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# Lawn & Landscape

02 | 06

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Issue Focus: Zero-Turn Mowers

Truck & Trailer Buyers' Guide

Irrigation Pricing Principles

## RESIST COMMODITY THINKING

Who needs cost-conscious customers? Not Duke's Landscape Management. They woo strategic-minded clients with better communication and fresh ideas.

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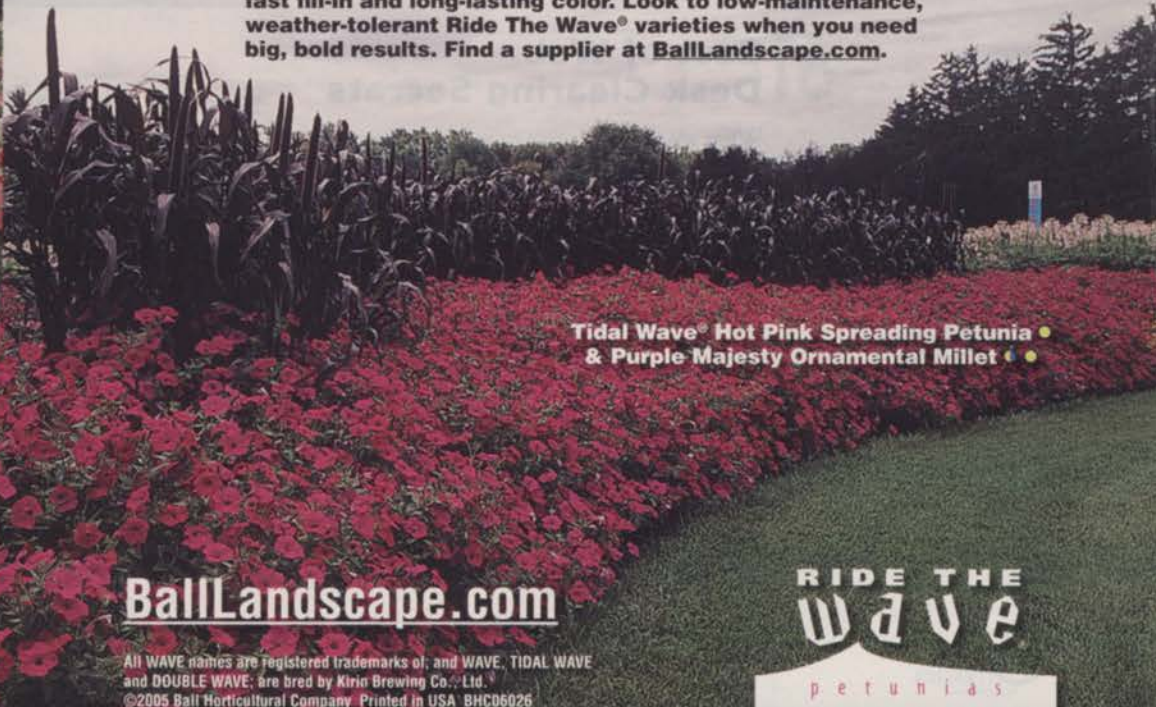


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USE READER SERVICE # 11



**Cover Story – Resist Commodity Thinking**

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Who needs cost-conscious customers? Not Duke's Landscape Management. They woo strategic-minded clients with better communication and fresh ideas.

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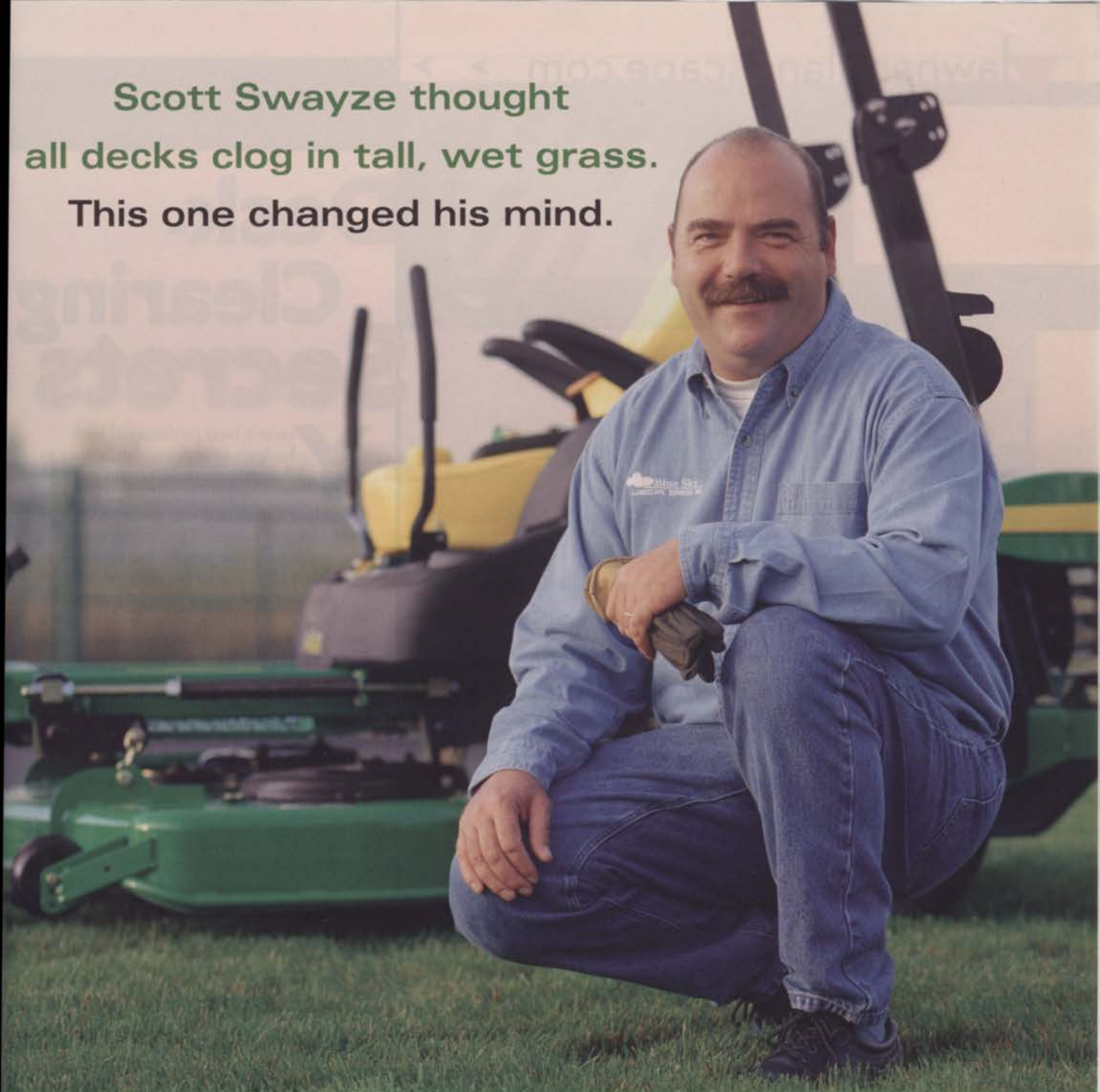
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Scott Swayze, Blue Sky Landscape Services, Inc., Puyallup, Washington



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See more of what Scott Swayze has to say at [www.mowpro.com](http://www.mowpro.com)

# Desk-Clearing Secrets

**Y**ou're a busy professional with budgets to approve, landscapes to design, proposals to send out and timecards to initial – but you have yet to find a desk that will accommodate all your files and folders. The “piling system” may work for some people, but everyone’s desk has a tendency to get disorganized.

Whether you have a packrat personality, too little time to filing things away or just a natural tendency for disorganization, you’ll benefit from this month’s Best of the Web feature “Desk-Clearing Secrets” on page 81. When one *Lawn & Landscape Online* Message Board participant shared his secrets on “getting to the bottom of the top of his desk,” a number of other busy business owners chimed in with their ideas on reducing paperwork and office clutter.

So, before you leave a coffee ring on that all-important proposal or misplace your employees’ paychecks, read “Desk-Clearing Secrets.” (If becoming more organized was your New Year’s resolution, this is the article for you!) Be sure to visit the Message Board to participate in the topics of the day or start a thread of your own. See you on the Web!

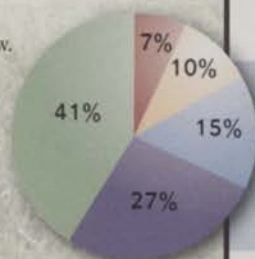
## Lessons in Pricing

# W

ant to know the secret to pricing residential irrigation installation? Know your costs. In order to make money on jobs, you have to understand your costs for materials, labor, profit and overhead, as well as the variables that affect each. Many professionals agree the trick to profitable pricing is to become a good student of your work, learning where you made money – and where you didn’t – on previous jobs.

Learn more about pricing irrigation installation in this month’s “Lessons in Pricing” feature on page 142. Afterward, visit the *Lawn & Landscape Online* Message Board to share your pricing methods and read what other contractors are doing.

Also, Be sure to visit *Lawn & Landscape Online* Feb. 20 through 26 to participate in the weekly Online Poll where we ask, “What percent profit do you try to achieve on residential irrigation installation?” We’ll share the poll results in the *Lawn & Landscape* e-Newsletter on Monday, Feb. 27. Read more about the e-Newsletter below.



Between Feb. 13 and 19, log onto *Lawn & Landscape Online* to participate in the weekly Online Poll where we ask, “How often do you work with subcontractors?”

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Being a knowledgeable business owner means keeping up with what’s going on in the industry at large. But even if your busy schedule keeps you from visiting *Lawn & Landscape Online* every day for the most up-to-date industry news, you can still stay in the loop with our weekly e-Newsletters.

The *Lawn & Landscape* e-Newsletter lands in your e-mail inbox every Monday with a news rundown from the last week, followed by our extensive Product e-Newsletter on Thursdays with info on equipment to keep your business running at its peak. To sign up for the *Lawn & Landscape* e-Newsletters, e-mail [lspliers@gie.net](mailto:lspliers@gie.net) or visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com) today!





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"Unless you try to do something beyond what you have mastered, you will never grow."  
- C.R. Lawton

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By now you're well into buying new products and refurbishing older equipment for the new season. Your sales team is out closing new residential and commercial business. You're interviewing and hiring employees in all levels of your business. In warmer climates, you're already out servicing properties and creating enhancements to existing properties.

Ultimately the mission of *Lawn & Landscape* is to provide our readers with solutions to your challenges so you can operate more efficiently and profitably. We do that monthly through columns like *Sales and Marketing* by Marty Grunder, *Business Operations* by Jack Mattingly and *People Smarts* by Larry Fish. We also provide our readers with monthly business management articles designed to grow your businesses and increase your profitability. At the end of the day, that's what drives your business operations.

People learn in different ways. And we encourage contractors to take advantage of the many business learning opportunities available to them. Join a state or national association if you don't already belong to one. Read any number of business books currently on the New York Times best-selling list. And, perhaps best of all, network with your peers.

In addition to our monthly magazine and interactive Web site ([www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com)), *Lawn & Landscape* hosts face-to-face conferences that are designed to bring together top-notch industry speakers and researchers on technical and business related topics that affect you daily in your business.

In August, *Lawn & Landscape* will host a national Lawn Care Conference promising a beneficial educational experience dedicated solely to the topic of professional lawn care.

The conference will include current trends in weed, insect and disease management for turf, trees and ornamentals. The event will provide attendees with the opportunity to discuss the business and technical challenges and needs facing today's lawn and landscape professional.

Our objective for the conference is to tap into some of the leading minds in the lawn and landscape industry and identify the blockers they are encountering in establishing successful lawn care programs, and how to identify solutions for overcoming these challenges.

We hope you'll put our conference on your calendar. Invest in your business. The conference will be reasonably priced; not designed to break the bank or your budget. In fact, we encourage you to bring your key team members in addition to yourself.

We are in the process of fleshing out the program and finalizing the dates and location. Watch for more specifics on our conference in the pages of *Lawn & Landscape* and on our Web site. We'd like to hear your ideas. Send them to me at [ccode@gie.net](mailto:ccode@gie.net). Make it a great year. **LL**

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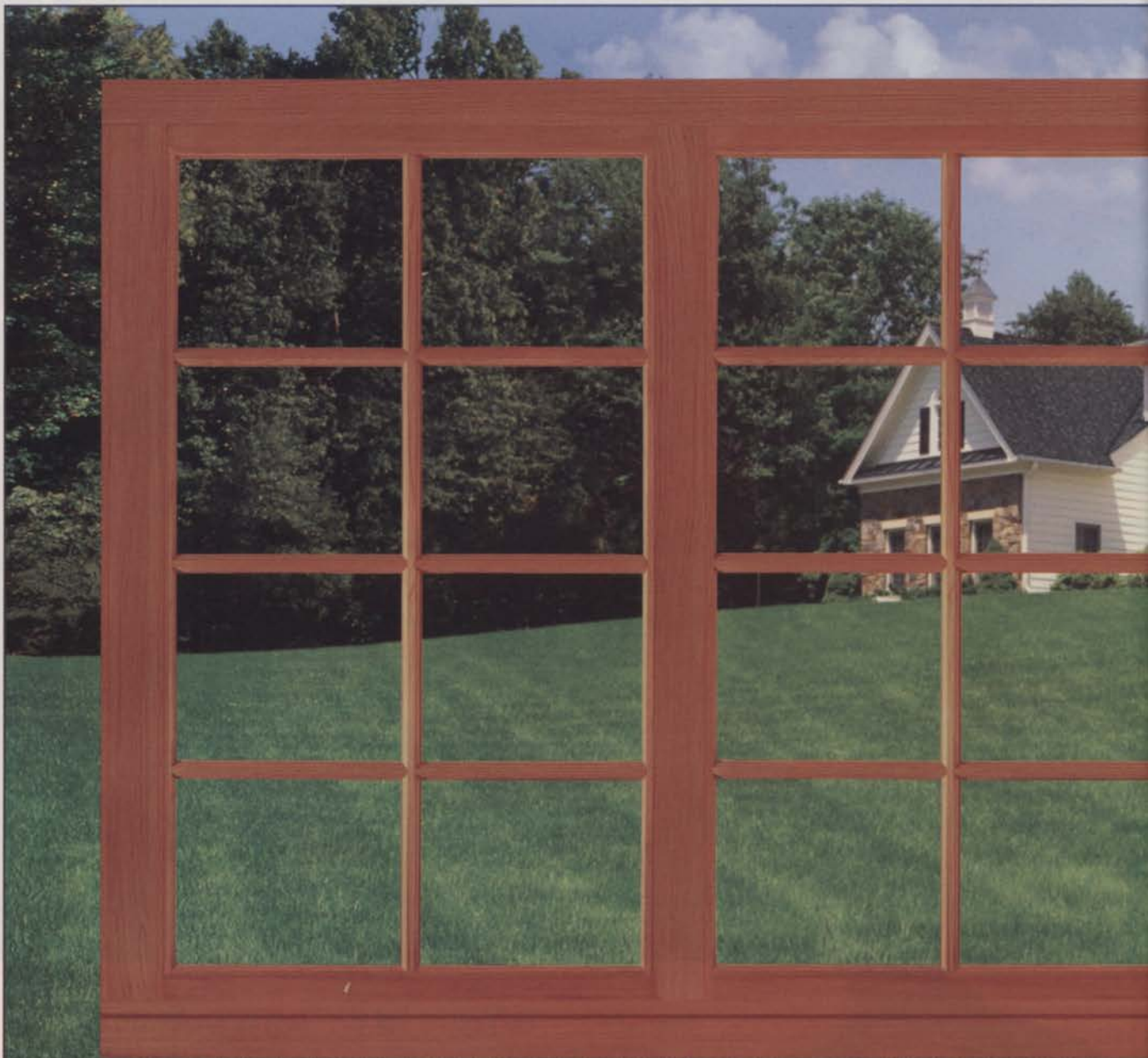


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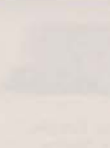
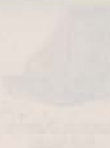
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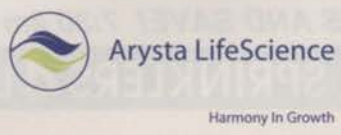


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Dear Editor,

I'd like to say thank you for the cover story in January 2006 about Landscaping Concepts. I found this article most helpful in the fact that I can relate with the company. Landscape Concepts seems to be the typical size company where we as owners are currently at or are working to get to that million-dollar benchmark. It looks like you did take advice about stories on companies that are smaller than \$1 million in sales in a survey conducted last year. My opinion was acted upon, as we are a company that did almost \$500,000 in 2005.

It would be great to hear more from these companies. Ideas for articles would include managing crews in detail, managing project profitability, hiring & firing and organization. I think, most importantly, that many small business owners have difficulty making systems and holding employees accountable for their actions and consequences. We as small business owners seem to fear that if we reprimand our employees they will quit and we will go out of business. That used to be my fear until it almost made me go out of business when my crews didn't turn in paperwork on time. Most employees crave structure so they can come in, get their work done, go home and get paid on pay day.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts,

Landry Roebuck  
Landry's Landscaping  
Rochester Hills & Southfield, Mich.



letters

Lawn & Landscape magazine welcomes letters from its readers. We feel that your honest feedback about our publication – whether it's positive or negative – is crucial to our future success. We take your comments very seriously and are always willing to respond or answer any questions you might have. To submit a Letter to the Editor, please send the letter via mail to Nicole Wisniewski's attention at 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113, or e-mail it to her at [nwisniewski@gie.net](mailto:nwisniewski@gie.net). You can also call her at 800/456-0707.

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*Mike Simon, Owner,  
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## Confidence Sells

There are many skills sales professionals need to be successful. You must be very organized, attentive to details, have passion for your work, be knowledgeable and listen well. But one is much more important than all of the others – confidence. If you don't have it, you are not going to be a successful salesperson.

New York Yankee Alex Rodriguez is one of the best hitters in baseball. The 28-year-old third baseman earns more than \$24 million a year to be successful 33 percent of the time. Every third at bat he gets a base hit. The other 67 percent of the time he fails. Yet, Rodriguez is still considered a great ball player and gets paid accordingly.

Do you think he steps to the plate to face an opposing pitcher and says to himself, "I am going to strike out!" No way! He says to himself, "I'm going to get a hit. I'm going to be successful."

If you don't believe in yourself, who will? You must maintain a level of confidence to walk into Mrs. Pepper's house and sell her that \$50,000 landscape. You must feel, deep down inside, your company is the best choice for Mr. Nelson's office and sell him a \$10,000 maintenance contract.

Plain and simple, prospects can tell if you believe in your product or service, and more times than not buying decisions are based on the salesperson's ability to clearly and confidently show why your firm is the best choice for the job. When you don't make a sale, more than likely you did not prove you were the best.

I frequently hear landscapers comment, "My market is different, nobody wants to pay around me, they're all looking for the best price." Or I hear, "I can't sell work for those kinds of prices, no one will buy it." And my personal favorite, "We do great work, but nobody seems to


care." These comments make up a recipe for failure.

In almost every market in the United States that I have studied, there are Lexus dealerships, jewelry stores that sell Rolex watches and fancy restaurants. There are also Wal-Marts and small, private retailers doing well. If you properly position your company in a market, relentlessly communicate the value you bring to the table and then go and do what you said you would do, you will be successful. You must know what your company does best and what your clients want and need. Then you need to go out and deliver. Trying to be Wal-Mart and Nordstrom at the same time won't work. You must have confidence to go out and sell with passion.

So how do you gain confidence? The same way Alex Rodriguez does. He practices.

Even though he is one of the best hitters in the major leagues, he practices and studies the game. And that's what you need to do, too.

As a manager your job is to build confidence in your people. Be on the lookout for things your team has done well and recognize them in person, via writing and, best of all, in front of others. The simple technique can enable your people to thrive at your company. When someone feels good about the job they did and the role they play in the company's success, magical things happen. People take ownership of their work when they feel appreciated.

Former General Electric Co. CEO Jack Welch said it best: "I firmly believe that my job is to walk around with a can of water in one hand and a can of fertilizer in the other and make things flourish." Now, I'm willing to bet you're a better landscaper than him, so get to work building confidence in yourself and instilling it in others. 

marty grunder

is a speaker, consultant and author, as well as owner of Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, Ohio. He can be reached at 866/478-6337 and via [www.martygrunder.com](http://www.martygrunder.com).



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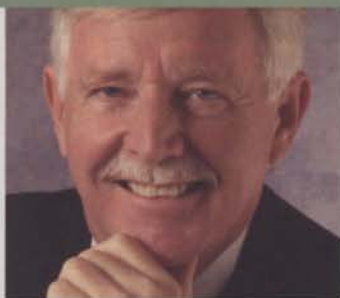
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## Make Your Plan

Now is the time to develop a plan to improve your operations and get the year off to a positive start. Soon, you'll find yourself too busy to focus on a plan and the next thing you'll realize is another year has gone by and things are the same as last year.

If you can't get to the next level, it is in part because you do not have a plan. This is a disciplined, creative process for determining how to take your organization from where it is to where you wish it to be in the future. It is fundamentally a decision-making process and encompasses the entire spectrum of issues an organization faces. Here are a few steps to create a plan and go through the process of envisioning your company's future.

**STEP 1 - CREATE A SURVEY.** In an effort to make it congenial for your staff to participate in developing this plan, I suggest a survey that asks questions about everyone and everything. For example:

- What improvements should be made to our shop operations?
- What can the front office do to help you?
- What are you really good at?
- What can you do better?

This allows participants to express ideas on how the company can improve operations and also outline their own goals. Involve the field crew leaders, mechanics, etc. Also, give employees the opportunity to anonymously review other individuals they work with for additional feedback.

**STEP 2 - COMPILE SURVEY RESULTS.** It is best to have each individual mail these surveys to an outsider to compile. This is where you need to strongly consider a facilitator. A planning-session facilitator should be someone outside the company, but familiar with our industry. Someone


not emotionally invested in the business who can bring experience in the planning process, give perspective on the future and allow team members to work as equals.

**STEP 3 - CREATE A TEAM.** The ideal size of a planning team is six to 12 individuals who represent every area of the company. For a small company, the team may involve just the owner and one or two managers.

**STEP 4 - SCHEDULE A MEETING.** Have the group meet at an off-site location like a hotel or resort for the maximum of two days. This keeps everyone focused on the task at hand without the typical daily distractions.

**STEP 5 - REVIEW SURVEYS.** Take each question and review the answers compiled by the facilitator. At this point, list your company's strengths, limitations, opportunities and threats. This is where everyone can provide their input on changes.

**STEP 6 - ACTION PLAN.** The majority of the team's time will be spent on identifying each goal and developing an action plan. The action plan identifies the events, phases or accomplishments that must take place for the plan to be met. Keep in mind, someone on the team must be responsible for setting dates by which goals must be accomplished and then seeing them through.

If your company is small, simplify the employee-survey concept by asking your employees their opinions, reviewing them and creating a plan for their suggestions to be implemented this year. Regardless of your company size, though, your plan will not work if you don't write it down and review it in its entirety at least every quarter. Do this and you will be proud of your 2006 accomplishments. 

jack mattingly

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

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## Caffeinated Leadership

I recently visited a new client in the Mid-Atlantic who operates a very profitable 7-year-old full-service commercial landscape company employing 75 people. I had the opportunity to be side-by-side with the owner from sun up to sundown, and the experience was exhilarating.

I observed the owner interacting with his crew supervisors at 5:30 a.m. before the first truck left the premises, visited a number of work sites, met many of his vendors and was present when he welcomed back his crews to the yard in the late afternoon. It was raining by then, yet the employees were still engaged and seemingly full of energy. There was something special about this owner regarding how he led and interacted with others that made me invest additional time in reflection after returning to my hotel room that evening. For a while it seemed I had more questions than answers.

Why do some green industry business owners do a better job leading their people? How do they obtain more "buy-in" than most others on key initiatives? Who do these people talk to outside of work to gain perspective? How are they apparently able to consistently make all the right moves? Why do they not bend to temptation of taking the easy way out by delaying employee paychecks and vendor payments when business is not so great?

For many owners, coming to grips with his or her own unique leadership style has been a positive learning experience. For others it has been a painful journey of lessons learned the hard way and paid for with dollars that should have been booked as bottom-line profits.

The more I study successful leaders in our industry, the more I see there are certain common practices they seem to apply in a universal manner. Generally, successful leaders seem unwilling to accept the status quo. They are never comfortable sitting by and having fate determine their

course of action. Instead, they chose to be pioneers and innovators. They always have their ears to the ground for good ideas and have an uncanny ability to apply the best ones in a successful manner. They are willing to take the risk of a good idea failing. Why? Because that's one of the ways good leaders learn.

Another common trait among leaders is their ability to inspire others by defining a clear vision of what might be. To use one of Stephen Covey's principles of personal leadership, "They begin with the end in mind." What's more, they encourage others to become a part of that vision. They express themselves in terms that their followers know and understand, and they do it with enthusiasm.

There was a great book published in 1999 titled, *First, Break all the Rules. What the World's Greatest Managers do Differently* authored by Buckingham and Coffman of the Gallup Organization. I highly recommend it to business owners who are serious about enhancing their leadership skills and knowledge. The authors state leaders have a realistic sense of themselves. They realize what they envision cannot be done without the help of others. Therefore, they are also particularly good at enabling others to act. In short, they have the ability to enlist the help of all those who will make their vision a reality.

The authors also suggest that great managers focus on each of their people's strengths and manage around their weaknesses. In other words, don't try to perfect each of your employees, rather, do everything to help them become more of whom they already are. Keep in mind this does not mean employees cannot learn to do things differently. Skills and knowledge are fluid. Talent, however, is not.

What does this all mean for aspiring green industry leaders? Don't be afraid to break some rules along the way and go with the caffeine once in a while. ☘

**larry fish**

is president of GreenSearch, a human resource consulting organization. He can be reached at 888/375-7787, [larry@greensearch.com](mailto:larry@greensearch.com), or via [www.greensearch.com](http://www.greensearch.com). PeopleSmarts® is a registered trademark of GreenSearch.

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**ARIES** (March 21 - April 19): A new friendship is blossoming. Take your time and really get to know this person. You will be pleasantly surprised what you find out.



**TAURUS** (April 20 - May 20): Money seems lighter than usual lately. But just remember, you have great fortune in other aspects of your life. Enhance your family and you will get through this.



**GEMINI** (May 21 - June 21): Your career is on the fast track. Now is not the time to slow down your work presents to you.



**CANCER** (June 22 - July 22): Happiness is on its way. You've been through a lot and now it's your turn to shine. Be sure to take some time just for you. You truly deserve it!



**LEO** (July 23 - August 22): You are the center of attention. People rely on you not only for advice, but also for a good laugh. So keep it up, your fun spirit is contagious.



**VIRGO** (August 23 - September 22): It's time to take a stand. You should no longer remain on both sides of an issue. Instead, put your foot down and let others know exactly what you think.



**LIBRA** (September 23 - October 22): Love is in the air. Your relationship with the one you love will soon get even stronger. You are about to receive an even greater commitment.



**SCORPIO** (October 23 - November 21): It's time to let things go. The past is the past, and you should only be looking forward. "Forgive and forget" is the new motto you should live by.



**SAGITTARIUS** (November 22 - December 21): Knowledge truly is power. It's time to use your brain to its full advantage. Seek out opportunities in the workplace to show off your capabilities. Expect rewards!



**CAPRICORN** (December 22 - January 19): Be sure to listen carefully. Your ears are your most effective form of communication. Others will appreciate your willingness to hear them out for a break. Use that vacation time you've been saying up for a spontaneous trip. It will re-energize your mind and body for the rest of the year.



**AQUARIUS** (January 20 - February 18): It's time to take a break. Use that vacation time you've been saying up for a spontaneous trip. It will re-energize your mind and body for the rest of the year.



**PISCES** (February 19 - March 20): Are you like a surprise? There is a big one in your future. Be alert, because this is one surprise that is going to change your life for the better.

**DON'T COUNT ON THIS.**





## Spreader Calibration Tips

**W**e all know that we should brush our teeth three times a day, but how many of us actually do? Studies show only one in three Americans meets this mark, and that doesn't include flossing. We all know the risk and potential pain associated with poor dental care, but, for some reason, we choose to take the chance.

The same can actually be said of applying granular turf products. Everyone knows they should calibrate their spreader regularly (ideally before each application of a new product), but how many lawn care professionals do this? Not nearly enough, despite the potential downsides.

Consider the benefits associated with regular and proper spreader calibration:

- Effective product performance
- Reduce potential for plant injury
- Reduce callbacks/cancellations
- Economic efficiencies
- Enhanced company reputation
- Good environmental stewardship

**SAY AAAHHHH.** Let's take a look at how easily lawn care professionals can calibrate a granular spreader. Calibrating requires a measuring tape/wheel, scale, bucket, calculator and cones or marking paint. Once you have the tools, follow these steps.

First, make sure the holes in the bottom of the spreader are completely open, set the spreader according to the recommended application rate on a bag of fertilizer that you will use for this exercise and find a concrete or paved surface where you can measure out 1,000 square feet. You need this size space because most fertilizer labels make recommendations based on the pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet.

For this example, assume we are calibrating a spreader with an 18-24-12 fertilizer at 4 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

Next, determine your effective spread width. This should be between 6 and 10

feet. Assume the spread width is 7 feet for our example, so then you want to divide 1,000 square feet by 7 feet, which is essentially 143 feet. With a 7-foot spread width, walking 143 feet means we essentially applied product to 1,000 square feet ( $7 \times 143 = 1,001$ ).


Now that you have that number (143 feet), use the measuring tape and cones/markings paint to mark off that distance in a straight line.

Next pour product into the bucket and weigh it on the scale (at least 10 pounds, which we will assume for this example). This product needs to be poured into the spreader hopper after being weighed.

With your spreader ready to go, push it the exact length of the distance you marked off (143 feet in our example). Do not push the spreader any further. And be sure to walk at your normal application speed because that influences how much product gets put down.

If our spreader is calibrated properly, we should have applied 4 pounds of product since we originally set the spreader on the 4 pounds per 1,000 square feet setting. But we need to confirm what really happened, which means we need to dump the remaining fertilizer from the hopper back into the bucket and weigh it again. Subtract the amount in the bucket now from how much you began with, and that tells you what rate you applied at.

Getting an actual rate that matches up with the spreader setting means your spreader is accurately calibrated and ready to go to work. If you have too much or too little product left in the hopper, then adjust the calibration arm accordingly and repeat this process.

Spreaders do not need to be calibrated every hour or even every day, but they should be calibrated regularly because their performance will change over time. 

j.b. toorish and michael steve

are part of LESCO's Tech Services Department. They can be reached at [techguys@lesco.com](mailto:techguys@lesco.com) or at 800/321-5325 ext. 3150 to answer technical questions.

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breaking news

## H-2B Cap Reached, House Passes Unfavorable Immigration Bill

In Congress's hurry to finish business before the holidays, the House of Representatives has passed a bill that many in the green industry challenge as being a "bad bill," for employers. Simultaneously, it was announced recently that the H-2B program has reached its visa cap for the first part of 2005. While seasonal workers who were employed in the United States within the last three years do not count against the cap as a result of legislation passed in May of 2005, business owners hiring new workers will now have to wait until April to bring those new employees stateside.

**BORDER ENFORCEMENT BILL.** H.R. Bill 4437, the "Border Protection, Antiterrorism & Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005," was passed on Dec. 16, 2005 as an "enforcement-only" bill focused on U.S. border security and flushing out illegal immigrants from the workforce through requirements applied to employers.

The American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) and other state and regional associations in the industry have voiced their opposition to the bill and encourage their members, green industry professionals and employers in general to do the same.

As explained by ANLA, H.R. 4437 would require that all employers verify the authenticity their new workers' Social Security numbers and/or alien authorization documents, either by telephone or over the Internet. A pilot program is underway for the verification system, which would have employers key in workers' Social Security numbers and then match the number to U.S. Government files. Failure to verify documents could yield fines from \$5,000 to \$25,000 per worker, depending on the size of the employer and whether the employer had prior violations. Moreover, after six years, employers would be required to verify documents for all of their workers who had not been previously electronically verified. Workers' whose documents don't match up would have to be terminated.

While ANLA says it generally supports electronic

verification, their opposition stems from the fact that H.R. 4437 includes no provision to replace those workers who would inevitably be terminated due to fraudulent documents. A good bill, the association says, needs to include guest worker immigration reform that would allow employers to bring in new workers legally.

"The bill does nothing to address changes in immigration laws relative to guest worker programs, nor does it say anything about the 8 million illegal workers in the country now other than enforcing employer sanctions, including mandatory electronic verification," ANLA Executive Director Bob Dolobois tells *Lawn & Landscape*. "The demand for seasonal labor is so high and the fraudulent papers business so sophisticated that otherwise law-abiding employers end up hiring illegal workers. We recognize that this problem needs to be solved because no ethical employer wants to be in this position. However, this bill puts all of the burden on employers to stop hiring illegal workers without an option for replacing those employees with legal workers."

Dolobois acknowledges that the House passage of H.R. 4437 is just the first step in the bill becoming law. From here, the U.S. Senate must agree on its own version of the bill, at which point the House and Senate version would go into conference to develop a complete bill for the President to sign into law. A bright spot for employers is that a number of Members of Congress voting for the bill indicated that their support of a conference report was contingent upon the inclusion of guest worker reform. The bill passed 239 to 182 with all but 17 republicans supporting the bill and all but 36 democrats opposing.



**H-2B REFORM PUSHES ON.** Also on Dec. 16, the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Service (USCIS) announced that the first of two H-2B caps had been reached for the 2006 season. As a result of beneficial legislation passed in May, only new H-2B workers are counted against the 66,000-visa cap, which was split into two 33,000-cap sessions for fiscal year 2006.

USCIS has officially received enough applications to meet the first 33,000 cap, though returning workers – those whose visas counted against the cap between Oct. 1, 2002 and Sept. 30, 2005 – may return without counting against the cap. USCIS will continue to accept petitions for new workers with start dates on or after April 1, 2006 as long as such petitions are supported by valid temporary labor certification.

After a few months of relief with the passage of May 2005's "Save Our Small & Seasonal Businesses Act," (SOS Act) grassroots organizations are once again encouraging employers to jump on the bandwagon to help develop and support more permanent guest worker reform. Save Small Business, a grassroots organization formed last year and, says current discussion of the bill is to develop language

for a long-term or permanent extension of its provisions, which are currently set to expire on Sept. 30, 2006.

