page 80)

lished a price chart, and for sites with more than 20,000 square feet, we add \$4 or \$5 dollars per 1,000 square feet," Borobich says, adding that he sometimes even charges as little as \$3 for each additional 1,000 square feet, depending on the product he puts down.

Stout does things a little differently. He charges an average price for every visit, crediting his new business management software as the catalyst for simplifying his pricing structure and eliminating guesswork. "We've rounded it out so that the base price is about \$14 per 1,000 square feet," he says.

Yet another pricing strategy is to roll the cost of fertilization into a package price. This is how Mark Leahy, president, Blades of Green, Churchton, Md., does business. "We have three different programs and in each program the pricing for fertilization remains the same. To arrive at a price per square foot, I look at square footage, labor and materials, and average all of this together."

Formulas for averaging expenses and

calculating a profit-earning price will vary from LCO to LCO because each company has different equipment, employees and products that they use. Stout maintains that these must be factored into a price to ensure profit. "For us, the labor is probably one-third of the cost," he says. "The materials are probably less than that. And after that you still have to consider overhead."

Establishing a price is not a simple by-the-numbers process, Stout asserts. "Gas prices affect us, petroleum affects fertilizer prices, and material prices are going up," he says.

For instance, between 18 and 20 percent of Borobich's costs cover products on an annual average, but because straight potassium is used for his company's fall applications, his product costs are closer to a range of 10 to 12 percent. "We look at all of our chemical costs when we're ordering," Borobich says. "We ask ourselves, 'How much have they gone up in price?' That way we already have our overhead cost."

Meanwhile, Borobich says that labor makes up between 12 and 15 percent of his application cost.

Examining the mistakes of others also is helpful when deciding how to charge your customers. Stout says the most common rookie mistake he's seen is not taking into account all of these costs. "Sometimes people just apply straight mowing rates to the price," he explains. "They'll say, 'It cost me \$4 per 1,000 square feet to mow a property that size and I can apply fertilizer quicker than that.' But you have to consider the overhead, the profit and the mark-up."

Borobich says he's observed LCOs making the mistake of mismeasuring square-footage, which can lead to using more product than originally intended, diminishing returns. "Some may overfertilize," adds Leahy. "And then a lot of product goes to waste and affects costs, and if they haven't figured out their costs, that's where they're most likely to go wrong." L

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TRUCK



contents

TRUCK & TRAILER SUPPLEMENT



A New Lease on Life

Leasing or buying trucks is a decision landscape contractors often struggle with. Here are some tips from truck industry experts on picking the best option. **T10**



No Fleeting Decision

As landscape contractors become more sophisticated so do the trucks many use to get the job done. Here are some options contractors should explore when stocking their fleets. **T4**



Landscape Trailblazers

Trailers are becoming increasingly complex with tool racks and other built-in features that contractors find useful for their operations. **T14**

As landscape contractors become more sophisticated so do the trucks many use to get the job done. Here are some options contractors should explore when stocking their fleets.

by Jonathan Katz

Many landscape contractors probably remember the old days when their fledgling operations could subsist on unreliable, used pickup trucks and trailers. With most of their limited client base located around the corner, a little quality could sometimes be sacrificed for lower cost.

But several hundred thousand dollars in revenue later and with accounts all over the city, these growing enterprises often become more concerned about efficiency, durability and long-term truck use. And, according to truck industry experts, landscape contractors should be paying more attention to what they're purchasing to ensure their needs are being met.

"We get so many phone calls from members who have gone into a dealership and got talked into buying a truck only to find out they can't do with it what they thought they could," explains Steve Spata, technical services manager, National Truck Equipment Association, Farmington Hills, Mich.

Hence, the scope of a landscape contractor's business and its location should determine what type of truck he or she buys.

MILES AHEAD. As gas prices remain volatile, contractors with fleets traveling across town to multiple locations may want to consider diesel-engine trucks. Diesel engines cost \$3,000 to \$4,000 more than gas-powered engines, but the higher price may be worth it in the end, depending on mileage, says Todd Bloom, vice president of marketing, General Motors Isuzu Commercial Trucks, Cerritos, Calif. Contractors who drive



Contractors have several options to choose from when buying trucks depending on their intended applications and weight requirements.
Photo: GMC

more than 20,000 to 25,000 miles annually should look closer at diesel engines because gas engines are only designed to last 100,000 to 150,000 miles before requiring major engine work, according to Bloom, who estimates that approximately half the landscape industry is using diesel engines. Diesel engines can last anywhere from 200,000 to 500,000 miles, say truck manufacturers.

Mike Eaves, manager of medium-duty trucks, General Motors, Detroit, agrees with the 20,000-mile-plus threshold for purchasing gas trucks but cautions that contractors also should consider engine-idling time. For

No Fleeting Decision

A WEIGHTY ISSUE

Depending on the size of a landscape contractor's operation and where the company is located, truck classes will vary among contractors nationwide. In the north, most contractors purchase pickup trucks so they can add snowplows for winter use. These are Class 2 trucks that are considered light-duty and range from 6,001 gross vehicle weight (GVW) to 10,000 GVW.

Landscape contractors should always be aware of their trucks' gross vehicle weight (GVW) to determine what the vehicles' customization capabilities are, says Steve Spata, technical services manager, National Truck Equipment Association, Farmington Hills, Mich.

For instance, if a contractor buys a box-removed pickup truck with a GVW of 9,200 pounds and wants to install a flatbed, the contractor needs to make sure the bed doesn't exceed the truck's weight restrictions. Too much weight can cause problems with brakes and the truck's front end. Changes could also affect federal crash requirements, according to

"If you're pulling a pickup box off and putting a different body on, it's not going to crash the same way," Spata explains. "Now, that doesn't mean it's going to fail any of the tests that's required, but you don't know unless the people who built the thing put out information to say 'here's the range of what's possible to do with the vehicle.'"

For instance, contractors should check with the truck manufacturer's specification charts when adding snowplows to match the proper-sized plow with their trucks' GVW, Spata says.

Gliford, N.H.-based Belknap Landscape Co.'s crews typically use trucks with a heavy enough front-end suspension to handle an 8- or 9-foot plow, says Belknap Director of Operations Andrew Morse. The company sometimes requests the manufacturer change the front-end suspension to meet its plow specifications, if necessary, Morse says.

GVW is especially important on Belknap's dump trucks. The company has three dump trucks with 18-foot bodies that require Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDL) because their GVW is more than 26,000 pounds, according to Morse. The company purchases at least one dump truck under 26,000 pounds so more employees can drive the dumps since not everyone at Belknap has a CDL, Morse says. These trucks carry lighter loads such as mulch instead of heavier materials such as gravel, rocks and garbage dumpsters.

More landscape contractors are buying between Class 3 and Class 6 trucks, according to Mike Eaves, manager of medium-duty trucks, General Motors, Detroit. Most contractors stop at Class 6 because anything larger requires a CDL, Eaves says. Bigger-sized trucks are becoming more popular with many contractors because they provide more capabilities and manufacturers are making them more driver-friendly, Eaves says.

"One of the things we try to do with the new conventional trucks is to make them easy to drive," Eaves explains. "We want to get people out of the light-duty vehicle so they can walk into our medium-duty truck. Even though it's a large truck, we made all the surroundings very familiar. The steering wheel is just like you'd see on a light-duty truck, and the controls are just like you'd see in a light-duty truck." — **Jonathan Katz**



trucks equipped with power take-off applications, such as fertilizer spreaders, contractors need to include usage by hours along with miles when considering gas vs. diesel, which can lower the mileage barrier even further, Eaves says. The amount of gas used during idling time can be affected by engine revolutions per minute and temperature, but a general way to convert idling time into miles would be approximately 35 miles per hour of idling time, according to Dan Cutler, sales engineering manager for GM Isuzu Commercial Truck.

Aside from engine durability, another consideration is fuel price. Diesel is less money per gallon than gas. "I'm struggling to find a downside to diesel when gas is \$2.15 a gallon here in Michigan, and diesel is \$1.65," explains Lew Echlin, marketing manager, Ford Division Commercial Trucks, Dearborn, Mich. "The advantage to diesel is you can leave things idling all day. They use very low fuel at idle, and their heating capabilities and ability to cool themselves makes them naturally superior."

Norcross, Ga.-based Landmark Landscapes uses diesel flat-nose cabover trucks for its operations, according to Owner Mark Thelen. The diesel trucks last longer and are more fuel efficient, Thelen says, adding that the

company has two 1989 diesel models that are still in operation. But contractors need to keep in mind that unless their trucks travel at least 20,000 miles annually, diesel engines may not be the best choice.

"Obviously you're a businessman, so you need to ask yourself, 'Am I a little better off spending that money on my fuel

or do I want to spend that money upfront with a diesel engine?'" Eaves says. "So obviously you would do your own cost-benefit analysis, and for a landscape contractor with low mileage per year, a gas engine would make a lot of sense."

Thelen says his trucks average between 16,000 and 20,000 miles per year but that

mileage wasn't a factor when deciding on a diesel engine, adding that it was more of a reliability and longevity issue.

IN THE CITY. Maneuvering a car around corners and through tight spots can be a challenge in many metropolitan areas. Driving a truck and trailer through city streets can be even tougher. Some truck manufacturers say more landscape contractors are moving away from pickup trucks and trailers and moving into conventional trucks where they can design and attach a body to the cab and low-cab forward (LCF) designs, which position the engine under the driver instead of in front. LCF trucks are usually available in gas and diesel. Using the same wheelbase as a conventional cab, these trucks tend to provide a shorter turning radius and offer greater visibility on the road because

"We get so many phone calls from members who have gone into a dealership and got talked into buying a truck only to find out they can't do with it what they thought they could." - Steve Spata

they're lower to the ground, Spata says.

"The reason cabovers do so well is your sightline," Bloom explains. "You can see the ground 3 feet in front of you. If you take a conventional truck, it's 27 feet before you can see the ground. When you're in neighborhoods where there are children, you need to be able to see what you're doing - you need to be able to maneuver that vehicle easily, and that's one reason the cabover models have been so popular in the landscape industry."

Landmark Landscapes uses primarily diesel cabover trucks for its operations and designs different bodies for use in its lawn maintenance, irrigation and construction divisions, Thelen says. Only Thelen's account managers still drive pickup trucks.

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"They have a longer wheelbase than the pickups, so I can put a 16-foot bed on the back and haul more equipment than I can on pickups. The pickup diesels are just these monster engines that we really didn't need." Safety is another reason Landmark abandoned pickups, says Phelen, adding that the driver is situated over the tires, creating better visibility and a tighter turning radius. Landmark's trucks cost about \$40,000 each after customization.

On LCF models, landscape contractors typically purchase class 3 or 4 trucks, which range from \$28,000 to more than \$40,000, according to Justin Dent, finance associate, Middle Georgia Freightliner, Macon, Ga. The higher end of the price range is usually for trucks equipped with 16-foot enclosed bodies designed specifically for the landscape industry. In the \$28,000 to \$30,000 range are open flatbed bodies used for transporting lawn maintenance equipment such as mowers, trimmers and blowers. Dump bodies with hydraulic ramps used to haul and dispose of rocks, mulch and other heavy debris cost approximately \$33,000, Dent says.

PICK UP STEAM. Contractors like Thelen who live in warmer climates where the landscape business is year-round don't have to consider snowplows. In the northern half of the country, pickup trucks still dominate much of the landscape industry.

In the heart of the Northeast, where Gliford, N.H.-based Belknap Landscape Co. operates, pickup trucks are a must. "We want a vehicle that's going to serve our purpose 12 months out of the year," says Belknap Director of Operations Andrew Morse. "We steer away from vans and light-duty pickups because we don't have much use for that in the winter." Depending on hauling and towing needs, most landscape contractors in the northern regions are purchasing light- and heavy-duty pickup trucks, which range in price from \$21,000 to \$35,000, Echlin notes.

Belknap's fleet consists of eight heavy-duty pickup trucks, five pickups customized with utility bodies and three dump trucks. The heavy-duty pickup trucks are used for general lawn maintenance equipment, and the trucks with utility bodies

transport irrigation and lighting supplies and fleet management tools, Morse says. Dump truck applications include hauling heavier materials such as rocks and mulch. The pickup trucks range from \$25,000 to \$30,000, plus \$3,000 to \$5,000 for the utility bodies. The dump trucks cost between \$29,000 and \$35,000, according to Morse.

In addition, Morse says the company recently switched to automatic transmissions because they're easier to operate and reduce plowing time in the winter. "You're not going to have an A+ driver in the seat all the time," he says. With all this rugged use comes rising demand for higher load and towing capacity. Some 2005 pickup

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TRUCK TRENDS

trucks can handle considerably higher towing capacities and many diesel engines have increased pulling power, according to Echlin.

Also, once an after-market add-on, trailer brake controllers are now being integrated into the dashboard of newer-model trucks, Echlin says. These in-dash controllers indicate instantly how much brake power is going to the trailer. Another trend in pickup and cabover models are crew cabs, which add \$3,000 to \$4,000 to the cost of a truck, according to Tony Pisciotta, general manager, Kelly Commercial Truck Center, Atlanta. "If you can fit everybody in there and take one truck, you've got the feasibility of having the extra staff to take care of customers' needs," Pisciotta says.

