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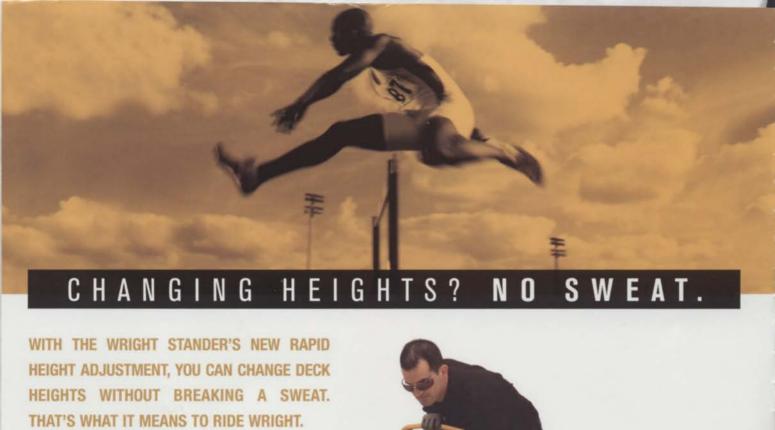
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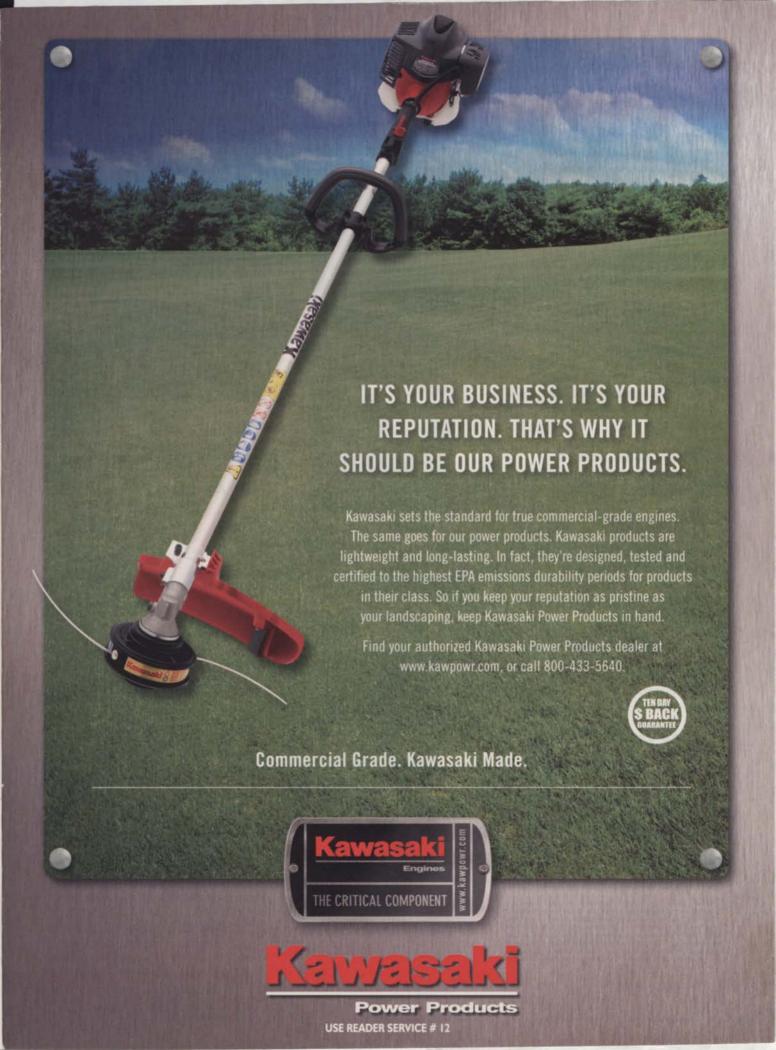
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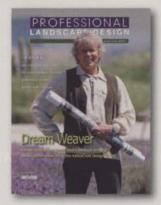


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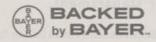


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ONLINE EXTRAS

There is so much valuable content prepared for Lawn & Landscape each month that there sometimes isn't room to print all of it. Luckily, this information is offered as online extras, available via our Web site each month. Scroll to the bottom of the homepage and look for the image of this month's cover of Lawn & Landscape. Under the image you'll find the titles of the latest online extras. Check back each month for more valuable online information.

WISE REVISITED

This month's cover story, "Wise Guys," on page 42, follows the story of Covey Wise and the unique marketing methods his company employed to grow the business. The story continues on www.lawnandlandscape. com with more stories and tips that other companies can use to get their companies on track.

> LABOR BURDEN IN-DEPTH

Jim Huston describes ways to calculate and manage the labor burden in this month's "Benchmarking your Business" column on page 16. The information doesn't stop on these pages. Visit our Web site and look for the online extra that contains charts that will help you map your labor costs.

LEAF BLOWER LEARNING

Is a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers coming to a city near you? After you read "Blown Into Proportion" on page 58 and the "Talking Points" sidebar on page 62, visit the Web site's Online Extras section for more tips on how to bring solutions to the table when blower-restricting ordinances arise in your region.

News about immigration reform and the status of the H-2B guest worker program is constantly changing. Bills are being debated in Congress and the H-2B cap continues to get closer to being filled. Lawn & Landscape Online can keep you updated on the latest news from the U.S. Capitol or the Labor Department.

Need help understanding the process? Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com May 14 for an Industry Buzz column with the latest information about H-2B.



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THE RIGHT TRUCK FOR THE JOB

cindy code | editorial director



Leaf Blower Quagmire

Susan Africa and her husband Walter run a small landscape contracting business in Ardmore, Pa. They provide landscape maintenance services to large estates within Lower Merion Township. Like contractors nationwide, hand-held equipment is an important staple in their maintenance business.

However, their business world may soon be turned upside down. An ordinance to curtail the use of gas-powered blowers in their township is dangerously close to being passed. If passed, not only will the hours of use be restricted, but the number of blowers in use at one time will be regulated. After 2011, blowers will be prohibited outside of leaf collection season.

Township officials want to mandate the hours and days that a blower can be used - between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday - and the number of blowers used on a single property - one, except during the leaf collection season of October, November and December, in which two can be use. But, that's only until Jan. 1, 2011, at which time two blowers can never be used on one property, even during leaf collection season.

Approved gas-powered leaf blowers are those with an operating decibel level that does not exceed 65 dba. The oldest blower Susan and Walter use is 3 years old and it does not meet the proposed decibel standard.

At least one hearing has already been held. Susan fears that the ordinance will be passed this month before she can round up her fellow contractors and equipment suppliers to tell their story. The township is not being forthcoming with information even though Walter has operated a legitimate landscape business in the area for more than 25 years. The fouremployee firm maintains 10 estates. One of them is 25 acres. If blower use is restricted, they would be required to manually rake the property.

A call for the ban apparently stems from one retired individual who is tired of hearing blowers before 8 a.m. on Saturday morning. The township already mandates that equipment - gas-powered blowers, jack hammers, etc. - cannot be used before 8 a.m. Rather than reporting a violator of that particular ordinance, or appealing to the town for improved enforcement, the individual has organized the Lower Merion County Citizens for Action Against Leafblowers.

'The whole thing is insane," Susan says. "Next they'll be blaming blowers for global warming. How can they expect us to rake our estate properties? Our customers will have to pay the (increased labor) price. In turn, that may take a bite out of our other services like planting beds.'

Susan and Walter maintain properties in an area called Main Line. It's an affluent area where customers demand pristine surroundings. Living areas are part of the outside grounds. Pool covers and trellises need to be blown daily. When parties are held over the weekend, their crew may be on the property all day Saturday planting flowers and readying the grounds for the party goers.

Parties aside, Saturdays represent a back-up day for times when rain washes out regularly

"Our workers are dependent on their income," Susan says. "These are employees who have worked for us for 20 years. We're above board. They have health insurance and they have families to feed."

Curiously, the ban does not include townships that send out 20-man crews to clean the area's parks throughout the week and on Saturdays.

Susan hopes the township commissioners will listen to the voice of reason. Fast action is required and she hopes she can convince her peers to turn out in force.

For gas-powered blowers to remain a staple in your business, take heed of Susan's story. Responsible use and good etiquette should be adhered. Issues such as this are popping up in communities across the U.S. For an update on the national situation, turn to page 58. III



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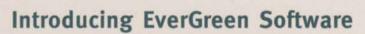


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3. I do less than \$200,000 business annually, where the others are above that. Your table shows a 24.8 percent differential between companies on different sides of the \$200,000 line. So, making an (admit-

tedly overly simplified) adjustment, my \$28 per man-hour portal-to-portal rate for a small company in Houston is equivalent to a \$35.30 times 1.248 equals \$49.52 per man-hour curb-time rate for a larger company in Steubenville.

Comparing this to Russell Hunt's \$40.00 per man-hour rate shows him to actually be a more aggressive bidder than me. I'd love to get Jim Huston's thoughts on this discussion.

Paul Wieting Owner, Seagull Lawn Services Houston

Dear Paul,

You make some great points. Differentiating between a portal-to-portal vs. a curb-time rate is critical as curb-time rates usually range from 10 to 20 percent higher than portal-to-portal ones. Here are a couple of additional thoughts as to why rates in Southern states (ones with a 12-month season) tend to be lower than Northern ones (those with an eight- to 10-month season).

Companies with a 12-month production season can spread their general and administrative (G&A) costs over more billable labor hours. Therefore, their G&A overhead per hour (OPH) is lower. This lowers G&A overhead costs and hourly rates.

These companies normally keep overtime to a minimum. This keeps operating costs down. Companies with an eight- to 10-month season normally work a 45- to 55-hour week. This drives costs and hourly rates up. Also, labor costs in states with a 12-month season tend to be significantly lower than those in Northern states where the season is shorter. This is a reflection of the labor supply-demand curve. This also drives hourly rates down.

Many contractors who work a 12-month season work four 10-hour days vs. five eight-hour ones. This reduces drive time and increases production time. It also drives rates down a bit because you have more billable curb-time hours in the same amount of total time (40 hours).

Despite all of these factors, contractors shouldn't overanalyze this. Remember, your primary goal is to achieve your daily billable revenue minimum. If your daily goal is calculated properly and you hit it consistently throughout the season, you will make money. I've seen contractors get so cost focused that they miss a market opportunity and therefore they leave a lot of money on the table. Many of my clients are consistently 10 to 20 percent higher than their competition and they win the jobs. They know how to market and sell their services. Cost analysis is very important but so is marketing.

Regards,

Jim Huston President J.R. Huston Enterprises



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sales and marketing



Persistence Pays and Sells

Recently, after a long string of days spent speaking around the country, I headed to the airport, eager to catch an earlier flight home than the one I had booked weeks before. Though I had met many enthusiastic entrepreneurs over the course of my trip and though I had enjoyed speaking with them about ways to improve their businesses, I was eager to get home to my wife and kids by dinner time.

So at the airport I went directly to the ticket agent and asked if I could get on an earlier flight. He told me there was a small possibility I could, but I would have to go to the gate to know for sure. Undeterred by what I gathered were rather poor odds, I hurried to the gate and waited for the agent to open up her station. Once she arrived, I explained to her that it was important to me that I get on the earlier flight and asked her if there was anything she could do. She politely told me the flight was sold out and there just wasn't any way I could get on it. I thanked her, sat down next to her station and waited.

Now I want you to think back over the last year and count the times you found yourself letting "No" defeat you. How many sales did you give up on after the first rejection? How many times did you make a pitch only to be met with a lukewarm reception that you took for disinterest and then did nothing to follow up? Just how persistent are you?

Rarely is running a business easy, but the steps you need to take to make it successful are at least easy to understand. And one of the most important steps is to always, always be persistent. Curiously, persistence is one of those qualities we all seem to have in abundance as children. I need only think of my kids' insistent pleas for a trip to the ice cream shop. But

somewhere along the line, it seems many of us lose the quality of persistence, trading it in for the path of least resistance.

But persistence pays and sells. Persistence is the ability to go on resolutely or stubbornly in spite of difficulties. A couple of outstanding examples come to mind. Christopher Reeve, for one, steadfastly pushed beyond the limits of his paralysis, raising money and awareness and inspiring researchers to work even more passionately for a cure. Actor Ronald Reagan starred in "Bedtime for Bonzo" in 1951; a mere 15 years later he ran for and won the governorship of California and later the presidency of the United States. And Sam Walton was 44 when he opened his first Wal-Mart store, which he would grow into the world's largest retailer and, in the process, revolutionize the way the world does business. As he explained, "I had to pick myself up and get on with it, do it all over again, only even better this time." Persistence led these individuals to success and it's what can lead you to yours.

So push yourself, expand, stretch. Think of yourself and your abilities like a rubber band – see just how far you can stretch. I'm confident you'll be surprised by what you can do if you just try a little bit harder, expend a little more effort or devote a couple more hours a week to your business. If you're faced with rejection, then face it right back. And if that fails, then move on to the next challenge stronger, and wiser, than before.

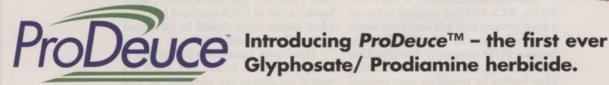
Sure, maybe that huge house on the hill has been maintained by a big company for years, but that's not to say the homeowners wouldn't listen to a pitch from you. And if you don't succeed this season, try again the next.

As for those of you wondering if I ever got on that earlier flight home – well, after reading this article, you tell me. .

marty grunder

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Labor Burden Basics

There's confusion about labor burden, including how to add it in bids and service pricing to pass its cost onto customers. Let me try to clarify these issues.

Labor burden consists of items (FICA, FUTA, SUTA, workers' compensation insurance (WCI), general liability insurance (GLI), etc.) that can be directly correlated to office and field payroll, and which vary in direct proportion to it. Labor burden added to field labor is a direct cost, whereas labor burden added to general and administrative (G&A) overhead payroll is an indirect G&A cost. It's calculated as a percentage that's then applied to field and office (or G&A administrative) payroll.