"As has been clear throughout our efforts, nothing will happen on Capitol Hill without our hard work again in 2006," says Hank Lavery, of Save Small Business in a notice to members. "As part of the Save Small Business network, each of us needs to be prepared to do everything that we can to extend the SOS Act."

Save Small Business officially established itself as a non-profit organization this year and will focus solely on the SOS Act and its reform. A dues structure outlined on its Web site will allow the organization to continue to successfully work with the industry and with Congress to bring more beneficial change to employers. – *Lauren Spiers*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *Lawn & Landscape is working to contact members of the industry for more information on the H-2B situations. If you have a story to share, contact Nicole Wisniewski at 800/456-0707 or via [nwisniewski@gie.net](mailto:nwisniewski@gie.net). Visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com) for updates as they become available.*



## BREAKING NEWS

### Symbiot Scraps Erie Ops Center; John Allin Leaves the Company



John Allin

**S**ymbiot Business Group is consolidating its Erie, Pa. operations group, which includes its snow removal business, to its Utah headquarters at the conclusion of the current snow season.

The move, according to an official statement from the Draper, Utah-based company, allows Symbiot to meet spiked needs from customers, gives it greater cost controls and provides greater operation integration and execution, increasing its ability to meet customer needs.

In related news, John Allin, the former head of Symbiot Business Group's snow removal operations, and Symbiot executives agreed to a "mutual separation" in mid-December 2005.

Allin says his departure from the property management company was amicable. "My commitment to Symbiot, from a transitional standpoint, had come to an end," he explains. "I have no animosity towards

Symbiot and I don't think it was a parting based on animosity. They have their way of doing things and I have my way of doing things."

There were some conflicts following the assimilation of Allin's Snow Management Group (SMG) into Symbiot between the business cultures of Erie and Salt Lake, following the November 2004 merger, Allin says. "There were challenges with the distance," Allin says. "I wouldn't call it conflict, but there were definite challenges integrating the two cultures and you can't have two cultures in one company."

Symbiot has offered relocation options to as many as six of its 25 Erie employees. The option to consolidate the Erie operations had been on the table prior to Mike Edwards being hired as Symbiot CEO in July, says Jared Glover, Symbiot's director of network development.

*continued on page 28*

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## Symbiot News

Erie wasn't the only office to consolidate, Glover adds. Symbiot brought its Kentucky business development operations to Salt Lake in late 2005.

In terms of Allin leaving the company, Glover says, "it was what was best for both parties," adding that he couldn't comment on Allin's performance but that there were concerns within Symbiot that the snow operations had not met revenue expectations.

Outside of snow removal, Allin had no interest in Symbiot's broader corporate mission. "My interests were not in janitorial or pest control contracts," Allin says. "My interest is in the snow industry and it always will be."

The 2004 merger caused quite a stir in the snow removal community, making Allin a pariah with a segment of the industry. Many former SMG subcontractors, unhappy with Symbiot's terms for payment of snow removal services still owed to them, threatened legal action. To Glover's knowledge, only a "handful" of disgruntled subcontractors threatened or pursued legal action.



There were initial cash-flow problems, Glover says, and Symbiot still owes money to some subcontractors on their SMG contracts. Glover could not comment on the number of subcontractors or the dollar amount still owed, but added Symbiot hopes to clear up any outstanding billing matters during the first half of 2006.

Symbiot has spent the last year creating new partnerships with its subcontractors and strengthening its business systems, Glover says. "We're on the right path," he says. "But 2005 has been a transition year and we feel we're heading in the right direction. We've worked on a lot of new processes to improve billing and paying in 2006."

Allin, too, says much of the controversy and anger were perpetuated by a small minority of contractors in the snow and ice removal industry.

As for Allin, on Jan. 16 he began his new job as president of Snow Dragon, a company formed as a partnership between Allin and Park Ohio, a Cleveland, Ohio-based diversified manufacturing company, to develop and build snow melting units for mid-sized snow contractors. As president, Allin will oversee Snow Dragon's sales, marketing and manufacturing operations. Allin expects Snow Dragon to be in full-scale production by this summer.  
— Mike Zawacki

## Research Reports

### NTEA Forecasts

## Truck Sales Growth, Hosts Work Truck Show

**FARMINGTON HILLS, Mich.** — Leading U.S. economists at the recent National Truck Equipment Association Economic Outlook Conference agreed that 2006 will be a year of continued growth for the commercial truck and transportation equipment industry.

According to Tim O'Neill, principal of O'Neill Strategic Economics, U.S. economic growth has been healthy despite rising oil prices, and inflation remains well contained. O'Neill predicted the Federal Reserve will continue to raise rates and that the spread between long-term and short-term rates will remain relatively stable. However, he cautioned on economic risks in the form of a U.S. trade imbalance, high energy costs and a collapse in house prices.

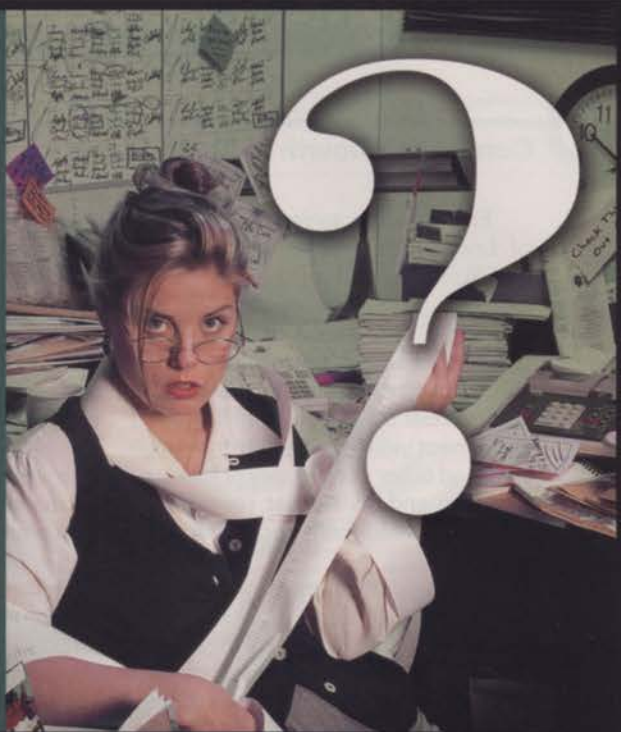
Martin Labbe, president and CEO of Martin Labbe Associates, predicted sales growth for Classes 1 to 8 in 2006, but expressed concern regarding heavy-duty truck sales in 2007. Due to impending emissions regulations and concerns about new engine technology, he said there is likely to be a pre-buy situation in 2006 that may result in a decline in heavy-duty sales and production in 2007.



Photo: GMC

continued on page 30

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continued from page 28

## Continued Growth in Truck Sales

Eli Lustgarten, senior vice president of Longbow Research and principal of ESL Consultants, forecast strong industry growth through 2010 but concurred with Labbe that 2007 may bring decreased heavy-duty truck sales. Lustgarten also noted that the commercial truck and transportation equipment industry's respite from high steel and other commodity prices may be at an end, as August steel prices were increased from second quarter levels.

Among other topics, Lustgarten also discussed signs of a sustained recovery in the manufacturing sector. "In September 2004, the concern was whether manufacturing was finally beginning to recover," he said. "Today,

the manufacturing data is consistent with our belief that 2004 was the first year of at least a three-year upturn for this sector, lasting through at least 2006."

Steve Latin-Kasper, market data and research director for the NTEA, estimated 5 to 10 percent growth in truck equipment sales in 2006. He also referenced the close cyclical relationship that has existed between the commercial truck and transportation equipment industry and interest rates for the last five business cycles. Based on this link, Latin-Kasper said interest rates that have been rising since July 2004 indicate a likely decrease in business truck production in late 2006 or 2007.

In other news, NTEA is holding its Work Truck Show March 1 to 3 at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta, Ga. At the show, more than 40 exhibitors plan to introduce new products. If you have any questions or would like to attend the event, contact Kristen Simpson, Simpson Communications, at 216/991-4297 or via [simpsoncomm@aol.com](mailto:simpsoncomm@aol.com).

Established in 1964, NTEA is an association supporting the \$98.3 billion commercial truck and transportation equipment industry. For more information about the NTEA, call 800/441-6832 or 248/489-7090.

## Research Reports

### Report Predicts More Use of Diesel as Oil Prices Climb

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Allen Schaeffer, executive director of the Diesel Technology Forum, issued a statement following the recent release of a new report by the Energy Information Administration (EIA), which indicates more high oil prices for U.S. energy markets and a greater than expected increase in U.S. diesel vehicle sales by the year 2030.

"The Energy Information Administration's (EIA) release of its 2006 Annual Energy Outlook indicates that U.S. consumers will continue to face high oil prices and more pains at the gasoline pump in the years ahead," Schaeffer says.

"Nevertheless, the report also shows that as consumers and business owners look for greater fuel economy in their cars and trucks, increased efficiency in U.S. light-duty vehicles will be built upon a sharp increase in the sale of diesel and hybrid vehicles."

Schaeffer estimated that 1.3 million diesel vehicles will be purchased annually in the U.S. by the year 2025, according to the EIA report. This represents a 29-percent increase (290,000 more vehicles) over the agency's 2005 predictions for the same time frame. The full report is available at [www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/aeo/index.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/aeo/index.html).

According to EIA, diesel offers a 20- to 40-percent greater fuel efficiency over comparable gasoline engines, which could help reduce dependence on foreign oil. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that a 30-percent market penetration of diesel vehicles by 2020 would reduce U.S. net crude oil consumption by 350,000 barrels daily.

Congress has recognized the energy-saving benefits of clean diesel during the summer by passing new tax incentives up to \$3,400 for consumers purchasing advanced clean diesels starting in 2006. EIA expects this incentive to spur the

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USE READER SERVICE # 22

continued from page 30

## More Use of Diesel

growth of diesel in America.

A recent survey suggests that American drivers already are turning to diesel-powered vehicles. A 2005 analysis of data from R.L. Polk & Co. shows that annual registrations of new diesel passenger vehicles in the U.S. has grown from 301,000 in 2000 to nearly 470,000 in 2004 – a 56 percent increase. GIE Media's *Snow* magazine, a sister publication of *Lawn & Landscape*, has recently surveyed its readership on the use of diesel vehicles in their companies.

According to the research, many snow contractors are considering the switch to diesel-powered vehicles to lessen the financial blow of fuel prices, which jumped to more than \$3 per gallon at some points in 2005. In past years, the split between the use of diesel vs. gas-powered vehicles has been about 65/35, in favor of gas. However, recent research shows fleet composi-

tion is now 60-percent gas and 40-percent diesel. In contrast, Canadian contractors run fleets comprised of 75 percent diesel and 25 percent gas-powered vehicles, according to *Snow* magazine research.

Concurrent with rising sales of diesel vehicles has been a greater availability of diesel fuel at local filling stations. According to a recent report commissioned by the Diesel Technology Forum and released last spring, diesel is now available at nearly half (42 percent) of fueling service stations across the country – a 12 percent increase from EPA estimates released in 2000. However, the AAA Daily Fuel Gauge report today is showing diesel at a national average price of \$2.56 per gallon, compared to regular unleaded gasoline, with a national average price of \$2.21.

"As more consumers become aware of the increasing availability and energy-saving benefits of these vehicles, we can expect that the popularity of light-duty diesels in the U.S. will continue to grow," Schaeffer says. Consumers interested in learning more about diesel cars, trucks and SUVs can visit the Forum's web site at [www.dieselforum.org](http://www.dieselforum.org) for a complete list of the light-duty diesel vehicles available in the U.S. and additional information on the environmental, economic and energy conversation benefits of modern clean diesel technology.



## do you do diesel?

**H**ow does your company view the use of diesel as opposed to gasoline-powered vehicles and equipment?

In a poll conducted on *Lawn & Landscape Online* in April 2005, we asked, "How is your company handling rising fuel costs this year." At the time, zero respondents said they were planning on switching to diesel fuel instead of gasoline. Has that mentality changed at all in your company?

Let us know your thoughts on the issue by visiting the *Lawn & Landscape Online* Message Board where you can discuss diesel vs. gasoline – and numerous other topics – with other industry professionals and share ideas on how to beat the continued expected rise in fuel costs in the coming years.



## Manufacturer Minutes

### LESCO Opens Three More Service Centers

**CLEVELAND, OHIO** – In keeping with its goal to open 25 to 35 new locations in 2005, LESCO has added three more new locations to its Service Center roster.

The four newest locations (including No. 300) are in West Wareham and Walpole, Mass.; Vandalia, Ohio; and Concord, Calif. The company's Service Centers are spread throughout the country in 39 states.

This announcement comes just weeks after the opening of LESCO's 300th Service Center, which is located in Concord, Calif., bringing the total count to 303.

"We appreciate the hard work of all of our sales associates in helping us achieve this milestone," notes Jeffrey Rutherford, LESCO's president and chief executive officer. "Most importantly, the traction we gained with our newer Service Centers demonstrates that we are using our capital wisely and making progress toward our goal of generating a return on invested capital above 10 percent."

This year, LESCO plans to continue driving its growth and better serving customers by increasing the number of Service Centers by 10 to 15 percent annually.



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MANUFACTURER MINUTES



## Hustler Turf Equipment Back to Full Production After Fire



**HUSTLER**

HESSTON, Kan. – After a fire that affected an Excel Industries manufacturing facility on Dec. 12, 2005, the company announced that production is back online. The fire caused significant damage to the company's power distribution system, but Hustler says all office power and services were restored within the first 36 hours after the fire.

The manufacturing process took slightly longer to come back online, but because the company was planning its traditional holiday shutdown for late December, the result was only a loss of four manufacturing days, accounting for about 400 to 500 lawn maintenance machines.

"Everyone really stepped up to the plate," says Facility Manager Lee Peters. "Employees, the city, vendors, and our contractors all went above and beyond the call of duty to get us back to work ASAP."

Peters tells *Lawn & Landscape* that several key Excel/Hustler team members quickly identified items (beyond electricity) that would need to be replaced or repaired right away in order for production to get up to full speed. "Our staff

was able to determine in advance some of the equipment and other things we would need to have ready to go quickly," he says. "For example, air compressors are essential to the work we do here every day and right now we were able to secure rental units, which we're using now, until we're able to have new ones installed in the facility."

Peters expects new air compressors to be delivered by the middle of February, followed by two to three weeks to install them properly. Additionally, a new roof will need to be installed and should be delivered in four to five weeks, followed by another month of installation time.

"We're looking at about four months of repair and recovery time, but we're very thankful to have our contractors, subcontractors and the community that were able to help us get ready to go in 2006," Peters says. "In order to get back up to speed in terms of making up our four days of lost production and also getting ready for the spring, we'll probably end up working a couple of Saturdays, but it's well worth it to make sure our customers have the products and service they're expecting."



ASSOCIATION NEWS

## PGMS Launches Grounds Management Seminars and Site Visitation Series

**BALTIMORE, Md.** – The Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) will launch a series of regional grounds management seminars and site visitation programs March 9 and 10 at Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe, Ariz.

"The goal is to have attendees learn, think and leave with solid management and leadership ideas they can then implement at their own facilities," says PGMS President Ellen Newell, assistant grounds manager at ASU.

Featuring classes on customer service, motivating staff, time management, benchmarking and managing a diverse work force, the leadership seminars are designed to provide grounds managers with the opportunity to gain knowledge, ask questions and network with others about challenges and issues specific to their profession.

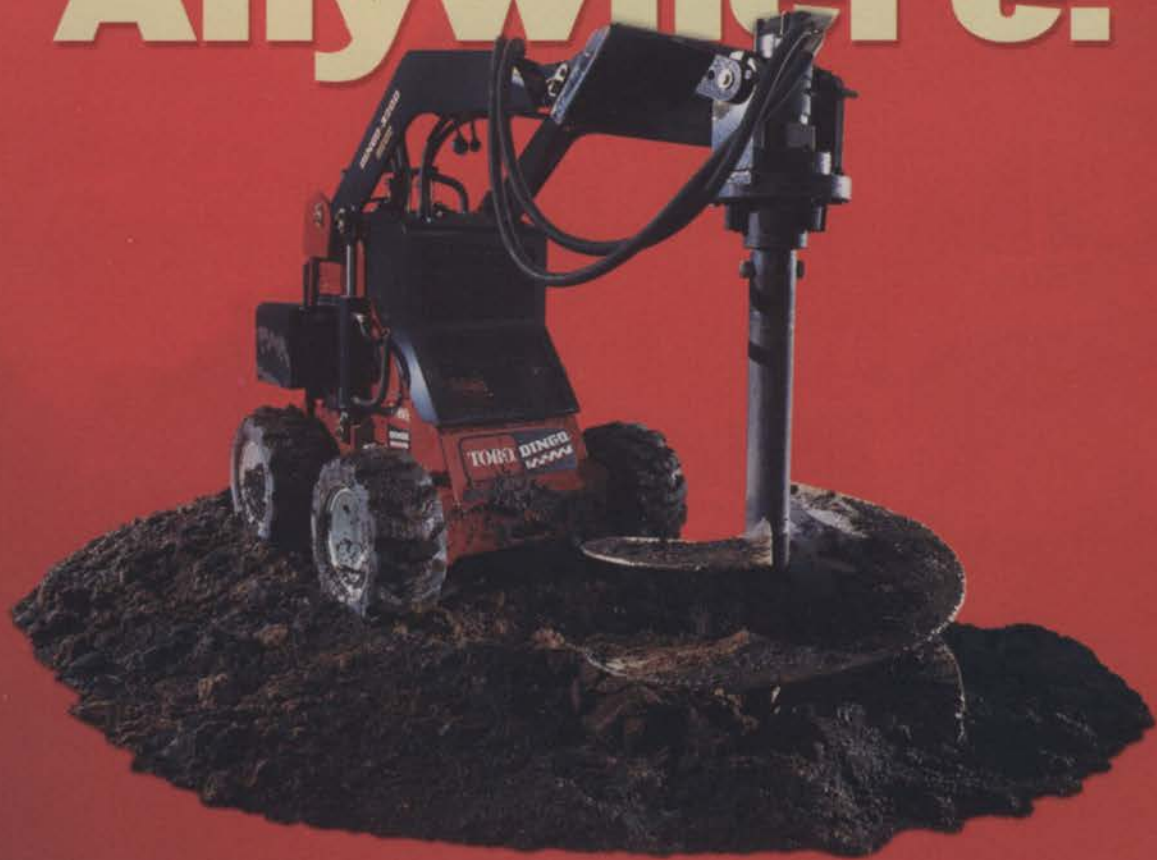
Included in a PGMS seminar and site visit program, will be behind-the-scenes tours of the grounds management programs at the host institute (ASU) as well as a tour to another area grounds program. The March program will visit the Phoenix Zoo, for instance.

The ASU regional seminar and site visitation will be the first of two scheduled by PGMS in 2006. Another will be offered later this year at the University of Delaware. For more information, visit [www.pgms.org/2006regionalseminar.htm](http://www.pgms.org/2006regionalseminar.htm).



*Sun Devil Stadium is just one of many areas where Arizona State University grounds managers must combat wear and tear on turf in the heat of the desert. Photo: [www.asu.edu](http://www.asu.edu)*

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USE READER SERVICE # 24



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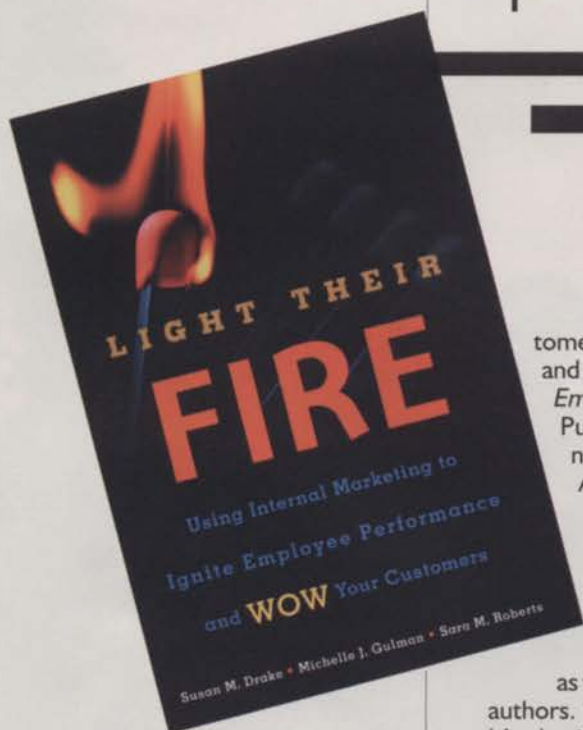
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BOOK REPORT

# Firing Up People is the First Step Toward Firing Up Your Profits > >



**T**oo many leaders associate “internal marketing” with such uninspiring tools as, say, the company mission statement slapped on a bulletin board in the break room, a dull company newsletter or maybe a holiday party that people feel obligated to attend. But according to Susan Drake, selling your brand promise to employees is an absolutely critical function.

“Effective internal marketing is all about getting employees to love your brand so they, in turn, will convince customers to love it,” asserts Drake, co-author (along with Michelle Gulman and Sara Roberts) of *Light Their Fire: Using Internal Marketing to Ignite Employee Performance and WOW Your Customers* (Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2005, ISBN: 1-4195-0252-2, \$23). “Experts estimate that nearly 85 percent of employees are not fully engaged and motivated. And when you think of lost business and the cost of training new people – because dissatisfied employees do tend to leave – you realize this is a very expensive problem to have.”

Here are a few *Light Their Fire* tips to boost employee motivation:

1. Inspire employees with a good logo – You’re probably used to thinking of your logo as a customer communication tool. But a well-designed logo can and should be used to communicate messages internally as well. For example, “Disney uses this technique very effectively,” write the authors. “You’ve no doubt seen the silhouette of Mickey Mouse’s head and ears. It’s classic Disney. At Disney World, you’ll see the shape in landscaping features, carpet patterns, bathroom fixtures, and thousands of other places . . . what a great way for Disney to deliver a happy, positive image of its brand.”

2. Start branding from day one. Employees will never be more excited than the first day they’re hired. Take advantage of their positive outlook to get them fired up about your vision. In other words, make your orientation be more than tons of forms to fill out, a talking head video of the CEO, and a stream of various department representatives parading in and out. Make this a time to build employee pride in your organization. “Orientation is the time to get new hires on board mentally and emotionally,” write the authors. “New employees want to believe they’ve joined a special place. Tell them, ‘Here’s the value you bring to us and here’s the value we bring to you.’ Show them how their role will further the company’s growth and how it’s a mutually advantageous relationship. Involve executives. When the top dogs participate, it tells new employees: You’re important to us and we’re honored you work here.”

3. Make them feel like owners – There are very simple, inexpensive ways to show your employees that you care and make them feel connected to the brand. The authors tell the story of how Seth Goldman, head of Honest Tea, uses UPC codes to help his employees feel a sense of ownership. The last five digits of a code can be chosen by the company whose product it appears on. Honest Tea lets people build their own birthdays or anniversaries into its UPC code so that product truly becomes theirs.

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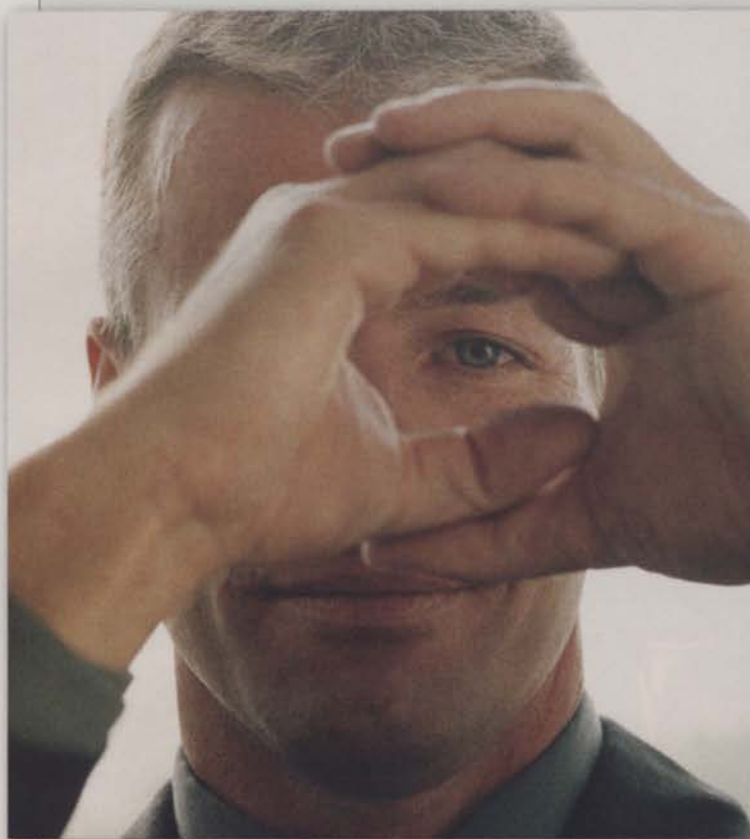
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USE READER SERVICE # 27

A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

## 80% of Small Business Owners Don't Plan to Retire



**W**hile many green industry workers “retired” for the winter months, a new Wells Fargo/Gallup Small Business Index finds that eight in 10 small business owners don’t plan on actually retiring at all come age 65. In fact, four in 10 respondents say the only thing that would force them to retire is their health.

“We started this business with our hearts and our minds and are extremely passionate about its success,” says Nancy Fe Tom, owner of The Architectural Co., Tucson, Ariz. “It would be very difficult to just walk away from what we have built and ‘retire’ completely. I will always have an interest in the success of this company and will be committed to continuing that success for as long as I can.”

The Index shows that 42 percent of small business owners surveyed indicate they may cut back on work, but will never completely abandon their businesses. The Index also shows that almost two-thirds of small business owners expect their business to continue operating after they have retired. Only 19 percent plan on traditional retirement.

Of the business owners who expect their businesses to carry on beyond their working years, 41 percent expect someone in their family to keep the business going. Additionally, 34 percent expect to sell their business to someone outside the company, and 21 percent say they will sell it to one or more non-family member employees in the business.

“Small business owners have a different definition of the word ‘retirement,’” says Rebecca Macieira-Kaufmann, executive vice president and small business segment manager for Wells Fargo. “Since many are living their dreams and love what they do, they do not want to stop working. This survey shows that more than ever they’re dedicated to the success of their business. It’s their passion and they want to stay engaged in their business as long as possible.”

The Index tracks six key measures for both current conditions and future expectations as reported by small business owners: Current financial situation, revenue, cash flow, capital spending, number of jobs and credit availability. The index has been active since the third quarter of 2003.

### WHAT ARE YOUR RETIREMENT PLANS?

**A**re you among the 80 percent of small business owners who don’t plan to retire when the time comes? Let us know by visiting the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board ([www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard)) and sharing your thoughts on retirement and the recent Wells Fargo/Gallup poll highlighting small business owners’ die-hard entrepreneurial spirit. Here are some questions to kick-start the conversation:

- Do you plan to retire around age 65? Sooner? What does your current vision of retirement include?
- If you intend to retire, do you have financial plans in place after the paychecks stop coming in? Please share your plans and how you put them together.
- Do you expect someone in your family or one of your employees to take over the business after you retire? What plans do you have in place to make a smooth transition?

...such as biometrics.  
**economic** /,i:kə'nɒm  
nomics or the econom  
ability



## LABOR SOLUTIONS

# Workers Want Raises in 2006 > >

**A**merican workers, when asked about their work-related New Year's resolutions, reported getting a raise as their top job-related priority for 2006. In fact, workers are eight times more likely to desire a salary increase than better relationships with their bosses, according to a survey by Adecco Staffing North America.



And, specifically, landscape contractors will most likely agree with these survey results. According to *Lawn & Landscape* research, workers averaged a 1.85 percent decrease in wages from 2004 to 2005.

While early indicators point out that pay increases may be in the cards for workers, it may not be the cash windfall they really want.

"While we're seeing an up-tick in hiring, early salary increase predictions for 2006 are coming in at about the same levels as the past few years, which is around 2 to 4 percent, says Raymond Roe, Adecco's CEO.

Respondents identified these other work-related New Year's resolutions in order of priority:

- 24% – Get a raise
- 17% – Be more productive
- 13% – Get a new job
- 9% – Get promoted
- 5% – Get to work earlier everyday
- 3% – Build a better relationship with my boss

Also, the study says women are more likely than men (27 percent to 20 percent) to put the raise first, yet men are more likely to pick productivity and wanting a new job as their top priority in 2006.

## TURF FACTS



# Green With Envy > >

**A**s the mild winter melted the snow in January, Northern U.S. homeowners were surprised at the lush green color that was revealed. If your clients have been asking questions about why their turf is still green despite winter weather, industry researchers have some answers.

Karl Danneberger, professor of turfgrass science, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, reported in a recent edition of Syngenta's *TechNotes* newsletter (read it online at [www.greencastonline.com](http://www.greencastonline.com)), that 2005 temperatures remained warm well into late fall. This, combined with late season nitrogen fertilization helped the turf retain its color. "With the arrival and persistence of snow cover through most of December, the turf remained insulated from the cold and the chlorophyll degrading action of cold and high light intensity," he explains. "With snow melt and relatively warm temperatures after Christmas, the turf has remained green."

University of Nebraska Extension Educator John Fech also noticed green lawns, as well as spotty green and brown turf. "Green color in

turf is a visual thing – you see the crowns as well as the grass blades," he says. "During the first cold weather, the blades turn brown before the crowns. We are seeing some of the crown color right now."

While Danneberger says the greener than normal turf should not affect its cold tolerance because the plant has already undergone its hardening-off process, there is a potential for damage on turf in this condition if significant traffic is involved. "On sports fields or golf courses, individuals may want to play soccer, football or golf since the turf is still green and temperatures are relatively warm," he says. "The problem with such activities is that the turf is subject to wear. Although the turf is still green, this does not mean it's growing. Thus, wear injury could occur to the turf because it is unable to recover via growth from the damage."

But your clients won't have to fight the urge to run around on the green lawn for long. By the end of March, Fech says most of the lawns in the North will finally be completely brown just before spring when they will green up like normal again. – Nicole Wisniewski

# WHAT'S NEW?

Ever since its introduction in 2001, the Hustler Super Z™ has been setting the standard for commercial z-riders. Now, 5 years later, the Super Z for 2006 will send the competition back to the drawing board and contractors will be beating a path to their Hustler dealer like never before.

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- Reduced grease points from 13 to 9
- New** mulch-kit design (patent applied for) that is the easiest to install in the industry
- Longer-life idler springs
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- Easier blade servicing
- Serviceless deck idler
- Improved bearings in deck and pump idlers
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- More durable deck cover knobs
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New logo to let you know Hustler is not resting on its laurels



## Landscape Contractors Take Their Trade to New Heights > >

One of the hottest trends in urban design is rooftop landscaping. From lush, green gardens to elegantly appointed resident amenities, the efforts of resourceful planners and landscapers are turning ordinary rooftops into sanctuaries.

Bozzuto Landscaping Co., located in Greenbelt, Md., has experienced a significant increase in requests for this style of landscaping from its clients. Branch Manager Chris Greene estimates that in his territory of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, more than half of new installations and renovations have utilized rooftop landscaping.

With the appeal of urban living on the rise, people who have been accustomed to suburban landscapes may find themselves missing trees and gardens, even as they enjoy the convenience of city life. "Rooftop landscaping incorporates nature into the urban environment and gives it the feel of a community in the suburbs – it's the best of both worlds," Greene says.

Furthermore, he continues, "This style of landscaping not only creates a tranquil living environment, it also offers a number of other benefits, including a reduction in air pollution." Rooftop landscaping may also cut energy costs by as much as 10 to 20 percent and prolong the life of the roof covering by shielding it from UV rays and temperature fluctuations. By absorbing and processing building heat as well as carbon dioxide emissions, rooftop landscaping helps offset the "urban island" effect, in which heat generated by concrete and other reflective urban materials can cause air temperatures to be up to 10 degrees hotter than in rural areas. Landscaped rooftops' vegetation also retains storm water and prevents polluted runoff from being channeled into lakes and other natural resources.

"Environmental responsibility – recycling, reducing air pollution, making use of all materials and space – is becoming increasingly important," Greene says. "By introducing more landscaped environments in urban settings, we're able to provide both environmental and aesthetic benefits. The environmental benefits and aesthetics go hand in hand."

The advantages of rooftop landscaping are well known in Europe, where 10 percent of flat roofs in Germany and 12 percent in Switzerland are already "green." Rooftop landscapers in these countries are backed by both legislative mandates and financial incentives. However, as more North American landscapers embrace this trend without widespread governmental support, they can face both logistical and financial obstacles. The support capabilities of the roof structure must be considered, along with the total weight of the fully-grown plant life, containers and moisture that will be retained. Adequate irrigation to prevent the flooding of interior structures is also essential. Plant materials



An example of the "green roofs" becoming popular atop commercial buildings. Photos: Bozzuto Landscape

must be able to thrive in shallow soil and in the often-harsh microclimate of exposed rooftops, where UV rays and wind can be unforgiving.

Rooftop landscaping also poses some unusual challenges. Large trees and plants must be delivered by crane and large amounts of soil deposited by specialized blower trucks. Crews often work without the typical installation equipment found on other project sites. Costs can be steep, if not prohibitive.

Despite such hurdles, Bozzuto Landscaping has provided rooftop gardens and courtyards for many projects in the Mid-Atlantic region. Some of their more dramatic projects required the use of 3,600 yards of soil, sophisticated irrigation systems, exterior lighting and site furnishings. The result: lush courtyard settings that enhance the recreational amenities available to residents.

Bozzuto Landscaping Co. is currently engaged in the installation of a rooftop garden at Spinnaker Bay, a waterfront property consisting of 32 luxury condominiums and 316 apartment residences currently under construction in Baltimore, Maryland. The centerpiece of the revitalized Inner Harbor East community, Spinnaker Bay plans to incorporate rooftop landscaping into its rooftop swimming pool area and dramatic fountain. White flowering trees, including magnolias and Snowdrift Crabapple, as well as colorful yellow perennials such as Happy Returns daylilies and Coreopsis Moonbeams, complement the rich blues, reds and purples of the harbor and its sunsets. Karl Forester and Fountain grasses add lushness and a feeling of sanctuary.