Contractors should choose these features based on staff size and services they provide. Otherwise, contractors may end up wasting money on trucks larger than necessary or too small for their intended use. For instance, contractors with crews made up of three or more men should get at least a four-seat truck cab, according to manufacturers.

"They have to determine what type of business they're in," Eaves explains. "What truck they need is going to depend on what services they offer and how large their operation is. And that's where they need to talk to their local dealer, and understand what exactly the requirements are so they can spec out the right vehicles to do the job. The



Cabover models and crew cabs are becoming more popular with landscape contractors who work in traffic-congested areas.

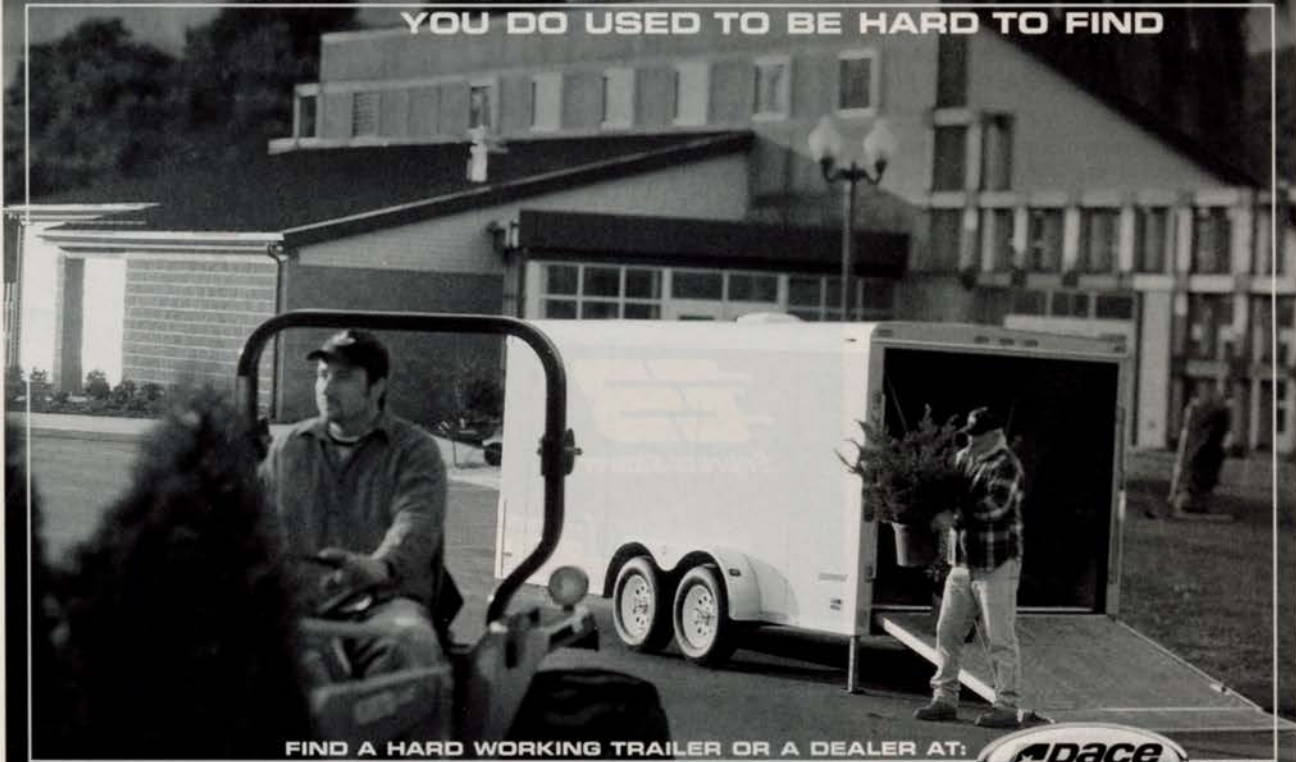
Photo: Kelly Commercial Truck Center



thing you don't want to do is to put too light of a duty truck into an application because then you're going to put too much stress on it.

"The heavier trucks are going to take more abuse, but you don't want a truck that's going to be too heavy because then you're squandering vehicle resources. So it's important you seek out good advisors who can spec out the right vehicle to do the job."

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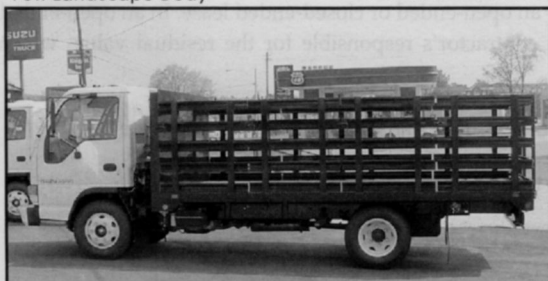
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A New Lease On Life

Leasing or buying trucks is a decision landscape contractors often struggle with. Here are tips from truck industry experts on picking the best option.

by Jonathan Katz

Buying a new truck for a landscape business isn't always easy. Contractors must take into account several factors, including how the truck will be used, what materials the vehicle will haul, weight distribution and frequency of use – to name a few. Once the right truck is selected, contractors then have to decide whether they're going to lease or buy their new vehicle.

There are pros and cons to leasing and buying, which is why financial consultants and landscape contractors say the decision is usually based on past experience and usage.

BOOKENDS. Roughly half of commercial customers lease their trucks, according to Tim Vella, commercial marketing specialist, Ford Credit, Dearborn, Mich. Leasing is attractive to landscape contractors because they generally have a lower or no down payment and no security deposit, and they get a new truck at the end without paying the depreciation of the vehicle, says Heath Wood, sales manager, Middle Georgia Freightliner, Macon, Ga.

Also, by continually rolling over into new trucks, contractors can minimize maintenance issues they may have with older trucks they purchased, Wood notes. Some commercial leases include free maintenance programs, advice and consultations on the truck's equipment and engineering, preventative maintenance schedules, quarterly fleet evaluation reports and emergency roadside assistance, Villa says.

That's why the Belknap Landscape Co., Gliford, N.H., leases its maintenance and light-duty dump trucks, says Belknap Direc-

tor of Operations Andrew Morse. "In four years, you get a brand new vehicle that is going to pull a trailer everyday and plows all winter for four straight years, and after those four years, it's tired so you don't have to worry about sinking money into transmissions and front ends."

There are two types of leases contractors usually choose from – an open-ended or closed-ended lease. In an open-ended lease, a contractor's responsible for the residual value, which is its

"Obviously you're a businessman, so you need to ask yourself, Am I a little better off spending that money on my fuel or do I want to spend that money upfront with a diesel engine?" - Mike Eaves

projected value at the end of the lease. The contractor may purchase or sell the truck at the end of the lease. If the truck is sold for more than the residual, the contractor keeps the balance. If the truck sells for less, the contractor pays the difference.





Landscape contractors continue to debate the merits of leasing vs. buying trucks.
Photo: GMC

With the open-ended lease, there are no mileage restrictions or wear-and-tear penalties. When considering an open-ended lease, the dealer's financial department will work with the contractor to determine the residual value based on the truck's usage requirements. The residual is usually higher on open-ended leases, resulting in lower payments, Vella explains.

On a \$30,000 truck, the residual may range from \$0 to \$5,000, according to Tony Pisciotta, general manager of Atlanta-based Kelly Commercial Truck Center. Open-ended leases usually last five years, compared with three or four years on a closed-ended lease, Pisciotta says. Open-ended leases also are popular with landscape contractors because they tend to put their trucks through heavy wear and tear, according to Vella. "Generally landscape vehicles go on an open-ended lease unless they're used for sales where there's not heavy wear or use," Vella says.

On closed-ended leases the financial department is responsible for the residual value, but on the lease maturity date the contractor is held accountable for mileage limitations and the truck's condition. Dealers should ask contractors how many miles they typically drive and their hauling needs to determine the right type of lease, Vella says.

Pisciotta says most of his commercial clients choose a closed-ended lease because after just three or four years, a contractor can roll into a new truck instead of purchasing or selling the truck at the end.

BYPASS LEASES. Leasing is not for everyone. Contractors who rack up a lot of miles or plan on owning their trucks for more than four or five years may want to consider buying. Heads Up Landscape Contractors, Albuquerque, N.M., purchases all its trucks because the company can usually get a better overall interest rate by taking advantage of 0-percent financing promotions, according to Vice President Dave Daniell.

"We have leased in the past and just found that we ended up probably paying, in total, more for leasing than if we had just bought it," Daniell says. "But at the time we were leasing as a way to keep debt off our balance sheet – it was based more on how our business looked to the banks."

Daniell adds that the company's balance sheet "got considerably better" in the last three or four years by purchasing instead of leasing, estimating his company saved between \$500 and \$1,000 dollars per truck this way.

Although Belknap leases most of its trucks, the company does purchase its light-duty pickup and construction trucks. The light-duty pickup trucks are reserved for managers who drive more miles than the leases typically allow, Morse says. "The construction vehicles don't put many miles on at all, so it'd be stupid to lease because you'll never come close to using the miles that

they allot to you," Morse explains.

Morse adds that the construction trucks last five to 10 years because of the low mileage. Morse estimates lease payments at \$350 to \$400 per month and purchase payments at \$400 to \$450 per month. Morse says the company took advantage of no money down and 0-percent interest rates on its purchases.

Even if mileage isn't a consideration with an open-ended lease, landscape contractors need to remember that if the truck's actual value is lower than the projected value, the contractor pays the difference. "Anybody who leases right now is going to cap that mileage at 25,000 miles per year unless you want to do a commercial lease, which buys the vehicle way down," says Mark Perleberg, lead automotive expert for NADAguides.com (National Automobile Dealers Association), Costa Mesa, Calif. Contractors must also carry higher insurance limits on leases than on purchases, according to Perleberg. Liability charges can increase by 25 to 30 percent on leases, Perleberg estimates.

"One of the best tips for leasing is that, as a rule, work trucks or vans aren't going to be in that stellar condition when they're done," Perleberg says. "Look at what you have in your inventory now. If you know you're going to be hard on the

vehicle, that's one thing to consider. When people make mistakes on leasing it's normally because they don't factor in their driving habits."

THE TAXMAN. Payments on work trucks are also recognized as business

expenses when leasing and purchasing. Deductions on commercial purchases usually work this way: When contractors buy trucks they expect to last several years, they can deduct a small portion of the truck's depreciation each year over a period of time, according to Steve

Greenway, commercial tax manager, GE Commercial Finance, Fleet Services.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) uses a formula to calculate how assets will depreciate during this time period, which is usually five years on trucks. Contractors would then deduct a larger amount



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- Mark Perleberg

during the first couple years and less throughout the remaining two or three years, Greenway says. For instance, on a \$20,000 truck the IRS will allow a contractor to deduct \$12,000 the first year, \$3,200 the second year, \$1,920 the third year, \$1,152 in each of the fourth and fifth years and the final \$576 in the sixth year, if the truck is in service that long.

"What happens is you take a bigger write-off the first year than the truck actually cost you," Greenway says. "So that helps you to shelter income for the first couple years and you pay less income tax so you've got more money this year. Now, you've got to pay it on the backend, but you've got the use of the money now, and

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that can help you grow your business."

This method is more advantageous for larger landscape companies that are looking to grow their businesses because they're more likely to have high enough income for the larger write-offs, Greenway explains. "They've got money coming in, they're paying a significant amount of income tax, so this would probably be of more benefit to an established company," he says.

Leased trucks are also tax deductible, but the contractor leasing the truck writes off each payment as a business expense rather than deducting larger amounts associated with accelerated depreciation on purchases. Leases make more sense than purchasing for newer landscape companies, Greenway explains. "The cash flow is better because you didn't have to come up with the \$20,000 in the first place to buy the asset," he says. "So I think there's some advantages to the start-up company just from a cash flow perspective."

Contractors who purchase should also remember that they will pay additional taxes after they sell their trucks, Perleberg says, adding, "the advantage of a purchase is, you can depreciate the inventory but then when you go to resell it you will have a tax base on the other side." ■

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Some companies, such as Heads Up Landscape Contractors, swear by purchasing its trucks while others say leasing is the best option.
PHOTO: Heads Up Landscape Contractors

OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH...

Most landscape contractors want new trucks. The benefits are obvious: less maintenance, longer truck life, more professional appearance and the latest features. But not every contractor can afford to buy new trucks, making used vehicles the most practical option.

When shopping for a used truck there are several factors to consider. One issue is quicker depreciation, explains Mark Perleberg, lead automotive expert for National Automobile Dealers Association, Costa Mesa, Calif. "Contractors should sell or trade their used trucks more often, rather than waiting until the truck has little or no resale value," Perleberg suggests.

However, used trucks for the landscape industry can also be more difficult to find, according to Perleberg. "I can find you a whole lot of Toyota Camrys, but I can't find you a whole lot of pickup trucks with stake beds on them," he says. "An add-on like a stake bed, which is really common for landscape contractors, are expensive when they're new, but they don't have an excessive amount of resale. When you go to resell that vehicle, you have to find someone who's in the exact same business you're in because the average consumer doesn't want a stake-bed pickup truck."