Most labor burden items (FICA, FUTA, SUTA, WCI, GLI) are assigned to you as a fixed percent that will vary little when calculated into your labor burden. For instance, FUTA is currently .8 percent. This doesn't change, whether you're calculating labor burden for prevailing wage projects or non-rated ones.

Some field labor burden items, such as medical insurance, are predetermined costs that have to be converted into percentages. We do so by dividing its annual cost by the projected total field labor cost for the year. If offered by the company, medical insurance premiums, paid for by the company, normally range from 2 to 6 percent of total field payroll.

Other field labor burden, such as holidays, sick days and vacation days, are calculated in days and also have to be converted to percentages. You do so by dividing the total number of the respective days by the total field work force days in the year. These items range from 1 to 2 percent each.

The two biggest variables in the labor burden calculations are workers' compensation insurance and medical insurance costs, WCI rates for most green industry field work ranges from \$4 to \$16 per \$100 of payroll. As a percent, this is 4 to 16 percent. The average around the U.S. is from 6 to 8 percent. The WCI rate for office staff and sales personnel is less than 1 percent. Arborists see the highest WCI rates, from 20 to 45 percent and higher.

As a cardinal rule, we want to ensure that all costs are included in our bids and pricing and passed onto our customers. We want costs to come out of their pockets, not yours. In an attempt to do so, some estimating systems put field labor burden items in G&A overhead and then use a markup percent to calculate these costs into bids. I disagree. I do include office labor burden costs in G&A overhead but field labor burden costs should be calculated on a job-by-job basis.

Here's why. Installation jobs A and B are both priced to be \$10,000. Job A is a typical installation job. However, job B is all demolition and has twice the labor costs and no materials. Your field labor burden costs should be twice as much for job B because it has twice the field labor as job A. However, if you include your labor burden costs in G&A overhead (let's assume 25 percent for the total), it would not change from one job to the other. And that's a problem because you've understated your costs. While job A would still be \$10,000, job B would be \$9,167. And that's a big 'Oops!" because \$10,000 is a good price for both jobs. Here's how the math works out: (Total direct costs minus burden) divided by (1 minus (G&A plus burden plus net profit)) equals price.

Finally, don't make the mathematical mistake of putting labor burden into your G&A overhead. If you do, it will come out of your pocket, not your customers' pockets.

jim huston

The author is president of J.R. Huston Enterprises, a Denverbased green industry consulting firm. Reach him at 800/451-5588, benchmarking@gie.net or via www.jrhuston.biz.



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Why People Do What They Do?

Recently I spoke about employee turnover. Rather than reiterate what attendees usually hear about how ineffective selection methods and poor supervisory practices are the primary causes of turnover, I took a different approach.

In many instances, the decision to leave a company and do something else relates to the changes a person is experiencing in life. The problem, though, is we don't always recognize these changes in ourselves and, thus, we can't identify them in others.

Research suggests there are five stages in a person's life. These stages are influenced by a number of factors — socio-economic levels, mental abilities, personality characteristics and interests — all of which influence the decisions we make about our careers and lives.

GROWTH. This stage occurs between the ages of 10 and 18 and includes three characteristics – capacity, interest and fantasy. Remember when you were a child and you wanted to know how fast and far you could run? You were constantly testing your capacity to try new things and stretch yourself. The interests you had were many, however those interests became more focused as you grew older.

EXPLORATION. This lasts from 19 to 25 and is composed of characteristics such as trial, transition and stabilization. Your younger days set the stage for you to focus on real interests. Gradually, you go through the sorting out process and stabilize your interests. Job changes are many and vary as you look for where you fit. Instinctively you choose a career path.

ESTABLISHMENT. This occurs between 26 and 45 and is characterized by advancement, frustration and consolidation. Instinctively you know you are in the most

productive years of your life. Advancement is important and you are willing to pay the price to achieve career goals and success. But, another reality becomes evident. You are competing against others who are just as focused on their own advancement as you. You began to see that some folks are more talented and this gives them a better shot at promotion and/or opportunity. You become frustrated about where you are going and when you will get there.

MAINTENANCE. This stage spans from 45 to 60. You have three choices here – innovation, stagnation and/or upgrading. By now, if you are honest with yourself, you have a very clear picture of who you are. Maybe you fall into the trap believing life has dealt you an unfair hand and now you are too old to start anew. Call this approach stagnation. Perhaps, instead, you do some soul searching and reach the conclusion that the best thing you can do is upgrade your skills and take a fresh approach to competing in the work place.

DECLINE. This final stage applies to folks 60 to 75. The options here are retirement, specialization and disengagement. Some people can't wait for retirement, while others are by no means ready to retire. Instead, they have evaluated their skills and experience inventories and decide to specialize and continue working and having fun. There is another group, though. They size everything up and disengage from work and other aspects of life. Said another way, they lose a sense of direction because age has come upon them and they are not prepared for it.

Hopefully, now you'll understand that leaving one company and going somewhere else is a part of growing up and a big part of life. But then, you knew that all along, didn't you?

larry fish

is president of GreenSearch, a human resource consulting organization. He can be reached at 888/375-7787, peoplesmarts@gie.net or via www.greensearch.com. PeopleSmarts® is a registered trademark of GreenSearch.

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The Adjuvant Advantage

any lawn care professionals aspire to get more "bang for the buck" out of their products because doing so not only improves performance and efficiency, but also increases customer satisfaction.

If you haven't already, consider using an adjuvant with your next pesticide or fertilizer application and you might be pleasantly surprised by the overall benefits of these unique problem solvers.

An adjuvant, for those unfamiliar with these products, is any material added to the spray mixture to enhance product performance, efficacy, function or ease of application. In a nutshell, an adjuvant helps increase both product performance and application efficiency because it helps the applicator get more "bang for the buck" out of many control products without any real drawbacks. It's a true win-win situation for both the contractor and the client.

HOW THEY WORK. The applicator needs to decide what adjuvants will be most beneficial to his or her particular services. However, when properly used, adjuvants, which are tank mixed with control products, can aid a contractor in product performance and efficiency in a number of ways.

For example, a spreader sticker enhances pesticide uptake on the leaf surface while helping the product to adhere to the leaf surface. The result is optimum product performance while improving the durability and longevity of the application.

Adjuvants are available to lawn care professionals in a number of common formats. For example, some specific adjuvants and their benefits include:

• Spreader Sticker – Reduces leaf surface tension to help spread the spray droplet over a larger area of the leaf surface. While improving the uniformity of the spray droplet, it also more effectively wets foliage and/or target pests and enhances penetration and translocation within the plant.

Color Marker Dyes – Colors spray solution to mark application areas. These markers help prevent over application, missed application and off-target applications.

• Foam Marking Agents — Used with boom sprayers to mark spray width, which gives the applicator a visual line to increase application efficiency.

 Acidifiers – Lowers spray water pH to eliminate premature breakdown of alkaline sensitive products.

Compatibility Agent – Improves compatibility of spray mixtures.

• Drift Control Agents – Reduces potential off-target spray drift.

 Odor Masking Agents – Masks pesticide odors, i.e., EC formulations.

Short-term benefits of incorporating an adjuvant include ease of application, enhanced rain fastness and improved product performance. Over the long term, adjuvants improve product control which can reduce the use of pesticides and call backs, all of which increase customer loyalty and profits while promoting environmental stewardship.

COST. The cost of most adjuvant products is minimal when compared to the added benefits of using them and therefore should not warrant any cost increases to a standard lawn care program.

The applicator cost will be absorbed due to greater product efficacy (fewer call backs) and improved productivity. For example, integrating a colorant makes skips less likely and increases productivity rates and customer satisfaction levels.

Likewise, the adjuvant reduces the chances of over applying product, and in the cases of applying a pesticide, promotes solid environmental stewardship practices.

j.b. toorish and brian kelley

are part of LESCO's Tech Services Department. They can be reached at fromthefield@gie.net or at 800/321-5325 ext. 6150 to answer technical questions.

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what's the deal?

question or issue posed by the editors.

The editors of Lincians and DECLER magazines believe ongoing dialogue between contractors and commercial dealers is essential.

Each month, one contractor and one commercial dealer will address a

This month's question: "What should a contractor expect in a loaner mower?"



THE DEALER:

David Abbott, owner, Abbot's Pro Power,

Gilroy, Calif.

"For the most part, the contractor gets what he gets, concerning loaner mowers. If he comes in with a 60-inch and the only thing I have is a 48-inch, he has to live with it. If I have a 72-inch and he needs to get through a gate that's only 3 feet wide, how am I going to satisfy him? It's just too hard to keep everyone happy.

"I generally don't do loaners because of these issues. I also don't have a multitude of mowers to loan out. To avoid needing loaner mowers, I tell contractors to get a handle on their regular mower maintenance — doing 100-hour checkups. That way, there's less likelihood of big problems

down the road.

"The other day we had a mower with some catastrophic engine failures – that was a rare case. If the mower's getting up there in years, I encourage the contractor to buy another one. In my area, sometimes we have 3 feet of grass, so our zero-turns are out there mowing 300 days a year – sometimes 320 days a year. We don't have time for downtime to fix things and we can't afford to wait to fix things – there's just no time. We have a winter, but it's not really a winter at all, so the mowers keep going. Because of this, contractors must maintain the mowers regularly as they go along so the big problems don't stop them from working. These reasons are why I'm not really big on loaners."

THE LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR:

Michael McDonough, owner, U.S. Lawns,

Hilliard, Ohio

"The place where I service my mowers is where I bought them. They do a pretty good job. If it's under warranty, they'll provide a loaner to me that is comparable to what I need, so I've never had a problem with it. I don't think I've ever expected a dealer to furnish a mower out of warranty without paying for it. But if the repair is covered by a warranty, I'd expect it to be a free loaner. I also usually have backup mowers ready to go in case I cannot get a loaner mower in a pinch.

"Most of the loaners I get from dealers are typically newer than the mowers my company owns anyway, which is nice. We're in a unique position because we're part of a larger company. I've never had to make two dealers compete against each other for our business, so I think

we are treated fairly.

"My take on loaners is finding a fair and equitable situation for both the dealer and the contractor. I'm not expecting any free handouts from dealers. I understand they're businesspeople too and need to make money just like me. Maybe I'm just fortunate with my equipment – I've never had a mower down for more than a week. But whenever I've gotten a loaner as a result of a down mower, it's always been comparable to the one I've turned in for repairs."

say what's on your mind

If you'd like to say what's on your mind for future issues, please e-mail Mark Phillips at mphillips@gie.net.



"In a matter of seconds,
you can go from
mulching to side-discharge.
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mower that can do that."

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"When we want to side-discharge, we can do it right from the seat," says Mike. "And we don't have to carry an extra piece of equipment." Just by engaging a lever from the operator's seat, the 7-Iron II mulch-on-demand deck goes from mulching to side-discharge in an instant.

Mike Dykstra, Dykstra Landscape Services Inc., Grand Haven, Michigan





Industry Alert

Encourage Your Customers, Prospects to Ask Questions



Photo: L&L staff

hallenges to state and federal pesticide preemption laws by activist groups are not new to the professional lawn care industry. Nor are the widespread pesticide bans that are prevalent across Canadian municipalities.

But a new initiative by a consumer group is undermining the business practices of professionals across the green industry. Safe Lawns, established by HGTV host Paul Tukey, was promoted as a dialogue about alternatives to traditional lawn care. But the initiative has turned into a locally based campaign to ban pesticides and synthetic fertilizers on municipal and public properties, especially schools that focus on children's and pet's health.

According to the Safe Lawns' mission, the goal is "to cause a quantum change in consumer and industry behavior" and to prevent "Americans from spreading millions of tons of toxic materials, all in the name of a beautiful lawn."

As a multi-billion dollar business, the green industry is

extremely visible; more than 30 million acres of lawns exist in the United States. But, in addition to being aesthetically pleasing, it's estimated that lawns remove 5 percent of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and provide a significant amount of oxygen. Lawns also absorb more than 12 million tons of dust and dirt annually, trap and filter rainwater and prevent erosion.

Additionally, they provide a cooling effect in summer months, help boost energy efficiency, and provide children and families with safe areas to play and recreate that are free from dangerous insects and weed allergens.

There's no doubt, professionals and their customers need to have complete information about the products used in lawn care services. And the playing field has become murky with businesses of all shapes and sizes using terms like green, organic, sustainable and biodegradable in marketing.

"Consumers need to recognize that to maintain healthy lawns, it is essential that organics and synthetics coexist," says Tom Delaney, director of government affairs, Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). "There's a false perception that because it's organic, it's safe and because it is synthetic it is not, and that misleads the public. It is about choices and what works."

For industry professionals who offer organic services to their customers, it's typically offered as a choice rather than an alternative.

PLANET does not promote one kind of lawn care product or service over another; however, the organization does promote the safe and proper use of all state and federally registered products used to maintain customers' properties. PLANET also encourages consumers to thoroughly research the products that are being used on their lawns.

"As consumers search for safe products, it's important to remember that the legal definition of the word 'safe' is 'without risk,'" Delaney says. "No product is without risk – organic or synthetic – and it is of the utmost importance that consumers recognize that fact."

If misapplied, both organic and synthetic fertilizers can damage landscapes and potentially pollute the environment, Delaney says. For example, if either product is inadvertently left on paved surfaces, rainfall may move the nutrients into storm drains where they can find their way into rivers and lakes, he says. Applied properly, both organic and synthetic fertilizers provide lawns with necessary nutrients without harm to our environment.

"There are no real guidelines out there when talking about organic programs," Delaney says.

Safe Lawns and other activist groups will continue to try to undermine the value of the industry and the continued use of traditional products. Lawn and landscape professionals need to communicate effectively with the public and their customers and encourage questions in return. – Cindy Code

Lawn Care Organics vs. Synthetics

is a time when the thoughts of many homeowners turn to the lawns with so many lawn care products on the market, there is a lot of confusion regarding the use of organic lawn care products vs. synthetic products. The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), representing landscape, tree care and lawn care specialists across the country who use both types of products, wants to bring clarity to the issue for contractors and their customers.