Bozzuto Landscaping also used this technique to beautify and bring life to the pool, hot tub and artificial putting green located atop a new luxury apartment community in Arlington, Va., and the pool and children's play area on the roof of a new residential community in Bethesda, Md. The company also completed a richly landscaped courtyard garden on the roof of an apartment community in Washington, D.C.

Greene projects that urban landscape architects and developers will continue to benefit from this lofty landscaping approach through an increase in container gardens as well.

A more modest project than full-scale rooftop landscaping, container gardening enables older buildings or unfavorable roof structures to enjoy some of the benefits of a "green" roof. Greene says of urban dwellers, "Everybody wants a garden, something nice to look at besides brick and concrete. This is a way to do that." — Jennifer Reitmeyer

*The author is corporate communications coordinator, Bozzuto Landscaping, Greenbelt, Md., and can be reached at 301/623-3647 or jreitmeyer@bozzuto.com.*







## CALENDAR

### Calendar Note

To ensure that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to *Lawn & Landscape Calendar*, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113.

**FEB. 14 – 17** TPI Midwinter Conference, Savannah, Ga. Contact: Turfgrass Producers International, [www.turfgrassod.org](http://www.turfgrassod.org), 800/405-8873

**FEB. 13 – 18** Middle Atlantic Hardscaping Trade Show 2006, Atlantic City, N.J. Contact: [www.mahts.com](http://www.mahts.com)

**FEB. 14 – 15** Chattanooga Association of Landscape Professionals Spring Express Short Course. Collegedale, Tenn. Contact: [info@chattanoogalandscapers.com](mailto:info@chattanoogalandscapers.com), 423/886-8874

**FEB. 14 – 16** Landscape Contractor's Association Winter Workshop. Ellicott City, Md. Contact: [www.lcamddcva.org](http://www.lcamddcva.org), 301-473-5678

**FEB. 15 – 16** 2006 California Landscape Contractors Association Landscape Industry Show and Convention, Los Angeles, Calif. Contact: [www.clca.org](http://www.clca.org), 916/830-2780

**FEB. 15 – 17** DeckExpo 2006, Memphis, Tenn. Contact: [www.deckexpo.com](http://www.deckexpo.com), 678/344-6283

**FEB. 20 – 24** International Erosion Control Association Environmental Connection 2006, Long Beach, Calif. Contact: [www.ieca.org](http://www.ieca.org), 800/455-4322

**FEB. 21** Third Sustainable Nursery Crop Production Conference, Laurel, Md. Contact: 301/596-9413

**FEB. 21** Rain Bird Regional Training Camp, Sacramento, Calif. Contact: [www.rainbird.com/training](http://www.rainbird.com/training), 800/498-1942

**FEB. 22** 2006 Southern California Plant Tour Days, Del Mar, Calif. Contact: [info@flowerandplant.org](mailto:info@flowerandplant.org), [www.planttourdays.org](http://www.planttourdays.org), 760/431-2572

**FEB. 22 – 25** Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association Annual Convention & Floral Expo 2006, Lake Buena Vista, Fla. Contact: [www.wffsa.org](http://www.wffsa.org), 888/289-7732

**FEB. 28 – MARCH 2** Western Pennsylvania Turf Conference & Trade Show, Monroeville, Pa. Contact: [www.paturf.org](http://www.paturf.org), 814/238-2402

**FEB. 28 – MARCH 3** Rain Bird Regional Training Camp, San Francisco, Calif. Contact: [www.rainbird.com/training](http://www.rainbird.com/training), 800/498-1942

**MARCH 1 – 3** National Truck Equipment Association Work Truck Show, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: [www.ntea.com](http://www.ntea.com), 800/441-6832

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

R. Lee Ermey, USMC veteran, TV show host, film star

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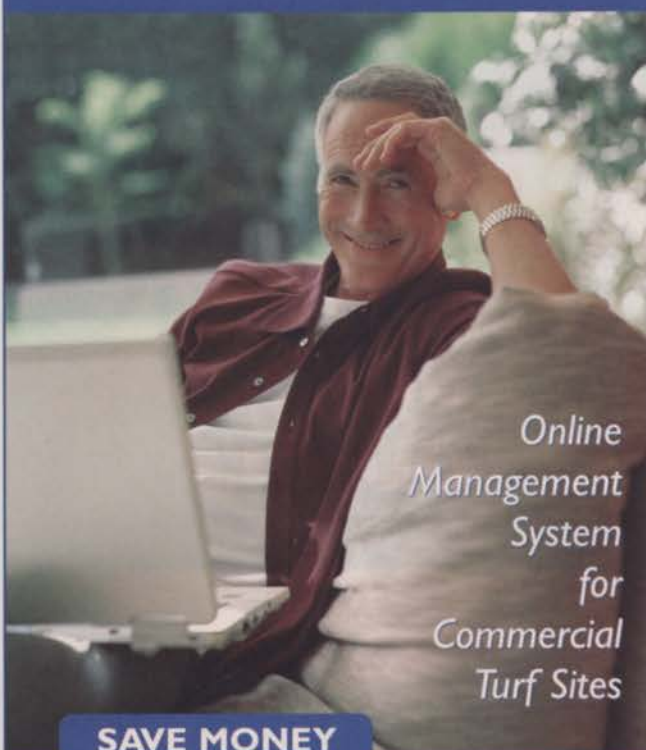
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## calendar > >

**MARCH 2** New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association 29th Annual Trade Show & Conference, Secaucus, N.J. Contact: [www.njlca.org](http://www.njlca.org), 201/664-6310

**MARCH 2 - 5** 2006 Nashville Lawn & Garden Show, Nashville, Tenn. Contact: [www.nashvillegardenandlandscapeshow.com](http://www.nashvillegardenandlandscapeshow.com), 615/876-7680

**MARCH 2 - 7** Canadian Golf Superintendents Association 57th Annual Canadian Turfgrass Conference, Vancouver, B.C. Contact: <http://cgasa/asicanada.net>, 905/602-8873

**MARCH 3 - 4** Ecological Landscaping Association's Winter Conference & Eco-Marketplace, Marlborough, Mass. Contact: [www.ecolandscaping.org](http://www.ecolandscaping.org), 508/877-7603 x3303

**MARCH 4** High Plains Landscape Workshop, Fort Collins, Colo. Contact: [www.fcgov.com/utilities/highplains.php](http://www.fcgov.com/utilities/highplains.php), 970/221-6877

**MARCH 6** Irrigation Association SMART Technologies for Irrigation Management, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: [www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org), 703/536-7080

**MARCH 6 - 8** Michigan Green Industry Association 19th Annual Trade Show & Conference, Novi, Mich. Contact: [www.landscape.org](http://www.landscape.org), 248/646-4992

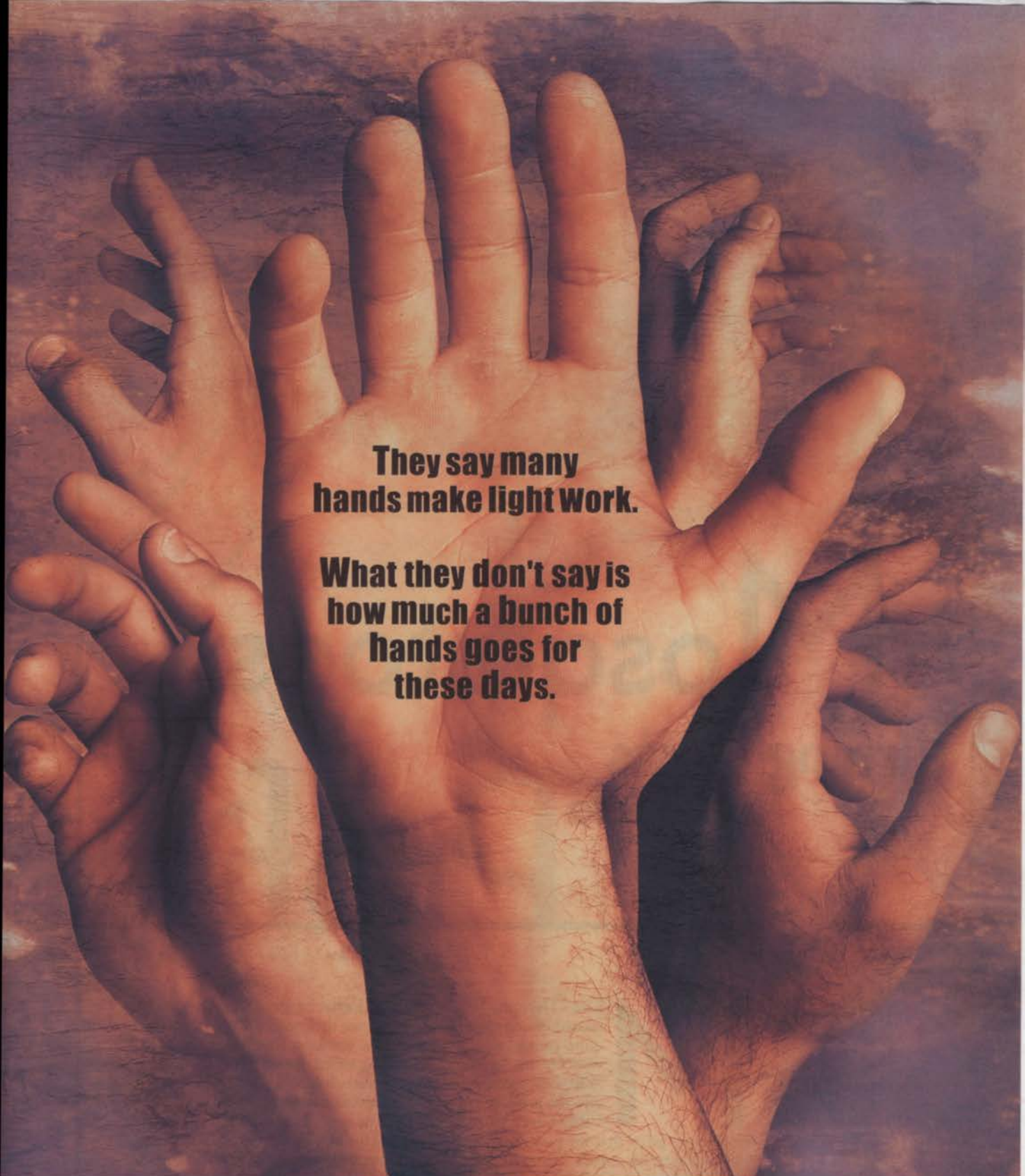
**MARCH 6 - 9** New England Regional Turfgrass Conference & Show, Providence, R.I. Contact: [www.nertf.org](http://www.nertf.org), 401/848-0004

**MARCH 7** Nassau Suffolk Landscape Gardener's Association 38th Annual Professional Plant, Turf & Tree Conference, Huntington, N.Y. Contact: [nslga2@optonline.net](mailto:nslga2@optonline.net), 631/665-2250

**MARCH 7** Landscape Lighting 101 at Kichler World Headquarters, Cleveland, Ohio. Contact: [mrybus@kichler.com](mailto:mrybus@kichler.com), [www.kichler.com/lisa](http://www.kichler.com/lisa)

**MARCH 7** National Arbor Day Foundation Trees, People & the Law Symposium, Columbia, Md. Contact: [nslga2@optonline.net](mailto:nslga2@optonline.net), 631/665-225

**MARCH 8** Virginia Turfgrass Council Erosion & Sediment Control Seminar, Fredericksburg, Va. Contact: [www.thevtc.org](http://www.thevtc.org), 757/464-1004



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Photo: United States Department of Agriculture

# Mosquitoes: Turning Pests *into* Profits

by kathleen franzinger

When lawn care operator Michael Hornung grew tired of slapping mosquitoes in his own yard, he hit upon a unique service opportunity.

**M**ichael Hornung started offering mosquito control services for one reason. "I hate mosquitoes," says the president of Valley Green Cos. In addition, given that the pesky bugs are abundant near his Sartell, Minn. location, offering the service made sense. After some lawn care customers inquired about mosquito control, Hornung decided to test out a couple of products in his back yard. It didn't take long before his neighbors noticed the lack of mosquitoes on his property. When he

explained what he was doing, they asked him to treat their yards. Word of mouth about the service spread from there, and Hornung rolled out the program on a once-a-month basis in 2002.

In addition to bringing in \$25,000 in annual revenue, Hornung says the program helps him better serve his existing customers. "It seems like nowadays more customers want a one-stop shop, and this is one more thing we can offer to help them," he says.

He views mosquito control as a great way to do just that. "It's a service that our customers really appreciate," he says. "It's just another service we can provide

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### business opportunities > > >

to help build that long-term relationship.”

**TAKING ON SKEETERS.** The first step to adding the service was getting each of his lawn care technicians licensed in mosquito control. The licensing process involved training from a book, followed by an exam. Hornung estimates it cost \$20 to \$25

was already using backpack sprayers for lawn care applications. To offer mosquito control, Hornung simply had to add one backpack sprayer to each vehicle. Doing only small-scale residential treatments, he didn't need to purchase any fogging equipment.

The program entails diagnosing the problem, treating the larvae stage and controlling adult mosquitoes. To

eggs before they hatch,” he explains.

To control adult mosquitoes, Hornung says there are a number of insecticides available. He recommends selecting one based on the time of year and length of control desired. He also suggests alternating products so the mosquitoes don't build up a tolerance to any one product. In addition, “contractors should talk to their local distributor about what products are registered in their state,” he says.

The full mosquito control package, including larvae and adult treatments, consists of two to four weeks between visits from May to October. The number of visits is really based on customer preference. “We talk to them about what they're trying to achieve and then base the spacing of each visit on that,” Hornung says.

He even has one customer on a

“Most people won't call until it hurts. We don't get a lot of calls on mosquito control until the mosquitoes are out and customers are slapping them.” – Michael Hornung

per book and \$90 for each technician to take the test.

In terms of equipment, expenses were minimal because the company

treat the larvae stage, Hornung uses mosquito dunks, which get thrown in stagnant water. “It's a biological product to take care of the mosquito



two-week rotation during the growing season. After this particular client's son was infected with West Nile Virus, he didn't want to take any chances with mosquitoes. "Until it affects you or a loved one, everyone's tolerance for it is different," Hornung says.

Not all customers are all on the full program. Some will call in the middle of summer and request only two or three adult treatments. Still others may be having a party or other big event and want their property sprayed one or two times beforehand.

But the one-time application is rare, Hornung says. "Once customers have had one application, and they see how much better it is for that three- to four-week period, they get on a program because it does make a big difference," he says.

**BLOOD MONEY.** Hornung's mosquito control is separate from the

company's lawn care program, meaning clients don't have to be lawn care customers to receive the service. That said, the company had about 130 customers receiving mosquito control

then do our best to take care of our current customers."

Only 13 percent of his lawn care customers also receive mosquito control, so there are definitely sales

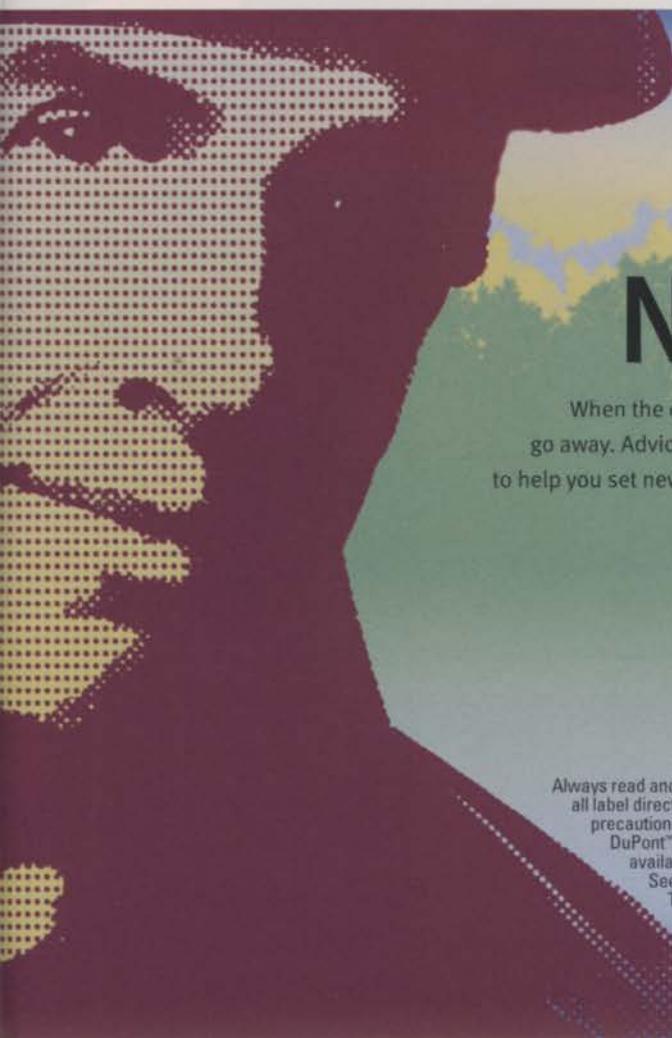
**"Some customers expect there to be zero mosquitoes. We remind customers that there are still going to be some mosquitoes because you can't get rid of them all."**

**- Michael Hornung**

last year and 85 to 90 percent of them were also lawn care customers.

That's the way Hornung prefers it, too. He isn't looking to add mosquito-control-only customers. "I'd rather be doing a lot of things for 100 people than doing a few things for 700 people," he says. "Our goal is to offer services that fit in our service mix and

opportunities within his existing customer base. Hornung has found word of mouth to be the most powerful sales tool. Last summer, he picked up 25 customers within two weeks - most of them neighbors of current customers. "We don't do it for a whole lot of people," he says. "But word of mouth travels fast for us."



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Hornung also informs customers about the service by having technicians leave a flier each time they visit a property. The black and white fliers mention that the service is available and how to get in touch with Valley Green. Hornung uses the fliers to promote different services throughout the season, and he staggers the mosquito control fliers with ones that tout the company's other add-on services. The fliers cost him about 10 to 12 cents a piece, and Hornung says he orders about 2,000 to 5,000 at a time depending on which service the flier is promoting.

But the program sells best when the mosquitoes are hungry and biting. About 40 customers joined the program last summer, Hornung says, adding that it's typical for most to sign up then. "Most people won't call until it hurts," Hornung says. "We don't get a lot of calls on mosquito control until the mosquitoes are out and customers are slapping them."

While the service may not be growing at a lightning pace, Hornung hasn't had any cancellations since the first year he offered it. "Customers will have more or less applications, but the customer count and revenues have grown," he says, adding that he consistently gains about 45 to 60 new mosquito control customers each year.

Hornung recommends anyone interested in adding the service to mention it when renewing customers from the previous year. "But you probably aren't going to get a big response until summer hits and you start leaving fliers about mosquito control," he says.

Before signing up customers, a pricing strategy needs to be in place. Hornung prices mosquito control by the square footage. He adds material costs and labor, and then factors in a 15 to 20 percent net profit, which is similar to the profit on his lawn care services. But he notes that if there is high demand and little competition in an area, a provider could increase

the markup. "You can charge more if you're the only game in town," he says.

If a property has a lot of non-lawn areas that need to be treated, such as ornamental beds, bushes, ponds and other water areas, Hornung will add a charge. If mosquito control on a 10,000-square-foot lawn is \$60, but there is also a section of trees that needs treatment, he suggests adding another \$25 to \$30, depending on the material and time it takes to cover the area. To ensure a profit, Hornung recommends measuring the square footage of the non-lawn area and pricing it the same way as the lawn treatment.

**PESKY POINTS.** With most mosquito control customers signing on in the middle of summer, scheduling can be problematic, says Hornung. It's not easy to efficiently schedule in late customers. "Customers who sign up for the program early on will get it done in the lawn care route," he says.





"But we have to make special trips for the late sign-ups."

If technicians will be in an area or on a certain property doing a lawn care application, Hornung can schedule a mosquito control application into their route. But it's not always that simple, he says. In an effort to smooth the process, he assigns technicians specific days of the week to do only mosquito control.

Another challenge Hornung has faced is getting customers to understand exactly what "mosquito control" means. "It's difficult to get customer expectations to meet reality," he says. "But it's also important to remember that customers don't really have expectations until you help set them."

Hornung relates the story of a customer who signed up for one application and, five weeks later, called Hornung to complain he had mosquitoes. "Well, of course he did because it was time for another application," Hornung says. "But he was upset that

the application didn't last."

To eliminate this type of misunderstanding, Hornung educates customers about what to expect from the program before they sign the contract. The key is to undersell and overdeliver. He explains the program can reduce mosquito populations by 75 to 80 percent, but he points out that 20 to 25 percent of the population will remain. "Some customers expect there to be zero mosquitoes," he says. "We remind customers that there are still going to be some mosquitoes because you can't get rid of them all."

Some customers will also ask if they still need to spray themselves once they're on the program, and Hornung makes it clear that they will. Complete elimination isn't possible, but the goal is to reduce the number of mosquitoes to a level where repellent spray is effective. "We try to educate them upfront," he says. "It sounds like you're just making excuses if you try to explain afterward."

Hornung says it's also important to set up guidelines on what you will and won't do as part of the program, such as when it rains and an application is wiped out. "It's important to read and follow the label directions for each product and relay that information to the customer," he says, adding that this was something he didn't do very well when he first offered the service. Now, he is clear on the first meeting with customers. He explains how many times a technician will visit the property and what they should expect in terms of length or percent of control.

Despite these challenges, Hornung says mosquito control is worth it. "It's one more thing we can offer customers to help them," he says. He advises anyone thinking of adding the service to research it thoroughly. "The best advice I can give is to call someone in your area who's doing it or possibly a supplier – someone who could mentor or train you for a fee or for free." **LL**



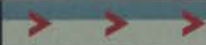
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# Resist Commodity Thinking



Who needs cost-conscious customers? Not Duke's Landscape Management. They woo strategic-minded clients with better communication and fresh ideas.

by nicole wisniewski

In the spring of 2004, Duke's Landscape Management, Hackettstown, N.J., lost some clients during the renewal process for what Director of Corporate Development John Unorski describes as "reasons we could have avoided."

"They thought things were getting stagnant – they didn't think we were giving them fresh ideas," Unorski explains. "We developed good long-lasting relationships with our project manager clients and thought they would never leave us ... but we were wrong."

With more competition erupting in the marketplace everyday making it easy for clients to change service providers, Duke's Landscape fell victim to what Unorski calls "commodity thinking."

Commodity buyers, company President Eric Cross explains, know what they

want and typically won't pay more than necessary for a service. To be successful with these customers, companies must reduce costs. As a seller, there is little you can do to create value except make your service cheaper.

But Cross didn't want to steer his company in this direction. He didn't want to be considered a mass-produced, unspecialized service.

Duke's Landscape *did* want to retain and attract customers who made sound, strategic buying decisions. With these clients, Duke's could create value by what they personally brought to the relationship. "We wanted to help our clients find ways around the obstacles they encounter daily and propose new ways to do more with the same investment," Cross explains. "We wanted to bring more to our customer relationships



## duke's landscape management

**OWNER/PRESIDENT:** Eric Cross

**HEADQUARTERS:** Hackettstown, N.J.

**FOUNDED:** Started in 1983; first full year in business was 1986

**EMPLOYEES:** 14 year-round, 58 seasonal; 90 percent Hispanic/H-2B workers

**SERVICE BREAKOUT:** 51 percent maintenance/mowing; 25 percent snow and ice removal services; 11 percent installation only (no design); 6 percent chemical lawn care; 3 percent design/build; 2 percent tree and ornamental services

**CLIENT BREAKOUT:** 52 percent commercial (office parks, hospitals, educational facilities, etc.); 38 percent commercial residential (condominiums, apartment buildings, etc.); 7 percent government municipal and 3 percent residential

### REVENUE BREAKOUT:

**2006 Expected:** .....\$4.55 million

**2005 Revenue:** .....\$3.9 million

**2004 Revenue:** .....\$3.5 million

**2003 Revenue:** .....\$3.4 million

**2002 Revenue:** .....\$2.8 million

**2001 Revenue:** .....\$2.6 million

**2000 Revenue:** .....\$2.4 million

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### THE THREE CHALLENGES FACING BUSINESS TODAY:

1. Increases in major expenses, such as insurance, fuel and labor, are outpacing increases in hourly or contract rates.
2. Attracting and retaining crew members in a seasonal business.
3. Keeping the "magic" going. We have long been considered an innovator when it comes to business systems and practices. Our challenge is to not allow that spirit to get diluted as we grow and the business climate changes.

### CONTACT INFO:

Duke's Landscape Management  
50 Route 46 West, Hackettstown, N.J.  
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FX: 908/850-5516  
Web: [www.dukeslm.com](http://www.dukeslm.com)  
E-mail: [eric@dukesim.net](mailto:eric@dukesim.net)

than the standard service. We wanted to create real value."

The problem? "We were resting on our laurels," Unorski says. "We realized we had to focus on our customer niche and come up with some fresh ideas to improve our customer communication and overall service and then promote these ideas to current and prospective clients."

So, Duke's Landscaping focused on service solutions and implemented them in the spring of 2005. The results have transformed their company. "There's an old adage that says, 'Value or beauty is in the eye of the beholder,'" Unorski says. "In our business, part of our challenge is to make sure property managers don't take this value for granted and that they see it and

understand that our company provides more than just a commodity service."

**STEP 1 – RECOGNIZE COMMODITY BUYERS.** More than two years ago, Duke's Landscape responded to a potential client's bid via an online auction with five to seven other bidders. Companies were not recognizable by name – each was identified only by the color dot they had flashing on the screen. Duke's dot was blue. "Based on the specifications, we would typically bid \$50,000 for the job, and my walk away price was \$44,000," Cross says, explaining his mindset when he went into the bid. "After an hour passed, we were down to \$29,000. Everyone was undercutting each other just to get the job. To do the work for that price and make money, I would have to ignore the specifications and cut corners. It was then that I realized more commercial customers were starting to treat landscaping as a commodity – we were all just a different color dot. When bidding new work, the last thing we wanted to do was fax in a bid and have a client put our information in a matrix with a different logo and price and then compare all of the bidders as if they were all the same."

Cross walked away from the job and has avoided online auction-type bidding ever since. But the experience stuck with him.

For new accounts, Duke's Landscape Management's close rate is only 15 percent. But those at Duke's don't consider this a poor number because they realized the potential customers they were seeking might not be right for the company in the first place.

Therefore, the first step to battling commodity thinking was recognizing commodity buyers and the company's own customer niche. "When you try to be all things to all people, it's difficult," Cross explains, adding that sometimes the desire to win is greater than knowing you should say no. "There are jobs out there that we said we wouldn't bid on, but did anyway. That would explain our low close ratio on new clients."

Like many other commercial maintenance service providers, including Duke's competitors, the company has always tried increasing its cache of particularly attractive commercial clients, such as large office buildings, because they garner a lot of attention and look good on a company's

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## making the grade

Sometimes customers who consider landscaping a commodity and can be bought by lowest price are unavoidable. For this reason, Duke's Landscape Management, Hackettstown, N.J., grades the bidding process to help determine if a bid is worth investing time in.

"When we submit bid for a property, we like to grade the process and get a feel for the situation and whether there's a 50, 20 or 80 percent chance that we'll get the job," explains company President Eric Cross. "We look at how set their numbers are as far as sales goals. If it's a situation where the buyer doesn't want us to spend a lot of time discussing our service with them and just wants us to fax over a price, then we feel they will not change and are looking strictly at getting the cheapest price with little regard for quality. We mark that as a low chance of getting the work and usually don't bid on that type of project.

"We are looking for clients who are willing to pay a fair amount for a great job," Cross adds.

But this type of client isn't easy to recognize just by looking at the job specifications. So, Duke's will visit the job and inspect it, making sure the specifications match the job that's being done. "If the specifications are great but the quality their current provider is delivering is low, then that contractor isn't following the specifications and the property manager isn't holding them to those specifications," Cross says. "In this situation, I try to talk frankly with the potential client. I say, 'Obviously, you're not using these specifications – do you want us to submit a bid based on what's being done currently?' By doing this, the

client knows we've inspected the property and compared the work to the specifications, that we care about quality and that we care about what they truly need from a landscape contractor."

Another reason Duke's Landscape spends time grading the bidding process is because there is a trend in the New Jersey area where the owner of a site is out of state and they choose an inexpensive vendor with little regard for quality because they don't see the site regularly. "They don't want to put a lot of time and energy into picking a company that they can have a long-term relationship with or altering their specifications based on what they really need," Cross explains. "They want to pay as little as possible to get the work done and not worry about it. We try and stay away from that type of work."

And, despite the extra time Duke's takes to inspect the property and grade the bidding process, a few mismatched prospects sometimes slip through the cracks, but the company continues to try and learn from these instances. "Most of the bids we get are people we're soliciting to, whether we're sending them mailers, calling them on the phone or inviting them to our annual open house," Cross says, adding that this makes it easier to recognize a desirable customer. "When we do get a call out of the blue it's because it is a member of the Building Owners and Managers Association, which we are a member of, or they saw our trucks at another property in the area. When this happens, we just do the best we can to research the job and find out why it's going out to bid and whether or not it's a property that fits our niche. If it's not a good property for us, we'll politely decline the opportunity to bid the work."

resume of work. But there was a part of the commercial market that Duke's thrived in – one that his competitors stayed away from – and that was condominiums and townhouses. "That's where we had the best reputation and that's what our company was built on," Unorski explains. "While our competitors hated the fact that these clients were more like residential clients since you had the tenants in addition to the project managers to

please, we found we were the most efficient at these types of jobs."

Plus, most condominium-type properties want their maintenance done late in the week, similar to residential clients, so they look nice and can enjoy them over the weekend, while other commercial clients, such as office parks, want their maintenance done early in the week so they are presentable through the workdays. "We avoid scheduling pitfalls

this way," Cross says. "Also, because our competitors don't go after these clients, there isn't a lot of pressure from outside sources and that helps us solidify this business."

**STEP 2 – KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER.** Once Duke's identified their niche client, the next step was building better relationships with them to bring additional work from them as well as referrals. "Our biggest

realization was that instead of always dreaming of the next big client, we had to take better care of the clients we have today."

To comprehend their clients' mindsets, Duke's decided to narrow down what was important to them. And for property managers on condominiums and townhouses, this meant being another set of eyes on their sites for them, Unorski says. "We needed to be their friend and let them know about things that are going on around their properties," he explains. "Say someone is illegally dumping behind their unit and we notice this, that is something we need to tell them or they might never know otherwise. This way we can become an ally to them. In a business relationship, those who become friends are much less likely to cancel the relationship than those who do not."

Also, Unorski says while brainstorming he realized many times they are on their clients' 16- to 400-acre

**F**inding someone to fill an open position can be easy, but finding the right person is more difficult. "Hiring the right person the first time makes such a big difference," shares Duke's Landscape Management President Eric Cross. To find employees with the right attitude, Cross always asks one question during interviews: "Tell me about your high school experience."

The reason? "I find that people who liked high school and took part in extracurricular activities and sports are good team players," Cross says. "But if they hated high school, got out early and were loners, I find that they may be able to do the job but tend to be very difficult to work with. The skills for the job are easy to train, but a bad attitude is really hard to get rid of."

Recruiting employees with the right attitude is part of an analogy that Cross likes to remind himself of regularly: "The team with the best people who are able to execute the company's plan is the team that will win."

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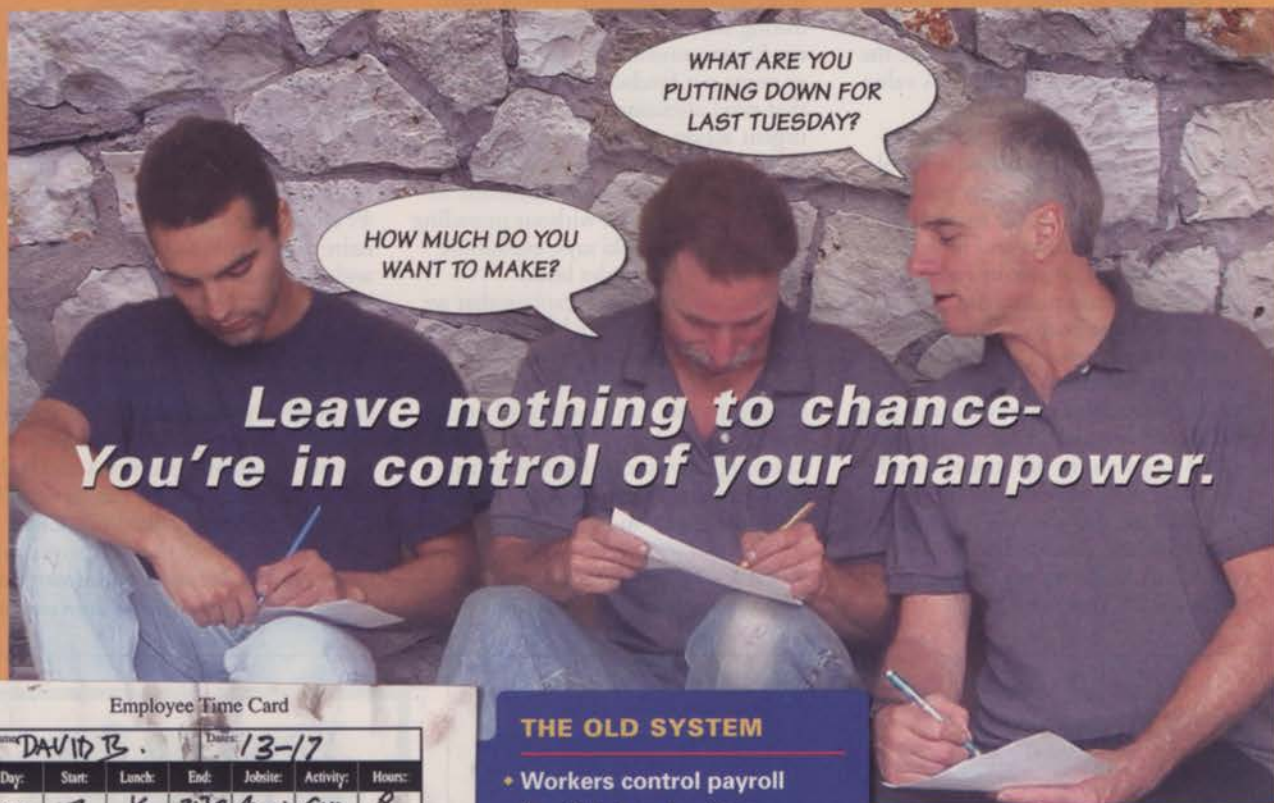
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## Employee Time Card

Day:	Start:	Lunch:	End:	Jobite:	Activity:	Hours:
Monday	7	1/2	3:30	Morris Gen		8
Tuesday	7	1/2	3:30	'	'	8
Wednesday	7	1/2	4	'	'	8 1/2
Thursday	7	1/2	4	'	'	8 1/2
Friday	7	1/2	4	'	'	8 1/2

Employee Signature: *David B.* Total Hours: **41 1/2**

## THE OLD SYSTEM

- ♦ Workers control payroll
- ♦ Illegible handwritten timecards
- ♦ Cannot verify locations or hours
- ♦ Accuracy based on workers' memories
- ♦ Impossible to verify overtime

## Employee Report

David Burns

Day	Start	End	Activity	Hours
Mon 2/13	7:08 AM	12:05 PM	Irrigation	4:57 hours
	12:41 PM	3:22 PM	Irrigation	2:41 hours 7:38 hours
Tue 2/14	7:12 AM	12:07 PM	Irrigation	4:55 hours
	12:43 PM	3:23 PM	Irrigation	2:40 hours 7:35 hours
Wed 2/15	7:12 AM	12:02 PM	Irrigation	4:50 hours
	12:46 PM	3:49 PM	Irrigation	3:03 hours 7:53 hours
Thu 2/16	7:17 AM	12:19 PM	Planting	5:02 hours
	12:50 PM	3:46 PM	Planting	2:56 hours 7:58 hours
Fri 2/17	7:13 AM	12:07 PM	Planting	4:54 hours
	12:43 PM	3:39 PM	Planting	2:55 hours 7:49 hours

Employee total **38:53 hours**

Signature: *David Burns* David Burns

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properties more often than their customers are. "So if we make it a practice to observe not only their landscape but to watch out for other potential problems, such as falling gutters, shingles in disrepair, etc., they will appreciate the head's up, which of course adds value to their service," he says.