A contractor can expect to save about 25 percent on a used, late-model pickup truck, Perleberg says. Used trucks are also more likely to have maintenance problems, so Perleberg suggests contractors ask for maintenance records and when the truck was last serviced before purchasing. "Have it cost you as little as possible to own that vehicle, otherwise it comes out of your profits," he says.

No matter the potential savings, many contractors don't want to chance it with a used truck. "Used trucks are not worth it – you don't know what you're buying, and you don't know how they were driven," says Andrew Morse, director of operations, Belknap Landscape Co., Gliford, N.H. Belknap has purchased used trucks in the past, but Morse says there were too many maintenance issues, such as transmission problems.

Dave Daniell, vice president of Albuquerque, N.M.-based Heads Up Landscape Contractors, also buys mostly new trucks. "For us, it's an issue of the vision we have for our organization and how we're perceived in the marketplace," Daniell says. "We also found we're able to drive down our maintenance costs pretty dramatically by doing that because there is a warranty time that you can take advantage of if you do have a problem."

Used trucks make more sense for landscape contractors just starting out, says Heath Wood, sales manager, Middle Georgia Freightliner, Macon, Ga.

"With used, obviously you're getting somebody else's truck, and you don't know the history of it," Wood says. "But used is great for somebody just getting started who doesn't have the cash or ability to make higher payments." – **Jonathan Katz**

Landscape TRAILBLAZERS

Trailers are becoming increasingly complex with tool racks, advertisements and other built-in features that contractors may incorporate into their operations.

by *Jonathan Katz*



Landscape contractors have a variety of options when it comes to trailers: open, enclosed or no trailer at all. The decision ultimately depends on what contractors want their trailers to do and how much money they want to spend.

Before purchasing any trailer, contractors should know how they intend to use the equipment and how much weight they'll be carrying, says Kevin Richardson, sales manager, Wells Cargo, Elkhart, Ind. Enclosed trailers, for instance, cannot carry as much weight as open trailers. Contractors also need to consider what type of truck they're driving, says Lonny Smith, product manager of Featherlite, Cresco, Iowa.

"If somebody tells me they want to haul a 10,000-pound tractor

and they tell me they have a light-weight pickup truck, I'm going to have to tell them I can't do it," Smith explains. "I can build them a trailer that can do it, but they don't have enough truck."

With heavier equipment, contractors may want to consider a gooseneck trailer, which hooks up to the bed of a truck using a larger ball coupler, than a bumper trailer that's 4 to 6 inches ahead of the rear axle, Smith says. Goosenecks allow some of the trailer's weight to be distributed to the front tires in addition to the back tires, resulting in more uniform weight and safer driving conditions, Smith explains. Although bumper pulls tend to be more versatile than goosenecks because they can be connected to lighter-weight pickup trucks, according to Smith.

trical signals from the truck that tells the trailer when to brake. Some truck manufacturers are beginning to integrate trailer brake controllers into the dashboard of trucks, according to Lew Echlin, marketing manager, Ford Division Commercial Trucks, Dearborn, Mich.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS. Because of their heavier weight capacity, open trailers are still used by most landscape contractors involved with construction work that requires heavy-duty equipment. They also cost less. Most landscape contractors purchase open trailers, which usually start at about \$2,000 while enclosed trailers start at about \$4,000, according to Smith.

Open trailers can also handle between 1,000 and 20,000 pounds, compared to an enclosed trailer, which caps off at 10,000 pounds, Richardson says. In addition, enclosed trailers can't handle equipment taller than 7 feet. "If you have real tall or real heavy equipment, you're probably better off with an open trailer," Richardson explains. "They have a lot more versatility on how it's designed."

Mike La Rosa, president of Mequon, Wis.-based La Rosa Landscape Co., says he prefers open-air trailers over enclosed trailers for his lawn maintenance needs because they're more easily accessible and more convenient to fuel. The company pays between \$2,500 and \$5,500 for its trailers, depending on towing capacity, La Rosa says. When shopping for an open trailer, La Rosa says he looks for the following:

- Ease of loading: The tailgate must be durable enough to withstand loading and unloading without too much strain on employees.

- Interchangeability of tire rims, so the company can stock replacements
- A heavy-duty frame that can withstand wear and tear of multiple stops per day

- An electrical system that has solid weather-sealed connections so the lights don't fail

- Universal light plugs

CASE CLOSED. But enclosed trailers also provide features not available on open trailers, which is why Albuquerque, N.M.-based Heads Up Landscape Contractors uses enclosed trailers for most of its operations. "First and foremost, they're like big rolling billboards for us day in and day out," says Heads Up Vice President Dave Daniell. "I would guess that it's probably one of the top three reasons people call us to get a quote or do business with us."

Most contractors purchase enclosed trailers that range from 18 to 24 feet long and 5,000 to 10,000 gross vehicle weight rating, Richardson says, adding that prices for these.

Enclosed trailers can provide additional security and convenience for landscape contractors, Daniell points out. "On the construction side, we're able to leave our tools on-site and not have to drag them back and forth daily," he says.

Heads Up paid approximately \$4,800 each for its 12- to 14-foot enclosed trailers, which are used primarily for landscape maintenance and \$3,600 each for its 10-foot enclosed trailers that the company uses to store tools for construction jobs. The company's larger trailers carry one zero-turning-radius mower, two 21-inch walk-behind mowers and other equipment typically used for maintenance, such as blowers and trimmers.

With enclosed trailers, contractors have the option of installing tool racks, which helps them organize and gain easier access to their equipment, Richardson says. These tool organizers generally include racks to store backpack blowers, backpack sprayers, hedge trimmers, several line trimmers, hand tools, gas cans and water coolers, and can add approximately \$1,000 to the cost of a trailer, according to Richardson.

Some manufacturers provide enclosed trailers designed for landscape contractors, which typically include plywood sidewall lining and treated plywood flooring to protect the interior from water damage and heavy use, Richardson explains. Prices can range from \$1,100 to \$1,600 de-

Landscape contractors have more choices than ever when shopping for trailers.
PHOTO: Featherlite

"Historically, contractors purchased enclosed trailers that were unfinished inside, and they would then build their own interior shelving. The current trend is leaning towards them purchasing a more complete trailer." - Lonny Smith

Trucks hauling trailers must come equipped with trailer brake controllers. Typically, these devices are add-ons that cost between \$150 and \$175, Richardson says. A trailer brake controller sends elec-

pending on the length of the trailer.

They also come equipped with ramp door extensions, which can be used to drive equipment into the trailer, according to Richardson. Prices on ramp door extensions can range from \$125 to \$160 each. On the security side, some manufacturers provide heavy-duty padlocks to the side door

for approximately \$110.

"Historically, contractors purchased enclosed trailers that were unfinished inside, and they would then build their own interior shelving, Smith explains. The current trend is leaning towards them purchasing a more complete trailer. Many are even purchasing trailers with on-board

generators and 110-volt outlets so their equipment can be used even in an area that has yet to be supplied with power."

MOBILE GARAGES. Trailers can be a pain to maneuver around tight corners and city streets. That's why more contractors are swearing off these traditional pieces of equipment for good. Some truck body and van manufacturers are custom-fitting their products for landscape contractors.

Inside these tailored bodies are hand-and power-tool storage racks, gas tanks built into the truck body. Pittsboro, N.C.-based King's Landscaping & Grounds Maintenance uses truck bodies with one 39-gallon tank for regular fuel used in mowers and a 13-gallon tank containing pre-mixed fuel, which is used for power blowers and string trimmers, explains company President Ronald King. King says now he can simply pull his mower up to the truck's side, flip a switch and begin pumping gas.

These built-in gas tanks, which cost an estimated \$2,500, can save companies time and money, says Tony Bass, president, Super Lawn Trucks, Bonaire, Ga. "By carrying a reservoir much larger than what you typically carry on gas cans, you prevent your crews from having to return to the gas station," he explains. "So if you save what's a typical 10-minute fuel stop with a three-man crew, that translates into about 200 man-hours that can be saved if you reduce your stops from three to one per week."

King estimates these customized bodies cost about \$8,000 more than using a pickup truck and a trailer, but he says the additional price is worth it. "Trailers eat tires up because they turn and twist so much," King says. "Trailers are a good thing if you're going to be pulling them once a week, but when you get to pulling them every day, they're just not for me. I've got one trailer on the road that I pull every day, and as soon as I am financially able, I will replace it."

Aside from saving money on broken taillights, worn tires and repairing hitches, King says he escapes paying additional insurance and taxes by switching to these landscape-specific bodies. King estimates that he saves about \$100 to \$125 per year on insurance without trailers. Broken parts

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can result from wear and tear, but they can also happen when drivers misjudge turns. "The thing that hurts productivity the greatest is teaching people how to back up a trailer," Bass says.

The La Rosa Landscape Co. has reduced its dependence on trailers by switching to 1-ton cube vans that are used to haul hand tools and small engine equipment, says La Rosa. By switching to the vans, La Rosa has cut down on the number of commercial driver's licenses (CDL) necessary in the past, explains La Rosa, because previously the weight of the trailer and the truck pushed the weight over the limit for a CDL.

And weight, towing capacity and length, are the three most important factors landscape contractors must consider before purchasing any trailer or a customized truck, according to Richardson, adding, "You can buy a nice trailer, but if the tow vehicle capacity isn't enough, you are not going to do a whole lot of good." 

TRAINING WHEELS

The scene is all too familiar for most seasoned landscape contractors – an inexperienced driver wheels around a corner a little too fast, loses control of the truck's trailer and smashes into a curb, or worse, another vehicle.

Contractors can take steps to reduce trailer accidents through proper driver training. When a new driver starts at the La Rosa Landscape Co., the company first checks employees' driving records and assesses their driving ability through road tests, says Mike La Rosa, president of the Mequon, Wis.-based company.

While on the road, supervisors instruct the drivers to avoid sudden lane changes so the trailer has enough time to clear the other vehicle before pulling into the lane, La Rosa says. Supervisors also make sure drivers use their mirrors when backing out or changing lanes to avoid accidents, according to La Rosa.

When Pittsboro, N.C.-based King's Landscaping & Grounds Maintenance trains employees on trailer safety, company supervisors take employees to a large shopping center parking lot early in the morning where they show the new drivers the ropes, says company President Ronald King.

"On a trailer, you have to brake before you would normally to make sure the brakes are working," King says. "You have to feel the brakes engage, and if you don't, you know the trailer's pushing you." – **Jonathan Katz**

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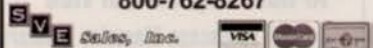
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Before offering tree fertilization services, a lawn care operator must establish a sound pricing strategy.

by Will Nepper

Deep-Rooted

Rules

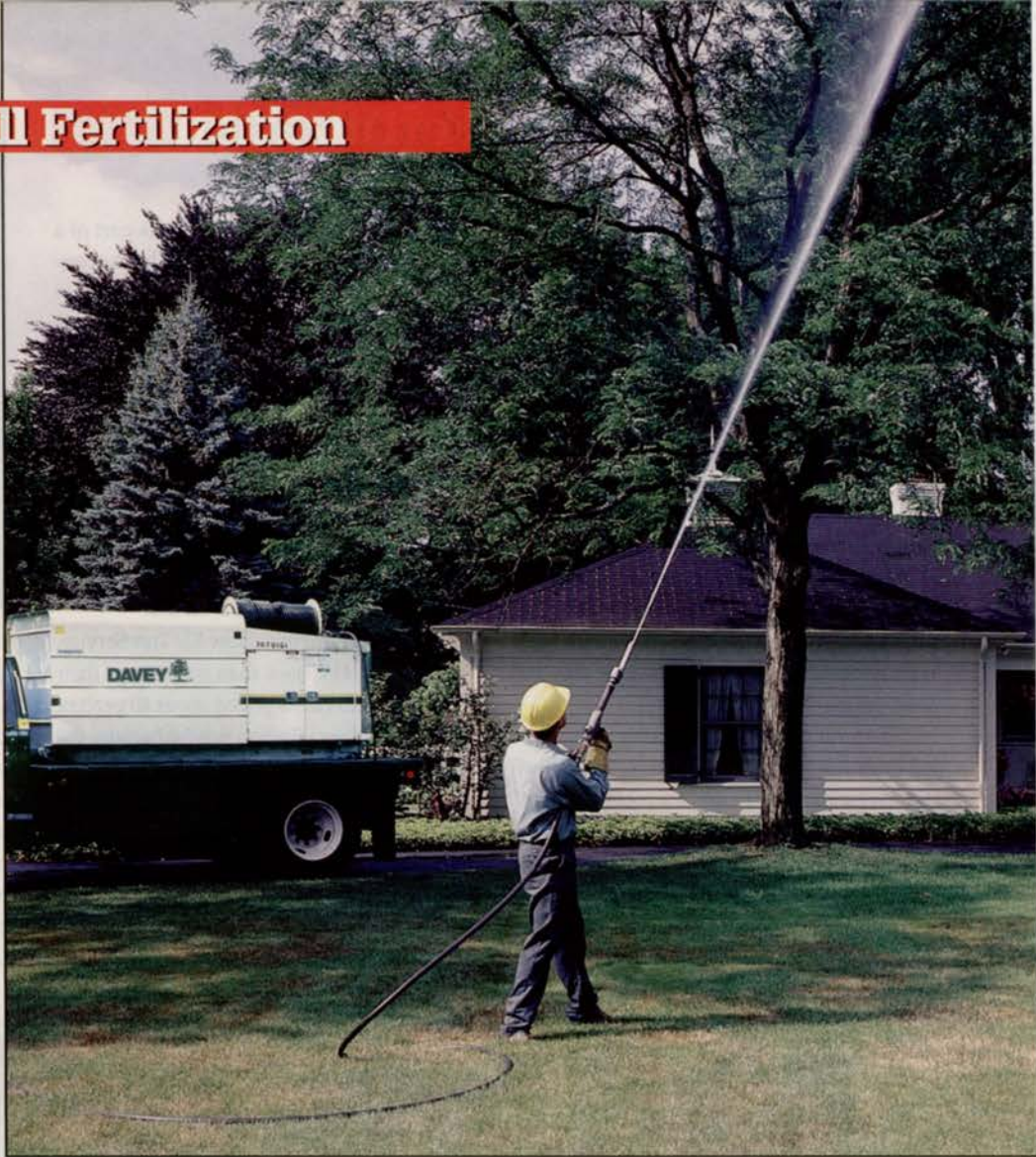


Photo: Davey Tree

Landscape contractors who offer tree fertilization may find that providing the service opens the door to a completely unique set of challenges. It differs from other types of fertilization in that it can't be priced by square foot. Add to that the fact that no two trees are alike. Because bigger trees demand different attention than smaller trees, pricing by size can leave the door open for guesswork, which is never a good idea when trying to turn a profit. That's why it's important to come up with a well-tested plan that incorporates treatment techniques, a sensible pricing strategy and some common sense.