"We recognize that there is confusion about organic and synthetic products and services that utilize them," states Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for PLANET. "We have members that use both products in their services and want to make sure that the public is well informed of the differences." While there are no universally accepted definitions of "natural" and "organic," here are the most commonly accepted definitions:

NATURAL. A product derived from animal/biological, mineral or plant sources, in a form substantially as it occurs in nature. The materials may be altered or manipulated to put them in a physical form that allows them to be efficiently used in the application process by homeowners or service providers.

ORGANIC. Technically, any substance containing carbon is organic. Both naturally occurring and man-made products may be organic. The common misconception that "organic" and "natural" have the same meaning may cause non-technical consumers to believe that man-made organic material is natural when it is not.

NATURAL-BASED. This term is generally used to describe a mixture of materials that include some elements that may be properly described as natural. The portion that is natural is frequently undefined. The other portion may be man-made pesticides or fertilizers.

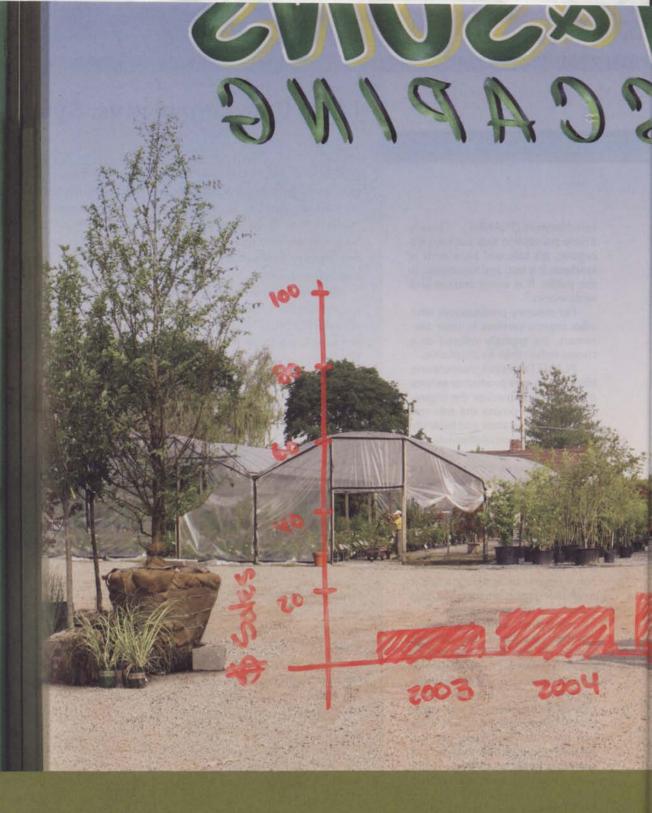
ORGANIC-BASED. This term is generally used to describe a mixture of materials that includes some organic materials. The portion of the product that is both organic and natural is frequently undefined. The other portion may be man-made pesticides or fertilizers.

Encourage interested consumers to ask these questions about organic lawn care products:

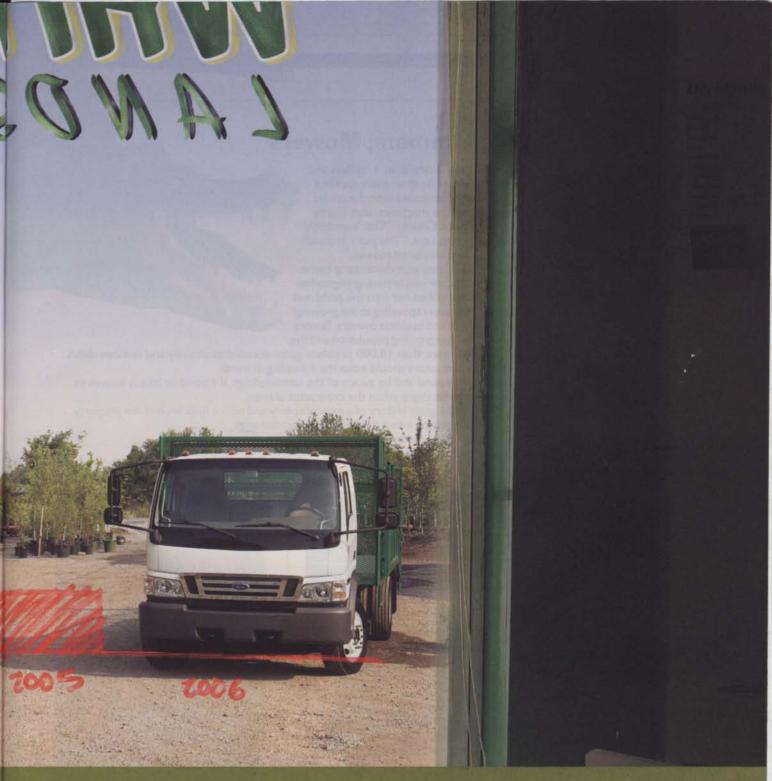
- Do the products used or services rendered contain or use any materials
 that are subject to EPA regulation and registration? Any product claiming to
 prevent, destroy, repel or mitigate any pest, such as insects, weeds or disease,
 requires state and EPA registration and is classified as a pesticide.
- · Are these materials man-made or naturally occurring?
- · Are weed, insect and disease controls a part of the product or service?
- What percentage (25 percent, 50 percent) of the active ingredients and of the total applications are man-made materials?

"The bottom line is that consumers need to pay close attention to the instructions on the products they're buying or hire state-licensed professionals to apply these products when unsure of the pest or the proper control measure," Delaney says.

25



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ENVIRONMENT

Gators Attracted To Trimmers, Mowers

With the Florida alligator population swelling to more than I million and spring being mating season, contractors will want to keep an extra cautious eye out for the primitive creatures. Gators seem fascinated with the sound of trimmers and mowers and will often lunge at the machines, says Curtis Lucas, a licensed nuisance alligator trapper in Volusia County. "That's probably the No. 1 complaint I get from landscapers," Lucas says. "The gator is usually not trying to attack the landscaper. He likes the trimmer or mower."

However, gators have attacked people, sometimes with devastating consequences. In 2004, a 54-year-old landscape contractor was trimming vegetation near a pond in Sanibel, Fla., when a 12-foot gator pulled her into the pond and mauled her. She later died. Florida wildlife officials are responding to the growing alligator population by getting input from residents and business owners. Gators can be a particular problem in Florida because of the growing population and the

disappearance of habitat. State officials receive more than 18,000 problem-gator complaints annually and remove about 7,000 gators each year. Lucas says landscape contractors should keep the following in mind:

- When working next to a pond or lake, look around and be aware of the surroundings. If a pond or lake is known to harbor a habitual gator, it's probably going to be there when the contractor arrives.
- A contractor should familiarize himself with the gator history of a new property and take a look around the property.
- During nesting, females will often gather vegetation into a mound to protect her eggs.
- · If a gator gets closer than 20 yards, it's time to move away.
- If a gator becomes a problem, contact Florida's gator hotline at 800/FWC-GATOR. Mark Phillips





USE READER SERVICE #21

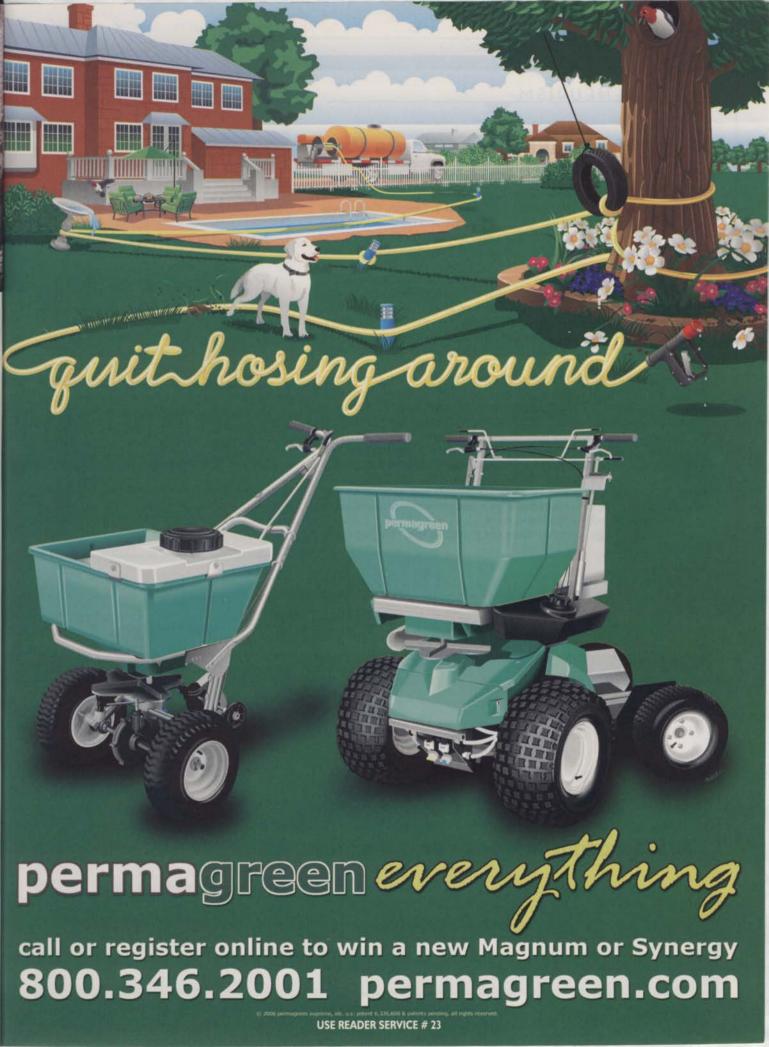
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LABOR

Contractor Makes Lax Clients Pay

Deadbeat clients were wearing down Matt Gugliotti.

In fact, the owner of Trailsend Water Gardens in Canton, Conn., was venting to a carpenter friend last fall about his frustration with a client who simply refused to pay part of an agreed upon bill for landscape work.

"I was surprised to hear that my carpenter friend had the same problem

with this exact same client," he says.

"The problem that landscape contractors and carpenters and others in related service industries run into is that we can't take back the service we provided if the client refuses to pay part or all of their bills," he says, adding he's lost nearly \$25,000 in unpaid fees over the last three years. "A lawn care guy can't go back and pull up the fertilizer he spread, and a carpenter can't go back and disassemble the deck he just built – though we'd like to."

Gugliotti struck on the idea of creating a Web site where contractors from a variety of professional disciplines could report payment problems they have with clients. The online repository of complaints could then be accessed to determine if a new client had a prior negative payment history or was a stellar customer.

With the assistance of his father, an attorney, Gugliotti developed www. SolidContract.com, an online consumer credit report database for service professionals. For \$360 a year, contractors have unlimited access to the online database to report and research consumers and debt up to two years old. In addition, any report made on a consumer remains on the site for seven years. The site went live in April.

"To my knowledge, there's nothing out there like this," Gugliotti says. – Mike Zawacki

D.C. Dispatch: Comprehensive Immigration Reform and H-2B

nnually, landscape contractors cite a shortage of labor as a one of their top growth-limiting challenges. As such, the landscape industry is focusing on lobbying for the passage of comprehensive immigration reform and fixing the H-2B guest worker program.

COMPREHENSIVE REFORM. Though the 2008 presidential election is a year and a half away, presidential hopefuls' campaigns

Their time is up.

Starts working in hours - even minutes.



CLCA members traveled to Washington D.C. in March to meet with Senator Diane Feinstein (fourth from left) and other Congress members about comprehensive immigration reform.

already appear to be in full swing. Insiders say Congress' August break is the deadline for the passage of comprehensive immigration reform. "President Bush has said he'd like to see an immigration bill by the August recess – before the election season begins," says John Farner, director of legislative relations for the American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA). "Otherwise, issues like immigration just get too polarized and basically nothing gets done."

The ANLA commended the House's answer to comprehensive immigration reform, H.R. 1625, also known as the STRIVE Act, which was introduced by Reps. Luis Gutierrez (D-III.) and Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.). The bill's key components include increased border security, an electronic employee verification system, a year-round temporary worker program and earned adjustment for the 12 million undocumented immigrants. However, there is one major flaw at this time, Farner says. It does not yet include specific language about H-2B. Although the Senate has identified immigration as a top priority, as of press time it had not yet introduced a comprehensive reform bill. Farner expects it to be introduced in May, when the Senate is expected to take up immigration.

The California Landscape Contractors Association also is encouraged about the STRIVE Act, says Director of Legislation Bob Wade, who owns Wade Landscape, Laguna Beach, Calif. "We're pretty happy with it," he says. "It creates a more secure border, a method to legalize those who were here that are working. Plus, it puts them at the



end of the line." Wade doesn't like the bill's touch-back provision, however, which requires illegal immigrants hoping to become legal to return briefly to their countries.

HELP FOR H-2B. Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for the Professional Landcare Network, reiterates the importance of a comprehensive immigration reform bill retaining the existing H-2B program, with some improvements such as making the repeat worker exemption permanent and expanding the base 66,000 cap number.

In the meantime, contractors should be aware that two other H-2B-related bills have been introduced. Both propose extensions to the provision of the Save Our Small and Seasonal Business Act that allows returning workers to be exempt from the 66,000 count. The Senate bill, S. 988, introduced by Senators Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) and John Warner (R-Va.), provides a five-year extension to this provision. The House version of the bill, H.R. 1843, introduced by Reps. Bart Stupak (D-Mich.), Marilyn Musgrave (R-Colo.) and Wayne Gilchrest (R-Md.), would make the exemption permanent. – Marisa Palmieri

They can crawl, but they can't hide.

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TECHNOLOGY

Study: Consumers Prefer Firms With Web Sav

Landscape contractors operating without a presence on the Web may be driving their customers to competitors who are Internet-savvy, according to a recent study.