At the same time, Duke's recognized they needed to be more visible to their clients. "If the only pieces of paper our customers see from us are responses to inquiries and renewal forms, then we are asking to be replaced," Unorski points out.

To alleviate both of these issues, Duke's implemented a site status report in late 2004. The idea for the form came after a condominium project the company had for 12 years decided to go out to bid to seek another provider. "We were on the site a lot and realized that the miscommunication with this client might mean that they don't know we are there as often as we are," Cross says.

The point of the site status report, which is sent to clients via fax every time a manager visits the site – usually three to four times a month or more during the busy season, is to let the client know someone was there and also to point out landscape concerns, items that need attention, issues that need urgent action, as well as recommend an action plan. "There is nothing more frustrating than for someone to point out a problem without providing a solution," Unorski says, explaining why the form includes both.

"On the form we'll explain that we looked around, the site looks good, but there was a broken irrigation head by unit 314 so we repaired it or that it's raining and we can't mow until next week," Cross shares. "Sometimes just knowing why something isn't getting done per the normal schedule makes it easier for clients to understand."

#### STEP 3 – THINK PROACTIVELY.

The site status report is one of a group

of ideas Duke's Landscape Management uses to better client relationships and, most importantly, "think proactively," Cross explains.

To gauge how Duke's Landscape crews are doing in the client's eyes and get improvement ideas for the future, the company conducts a customer survey once a year in mid-July.

Cross conducts the surveys himself in person or over the phone to Duke's 49 clients. The two-page questionnaire asks clients to read statements and choose whether they strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree with them. The statements go over information, such as if the crews and branch managers are helpful, positive and professional, whether the company is proactive in solving the client's problems and if the customer is happy with the service. If a customer strongly disagrees, Cross will ask them what the company can do to get a better score and is working

*continued on page 64, sidebar on page 65*



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## blue flag special

**S**imilar to a homeowner, a resident living in a condominium or townhouse is picky about his or her outdoor space – no matter how small it is or how much of it truly is their space to complain about. And when this tenant grumbles, the first person to hear it is the property manager, who immediately becomes frustrated with the landscape contractor for causing this headache.

For Duke's Landscape Management, Hackensack, N.J., the main complaints from these residents relate to little reminders they regularly warn property managers about. But with so many tenants on one property, crews have a hard time remembering which one wanted their azaleas fertilized and which one preferred none.

To avoid these types of complaints, Duke's

Landscape decided to use colored flags on these sites to warn crews of specific "No Work" zones. For example, blue flags say, "No Bed Care," while red flags read, "No Pruning." The flags cost approximately \$70 for 1,000, according to company President Eric Cross, and are displayed in specific areas where tenants have these common requests.

"The flags were an idea we came up with as a visual reminder to our crews and as a means to avoid miscommunication," Cross explains. "It's also a part of our new strategy, which is thinking proactively. Because of this small extra effort, the tenant doesn't get irate and the property manager doesn't have to call us and complain. It saves everyone the trouble and keeps us in the property manager's good graces."

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continued from page 62

on a way to make sure Duke's acts on these requests.

One of the systems in place to help make this happen is providing each employee in a management position with a yearly calendar and driving them to update it during regular meetings or more often. Typically, each branch has seven crews of three to four people each and a foreman, and schedules are made one month in advance. "We do this so managers don't fall victim to just putting out the fires of today and only focusing on this week or month, but also next month and the month after that as well," Cross says. "We want to always be doing a better job instead of doing things last minute."

Another way the company thinks proactively is to conduct annual formal walk-throughs with clients, as well as preparing five-year plans for them.

"At least once and possibly twice a year, we schedule a formal walk-through with customers," Unorski

says. "We have found that the key is to invite as many people as reasonable, i.e. condominium board members and other office people, in addition to the property manager. This gives the larger audience an opportunity to buy into any suggestions we might have about upgrades and other improvements. In addition, a formal walk-through gives us an opportunity to demonstrate our horticultural knowledge and expertise in person. Customers, hopefully, walk away understanding that part of what they are paying for is our knowledge and training."

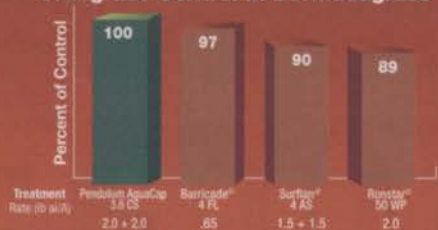
Also, before, or sometimes after, a customer signs a contract, a Duke's branch manager will sit down with that client and put together a five-year maintenance plan. "We walk the site, talk about things we both see and look at the property in its entirety," Cross says, adding that they plan for possible irrigation repairs and other maintenance issues that may be needed over this length of time.

"This way, instead of going to the client with repeated estimates for mums in the fall or snow plowing in the winter, we discuss the entire year, as well as the next four years, at once and what each item costs," Cross explains. "Then, clients pick and choose what they want or don't want. The beauty of it is that they have the pricing up front and can plan their budgets ahead of time."

The five-year plan will include maintenance and small installation or design/build projects that need to be completed. But, more importantly, the plan will highlight ways Duke's can improve that client's property each year. "The idea is we want the property to look better each year than the year before," Cross says. "So, landscape items that are prematurely aging the property like overgrown mature trees, large junipers that have been sheared into a ball and evergreens that are tall, spindly and have lost their natural shape are addressed here. We



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1. Oklahoma State University, 2004. Evaluated 168 days after first application in March. Partial Data Shown.  
2. North Carolina State University, 2003. Evaluated 145 days after first application in March. Partial Data Shown.




remove the overgrown shrubs and install roses and perennials. Mature trees that were ignored for many years are now maintained. Old broken concrete walks are replaced with pavers. Maybe they need a new privacy hedge or a patio near the cafeteria. It's sort of like an extreme makeover for large properties, and we help them plan and budget for the rejuvenation."

Implementing this look-ahead was an idea that came out of a brainstorming meeting. "We just thought, 'What would we do if we were them?'" Cross explains. "If I wasn't offered a five-year plan so I could allocate the money for capital expenses properly each year, I'd be upset. If I was the client and my landscaper came to me in September, pushing me quickly to sign a contract and spend money on mums, I'd be frustrated. The five-year plan is a win-win for everybody. There is no pressure or pricing surprises and the client is truly thinking about what they want to do to better the site over

the next five years vs. whether we're just trying to get more money from them throughout the year."

By implementing these strategic solutions, Duke's Landscape Management is enhancing its current client relationships. "We want to continue to plan ahead," Cross says. "It just makes sense – if we're not right in front of them when they go to bid, we still might lose the opportunity, despite all of these efforts. We have a call list of all of our clients contact information that we review monthly. If we notice that a client is going to bid next November, we'll make sure to call them in October to touch base. But in addition to that, we have to communicate with them regularly throughout the contract or our last minute correspondence could be too late. It's the only way we can ensure regular communication and hopefully exceed our clients' expectations so they don't think about accepting another service provider's low bid."

And as more commercial landscape maintenance companies crop up in the New Jersey area, Duke's trusts that this proactive thinking will keep them from ever losing clients again for reasons they could have evaded. "The commercial maintenance market is becoming increasingly competitive and cost-conscious, and loyalty is becoming a thing of the past," Unorski says. "We don't want customers to take us for granted and we don't want to become routine. Giving our customers an extra pair of eyes, letting them know that we pay regular visits to their properties (as well as provide solutions to potential problems), and demonstrating our knowledge during a walk-through all helps separate our company from the competition." 

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Check our February Online Extras section to view Duke's Landscape Management's customer survey and site status report.

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# To Catch a Thief



by andrew mauschbaug

Follow these steps to prevent employees and by-passers from stealing your plant materials, power equipment and hand tools.

**L**eaving equipment outside after hours is often convenient, but it presents a dilemma for landscape contractors. Theft is a multi-billion-dollar problem for business owners nationwide. Even if only small items are taken, their value can add up quickly. So, it is worthwhile to carefully consider taking measures to discourage thieves. A few simple and inexpensive steps can go a long way toward protecting your business against after-hours theft.

**THEFT PREVENTION PLANNING.** Developing a written policy making it clear that the company will prosecute thieves who are caught is the first

step in theft prevention planning. In addition, keep accurate records of your inventory. Photograph and tag expensive seasonal items and equipment so that, in the event of a theft, you will know exactly what was taken and will be able to describe each item in detail and/or provide photos. Keep records of serial numbers, purchase receipts or other proof of ownership.

Unfortunately, employee theft is also a concern. Employee theft costs businesses nationwide mil-



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lions of dollars every year. To prevent employee theft before it starts, carefully hire and screen prospective employees. Establish and enforce clear company policies on employee theft. Post the policy in the work area to discourage theft. Limit access to keys, computerized records and alarm codes.

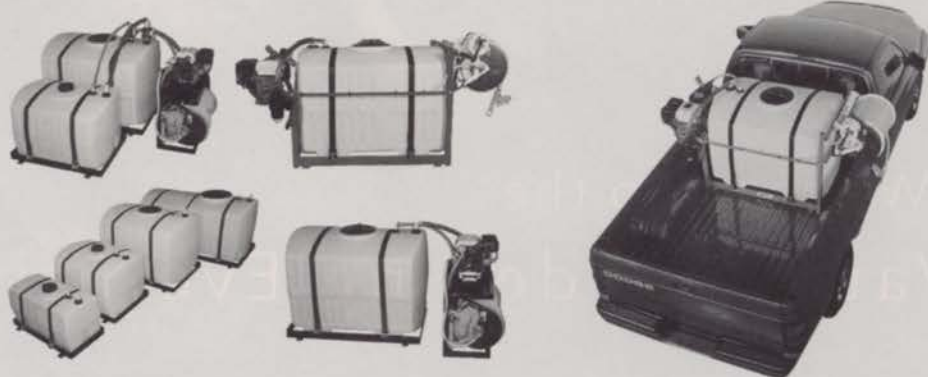
Communication with local law enforcement is key in protecting your business from after-hours theft. Talking to local crime prevention officers and making them aware of your operating hours can be helpful because police can patrol nurseries and garden centers on a periodic basis. Inform police that anyone seen on the property during non-operating hours can be viewed with suspicion. If a theft does occur, be aware that thieves quickly sell or dispose of stolen goods. Speed in reporting

these matters to authorities is essential.

**ELIMINATING OPPORTUNITY.**

It's impossible to prevent every theft, but if you make it difficult for them to succeed, thieves may go elsewhere. The opportunist thief does not want to take longer than two or three minutes to commit a crime. The following steps can make access to your merchandise more difficult and reduce the likelihood of your landscape yard or office being targeted by thieves:

- Store all materials and equipment in highly visible, well lighted locations.
- Install security systems, such as outside security lights with motion detector sensors, alarms, magnetic tags or video surveillance cameras.
- Arrange displays so that missing items are obvious. Place small items in neat rows or patterns so that missing items could be easily noticed.
- If you have storage sheds on the property, make sure the sheds have



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\* Case price based on Hunter PGP 4" rotor list price of \$21.95 per rotor as of October 1, 2005.

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adequate security and that door and window frames cannot be forced in.

- Prune trees, hedges and shrubs near greenhouses, sheds or other storage facilities and entrances to prevent thieves working undetected.
- Consider keeping thief deterrent shrubs such as those with prickly leaves and thorns close to vulner-

able entry points. Plants with thorns include Berberis, Pyracantha, Yucca, Gooseberry and Worcesterberry.

- Spread gravel on paths so that intruders can be easily heard when walking on them.
- Bricks can be added to pots of shrubs, trees and flowers to make it difficult to carry them away.

- Lock away expensive merchandise when possible. If these items cannot be locked away, tie them down or chain them with anchoring devices. Anchoring devices can be used to secure garden furniture, lawn ornaments and valuable trees and shrubs. Avoid storing expensive items in poly-covered greenhouses as thieves have been known to cut through the poly-cover and steal cash registers and other expensive equipment.
- A fence around the area containing outdoor merchandise can aid in theft prevention. Putting a trellis with a prickly rose bush growing along the top of the fence can also be a deterrent.

In addition to plant material, thieves are particularly interested in large equipment and hand tools.

People who buy stolen goods usually don't want equipment that is eas-



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"It's impossible to prevent every theft, but if you make it difficult for them to succeed, thieves may go elsewhere. The opportunist thief does not want to take longer than two to three minutes to commit a crime."

- Andrew Mauschbaug

ily identifiable. One of the first things they do is rip off the data plate with the serial number on it. That's why it's so important to engrave the serial number on each piece of equipment. One serial number location should be visible, and the other well-hidden in case thieves grind off the visible number. In addition:

- Keep a written record of each vehicle serial number with color photos of the vehicle viewed from four differ-

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ent angles.

- Paint the equipment in company colors including the company logo.
- Install anti-theft devices such as fuel cut-offs, track locks or alarms, hydraulic arm locks or hydraulic bypasses.
- Restrict the number of keys, keep a key inventory, and assign them on

an as-needed basis.

- Contact equipment dealers for specific anti-theft devices developed for their products.
- Display notices stating that equipment is security marked.

**PREVENTING THEFTS OF SMALL TOOLS.** Employees are more likely to

steal small items such as hand tools. Tools can be protected after hours by securing them in locked trailers or tool chests. To prevent pilferage during the day, make sure all equipment is marked. Inventory all tools periodically and consider use of a sign-out sheet for tools.

In some cases it may be difficult to identify which tools are the employer's and which belong to the employee. One way to deal with this problem is to mark all company tools with an



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“Inform police that anyone seen on the property during non-operating hours can be viewed with suspicion. If a theft does occur, be aware that thieves quickly sell or dispose of stolen goods. Speed in reporting these matters to authorities is essential.”

– Andrew Mauschbaug

etching tool. Employees should be encouraged to mark any personal tools with their names.

The costs incurred as a result of after-hours theft can be damaging. Taking the steps outlined above can help protect your business – and your bottom line. By developing a company policy, hiring and training competent employees, communicating with local law enforcement and preparing your landscape and equipment yard and/or garden center and office effectively, you can improve security and reduce opportunities for thieves to strike.

*The author is assistant vice president of loss control, Hortica Insurance, Edwardsville, Ill. He can be reached at 800/851-7740 or via [www.hortica-insurance.com](http://www.hortica-insurance.com).*

USE READER SERVICE # 46

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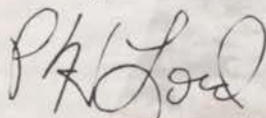
Enter, PRO Landscape software – the premiere landscape design software helping you sell better, plan better and bid better. Through the use of photo-realistic imaging, as well as night and holiday lighting features, PRO Landscape makes selling jobs easier by letting your clients envision just how beautiful their landscapes can be with your designs. Our computer-aided design (CAD) tools allow you to quickly create accurate plans and the estimating module lets you generate not just an accurate bid, but a professional looking customer presentation, with just a few clicks. All of this is available in one, easy-to-use software package.

Since the early 1990s, PRO Landscape software has had a hand in the success of thousands of landscape contractors, designers and landscape architects across the country and around the world, helping them save time and be more profitable.

This year, we're proud to release our 12<sup>th</sup> version of PRO Landscape software, with a number of new features and functions including more than a thousand new images, the ability to create complete customer proposals in seconds, and many other features to make designing faster and more realistic. In addition, PRO Landscape is the first design software to provide plant names in Spanish. These new features are the result of our dedication to continually bringing more innovations and valuable tools to our existing customer base and to future customers like you.

Our mission continues to be providing you with the best landscape design package possible, helping you to save time, make more money and help you gain more satisfied customers. We will continue to provide you and all our customers with the landscape design tools you need to take your businesses to the next level. Your success is our top priority!

Sincerely,



Peter H. Lord  
President, Drafix Software



# Believe Your Eyes

**T**he phrase "sight unseen" makes most consumers nervous. Would you buy a house without taking a walk-through? A new mower without a ride and drive?

Not likely. So think about how many of your design/build clients would be interested in touring their finished landscapes before you install them. PRO Landscape Software's newest version make this wish a reality more than ever before.

"We used to hand-draw designs with circles representing different plants," says Chris Walter, owner, Computerized Landscape Design, Kansas City, Mo. "If I told the customer, 'These circles represent burning bushes, I'd still have to show them a horticulture book or visit a nursery to show them exactly what a burning bush is. Even then, the customer might not have a solid concept of how their landscape would look. PRO Landscape software takes away all of that guesswork."

Walter has been using PRO Landscape from Drafix Software since it debuted in 1992 and, compared to other design software he's used, says PRO Landscape sent his business through the roof. "That year, I doubled my



sales," he says. "We added \$100,000 worth of business in one year and it's all in the pictures – people love to see what they're buying."

Drafix Software President Pete Lord agrees. "There is an old cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words," he says. "When you can show someone

what their landscape design will look like the new cliché is, 'A picture is worth a thousand dollars,' – at least!"

Mike McQuay, landscape manager at Stark Brothers Nursery & Orchards, Louisiana, Mo., says his company used to close

50 percent of its jobs before using PRO Landscape. "Once we learned about this software, we started using it our business and implemented our own photos in addition to what Drafix already offers, we started making more sales," he says, crediting PRO Landscape with the company's 98-percent close rate on design/build jobs in recent years – because customers could visualize their projects.

With tools refined over the last 11 editions, PRO Landscape's 12th and newest version

is easier to use than ever before. Of the more than two dozen new features offered in Version 12, Walter says one of the aspects he takes the most advantage of is the image library that now boasts more than 5,000 images since Version 12 contains 1,000 new images. Simply upload a digital image of a client's house or building and use the fully customizable image libraries to place realistic images of trees, shrubs, annuals and perennials in the virtual landscape. Designers can incorporate everything from ground covers to hardscaping to night and holiday lighting – another tool that's been updated in Version 12. In a fraction of the time it takes to hand-draw a design, PRO Landscape designers can create and sell landscapes before clients' very eyes.

"Typically, it would take me twice as long to hand-draw a CAD design if I were using PRO Landscape," says Brett Seltz of Enterprise Construction. By not having to erase and re-draw when changes need to be made, Seltz says he has more time to create more designs. "I love the flexibility the program offers," he adds.



## New Features

Version 12 of PRO Landscape software offers more than two dozen new features to make your work easier and even more impressive. Here are a few exciting additions to the program:

### GENERAL

- Instant Customer Proposals: Generate a proposal with one mouse click

- Bilingual Plant Materials: Plant names in English and Spanish

### IMAGE EDITOR

- Over 1,000 new images
- Quick Draw Tool: Draw multiple objects quickly and easily
- Randomize Command: Make a large planting of a single plant type look more realistic

- Rendering tool: Give designs the look of charcoal, watercolors, an impressionist painting or many other new options

- Snow Effect: Add falling snow to highlight a holiday decor design or winter scene

### PLANNER

- Symbol Editor: Easily create and modify symbols

- Clustering Tool: Turn overlapping plantings into a single symbol to highlight the group.

# top-notch Tech Support

Computers...they're only human. Or, at least they're subject to human error. Whether an operator clicks too fast and makes the wrong selection or has trouble importing an image, the tech support team at Kansas City, Mo.-based Drafix Software has answers for all of its PRO Landscape customers' technical questions.

"Just like any software, it takes some time to learn how the bells and whistles of PRO Landscape's design imaging and computer-aided design (CAD) tools work and how you can get the most out of them," says Brett Seltz of Enterprise Construction. "I've been using the software for more than 10 years and I'm very comfortable with it now, but there are still times when I have questions. One of the things Drafix has going for it is that the company has unbelievable technical support."

Drafix President Pete Lord notes that PRO Landscape includes video tutorials and a comprehensive user manual to help customers learn the software. "If for some reason those tools don't get them where they need to be, we offer free lifetime technical support," he adds. "That's rare since many software companies have gone

to charging \$25 to \$100 just to talk to a real person."

Seltz says he's given the Drafix tech support team a call when working on collaborative projects with builders and architects. "I'll sometimes work with building contractors who are required to submit a full set of plans for a proposed property to a neighbor-

hood architectural review committee," Seltz explains. "There have been instances where I've been asked to have landscape designs for these projects turned around in one day. If I get to a sticking point, I can e-mail the plan I'm working on to the tech support team at Drafix and they'll either physically call me on the phone and walk me through the mistake I'm making or they'll instant

message me and we'll clear it up over the Internet." Even with a tight timeframe, Seltz says the Drafix tech support team has never let him down. "I've never had an experience where they weren't able to get back to me on time or were unable to fix the problem," he says. "It's really unbelievable."

Mike McQuay agrees. "The Drafix staff has bent over backwards to make sure we're happy and make things easy," says the landscape manager for Stark Brothers Nursery & Orchards, Louisiana, Mo. "They have a great deal of product knowledge and make every effort to help us get to know our software better. Plus, they use customers' problems and suggestions to incorporate updates and better tools in new editions of the software."

Lord says many PRO Landscape features, such as seasonal changes and shadows on CAD symbols, have come from user suggestions. "We pride ourselves on having innovative features in every new version of PRO Landscape," he says. "The majority of those new ideas come directly from our customers or the questions they ask that spawn an idea of how we can make the software even more useful."



*Using PRO Landscape, a designer can spend just one hour on a typical job site and end up with a signed contract, while the traditional approach might require multiple meetings and several hours at the drawing table.*

message me and we'll clear it up over the Internet." Even with a tight timeframe, Seltz says the Drafix tech support team has never let him down. "I've never had an experience where they weren't able to get back to me on time or were unable to fix the problem," he says. "It's really unbelievable."

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# Design

# On the Move

Landscape designers who have invested in PRO Landscape regularly share stories about their increased productivity and impressive number of closed sales as a result of using the versatile software. But imagine the success a company could have by combining PRO Landscape's ease of use and seeing-is-believing characteristics. Landscape Designer Chris Walter has done just that.

**DESIGN ON-THE-FLY.** "The design imaging, the computer-aided design feature, the landscape lighting – all of the PRO Landscape features help me close deals and design more landscapes," says Walter, owner of Computerized Landscape Design, Kansas City, Mo. "But I've taken that one step further." Walter explains that before PRO Landscape, his sales process included several steps:

1. Take a call from a potential client and set up a time to meet.
2. Visit the property.
3. Go back to the office and hand draw a design – a multiple-hour process.
4. Set up another appointment to discuss the design.
5. Meet with the client again to – hopefully – sell the design.

Needless to say, it's a lengthy process. And, Walter adds that many of his Midwestern clients don't install their landscapes all at once, which calls for him to go through those steps again and again for multi-phase projects.

Now, Walter says he's eliminated many of the scheduling hassles and the time-consuming design process simply by loading his PRO Landscape software onto a laptop computer. "In the preliminary phone call, I let the

client know that I want them to be truly involved in the design process and I find out where they want to put their main emphasis for the project – probably the front of house with some trees, shrubs and annuals or perennials," he explains. "I set up an appointment to meet with the client and I make sure to arrive a little early. Then I just snap two or three digital pictures of the front of the house and load them onto my laptop. When the appointment time rolls around, the clients and I sit on their front porch and design their landscape together right on the spot."

With the software's features, Walter says he can easily work with the client to change the types of plants used in the design, their placement, etc. When clients see their landscapes – and their ideas – come to life right on the screen, "I don't even have to sell the job," Walter says. "They sell it to themselves."

**EASY ACCESS.** So, by designing landscapes with clients on the spot, Walter has taken his productivity and

percent of closed sales to even higher levels, noting that he doubled his sales the year he began using PRO Landscape software. He credits this success partly to the seeing-is-believing aspect, but also notes the impression of professionalism this process provides. "When someone's going to invest thousands of dollars in anything, they're going to do a little research," he explains. "If I'm one of three contractors a customer calls and the other two say, 'We'll be out in a week to see your property,' That could be fine – until I show up within a few days and design their landscape on the spot. Who would you go with?"

But Walter's success with mobile design doesn't end there. He notes that if a client is late for a design appointment, he can use that time to develop preliminary designs or work on other design projects without ever having to be at his desk or a drafting table. And his ability to multitask on the road goes even further. "I've had instances where a client has called my cell phone while I was driving down the road and said,



e

# Light up Your Sales

"You did some landscaping for me last spring and I have a question," or "I'd like you to create a design for another part of my property," he says. "A designer who did a hand drawing would have to go all the way back to the office, look up the design and delay getting back to the client, whereas I can pull over to the side of the road for a minute, bring up their file on my laptop and answer their questions as soon as they call."

When landscape clients know that their designers and crew are easily accessible, Walter says their level of customer satisfaction rises.

**HIT THE GROUND RUNNING.** Compared to the number of landscape designs Walter says he used to be able to hand draw over the course of a year, he now completes hundreds annually using the PRO Landscape software. And some of his designs aren't even requested.

"In late fall or early spring when business is usually slower, I use the PRO Landscape software on my laptop to generate new business," Walter says. "For instance, I'll go to a new subdivision and shoot some digital pictures of different houses on the block. I keep a printer in my van, so I'll create a quick landscape design for these houses, print them out and leave the design and our company's contact information on their doors."

Using this technique, Walter says he usually gets three or four calls for new work, which helps him get a head start for the season. "Not only has the PRO Landscape software helped me build my business by becoming more productive, but it's a great tool to get your foot in the door," he says. "I'm an excitable guy and if I can use my skills and these tools to get my potential clients, it's great – people just love to see what they're buying."

**Y**our customers are excited to use their new landscape as an outdoor living space and with PRO Landscape, you can make sure they know that this won't be a daylight-only investment. For contractors using PRO Landscape, brightening up a sale is as easy as turning off the lights. With tools that allow designers to add night and holiday lighting, many users report earning thousands of dollars more on individual landscape design sales with the addition of a landscape lighting package.

"A lot of lighting sales have historically been made with generators and test lights at night after a full day in the field," says Pete Lord, president, Drafix Software, Kansas City, Mo. "The PRO Landscape software lets you create the lighting design simultaneously as you prepare the landscape design."

Brett Seltz, Enterprise Construction, says he creates night lighting packages for the majority of landscapes he designs with the software. "Lighting is something a blueprint can't portray, so that part of the program is unsurpassable when it comes to showing the customer the possibilities," he says.

Though Seltz focuses on PRO Landscape's CAD features, for

each design he'll also use the imaging tools to create a realistic rendering of the client's future landscaping by incorporating a digital image of the client's house and importing images of the plants and trees the crews will be installing. When all that's done, Seltz says he adds the lighting fixtures and then turns out the lights.

"We add the lamps and light fixtures in last and then essentially turn the lights out on the PRO Landscape program itself," he says. "You can portray night in the program, which illuminates the lighting features so the client can see exactly what their property will look like when it's all lit up." Designers can manipulate the angle and flood of each lamp in the image, as well as the level of darkness – evening lighting or dark night – to make sure the effect is just right.

Additionally, Version 12 of the PRO Landscape Software has added a number of new holiday lighting objects including light displays and Linkables from Brite Ideas Decorating.

So, whether you're looking for an easy upsell with traditional night lighting or a great way to boost sales in your holiday decor division, PRO Landscape has the tools you can use all year round.



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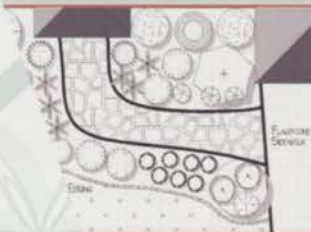
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# Desk-Clearing Secrets

What are the best ways to reduce paperwork piles and clutter? *Lawn & Landscape Message Board* users share their tips for revealing clean desktops, eliminating paperwork-related procrastination and recapturing office sanity.

**A** rather unpleasant, yet unavoidable, disorder is happening to an increasing amount of business owners each year – every spare horizontal surface quickly becomes covered in piles of invoices, statements, papers, brochures, proposals, letters, junk mail, phone message slips, etc. until there is no more room to stack another sheet without one or more piles tumbling over.

In fact, *Lawn & Landscape Message Board* User Steve Cissel found himself sorting through paper piles one recent Saturday morning, asking himself, "Why? Am I the only one who files almost everything in piles on the left and right sides of my desk? Is my desk a sign of getting things done or a sign of an organizational deficiency?"

Todd Patton feels the same. "It's amazing how fast the paperwork stacks up," says the president of Haymarket, Va.-based Patton Property Maintenance. "And if I procrastinate just a couple of days, it takes even longer to clear the way for what I really need to get done."

Message Board users were inspired to

share their desk-clearing secrets after Cissel, founder and chief executive officer of the online green industry directory GIYP.com, asked, "So, what do your desks look like?"

**SIMPLE SOLUTIONS.** "My desk always has those piles on either sides as well – even after I clean it off there is always one on the left hand corner," shares Todd McCabe, president of the McCabe Landscape Group, Wrightsville Beach, N.C.

"Right now, my desk is slightly cluttered but my desk is not that big to begin with," adds Chad Stern, owner, Mowing & More, Chevy Chase, Md.

To keep his desk clean, McCabe uses stackable plastic trays that come in sets of five for about \$7 and relies on a hutch to help him organize paperwork. "I use those for sorting mail and accounts payable," he says. "For stuff that is not quite yet ready to go in the filing cabinet, I put in file folders but keep them in the hutch on my desk so they are readily available – this helps with the little piles some. For out-going mail, I have a basket on

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## surprising statistics

**T**ake a look at these surprising statistics from the National Association of Professional Organizers and bring some in-your-face reality to the clutter you think you have figured out.

- 48 percent of American executives admit to having a messy desk but claim to know where everything is. In contrast, 12 percent say that although their desk appears organized, they have no idea where to find anything.
- Executives waste six weeks per year searching for lost documents.
- More than one out of four Americans remarked that they would like to be better organized.
- Of the total eight hours wasted per week in paper document management, we spend one hour finding documents, one hour with difficulty in sharing documents, one hour in distribution/storage and 30 minutes in archiving and retrieval.

another desk in the office. This way it is sure to actually get sent out. I think having a hutch is the key to helping keep my desk organized."

For Will Sharp, president, Lawn Dawg Services, Matthews, N.C., the key to cleanliness came with hiring an office manager. "I am two years into having an office manager and a blue sticky note pad," he explains. "I write on the sticky and stick it on the papers, give them to my office manager and she knows what it is and when I need it back. She even fills in most of the paperwork and all I have to do is sign my name. This is a big help and is really not that much money. The result is smaller piles on my desk. I still have 12 piles, but they are not very tall."

**FILING – SOLUTION OR PAPER TRAP?** Once Stern starts to feel disorganized and unproductive, he takes action. Currently, he's reading the book, *Getting Things Done* by David Allen. And "in an effort to bring more organization to my life, I purchased a large four-drawer, 25-inch deep filing cabinet," he adds. "I have plenty of room left to file stuff. Though the one thing I like about having all of my stuff in computer programs is that

there is not paper to sit on my desk and make me feel like I am not on top of things."

James Binns proudly describes his filing system, which has kept his paperwork in order. "I have a drawer for personal and household stuff and three for business," says the president of Fayetteville, Ark.-based Earthworks Landscape Gardening. "Of the three, one is for the financial part of business (insurance, a red folder for bills, spraying license, etc.), and another is a client drawer – I have copies of each contract, written instructions from clients, soil test results, etc."

Filing keeps everything in neat, tidy rows and under bold headings, but can one file too many things away, thus creating only a temporary solution to the problem? Patton thinks so. "I file everything away but then how many files can you have?" he asks. "Eventually you start making up categories and forget what you named them and what's in there. Then there's another project – going through the files and figuring out if there's anything important you may need again."

According to the Small Business Support Network, more than 90 percent of paper saved is never looked at after three months. And the National



Association of Professional Organizers says that 80 percent of the papers that are filed are never referenced again. So, what's the problem? Business owners hold on to too much paperwork thinking they will need it later when, in reality, they don't.

First, let's address piles. The Small Business Support Network's Stephen Spry says, "Many people scan their mail for 'important stuff' and then set the stack aside. Later, they review the stack again and again – continually handling the same pieces of paper."

"This pile of clutter," Spry continues, "also reduces your concentration. Because your eyes are attracted to it, you'll find yourself constantly sifting through the stack looking for more pleasant (and low priority) tasks to do instead of the important ones."

Having an organizational system is the key. Spry recommends developing an information retrieval system rather than a filing system.