The two primary types of tree fertilization techniques are foliar sprays and deep root injections. With foliar spraying, lawn care operators spray the external leaves of a tree. Deep

root injections involve using a soil probe to inject fertilizer near the trees' roots. The two techniques require different materials but they are often both used in treatment programs.

Mark Leahy, president, Blades of Green, Churchton, Md., provides both types of applications to clients. "We do deep root injections on most of our big trees, and then we do foliar sprays on some of the smaller stuff," he explains.

Gary Borobich, vice president, U.S. Turf Control, South Burlington, Vt., says that his company almost exclusively provides deep-root fertilization. "We use a soil probe that goes about 6 inches into the ground," he says. "It's hooked up to a tree and shrub gun and we inject 6 ounces on a 2-foot grid square." He adds that some trees, like evergreens, prevent

SPECIAL FOCUS: Fall Fertilization

using the 2-foot grid square. In these cases, Borobich makes injections at 2-foot intervals around the trees drip line. "Drip lines are the places where the rain would run off the tree first and drip down," he explains.

Rusty Stout, vice president, Complete Lawn Service, Vienna, Va., adds that technique is most important when making this type of application. "You have to make sure the pump is calibrated correctly and the injector is not removed from the ground too early."

There is no common knowledge regarding when to fertilize a tree. Leahy chooses fall. "We usually do it between October and early winter," he says. "That's after they've gone dormant for deep rooting."

"We fertilize trees in the spring before the soil dries out," Borobich counters. "This way you have soil moisture, and the roots don't get stressed out. We make a second application in the fall. But you don't want to push out a lot of late season growth, especially on evergreens."

Pricing the service can go a few different

ways too. Often tree fertilization is part of a full-service application provided by the contractor. Borobich, for example, offers a six-step program that includes fungicide and insect control.

Leahy includes small tree fertilization as part of a tree and shrub program but prices out larger trees individually by caliper. This is what Stout refers to as DBH (diameter at breast height). "We do our pricing based on the tree's diameter at breast height," he says. "Before the job, we come in, check the diameter and base the price on that."

Van Harms, owner, Show Me Tree Service, Jacksonville, Fla., says that on average their foliar spray service is priced about 40 percent higher than their injection service because the foliar spray products are more expensive — about \$5 or \$6 per bottle. Injection costs, he adds, have everything to do with the size of the tree. "But no matter what, there is a minimum charge of \$250 because you can easily kill one hour going out to service even a small



Photo: Nancy Tree

tree," he says, adding that the price can go up to \$400 or \$500 for an average 24-inch tree.

Borobich says that 10 to 12 percent of his tree fertilization costs come from products, while about 20 percent come from labor. The reason: "You have to spend a lot more time on properties when treating trees," he says. "It's more labor intensive because you're going to have to pull hoses across the property and carefully through perennial beds." **LL**

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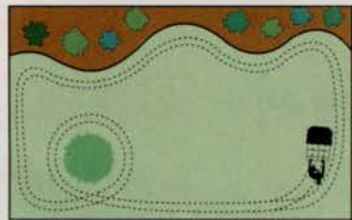
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Jeff Prink, park maintenance supervisor, City of Aurora, Colo., does the same thing for the parks and recreation areas in his care. For the last two years, Prink has experimented with fertigation, the recurring delivery of small amounts of liquid fertilizer and soil nutrients through an irrigation system. The process has been used for decades in the agricultural and golf course markets but only recently made its way into residential and light commercial settings.

In the past, fertigation systems were too expensive, too complicated or too cumbersome to make sense for residential irrigation contractors and homeowners. However, several manufacturers recently have developed pared-down fertigation systems targeted at the residential market. These units range in cost from less than \$200 to \$1,500, depending on the system, the market and the size of the landscape on which it will be used.

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(continued on page 88)

Fertigation has entered the residential and commercial landscape markets.

by Steve Smith





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Irrigation Focus

(continued from page 86)

fertilization program. If the homeowner is dissatisfied with the lawn's appearance, the fertilizer type or concentration can be altered quickly and easily – something that is often labor intensive and impractical with granular applications.

- Contractors can reduce overall fertilizer use by delivering it in liquid form

direct to turf and plant material.

- Contractors can reduce labor costs for contractors who sell/maintain fertigation systems in lieu of routine applications of granular fertilizers. The combination of reduced material and labor costs means higher profit margins for lawn maintenance operations. Additionally, the con-

tractor would make a profit on the initial sale and installation of the system.

"The biggest benefit I see is how weak the fertilizer is," Prink observes. "By the time you are putting it into the irrigation, it is so diluted that it becomes less harmful to the turf."

Prink also has noticed healthier root zones in the turf he fertigates. "The fertilizer is right there in the water, so it gets in the root zone well. I've seen first hand some improved root zones."

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FERTIGATION DISADVANTAGES. What makes fertigation such a logical proposition – use of an existing irrigation system to spread fertilizer – can also be the chief downside of the technology. The fertilizer only goes where the water goes, so if the irrigation system is poorly designed and achieves lackluster uniformity, the fertilizer will be patchy as well.

"Application of the fertilizer is only going to be as good as the uniformity of your irrigation systems, which on a residential system is probably not all that great," says Brian Vinchesi, president, Irrigation Consulting Inc., Pepperell, Mass. Likewise, high heat or wind, the same forces that evaporate or diffuse irrigation water, can have similar negative effects on fertilizer applied through a sprinkler.

"If I were a contractor, I would be concerned with the liability of it," Vinchesi adds, referring to the combination of fertilizer in irrigation water. Reduced-pressure backflow prevention devices are required to prevent contamination of the water source, and there is the concern about the liability of fertilizer carried by the wind into a neighboring property.

Before going too far with fertigation, contractors should carefully investigate state and local codes on the issue. In many states, certifications and licenses are required to apply fertilizer. "It may be that since the homeowner owns the system, they don't have to be licensed, but that's certainly a question I would want to ask somebody," Vinchesi notes.

Fertigation also involves increased sales activities. It is one thing for a contractor to sell a customer a periodic \$35-fertilizer application but quite another to ask a homeowner to purchase a \$500 fertigation system they may not entirely understand.

Jason Maddox, agricultural and irrigation sales representative, Dosatron International, Clearwater, Fla., says some contractors are designing programs to help homeowners de-

(continued on page 90)

USE READER SERVICE #84



Yard Gnome and Cement Frog Indicted



GARDEN — An unexpected twist in the infamous Bluegrass Massacre occurred yesterday. The case's special prosecutor announced at a press conference that a grand jury had charged two lawn ornaments with three counts of aiding and abetting a known fugitive.

"After a thorough investigation, our office found that Benny the Yard Gnome and Forrest the Unpainted Concrete Frog knew of the EverRide Warrior's destructive power long before that fateful day and failed to warn the proper authorities," said the prosecutor.

According to an anonymous source, the gnome and frog — who reside next to one another on the garden wall — witnessed the Warrior mow down the zoysia next door

several times before it arrived to take the lives of the local bluegrass.

When asked about the charges, Benny the Yard Gnome's attorney told the press: "No comment." Forrest the Frog is currently seeking counsel, but we can assume his future attorney would have no comment as well.

It is still feared that the EverRide Warrior will eventually come back to the site of the

original incident. After some investigation, it was found that EverRide is carried by 10 distributors across the nation, so it seems that the Warrior's return and subsequent

slaughters are imminent. Information on EverRide distributors is available at

www.EverRide.com. Grass officials ask all citizens to bombard the Web site with traffic so that no potential buyers of the Warrior are able to get through.



EverRide.com

First sign of the Apocalypse spotted in Anderson front yard



USE READER SERVICE #85

Obituaries

Anderson, George. The Bermuda blade was mowed down earlier this week. A prominent voice in the community, he actively campaigned for more stringent safety precautions before — ironically — being chopped off at the knees himself. He leaves a wife and 26 seedlings.

Coltrane, Dick. Died of old age Monday. Pronounced as the luckiest blade on earth, Coltrane resided out of the reach of the Warrior between two fence slats. Often heard screaming "I'm the king of the world." Because of that, he will not be missed.

Freeman, Fred. Accidentally plucked from his home during a routine weeding session by the current homeowner. Fred was constantly warned not to

Irrigation Focus

(continued from page 88)

fer upfront costs by spreading fertigation equipment and installation costs over time as part of a monthly fertilization contract. And, so far, Maddox adds, the key customers have been upper income residences and light commercial accounts, which are less cost conscious.

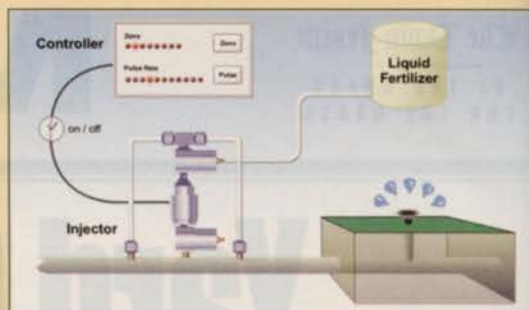
MARKET GROWTH. Though residential fertigation systems remain somewhat rare and limited to upscale clientele, there's no question the idea of fertigation is growing, says Ned Lipps, chief executive officer, Fertigator, St. Louis. Mainstream irrigation distributors, such as John Deere Landscapes, Ewing Irrigation, Horizon and United Green Mark, have begun carrying multiple brands of residential fertigation systems.

"I think in the next five years it could be our biggest market," says Jim Fields, horticulture sales manager, Dosmatic U.S.A., Carrollton, Texas. "The retrofit market is where a massive amount of business is going to take place in the next few years." ll

Several different fertigation systems are available for use in the home and light commercial markets, ranging from simple venturi-type arrangements to more sophisticated injection systems.

Basic parts of all systems include a backflow prevention device to protect the water source, a storage tank for the fertilizer and an injector or similar component that adds a controlled amount of fertilizer into the irrigation system. All the systems include a way in which to control the amount of fertilizer metered into the water, whether it be a complex metering injector and controller or a simple orifice, which widens and narrows. For example, some systems can be set to disperse 1/8 teaspoon to 2 teaspoons per gallon of water, says Darin Branch, vice president of Bia-Green, Las Vegas. "On the slowest setting, it takes 15,000 gallons of water to empty 5 pounds of fertilizer," Branch adds.

— Steve Smith



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USE READER SERVICE #87

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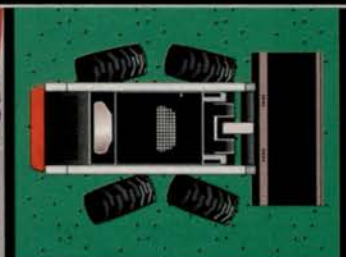
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Design/Build: Using Deck Subcontractors

Landscaping and decks go hand-in-hand, but not every contractor is an expert in both. Use these tips to find a qualified subcontractor when clients request big-ticket outdoor living spaces.

by Lauren Spiers



All Hands On Deck

Many homeowners take great pride in their landscapes, and with more people staying close to home rather than jetting off to exotic locales, landscaping is a hot commodity. Specifically, contractors are being called to create highly useful environments that include structures like decks where homeowners can do almost everything except go to bed for the night.

"Outdoor living areas are in," says George Drummond, owner, Casa Decks, Virginia Beach, Va. "An average deck has evolved from a square 12-by-12-foot appendage stuck off the back door to a functional outdoor living area. As decks are being used more, they feed the desire of wanting to improve that outdoor living area, whether it be with a gazebo, pergola, built-in cooking area, landscape or water feature."

However, not all landscape contractors have the staff or the expertise to build a client's dream deck. As a result, contractors may turn to deck builders like Drummond to take on these colossal carpentry projects. "When our clients request outdoor structures like a deck or gazebo, we'll often design the structure and hire a subcontractor to implement the

(continued on page 94)

Though hardscapes and landscapes complement each other, some landscape and deck contractors prefer to do their respective work on different days to alleviate congestion on the site. Photo: Casa Decks



THE GLOVES ARE OFF.