A Web site improves the interaction between consumers and businesses, and lack of a Web site could drive business away, according to research conducted by 1&1 Internet in Chesterbrook, Pa.

For example, more than 33 percent of U.S. households surveyed agreed that lack of a Web site would lead them to shop elsewhere or select an alternative business, while 28 percent agreed they would have doubts about doing business with a company without a Web site. In addition, consumers have become reliant on Web sites to find contact information. For example, 76 percent of respondents

in the study believe it is easiest to contact a business via a phone number or e-mail address provided online.

Web sites provide a link between consumers and their purchasing experiences, says 1&1 Chairman Andreas Gauger.

"Providing an online service is essential to keeping consumers happy and loyal," Gauger says.

Lack of an Internet initiative, though, is commonplace among green industry business owners, according to recent Lawn & Landscape research on attitudes toward business technology.

Sixty-six percent of landscape contractors do not have company Web sites, the Lawn & Landscape research found. This frequency rises when this issue is examined based on contractor revenue. For example more than half of landscape firms reporting more than \$500,000 in annual revenue do not maintain a company Web site, the data says.

Likewise, 63 percent of contractors who consider themselves "proactive" when it comes to business technology initiatives at their companies don't maintain a presence on the Internet,

according to the Lawn & Landscape study.

Many landscape contractors still don't see the business potential inherent in having a presence on the Internet, says Sal Mortilla, owner of Landscaping Unlimited in Long Island, N.Y., and a vocal green-industry advocate for the adoption

of more Web-based systems.

"This is a classic example of our industry being in the dark ages," says Mortilla, who generates about 85 percent of his business leads via the Web. – *Mike Zawacki*





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STUDENT CAREER DAYS

Students Follow the Green at Student Career Days

The Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) Student Career Days might have taken place at Michigan State University this year, but the host school of last year's event, Brigham Young University, was tops in event competitions.

More than 760 students from 54 schools traveled to East Lansing, Mich., to take part in the four-day event that included a career fair and 24 competitions in various disciplines, including arboriculture techniques, business management, exterior landscape design, irrigation troubleshooting and paver installation.

Eric Ball and Duane Pearson, both of Brigham Young University – Idaho, took first place in truck and trailer operation. Ball, who will intern with Bob Jackson Landscapes in Owings Mills, Md., this summer, says he chose the green industry because he likes to create. "I like to see how you can transform things," he says. "I like to see how you can start with one thing and use your creativity to change it into something incredible."

If students have any doubt about their career choice, it's put to rest after

attending Student Career Days, says Jim Martin, PLANET's president and owner of James Martin and Associates, Vernon

"This is an uplifting, emotional high for these students," Martin says. The event reinforces the quality of life landscape professionals enjoy. "When people see the kinds of opportunities this industry provides, they realize this is no longer just working in the dirt," he says. "These students get a feel for the level of sophistication in the industry they might not have realized before." – Mark Phillips



Top 10 Schools for Student Career Day Competition

- Brigham Young University -Idaho - 3,835.30 Points
- Brigham Young University -Provo - 3,692.81 Points
- Colorado State University -3,653.52 Points
- Kansas State University -3,601.30 Points
- 5. Penn State 3,520.40 Points
- North Metro Technical College - 3,466.52 Points
- 7. Cal Poly Pomona 3,394.01 Points
- Michigan State University -3,218.65 Points
- Clemson University -3,191.26 Points
- Columbus State Community College - 3,179.68 Points



The faces of the Professional Landcare Network's Student Career Days, which took place at Michigan State University March 29 - April 1. Photos: L&L staff

Tall Fescue, Bluegrass Seed Supplies Strained

Some contractors, like Andrew Aksar, owner of Outdoor will put pressure on the seed industry Finishes, Walkersville, Md., were surprised by their first for years to come: demand for acreage seed purchases this season. Aksar paid \$15 more than from the biofuel industry. last year for a 50-pound bag of a fescue blend.

Suppliers report availability will be tight this year. Inventories for Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue and fine fescue are small, says Glenn lacklin, director of operations for Jacklin Seed by Simplot, Post Falls, Idaho. Perennial ryegrass supply shouldn't be an issue, he says.

"It is still very early to tell, but I would estimate a 10 to 15 percent increase across the board, with the exception of perennial ryegrass, which should remain stable," Jacklin says.

Production costs are up due to the usual suspects, increased fertilizer and fuel prices, but another factor

"Corn, soybeans and other biofuel crops that are alternatives to producing grass seed play a role in making more money for the grower," says Wayne Horman, director of marketing for Scotts Turf-Seed, Gervais, Ore.

Horman expects contractors to seek alternative solutions of their own. He sees some contractors, like those in the Southeast who rely on tall fescue, to switch to blends that allow their seeding rate to go down. - Marisa Palmieri

Photo: EPIC Creative

WEATHER

Contractors Prepare for a Busy Weather Season

awn and landscape companies should prepare for the myriad of extreme weather conditions expected this spring and summer. Scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration say flooding is probable in portions of the Midwest and Ohio Valley through June. On the other hand, continued drought conditions are expected in the Southwest. These are the areas of concerns in the agency's 2007 spring outlook.

The upper Midwest went through snowmelt in April and warmer-thannormal temperatures in recent months have increased the risk of flooding due to ice jams. In addition, high soil moisture in parts of Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York create flood conditions, which was not helped by mid-April's Nor'easter that dropped record amounts of rain.

Dry conditions that have challenged the Southwest for the past few years will be back, according to the NOAA.

John Gibson, director of operations at Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care in Fort Collins, near Denver, couldn't think

about a dry spell in mid-April. He was busy preparing for the uncharacteristically late blizzards forecast for the area. Even after those subsided, he wasn't expecting much of a weather threat for his area. It all depends on the water sup-





ply in the reservoir as a result of snow pack, and the record snowfall there this past winter left the area in good supply, he says. But because of the persistence of dry conditions the past few years, Swingle tweaked some of its services to tailor to those restrictions. It is likely that other companies will use similar tactics this year, because other parts of the state, especially the southwest corner, are likely to face the drought conditions predicted for the rest of the Southwest U.S., Gibson says.

The Southeast isn't expected to escape the drought. The southern half of the Florida peninsula is experiencing abnormally dry weather. In addition, parts of the Southeast will have to contend with hurricanes. Weather expert William Gray predicts there will be 17 named storms this year, five of them major hurricanes. The probability of a major storm making landfall on the U.S. coast this year is 74 percent, compared with the average of 52 percent over the past century, he says.

While this year's hurricane activity is limited to guesses at this point, technology has advanced so that tree care companies know seven to 10 days in advance if they need to put together a team to clean up a targeted area. - Heather Wood

ENGLISH TO SPANISH PHRASES

Considering that a growing number of landscape contractors are employing Hispanic or H-2B workers, improving communication is becoming more crucial to ensure quality work done right the first time.

In an effort to aid landscape and lawn care professionals in their communication efforts, Lawn & Landscape will be running a few phrases each month in English and Spanish, including a pronunciation guide, courtesy of the book The Lingo Guide For Landscapers by E.G. White. To inquire about ordering the book, which costs \$14.95, visit www. lawnandlandscape.com/store or contact the Lawn & Landscape Book Department at 800/456-0707.

If there is a phrase you are having trouble with, let us know at mzawacki@gie.net.

- ENGLISH: We need another shovel. SPANISH: Necesitamos otra pala. (neh-she-see-TAH-mohs OH-trah PAH-lah.)
- 2. ENGLISH: Where are the rocks? SPANISH: ¿Adónde están las piedras/rocas? (as-DOHN-deh ehs-TAHN lahs pee-EH-drahs/RRROH-kas?)
- ENGLISH: Where is the water hose?
 SPANISH: ¿Adónde está la manguera?
 (as-DOHN-deh ahs-TAH lah mahn-GEH-rah?)
- ENGLISH: Where is the wheelbarrow?
 SPANISH: ¿Adónde está la carretilla?
 (ah-DOHN-deh ehs-TAH lah kah-rrreh-TEE-yah?)
- ENGLISH: Where is the back hoe? SPANISH: ¿Adónde está la retroexcavadora? (ah-DOHN-deh ehs-TAH lah reh-troh-ex-kah-vah-DOH-rah?)

CORRECTION

The article "Door to Door Is Not Dead" in the April 2007 issue misrepresents a component of TruGreen ChemLawn's neighborhood marketing program. TruGreen's door-todoor sales representatives do not leave marketing materials in mailboxes to generate inbound calls. This practice is a violation of federal statutes that grant a limited monopoly to the U.S. Postal Service on delivering mail to mailboxes and carries a fine of \$2,000 per violation, Instead, TruGreen leaves the materials on the door, which is legal. Additionally, TruGreen's Director of Sales Tim Ehrhart's name was misspelled.

Lawn & Landscape regrets these errors.

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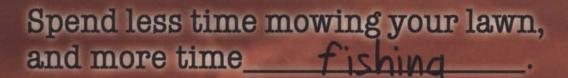
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USE READER SERVICE #29



USE READER SERVICE #30



DIXIE CHOPPEN

THE WORLD'S FASTEST LAWN MOWER

PAGE PER HOUR

For 27 Years Dixie Chopper has been building the most productive machines in the industry. Experience the difference today at your nearest Dixie Chopper dealer.

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DIXIE CHOPPER CT

market watch

90 percent

The percent of U.S. small business owners who are satisfied owning their own businesses.

Source: 2007 Wells Fargo/Gallup Small Business Index poll

Winter Was 'Near Average'

The December 2006-February 2007
U.S. winter season had an overall temperature that was near average.
Precipitation was above average in much of the center of the nation, while large sections of the East,
Southeast and West were drier than average. The global average temperature was the warmest on record for the December-February period.

Source: NOAA National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C.

36 percent

The percent of U.S. homeowners who believe the lack of a Web site could drive business away, according to a survey of 520 U.S. households. Seventy-six percent of respondents believe it's easiest to contact a business by phone or an e-mail address.

Source: 1&1 Internet



Housing Troubles – Is the Worst Over?

50

The percentage by which landscaping can reduce air conditioning costs by shading the windows and walls of a home.

Source: American Public Power Association A survey conducted by the Wall Street

Journal shows a majority of economists believe the worst of the housing troubles are behind us. In November 2006, 65 percent of economists believed the worst was over, compared to 71 percent this

April. In November,

35 percent

believed the worst has yet to come, compared to only 29 percent now.

Source: The Wall Street Journal

50 percent

The percent by which trees can reduce bothersome noise and mask unwanted noises with pleasant sounds.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



From addition to subtraction.



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From the biggest machines to the smallest tools, all it takes is one call to The Cat Rental Store and it's done.

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CALENDAR

Calendar Note

To ensure that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to Heather Wood, Web editor, at hwood@gie.net.

MAY 9 – 11 GIE Media's Snow Magazine's Snow Industry Exposition and Conference, Indianapolis, Ind. Contact: www.snowmagazineexpo.com, 800/456-0707

JUNE 6 – 9 U.S. Society for Irrigation and Drainage Professionals Conference, Denver, Colo. Contact: www.uscid.org, 303/628-5430

JUNE 14 – 17 Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association Annual Convention, Marco Island, Fla. Contact: www.fngla.org, 800/375-3642

JUNE 20 – 24 Professional Landcare Network Summer Leadership Meeting, Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. Contact: www.landcarenetwork.org, 800/395-2522

JULY 14 – 22 Aquascape's Pondemonium Annual Water Garden Training, St. Charles, III. Contact: 866/877-6637 or www.pondemonium.org

JULY 24 – 26 Penn Atlantic Nursery Trade Show (PANTS), Atlantic City, N.J. Contact: www.pantshow.com, 800/898-3411







Solutions that fit any ornamental pest problem.



When it comes to nasty ornamental pests and diseases, Bayer has the solution—products that will prevent or control every sorry insect or fungus that you may come across, quickly and effectively. Therefore, keeping your customer's landscape healthy and lush and your business healthy and in the black. And all our products are Backed by Bayer[™] and all the support and science that come with it. For more information ask your Bayer Field Sales Representative or visit us at BackedbyBayer.com.









Armada^{*}







GW/ise

To compete, Wise Landscaping turned its business model upside down and began to think creatively.

ou must be creative to compete. This is Covey Wise III's mantra.

For landscape contractors such as Wise, Central Florida is as challenging as it is beautiful and affluent. The region's wealthy residential areas and multi-million dollar homes are the norm rather than the exception.

"These neighborhoods are almost always gated, are in affluent areas of the city and have homeowners' associations that are strict about the look of the landscaping," Wise says. "Lush landscaping of the homes and the neighborhood entrances is expected, and because of this, people are constantly updating their landscaping. They want to make sure they have the best."

Just as plentiful are landscape firms, a \$15.2-billion industry in Florida, surpassing even citrus production, cites Wise, the company's vice president of operations and heir apparent. And this doesn't take into account less legitimate, fly-by-night, mow-and-blow contractors, Wise says. All aggressively compete for the same high-end real estate.

"Even though people in our market see the value in hiring a legitimate landscape contractor there's very little regulation of those who perform the work that we do," Wise says. "Those who

continued on page 46

by mike zawacki | managing editor



DON'T PUT YOUR ON THE SIDE OF



Payload is the GVWR minus curb weight and includes weight of occupants, optional equipment and cargo, limited by weight distribution. Payload is not the Vehicle Capacity Weight as defined by PMVSS 10, which will vary according to installed optional equipment. *Ax2 Regular Cab SRS Long Bed shown with available 5.7.1 V8 (maximum payload achieved with available 5.7.1 V8 (maximum payload achieved with available 6.7.1 V8 (maximum payload achieved with Do not exceed any Weight Ratiegs and follow all instructions in your Owner's Manual. The maximum you can tow depends on the total weight of any cargo, occupants and available equipment.

COMPANY LOGO ANYTHING LESS.