Then, "once you decide on a system, stick to it," Spry encourages. "The problem with any system is that it requires conscious, sustained effort to implement. Because it challenges ingrained habits you must make that effort. If you have an organizing system, then when you handle a piece of paper, you actually do something with it, instead of letting it pile up which will make you feel like you're drowning in paperwork."

**SETTING YOUR SYSTEM.** According to Spry, the secret to any system is deciding what to do with the paperwork the first time you touch it – either reply to it, file it or throw it away. "The golden rule of efficient business is to handle each piece of paper once – or, at the most, twice," he says.

First, set aside time each day for going through mail and "don't even touch the pile until then," Spry says. "When you're ready to take action, do something with each item and get rid of it."

A good system to use when looking at each piece of paper is one Spry calls the "ARTS" system:

- A – Action
- R – Reconsider
- T – Throw Out
- S – Store

"If it doesn't need immediate action, put it into a folder that you'll handle 'Later this week,'" Spry says. "Then set aside a block of time later that week to get to that folder and

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## shred it!

In a separate Message Board conversation, many landscape contractors discussed the advantage of having a shredder in the office to help them get rid of needless paperwork.

Terry Duran, owner, Preferred Property Maintenance, Fremont, Calif., has a shredder under his desk and uses it on mistake invoices, credit card receipts, correspondence and general mail.

Chad Stern adds envelopes that customers use to submit payments to this list but questions Duran's shredding of customer receipts, something the owner of Chevy Chase, Md.-based Mowing & More prefers to file away for later reference.

Junk mail gets minced at the SCLM Co. Landscape Contractor's Laverne, Calif.-based office, according to Daniel Hanson. "I don't let anything with an address or other information go into the trash," he explains.

Kenny Pikulski of K&S Landscape, Plymouth, Mass, even recycles his shredder shavings by using them to ship items.

And Melissa Brodsky, owner of Honeybee Landscaping in Grafton, W.Va., finds it helpful to feed papers diagonally through her shredder so there aren't straight shreds with full names or addresses available to dumpster divers. Then she sends paper waste to the local recycle center.

then get rid of it."

Before getting to this stage though, Spry says a helpful way for business owners to limit the paperwork they review daily is to sort through it as it comes in and put it in one of three categories – A: Must be done this week, B: Has a deadline soon, C: Would be nice to do if I have time but not essential. Then, the A items are the ones you go through during the designated time daily and apply the ARTS system to. A simpler alternative to the ARTS system is:

D – Ditch it (Throw it away)

E – Eyes, i.e. display or circulate relevant information

F – File it

Landscape Contractor Brian Klimek says he gets paperwork done by narrowing it down to just two categories. "I make two piles – one is the 'waste basket' and other is 'file it away now,'" he shares.

The reason Spry recommends the

additional A,B,C step before actually handling each piece of paper is because of the natural human tendency to work on things that are nice and/or easy, which is why important tasks get delayed. "Whatever goes in the A bundle simply must be done – it is deemed to be most important and it forces you to act. It will get done. You'll do it once and get rid of it.

"As far as B is concerned," Spry continues, "you must stay aware of when things must be moved into A. Set aside time when things must be moved into A and leave enough time prior to the deadline to do it."

The most interesting aspect of categorizing your work into A, B and C priorities is watching what happens to C items. "After a couple of months, you move them to D, E or F with the realization that they aren't essential, and they'll be overshadowed by newer, more important A and B tasks," Spry says. "Eventually, you throw them

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away without letting them waste your time.”

Another good idea Spry suggests is to make the C file in a special drawer with no back to it. “Put a rubbish bin at the back of the drawer,” he says. “Put the new C items in the front. As more C things are added, the older ones automatically end up in the rubbish. You’ll find that if you ever really need anything out of the C file, it’ll be in the front 3 inches of it.”

Other tips Spry suggests for handling paperwork in files include: “Take a few minutes each day to file recent information to the front, using staples instead of paper clips (since they don’t come undone) and write a use-by date on each file. If material is borrowed, replace it with a borrower’s card so you know where it went. Avoid large miscellaneous files and cramming things into drawers or piling things on top of one another.”

The trick with any of these systems is to “make sure you do not fall into the trap of creating a bundle of stuff to file/display because you’ll find yourself sifting through that bundle again and again looking for something since you didn’t act in the first place. Delegate the filing job to someone else.”



## tidiness tips

The National Association of Professional Organizers recommends the following tips for keeping your office tidy:

- Break large projects down into small, sequential steps. Schedule these steps into your day with your planner.
- Keep only supplies you need on a daily basis on your desktop.
- Be clear about the response you need when sending a message to a colleague. They can then provide a full response, even if they don’t reach you directly.
- Keep a file index (a master list of file names). Check the index before creating a new file so you avoid making duplicates. Also use it when deciding where to file a piece of paper.

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# TurnStyle

by marisa shoemaker

Zero-turn mowers combine quality of cut with speed, including the ability to turn on a dime, boosting productivity on the job.

**T**he premise is simple. But the product? Increasingly sophisticated. For landscape contractors, efficiently beautifying and maintaining the great outdoors means a choice of zero options – zero-turn options, to be precise.

In an industry that exists “to make tall grass short” – this according to Ferris Product Specialist Roy Dust – landscape contractors are opting for progressive zero-turn technology to get the job done faster without sacrificing quality.

**THEN VS. NOW.** Dust, a 21-year veteran of Ferris Industries, Munnsville, N.Y., says older zero-turn machines bear little resemblance to those of today. “The

first zero-turn mowers were chain-drive mowers,” he explains. “Although they were functional, the maintenance cost was high, they didn’t wear well and they weren’t reliable. But the improvements have been tremendous.”

Though the 1960s is the decade claiming the first zero-turn technology, the past few years have seen double-digit growth for numerous manufacturers due to a focus on new innovations. One example is independent suspension, which Dust says “can protect the machine from abuse and increase operator comfort, which can be helpful on large job sites.”

Additionally, designs incorporating a low center of gravity and even weight distribution prove to be key advancements for ease of use. According to Randy Harris, senior marketing manager



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for landscape contractor equipment, Toro, Bloomington, Minn., those two concepts have dramatically improved hillside stability in zero-turn riders. "This has broadened their utilization

using diesel engines and alternative fuels.

Of diesel engines, Harris says, "they can deliver greater fuel efficiency and substantially greater torque,

very important," Dust agrees. More than diesel alone, he says propane is more accepted today due to its production of lesser emissions. "We see Ozone Days in some parts of the country, and that's only going to continue."

Tim Cromley, Walker Manufacturing, cites the late 1980s move to an enclosed final drive as a distinct advancement. The marketing manager of the Fort Collins, Colo. company says that landscape contractors need not worry about chain adjustment with an enclosed final drive, as a

connection exists from the drive to the transmission. "The machines don't have the potential for wear. They're cleaner running, working parts don't need to be lubricated, and they have a more durable platform."

In terms of the weight of recent

**"Because the adage 'Time is money' rings true, mower manufacturers insist quality is of the utmost importance in reducing machine downtime - especially when many landscape contractors have a limited number of zero-turn mowers in their equipment fleets."**

because, early on, they had a reputation of being more of a 'flatlander' machine."

However, most manufacturers primarily agreed that recent years have juxtaposed true "innovation" with "improvements," such as the onset of

which translates into more power for mowing, mulching or bagging in demanding conditions. In addition, diesel engines have a longer life, lasting roughly three times as long as gasoline engines."

"Alternative fuels are becoming

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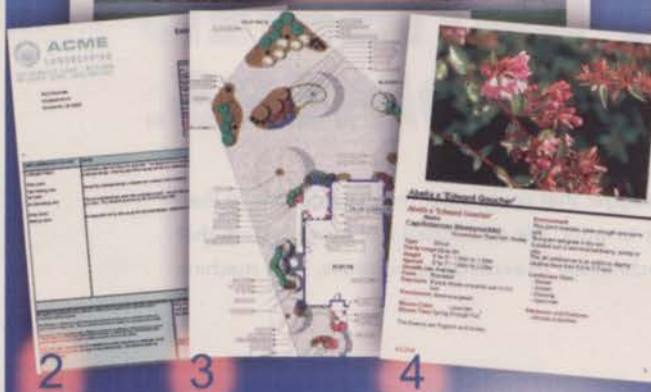
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USE READER SERVICE # 59

issue focus - mowers > > >



Today, an increasing amount of landscape contractors across the country are opting for zero-turn technology when purchasing riding mowers. Photo: The Toro Co.

zero-turn mower advancements, Cromley considers the advent of the liquid-cooled electronic fuel injection (EFI) to be of an innovative caliber. "Liquid-cooled EFI is basically the same engine that's in your car. The result has been longer-lasting engines paired with considerable fuel efficiency."

"Your engine is running at a good temperature," Cromley says, "which solves the long-term issue of operating with a reliable engine, as well as the immediate issue of benefiting from fuel savings."

Because the adage "Time is money" rings true, manufacturers insist quality is of the utmost importance in reducing machine downtime – especially when many landscape contractors have a limited number of zero-turn mowers in their fleets. Some manufacturers are pairing sturdiness and customization with a use of 7-gauge high-strength steel in deck construction, which provides an adjustable discharge baffle. Essentially, this allows the zero-turn operator to fine-tune the cutting and discharge performance of the deck upon encountering challenging and changing turf conditions. The decks can then potentially be "dialed in" to provide the most appropriate cut.

**KNOW YOUR NEEDS.** As is the case in any competitive industry, dealers of zero-turns may tend toward informing clients of their needs, encouraging models that may not be the most appropriate for a contractor's operations. Beware of the nuances and features that may not provide practical solutions, manufacturers warn, reporting the following to be mainstays in considering which model to purchase.

"A lot of contractors are being told by dealers what

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their needs are," explains Cromley. "Contractors have to define what their needs are; they're the ones spending the money, so they need to avoid being convinced by price or by a salesperson who is misinformed on the scope of their operation. I'm a

to think differently than when they're standing in the cereal aisle. If you don't go into a dealership knowing what your needs are, the dealership will be happy to determine your scope for you."

Cromley suggests a demonstration

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Contractors agree that durability is among their top needs, regardless – or perhaps due to – their job-site conditions. Parts availability and servicing are of equal weight, they say.

For example, Ron Knesal, area manager/operations manager, Pacific Landscape Management, Hillsboro, Ore., says they have only five zero-turn

mowers. When one is in the mechanic's bay, they resort to back-up equipment, which makes the operation less efficient. "So far it's been easy to get parts, which is critical. We have an ad-

**"Contractors should evaluate trailers based on the upper limits of weight and cargo volume they will want to accommodate. This will determine everything from the axle capacity to the strength of the frame needed to the length and width of the trailer necessary." – Brad Alden**

consumer too, and I'm as guilty as the next guy. Take cereal, for instance. I'll buy the brand that's 50 cents off or buy one, get one free. But this is premium equipment, so contractors have

on one of the contractor's properties to answer questions. Some upfront questions for contractors to think about: What conditions are you mowing? Are you mowing a lot of hills?

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vantage because we perform our own maintenance, but we can't be waiting on components to be shipped to us. The availability of parts is crucial."

"Durability is the price of admission in this business," Harris continues, adding that most contractors keep this attribute top of mind when making a purchase. He explains that machines have to stand up to hours of

being trailed around town, jumping curbs on jobs, absorbing impact from close trimming and mowing acres of turf each day.

Additionally, mowing decks must cut well, so as to prevent the need for double or triple cutting. The quality of cut is crucial when time savings is an issue, regardless of whether or not the machine is side-discharging,

mulching or bagging, as well.

Noting that contractors should look for a dealer who puts them at the front of the line when they need parts and service, Harris suggests purchasers ask, "Are service parts readily available from the manufacturer? Does the dealer have a healthy supply of parts in stock? Ask about warranty coverage - some brands are more lenient than others. Talk with your dealer's mechanic, and ask which manufacturers provide the best parts support, and who will work with them if they have a warranty issue." Harris explains that a typical commercial warranty consists of two years on the engine, pump and motor, spindles, deck and frame, which are the components that are

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"As is the case in any competitive industry, dealers of zero-turns may tend toward informing clients of their needs, encouraging models that may not be the most appropriate for a contractor's operations. Beware of the nuances and features that don't provide practical solutions."

expensive to replace.

"If you're spending \$10,000 to \$12,000, you don't want to be buying a machine from 2,000 miles away," Cromley shares. "You need readily available parts and well-trained technicians who keep up to date on the current production of your mower. It answers the question as to why dealerships fail - when they think it's just about selling trimmer oil."

"I would buy a poorer product from a better-servicing dealer, than the other way around," Dust adds.

As a former landscape contractor



When seeking out a mower, contractors should buy from dealers who have readily available parts and well-trained technicians, according to mower manufacturers.  
Photo: The Toro Co.

himself, Dust deems quality performance a necessity. Contractors are finding a niche with cut quality, combined with overall productivity – not just speed, he explains. For a growing number of contractors, he says, “striping” is the buzzword. “When landscapers are trying to differentiate themselves from their competition, it’s what their job site looks like after they’re gone. Whether it’s commercial or residential, neighbors or neighboring businesses are saying, ‘My lawn doesn’t look that good,’ and they change contractors.” Of the patterned cuts, he says, “It’s not that hard to accomplish the look, so better landscape companies are using it to separate themselves. In industry

conversations, striping is something that gets mentioned everyday. Two years ago no one talked about it, so it’s definitely become a trend in terms of what contractors want.”

Indeed, Knesal likens striping to an effective calling card. “We’ve recently put striping kits on our mowers,” he says. “It’s appealing, and it shows people there’s quality in our work, thereby aiding in referral busi-

ness. And we don’t do any advertising besides the work we do.”

Certainly not a category to be overlooked is safety. The acronym of choice is “ROPS” or a Roll Over Protection System. Though not universally standard, the roll-bar system protects the operator and the mower in case of an accidental turnover. Certified to OSHA standards, ROPS have proven successful in preventing injury

**“Contractors have to define what their needs are; they’re the ones spending the money, so they need to avoid being convinced by price or by a salesperson who is misinformed on the scope of their operation. If you don’t go into a dealership knowing what your needs are, the dealership will determine them for you.” – Tim Cromley**

and death in small agricultural tractors. Zero-turn mower manufacturers expect the system will be standard in the near future.

To purchasers, Harris suggests not only buying a machine equipped with ROPS, but also one that is ANSIB71.4 compliant. "This is a voluntary standard for commercial mowers that was enacted for safety," he says. "It means the machine conforms to standards like maximum blade-tip speed, maximum blade-stopping time, thrown-objects limits, minimum stability on hillsides ... it protects the operators who are racing the clock everyday, and it protects the business."

As an alternative to buying a new zero-turn in light of safety concerns, many mower manufacturers will retrofit older models of zero-turn mowers with ROPS.

To a lesser degree, ergonomic additions to zero-turns are a trend; however, it's not necessarily viewed as



Mower manufacturers suggest contractors purchase a zero-turn mower that is equipped with a Roll Over Protection System, or ROPS, particularly if they mow on steep slopes and hillsides. Photo: John Deere

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practical to contractors. Dust explains, "Yes, ergonomic features are important but, honestly, they are nice for first impressions," he says. "If you're looking at buying a new car, and you can't find the gear shift, and the seat is uncomfortable, you're less likely to buy that car. If you're the owner and operator, you'll consider that. But to be honest, especially when you're deal-

ing with large landscape maintenance operations, the purchaser isn't the one sitting on the machine. They don't care. They should, but they don't. Most of the time when I'm talking ergonomics, the purchaser is saying, 'Tell me something I want to know.'"

Dust says that ergonomic designs actually address safety concerns, so it should be considered in a purchase.

For instance, an operator needs to be able to quickly control blade engagements. If it's in a hard-to-reach place, and the operator needs to act quickly, the choice to ignore ergonomics may prove a dangerous one. According to Dust, if the purchaser is also the person responsible for writing compensation checks, opting for ergonomics suddenly has more influence.

In general, Harris agrees. "I can't necessarily say contractors want more ergonomically friendly machines. They want improved comfort and simplified controls. They want to know where everything is." For that reason, some manufacturers have clustered their levers – choke, throttle, ignition, PTO – in one area.

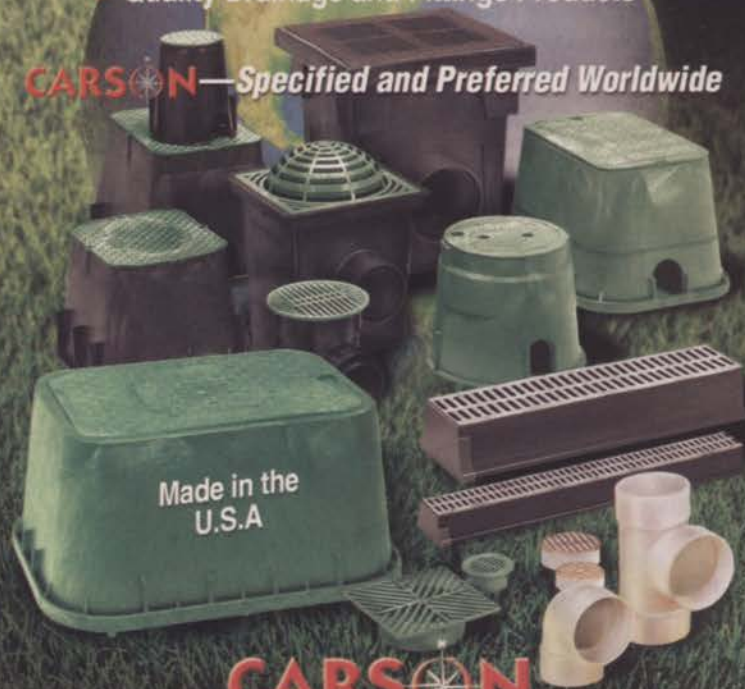
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"I can't necessarily say contractors want more ergonomically friendly machines. They want improved comfort and simplified controls. They want to know where everything is. For that reason, some manufacturers have clustered their levers in one area."

— Randy Harris

But for day-to-day practical use, Dust says, contractors should stick to the basics. "Contractors need to look for quality and durability," he points out. "They should look for a lack of gimmicks, because gimmicks normally complicate a piece of equipment. Do you need a fancy instrument to tell you when to change the oil? If you don't have a good maintenance program, the little electronic gimmick won't help. More people are talking about laser guidance and futuristic gadgets – I just think it's way too much. Sometimes the KISS or 'Keep It Simple, Stupid' principle works best for our industry." 

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Photos: Daimler Chrysler (this page); General Motors (page 106)

# Keys To The Work Truck



by mike zawacki

An effective fleet of work trucks starts with smart purchasing decisions.

**D**urability. Functionality. Versatility. This is landscape contractor Ken Pagurek's mantra when he considers a new work truck for his fleet at Philadelphia-based Cenova.

"It's got to stand up to the jobs we need done, it needs to perform those jobs consistently and it needs to be able to perform other duties – like snow removal in the winter," says Pagurek, Cenova's president. "All those things need to be considered so you don't get burned on a truck that, after a year or so, can't go the distance. Then all you can think about is getting rid of this headache – quickly."

The work-truck market can be a

minefield for landscape contractors to maneuver through successfully. Under constant pressure to control costs but boost productivity and efficiency, landscape contractors ideally hope to select a vehicle that, in the long run, can handle the aggressive requirements of their landscape duties.

One danger is to under equip a work truck, a cost saving approach that leaves a landscape contractor with a vehicle insufficient to handle the long-term rigors of landscape chores.

On the flip side, some contractors over purchase by adding excessive heavy-duty upgrades and flashy additions but are left with vehicles that are costly to operate, maintain and repair.

A solid work truck fleet starts with smart, informed purchasing decisions.

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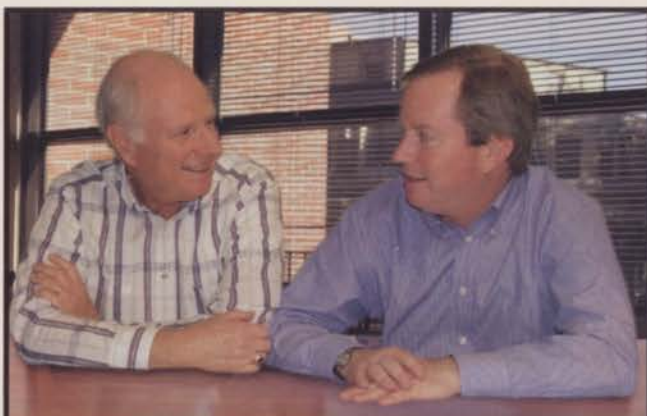
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I told him that at one point it made me uncomfortable at times, being in a profession many look at as a necessary evil. He said we're in the business of making promises for the future – and keeping them when it counts.

I worried that people can't always see clearly what they're getting for their premium dollar. He said that, when disaster strikes, we help keep families and businesses intact... and people's dreams alive.

I wondered if we shouldn't be doing more for our clients in the way of service. He said to me with a smile: "Good, keep thinking that way."

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These increase a contractor's odds of obtaining the caliber of work truck, whether it's a one-ton dump or a light-duty vehicle, that meets his operation's immediate and near-future landscaping needs, increases productivity and goes the distance with dependable and reliable service for many miles and years.

**THE ESSENTIALS.** Landscape contractors begin to give serious consideration to truck purchases around the first of the year. Typically, the decision to purchase or lease a new vehicle (see *Buy vs. Lease* on page 112) comes from either the need to replace a failing vehicle or to boost the fleet in order to accommodate business growth.

With a March start date for the new landscape season, most commercial truck dealers say it's important for a landscape contractor to get the purchase finalized by at least mid-February because it may take six to eight weeks for the truck chassis to be equipped to the landscape contractor's specifications, says Wes Grizzel, sales associate at Kelley Commercial Truck Center in Atlanta.

The classic landscape truck is made up of a cab, chassis and a basic flat-bed style trailer, which may range in length from 10 to 18 feet, depending on the amount of equipment and materials a contractor intends to haul from job site to job site. If affordable, contractors suggest opting for the crew cab (up to seven workers) over the standard cab (three workers comfortably) due to the overall convenience it affords in transporting an entire work crew in a single vehicle. Workers also appreciate an air conditioned work cab during the dog days of summer.

However, in lieu of the flat-bed trailer, the industry is seeing more landscape contractors outfit work truck chassis with a 14-foot box trailer and a 4-foot dovetail, Grizzel says.

"The ability to cover and protect your equipment is what's attracting contractors to the box trailers," Grizzel says.

Pagurek recently purchased three box trailer trucks. He plans to use them to transport plants and trees to avoid the windburn issues common with an open-air trailer.

Making the best and smartest work truck purchase isn't as simple as rushing out to the local dealer and picking a vehicle off the showroom floor. Commercial truck dealers and landscape contractors agree, truck-buying contractors often don't have a clear idea of their needs and how they plan to maximize the new vehicle in their operations.

Prior to making any purchases, landscape contractors should first write down the specific components essential to their company's work trucks. Putting these requirements on paper alleviates the temptation to add costly, unessential extras during the purchasing process, says Robert Johnson, fleet management liaison for the National Truck Equipment Association headquartered in Farmington Hills, Mich.

"One of the most common mistakes a landscape contractor can make when it comes to new vehicle purchases is they buy what they've always bought," Johnson says. "The vehicle they've always bought may not have been the right decision when they made their previous purchase five years ago, and it certainly doesn't hold up as the right decision when they're making a purchase today."

Likewise, landscape contractors should avoid making emotional decisions, such as brand allegiance or maintaining traditional purchasing trends, Johnson says. Instead, contractors should determine exactly what they need in

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truck equipment specifications, including frame size, suspension, engines, transmissions, brakes and other specialty, aftermarket additions such as trailers and tool racks.

"Contractors should be asking themselves three things," Johnson says.

"What exactly will they be using their trucks for, what size is both appropriate and affordable and what aftermarket accessories will be needed?"

"If you can honestly answer those three questions then you may be able to eliminate some of the features that you really only use one to two times throughout the year," Johnson says.

When making a work truck purchasing decision, Barry Morton




"You may find yourself stepping up or stepping down in terms of accessories and extras depending on the functions you expect you'll need in the future," Morton says. "Look past the next few weeks and months and into the long term. How will you be able to maximize the functions of this new truck in the future?"

**SIZE IS EVERYTHING.**

A common misperception is the bigger and more bodacious the truck the better for the landscape contractor. The truth is, an overweight work truck will demand a high amount of maintenance and can be unsafe, if not illegal, to operate on the road.

Size and weight are often taken for granted. What contractor wouldn't

Sr., owner of Morton's Landscape Development in Columbia Station, Ohio, says a solid rule of thumb is to use your company's business plan as a rough guide for how the new truck and its accessories will coincide with projected growth in your landscape operations.



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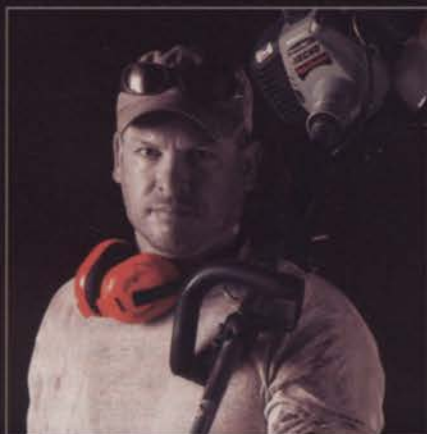
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want a monster truck for their landscape operations to impress clients and be the envy of the competition? However, this focus can overshadow issues relating to weight, strength, productivity and even profit.

"Over the last 10 years, vehicle chassis have gained a lot of weight from the addition of items such as

heavy-duty frames and engines," Johnson says. "But in many cases, the heavy-duty vehicle's weight and payload ratings haven't increased to compensate for that extra weight."

Super-sizing a truck purchase – including excessive heavy-duty component upgrades – will not only cost landscape contractors more at

the time of purchase, but will require costly routine maintenance and repair bills. Likewise, the added weight of heavy-duty features may actually limit the truck's towing or carrying capacity, leaving a contractor to risk overburdening the vehicle's components or forcing a vital piece of equipment onto an additional vehicle.

Again, landscape contractors should determine what and how much they'll be hauling, pulling or pushing with the work truck and correspond that to the vehicle's payload rating, Johnson says.

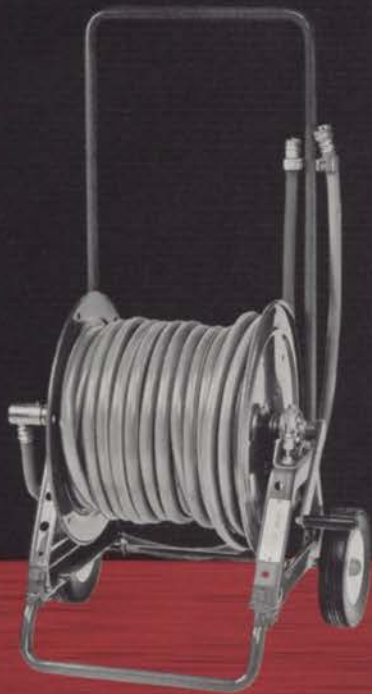
"Will you be carrying materials with a significant amount of density?" Johnson says. "A load of grass clippings won't tax the vehicle the same way as similar-sized load of pea gravel. Contractors really need to do their homework and do the math when it comes to payload ratings."

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"You may find yourself stepping up or stepping down in terms of accessories and extras depending on the functions you expect you'll need in the future. Look past the next few weeks and months and into the long term."

– Barry Morton

While it's important not to over-specialize a vehicle, it's equally important not to under-specialize it, too. Saving dollars now by cutting back to the truck's bare essentials and not thinking about possible future job requirements may cost a landscape contractor more money in repair and vehicle upgrades down the road, Johnson says.

Contractors who fall into the



"cheap" trap, says Johnson, end up with vehicles that begin to perform poorly and have more incidents of down time and higher maintenance costs.

"The fact is, an over-specialized and an under-specialized vehicle are going to be expensive for the landscape contractor," says Johnson. "It's the point most contractors miss when they're making their purchasing decisions."

Johnson suggests "The One Step Rule," which advises never to upgrade a component, such as an axle, suspension or engine, or downgrade a component by more than one step. The rule provides a contractor with a vehicle that can perform the jobs at hand while not overdoing it from a cost standpoint when predicting the requirements of future, more aggressive job applications.

Finally, Morton warns not to be swayed by what the competition has on the streets. This is especially important for start-up and small-sized landscape outfits, whose financial resources may not match the size of their professional egos.

"The most important thing is to buy the right piece of equipment for the job you're going to do," Morton says. "I believe it's better to over equip the vehicle in terms of a heavier-duty suspension and drivetrain than to under buy in those areas. It may seem expensive at the time of purchase, but if you under buy because you feel you can't afford it, the reality is it will most likely cost you a lot of money and hard ache in the long run."

**GAS VS. DIESEL.** The debate between whether a work truck should be powered by diesel or gasoline ultimately comes down to how the vehicle will be used. If the landscape contractor expects to do a lot of heavy towing, or plans to put an excessive amount of miles on the truck, a diesel engine is the smart route to go.

And when asked, most landscape contractors say diesel-engine vehicles make up a large percentage of the truck fleet because of their proven ability to carry heavy loads and to remain reliable at a high mileage rate.

"I prefer diesel vehicles for their pulling power and longevity," Pagurek says.

However, a diesel-engine vehicle may not always be the smart buy. Die-

sel-engine trucks are a certain status symbol for ego-conscious landscape contractors, and they may not be the smart choice when purchasing a light-duty truck, Johnson says.

"Don't buy a diesel-engine truck as a feel-good item," Johnson says. "It boils down to whether or not the application of the vehicle coincides with

the advantages that a diesel engine provides you. If they don't, then you're basically throwing your money away."

**AFTERMARKET UPGRADE.** Landscape contractors should be leery of ready-made work trucks available at a commercial truck dealership. It may look like the perfect truck, but, in

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most cases, it is not.

To this point, landscape contractors have purchased an incomplete vehicle. Every truck cab and chassis has the potential to be a great work truck for a landscape contractor. However, that greatness comes from how it's outfitted for landscape duty.

While the number of after-market upgrades may seem limitless, are they necessary for the average landscape contractor?

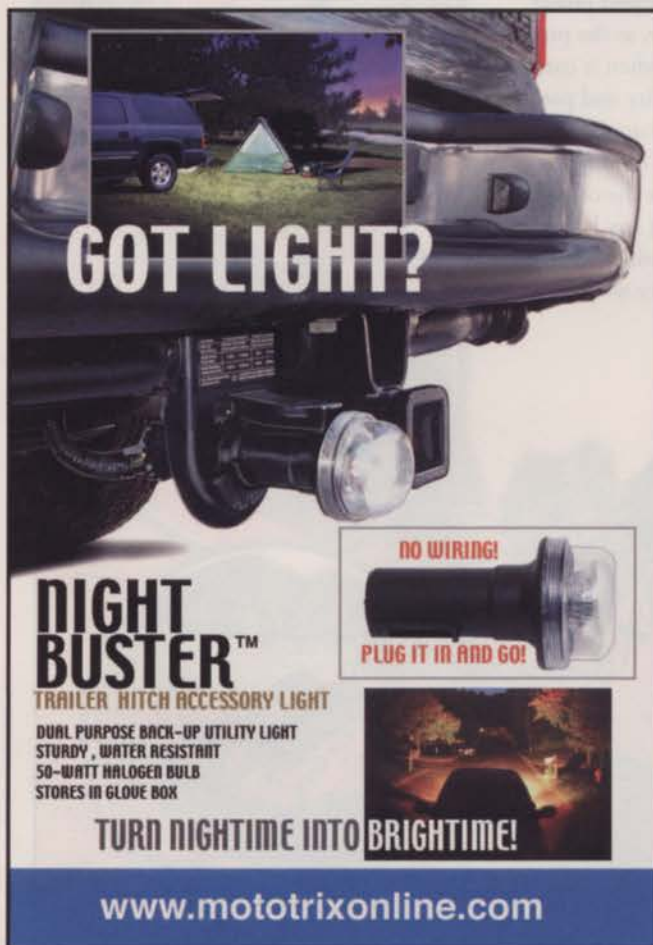
For example, should the chassis be equipped with a dump body or trailer body? Again, it depends on the extent of how the truck will be used in a contractor's landscape operations.

There are customized additions essential to all landscape contractors.

*continued on page 114, sidebar on page 112*

**B**efore choosing a new vehicle, landscape contractors need a solid understanding of the job parameters the vehicle will be expected to perform. The Nation Truck Equipment Association in Farmington Hills, Mich. suggests landscape contractors closely review the following requirements prior to any new truck purchases.

- **Operating conditions** – Exactly what will the truck be used for? Will it be expected to push snow?
- **Operating cycle** – How long do you expect the truck to last? How many miles/operating hours do you expect to receive before major repairs are required?
- **Loading cycle** – Will the work truck be hauling a static load or will it be loaded and unloaded every morning and evening?
- **Towing requirements** – Will a trailer be hitched?
- **Maintenance environment** – Are you vigilant with routine and preventive maintenance? Is it performed in-house?
- **Operator proficiency** – Do your workers attend driver safety training? Are they held accountable for damage and/or accidents?
- **Regulator and contractual requirements** – Does your state or local government dictate specific safety lighting on your trucks? Are there environmental considerations?



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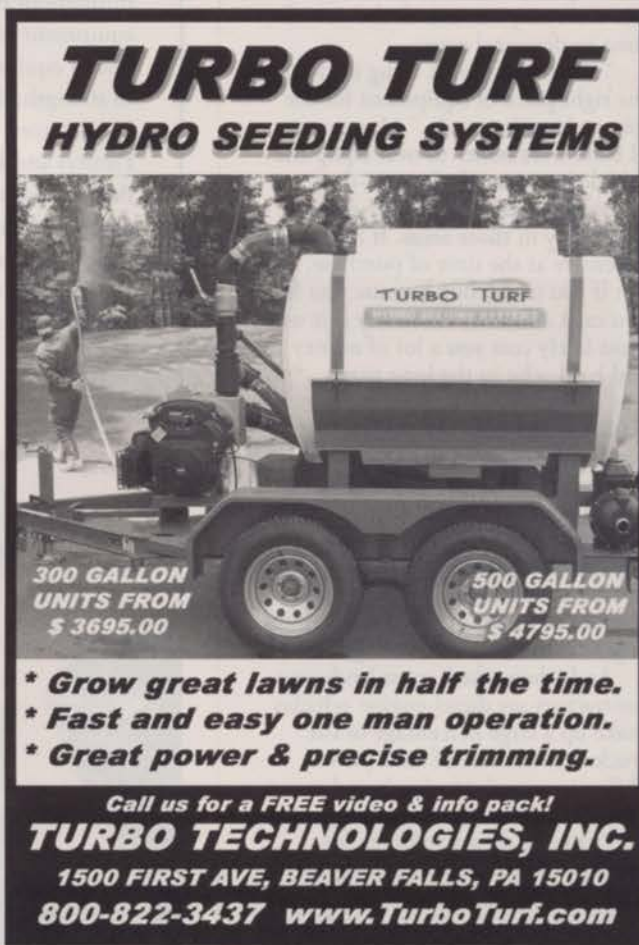
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## buy vs. lease options

Landscapers have a few clear options on how to pay for their commercial trucks. If their business is flush with cash, they can put the money down at the time of purchase. However, this financial capital isn't always available. Therefore, a contractor can either take out a loan to finance the truck purchase or lease the vehicle, which is similar to renting.