Because of activists, extremists and misinformed politicians, consumers are questioning whether the products and resources (such as water) used to care for their lawns, landscapes and other green spaces are a waste—or a harm to the environment. Yes, legislation and regulations have been throwing the green industry some rough punches. And we're about to start fighting back.

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USE READER SERVICE #94

Using Deck Subcontractors

(continued from page 92)

work," says Chuck Hyams, project manager and landscape architect with Scott Byron & Co., Lake Bluff, Ill. "By talking with the client, we can do a good job of embodying what they want in a deck design, but a lot of times we need the accuracy of a carpenter or engineer to help us implement it. It's a working partnership."

As such, Hyams and Drummond both note that strong interaction between the landscape contractor and deck builder is essential for projects to be completed to the client's satisfaction. Though both men have different approaches to these types of co-contractor relationships, their advice can help contractors in both industries develop highly compatible partnerships.

PICKING TEAMS. Most contractors would agree that having compatibility among crewmembers and subcontractors is a priority, especially on large projects. In the same way that companies interview people for

regular employment, meeting with prospective deck subcontractors ensures that those potential team members meet company standards in both job quality and communication.

"When you're looking for a subcontractor who you trust, there are a couple of issues to consider," Hyams says. "Primarily, you're going to look at the quality of the work, which includes the grade of wood they use, how the joints are put together, and the basic elements of how the structure was built. The other aspect is what kind of company they are. Checking that they're insured and licensed to do the type of work you and your client are expecting will make sure everything comes together correctly."

Hyams says Scott Byron & Co. has a number of subcontractors they work with for projects ranging from decks to electrical work that may need to go into a job. Choosing the most compatible company is a matter of looking closely at the work they've done in the past. "We look at the quality of

work either by going through a portfolio that they have or by visiting job sites, which is the best scenario," he says. "That lets us take an up-close look at the techniques they use, as well as how their work holds up over time."

As a deck contractor who works with landscape contractors regularly, Drummond adds that landscape contractors should look for someone with a reputation and willingness to work with the overall contract manager. "This becomes a business relationship, and both company reputations are on the line," he says. "The contract manager needs someone he can rely on - someone who is personable, communicates well and does quality work."

In choosing subcontractors himself, Drummond prefers smaller companies and worked with several subcontractors before finding the most reliable companies. "I tried to go with the smaller companies where the company principal was on site," he says. "I felt they had a much greater awareness of the

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Using Deck Subcontractors

project's image and dealing with the client. I've gone through several masons, roofers and electrical contractors to finally get a subcontractor I'm comfortable with."

Finally, when choosing a deck subcontractor, Hyams and Drummond agree that looking for a contractor who specializes in decks and gazebos is best. "Most of the contractors in that area of the industry handle fences, trellises, wood products, small decks or railings to big gazebos or pergolas," Hyams says, "so they're able to do all that and have the resources to buy the wood and other products involved with these projects."

COMPANY COLLABORATION. During the selection process, landscape contractors should consider the relationship they expect to build with the deck contractor. Will the

Complicated deck designs often require input from engineers or carpenters to ensure that the structure will be sound. Photo: Casa Decks



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"I'LL SHOW THE DECK BUILDER A SKETCH OF THE DECK AND EXPLAIN MY INTENT WITH THE DESIGN. WE DON'T HAVE ENGINEERS ON OUR STAFF, SO WE RELY ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE SO THE STRUCTURE IS SOLIDLY SUPPORTED." — CHUCK HYAMS

deck builder be listed as a subcontractor or will the companies use separate contracts? How much input will the deck contractor have on the design? Because all businesses operate differently, these types of questions should be considered early on.

"We don't have an issue working with landscape contractors, but we don't include them as a part of our contracts, nor is our company included as a subcontractor in theirs," Drummond says, noting that working in a subcontractor capacity often causes him to lose client input on the deck design.

Hyams, however, prefers to work as the lead contractor on large projects, though he discusses his designs with the deck subcon-

tractor before presenting the design to the client. "I'll show the deck builder a sketch of the deck and explain my intent with the design," he explains. "We don't have engineers on our staff, so we rely on their knowledge to help us determine the load and quality of wood we need to use, certain lengths or dimensions and the engineering aspects so the structure is solidly supported."

This stands as another reason for landscape contractors to find subcontractors who specialize in decks, Hyams adds. "Even though our landscape crews are involved in setting the grade for the structure, our deck subcontractor often has a better understanding of what is needed to implement a de-

sign," he says. "For instance, if we made an elevation error, we want them to bring that up to us. They're bringing knowledge from their industry that we may not be aware of."

Additionally, Drummond notes that whether landscape and deck contractors are working as a team or independently, communication is a must. "Our clients mostly use separate contracts — one for the deck and one for the landscaping," he says. "But those installations can't be done in a vacuum and it's my reputation at stake with any contract I have with a potential client. If I was referred by another company, their reputation can also be impacted by my actions, and I'm protective of that."

TALKING SHOP. In terms of communication, coordinating when different crews will be on site can help landscaping and deck crews keep out of each other's way.

"If we can schedule the landscape and deck crews to be on the site on different days, that

(continued on page 98)

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Using Deck Subcontractors

(continued from page 96)

Looking for a deck contractor to collaborate with on future design and installation work? Check these deck industry associations for companies in your area.

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www.deckindustry.org

North American Deck & Railing Association

www.nadra.com (Coming Soon)

DECK CONTRACTOR Sources

normally works best." Drummond says. "The exceptions are those items that need to be incorporated at the same time, such as rerouting gas, plumbing or electrical lines for an outdoor kitchen or spa. We like to hide all the plumbing and wiring within the structure, so those are instances where we would collaborate with the other contractors on the site."

Drummond adds that on many jobs the deck is installed before the landscaping. However, convenience or cost may prompt the homeowner to have some of the landscaping installed before the deck and then have the landscape crews return to install more plants after the structure is completed. In those cases, cell phones and e-mail are often the easiest ways for contractors to stay informed on each other's progress. Still, on-site meetings are important.

"If a lot of work is going in at the same time, ideally I'll meet with the subcontractors on a daily basis," Hyams says. "We'll talk about who will be working in certain spaces and how we'll coordinate the traffic patterns if our crew needs to be around the structure for some aspect of the installation."

Hyams adds that he prefers clients to communicate directly with him, rather than discuss their concerns with a subcontractor. "We like to be their single point of contact, but if they happen to talk to the deck contractor about a detail they want to change, it's not a terrible problem," he says. "In those cases, we expect the subcontractor to contact us and update us on the situation. We won't necessarily question the choice if the customer has decided to change a material or something, but we certainly want to be informed."

Regardless of who the client speaks with, Drummond comments that a contractor is a craftsman who turns a homeowner's dreams into reality. "The biggest thing is to listen to the client and let the design complement whatever the homeowner is trying to do," he says. "We need to remember that we get to leave after the job is done — they have to live with it." 

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Visit the Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board to chat with other professionals about working with deck subcontractors or to see more deck designs.

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Product Spotlight: Cutting & Pruning Equipment



Sawed Off

Japanese style saw blades allow handsaws to slice easily through limbs, leaving ideal healing conditions for trees.
Photo: Corona Clipper

More contractors are expanding their pruning services to larger and higher branches. Use these tips to make sure you have the right tools for the job.
by Lauren Spiers

Let's face it. We've all used our teeth to open a stubborn ketchup packet when scissors weren't handy. And it's not uncommon to prop up a wobbly table with a couple of matchbooks when a shim and a level aren't available. Using alternative tools is usually acceptable in a pinch, but when it comes to live material like trees and shrubs, having the right tool for the job is crucial.

According to a 2003 *Lawn & Landscape* survey, 66 percent of respondents noted that they offer tree and shrub care, including pruning. This is up from 60 percent in 2002. With two-thirds of contractors offering pruning services, ensuring that those services are provided professionally is important.

"A lot of landscape companies are starting to get above lawn level by offering tree care and aerial work that they didn't used to do before," observes Robert Fanno, president, Fanno Saw, Chico, Calif. "Their clients are asking if they can take care of their trees in addition to their lawns and their bedding plants, so you see more landscape contractors getting into that side of the trade. It's a positive trend in the industry as long as they're educated and knowledgeable."

Indeed, a large part of that education pertains to cutting and pruning equipment and ensuring that contractors fill their toolboxes with an appropriate mix of manual and mechanized cutting tools. Cutting equipment manufacturers offer some explanations of the tool options available to narrow down the choices.

Product Spotlight

LOPPER LOW-DOWN. Most contractors are familiar with small hand tools, such as hand pruners or hedge shears. Loppers are these tools' larger cousins, often used on trees and large shrubs to handle branches about 1 to 2 inches or more in diameter, depending on the strength of the tool.

"Compared to saws, loppers handle smaller material—usually around 1½ inches, whereas pole saws could cut up to 10-inch

"ALL PRODUCTS WILL CUT THROUGH A PIECE OF WOOD SOONER OR LATER. PICKING THE RIGHT PRODUCT COMES DOWN TO HOW MUCH AND HOW FAST THAT MACHINE CAN DO THAT WORK." — **MARK MICHAELS**

branches," says Karl Zeller, vice president of marketing and sales, Banel USA, Portland, Ore. "This is great if you have small branches that you need to cut, and a larger saw blade would be too aggressive and end up moving the whole branch and causing damage."

Additionally, Zeller notes that loppers are also faster than saws when they're used on appropriate branch sizes. "With loppers, you're using two hands and clipping right through the branch, while with a saw you may have to make several strokes," he explains.

With the range of branch sizes they can handle, manufacturers say a solid pair of loppers should be in every tree care worker's tool box. A wide price range makes it easy for contractors at all levels of experience to find a tool that fits their needs. Generally, loppers can range from \$15 for a low-end model up to \$100 for a larger, more profes-

sional tool. Additionally, Zeller notes that price is impacted by details like the size of the tool and materials it's made from. For instance, a 36-inch lopper that offers more leverage and larger cutting capacity could cost up to \$80, whereas a small 20-inch model could hover around \$25. Moreover, wood-handled equipment can be 10 to 20 percent less expensive than lightweight aluminum-handled models, and die-cast models are less expensive than forged blades.

HANDY HANDSAWS. For cutting branches that don't warrant revving up the chainsaw but are too large for loppers to handle, contractors can turn to handsaws. Available in several different sizes and styles, a quality handsaw makes easy work of limbs between 3 and 10 inches in diameter.

"There are folding saws available from 5 inches to about 12 inches in length, and those are very convenient because the contractor

(continued on page 102)

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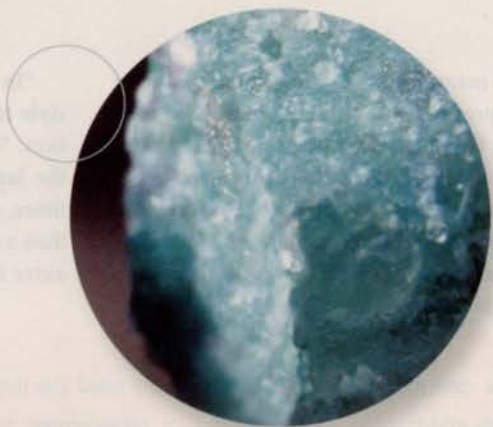
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Product Spotlight

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can fold it up and keep it in the holster when he's not using it and then pull it out again as he needs it," Zeller says. "For most landscape contractors and orchardists, though, the non-folding saws are usually more popular. These are sturdier for more of the bigger cuts of 6 to 10 inches."

Ranging from 10 to 20 inches in length,

most manufacturers provide hard plastic or polypropylene sheaths to protect the user from the blade when the saw is not in use and also to protect the blade itself from damage. Indeed, with new Japanese saw blade technology becoming more popular in the market, contractors need to protect their investments into these powerful blades.

"In the hand tool market, the Japanese-style tooth has been very popular," Fanno says. "Unlike a conventional tooth design, the Japanese-style teeth are ground three times, giving the blade more slicing action than a conventional saw tooth and letting it move through the wood more easily."

(continued on page 104)

Most professional pruning equipment is designed to withstand the frequent use and rough-and-tumble working conditions of contractors' tree care needs – but that doesn't mean loppers and pole saws don't need a little TLC now and then.

"Maintenance on pruning equipment is very important because if you don't take care of the blades, especially, the tools won't give you the quality of cut you need on a job," says Karl Zeller, vice president of marketing and sales for Banel, Portland, Ore. "At the very least, contractors should clean the dirt from their cutting tools every day to keep the debris from dulling the blades more than just regular wear and tear."

Moreover, for loppers and hand shears, Zeller suggests oiling and cleaning tools' moving parts on a regular basis, as well. "A lot of people don't do that, and that's when you get a build up of resin or tree sap inside the tool and it's harder to work with or the tool may not work properly at all." For products that are not self-oiling, Zeller says disassembling tools to clean out and oil the inside is easy. "You just take a wrench, open up the nut and pull out the center bolt to take the tool apart. Then clean it, oil it and put it back together."