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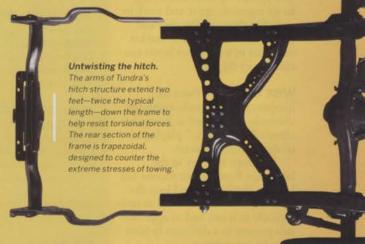
Meet the half-ton truck that's changing expectations of how much work a half-ton can do. The available 5.7L V8 can carry up to 2065 lbs. in its cargo bed,12 or it can pull up to 10,800 lbs.23 Not

once. Not once in a while. But all day long. Its drivetrain and chassis feature engineering innovations that help ensure those stats aren't just paper promises. They're capabilities you can count on.

> Leave no pound-foot behind. The weak link in many pickups is the ring gear in the rear differential. To strengthen this critical area, all three of Tundra's available engine choices-4.0L V6, 4.7L V8 and 5.7L V8-transfer torque to the rear wheels through exceptionally large ring gears; 10.5" on the 5.7L V8, 9.5" on the V6 and 4.7L V8.



A metal duet. The big available V8's block is lightweight cast aluminum, but each cylinder bore is lined with a durable steel sleeve. So the engine efficiently expends energy hauling the weight of your payload, rather than itself



A TRAILER'S BEST FRIEND. Tundra is the first half-ton to offer a 6-speed automatic transmission. Six speeds mean a wide range of ratios, starting with a first gear ratio of 3.333, so there's no need to choose a rear axle ratio just for towing. Add TOW/HAUL mode and you'll pull with more power uphill and better control downhill.

Find out more at toyota.com

THE TRUCK THAT'S CHANGING IT ALL.





continued from page 42

do compete against us don't care and don't have the proper licensing or pull the necessary permits. And when you compete against those types of landscape contractors you begin to find that there's a lot of homeowners who don't care either.'

To differentiate itself from the competition, the family-owned-andoperated business had to begin doing things differently. It flipped its service focus, committed to cutting costs and took a different approach to the way it presented itself to the community. The company got creative to become better competitors, including focusing on a key media sponsorship.

As a result, the St. Cloudbased landscape firm is experiencing steady growth, between 10 and 15 percent annually, that is fed by steady client development. The company expects to post \$2.3 million in revenue for 2007.

We have to be creative to make us competitive in this market place," Wise says. "We do this by cutting costs and trying to set ourselves apart and work in a market that requires skill and professionalism. We also market ourselves in ways other landscape companies do not.'

WISE CHOICES. From its inception, Wise Landscaping has always branded itself as being the client's "wise choice," playing off of the family's surname.

However, one key to the landscape firm's recent success has been to thrust its brand into the general public as often and as strategically as it can and to approach this process in a different fashion than its competitors.

For example, Wise Landscaping considers the two major central Florida home shows as the bread and butter of its marketing initiatives. According to Wise, the Central Florida Home and Garden Show in the spring and the Central Florida Home Show in the fall are the "big shows" because they expose the company to more than 100,000 potential clients.

"It takes a lot of work and effort to provide a beautiful display inside," Wise says. "But it's well worth it."

The landscape firm has been displaying at these two shows for the last four years, at a cost of between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per show. It's a solid investment, Wise explains, because the company's presence at these shows has a cumulative effect on generating new business.

"At this point, we have a lot of repeat visitors at the show," he says. "People begin to take notice of you after you've been there for a couple of

Wise Landscaping

PRESIDENT: Covey Wise, II VICE PRESIDENT: Covey Wise, III **HEADQUARTERS: St. Cloud, Fla.**

FOUNDED: 1990

EMPLOYEES: Between 12 and 15 year-round

SERVICE BREAKOUT:

85% Design/build 5% Maintenance/Mowing 5% Installation-only 5% Gardening

CLIENT BREAKOUT:

100% Residential

REVENUE BREAKOUT:

2007 Revenue:	\$2.3 million (projected)
2006 Revenue:	\$1.85 million
2005 Revenue:	\$1.2 million
2004 Revenue	\$982.000
2003 Revenue	The state of the s

THREE GREATEST CHALLENGES:

- Quality labor, this is a constant battle.
- 2. Operating as a legitimate and competitive business in a highly unregulated industry.
- 3. Educating homeowners on the value of quality landscaping and outdoor living areas.

MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY:

You must be creative to compete.

CONTACT INFO

5251 KC Durham Road St. Cloud, Fla. 34771 PH: 407/891-9473 FX: 407/891-9474 WEB: www.wiselandscaping.com E-MAIL: wiselandscapeinc@aol.com

years. It's advertising consistency. We get a lot of people coming up to us who remember us from previous years and saying they wanted to see what we were going to do different this year. We'll get calls from people who saw us six months ago, and as long as a year ago, from a home show."

Wise estimates that 30 to 40 percent of the sales leads generated from their participation in a local home show develop into new work.

"In a sense, the shows pre-qualify a person beforehand, unlike someone calling in response to a Yellow Pages advertisement," Wise says. "They're coming to these shows to find a landscaper, to investigate our professional

credentials and to talk to us. This separates them from the general

population.'

The home shows have been responsible for the other key aspect, and arguably the most influential, of Wise Landscaping's marketing initiatives - on-air radio promo-

Three years ago, promoters for In the House with Kent & Jared, a locally produced AM radio homeimprovement program syndicated throughout Florida, approached Wise about being the show's exclusive landscape sponsor. While the exposure potential for Wise Landscaping was extremely attractive, the initial cost to do so was not.

We just didn't have the budget to spend that much money on a single marketing initiative," Wise says. The family carefully considered the proposal and debated its merits for a year before signing on.

'Honestly, we had to save up to do this because we didn't have the money budgeted to spend as much as it would require to do the radio sponsorship," Wise says. "But to do the things we wanted to do, and to operate in the market we wanted to be in, we had to spend the money at some point."

Being the show's exclusive landscape sponsor costs Wise Landscaping about \$2,500 a month. In return, Wise, along with his brother Clint and mother, Nancy, are brought into the studio for six, one-hour appearances throughout the year. In addition, Wise Landscaping commercials, which are produced by

the radio station as part of the deal,

run three times a day.

"The sponsorship is the single largest cost for us in terms of advertising dollars," Wise says. "But we get back five times what we put into it. The show always generates a good response for us. On Monday, after the

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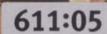
372:16 238:49

Total hours: Irrigation

Total hours: Placing Sod

38:53

Hours Bill Owen worked last week



Total hours to date: Crestview

WEEKLYTIMECARD

	START	LUNCH	ENO	JOB CODES	JOBSITE/PROJECT	HOURS
Mon.	7:00	1/2	3:30	1	Breutypod	8
ues.		-	3:30	3-1		8
Wed.			4:00		To the	85
hurs.	40%		4:00		Crest view	83
Fri.	7	V	4:00		1	85

GUESSWORK

>TRACKING service work?
>DOZENS of cost codes?
>Crews on the MOVE?

PocketClock

Employee Report

38:53 hours

Day	Date	Jobsite	Start	Stop	Cost Code	Hours	Total
Mon	6/11	Brentwood	7:08 AM 12:41 PM	12:05 PM 3:22 PM	Irrigation Irrigation	4:57 2:41	7:38 hours
Tue	6/12	Brentwood	7:12 AM 12:43 PM	12:07 PM 3:23 PM	Irrigation Irrigation	4:55 2:40	7:35 hours
Wed	6/13	Brentwood	7:12 AM 12:46 PM	12:02 PM 3:49 PM	Irrigation Irrigation	4:50 3:03	7:53 hours
Thu	6/14	Crestview	7:17 AM 12:50 PM	12:19 PM 3:46 PM	Placing Sod Placing Sod	5:02 2:56	7:58 hours
Fri	6/15	Crestview	7:13 AM 12:44 PM	12:07 PM 3:39 PM	Placing Sod Placing Sod	4:54 2:55	7:49 hours

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show airs, we always have calls from people who heard us on the show the previous Saturday and are interested in doing business."

After the first couple of months, the exposure from the radio shows increased calls for new business by as much as 30 percent, Wise says. That enabled the company to add an additional crew, beef up its design/build service and forced the Wise family to strategically think about the future.

"It was a big turning point for us as a company," Wise says.

THE FLIP FLOP. As the company gained wider exposure from its marketing initiatives and the design/build side of the business continued to grow, the decision was made to rethink and refocus the business model.

Patriarch Covey Wise II formed the business in 1990 primarily as a landscape maintenance company doing a few design/build projects here and there. In terms of service

contractor quick tip: home show setup

very year we try to incorporate some new or popular ideas. We start about six months beforehand and we save magazine and newspaper articles that show the most current trends in land-scaping and outdoor living. Then we design the booth based on these features. We make a to-scale drawing of the booth to make sure there is room in the space for what we want to include. This sets us apart from other companies at the show as it is apparent that we have taken the time to design the booth and are not just filling the space. Everyone incorporates new ideas and features in their booth, but the design is what makes the difference."

- Covey Wise III



Photo: Wise Landscaping



offerings, the firm's service breakdown was 80 percent maintenance and 20 percent landscape installation and design/build.

But when they examined their market closely they saw several companies offering more diverse services.

"We knew we needed to begin moving toward that end with our services," Wise says. "And at the same time, the one-truck landscape guys were undercutting everyone."

To better compete in the Central Florida market, the company would need to be 90 percent design/build and 10 percent maintenance, Wise says.

"We got tired of the constraints of being primarily a maintenance company," Wise says. "From a business perspective it wasn't flexible for us. It required a large workforce, long hours, Saturdays, very tight schedul-

"Maintenance is a good service when it's just you and another guy or if you're a large maintenance company. But when you're a mid-sized land-scape firm like ours it was difficult to be competitive because the profit margins just weren't there."

- Covey Wise III

ing and very small profit margins.

"Maintenance is a good service when it's just you and another guy or if you're a large maintenance company," he adds. "But when you're a mid-sized landscape firm like ours it was difficult to be competitive because the profit margins just weren't there." The transformation included adding the capacity to do more stone projects, water features, landscape lighting and elaborate plantings. The process took about a year to fully evolve, but today it is serving the company well. The firm's profit margins have grown from less than 10 percent as a maintenance company to nearly 30 percent as a predominately design/build firm with roughly the same labor force, Wise says.

NEW DIGS, NEW OPPORTU-NITIES. Making solid decisions to change the business model and enter into unique

advertising and branding opportunities resulted in measurable growth for Wise Landscaping.

The company achieved the \$1million revenue milestone in 2005 and has experienced between 20 to 30

continued on page 54, sidebar on 52



USE READER SERVICE #36



guide

lawn disease

If Lawn Disease is your problem, Bayer has the Solution.

Bayer Environmental Science





Lawn Disease

The Causes

Turfgrasses have complex defense mechanisms. And like human beings, when the defense system is weakened by various stresses, a pathogen can invade and disease can develop.

What Determines the Disease That Strikes

Most lawn diseases caused by fungi require moisture (leaf wetness) to grow. However, it's the complex interaction of turfgrass type (species and cultivar), climate and cultural factors that determines the disease that strikes. Conditions that favor disease include:

- · Poor soil drainage
- · Excessive thatch
- · Poor air movement
- · Extended periods of leaf wetness
- · Over-or under-fertilization / irrigation

The Big Mistake Your Customers Make

Homeowners often don't know that they have turfgrass disease and think they can "fix" their lawn problems by watering their lawns more. It will be easy for you to point out to them that disease and watering issues are interrelated and then make appropriate recommendations.

Have a Plan

Preventive care has become a necessity. Many customers don't realize the value of preventive care and that the cost of curing a lawn disease problem can be far more expensive than its prevention. Not to mention, the cost of ignoring a lawn disease problem altogether and facing the possibility of total lawn replacement, a costly and time-consuming undertaking.

Educating your customers on the need for preventive lawn care is a good opportunity for you to discuss a lawn disease prevention program. Some customers may balk at the expense initally. But you may, in fact, gain their confidence and respect, and build a stronger relationship with your customer.

You'll see that the right plan – and especially the right products – will keep your customers happy, their lawns beautiful and disease-free, and your business growing.



The Bayer Solution to Lawn Disease

Lawn care professionals like you are the first line of defense against lawn disease. Trust Bayer Environmental Science for the tools that will transform you in your customers' eyes from a lawn care operator into a lawn care hero.

Only Bayer gives you a complete set of options – Armada® fungicide, Bayleton® fungicide, Compass® fungicide and ProStar® fungicide – that helps you provide the most effective protection against lawn disease available today. These are the standards against which all other lawn disease products are measured. Bayer invented the total lawn disease solution and it has revolutionized the lawn care industry.

No matter the severity of your customers' problems, the season or even the region of the country you're in, relax: Bayer has the products that will let you provide your customers with a complete and cost-effective lawn disease solution.

The Industry's Most Effective Protection Against Lawn and Landscape Diseases

Armada" – Cost-effective, fast-acting and long-lasting. This full-service fungicide treats virtually every major fungal problem you'll ever come across for up to 30 days.

Bayleton* – A broad-spectrum fungicide that offers unsurpassed efficacy against tough disease problems, including dollar spot.

Compass* – A cornerstone strobilurin fungicide ideal for disease management programs. Provides longer residual protection of diseases like brown patch and leaf spot than contact products, at a cost-effective price.

ProStar – Locally systemic fungicide for turfgrass that is especially effective on fairy ring and a broad spectrum of Rhizoctonia species.

Lawn Disease







Armada^{*}

The Science of Armada® Fungicide

The first fungicide designed and priced specifically with the lawn care industry in mind, Armada provides exceptional contact and systemic turf protection against the toughest lawn and ornamental diseases.