While most landscapers suggests contractors consult with their accountants to better understand the financial particulars between buying and leasing a work truck, there are benefits to both options.

### BUYING

**Taxes** – Landscapers who purchase their trucks can write off the value of the vehicle on their federal taxes, while leases can only write off the monthly payments. An accountant can guide you through this process.

**Resale** – Diesel-engine vehicles have the best resale, depreciating only about 15 percent to 20 percent in value after three years, while a gas truck loses about 50 percent of its value.

**Payments** – Monthly payments are actually applied to the final purchase of the truck.

**Insurance** – In some cases, insurance premiums may be lower when the truck is purchases versus when it's leased.

**Modifications** – Purchasing the vehicle grants the owner the freedom to adapt the truck with any addition or customizations.

### LEASING

**Payments** – Monthly payments are generally lower when leasing a vehicle because the contractor is paying off the vehicle's depreciation and not its overall value.

**Appeal** – Some landscape contractors like the fact that they'll have brand new trucks every three to five years. Driving and being seen in a clean, shiny vehicle is an important branding tool for some landscape contractors.

**Warranty** – Many manufacturers offer extended mileage leases on commercial trucks. Likewise, the warranties typically cover major malfunctions throughout the life of the lease.

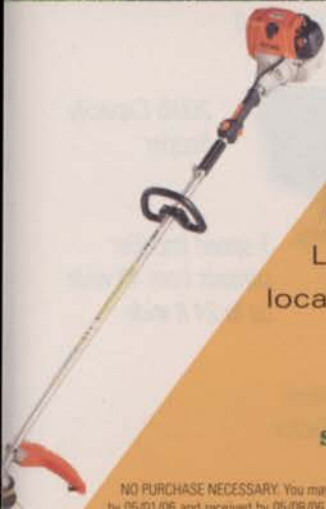
**Debt** – In some instances, contractors prefer to lease in order to avoid the truck's debt on their balance sheets. Consult an accountant for further information on the impact to the bottom line.

**Flexibility** – Because a lease's monthly payment may be less than those of a purchase/loan, a landscape contractor can choose a bigger, more expensive, heavy-duty or more customized vehicle.

**Purchase** – At the lease's conclusion, the contractor has the option of purchasing the truck for its residual value.

**Penalties** – Unlike car leases, many work truck leases, especially those for commercial vehicles, have few wear-and-tear penalties.

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Contractors should add on customized heavy-duty ramps to handle the wear and tear of load and off-loading mowers and other vehicles, such as skid steers and loaders. Likewise, fold-down sides are a practical option if contractors plan to load pallets of fertilizer or other materials onto the bed with a forklift.

Many commercial truck dealers offer menu-style add-ons for landscape trucks, Grizzel says. The additions, done typically by an outside party, include everything from extended tool boxes, shelving, fuel tanks, tool racks, trimmer racks and even backpack blower racks.

"I try to outfit the truck for the crew who will be using it," Pagurek says of choosing accessories. "Will it need additional saddle boxes for tool? Will this crew require spray tanks for watering and pesticide applications? Should a tow hitch

Commercial trucks are an essential part of any landscape contractor's fleet. However, many may overlook the benefits a van can bring to their operations.

Ken Pagurek, president of Philadelphia-based Cenova, says a van has recently become a key component to his landscape operations. Cenova's van holds upwards to 11 workers, easily outperforming the carrying capacity of a work truck's seven-person crew cab.

"Our foreman comes through with the van in the morning and picks up our Hispanic workers and brings them to the truck yard," Pagurek says. "It's a great way of getting everyone to work together and at the same time. Also, if a particular job site is not too far away, the workers can be taken directly there, too."

Vans, new or previously owned, in landscape operations provide other benefits outside of serving as crew carriers. In lieu of tying up a work truck, a van and its carrying capacity is a cost-effective solution to handle go-for and deliver duties throughout the course of the business day. Likewise, vans are ideal for bringing in hand-held equipment to commercial dealers for maintenance and service, as well as rushing replacement or forgotten equipment to job sites.

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## trucks & trailers

or hook be added? In the end, it all depends on what I expect I'll be using this truck for."

If an accessory or upgrade fails to provide an everyday function or extend a vehicle's versatility, then it is probably a drain on a contractor's financial resources, Morton says. For example, a work truck with a crew cab won't need carpeting, however its axels and springs should receive an upgrade, Morton says.

"One of the most common mistakes a landscape contractor can make when it comes to new vehicle purchases is to buy what they always bought."

- Robert Johnson

Grizzel advises contractors that items and accessories – such as additional hand-held tool racks – can always be added to the truck and trailer at a later date.

"It's a mistake contractors make thinking they need to outfit the vehicle with everything upfront and at one time," Grizzel says. "As long as the truck has a big enough trailer, you can pretty much add any type of customized add-on. After the essentials, nearly everything can be built on after the fact to accommodate new needs."

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Photo: Wells Cargo

# Happy Trails

by kathleen franzinger

When it comes to handling tools and equipment, contractors have a variety of options.

**N**o matter what the size of their company, contractors need some type of vehicle to transport their equipment. But all the trailer choices – open, closed or none at all – can leave buyers wondering what's right for them.

Kevin Richardson, sales manager, Wells Cargo, Elkhart, Ind., says contractors need to ask themselves these questions when shopping for trailers:

- How am I going to use the trailer?
- Am I going to use it every day?
- What size do I need?
- How much weight am I going to put on the trailer?

"The size and weight will determine the type of trailer axle capacity and what direction I guide them," Richardson says,

adding that the most popular sizes for closed trailers are 7-by-16 feet or 8-by-20 feet.

When contractors are looking for a trailer, they should discuss all of their needs in detail with the trailer dealer, says Brad Alden, territory manager, Feather-lite Trailers, Cresco, Iowa. "Contractors should evaluate trailers based on the upper limits of weight and cargo volume they will want to accommodate," he says. "This will determine everything from the axle capacity to the strength of the frame needed to the length and width of the trailer necessary."

Alden says most contractors want a weight capacity between 3,000 and 5,000 pounds, including the weight of the trailer. But he advises contractors check first with their truck manufacturer for the

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optimum weight loads their vehicle can safely haul.

Richardson agrees the first step for contractors is to size the trailer to their truck. A three-quarter ton pickup is going to be able to pull a 7,700-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) adequately. But if a contractor has a lightweight pickup truck, it might only be able to pull 3,000 pounds. "Having a 10,000 pound trailer behind you will burn up the truck's engine because it doesn't have enough power to pull that trailer," Richardson says. "The first thing a contractor should do is find out the tow capacity of his vehicle. That allows him to figure out how big of a trailer he can get."

*continued on page 122, sidebar on page 121*



In an enclosed trailer or truck and trailer combination, a contractor should organize his tools and equipment. Organization is crucial because it can help crewmembers find tools more quickly, making them more productive. Keeping a tool in its place and away from constant abuse can also extend its life. Photo: Super Lawn Trucks

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## spotlight on safety

It's a common story among contractors: A driver makes a quick turn, sending equipment smashing into each other or off of the trailer completely.

Contractors can reduce accidents like these by training crews on trailer safety, including how to properly secure loads. Before crews at Suburban Landscape Management, Wichita, Kan., can head out in the morning, every vehicle undergoes a safety inspection. The crew leader checks everything first, says John Biehler, president. Then, before the crews leave the yard, the company's safety team does another inspection.

The safety inspectors check seat belts, tires, turn signals, brake lights, trailer connection and equipment locks. The information is recorded on a spreadsheet with any comments, and "after all of the crews have left for the day, the safety team leader e-mails the spreadsheet

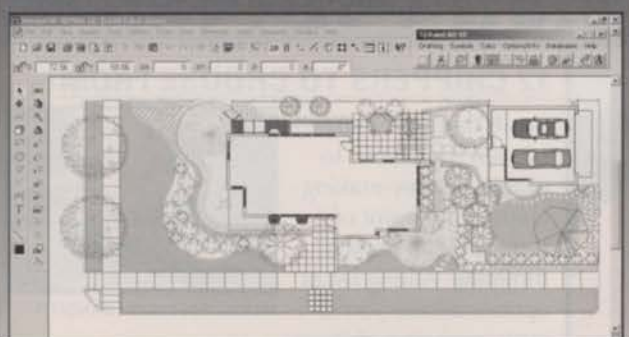
to managers in the entire company," Biehler says.

If something is wrong, the crews move out of line and aren't allowed to leave the yard. Depending on the circumstances, "they may be written up for it with a note in their permanent employment file or we may just have them fix it before they leave," Biehler says.

The inspection not only includes safety features but cleanliness as well. "Each crew has a specific day to wash their truck and trailer," Biehler says. "If it's not clean that day, the safety inspectors make note of it."

In addition to training new drivers on how to operate trailers, Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping, Portland, Ore., instructs crews on securing loads, including proper weight distribution (60 percent of the weight in the front and 40 percent in the rear) so driving is easier.

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continued from page 120

**OPEN TRAILERS.** Contractors new to the business often select open trailers because of their low cost. "You can get an open trailer, depending on the size, from about \$700 to \$2,000," Richardson says.

But some seasoned contractors like open trailers, as well. Suburban Landscape Management, Wichita, Kan., uses mostly open trailers. President John Biehler likes the open trailers because of the better visibility they offer when driving. "It's difficult enough to pull a big trailer around in tight residential areas," he says, adding that open trailer also keep visibility lines clear. In addition, open trailers make accessing equipment and tools easier. "Crew members can access them from every side," he says.

Even though open trailers offer contractors easier access to equipment, they are also more susceptible to theft. Potential thieves can steal lighter equipment more easily when contractors aren't watching or when



Closed trailers can keep equipment safe and clean, as well as protect it from theft. A bonus is that the trailer can also act as an advertising billboard for the company using it. Photo: Wells Cargo

they are working in the backyard while the trailer is in the front. Biehler noticed one other problem with flat bed open trailers. When towing them, the riding mowers would often bump into and damage

the smaller equipment. To prevent this, the company designed its own open trailer that has separate compartments for each type of mower, as well as separate gates to ease accessibility. The design also includes fuel tanks for

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refueling. Biehler estimates they have 25 to 30 flat bed open trailers and 20 of the custom designs.

Biehler points out that a good, heavy-duty open trailer might cost around \$2,500 to \$3,000, whereas a lighter, double-axle trailer might cost between \$900 and \$1,000. But with a \$5,000 to \$6,000 price tag, his cus-

tom design costs more. But it's worth it to have it exactly the way he wants. For contractors looking to simply haul equipment from job to job, open trailers are a good choice. "Open trailers are primarily for contractors who simply want to haul equipment from one site to another," says Alden. "Enclosed trailers are more versatile.

Contractors prefer them to haul and store equipment, as well as tools, in a secure, weatherproof environment."

**CLOSED TRAILERS.** Like many contractors, Steve Anderson, president, Anderson Property Management, Leesburg, Ind., didn't have the money for a closed trailer when he started in the business. "But we soon realized that enclosed trailers were a great advertising billboard," he says, adding that the trailers also keep his equipment safe, clean and organized.

Because they are enclosed, the trailers protect tools and equipment from theft and outside elements. In addition, closed trailers also serve as a "portable garage," Richardson says, which helps contractors save valuable space at the shop. "With enclosed trailers, when a contractor gets back

"Many first-time landscapers start out using open trailers because they're less expensive. Then they upgrade to an enclosed trailer when their business is established and they have a little more money to spend."

- Kevin Richardson

to his shop, he can just unhook it and lock up his trailer," Richardson says. "If he has an open trailer, he has to unload all of his equipment to take it indoors to make it safe."

Another benefit, which Anderson realized, was that the sides of closed trailers can be lettered with the company's name, logo and contact information, in effect serving as a moving billboard, Richardson says. "It's great advertising for them," he points out.

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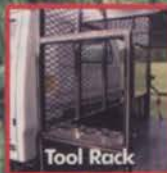
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But these advantages do come with a higher price tag. Many first-time landscapers start out using open trailers because they're less expensive, Richardson says. "Then they upgrade to an enclosed trailer when their business is established and they have a little more money to spend," he says, adding that an 8-by-20-foot closed trailer costs about \$7,500. "It's more expensive, but in the long haul, the enclosed trailer is going to outperform the open trailer in durability and life expectancy."

Richardson also points out the importance of buying some type of tie-down system when purchasing a closed trailer. "Contractors need



Suburban Landscape Management vehicles undergo safety inspections each morning before leaving the yard. To reduce accidents, crews are regularly trained on trailer safety and how to properly secure loads.

to look at the available methods for securing their load," he says. "Too many landscape contractors buy a trailer with no type of load security so

it's just shifting inside the trailer." Other popular options on closed trailers include flasher lights for use when the trailers are pulled off to the

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side of the road. "They're a safety feature," Richardson says, adding the price for that option is \$200 to \$400.

**CUSTOM TRUCKS.** For landscape contractors who are fed up with trying to maneuver trailers around tight city streets, truck and trailer combinations customized specifically for the landscape industry are an alternative way to transport tools and equipment.

The trucks can be easier to drive than towing a trailer, says Tony Bass, president, Super Lawn Trucks, Bonaire, Ga. Because of the length of a truck and trailer combined, Bass says drivers tend to catch curbs more often. "They cut the radius too short because they're used to driving short



When purchasing trailers, contractors should consider these questions: "What size do I need?" and "How much weight am I going to put on it?" Photo: Wells Cargo

personal vehicles, and truck and trailer combinations are long," Bass says, adding that the trucks are often 25 to 30 percent shorter than a typical truck and trailer combination.

Mark Borst, president, Borst Landscape and Design, Allendale,

N.J., is one contractor who likes the easier driving. With trailers, his crews would hit curbs and blow out wheels, as well as have trouble backing up. "We don't have any of those issues now," he says. "Box trucks are simpler. They're like driving a car."

The shorter length also leaves more space in facilities and yards. When he first opened his business, Borst used open trailers. He quickly moved into closed trailers because he didn't have a lot of storage space, and closed trailers safely stored his equipment overnight.

But Borst realized he still needed more space, which is why he likes the custom trucks. Not only do they offer storage like closed trailers, but they take up less of his valuable real estate

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as well. "A truck and trailer takes up two parking spots, and we don't have a large facility," Borst says. "Box trucks take up less room in our parking lot."

The trucks also help contractor organize their tools and other equipment, Bass says. "Organizing helps crews find tools faster, so they

get more work done," he says. "Even more importantly, when tools are stored properly, they last longer."

Borst likes the fact that the trucks eliminate the need to load and unload his equipment each night. While that might not sound like a big deal, he says it can add up to significant labor savings over time. "It takes about 10

minutes in the morning and 10 minutes at night to load and unload open trailers," he says. "When you have three guys, that's an hour a day. Say we work 200 days, that's 200 hours. The labor costs add up."

Obviously, a truck costs more than a trailer. Cost depends on the options, but Bass says customized trucks can start at around \$43,000.

Most contractors also opt for a

"Contractors should evaluate trailers based on the upper limits of weight and cargo volume they will want to accommodate. This will determine everything from the axle capacity to the strength of the frame and length and width of the trailer necessary."

- Brad Alden

hand and power tool storage option, most of which are under \$2,000, Bass says. Another popular option are built-in fuel tanks mounted on the outside of the trucks. "Fuel transport tanks are specially designed to give a landscape maintenance crew enough fuel to last all week long," Bass says, adding that the tanks typically save about \$2,500 per year in labor costs if the contractor is running a three-man crew and going to a fuel station three times per week. The option costs about \$2,600 Bass says.

The trucks cost more than enclosed trailers, but Borst says it's worth it. "We figure the box truck is equal in value to buying a new truck and trailer," he says.

The only other potential drawback is versatility. "We use ours strictly for lawn maintenance," Borst points out. "Someone using it for multiple applications may not find it as versatile."



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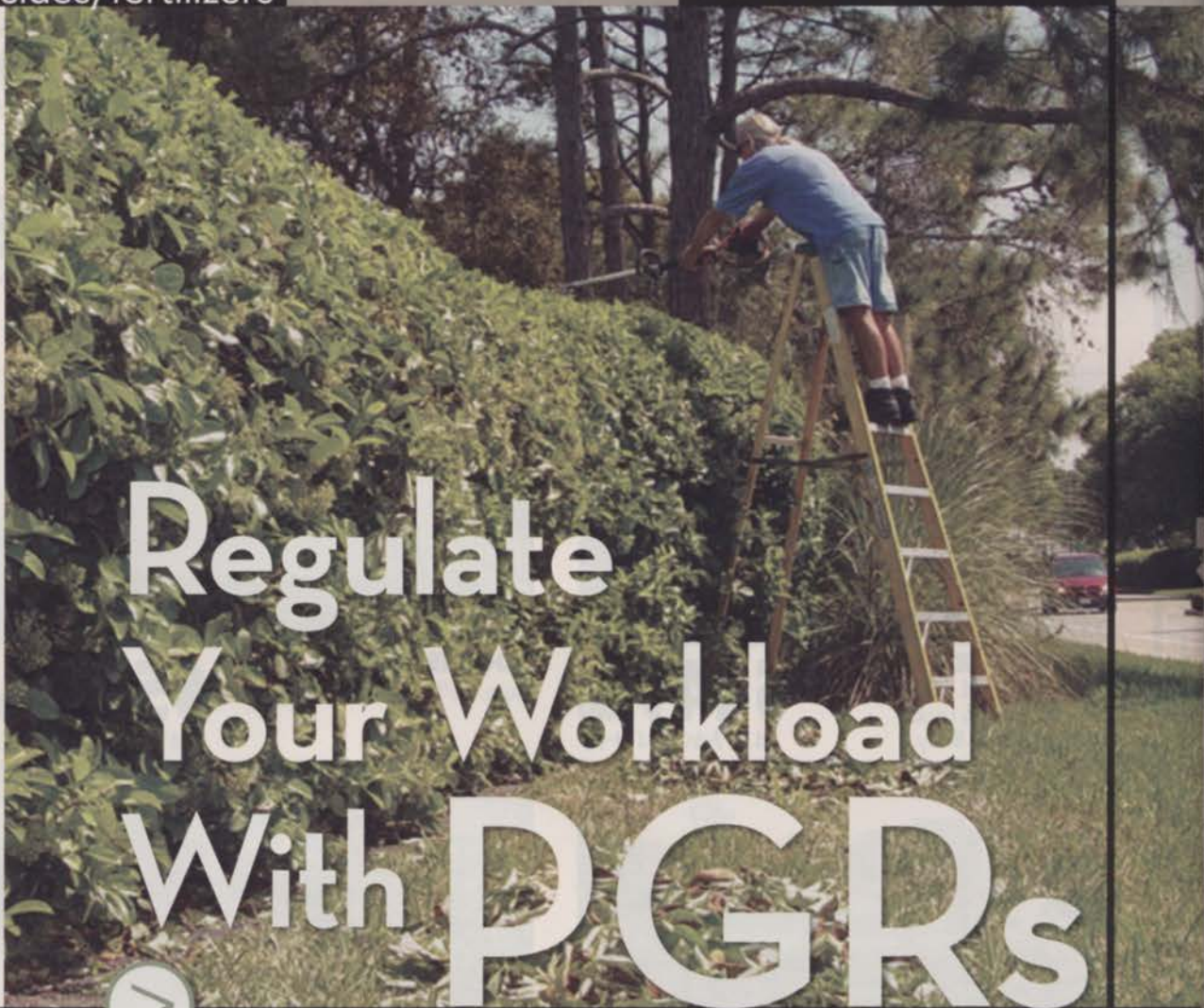
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# Regulate Your Workload With PGRs



by kristin van veen-hincke

More lawn care operators are using plant growth regulators to ease labor concerns and combat the rising cost of discarding grass clippings.

**A**sk any lawn care operator (LCO) to rate his top five business challenges and inevitably each list will include labor costs and the increasing expense of clippings disposal. In an effort to manage these issues, more LCOs are looking to plant growth regulators (PGRs) for relief.

Plant growth regulators are used by LCOs as a tool to reduce their workload. These products are usually applied to diminish the growth cycle of turf and ornamentals resulting in less frequent mowing and pruning requirements and a reduced amount of yard waste. The market for these products has been on the rise for the past decade and continues to grow.

"The lawn care business has an excellent opportunity for a couple of reasons," explains Buddy Reid, specialty division manager, Helena Chemical Co., Cuthbert, Ga. "No. 1, the biggest cost for a lawn care operator is labor. PGRs will reduce the number of times you will mow a property in a year. The second thing is clippings and what to do with them. If you have fewer clippings that means you have less to dispose of."

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They can also help lessen the amount of messy and hazardous fruit dropped from trees. "The savings in labor costs appears to be pretty significant in climates where you have to prune three times a year," points out Bill Culpepper, president, SePRO Corporation, Carmel, Ind. "The products can also be used for groundcovers and, in some cases, on flower plantings, growth habits can be controlled."

Understanding what PGRs do and using proper application techniques can help LCOs alleviate their labor- and efficiency-related concerns.

**WHAT PGRs DO.** Although PGRs have been commonly used by golf course superintendents for many years, LCOs are realizing the benefits of these products in their efforts to lower labor costs. According to Steve Stansell, lawn market manager for Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro, N.C., those LCOs using regulators on estate-type lawns are



A PGR-treated shrub stands neat compared to an untreated one that requires pruning more regularly. Photo: PBI Gordon

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providing their customers with beautiful, lush turf. "These contractors are using plant growth regulators to really strengthen up the grass, to give it a nice compact look, and to give it a stronger root system which manages stress better."

"Some of the growth regulators can help from a monetary standpoint with the lawn care companies," says Ben Cicora, business manager for herbicides and plant growth regulators, Bayer Environmental Science, Research Triangle Park, N.C.

"If a contractor can bid out a job, and they may not have to mow every week, it increases their bottom line. Ultimately, anytime you look at the labor situation, regulators will always play into account with LCOs."

According to Doug Obermann, turf and ornamental products manager, PBI Gordon, Kansas City, Mo., use of these products requires less labor, which frees the contractor to devote time to other areas. "The labor

that piece of time. They can use it somewhere else."

Studies have shown that although regulators will not necessarily save a contractor on the cost of product, they will affect the amount of labor

**Most companies see a drastic change in the amount of yard waste generated after PGRs are used. "We've seen 60 to 70 percent reduction in green waste," says Barry Troutman. "In Florida, we can't put any green waste in a landfill. It has to go to a separate site where it is recycled, and we pay a hefty fee to have that done."**

savings is one thing. They do save a lot of time on mowing and pruning; however, the benefit is that the LCO now has time to allocate to another project. They don't have to manage

utilized on large accounts. "If you compare the dollar value of the product to the dollar value of the labor you save, you break even," remarked Barry Troutman, vice president, technical

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services for ValleyCrest Cos., Sanford, Fla. "In the analysis we've done, we're within \$5 to \$10 out of a \$1,000 of breaking even so we're not saving money using the product, but what we are doing is reallocating labor," Troutman explains. As with most companies, ValleyCrest utilizes this extra labor to fill gaps that exist as a result of fewer available employees.

Use patterns can be based on several factors including:

- Length of the growing season
- Product label instructions
- Availability of trained applicators

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 4.0 million occupational injuries occurred in the private sector during 2004. Of these, 68 percent or 2.7 million occurred in service indus-

tries. Use of PGRs enables contractors to lessen the on-the-job injuries sustained by their employees.

"They've done reviews with crews, and minor injuries from trimming and pruning have lessened," Obermann reports. "With fewer injuries, LCOs have less paperwork to complete and, in the end, more time to devote to the business."

"The gas hedge shearer is probably the most dangerous piece of equipment we use," Troutman states. "The injuries often aren't severe, but there are more injuries on that piece of equipment than any other we use. If somebody even nicks his finger, you're going to spend up to \$1,000 by the time you get him drug tested and as a result of the management time that goes into that so the liability reduction is almost as significant as the labor reduction." On that same note,

"The savings in labor costs appears to be pretty significant in climates where you have to prune three times a year. PGRs can also be used for groundcovers and, in some cases, on flower plantings, growth habits can be controlled."

- Bill Culpepper

Stansell recommends that regulators be utilized in hard-to-mow areas that can present a danger to LCOs.

The disposal of clippings continues to be a challenge for operators. "In many parts of the country, it is not just the time savings, it is the disposal into the waste centers," Obermann continues. "There's cost involved in disposal."

In some states, such as Florida and Missouri, the disposal of grass

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clippings in landfills has been banned. Colorado State University Cooperative Extension reports that 1,000 square feet of grass can generate approximately 200 pounds of clippings annually, and up to 20 percent of trash sent to landfills each year is yard waste.

Most companies see a drastic change in the amount of yard waste generated after PGRs are used. "We've seen 60 to 70 percent reduction in green waste," Troutman says. "In Florida, we can't put any green waste or yard waste in a landfill. It has to go to a separate site where it is recycled, and we pay a hefty fee to have that done."

These products, through the suppression of cell growth, alter the development rates of turfgrass and ornamentals by as much as 50 percent. "The product prevents cell elongation," Culpepper explains. "When you're looking at plants typically hedges or shrubs, you are not limiting



Pruning shrubs can be labor intensive. Many lawn care operators are using plant growth regulators to help control shrub growth and eliminate this excess work. Photo: PBI Gordon

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the leaves; you are getting a darker, greener color. You get the aesthetic benefits, flowering is enhanced and flowers appear to be more numerous on the plants."

This adjustment for ornamentals can produce radical results without damaging the plant. In fact, PGRs can actually benefit a plant by redirecting

growth from the top to the roots. "Using PGRs requires less pruning and it fills in holes very well," reports Keith Reid, president of Bioscapes Integrated of Virginia Beach, Va. "It produces a lot of lateral branching and plants will be denser and thicker as a result of the spraying."

"We've tried it at a couple of

malls, and it has done miracles," praises Mark Morawa, superintendent with The Brickman Group, West Palm Beach, Fla. "I am using a plant growth regulator on every one of my accounts. We include it as part of the contract to maintain the areas. Down here in Florida, the plants grow so rapidly that we don't have to touch the property again for two to three months. We are saving on the bottom line. We save on labor so we're able to focus on other things, such as providing better detail of the property than we were able to do before."

Keith Reid, who has been using regulators for more than 15 years, reported that one-third of his business involves spraying PGRs.

"PGRs are most beneficial when applied during the growth season, typically April through June. Generally, PGRs should not be applied during a stress period involving heat, drought, diseases and insects."

**APPLICATION EDUCATION.** According to Culpepper, application of regulators is fairly simple. "You just sprinkle granulars around the drip line of the plants on the soil and the root will absorb it. It is best to make applications before or immediately following a pruning. You should see results in six to eight weeks depending on the species and location."

PGRs are most beneficial when applied during the growth season, typically April through June. Generally PGRs should not be applied during a stress period involving heat,

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# “Low odor is important, but Triplet Low Odor herbicide has been an even better investment than that”

– Michael Kravitsky, Vice President of Grasshopper Lawns, Inc.

Grasshopper Lawns, Inc. has been a family-owned business for more than 40 years and has built a reputation as a caring company who takes pride in their service and does not cut corners when it comes to either their customers or their employees.

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The low odor feature was what initially intrigued them and they were not disappointed. “Our crews first commented on the clearer color of the herbicide, but then we started to notice that there were far fewer complaints from applicators – their clothes didn’t smell after using Triplet Low Odor and the mixing/storage area didn’t have that usual lingering chemical odor,” says Shawn. “While we did not feel it was entirely necessary to promote the low odor benefit to customers, the internal benefit to us was huge.”

Michael adds, “What’s even better is that we found that the first two rounds of applications took care of most weed problems and we had significantly fewer weed calls – in fact, an average of 75 to 80% less complaints than the previous few years. The only thing different in our program has been the addition of Triplet Low Odor. The reduced callbacks actually save us quite a bit of money in the long run.”

While they both agree that they would continue to use Triplet Low Odor strictly on the merits of its low odor qualities, they are even more sold on it now that they understand the financial benefits of reduced complaints from slow or incomplete weed control.

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“...we had significantly fewer weed calls – in fact, an average of 75% to 80% less complaints than the previous few years.

The only thing different in our program has been the addition of Triplet Low Odor.”

*Michael and Shawn Kravitsky, Grasshopper Lawns, Inc., confer with Mark Phipps, Nufarm Turf & Specialty Regional Sales Manager, about the benefits of using Triplet Low Odor herbicide*



  
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drought, diseases and insects. According to Obermann, "some climates may use these products twice a year. They can be used in one application or at multiple times for ornamentals and generally one time for turf."

The products come in both liquid and granular form. Typically a liquid PGR is the ideal for turf. Granulars work best on shrubs and trees.



Disposal of yard waste can cost time and money (above). Florida Lawn Care Operator Keith Reid compares a PGR-treated holly bush on his left to an untreated holly bush on his right six to eight weeks after treatment (center). Below Reid maintains one of the many holly bushes on his clients' properties. Photos: PBI Gordon

"The most important factor when applying is coverage," Obermann notes. "You have to make sure you have even distribution."

"Obviously equipment that gives you precision application, such as a spray boom with a marker so you know where you have already sprayed and don't overlap, is ideal," Buddy Reid recommends.

The coastal regions of the United States include the biggest users of plant growth regulators due to the warmer climate. Contractors in states such as Georgia, Florida, Texas and California rely heavily on regulators. Arizona and Nevada utilize these products due to irrigation concerns.

Awareness of these products is growing. The Los Angeles Unified School District has a plant growth regulator on the list of approved pesticide products for use around schools. The Portland, Ore. airport also utilizes these products.

"The ornamental market is grow-



ing like crazy," Obermann notes. "Labor is key for the lawn care operators. Companies don't have the bodies. When we ask them what they want, they say 'I want to do more with less.'"

"For the commercial lawn care company, it makes sense to use the products; however, the homeowner is being billed by the week so the maintenance contractor may want to mow as much as possible," Cicora explains. "Ultimately the decision to use regulators has to do with a

company's growth strategy. If spraying costs more than mowing, it probably doesn't make sense. You have to find out what works best for the operator."

Landscape operators face daily challenges to the success of their business. Labor is at the forefront of every manager's mind. Finding solutions that offer a more efficient business model is essential. Plant growth regulators can be that tool. Troutman says it best, "A PGR never gets sick and it always shows up for work." **LL**

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Photos: Hunter Industries (pages 142, 146, 150); Rain Bird (page 144)

# Lessons in Pricing



When pricing irrigation installation in the residential market, the mantra is "know your costs."

**W**ant to know the key to pricing residential irrigation installation? Repeat this: "I must know my costs. I must know my costs." It may sound simple, but that one sentence is the foundation to effective pricing.

To ensure a profit at the end of the day, contractors must know the cost of materials, labor, profit, overhead and the variables that affect each. The best way to gain that knowledge is to learn from previous jobs.

"If I had one tip, I would say become a really good student of the jobs you've already done," says Scott Fay, president, Treasure Coast Irrigation, Hobe Sound, Fla. "Know where you made money and

where you didn't because the better you are at job costing, the better you'll be at estimating."

**PRICING METHODS.** In a system of checks and balances similar to the U.S. Government's three branches of power, Fay prices jobs three ways. First, he estimates a square footage price based on the size of the lot. While he doesn't bid jobs based on square footage alone, it serves as a point of reference and gives him a rough idea of the price.

After the design is laid out and he knows the material specifications, Fay uses a unit pricing method. "As we watch our job costing, we know in general what we should be at for every spray head," he says. This gives him a quick estimate, but it doesn't take into account site condi-

by kathleen franzinger

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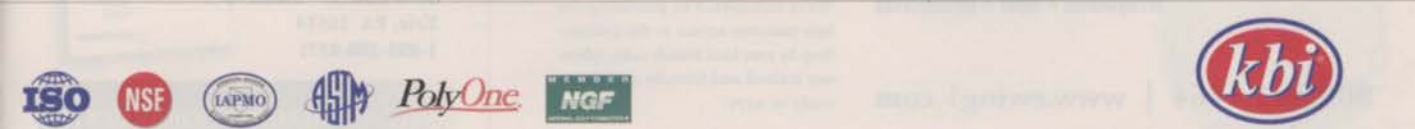
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tions, travel time and other variables, Fay says, which is why contractors shouldn't price on unit alone.

Finally, Fay fine-tunes the price by adding labor and materials, factoring in overhead, and then adding a percentage for profit. This last method is the best one, he says, but he still combines all three on every job as a way to check his price.

Most of the time, contractors understand material and labor costs. The tricky part can be adding in profit and overhead. For residential irrigation installation work, industry consultant Jim Huston recommends contractors strive for a minimum net profit margin of 20 percent and gross profit margin of 35 to 40 percent.

Hydro-Tech Irrigation Co., Chantilly, Va., adds a profit based on a net profit they're trying to achieve. Vice President Steve Battiston says the number fluctuates based on certain variables, such as what is going on in the market, the workload at the time



and where the job is located.

Three different pieces factor into Grapids Irrigation's pricing: materials, labor and subcontractors. There is a markup on each component, and then

a total markup on top of that, says the Grand Rapids, Mich.-based company Owner Aaron Katerberg. "It's usually 5 to 20 percent gross depending on which category it's for," he explains.



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"Material would be on the higher end for us, and subcontractors would be on the lower end."

Katerberg also points out that the profit will vary depending on how much work they have. "There are times when we're looking for work, and we'll adjust the markup down," he says. "When we're busy, we'll increase the markup."