Beyond keeping tools clean, keeping them sharp is essential for clean cuts. Zeller notes that diamond sharpeners are available and easy to use for sharpening loppers' and hand shears' cutting edges. For saw blades, however, professional sharpening often is recommended, especially for tri-edged blades. "Because the teeth are quite delicate, we would recommend that a professional sharpening house handle the sharpening of these Japanese-style saw blades," he says. "Keeping the blades clean of resin will keep them sharp enough for most cuts, but if you find that the blade is still dull after the resin is cleaned, it's either time to get the blade professionally sharpened or replaced."

Likewise, chain sharpening is important for contractors who use chainsaws and gas-powered pole saws, notes Mark Michaels, marketing manager for handheld products, Husqvarna, Charlotte, N.C.

"Chains probably need the most attention because they can need sharpening or replacement the quickest with all the dirt they encounter or if they happen to hit the ground," he says. "Depending on the amount of cutting they're doing, the operator may have to sharpen chains daily or more than once a day to maintain a high quality of cut."

Slower cutting or cutting that requires more pressure are signs of dull chains, as is "skating" across the branch when the chain can't feed itself into the tree bark, Michaels notes.

Though devices are available for contractors to field sharpen chainsaw blades, the work is often done at a servicing dealer or back at the contractor's garage all at once, Michaels says. "People who are not heavy chainsaw users may not have the skill to do a good job of field sharpening, so many will carry new loops of chain with them so they can do replacements on the job and then take all the loops back to a central location for sharpening," he says. Because they're a commodity, price ranges for new loops will vary from dealer to dealer, though Michaels says contractor should expect to pay \$12 to \$15 for pole saw loops of 12 inches or \$16 to \$22 for regular chainsaw chains.

Also for chainsaws, Michaels recommends using a good-quality oil to lubricate pole saws' bars and chains. "The oil helps make sure you don't create excess heat during cutting," he explains. "The speed of the chain is relatively fast, and the oil has a tackifier in it that will allow it to stick to the chain. The oil also helps clean the system while it lubricates, and because of the speed of the chain, it will actually be thrown off during cutting to allow new oil to take its place."

Lubrication, sharpening and cleaning of all tools, as well as engine maintenance for gas-powered products, should take place according to each tool's operator's manual, according to manufacturers. By following those guidelines and cleaning tools on a regular basis, contractors can get the best performance from their cutting equipment. – **Lauren Spiers**

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Product Spotlight

(continued from page 102)

Zeller adds that because of the extra cutting edges on the teeth, Japanese-style saws, which work on the pull stroke, remove more material from the cutting path than a standard saw blade. This allows cuts to be made 10 to 20 percent faster, and the resulting smooth surface leaves less favorable conditions for water and disease to get into the wound and allows the wounded tissue to heal better.

Ranging from just \$15 to \$25 for a small folding saw to \$45 or \$50 for a large non-folding version, hard-working handsaws are a perfect fit for most contractors' pruning tool arsenals.

POLE SAW POWER. When handsaws offer the right cutting strength for a pruning job but offending branches are out of the user's reach, it's time to turn to versatile pole

pruners and pole saws.

Available in either fixed-length or telescopic models, pole saws can extend the contractors reach up to 20 feet in some cases.

Additionally, some manufacturers offer products that are essentially two tools in one. "These types of tools usually come with a lopper blade to allow the contractor to reach smaller branches up high," Zeller says. "Then, with a push-button disconnect feature, the contractor can turn the pruner into a pole saw with the saw blade attachment and remove limbs that are up to 10 inches in diameter. In many cases, this versatility can help contractors do a more professional job."

Manual pole saws that come with both lopper and saw blade attachments can usually run between \$150 and \$250, depending on the length of the tool, according to Zeller. But for contractors who want more power

and are willing to spend more to get it, gas-powered pole saws may be just what the tree doctor ordered.

"Pole handsaws with a cutting blade usually make the finest cut—it is the slowest cut, but it's also the finest and neatest type of cut," says Mark Michaels, product marketing manager for handheld products, Husqvarna, Charlotte, N.C. "Power saws come into play when speed is important but such a fine cut isn't required. In these cases, we're usually talking about bigger trees and species with thick bark that will sustain less damage if the saw touches it." The age of the tree can also come into play when determining what type of saw to use, Michaels adds. For instance, a younger tree with thinner bark or species such as birch or cherry could sustain more damage if the bark is scraped

(continued on page 106)

Cutting tool manufacturers note that one of the biggest pruning mistakes a contractor can make is using a tool that's too small or too large for the job at hand. For the most part, this misuse stems from either not investing in the right equipment or because the proper tool happens to be at the bottom of the ladder or back on the truck.

Improper tool use can create plant

wounds that won't heal properly and also puts undue wear on the equipment. To ensure that your pruning toolbox contains job-appropriate equipment, use the chart below, provided by Corona Clipper, to identify the right tools to carry and the types of jobs they fit best. — *Lauren Spiers*



Floral Shears

for light trimming, cutting or arranging



Grass Shears

for trimming, edging or light shearing



Hedge Shears

for shaping, controlling size or renewing growth



Hand Pruners

for maintaining shape and health or renewing growth



Loppers

for extra leverage or hard-to-reach or thorny growth



Tree Pruners

for maintaining the shape and habit of growth for inaccessible tree limbs



Pruning Saws

for removal of diseased or damaged branches and thinning

Types of Plants	Maximum cutting capacity	Floral Shears	Grass Shears	Hedge Shears	Hand Pruners	Loppers	Tree Pruners	Pruning Saws
Flowers and house plants	1/2"	Yes						
Lawns and groundcover	5/8"		Yes					
Hedges, formal shrubs, evergreen vines	3/4"			Yes				
Ornamental shrubs, trees and vines	1"				Yes			
Small branches	1 1/2"					Yes		
Medium branches	2 1/4"					Yes		
Large branches and limbs	6"						Yes	

Cutting Tool Quick Reference

6 INCH HOIST

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USE READER SERVICE #101



K-PAC
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Product Spotlight

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by a powered saw, Michaels says. Using a finer handsaw would be more appropriate in those situations, whereas older trees and those with rougher bark, such as on oaks or ash trees, may be more able to withstand the strength of a powered pole saw.

In terms of pole saw technique for both powered and non-powered models, Michaels explains that initial cuts usually include an undercut and are made farther out from the tree itself. "When you're working with pole saws, the limbs aren't really close to you, so the technique is to cut farther from the tree and then make a final cut close to the tree," he says.

Also, contractors should look for pole saws that are lightweight for more manageability, Michaels explains. "If the pole saw is powered, that will add a lot to the weight, but there are still lightweight models available," he notes. "A 10-foot fixed-length saw,

for instance, would be lighter than a pole with a handle that telescopes to 20 feet."

Generally, a non-powered, fixed-length pole saw can weigh as little as 1 pound with an aluminum handle, while a 10-foot telescoping model could weigh 3 to 5 pounds. The engines on gas-powered models, however, can add as much as 10 pounds to the weight of the tool, though the speed and ease of cut will make pruning easier on appropriate size branches up to 10 inches in diameter. Powered products can range from \$200 for a consumer-grade model, up to \$400 or \$600 for a professional model, depending on length.

CHAIN GANG. For large-scale pruning or complete tree removal, contractors can put their hand tools away and pull out the trusty chainsaw.

"With chainsaws, some of the same ideas

take place as when you're working with pole saws," Michaels says. "The difference is that with chainsaws you're typically either working with something close to you and probably a bigger branch."

By removing the weight of the pole, chainsaws are actually lighter than pole saws, usually ranging from 6 to 10 pounds. Additionally, the orientation of the chainsaw's handle can make these products more user-friendly when climbing.

In terms of power, Michaels says the most common sized chainsaw used commercially is in the 2-hp range.

Contractors can expect to spend \$350 to \$700 for a model appropriate for their work, Michaels says, adding, "All pruning products will cut through a piece of wood sooner or later. Picking the right product comes down to how much and how fast that machine can do the work." **LI**



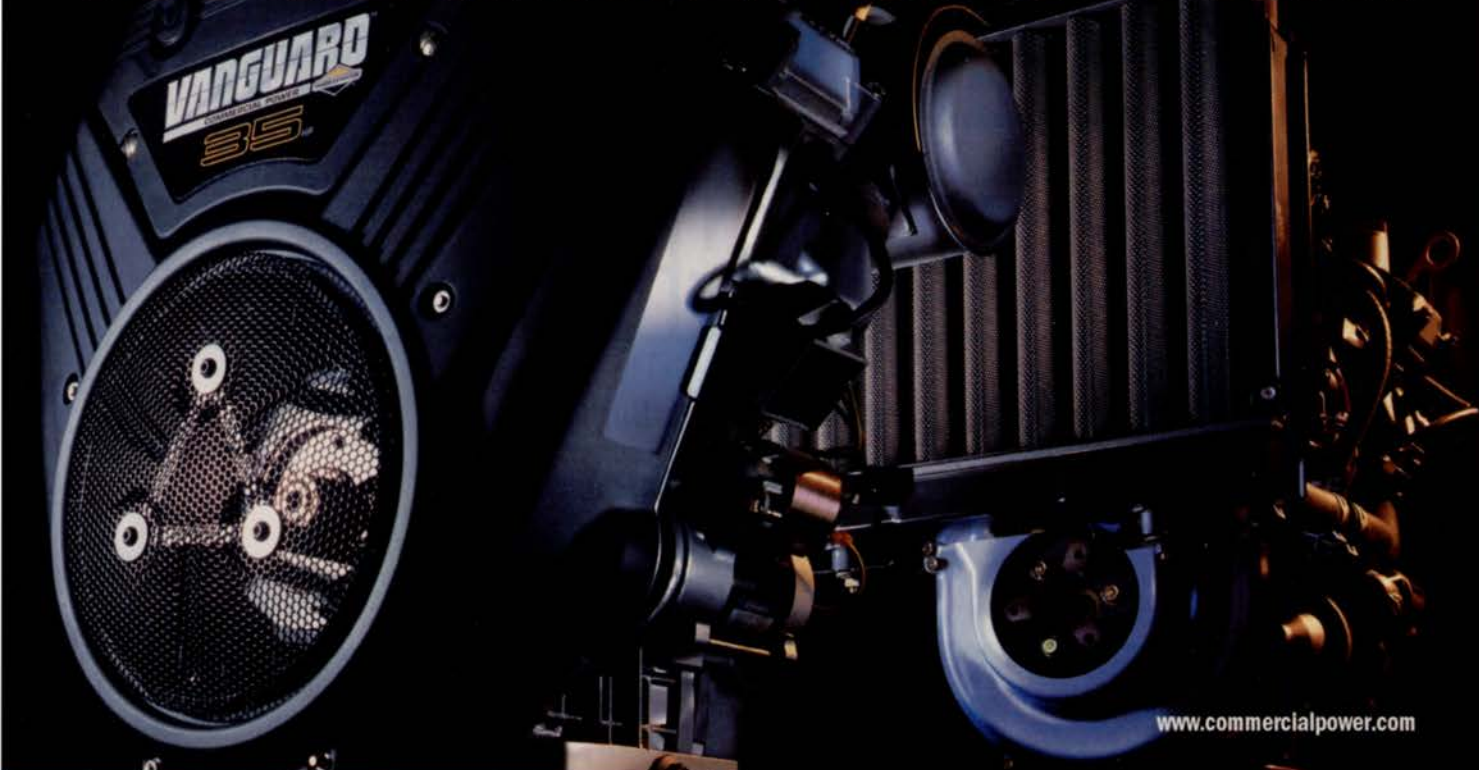
Photo: Husqvarna

With super-sharp blades and the hazards of falling tree limbs to account for, tree care workers must make safety a top priority on pruning jobs. Cutting equipment manufacturers offered these points of advice to ensure that as trees' limbs get chopped off, contractors' limbs stay firmly in place.

- Always keep unused tools closed and/or holstered.
- Never point tools at another person or swing tools around.
- Always wear appropriate protective gear while pruning.
- Wear gloves and protective eyewear when using loppers, handsaws or pole saws.
- Wear ear protection when operating motorized tools (chain saws, pole saws).
- Wear protective chaps when using chainsaws.
- Wear a hardhat any time branches are being cut above your head.
- Always use two hands to operate chainsaws and avoid using chainsaws above chest level.
- When working up high, keep the area below you clear of other people to avoid falling branches and falling tools.
- Try to keep other workers out of your arm's or tools' reach while pruning.
- Allow only one person to prune a tree or shrub at one time.
- Coordinate movements with other workers on the site. For example, do not let individuals clear pruning debris until the tree care work has moved to another tree or shrub.
- Concentrate on the job at hand. Letting your mind wander can cause cutting accidents or loss of balance when working up high. — **Lauren Spiers**

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USE READER SERVICE #107

Preventing Weeds With PREEMERGENTS

Preemergent herbicides stop weeds before they start. But knowing when, how and what to apply is all up to the lawn care operator.

by Will Nepper



Photo: Dow AgroSciences

Getting your money's worth from a preemergent herbicide is tricky business. No two formulations are the same and there is no set standard for when to apply the product. Most of what you need to know should be on the product label, but there are some things a label won't tell you, like when to make your applications.