 Brown patch, dollar spot, red thread, fusarium patch, leaf spot, gray leaf spot, rust, stripe smut, summer patch, pink patch, pink snow mold, rapid blight, southern blight

Why Armada is Better Than the Competition

- · Armada is priced for the lawn care market making it a profit opportunity
- · One product with multiple modes of action for both lawn and landscape diseases
- Controls the two major lawn care diseases brown patch and dollar spot as well as 12 other turf diseases
- · Residual control that lasts up to 30 days you'll have fewer callbacks
- Delivers both preventive and curative control, which further delays the development of resistant disease organisms
- · Cost-effectiveness makes it a profit opportunity
- · Provides excellent control of major fungal diseases on ornamentals

Application Guidelines

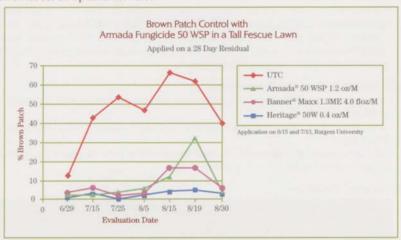
Disease	Armada Fungicide 50 WSP Use Rate (oz per 1,000 ft²)	Application Interval/Timing
Dollar Spot, Brown Patch, Leaf Spot, Anthracnose, Gray Leaf Spot, Red Thread, Pink Patch, Rust, Southern Blight	0.6 - 1.2	14 - 28 days
Stripe Smut	0.6	3 Applications/Season
Pusarium Patch	1.2	Fall - Early Spring
Pink Snow Mold	1.2	Late Fall
Summer Patch	1.2	21 – 28 days







The Research Speaks for Itself









BAYLETON

The Science of Bayleton* Fungicide

Prevents and controls many turf and ornamental diseases for up to 28 days, including:

 Bermudagrass decline, brown patch/Rhizoctonia blight, red thread, dollar spot, fusarium blight, gray snow mold/Typhula blight, powdery mildew, pink snow mold/Fusarium patch, rusts, southern blight, stripe smut, summer patch, take all patch, Zoysia patch, large brown patch

Why It's Better Than the Competition

- A proven fungicide for lawn and ornamental disease protection with long-lasting residual control
- Broad-spectrum control is so effective, you need apply it only once every 21-30 days
- Mini drum size that contains 50 11-ounce water soluble packets allows you to treat 25 acres of turf at the labeled application rate

Application Guidelines

Turf Disease	Bayleton 50 WSP Use Rate (oz per 1,000 ft²)		
	Preventive	Curative	
Dollar Spot	0.25 - 0.5	1.0	
Brown Patch, Copper Spot, Corticium Red Thread, Powdery Mildew, Rusts	0.5	1.0	
Anthracnose	1.0	1.0	
Southern Blight	0.5 - 2.0	2.0	
Gray Leaf Spot	0.5 - 1.0		
Fusarium Blight, Summer Patch, Pink Snow Mold/Fusarium Patch, Large Patch of Zoysia	1.0	- 2.0	
Stripe Smut	1	.0	
Bermudagrass decline Fake all patch (Except California)	0.5 - 1.0	2.0	
Gray Snow Mold/Typhula Blight (Except California)	2	.0	

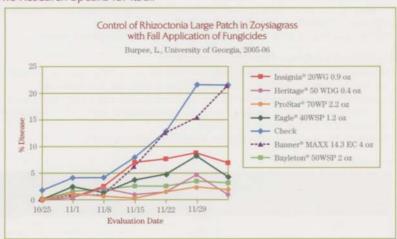








The Research Speaks for Itself



Bayleton®







COMPASS®

The Science of Compass* Fungicide

A broad-spectrum strobilurin fungicide, which at remarkably low rates, provides a high level of activity against diseases such as:

· Brown patch, leaf spot, summer patch, gray leaf spot, red thread, rust

Why Compass is Better Than the Competition

- Delivers the value of a contact fungicide with the power of a systemic because of its unique mesostemic mode of action, which is resistant to weathering
- · Provides longer residual protection than contact products at a cost-effective price
- An excellent tank mix partner, Compass is compatible with most insecticides, fungicides and foliar nutrient products
- · Compass is classified by the EPA as a reduced-risk compound

Application Guidelines

Disease	Rate of Product per 1000 ft ²	Application Interval/Timing
Brown Patch	0.1 – 0.2 oz	14 days
	0.15 – 0.25 oz	21 days
Leaf Spot	0.1 - 0.15 oz	14 days
	0.15 - 0.25 oz	21 - 28 days
Summer Patch	0.2 - 0.25 oz	21 – 28 days
Gray Leaf Spot	0.15 - 0.2 oz	14 days
Red Thread, Pink Patch	0.25 oz	21 days
	0.1 - 0.15 oz	14 days
Rust	0.2 - 0.25 oz	21 days
	0.1 – 0.15 oz	14 days
Fusarium Patch	0.2 - 0.25 oz	21 days
	0.2 - 0.25 oz	Fall – Early Spring
Pink Snow Mold	0.25 oz	Late Fall

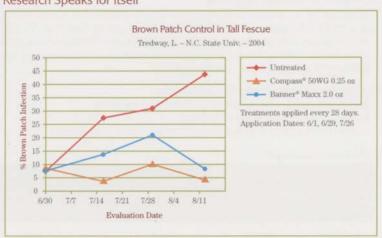








The Research Speaks for Itself



Compass®







ProStar

The Science of ProStar® Fungicide

A fungicide with a unique mode of action that provides excellent control of brown patch and other diseases, including mushrooms caused by fairy ring. Its systemic mode of action both prevents and cures fungal diseases. ProStar also controls:

 Large brown patch (of Zoysiagrass and other warm season grasses), red thread, southern blight, pink patch, gray snow mold

Why ProStar is Better Than the Competition

- · It's the industry's most consistent performer on fairy ring
- · Longer residual than contact fungicides
- · Unique mode of action provides excellent resistance management

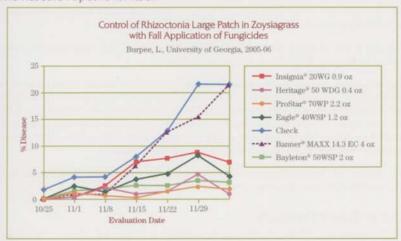
Application Guidelines

Turf Disease		ProStar* Application Chart		
		Use Rate (oz per 1,000 ft²)	Application Interval (Days)	
Brown Patch	Preventive	1.5 – 2.2	14 – 28 Days	
	Curative	3.0	14	
Fairy Ring	Preventive	2.2	21 – 28 Days	
	Curative	4.5	30	
Red Thread/Pink Patch Yellow Patch/Southern Blight Gray Snow Mold Large Brown Patch		1.5	21 – 28	
		3.0 - 4.5	Before permanent snow cover	
		2.2	30	





The Research Speaks for Itself









The Science of Healthy Environments

Just as important as the total solution we provide is our totally unique commitment to improving environments anywhere people live, work or play.

We call it the "Science of Healthy Environments." Improving environments everywhere is our goal. And science is how we achieve it.

Science, in fact, has always driven Bayer. Today, as one of the world's leaders in product development, we have state-of-the-art testing facilities throughout the world. Here, we evaluate the efficacy of our products and formulations in real-world situations. Only after we measure our products' impact on those environments do we determine their ultimate end use. This allows us to go beyond merely eliminating pests and disease to helping create turf that is better functioning and more beautiful.

The Science of Healthy Environments. It's what helps make Bayer the #1 brand lawn care professionals use to protect turf and ornamentals.

Other Bayer Products

Science and the world we live in are changing every day. That's why Bayer Environmental Science is forever adapting existing products and developing new ones that will keep us – and you – ahead of the competition.



We invite you to examine our full line of products available through our network of Bayer authorized distributors. For more information about our products, please visit us at www.BackedbyBayer.com or speak with your Bayer Field Sales Representative.

Bayer Authorized Distributors:

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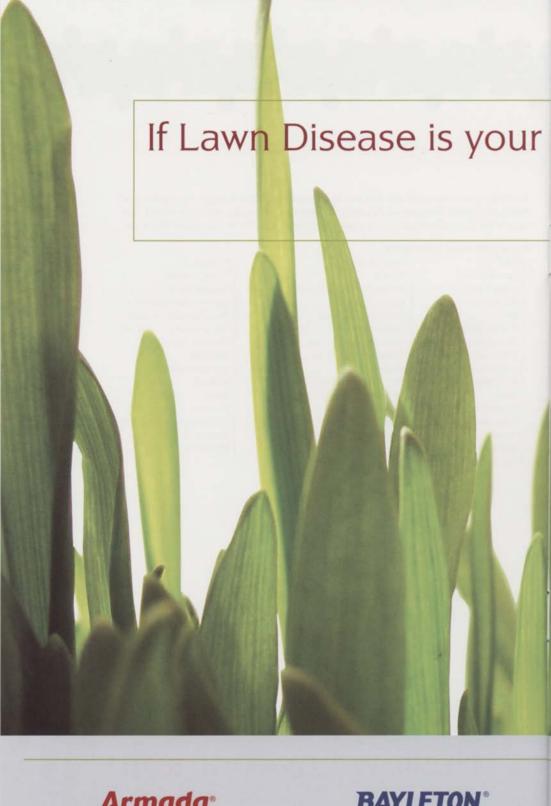
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the best mistake

n 2006, Wise Landscaping hired a business consultant to organize the business and increase operational efficiencies. The experience was an expensive disaster. "We wanted help in creating better structure and organization within the business," says Covey Wise III, the St. Cloud, Fla.-based firm's vice president of operations. "Instead, it all just exploded in front of us."

The family brought in the business consultant to tutor them on how to manage cash flow and to develop a business forecast. But the consulting firm wasn't green-industry specific, Wise says, and they treated the landscape firm more like a "big business" than a growing family-run operation.

Less than six months and \$30,000 in fees later, the Wise family cut the consultant loose. "They were guaranteeing us a 30 to 40 percent increase in our business if we just stuck with it," Wise says. " But we knew if we didn't stop it would eventually kill us."

The silver lining, though, was the experience forced the Wise family to take a hard look for themselves at the way they were conducting business. And instead of hiring another business expert to fix their problems, they hired an office person with an accounting background on an hourly basis, which proved to be a better and cost-effective fit for the landscape company.

"We finally realized we had many years of experience with our management team and, together, we could make the necessary changes ourselves," Wise says. "It made us more serious about learning how to do these things for ourselves."



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continued from page 49

percent in revenue increases since.

"We could now see the light at the end of the tunnel," Wise says.

This light led the Wise family to purchase their own corporate headquarters in March 2006, a necessity to increase efficiencies and significantly reduce costs. Previously, the firm leased a 5,000-square-foot warehouse space for \$3,000 a month. In addition, the company's lease agreement was open to review and adjustment by the property owners.

"We were at their mercy," Wise says. "Within the first year, we had

two price changes.'

To compound matters, the rented space didn't provide Wise Landscap-

ing with a holding yard or staging area, which forced them to order materials in small quantities or have workers pick up supplies on the way to the job site. In addition, they had nowhere to dump debris or compost materials. Instead, they shipped all of their refuse off site, which resulted in \$1,000-per-month landfill fees.

Finding a new place to call home, though, was an audacious, two-year process for Wise Landscaping. When they begin the initial search, the region was entering into a real estate boom, ratcheting up land prices by as

much as 30 percent.

The Wise family needed to get creative to make a land purchase. The 5-acre plot they wanted cost about \$300,000 and they would need an additional \$20,000 to invest in more equipment, materials to set up the site and an office trailer. The family saved up 20 percent of the costs, and received outside loans to make up the remaining 80 percent.

remaining 80 percent.

"Financially, this was the single biggest risk we've taken as a company," Wise says. "But we knew we had

to do it.'

In the end, owning the property allowed the company to slash costs by at least 15 percent and improve the company's foundation for future growth. As an example, Wise says that before the company moved into its new home a \$5,000 job took on average three days to complete. Now, because they more efficiently manage day-to-day operations, the same \$5,000 job takes two days to finish.

In addition, the 5-acre site provides the firm with a centralized location inside a 50-mile radius from Central Florida's most populated high-end residential areas. Forecasters, Wise says, predict that more than 30,000 new homes will be built in this region over the next five years.

"We have the space we need to grow now," Wise says. "It's paying for itself, plus some. And the land has a lot more uses for us in the future."

One option being closely considered is the creation of an event services division. Wise believes his home show experience could be parlayed into a business enterprise that helped others prepare and set up for trade shows. One aspect of that business could be a plant and material rental service, he says.

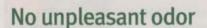
continued on page 57, sidebar on 56



cover story

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eye in the sky

or Covey Wise III, the last straw was an employee who, in an equipment-filled company truck, drove his girlfriend to Wal-Mart to pay a bill.

"I watched him do this," Wise says of this particular incident. "When I confronted him he

tried to lie about it, but finally admitted to it.

Wise, the vice president of operations for St. Cloud, Fla.-based Wise Landscaping, was fed up with the shenanigans workers were pulling during the day, such as dawdling at gas stations or padding lunch breaks.

'There was nothing there for us to keep them in check," he says. That is until a friend in the pest control industry told Wise about the increased efficiency and reduction in time-wast-

ing activities he experienced after installing global positioning units in his trucks.

Inspired, in January Wise contracted with a local GPS provider to outfit seven trucks for a total cost of about \$200 per month. The GPS unit are passive systems and do not provide the landscape company with live tracking. Instead, they record data such as speed, idling times and stops made throughout the day and download the information when the units come within 300 yards of the shop. Additionally, Wise uses the information for billing and to cross reference employee time cards.

From the money we now save in operational efficiencies, the GPS more than pays for

itself every month," Wise says of the lease arrangement.

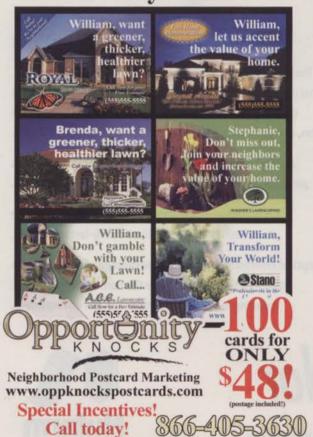
In addition to the affect on the bottom line, the impact on employee attitudes has been

equally as significant.