Katerberg says they like to be able to schedule installation jobs three to four weeks out. Anything less than that is viewed as a slow time, and they would be looking for work. Anything more is considered a busy period.

Overhead is another critical component of pricing. "The biggest thing is understanding what your overhead is and making sure you put profit on your overhead, as well as your labor and materials," Battiston says. His estimating spreadsheet has overhead built into the manhour cost. Every winter, his company figures

out a budget that determines what the overhead per manhour is, which then gets plugged into the spreadsheet.

When all the costs are calculated, Battiston says the average price he sees is \$600 to \$650 per zone. "I know after we run everything and put in the profit we want to see, it runs about that," he says, adding that the zone price is based on the average home having 15 gpm available.

**FACTOR IN VARIABLES.** No matter how well contractors know their material and labor costs, it's important to realize that every job is different. Site conditions, travel time and customers themselves differ from job to job, and they can quickly add on labor costs.

"The biggest variable is labor," Katerberg says. "If I had to enforce one thing, it's to know your labor costs. If you don't and you're not good at incorporating these variables, you're never going to be able to run a busi-

"Know where you made money and where you didn't  
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ness that can keep going.”

Typically, Battiston estimates one man per zone per 10-hour day. “If it’s a six-zone job, then we would send six guys and they would work 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.,” he says, adding that the average residential installation job is six to eight zones. But not all jobs fit nicely into the equation.

That’s why all the variables need to be considered in order to bid properly. One of the biggest variables that could affect labor time is the soil type. Katerberg says soil conditions can vary, even within a service area. “Within 10 miles, you can have very soft, nice soil to rock hard soil,” he says.

For Katherine Gavzy, design/build division manager, Del Conte’s Landscaping, Fremont, Calif., her part of the country tends to have clay soil. “So trenching time is doubled from

“The biggest thing is understanding what your overhead is and making sure you put profit on your overhead, as well as your labor and materials.”

— Steve Battiston

your usual standard benchmarking production rates,” she says.

But there are also certain sections of their service area where the soil is different. “Some residential areas are built on landfills, so they have mainly sand, which we can cut through easily,” Gavzy says.

Katerberg warns that contractors who don’t know how the plumbing will come off a building can also incur costs. “If you don’t notice the water pressure is too low, you could incur the cost of having an electrician and a booster pump,” he says.

Another aspect to site conditions is the type of trees on the property, which Katerberg says is often over-



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12-zone	\$450	\$504	\$500	\$700
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<b>Electric Valves</b>				
1-inch	\$50/valve	\$72/valve	\$100/valve	\$130
2-inch	\$120/valve	\$165/valve	\$200/valve	\$450
3-inch	\$200/valve	\$225/valve	\$300/valve	\$730
<b>Heads</b>				
4-inch spray heads	\$30/head	\$60/head	\$70/head	\$30/head
6-inch spray heads	\$35/head	\$75/head	\$70/head	\$40/head
Rotors	\$50/piece	\$110/piece	\$100/piece	\$75/piece
<b>Mainline</b>				
1½-inch	\$2/foot	\$2.50/foot	\$3/foot	\$6/foot
2-inch	\$3.50/foot	\$3/foot	\$5/foot	\$6.10/foot
3-inch	\$4.50/foot	\$4.25/foot	\$7/foot	\$7/foot
4-inch	\$6/foot	\$6.25/foot	\$10/foot	\$8/foot
<b>Rain Sensor</b> (required in some areas)				
	\$125	\$175	\$175	\$200
<b>Example Total</b>				
A job with 26 rotors, 13 spray heads, one 6-zone controller, 5 1-inch electric valves and 100 feet of 1½ inch mainline would cost:				
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**Lawn & Landscape** interviewed contractors from East to West to find out how irrigation prices differ. All prices quoted are for new construction only and include labor and installation costs. These are not service or maintenance prices. Because variable installation specifications and component selection can cause significant swings in price (i.e. depth of piping, backfill requirements, type of valve/sprinkler/timer/sensor, valve manifold configurations, etc.), these prices are based on the most typical specifications encountered in each area.

looked. For example, if he sees a locust trees on a site, he knows labor costs will be high because of the intricate and troublesome root systems.

Knowing the customer also plays into pricing, says Fay. Ideally, his crew would finish a job within a day. But with some general contractors, his

crews have to leave and come back a few times and no change orders are allowed. In those cases, Fay has to charge more money to cover the costs of the extra time involved. On the other hand, when general contractors understand the value of scheduling, Fay knows he can afford to give them

a better price because they manage their jobs well.

**MISTAKES TO AVOID.** Despite the best advice, mistakes in pricing are almost guaranteed. "We've made mistakes," Katerberg says. "Everybody makes mistakes on bidding. But you



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have to learn from those.”

One mistake Katerberg has seen contractors make is charging a flat fee for installation jobs. For instance, contractors new to the business and looking for work may offer to do every house in a development for a flat \$2,000 rate, he says. But that pricing doesn't take into consideration all the variables of a job, and contractors can end up losing money.

Other times, contractors will make the mistake of saying they'll beat any price by 10 percent. The problem with this is that contractor's are relying on other people's bidding process, which may not be reliable or may be purposely low for competitive reasons. "A lot of contractors just starting out are so desperate for work, they work themselves right out of the business," Katerberg says.

Fay points out how valuable it is to have a comprehensive proposal — one that includes verbiage on what the job entails and what happens if



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there are any changes to the design. Oftentimes, in an effort to provide good customer service, contractors can rush through the proposal process to get working on the job. "But if we're not careful, we actually create more problems," Fay says.

One of the biggest mistakes to avoid is getting involved in a bidding war with low-ball competitors. There

always has been, and always will be, low-ball competitors. But contractors who worry about them or try to match them, will end up only hurting themselves. "It's my strong belief that we're our own worst competition," Fay says. "I don't waste my time worrying about those other guys."

Contractors should also avoid lowering their prices to satisfy hard-to-

please customers. Battiston explains to customers that his company's price comes with expertise and high quality. Given that 95 percent of the company's work comes from referrals, it seems to be a good sales tool.

But if customers are shopping solely on price, Battiston doesn't lower his prices to make the sale. "We're definitely not the cheapest guy on the block, nor do we want to be," Battiston says. "If you're looking for the lowest priced guy on the block then I'm not your guy, and that's OK. There is plenty of market for that, but it's not what we're looking for."

To help customers, Battiston will

"Our biggest mistakes have come from being sloppy on the estimating side. If there is ever a time to be slow and deliberate, it's when you're pricing."

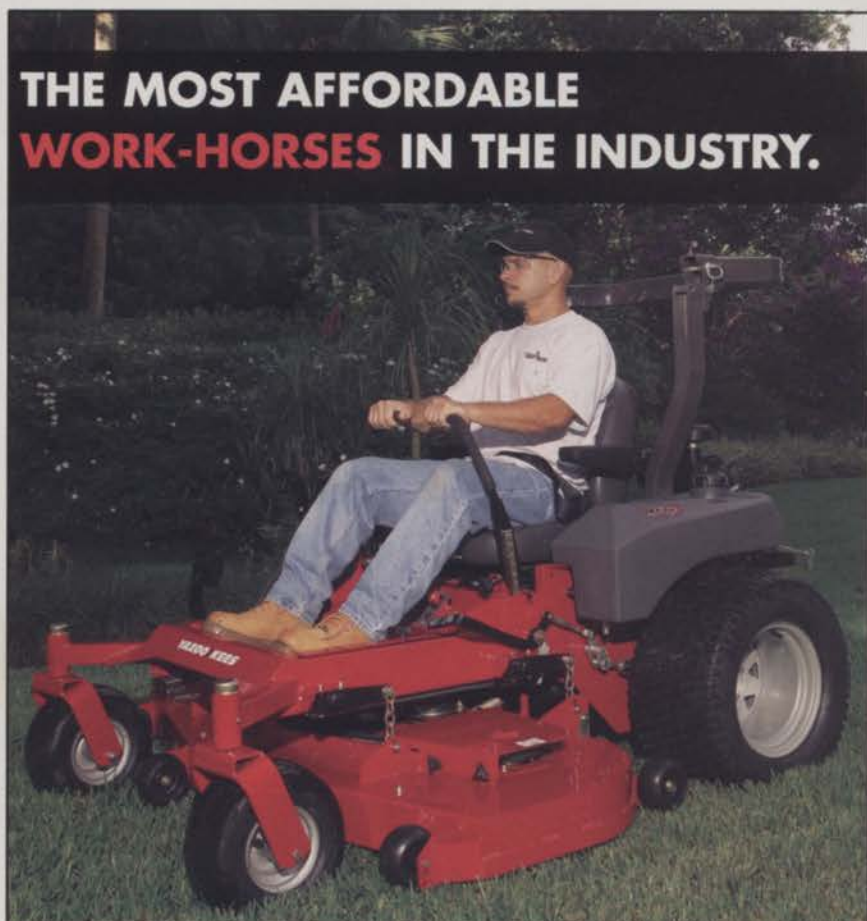
- Scott Fay

sometimes offer off-season discounts. "We give 7 to 10 percent off of the contract if a customer is willing to wait until January or February for us to install the system," he says.

In the end, closing a sale and offering deals goes back to knowing your costs. "The No. 1 thing is to know your costs because then you know what you can give up if you have to," Gavzy says.

And remember: Once an agreement with a customer is made, the contract is put away. "The customer doesn't want to, and should never, hear that we made a mistake and need to charge them more money," Fay says. "We don't do that. It's our job to get it right the first time."

This makes pricing all the more critical. "Our biggest mistakes have come from being sloppy on the estimating side," Fay says. "If there is ever a time to be slow and deliberate, it's when you're pricing." **U**



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# Bold & Beautiful

by kathleen franzinger

When it comes to plants, big and bold is in, but proper placement and design also help make gardens beautiful.

**A** garden, especially a front entry bed, is not a place to be shy. Forget soft pastels and boring foliage, and think bold colors and big plants. A punch of color and a splash of texture can brighten any bed and helps create a warm, welcoming space. But being bold doesn't mean throwing all design principles to the wayside. The right blend of colors, texture and year-round appeal can create a living work of art. Even though today's gardens shun wallflower status, it's still necessary to follow basic design principles to create a unified space.

**EYE-CATCHING COLOR.** It's hard to ignore a garden overflowing with vibrant color. And with shades of reds, pinks and purples gaining popularity, it seems more customers want their gardens to scream, "Look at me!"

Jessica Atchison, industry communications manager, Ball Horticultural Co., West Chicago, Ill., sees rich, bold colors, such as burgundy, purple and black becoming more popular, along with warm tones like yellow, orange and fuchsia. "We're moving away from pastels and toward deeper or more vibrant colors that provide a sense of fun or luxury," she says.

Although client preferences will differ from job to job, it's hard to argue the prevalence of red, pink and purple hues. For example, Nicholas Staddon, director of new plant introductions, Monrovia Growers, Azusa, Calif., notes the continued popularity of weigelas, especially a new





Photos: Morton's Landscape Development Co.

variety that offers burgundy leaves. "It used to be they only had green leaves," he says. "But now you have a rich coppery tone that offsets the pink or red flowers."

Roses are a perennial favorite among clients, and an increased use of Knock Out Shrub Roses also suggests a trend toward pinks and reds. But it's not just the color that makes the plant popular. William Healy, a landscape designer who works with Morton's Landscape Development Co., Columbia Station, Ohio, started using the *Rosa* variety of the plant about six years ago, and it quickly became one of his favorites because of how much it flowers and how tolerant

it is to disease. Healy is also a big fan of the *Blushing* variety, which comes in a lighter pink color.

Purple is also a big hit in gardens, thanks in part to *Geranium Rozanne*, a new variety of hardy geranium. Kevin O'Brien, landscape designer, Lifestyle Landscaping, Grafton, Ohio, likes to use the flower, especially when planted in mass. "It virtually flowers all summer," O'Brien says. "It gets about 1 foot tall, but has a strong horizontal habit to it."

But of all the colors, Staddon believes one in particular is gaining the most favor. "If you look at trends in interior design and fashion, there is a quiet trend toward pinks and

greens," he says. "Pink is becoming an enormously popular color again."

It's often difficult for the gardening industry to keep up with other design trends because of how long it takes to bring a plant to the market. But Staddon predicts the timing is perfect for a new dwarf pink echinacea due out next year called *Pixie Meadowbrite*. The plant grows 18 to 20 inches high and wide. "At last, we have a plant that ties into fashion and interior design," he says.

**A TOUCH OF TEXTURE.** The bold look doesn't just apply to color, but size and shape as well. Plants with large flowers and foliage can add vi-



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sual interest to any garden. The trend toward “monster plants,” as Atchison calls them, looks like it’s here to stay. “In annuals, the most attention-getting plants of the past year have been giants in some way,” she says, pointing out the Kong coleus, Magilla perilla and Wave petunias. “The Kong coleus has enormous leaves with flashy color patterns. The Magilla perilla is an annual foliage plant that grows up to 3 feet tall, and Wave petunias spread up to 4 feet.”

Staddon notes the popularity of oakleaf hydrangeas which, instead of a regular green leaf, have a large oakleaf that can grow 8 to 9 inches across.

In addition, the leaves turn vibrant shades of crimson and burgundy in the fall, providing year-round interest. Next year, Staddon says to watch for a

“If you look at trends in interior design and fashion, there is a quiet trend toward pinks and greens. Pink is becoming an enormously popular color again.” – Nicholas Staddon

new breed called Vaughn's Lillie. “The plant is 4 to 5 feet tall and 4 to 5 feet wide,” he says. “The flower is the size of a small child’s head. It’s a gorgeous plant with year-round interest.”

Another indicator of the big-

ger-is-better trend is the increased use of tropical plants in recent years. “Designers are using tropical plants in beds to add bold texture and color,” Healy says. “Cannas, which can grow up to 6 feet tall and have huge leaves and wild-colored flowers, are a popular choice.”

In addition to large plants, customers are drawn to soft plants. “I think people like textures they can actually touch,” Staddon says, such as ferns and ornamental grasses.

Atchison notes the increase of what she refers to as “touchy-feely” plants – the kind that make you want to reach out and touch them. “Examples would be Silver Shield plectranthus, a variety with thick, fuzzy silver leaves or Purple Majesty ornamental millet, which has fluffy seed heads,” she says.

Atchison also sees a trend of combining lots of different textures. “Plants with big, fuzzy leaves or small, succulent foliage can harmonize perfectly with large-flowered annuals in combination plantings,” she explains.

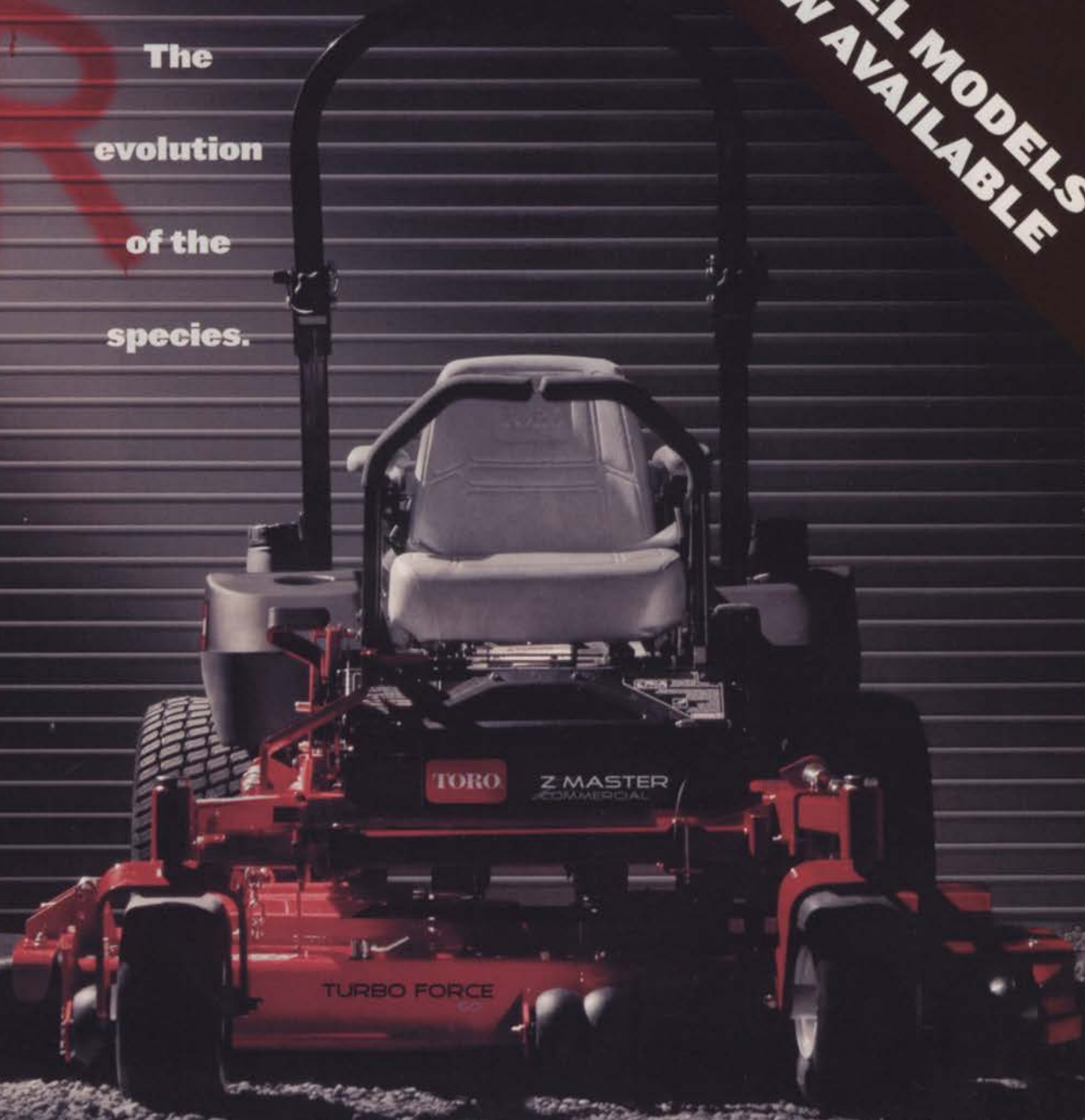
Bob Thomas, landscape designer, Moon Landscaping, Yardley, Pa., says his clients, who live in homes worth around \$1 million, prefer a more evergreen look to their front gardens. They like the formal look it offers, as well as the year-round interest it provides. “P.J.M. Rhododendron, for example, has a green leaf in the main growing season, but the leaves turn a little mahogany in the fall and winter,” he says.

To create textural differences, Thomas will place a broadleaf ever-

green next to a finer leaf evergreen. Next to that, he’ll plant a juniper variety, which offers more of a needle evergreen. In addition to differing texture, all these plants have various shades of green. He says he tries to

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Sometimes design rules were made to be broken. Here, larger plants with see-through ability are placed in front, rather than in the back of a bed. Photo: Morton's Landscape Development Co.

stick with 12 to 15 varieties for an entire front-yard planting. Occasionally, he'll also incorporate ornamental grasses such as *Adagio* for texture and color variation.

In addition, Thomas' customers live in an area where deer often eat plants in the landscape. When designing beds, he needs to select plants that are tolerant to deer, which can be challenging. "Deer are an all-season long problem, and their appetites change weekly," he says.

A popular plant, both for its appearance and its deer-tolerance, are boxwoods. In addition to being

draws the eye. Close by, I would have a plant to soften it, such as moving grasses."

#### EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE.

Once plants have been selected for a bed, the next step is figuring out where they should go. The goal of entry bed plants is to create a welcoming space and call attention to the entrance.

A plant with an interesting texture or a splash of color can highlight the entry. "There may be a specimen plant material such as a Japanese white pine to show this is an area of

he moves farther from the door, he'll start massing plant material.

With the right placement, plants can also disguise parts of the house, such as an electric meter or a downspout, and accentuate other parts, such as a unique architectural feature.

It's also important to remember that gardens should be appealing from the inside, as well as the outside. That's why Thomas always asks to go inside the home when he visits a site. "We can determine what views we may want to screen or disguise," he says. "Many of the homes we work on have a lot of windows, so we want to design the garden for inside, as well as outside viewing."

Massing plants together delivers the best color show, and it also helps alleviate maintenance because the plants crowd out weed competition. "If you group things together, the texture becomes one," O'Brien says. "It has more impact visually than a bunch of individual elements."

But be sure to consider how the garden will look from up close as well as far away. A block of dark-leaved plants works in dappled shade areas and may look good up close, but when from a distance, they can look like a black hole. "To liven up the space, use them

"Designers are using tropical plants in beds to add bold texture and color. Cannas, which can grow up to 6 feet tall and have huge leaves and wild-colored flowers, are a popular choice."

— William Healy

used as hedges, they can also be used to frame the sides of an entrance or as a single specimen in a container. "I would plant a triangle of three of these in a garden," says Staddon. "It gives it a mathematical look that

interest," O'Brien says.

O'Brien also uses the area around the front door and porch to do a more detailed planting. "At that point, people have slowed down enough to take everything in," he says, adding that as

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Example of shoots from Cutless Granular treated plant (left) and untreated plant (right).

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USE READER SERVICE # 124

in conjunction with blues, golds or bright greens," Staddon suggests.

Even though a plant may offer the right color and texture, it doesn't mean it's the right plant for the space. Staddon says the greatest tip ever passed on to him was to be aware of how big a plant will get. "A plant may

be beautiful and the color just right, but if it's too big or too small for the spot, the design won't work," he says.

For example, says O'Brien, it's not a good idea to cram a *Viburnum* one foot from a pathway. "It will ultimately grow into the pathway and create a maintenance issue."

When placing annuals, Atchison recommends placing plants close enough to fill in quickly. "It takes more plants, but it also makes a much bigger impact and results in a happier client," she says. "Nobody likes to see bare spots."

Understanding the plants and knowing their growth habits can ease selection and eliminate potential headaches. "The choices in plants can be completely overwhelming," Atchison says. "You can get help from the Internet, catalogs and your wholesale grower to make sure you're making the right decision. A little research up front means better results later on."

**"The choices in plants can be completely overwhelming. You can get help from the Internet, catalogs and your wholesale grower to make sure you're making the right decision. A little research up front means better results later on."**

**— Jessica Atchison**



**BALANCING ACT.** The shift may be toward bold color, but in order to remain beautiful, designers need to follow basic design principles. This doesn't mean gardens have to be stale or staid. Designs should be creative and dynamic, but the goal is to provide balance.

Bold textures are great, but the bold stands out because finer textured plants are nearby for them to play off. Balance is what gives gardens more appeal. "Garden beds need to have some type of unity," Healy says. "If they don't, it's chaos."

Unity can be easily established through repetition, such as using a group of oakleaf hydrangea on both sides of a garden. Or, if there is a triangular planting on one side of the garden, use the same triangular planting somewhere else in the garden. "This creates balance and natural flow of the eye," Staddon says.

To bring unity to his designs, Healy likes to place one plant, say a red peony, at the end of a driveway, and then repeat that plant by the front door. "Design-wise, it takes the eye and philosophically, it brings the person to the door," he says. "It's easy to do, but it creates repetition and unity."

While basic principles are

Designers don't have to contain their creativity to plant beds. Planters are a great way to complement a landscape bed or spruce up an entryway. Photo: Monrovia Growers



Bold plants can add visual interest to any garden. Designers note a definite trend toward large, attention-getting plants like this Kong coleus. Photo: Ball Horticultural Co.

the key to an effective design, that doesn't mean creativity has to be stifled. In fact, Atchison sees more designers following the idea that anything goes. "You can interplant petunias among junipers, for example, or try breaking up long beds with exotic-looking tropical plants," she says.

Healy also likes to go against the

says that rule doesn't always have to be followed.

He suggests placing larger plants with see-through ability, such as a medium-sized perennial like *Persicaria*, in the front of a bed. "If it's a grassy plant or the flowers are up higher on stems, you can see through the flowers to the plants in the back of the bed,"

containers can really help tie the landscape beds in with surrounding structures," Atchison says.

Staddon agrees that containers are a great way to spruce up a landscape bed or entryway. "You can accentuate and soften an entranceway with containers of flowers, perennials or columnar plants," he says. "Sometimes people have to wait in entranceways, so you should give them something to look at while they do."

Containers can hold an assortment of ornamental plant materials, a small tree, or even grasses and bamboo. Other popular container plants are Endless Summer hydrangea and columnar plants, such as boxwood.

But in the end, the most important thing to remember is that a garden is not the place for a designer to be shy.

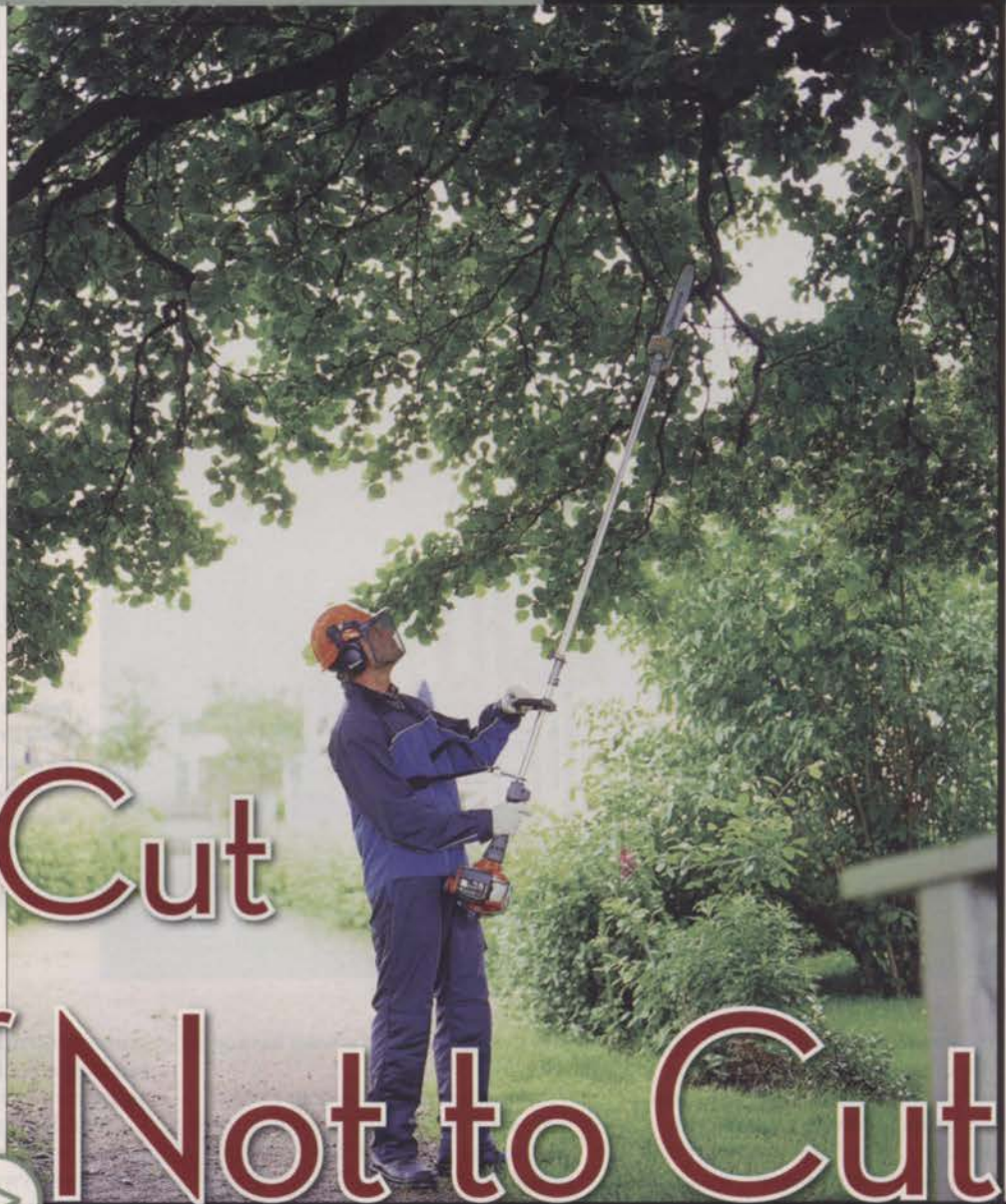
"Don't be afraid to be dramatic," says Staddon. "A garden is a place to unleash your creativity." ☺

**"You can accentuate and soften an entranceway with containers of flowers, perennials or columnar plants. Sometimes people have to wait in entranceways, so you should give them something to look at while they do." - Nicholas Staddon**

flow when possible to add some kick to his designs. For instance, standard design principles say large plants should be placed in the back of a bed, and small plants in front. But Healy

he explains.

But to get really creative, sometimes it's necessary to think outside the bed. "Landscape beds are important, but little spots of color in



# To Cut or Not to Cut

by tom ewing

Last year's severe weather in many states resulted in serious landscape plant damage. Take steps to protect and repair your customers' trees with proper and well-thought-out pruning.

**P**rotect the investment that is your property. The landscaping and trees in your yard make up a significant portion of your property value. It is the first thing people see, and when you try to sell your home with less-than-stellar landscaping, the curb appeal is gone," states Fran Lambert, co-owner of Mariposa Tree Service, based in Rancho Santa Fe, Calif. Family owned and operated for almost thirty years, Mariposa Tree Service is a trusted partner of Miramar Wholesale Nurseries (MWN) and is a member of the Professional Tree Care Association of San Diego.

With hurricanes ravaging many Southern U.S. states in 2005 and even torrential storms throughout Southern California created deadly mudslides and floods, both MWN and Mariposa Tree Service helped clean up damage, such as knocked over trees.

While there have been numerous accidents and damage, clean-up crews, landscapers and nurseries will be busier than ever in 2006, getting these



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and leaf spot with improved resistance to  
powdery mildew.

areas prepared for a serene spring. And preparation also includes taking a number of preventive steps to prepare trees for any future storms.

**RESILIENT TREES.** If you take a quick drive around your neighborhood, you are bound to see one, if not more, trees cracked in half – resulting in damaged trees and road hazards. Trees are resilient by nature, and if damage occurs during a harsh winter, it is likely that a natural pruning process will be taken care of by Mother Nature. Wood debris are beneficial to the survival of the tree as it provides essential nutrients to be recycled for continued growth. A tree's fate is determined by the amount of damage sustained. If it has lost less than 25 percent of the canopy, it will probably recover. However, many times new growth occurring after tree damage can result in weakened limb growth, uneven re-growth or unbalanced limb weight



that will, once again, have the potential for breakage. Left untouched, many tree wounds can also invite bacterial or fungus damage later on. But if the main portion of the trunk has snapped in half, it will most likely need to be removed at a later date.

Pruning is considered a science, since it often requires special equipment and can be dangerous – both to the landscape contractor and the tree's health. Encourage your clients to hire a professional certified in your state, since they will have the proper equipment and liability insurance to cover injuries suffered while repairing trees on your property.

**MAINTAIN ORDER.** Contractors should first tend

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# REAL GREEN SYSTEMS



If a tree has lost less than 25 percent of its canopy in a storm, it has a good chance of recovering. Photos: Corona Clipper (left - page 164); Fiskars (above and page 166)

to trees close to structures, and work their way out. Unless trees pose a hazard to roads or power lines, they can probably be left alone. As a general rule, no branch should be pruned without a reason. The recent storms creates the temptation to over prune, the objective of pruning should be limited to the removal of what is hazardous and structurally weak; the natural form of the tree should be maintained as much as possible.

Removal of a tree may be a consideration when the following occurs: the entire top is broken off or when one of the arms of a Y junction on the trunk has started to split. How a tree is pruned will greatly affect the growth form, vigor and stability of the tree. Two common types of pruning are thinning out and topping.

Thinning out is also known as selective cutting or drop-crotching. It involves complete removal of a branch back to the main stem, or to another lateral branch, or to the point of origin. With thinning out, the overall general shape of the tree is kept. Pruning wounds are closer to the stem and heal more rapidly. In addition, stimulation of new growth is distributed over many growing points.

Topping is a more severe type of pruning and

"Most landscapers are in clean-up mode rather than prevention mode. By evaluating the planting climate, soil compatibility and tree species structure, your plant materials will be better apt to weather storms."

- Tom Ewing

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consists of cutting the top of a tree in a "flat-top" or "snowball-cone" shape. With topping, effects will be far more negative. Numerous new shoots will develop rapidly, producing many fast-growing, succulent sprouts. The tree will appear bushy, and the new shoots will generally form more structurally weak junctures with the main branch

of the limb. Branches will tend to angle up very closely to the tree trunk, producing weak crotches.

"If you cut down the foliage too much, the tree will use all of its energy reserves to regenerate the foliage," Lambert explains. "This leaves little energy left to resist disease, and may also result in limbs that are



weakly attached."

Topping also reduces the number of leaves a tree has, limiting the trees' ability to produce food energy through photosynthesis, which can result in the plant's early death.

Because of the weather, most landscapers are in clean-up mode rather than prevention mode. By evaluating the planting climate, soil compatibility and tree species structure, your plant materials will be better apt to weather storms. Trees less than 30 feet often do well in high-traffic areas. Even if you choose the perfect plant for the perfect place, regular care and maintenance is important.

While the job of cleaning up after a storm is an enormous one, it is not necessary to do everything for your clients at once, even though they may demand it. By slowing down your clean-up activities and thinking before acting, you may actually save yourself and your clients a lot of hard work. When in doubt as to what is best for your customers' trees, read up on pruning or consult a professional. With careful pruning and patience, you may discover just how resilient trees really are. **LL**

*The author is a California Certified Nurseryman with more than 25 years of horticultural experience and managerial expertise. Miramar Wholesale Nurseries has facilities in San Diego, Irvine/Lake Forest and San Juan Capistrano, Calif. If you wish to subcontract tree services to a certified arborist, contact the American Society of Consulting Arborists at [www.asca-consultants.org](http://www.asca-consultants.org).*

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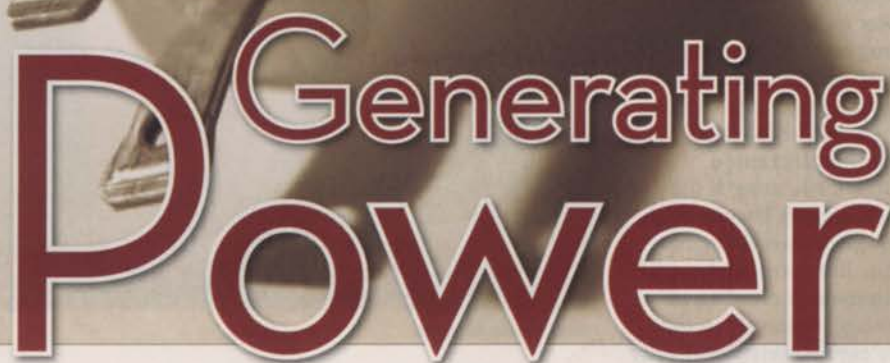


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USE READER SERVICE # 129



# Generating Power

Although models and features vary widely, choosing a generator doesn't have to be a confusing process.



by kathleen franzinger

**G**enerators supply power on job sites where electricity is needed, but not readily available. But a generator is a piece of equipment many contractors may not know much about. Adding to the confusion is the multitude of choices available. Generators come in a range of wattages. Some are noisier than others. Some are more portable, and some are more durable. With all the variations, contractors can be left wondering how to select the right one for their needs.