Some lawn care operators (LCOs) make applications in the spring but a trend toward fall preemergent applications is beginning to, well, emerge. Is it a trend that deserves LCOs' attention? That depends. Considerations like location, soil temperature, turf type all play an important role in an LCO's decision. What's more, different preemergent herbicides target different weeds so getting familiar with the product is essential. Square one, however, is knowing what preemergent herbicides are and what they do.

FALL FORWARD. SPRING BACK. Preemergent herbicides are formulated to prevent weed seeds from germinating. This, in turn, prevents those weeds from establishing in the spring. And while most preemergents are used to control annual grasses, they also can be used to help control annual broadleaf weeds to minimize the need for control of those weeds later in the season. This means contractors shopping for a herbicide should have a good idea of what types of weeds they are up against. Whether the weed is an annual, biennial or perennial will make a difference in a preemergent's effectiveness and, in some cases, dictate the best time of year to make the application.

"Preemergents prevent top weeds," explains Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist, BASF, Research Triangle Park, N.C. "Annual bluegrass, *poa annua* and chick weed are commonly targeted, as well as broadleaf weeds like cudweed and speedwell. Fall preemergent applications generally target broadleaf weeds that are trying to germinate from seed, so deciding when to make the application hinges on the weeds being targeted."

(continued on page 110)



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Since crabgrass is usually at the top of a weed-hunting contractor's most wanted list, preemergents have traditionally been applied in the spring to cool-season turf, Miller says. "But because they control crabgrass so effectively, it's sometimes overlooked that many preemergents also control several weeds that develop during the winter," he explains.

Meanwhile, in areas of the country where turf goes dormant, weeds are more likely to germinate, resulting in a weedy lawn in the winter. "In southern turf or warm-season turfgrasses, it's a very different situation," Miller explains. "Normally, you don't have anything competing with weeds because the turf is either dormant or near dormancy.

Because turf is less likely to compete, more weeds end up emerging in the fall, which is why fall is a very good time to use a preemergent herbicide in warm-season turfgrass. You won't have anything competing with those weeds."

David Ross, technical manager, turf and ornamentals, Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro, N.C., agrees that deciding between a fall or spring application largely depends on that old cliché: location, location, location. "There are some advantages to fall application," he says. "One is that you can take care of applications early so that you don't have to do it in the spring when you're busy doing other types of work. Often, it's a time management issue."

Preemergents can really do a number on turf weeds – but weeds don't discriminate and can sometimes turn up in other places, such as landscape beds. Can preemergents be as indiscriminate as the weeds they're out to destroy?

"There's no reason preemergents won't work the same in a bed as in a lawn-type application," says David Ross, technical manager, turf and ornamentals, Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro, N.C. "The main thing to look at between the active ingredients that are used with preemergents is to make sure they're going to be safe on whatever landscape beds you're putting them in around."

But the main issues are the same as with turf applications, Ross points out. "You have to make the application before the weeds have emerged and you have to remember to water them in. Whether it's the fall or spring, if the plants are tolerant to the product and you're using the appropriate rate to last through the period of germination, then it should work fine."

Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist, BASF, Research Triangle Park, N.C., says that he's typically observed preemergents being used on beds in the spring. "However, in some parts of the country, they treat beds of fall flowers like pansies, chrysanthemums, ornamental cabbage and kale with preemergents." Miller says the same product is used in both circumstances, but sometimes in slightly different formulations.

When applying a preemergent to an area where plants and ornamentals thrive, Miller advises taking great care. "The plant needs to be planted well and the soil around it needs to be packed around the roots and watered," he advises. "It's important that the plant is established before any preemergents are applied because you don't want it coming in contact with the plant's root system. Water it in so there are no air spaces or holes for the herbicide to get into and then most any of the products can be used."

– Will Nepper

READY For Bed

Fall applications increase efficiency because many preemergents are good for controlling broadleaf weeds in addition to the basic grassy weeds, says George Raymond, business manager for herbicides and plant growth regulators, Bayer Environmental Science, Montvale, N.J. "If you do a good job of preventing broadleaf weeds, your late summer application of postemergent materials would be significantly decreased," he says. "The fact that you're able to put down a preemergent before late fall, winter or early spring when the majority of weeds germinate gives you the opportunity for better control," Raymond shares.

"In a region where you have a lot of winter weeds it makes good sense to use a preemergent product to try and get that under control before it becomes a problem," Miller adds. "No one wants to wait and see how many weeds they'll get before they're controlled. Most want them controlled before they're even seen."

Scott Eicher, senior marketing manager, DowAgroSciences, Indianapolis, Ind., points out that customer expectations are also a consideration when making fall applications. "Putting out a preemergent herbicide next spring doesn't really do anything to aid the customers early perception of quality," he explains. "But if they can do it in the fall when labor flexibility is a little greater, that frees up their time next spring to do the visible services early that will influence the perception of quality."

GROUND RULES. Deciding whether to apply preemergents in spring or fall is, above all, a matter of personal preference with location and efficiency being the primary considerations. A contractor who may be thinking of switching to fall applications may wonder then how it differs from a preemergent application made in the spring – if it does at all.

To arrive at this answer, an LCO must consider the primary goal of a preemergent application. "The main objective with a preemergent application, whether it's granular or liquid, is getting it down into the soil profile," Raymond says. "A number of preemergent herbicides are broken down by heat and microbial degradation in the soil, but in the winter time this doesn't happen." Depending on the product, the

herbicide will break down in the soil by various mechanisms whether it be moisture or sunlight. Most often though microbes in the soil break down the product into non-useful constituents until there is nothing left. If a product is applied to turf in the fall, there will be fewer elements working against the herbicide, and when the winter comes, there will be less sunlight. Though you may have moisture, the microbes aren't as active as they would be when the soil is warm, so the residual of the herbicide is extended and the active ingredients breakdown at a slower rate. But you need to keep in mind that the product is going to be out there longer so to get it's maximum effect you may have to bump up the rate a little bit. Typically a product's label will give some indication of the rate to use per increment of time."

Eicher agrees. "You don't want to overapply the product, but you're probably going to have to go with a higher rate," he says. "And when you get south of the Mason Dixon line you're still going to need a second application next spring, but you've got a lot more flexibility on when you do it."

LCOs should also be mindful of a weed's germination schedule when making their applications to ensure control, Miller suggests. "The idea is to apply it before the winter weeds begin to germinate," he says. "Too often people associate seeing the weed with being the right time to apply the product and that's not the case. You need to be applying that product when the weeds haven't germinated yet. This means making applications as early as August in some northern regions. It all depends on the geography and when you can expect the germination of your weeds to occur."

If an LCO has a good idea of when germination will occur, he or she should plan to make a preemergent application about one month in advance, Miller recommends. "The most important thing with preemergents is the timing. If you don't put it down before the weeds begin to emerge, you're not doing any good," he explains. "Obviously this coincides with soil temperature. Winter weeds won't germinate when the soil temperatures are high. That's why you wait for the weather to become cool and fall-like."

"As long as the temperature is above freezing, you'll be able to move the product into the soil," Ross adds, explaining that most preemergent products have to be in to the top 1 inch or so of soil so that germinating weeds will pick up the product. He suggests then that the ideal soil temperature for preemergent applications is above freezing but below the temperature at which the targeted weed germinates. "For example, crabgrass will typically germinate at 65 degrees F," he says.

SEEDY OBSTACLES. Obviously, there is more going on in a yard than a battle between herbicides and weeds, and a careless LCO might let innocent turfgrass get caught in the crossfire.

Raymond asserts that it pays to be mindful of a property's seeding schedule, particularly if the contractor is making a fall application. "If any overseeding has been done, the contractor needs to wait until the overseeded grasses are up and that they've been mowed a couple of times so that you don't inhibit germination," he says. "If it's a well-established lawn that's not thin and it's clear that there won't be any overseeding done the next spring, a fall preemergent application is appropriate."

However, if overseeding is a factor and there are concerns about winter kill or if an LCO is faced with generally thin turf, Raymond suggests that the residual of the preemergent might be too long and could potentially interfere with the overseeding. "You have to keep those intervals in mind and check the label of the product," he says. "See what the overseeding intervals are with the types of grass receiving the overseeding."

Miller points out other reasons that resident turf should be a consideration. "In the southern United States, you may not have any competition from desirable turf because you have warm-season grass that goes dormant," he says. "In that situation, you could potentially use a couple of applications. In the northern states, however, on cool-season turf you would probably be fine with one application."

TRENDS TO TEND TO. Whether an LCO makes one or many fall or spring applications, the most fundamental decision has yet

to made: what product to pick?

It's probably true that most LCOs come to their "favorite" preemergent herbicide by basic trial and error. Miller has some suggestions for shortening that process.

"You have a spectrum of weeds that are on a particular products label," Miller says. "An LCO will want to make sure they get a product that controls as many weeds as possible, and each product is a little different when it comes to that. Price shopping is particularly wise with preemergents as they tend to be pricier than postemergent products."

Sometimes, the type of application equipment being used affects the preemergent product an LCO chooses. "If they primarily apply product using rotary spreaders and they don't do very much spraying at all, they'll want to use a product they can get on a fertilizer carrier," Miller explains.

In face, there is a trend of contractors using combination products that incorporate herbicides with fertilizers. "I think the reason is that it's a little easier to apply because you don't need spray equipment and some LCOs are trying to move from liquid to granular products because of customers' negative perceptions of spraying. However, there are still a number of weeds that are most effectively controlled by spraying and a lot of weeds that you cannot really control by using a herbicide that's on a fertilizer carrier."

But with regard to industry trends the market for preemergents has been relatively static, according to Raymond and Ross. "Most of the preemergent herbicides that are used have been around awhile," Raymond says. "There haven't been too many new ones, though there are more combination products for fall application which are better for root growth without pushing shoot development."

Formulators also are beginning to develop blends that are specific to geographic areas, according to Raymond. "In fact, many contractors talk to their formulator representatives and actually get formulations that are practically custom-made," he says. "The formulation would be based on geography and agronomics in that area. If an LCO can partner with a good formulator in their area, they can really maximize their efficiency." **LL**

Aeration Made Easy

Running a lawn aerator can be one of the most fatiguing jobs in the landscape maintenance business. Lawn and turf aeration has long been a proven remedy for relieving compacted soils and excess thatch layers, but it's been a tough and tiring operation. That's changing, thanks to some innovative new equipment designs that have been introduced to the market.

After buying Klumpp Flower & Garden Center, Kalkaska, Michigan, eight years ago, owner Kip Scott made the decision to grow the company's lawn and landscape maintenance services. At first, he provided only a selective list of services and did not offer grass cutting or aeration. He soon determined that customers prefer to deal with one person for their lawn and landscape maintenance services, so he added both mowing and aeration.

Aeration was profitable and, as customers noticed the improvement in neighbors' lawns that had been aerated, more and more requested the service. "The type of aerator we were using worked well, but it was time consuming," says Scott. "We would line up the machine, lock it down and make the pass across the yard, then lift it out, turn, lock it back down and make the next pass."

Last summer, he decided to try a new machine, just being introduced to the market – the TurnAer 26 aerator from Turfco Manufacturing, Minneapolis, Minn. The model's exclusive DiffDrive™ drivetrain uses independent disc brakes on both wheels, allowing the TurnAer operator to use the brakes to turn corners without lifting the aerator tines out of the ground. This lets Scott run the TurnAer much like a mower, maneuvering around the lawn without having to stop and lift the machine out of the ground.

For Scott, the savings were dramatic. "For the typical 20,000 square foot yard in this area, the TurnAer cut 20 to 30 minutes off the time to aerate. So, what was a one or more

hour job was reduced to half that," he says.

"Not only can you pay for the aerator pretty quickly with that kind of production, but if you charge by the job and not by the hour, you pocket extra income." Scott says replacing the old aerator that had to be lifted and turned manually each pass reduced his workmen's compensation claims, as well. "The TurnAer just isn't as physically demanding as the old machines."

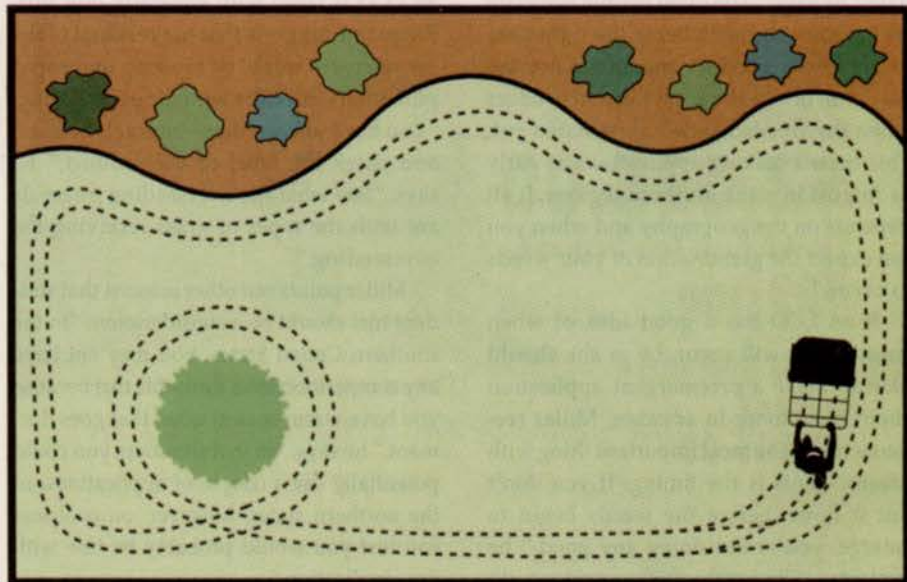
Unlike Scott's sandy soils in upper Michigan, Fred Freytag contends with heavy clay soils in Lincoln, Neb. That means lifting aerators up and out of the ground is even more fatiguing for Fred and his operators. Freytag started his FM Lawn Care business more than 20 years ago and, along with lawn maintenance services, offers lawn renovation, including aeration, tilling and seeding.