Some workers were apprehensive about the idea but we had to do it," Wise says. "Within two weeks the attitude and demeanor of workers company-wide changed. Now everyone is thinking about what they're doing during the day. It's as if they'd all taken honesty pills.



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Another is Wise Landscaping's new wholesale nursery. Besides acting as its own supplier for plant materials, the nursery, located on the 5-acre site, has recently become licensed to sell as a broker to other Central Florida landscape companies.

At this time, the nursery, which is being spearheaded by his father, has not been a revenue generator, however, Wise remains optimistic.

"We still need to build up our client base," Wise says. "But there's a lot more landscape companies out there then there

are nurseries.'

One important lesson learned during this complex process, Wise says, is that when you believe you've reach the goal you've set, a new one always presents itself.

"This is a constant growing process," he says. "And once you get to



It takes a lot of time and work to develop a beautiful display inside a home show, says Covey Wise III, but its impact as a sales lead generator is well worth the effort. Photo: Wise Landscaping

the point you think you need to be at you begin to see new opportunities. We're always going to see needs in our market that can be filled and new services we can provide." III



For more on how Wise Landscaping does business, check out the May issue online.



USE READER SERVICE # 44



USE READER SERVICE # 43

hand-held equipment



Images: Outdoor Power Equipment Institute

by marisa palmieri | associate editor

SOLOWING PROPORTION

Lawn & Landscape puts
this perennial issue into
perspective, discovering
that blower restriction
prevention is in operators'
hands now more than ever.

eaf blowers were recently voted to *Parade* magazine's list of products Americans wish they could un-invent.

Landscape contractors and power equipment manufacturers aren't surprised. Cities have been banning and restricting the use of leaf blowers almost as long as the devices have been in the United States.

Landscape contractors generally aren't opposed to reasonable restrictions that encourage blower buy-back programs promoting low-noise units, operator training and time of use restrictions. But they say blind, outright blower bans are unfair and unnecessary when the issue can be addressed with less severe ordinances. All-out bans strap landscape maintenance businesses, hindering their ability to do their jobs in the most efficient, profitable way. Maintaining a property without using a blower increases costs 20 to 40 percent, according to the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET).

Once the blower issue arises in a community the debate can become heated and emotional. Opponents' arguments often are based on old data, blind to modern technology and used as a political maneuver by local lawmakers wanting to be viewed as improving quality of life.

Blower ban advocates often organize on the Web and drum up support by arguing their cases on the local newspaper's op-ed page. However, they underestimate the costs to landscape contractors, equipment dealers or other businesses whose livelihood is sustained in part by blowers. They believe brooms, rakes and hand tools can adequately replace blowers, yet fail to acknowledge the associated cost increases and difficulty in passing these costs on to customers.

"I've had a city councilman tell me, what's wrong with using a broom? It's good exercise," says Bob Wade, director of legislation for the California Landscape Contractors Association. "My response is, it might be good exercise if you're doing your backyard on a Saturday morning, but we do this all day long all week long."

Wade's company, Wade Landscape in Laguna Beach, Calif., draws 40 percent of its revenue from maintenance in a market where blowers, even electric ones, have been banned outright for more than five years. His company has adapted, using rakes, brooms and vacuums where permitted, but blower prohibition has cut into profits. It costs his company 40 percent more to maintain properties in cities where blowers are banned. Not to mention, it hinders growth. "That's a lot of labor that could be used to do something more productive," he adds.

Another problem is getting customers to realize that manual cleanup doesn't compare to a blower's ability to remove debris from a yard. "We can't raise someone 40 percent and not do a better job," he says. "I told my customers, we'll clean it as much as we can, but you're going to have to accept a little more debris when we leave a job. For the most part people will say OK, then they'll call a few weeks later and say, 'Can't you get it any cleaner?' We're stuck absorbing most of that cost," Wade says. "There really is no good answer."

While companies like Wade's do their best to adapt, technology has shifted much of the concern into

hot spots

It's been almost two years since Palo Alto, Calif., enacted a ban on gas-powered blowers in residential areas. This decision drew national attention because the city had promised several years earlier that no such ban would take place if contractors purchased clean, low-noise models and participated in training and operator certification programs. The industry complied, but the city passed the no-blow ordinance anyway. A year later, in July 2006, the city rejected a written request from OPEI and the Bay Area Gardeners Association to reverse the ban.

Though the industry lost Palo Alto, it achieved success in nearby Capitola. In reaction to a petition for a ban on blower use, a group of contractors, dealers and citizens effectively argued that such a ban would greatly increase the cost of landscape maintenance and the issue was one of courteous use, not the blowers themselves. In September 2006, the city instead voted to increase restricted hours of use for leaf blowers in residential areas rather than ban them completely. The group's awareness of the issue and efforts to educate the council paid off.

While California historically has been the capital of blower-restricting ordinances, there has been a proliferation of restrictions in other localities nationwide, says OPEI President and CEO Bill Harley. A bill has been introduced in Hawaii's house that would ban the use of blowers by 2008. On the East Coast the issue has been taken up recently by councils in Westchester County, N.Y., and Cambridge, Mass.

This January, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano signed Executive Order 2007-03, ordering all state agencies to cease the use of leaf blowers, gasoline-powered lawn mowers and "other pollution-causing landscape maintenance equipment" on state property in three counties. The concern here is mainly one of particulate matter, as the state is required to submit a plan to the federal EPA by the end of the year to reduce PM emissions by 5 percent annually until it meets Ambient Air Quality Standards.







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hand-held equipment

the hands of blower users. "As the industry has addressed the issues of both sound level and sound quality, the issue tends to be on courteous and common-sense use of blowers," says Scott Tilley, general counsel for Stihl, Virginia Beach, Va., and chair of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's blower task force.

It's now incumbent on contractors in communities without blower laws to operate their machines in a responsible manner. Buying low-noise devices, training operators to use them properly and courteously and correcting public misconceptions will quell the spread of no-blow laws.

THE GREAT DEBATE. Invented in Japan in the early 1970s, leaf blowers soon arrived in the U.S., welcomed by maintenance contractors and homeowners as an alternative to using water for lawn and garden cleanup.

In 1975, Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif., a self-described Bohemian Mecca, was one of the first communities to ban blowers, deeming them a public nuisance. Three years later affluent, star-studded Beverly Hills did the same. By 2000, 20 California cities had blower bans on the books (usually addressing gas blowers in residential areas) and 80 cities had ordinances restricting their use, according to a report in 2000 by the California Environmental Protection Agency's Air Resources Board (CARB). At that time, it's estimated that 400-plus communities around the country had enacted such restrictions and that number has no doubt multiplied today.

In most cases, blower opponents cry "nuisance." Of all power equipment, blowers take a beating because the high-pitched frequency of noise they emit is considered obnoxious. Where mowers hum and chainsaws buzz, blowers whine, opponents say. In addition to the noise pollution argument, activists have tried to ban blowers based on the environmental and health impacts of exhaust emissions and fugitive dust.

Over the last two decades, blower manufacturers have succeeded in significantly reducing both noise and emissions levels. When blowers were first introduced to the United States, they operated at a noise level of about 78 decibels measured at 50 feet.

Today, many manufacturers produce blowers that operate at 65

talking points

When the blower issue makes it to a legislative body, typically an indiscriminate ban has been proposed and it's up to local contractors and other users to propose reasonable restrictions. At these meetings, it's common for opponents to cite erroneous information. Here are some common misconceptions and talking points for contractors to clear the air and bring solutions to the table.

Misconception: "Brooms and rakes work just fine."

Fact: Most estimates say it takes about five times as long to remove debris from a site with brooms and rakes than it does with a leaf blower. This can add 20 to 40 percent to the cost of a job. In addition, using rakes can damage the important root and biomass structure of the grass, thereby harming the health of the lawn and reducing the efficiency by which grass converts carbon dioxide into oxygen.

Possible solution: Identify opponents' specific concerns (courteous use, dust, etc.) and enact a comprehensive policy that would address each of these specifically.

Misconception: "Blowers can damage hearing."

Fact: It's true that high-decibel noise can damage hearing, however the Occupational Health & Safety Administration does not even require a hearing-protection program for blower users unless exposure equals or exceed an eight-hour, time-weighted average sound level of 85 decibels. With blower sound levels around 65 decibels when measured according to ANSI B175.2, a bystander sound measurement, the risk of harm to a bystander from blower noise is non-existent.

Possible solution: Require professional users, possibly through city licenses or certification programs, to attend safety, etiquette and dustand sound-reduction technique training.

Misconception: "A single gas-powered blower emits as much pollution in a year as 80 cars."

Fact: Auto emissions are measured in grams per mile while blower emissions are measured in grams per kilowatt-hour. Automobiles have separate requirements for hydrocarbon (HC) and nitrogen oxide (NOx) while outdoor power equipment has a combined HC plus NOx limit. Annual automobile usage per EPA is 12,000 miles per year (300 hours of drive time) which equals 5,700 grams of HC and NOx emissions. The average annual use of a hand-held blower is 36 hours (one hour per week for nine months) at an average of 0.9 kilowatts of power, which equals 1,620 grams of HC and NOx emissions.

Possible solution: Specify the latest, cleanest and quietest blowers (EPA phase two, 65 decibels), require buy-back programs and user education programs that teach the safe, courteous and environmentally sustainable use of outdoor power equipment.

Sources: OPEI, PLANET and CLCA

www.lawnandlandscape.com



Visit the May Online Extras section for more tips on how to bring solutions to the table when blower-restricting ordinances arise in your community.



TYPHOON 20

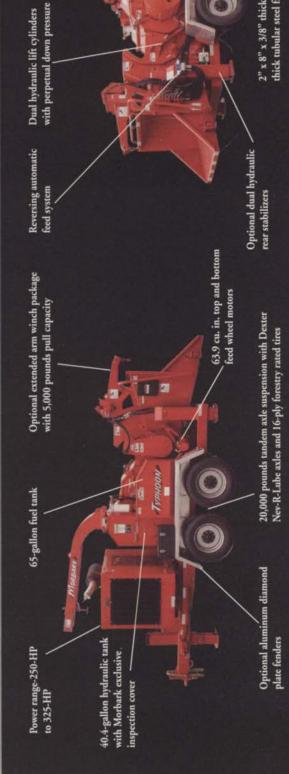
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decibels or less, which doesn't seem like much of a reduction, but is, considering a 6 decibel reduction reduces the sound level by 50 percent. That makes today's low-noise blowers about 75 percent quieter than their predecessors, Tilley says.

In addition, manufacturers have implemented improvements in engine technology, fan design, tube design and material usage to reduce sound levels, says Jeff Nesom, product manager of hand-held equipment for Husqyarna, Charlotte, N.C.

Exhaust emissions are usually secondary to the debate, as the EPA regulates and sets emissions standards for hand-held equipment much like it does for automobiles. In fact, it's illegal under the federal Clean Air Act for cities and states other than California to regulate mobile source emissions. The EPA and CARB emissions standards put into place since the 1990s have reduced exhaust emissions by 70 to 90 percent, Tilley says.

Another concern in the blower debate is particulate matter, or dust that's kicked into the air during blower operation. Studies have shown that health risks are associated with breathing in such matter, including respiratory symptoms and other illnesses, even mortality, according to the CARB report. Some particulate matter concerns can be mitigated by training operators on proper blower use and dust-reduction tactics (see "Leaf Blower Operation Tips" on page 65). However, it's not clear that blowers generate more dust than brooms and other debris-removing methods.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES. "A lot of times, by the time it shows up in the city council or state legislature, you're already way behind on trying to get a solution in place because the war already has been fought on the ground and the troops have been garnered on the other side of the issue," says James McNew, OPEI's vice president of technical and statistical services.

Wade witnessed this difficulty firsthand, when the practice of restricting blowers was rampant in California in the early 2000s. "We fought very hard, lobbying legislators, partnering with manufacturers, doing all we could to stop the steady advance of no-blower legislation," he says. "We saved some cities, we lost a whole bunch of them, and I don't

think we're ever going to get those ordinances overturned."

In preventing the advance of blower-banning ordinances, technology, education and etiquette should be front and center. "You want to get out ahead of the problems," McNew says. "We as an industry can make a huge impact by practicing and using the equipment in a safe, courteous fashion and replacing older equipment with the latest technology."

Investing in the low-noise units will keep complaints to a minimum. The noise level on most of these blowers is 65 decibels or less, about the level of normal conversation. This is a significant reduction from the original blowers that operated in the high-70decibel range. Until two years ago, purchasing a low-noise unit might have meant sacrificing performance, weight and cost, because the quieter models available were modifications of regular models. When low-noise blowers first came out, manufacturers often used more material to better enclose the engine to keep the noise down, Nesom says. Those factors increased cost, didn't improve performance and created a weight penalty of about 1 pound.

Today's quieter blowers are "purpose-built" with improved fan designs, sound-absorbing materials and engines designed to run at a slower speed. Most of the low-noise units with displacement levels in the 50- to 60-cc range perform comparably to the non-low-noise blowers, Nesom says. The cost of these units, which last three to five years, are about \$50 to \$100 more than their non-low-noise counterparts.

Once maintenance field staffs have the cleanest, quietest blowers in their arsenals, they should be trained on how to best use them. Untrained, conscienceless contractors who overuse blowers and run them at full-throttle at 5 a.m. are usually to blame for creating the problems associated with common-sense, courteous use.

Much of the problem stems from operator error, Wade says. "I see trucks pull up and the first machine that comes off the truck is the blower," he says. "In our operation, that's the last machine that gets used." In addition, the variation in throttle-level adds to the obnoxious sound. Wade trains his employees only to operate blowers on idle, not hit the gas up and

down. "If you can't move the pile with the blower idling, then get the rake out," he says.