**THE RIGHT CHOICE.** The first question a contractor should ask is obvious enough: What is the generator's primary purpose? Contractors must first figure out what type of equipment and, if applicable, how many pieces of equipment will be running off of the generator at one time.

The next step is to find out how much power the equipment needs to run. For example, if a contractor is going to run three pieces of equipment, he has to know how much power each piece requires, says Dale Gabrielse, training manager, Robin Subaru,

Wood Dale, Ill. "And if he wants to run all three at the same time, he has to add that up and choose a generator big enough to handle that," he says.

But how do you figure out how much power the equipment needs to run? Most equipment will have a data tag or plate with a rating on it that tells how many amps the electric motor draws and how many volts it runs on, says Rick Kier, president of Syracuse, N.Y.-based Pro Scapes. Multiplying the amperage by the voltage will give the wattage, he says. "For example, a circular saw drawing 10 amps on 120 volts would need 1,200 watts to run," Kier says.

It's also critical to keep start-up amperage in mind. "When you're running power tools off of a generator, start-up amperage is important because electric motors always take more to get started," Kier says.

If the generator a contractor is using is too small, it won't have enough wattage to start the equipment. But fortunately, most equipment is rated on its start-up amperage, so the data tag information already takes that into account.

In addition, many generator manufacturers can provide average wattage requirements for various pieces of equipment, with some even offering charts online. But remember

rather than smaller, than their needs. "You add up everything you want to run," Gabrielse says. "Then you add on another 300 to 400 watts as a cushion."

Kier agrees it's important to leave some wiggle room when it comes to wattage. "You have to think about

Lowe's and you can buy a 6,000-watt generator for \$500 to \$600," he says. "But higher quality generators cost double, sometimes 2.5 times, that price. A high-end 6,000-watt generator may be \$1,300 instead of \$500 to \$600. But you're buying a better quality generator."

Kier also agrees that the cost of generators varies greatly. "Depending on the bells and whistles you get, generators can cost \$200 to \$4,000 – sometimes even more," he says.

But with a higher price tag comes better quality, says Gabrielse. Better quality means quieter, more durable, lighter weight and longer life equipment, he says. If these factors are important to the contractor, the generator is worth the money. If the generator will be used on a regular basis or in areas where quiet operation is a necessity, a higher quality generator is the best option, he says.

Kier puts his two portable generators to work mainly when planting flowers on large commercial sites, such as shopping centers. "We plant 30,000 annuals in the spring and we set it up like a mass production line," he explains, adding that one crewmember has the potted plant while another uses an auger to dig the hole, and another crewmember follows behind to do the actual planting. "The generator is mounted on flower carts and we move them around the site."

One way to try out a generator without a large investment is by renting one. Kier owned a 4,000-watt generator for 15 years. "It came with a motor home we bought to use as a job site office," he says.

At first, Kier would use that generator and then rent another one dur-



Photo: Robin America

what equipment you want to run and what its draw is and give yourself room in case you want to run two of that equipment off it in the future," he says. "You don't want to buy the bare minimum."

**"The hardest thing on generators is that people don't use them. If they're not being run regularly, generators need to be exercised every so often to burn off any moisture. They are electrical pieces of equipment." – Dale Gabrielse**

these are averages, so it's important to use them only as a guideline, says Gabrielse.

Once the necessary wattage has been calculated, contractors should then select a generator that is larger,

**COST CALCULATIONS.** Contractors also need to consider how much they want to pay for a generator. Gabrielse notes the wide range of prices and types of generators available. "You can go to Home Depot or



ing planting season. "But we would incur extra costs when we rented the second one," he says, so about a year ago he purchased another 2,500-watt generator. Kier estimates that he runs his portable generators around 100 hours a year.

When it comes to generators, Kier also stresses the importance of ground fault interrupters or GFIs. "Generators need a GFI because without one, you can be electrocuted," he says. "In my opinion, every generator being used in professional business should have a GFI."

Fortunately, most generators today have the GFI built right in. Older ones, Kier says even as recently as 8 to 10 years ago, don't usually have one. "You can buy one for around \$50 and attach it to your generator," he says. "We require our employees to use a GFI on our older generator."

**MAINTENANCE TIPS.** Once the selection has been made and



Generators can be a big help to contractors, supplying power on job sites where electricity is needed. Photo: Honda Power Equipment

the perfect generator purchased, it's important for contractors to keep the generators running as long as possible. The maintenance is fairly easy, requiring the oil and air filter be changed regularly. "The hardest thing on generators is that people don't use them," Gabrielse says, adding that moisture builds up when generators aren't used. "If they're not being run

regularly, generators need to be exercised every so often to burn off any moisture. They are electrical pieces of equipment."

Gabrielse recommends contractors run portable generators once every six months for at least an hour. "Ideally, it would be nice to run it 20 to 30 minutes on a quarterly basis," he says. **U**

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USE READER SERVICE # 130

# Edging Ahead

Check out these tools to give lawns and flowerbeds a professional edge.

compiled by kathleen franzinger

## Shindaiwa LE261 Lawn Edger

- Powered by a 24.1-cc, 1.3-hp engine
- Operators can trim along sidewalks and straighten edges around flowerbeds
- Features a heavy-duty gear case with helical gears
- Includes an easy-to-adjust guidewheel and fully adjustable front handle
- Equipped with a low-emission catalytic muffler
- Shindaiwa – 800/521-7733, [www.shindaiwa.com](http://www.shindaiwa.com)

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## Maruyama ED2620 Edger

- Equipped with a 25.4-cc commercial engine
- Weighs 15.8 pounds
- CARB-compliant machine is portable and maneuverable
- An open-shield offers greater visibility and an oversized guidewheel helps with control
- Comes with a two-year commercial warranty
- Maruyama – 253/735-7368, [www.maruyama-us.com](http://www.maruyama-us.com)

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## Tanaka TPE-250PF Portable Stick Edger

- Powered by a 24-cc, 1.3-hp PureFire two-stroke engine
- Features a heavy-duty, eight-layer cable
- 3-inch cutting depth
- Comes with a one-year commercial warranty
- Weighs 14 pounds
- Tanaka – 888/482-6252, [www.tanaka-usa.com](http://www.tanaka-usa.com)

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## Stihl FC 100 Curved-Shaft Edger

- Equipped with a 31.4-cc engine
- Uses 4-Mix lubrication technology that requires a 50:1 fuel mix ratio, so there is no separate oil supply to maintain
- Features adjustable depth control to handle a range of applications
- Heavy-duty skid plate protects the gearbox from wear
- Weighs 13.7 pounds
- Stihl – 800/467-8445, [www.stihlusa.com](http://www.stihlusa.com)

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## John Deere XT140SSELE Stick Edger

- Powered by a 25.6-cc, low-emission M-Series engine
- Features a large guidewheel, straight 59-inch shaft and an 8-inch blade
- Adjustable depth control lets operators cut as deep as 2.25 inches
- Low-tone muffler with glass-wool lining reduces noise
- Includes a cast-aluminum edger blade housing and cushioned loop handle
- John Deere – 800/537-8233, [www.johndeere.com](http://www.johndeere.com)

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## BlueBird Landscape Edger and CableLayer

- Edger creates landscape beds; CableLayer lays pet fence or landscape lighting from 2 to 4 inches deep
- A common platform and interchangeable blades and shields (available in optional kits) let users switch between each unit in seconds
- Removable shield eases access for maintenance and cleaning
- Powered by a 5.5-hp Honda GX engine with a centrifugal clutch
- Rear wheels lock to create straight bed edges or operate in full steering mode to create curved shapes
- BlueBird – 800/808-2473, [www.bluebirdintl.com](http://www.bluebirdintl.com)

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## E-Z Trench Bedscaper BE310-A Trencher

- 6.5-hp Honda GX engine features a centrifugal clutch in oil
- Features handle-mounted controls for the throttle
- Offers adjustable cutting depth and handle height
- Helps easily create landscape beds or redefine them
- E-Z Trench Mfg. – 843/756-6444, [www.eztrench.com](http://www.eztrench.com)

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## Echo Edger Shield

- Back portion of shield is cut-away so edger won't bog down in tough grasses
- Available on the company's PE-230/231, PE-260/261 and PE-311 edgers
- Also available on the edger attachment for the Pro Attachment Series
- Echo – 800/432-3246, [www.echo-usa.com](http://www.echo-usa.com)

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## Little Wonder Pro Edger

- Edges at speeds up to 90 feet per minute
- Features fingertip controls and full axles on front and back
- Includes nonslip drive belts, solid-steel drive shafts and a 3-quart gas tank
- Little Wonder – 877/596-6337, [www.littlewonder.com](http://www.littlewonder.com)

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## RedMax HEZ2500S Straight-Shaft Edger

- Ergonomically designed for taller operators
- Solid shaft offers durability and good throttle response
- Powered by a 25.4-cc Strato-Charged pure two-cycle engine
- Features an aluminum die-cast shield with an anti-clog system, extra-large steel protector for the shield and gearbox and synchronized flap to keep the wheel ideally positioned
- Nylon throttle is soft and flexible to prevent breakage
- RedMax – 800/291-8251, [www.redmax.com](http://www.redmax.com)

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USE READER SERVICE # 131



# Skeeter Solutions

Thinking of adding mosquito control to your service mix? These products and services keep customers' properties clear of the summer-spoiling pests.

compiled by kathleen franzinger

## Bayer Suspend SC Insecticide with DeltaGard

- Features low-dose rates and broad spectrum control
- Suitable for providing mosquito control around residential and commercial structures
- Offers the benefits of deltamethrin, a single pure isomer that provides quick knockdown and good residual
- Can be applied in a residual barrier treatment targeting resting areas and other dense, cool and damp areas
- Leaves no visible residue, has virtually no odor and won't clog spray equipment
- Bayer Environmental Science – 800/524-1662, [www.bayerprocentral.com](http://www.bayerprocentral.com)

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## FMC TalstarOne Insecticide

- Provides long-lasting control of mosquitoes, as well as 75 other pests
- Kills mosquitoes on contact, unlike other products that act only as repellents
- Labeled for use around perimeters and ornamentals, as well for residential, commercial and recreational uses
- Offers a long half-life in sunlight and no visible residue, odor or phytotoxic effects
- Use as integrated mosquito management to reduce the population for the entire season; barrier treatments for larger outdoor spaces; and opportunity treatments for a limited time period
- FMC Corp. – 800/321-1362, [www.talstar-one.com](http://www.talstar-one.com)

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## Suspend® SC with DeltaGard



## Syngenta Demand CS Insecticide

- Controls more than 20 insect pests, including mosquitoes
- Delivers quick knockdown and long residual
- Low, flexible use rates minimize exposure
- Little to no odor
- Combines an advanced generation pyrethroid with a unique, encapsulated water-based formulation of the active ingredient lambdacyhalothrin
- Syngenta – 866/796-4368, [www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com](http://www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com)

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## Mosquito Squad Franchises



- Mosquito Squad sells and installs automatic misting systems that kill mosquitoes and other insects
- Outdoor areas are fogged with pyrethrum, an EPA-approved, natural insecticide, two to four times each day
- Startup costs average from \$65,000 to \$95,000 and cover minimal equipment needs, a vehicle and initial capital
- Franchisees receive classroom and field training at corporate headquarters, as well as post-training support
- Mosquito Squad – 704/752-3693, [www.mosquitosquad.com](http://www.mosquitosquad.com)

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### Dimex EdgePro Ultra Landscape Border System

- Durable PVC form won't rust, crack, rot or deteriorate from weather exposure
- Easily curves to outline traditional and raised planting beds, concrete patios and walkways and planting beds around trees
- Connectors click into an integrated track system to lock together sections without overlapping or nesting edging pieces
- Spike anchoring adapters also use the track system to hold 3/8-inch-diameter steel landscape spikes of any length
- Available in black, 8-foot-long sections
- 4-inch-high, vertically symmetrical profile lets pieces be used in either direction
- Dimex – 800/334-3776, [www.edgepro.com](http://www.edgepro.com)

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### Focus Industries Landscape Lighting Catalog

- 149-page, four-color catalog highlights a variety of products
- Provides a comprehensive and effective means of selecting landscape lighting and enhancements
- Features area, directional, path and specialty lights
- Custom products available for difficult projects
- Includes information on fixture and finish options, as well as lighting techniques
- Focus Industries – 888/882-1350, [www.focusindustries.com](http://www.focusindustries.com)

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### Kubota ZD-Pro Zero-Turn Mowers

- Line has been expanded to include three models with 21, 25 and 28 hp
- Powered by a quiet, three-cylinder, liquid-cooled diesel engine
- Integral type twin hydrostatic transmission is hermetically sealed
- Feature a hydraulic, multi-disc wet PTO clutch, pivoting front axle and a hydraulic deck lift as standard
- Seven-gauge, steel-fabricated deck is available in a 60- or 72-inch cutting width for ZD-Pro 21 and 28 hp; the ZD-Pro 25 comes with a 60-inch mower deck
- Cutting height can be adjusted from 1 to 5 inches in half-inch increments
- Kubota Tractor Corp. – 888/458-2682, [www.kubota.com](http://www.kubota.com)

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### Fisher Engineering Pro-Caster Hopper Spreaders

- Suitable for ice control on driveways, roads and parking lots
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- Bodies are powder-coated steel or stainless steel
- Conveyor is 16-inch-wide pintle chain
- All models offer a choice of 1-hp I/C Tecumseh or 11-hp I/C Honda engine
- Fisher Engineering – 207/701-4200, [www.fisherplows.com](http://www.fisherplows.com)

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## Nufarm Americas Menace Insecticide

- Uses bifenthrin technology to control a variety of insect pests, such as chinch bugs, sod webworms, mole crickets, ants (including fire ants), billbugs and mites
- Synthetic pyrethroid has low to no odor and provides quick knockdown of insects
- Can be used as a perimeter treatment
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- Menace PL Granular offers easy application and penetration into turf and mulch
- Menace 7.9 Percent Flowable can be used indoors and outdoors
- Nufarm Americas – 708/754-3330, [www.us.nufarm.com](http://www.us.nufarm.com)

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## York Model YB32 Hitch-Mounted Broom

- Mounts to standard Category I or II three-point hitch tractors and requires a PTO running at 540 rpm
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- Horizontal and vertical dirt deflectors are optional
- Available in 6-, 7- and 8-foot widths
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## Hannay GH1100 Portable Hose Reel

- Features a steel handlebar, a one-piece foot and heavy-duty rubber-tired wheels
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- 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
- 5. Irrigation Contractor
- 6. Landscape Architect
- 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

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- 2. Seeding or Sodding
- 3. Turf & Ornamental Installation
- 4. Bedding Plants & Color Installation
- 5. Irrigation Installation
- 6. Landscape Lighting
- 7. Hardscape Installation
- 8. Water Features

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- 11. Turf Aeration
- 12. Tree & Ornamental Care
- 13. Tree & Stump Removal
- 14. Irrigation Maintenance
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#### Pesticide Application

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

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- 21. Hydroseeding
- 22. Snow Removal
- 23. Interior Landscape Services
- 24. Structural Pest Control
- 25. Holiday Lighting
- 26. Other

#### 3. What is the service mix %?

Mowing/Maint \_\_\_\_\_ Design/Build \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chemical Application \_\_\_\_\_

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

#### 5. Is Chemical Application work

1. Outsourced 2. Done by own employees

#### 6. 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

#### 7. What percentage of growth do you anticipate?

#### 8. What year was your business founded?

#### 9. What is your business mix? (%)

Residential \_\_\_\_\_ Commercial \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

#### 10. Is this a Headquarters or Branch location?

1. Headquarters 2. Branch 3. Single Office

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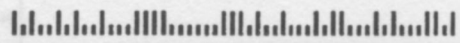


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- 440 and 420 models have an electrically operated chute for more control over material placement and easier material handling
- All models are designed to handle wet or dry materials
- Equipped with a chemical-resistant PVC belt
- Dakota Peat & Equipment – 800/424-3443, [www.dakotapeat.com](http://www.dakotapeat.com)

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## Wright Midmount Zero-Turning Radius Mower

- Engine is mounted nearly 3 inches lower than most midmount mowers
- Hydro drive pulley is mounted on the bottom of the engine drive shaft
- Rear wheel motors move forward and backward through three different settings to keep proper weight balance with collection systems
- Powered by a 21-, 23- or 25-hp engine
- Choice of 48-, 52- or 61-inch deck width
- Wright Mfg. – 301/360-9810, [www.wrightmfg.com](http://www.wrightmfg.com)

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### Star Hill Jawz Grabbing Attachment

- Hydraulic grabbing tool made of T-1 steel
- Enables light construction vehicles (less than 100 hp) to lift rocks, uproot trees and fence posts, move bulky objects and place them with precision
- Opens and closes in a common horizontal plane
- Features a quick-release hydraulic attachment system
- Measures 16 inches high, 34 inches long and 30 inches wide
- Star Hill Solutions – 415/285-2707, [www.starhilljawz.com](http://www.starhilljawz.com)

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### C&S Turf Tracker Stealth

- Capable of covering up to 240,000 square feet of liquid application and carrying up to 400 pounds of granular product
- Equipped with a zero-turn twin hydrostatic drive
- Offers 4-mph treating speed or 10-mph transport speed
- Includes a 200-pound-capacity, rear-mounted carry rack
- Features rear-mounted, 12-foot breakaway booms with seven pattern spray selections
- C&S Turf Care Equipment – 800/872-7050, [www.csturfequip.com](http://www.csturfequip.com)

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### Toro DDC-WP Irrigation Controller

- Battery-powered, waterproof digital dial controller
- Designed to operate one to eight valves in areas where hardwired connections are impractical or during manual system upgrades
- Digital interface provides ease of dial-based programming, while reducing the chance of mechanical failure
- Comes with three independent programs with three start times per program
- Can be programmed based on a seven-day week, in 14-day intervals or on odd/even days
- Equipped with a self-diagnosing circuit breaker that protects the controller by identifying and reacting to irrigation faults
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- Offer sturdy storage space in front for easy transport of attachments such as buckets, pallet forks, trenchers and augers
- Ditch Witch – 800/654-6481, [www.ditchwitch.com](http://www.ditchwitch.com)

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## Morbark Predator Shredder with Optional Loader

- Slow-speed, high-torque, primary waste reduction shredder offers the convenience of a self-contained loader
- Unit can produce up to 30 tons per hour, depending on the material
- Loading with a grapple offers a better operator view of material, easing detection of contamination while processing
- Loader hydraulics are powered with an auxiliary motor
- Built standard on a fifth wheel frame with a tri-axle design
- Equipped with the Iqan System which automatically adjusts speeds, pressures and rotor direction
- Morbark – 800/233-6065, [www.morbark.com](http://www.morbark.com)

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## Encore Prowler Mower with Articulating Deck

- Available in front- and mid-cut models
- Front-cut model comes in 52, 61 and 72-inch deck sizes
- Features out-front reach and visibility, side-to-side articulating floating deck, PTO driveshaft blade system and flip-up deck
- Includes four engine options
- Mid-cut model offered in 61- and 72-inch decks and features a true floating deck on a mid-mount rider
- Encore – 800/267-4255, [www.seriousred.com](http://www.seriousred.com)

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## Solo Backpack Sprayer Model 473P

- Features a high-density polyethylene tank and ultraviolet inhibitors
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- Comes with adjustable padded shoulder straps for optimum operator comfort
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## General Equipment 240 Hole Digger

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- Four-stroke engine offers fuel efficiency and eliminates the need for premixed fuel and oil solutions
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- Comes with a rubber splash guard and hardware
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- Fits all MulchPro and MulchFluffer models
- Grassroots Technology – 262/242-1944, [www.grassrootstechnology.com](http://www.grassrootstechnology.com)

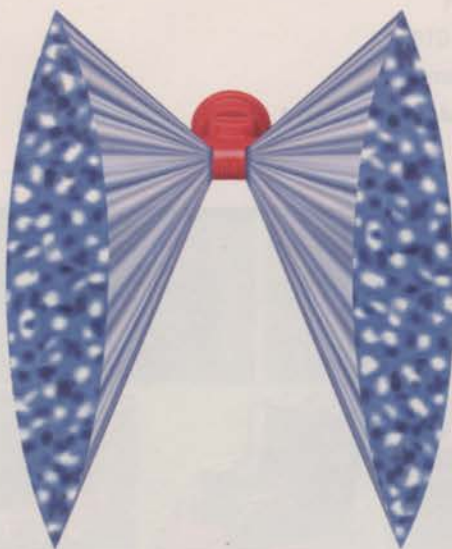
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### Spraying Systems Turbo TwinJet Spray Tip

- TJJ spray tip is designed for applications where good leaf coverage and canopy penetration are required
- Ideal for fungicides, insecticides and pre- or post-emergence contact herbicides
- Features a dual outlet orifice design
- Identical front and back flat spray patterns are produced with a 60-degree included spray angle between them to optimize coverage
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### Premier Auger T150 and T250 Planetary-Driven Trencher Attachments

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- USDA Cold Zones 4 to 9; AHS Heat Zones 1 to 9
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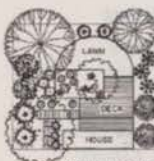
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## Cleanliness is Next to Profitability at Weed Man

I was taught the value of keeping things neat from a young age. My dad, for instance, always let my siblings and I borrow his tools as long as they were the right tools for the job and we put them back where we found them. Everything had a place. At age 15 I got a job as a dishwasher and had to rearrange the dish room so the flow of dishes ran from dirty to clean. By the end of my first night at work I received a 10-cent-per-hour raise. From then on, I realized that organization didn't just make sense – it made money.

Since entering the lawn care industry in 1987 I've applied the same mentality to the crews and companies I've managed. Shop operations, paperwork, company trucks, etc., are all organized to the finest detail to run at peak efficiency. At our Raleigh, N.C. Weed Man, we pride ourselves on organization and have often been recognized for the cleanliness of our operation – especially, our vehicles. Here's how we do it:

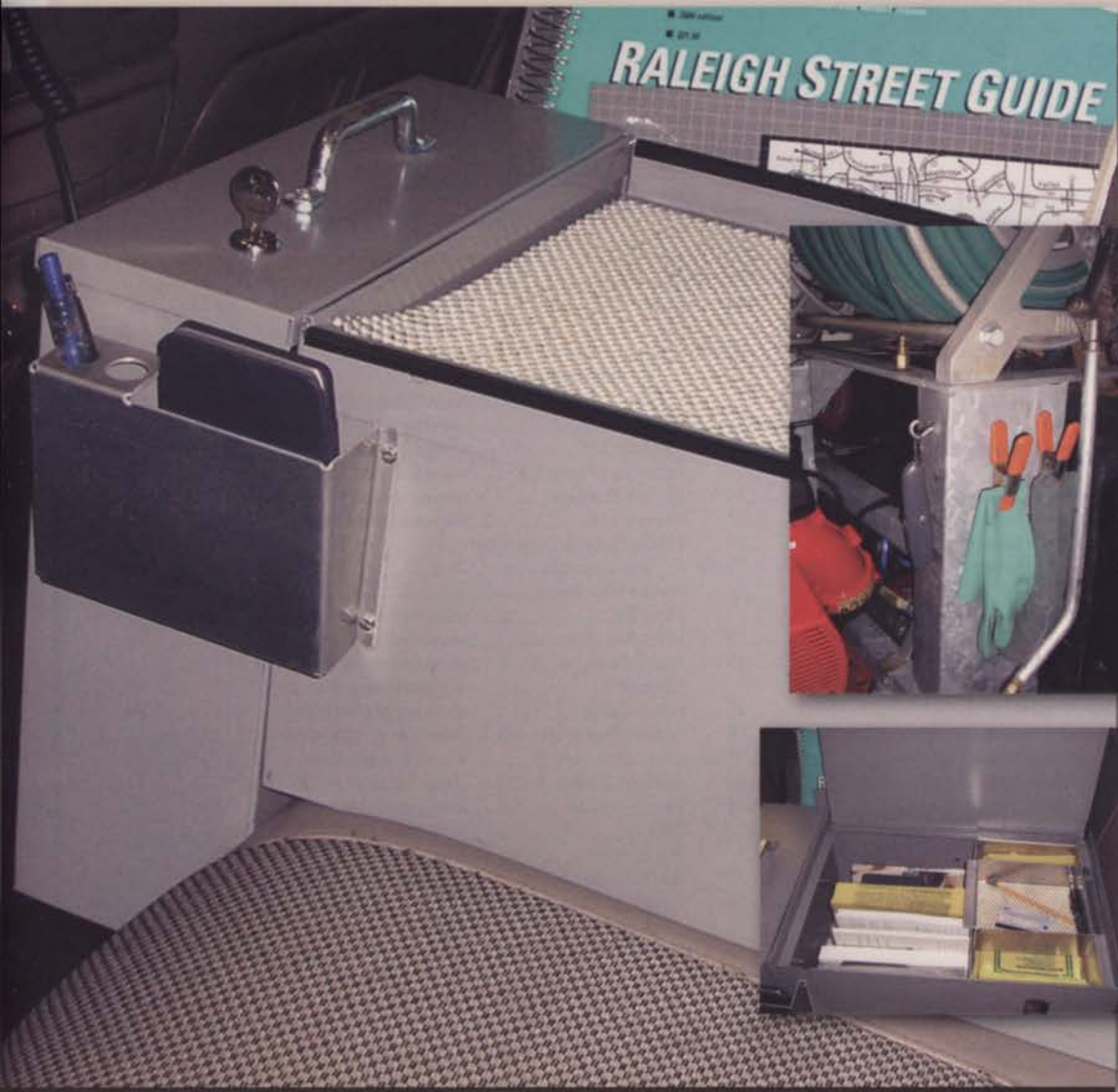
First, before our trucks are "road worthy," they're outfitted with everything our technicians need to do their jobs correctly and cleanly, including:

- Mat for the back cargo area
- Broom/dust pan
- Floor mats for cab
- Safety spill kit
- Tool box
- First Aid kit
- Seat organizer
- Hand cleaner, towels
- GPS

Each truck is outfitted exactly the same way, with "a place for everything and everything in its place." Inside the truck, we have two store-bought organizers, including a box for MSDS sheets, product labels, extra lawn analysis sheets and leave-behind literature. Additionally, each vehicle has an organizer that we fabricate ourselves to hold a pen, calculator, map book and small miscellaneous personal items. In the truck bed, all tools have specific homes as well, including a

### 5 Steps to Organizing Vehicles

1. Inventory vehicles to ensure each includes the same tools and necessities from first aid kits to paperwork.
2. Install hanging files, seat organizers, racks, bins and any other tools useful in organizing the vehicles. Give each tool a "home" where it should always be kept.
3. Get technicians in the habit of putting tools, paperwork and materials back where they belong at the end of each job, each day. Check vehicles at the end of the day to ensure technicians are following the new program.
4. Establish incentives to maintain the new organizational behavior. Hold employees accountable for equipment loss or damage as a result of not using the system.
5. Track the time and money saved by your organizational system and continually refine it. Once established, include the cleanliness of your vehicles and accuracy of your technicians as part of your sales strategy.



Keeping truck cabs organized at Weed Man in Raleigh, N.C., are seat organizers holding a map, pens, calculator, etc. It then flips open for easy access to hanging files, service literature and leave-behinds (bottom inset). In the truck bed, simple clips and hooks hold everything from gloves to box cutters, leaving plenty of room for application equipment and ensuring that all tools are always within easy reach. Photos: Weed Man

box cutter, scraper, brush, soil probe, gloves, a towel, a plug to cycle products and a remote choke.

Organizing our trucks and getting them sparkling clean inside and out cost \$300 to \$500 per vehicle. This may sound like a lot, but well cared for vehicles have lasted us 12 years or more, which really boils down to pennies a day for a highly professional looking vehicle. It also saves time and money on cleaning and maintenance later. For instance, at the end of the day, it takes only 20 minutes to put our trucks away, as compared to vehicles where the technicians may have spilled materials in the truck beds, tossed paperwork around the cab, etc. To get a vehicle like that in good shape for the next day, the technician would have to jack up the truck, clean out the bed, pressure wash and dry it, and then put away everything that's been strewn around the cab.

Instead, our technicians are meticulous about the cleanliness of

their trucks throughout the day. At our Weed Man operation, this level of cleanliness isn't something we do – it's what we *are*. Generally, putting things back where they belong is a process anyone can be taught, but if we find that one of our technicians can't embrace organization for themselves, this isn't the company for them.

To incentivize vehicle cleanliness and organization, we put \$20 a week in an escrow account for each technician. If a tool is broken or goes missing, or if some part of a vehicle is damaged, the cost of the repair or replacement comes out of the technician's account. Upon returning to work after the winter holidays, technicians receive any money remaining in their accounts at the end of the previous year (\$1,040 annually) as a bonus.

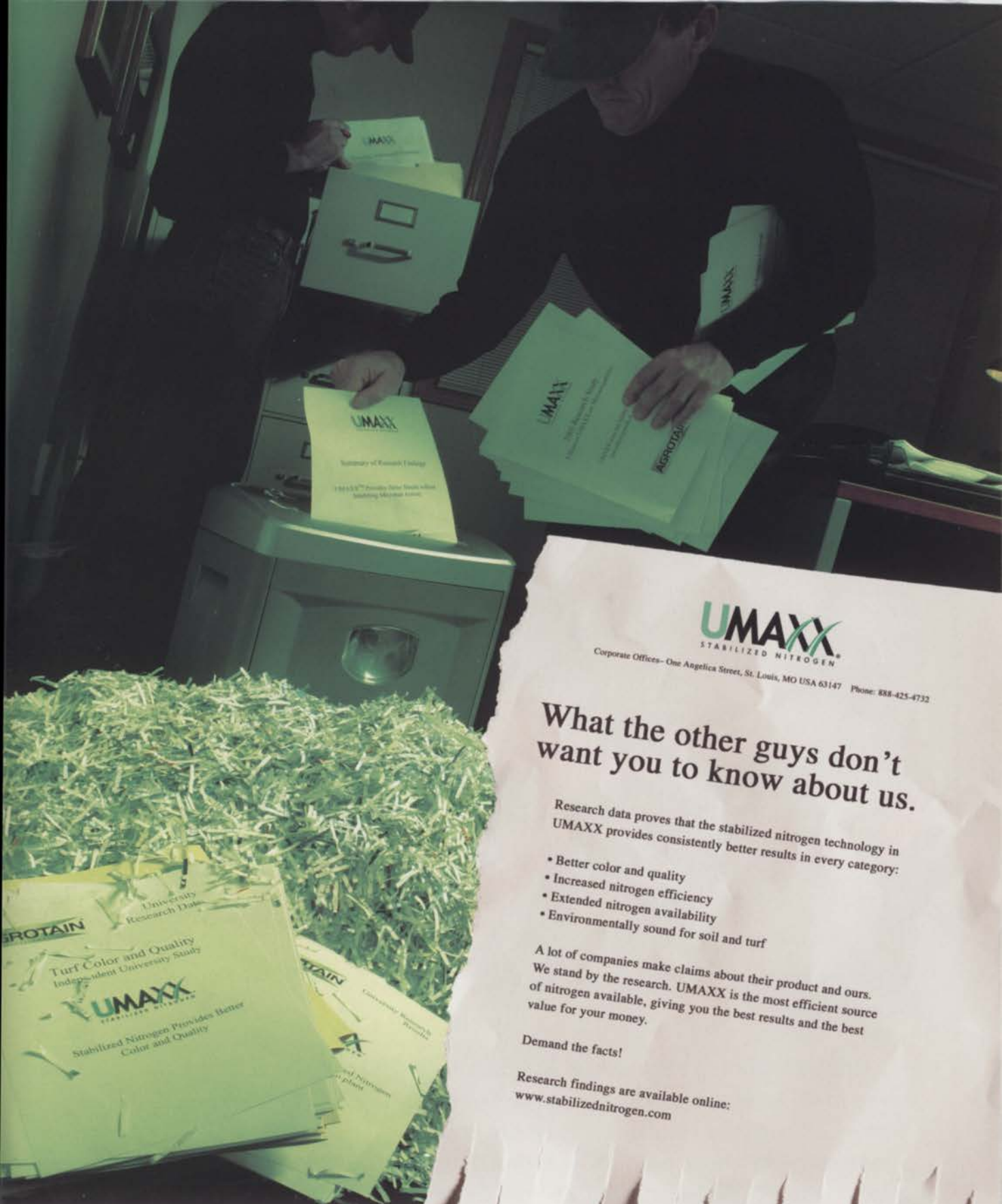
Some technicians have had to pay out hundreds of dollars from their accounts to replace tools or repair vehicles, but more often than not our technicians look forward to a nice bo-

nus at the beginning of the year, just by staying vigilant about the cleanliness of their vehicles. This creates accountability for each technician and we also find our employees policing each other to make sure all of our vehicles are in the best shape.

Since we've had these organizational processes in place from the beginning, it's difficult to quantify exactly how much time and money we've saved over the years. We know we save time daily by not having to clean trucks from top to bottom for the next day, and our technicians are highly efficient because all of their tools, paperwork and materials are at their fingertips. More importantly, we know that technicians who are diligent about cleaning their vehicles also are applying the same level of precision on our clients' lawns. As such, our Weed Man operation is noticed both for the professional look of our vehicles and the professional nature of our staff. — Ken Heltemes LL



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