He too, turned to the new TurnAer 26 last year and saw immediate benefits. "One problem with our older aerators was working slopes," says Freytag. "The aerators would

tend to tip and let the off-side tines come out of the ground. The operator had to struggle to keep the machine going. With its low center of gravity and fingertip operator controls, the TurnAer 26 has solved that problem."

The TurnAer was designed with front rollers built around 3-inch solid steel shafts for weight, instead of the typical water drums. That, plus the 1-inch plate steel cross members creates a lower center of gravity. "No matter which direction we aerate, the TurnAer's low center of gravity keeps the tines in the ground and pulling plugs."

For Freytag, the most advantageous feature is the ability to steer the TurnAer around the lawn with the left and right wheel brake, without having to lift the unit off of the ground. He figures this feature alone has saved his operation an average of 30 to 40 minutes per yard because he doesn't have to make as many passes to cover all the turf. "When you do lift the tines out of the ground, the spring-assist lift makes it a lot easier." – Gary Burchfield



Traditional aeration requires the operator to lift and drop the machine on each pass or hundreds of times each lawn. The new TurfAer 26 only requires the operator to lift and drop the aerator one time per lawn. Image: Turfco Manufacturing

Tanaka TBL-7600 Displacement Blower

- Comes with large, contoured assist handle
- Three-position throttle lever on the frame
- Weighs just 20.6 pounds (with pipes)
- Contains heavy-duty padded shoulder straps
- Four-point anti-vibration system included

Circle 215 on reader service form

Hyundai Robex 7 Series Wheeled Excavators

- Models include: R140W-7, R170W-7 and R200W-7
- Excavators feature an improved computer-aided power optimization (CAPO) management system
- Improvements to CAPO system include: new mode controls and a self-diagnostic display system with technical information for 48 distinct functions
- Redesigned cab
- Enhanced hydraulics for longer component life

Circle 216 on reader service form



Bomag ProPaver 813RT

- Features a turbo-charged, 80-hp Isuzu diesel engine
- Load-sensing hydraulic system
- Variable screed lengths allow for handling of a variety of paving applications
- Paving widths of 4 to 14 feet are standard
- Optional 18-inch bolt-on extensions increase paving width up to 16 feet

Circle 217 on reader service form



Advanced Tracking Technologies Shadow Tracker Pro Mapping Software

- The version 4.0 software displays one of the most current U.S. maps available in the fleet tracking industry
- Will provide additional reporting and graphing capabilities
- Analysis of vehicle activity
- Easily updated through Internet download

Circle 218 on reader service form

Ruud Lighting Square Dome Forward Throw Light



- Features a vertical lamp
- Forward-throw distribution with a main beam of 67.5 degrees
- HID lamp is supplied with fixture
- Accommodates pulse or probe start metal halide and high pressure sodium lamps in wattages of 250 through 750, depending on lamp type

Circle 219 on reader service form

Shindaiwa T2500 Trimmer

- Features power boost chamber
- The 4-cycle engine does not have a separate oil pump
- Features 24.5 displacement and weights 11.3 pounds
- Single fuel tank and 50:1 mix

Circle 220 on reader service form

Danfoss-Flomatic Backflow Preventer Condensed Catalog

- Newly revised 4-color catalog
- Highlights Danfoss-Flomatic's new unleaded material called Enviro-Check
- Unleaded bronze backflow preventers are listed
- Catalog gives an overview of the backflow program with flow curves and dimensions

Circle 221 on reader service form



ClearWater ScaleBlaster

- Eliminates formation of limescale deposits in sprinkler and irrigation systems
- Eliminates the need for water softening equipment, salts and chemicals
- Integrated circuitry system produces a waveform that hits the resonant frequency of the calcium carbonate molecules causing them to lose their adhesive properties
- Product is non-invasive and adds nothing to the water

Circle 222 on reader service form

Products

Pressure-Pro Horizontal Super Skid Models

- Feature a horizontal design that gives a lower, space-saving profile
- Can be configured to flow up to 8 gallons per minute with pressures up to 4000 psi
- Each machine is designed with easy access for servicing and is built with a stainless steel coil wrap and stainless instrument panel
- Powder-coated frame is constructed with an integral, heavy-duty roll cage and is outfitted with an oversize 12-gallon fuel tank, general pump and standard Honda or Robin-Subaru motors.

Circle 223 on reader service form

TerraMarc LL214 Load-N-Lift Trailers

- 81.5-inch deck width, 18-foot length
- Holds up to 10,800 pounds
- Gross vehicle weight of 14,000 pounds
- A low 5-degree angle for loading which helps to ensure safety and ease in loading and unloading

Circle 224 on reader service form

DewEze ATM-72LC All-Terrain Mower

- Compliant with Tier II Emission Standards.
- Keeps operator, controls and engine upright on slopes to 34 degrees or more
- 72-inch deck allows maximum float over crowns
- Hydrostatic drive, power steering with a steering wheel and increased visibility

Circle 225 on reader service form



Grasshopper Rotary Broom

- PTO-driven rotary brooms clean up to 8 inches of snow
- The 48- and 60-inch fixed angle models operate at a 25-degree right angle, while the 60-inch bi-directional model can be adjusted up to 25 degrees left or right
- Poly broom bristles brush to the surface without damaging asphalt or concrete
- The 60-inch bi-directional models can be adjusted with an actuator switch from the operator's seat

Circle 226 on reader service form

Hustler Turf Equipment's New Operator Seats

- Available on all FasTraks, Mini Zs, Super Mini Zs, Hustler Zs and Super Zs
- Light gray color for cooler summer comfort
- Hustler logo is embossed into the vinyl
- New suspension seat is easier to adjust and has lumbar and back angle adjustments
- Armrests included standard

Circle 227 on reader service form

Robin Subaru EX Series Engines



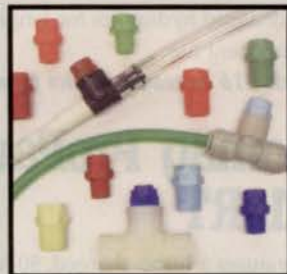
- Chain-driven overhead cam (OHC) technology
- Four models with power ranges from 4.5 to 9 hp
- Capable of high-compression ratio for higher torque and lower emissions and fuel consumptions
- Automatic decompression reduced the required recoil pulling force by 30 to 40 percent
- Designed with pent-roof combustion chamber

Circle 228 on reader service form

Industrial Specialties Relief Valves

- Offered in 1/8 and 1/4 male NPT and 1/8 female thread
- Housing is molded of polyvinylidene fluoride
- Internal relief material is nylon with a Buna-N seal
- Various color combinations are available

Circle 229 on reader service form



Howard Price Turf Equipment Blazer 360Z

- Includes an 80-inch cut "Z" with articulating deck
- Wing floats 20 degrees up and 12 degrees down for a manicured cut over knolls and undulations
- Extended-position-wings enable model to give trimming ability
- Choice of engines offered – a 29-hp direct fuel-injected, water-cooled Kawasaki gas engine or a 36-hp Yanmar diesel engine

Circle 230 on reader service form



Ultra-Drum Truck

- Offers drum handling, dispensing and containment in one unit
- Rugged polyethylene construction for chemical resistance
- 66-gallon containment sump meets EPA containment regulations
- Designed for safe and easy handling

Circle 231 on reader service form



Sipcam Agro USA Cavalcade Preemergence Herbicide

- Contains the active ingredient prodiamine
- Long-residual preemergence control
- Prevents grassy and broadleaf weeds, including crabgrass, goosegrass, *Poa annua*, spurge, purslane and more
- Effective in both warm- and cool-season turfgrasses as well as ornamentals

Circle 232 on reader service form



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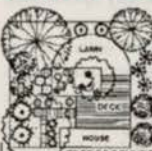
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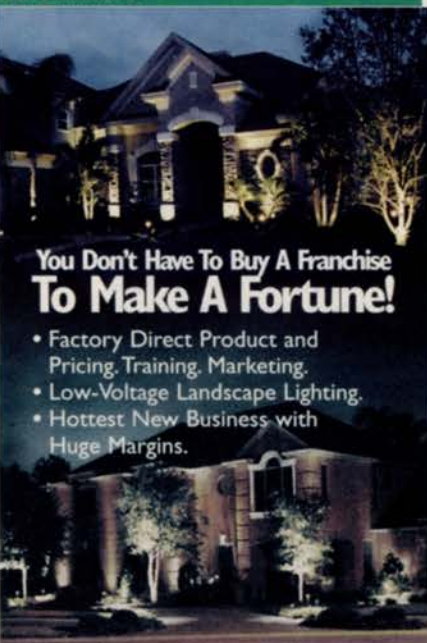
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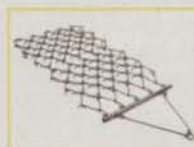
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How We Do It

In-Depth Customer Surveys at Highgrove Partners

With a bout 500 commercial and residential clients throughout our Atlanta, Ga., and Charlotte, N.C., branches, our company, Highgrove Partners, has a lot of client interaction to keep up with. When we hit a stretch in 1999 of suddenly losing several commercial maintenance accounts, we couldn't tell if the reason stemmed from our pricing or quality, or if we were somehow neglecting our customers.

To find out where the problem lay, we developed a targeted survey of our Atlanta commercial maintenance clients. We had done small "How are we doing?" surveys for a number of years, but we wanted this one to go in depth and really give us an opportunity to learn about our clients.

To handle the project, we interviewed two outside research firms and hired the company that was the best fit for us. In our initial planning meeting with the firm, we discussed the types of questions we wanted to ask, including maintenance-specific questions regarding turf and shrub quality, as well as how our clients perceived our work in terms of professionalism. In addition to helping us formulate questions, the research firm included places in our survey that would allow respondents to rate our performance in each category on a 1-to-10 scale, but also to rate the importance of each category. As an industry, we make assumptions as to what our clients want, and this gave us the opportunity to find out what they really wanted.

After our questions were formulated, we sent a letters via Federal Express to our clients, letting them know that we had hired a firm to handle the survey. The FedEx envelopes gave the survey more importance than if we had just mailed out the letters. Also, by letting our customers know that we were taking our own employees out of the equation, we were able to get more honest feedback.

Additionally, rather than following up with a written survey for our customers to fill out, we chose to have the research firm conduct phone interviews. The telephone bank operators contacted 150 of our maintenance clients to set up appointments for the interview and we ended up getting a 50-percent response rate to the calls. By letting the client set up the interview on their own time, we got a better response and let the client know that their time is important to us.

The research firm was able to tabulate and then cross-tabulate the results so we were able to see how different demographics of our clients were responding to each category. For instance, one thing we learned was that our male clients thought we were doing a great job, while our female clients were indifferent. It became clear that, among property managers, women wanted much more detail than the men. Knowing this, we now go much more in-depth in our sales presentations and service reports with female clients.

Additionally, we found an answer to why our customer attrition rates were higher, especially among newer clients. Our research showed that clients who had been with us for a year or less were more likely to cancel a service rather than renew. To remedy this, we started educating our customers more by letting them know specifically what we were doing on their properties and when they could expect to see results – sometimes it takes more than a year.

Overall, the research process cost us about \$10,000 for this particular part of our client base. Though it was a large investment, the results were so detailed that we are still able to use the information today – five years later. The research firm put together a PowerPoint presentation that we present to our sales staff and new employees to help them understand our company goals. Moreover, by using the information to refine our client interaction, we've been able to pick up nearly 10 percentage points in customer retention.

Currently, we're revising our customer survey and considering our options in terms of which customer segment to target. We've grown significantly and our service mix has changed to include residential work, which is a very fast-growing segment. With more in-depth research we're able to use the information we gather to our best advantage and become an excellent service provider for our clients. – Jim McCutcheon **■**

The author is president and partner of Highgrove Partners, Atlanta, Ga., and can be reached at 678/298-0550.

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I. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one)

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2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service)
3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor
4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
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

II. IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE

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

III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

9. Dealer
10. Distributor
11. Formulator
12. Manufacturer

Other

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

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

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
14. School, College, University
15. Trade Association, Library
- Others (please describe) _____

4. What are your company's approximate annual gross revenues?

- ___ 1. Less than \$50,000
- ___ 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
- ___ 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
- ___ 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999
- ___ 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
- ___ 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999
- ___ 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
- ___ 8. \$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999
- ___ 9. \$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999
- ___ 10. \$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999
- ___ 11. \$7,000,000 or more

2. What services does your business offer?

1. Landscape Design
- Landscape Installation
2. Seeding or Sodding
3. Turf & Ornamental Installation
4. Bedding Plants & Color Installation
5. Irrigation Installation



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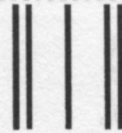


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