CLCA President Peter Estournes, vice president of Healdsburg, Calif.-based Gardenworks, agrees that training is necessary. "Blowers are obnoxious machines that happen to be extremely efficient for cleaning up," he says. "We strive to lessen their impact on our employees and our clients by training our crews to use them responsibly." He requires blower operators to follow California OSHA rules, which include wearing eye and ear protection. He also supplies employees with dust masks, though they're not mandatory. (See "Leaf Blower Operation Tips" on page 65 for a cut-out safety and training sheet.)

Although Gardenworks operates in a region that has not yet had to combat blower bans like in many other areas of the state, it conducts blower training with maintenance employees when they're hired, twice more each year and in the event of misuse. He says the only costs are downtime for training, which is included in the company's budget and recovered in overhead or general conditions.

Estournes has never had a complaint about blower noise and only once has received one about blower operation near an open window.

In the event of blower misuse or safety violations, Estournes warns the offender and includes a written notice in the employee's file. After three violations he'll have a meeting with the employee; if problems persist he'll let the employee go. He's even temporarily regulated blower use at his company. "There have been instances where I've actually pulled the machines off the trucks if the crews violated the rules," he says. "We're trying to train our guys that this is a very useful tool and to be without it creates a hardship."

In places where the issue is past the point of prevention and already has been introduced to legislative bodies, contractors shouldn't just pray for reasonable restrictions. Often arguments against the use of blowers are based on erroneous information, and it's up to the people who are locally affected to correct those misconceptions.

As OPEI's McNew says: "Fighting against something is not nearly as easy and effective as trying to propose a solution."





DRESSING SAFELY

- Wear hearing protection when using a leaf blower either ear plugs or earmuffs.
- · Wear goggles that meet eye protection standards.
- · Wear non-slip, heavy-duty work gloves.
- · Wear sturdy protective clothing. Do not wear anything loose. Tie back long hair.
- Wear long pants to help protect your legs and long sleeves to help protect your arms.
- · Wear sturdy shoes with non-slip soles.
- In dusty conditions, wear a respirator or dust mask as appropriate.

OPERATING COURTESY

- Follow local rules and ordinances about when to use leaf blowers. Do not use blowers before 7 a.m. or after 7 p.m.
- Check wind direction and intensity. Never point the nozzle or blow debris toward people, pets, cars or houses.
- · Do not blow debris toward open windows or doors.
- Always be considerate of people passing by and of neighbors' properties.
- · Do not leave the blower running when unattended.
- Do not use a blower to spread or mist fertilizers, chemicals or other toxic substances, unless it's designed for these purposes and in an appropriate area.

REDUCING SOUND

- · Use the lowest possible throttle speed to do the job.
- Use nozzle attachments that help reduce sound. See your machine's operator's manual.
- Avoid using more than one blower at a time, especially in neighborhoods or around buildings where sound can be intensified.
- Check the condition of the blower's muffler, air intakes and air filter to make sure they're in good operating condition.

See reverse side for Spanish version.

Source: Outdoor Power Equipment

Institute, "Leaf Blowers: A Guide

to Safe & Courteous Use"

REDUCING DUST

- Start with the nozzle close to the ground at first then raise it to a height where
 it does not generate dust.
- Use the full lower nozzle extensions to control sound and minimize dust.
- Pay attention to what you are moving. Practice moving grass clippings or a paper cup without moving dust.
- · Wet dusty areas down before using a blower.
- Never use a blower to move excessively dusty materials.
- Don't use a leaf blower to clean up the following debris; instead, use a vacuum or power broom with water:
 - · Large amounts of gravel or gravel dust
 - · Construction dirt
 - Plaster dust
 - · Cement and concrete dust
 - · Dry garden topsoil

lawn & landscape

LA MANERA CORRECTA DE USAR UN SOPLADOR DE HOJAS

USE VESTIMENTA SEGURA

- Protéjase los oídos cuando use un soplador de hojas use tapones para los oídos o tapaorejas.
- Use gafas que cumplan con las normas relativas a la protección de los ojos.
- Use guantes de trabajo gruesos, antideslizantes.
- Use ropa protectora fuerte. No use ninguna cosa suelta. Amárrese el cabello largo. Use pantalones largos para protegerse las piernas y mangas largas para protegerse los brazos.
- · Use zapatos gruesos con suela antideslizante.
- · En lugares polvorientos, use un respirador o una máscara contra polvo adecuada.

CORTESÍA DURANTE EL TRABAJO

- Respete las reglas y ordenanzas locales con respecto al uso de los sopladores de hojas. No lo use muy temprano en la mañana o muy avanzada la tarde.
- Compruebe la intensidad y dirección del viento. Nunca apunte la boquilla ni sople la basura hacia las personas, mascotas, automóviles o casas.
- · No sople la basura hacia las ventanas o puertas abiertas.
- · Siempre respete a los transeúntes y la propiedad ajena.
- · No deje el soplador funcionando desatendido.
- No use un soplador para esparcir o atomizar fertilizantes, productos químicos u otras sustancias tóxicas, a menos que esté diseñado para ese fin y en una zona apropiada.

REDUCCIÓN DEL RUIDO

- Use la aceleración más baja posible para hacer el trabajo.
- Use accesorios de boquillas que ayuden a reducir el ruido. Lea el manual del operador suministrado por el fabricante.
- Evite usar más de un soplador a la vez, especialmente en vecindades o alrededor de edificios donde el ruido puede intensificarse.
- Revise la condición del silenciador, las tomas de aire y el filtro de aire del soplador de hojas para asegurarse de que están en buenas condiciones de funcionamiento.

REDUCCIÓN DEL POLVO

- Primero, comience con la boquilla cerca del suelo y después elévela hasta una altura donde no genere polvo.
- Use las extensiones de boquilla inferiores completas controlar el ruido y reducir el polvo.
- Preste atención a lo que está desplazando.
- Practique desplazar la hierba cortada o un vaso de papel levantar polvo.
- · Moje primero las áreas polvorientas antes de usar un.
- Nunca use un soplador de hojas para desplazar material excesivamente polvoriento.
- · El soplador de hojas NO se debe usar para limpiar:
 - · Grandes cantidades de gravilla o polvo de gravilla
 - Tierra de trabajos de construcción
 - · Polvo de yeso, polvo de cemento y hormigón
 - Capa superficial seca de jardines

Use una aspiradora o escoba mecánica con agua.



What's your approach?





Preventive



Or Curative?



Preventive disease c

Anticipate outbreak, apply appropriately.

For disease to develop, three factors must exist: a susceptible plant, a disease-producing organism (pathogen) and conditions conducive to disease development. In many situations, certain conditions and diseases are likely to occur every year, making preventive fungicide applications ideal. For example, treating turf with a snow mold prevention fungicide in the fall or applying a fungicide when seeding or overseeding to protect germinating seedlings.

There are two categories of fungicides: systemic and contact. It is important to identify and understand the target disease before deciding which type of fungicide to apply.

For root and soil-borne diseases, systemic fungicides are the only option. These fungicides are absorbed by and translocated throughout the plant, providing protection for both existing and new growth for 14 to 28 days. Because disease can develop resistance to

systemic f often alter maximize

Contact fu on the pla by providing These fund by irrigation are general period that—approxim



ontrol.

ungicides, turfgrass managers nate with contact fungicides to control.

ngicides remain where applied in and control foliar diseases in a protective disease barrier. Spicides can be disrupted in, rainfall and mowing and ally effective for a shorter in the systemic products mately 7 to 14 days.



TURFGRASS SOLUTIONS												
LESCO PRODUCTS	ITEM#	SIZE'	COMMON NAME	PREVENTI RATES/1000								
18 Plus™ 081194		2.5 gal	Iprodione	2 - 8 fl.oz								
LESCO Bayleton™ 50	086189 086190	11oz x 50 4 x 5.5 oz	Triadimefon	0.25 - 2.0 0								
Bayleton 1.0% Granular	015102	40 lb	Triadimefon	0.75 - 6.0								
Mancozeb 4FL	084032	2.5 gal	Mancozeb	6.4 - 12.8 fl.								
Mancozeb DG	084029	12 lb	Mancozeb	4.0 - 8.0 02								
Manicure™ 6FL	084901	2.5 gal	Chlorothalonil	1.0 - 5.5 fl.o								
Manicure Ultra™ 82.5%	084897	5 lb	Chlorothalonil	1.0 - 5 oz								
PCNB 12.5% + Fert	014804 062510	40 lb 50 lb	PCNB	4.0 - 6.0 lb								
Prodigy [™] Signature [™]	069098	5.5 lb	Fosetyl-Al	4.0 - 8.0 02								
Revere™ 10G	060902	50 lb	PCNB	2.5 - 7.5 lb								
Revere 4000	060899	2.5 gal	PCNB	5 - 24 fl.oz								
Spectator™	086441 081233	1 qt 2 gal	Propiconazole	0.18 - 1.44 fl.								
Spectator Ultra™ 1.3	oectator Ultra™ 1.3 084904 084930		Propiconazole	0.5 - 4.0 fl oz								
LESCO T-Storm™ Flo	081854	2.5 gal	Thiophanate-methyl	1.0 - 5.25 fl.								
LESCO T-Storm 50WSB	081836	4 x 8oz	Thiophanate-methyl	1 - 6 oz								
Touche'™ EG Touche'™ EG 20 Acre Keg	062699 062888	11oz x 4 55 lb	Vinclozolin	1.0 oz								
TwoSome™	090814	1 gal	Thiophanate-methyl Prodione	1.0 - 4.0 0								

*Refer to product labels

Contact, Systemic, Both X X X C X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X	x x x x x x x x x x x	X X X X X		X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X	× × Curvularia Leaf Spot	x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x	x x x x Gray Leaf Spot	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X	x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X	x x Pythium	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X	x x x x X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X	× × Southern Blight	Yellow Tuft
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C X X	X X	хх	X			Χ	χ		χ	X	χ	X	X		
C X X	ХХ	ХХ	Χ				Χ		χ	Χ	χ	Χ	Χ		
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	S	Х	Χ			Χ	Χ	Х	χ	χ		χ	χ		
5.25 fl.oz	S	Χ	X	Χ		Х			Х	X		χ			
6 oz	S	Χ	Χ	Χ		Χ			χ	Χ		Χ			
*	С		X			X		Х	Х	Х		X			
4.0 oz	В	Х	Х			Х			Х			Х			

s for size - and disease - specific rates.

Cui

Identify

For disease to must exist: a side a disease-produce (pathogen) and to disease device conditions cour moisture, heat, deep shade, he others.

On highly main as golf courses sports turf, turf develop a com



rative disease control.

problem, treat accordingly.

develop, three factors usceptible plant, ducing organism deconditions conducive elopment. These aid include excessive humidity, drought, eavy fertilization and

stained areas such s or professional fgrass managers often prehensive fungicide program including both preventive and curative products applied on a scheduled rotation. But for many turfgrass managers, especially those responsible for residential and commercial lawns, this type of program is not practical or necessary. Instead, the appropriate systemic or contact fungicide is applied as a curative treatment after accurate diagnosis of the disease.

For root and soil-borne diseases, systemic fungicides are the only

option. These fungicides are absorbed by and translocated throughout the plant, providing protection for both existing and new growth for 14 to 28 days.

Contact fungicides remain where applied on the plant and control foliar diseases by providing a protective disease barrier. These fungicides can be disrupted by irrigation, rainfall and mowing and are generally effective for a shorter period than the systemic products – approximately 7 to 14 days.



Disease Control = LESCO

Anthracnose

· Creeping bentgrass, bluegrass, fescue, perennial ryegrass,

bermudagrass, centipedegrass and St. Augustinegrass. Annual bluegrass is particularly susceptible.

Colletotrichum graminicola.

Diagnosis

Yellow to brown, irregular shaped patches of turf, leaf lesions yellow

. Brown to black hairs (setae) may be observed on leaves or crown with aid of 10x eveniece.

Environment Temperature > 78°F (26°C).

- More than 10 hrs. of leaf wetness per day for several days.
- Disease is particularly severe on turf exposed to soil compaction and
- Pathogen may cause crown rot of creeping bentgrass at temperatures from 60° - 77°F (16° - 26°C).

Cultural Controls

- Maintain balanced fertility throughout the growing season.

- Use light-weight mowing equipment (reduce compaction).

Disease is more severe under low nitrogen fertility.

Dollar Spot

· All common species of turfgrasses.

Pathogen · Sclerotinia homeocarpa.

- Straw-colored patches of turf 1-3 inches in diameter.
- . White mycelium may be associated with patches when turf is wet. · Straw-colored lesions extend across leafblades.

- Night temperatures > 50°F (10°C) and day temperatures < 90°F
- More than 10 hrs. of leaf wetness per day for several days. . Disease is severe on turf subjected to drought stress.

Cultural Controls

- · Disease is more severe under low nitrogen fertility.
- Maintain balanced fertility throughout the growing season. Limit thatch thickness.
- . Decrease shade and increase air circulation to enhance drying of turf.

Necrotic Ring Spot

· Kentucky bluegrass and fine-leaf fescue.

Roots and rhizomes are brown to black.

· Severity of symptoms increase with drought and

Light-green to yellow patches of turf 3-15 inches in diameter turning

• Disease initiated at temperature <80°F (26°C) in moist soil.

Disease is more severe with excessive nitrogen applied

Avoid high rates of "fast-release" nitrogen in the spring.

Overseed with an improved perennial ryegrass.

Maintain balanced fertility throughout the growing season.

Avoid soil compaction – topdress and aerify as needed, use

· Avoid irrigation in late afternoon and in evening prior to midnight. Avoid drought stress.

Pathogen

Leptosphaeria korrae.

brown to straw-colored.

high temperatures (>80°F).

Cultural Controls

during the spring.

· Avoid drought stress.

light-weight equipment.

. Limit thatch thickness

Environment



. Decrease shade and increase air circulation to enhance drying of turf

Syringe turf with water when temperature >80°F (27°C).

Recommended LESCO Product

Avoid irrigation in late afternoon or in evening prior to midnight.

Gray Leaf Spot

Disease can also appear in spring and fall

Bentgrass Dead Spot

Has also been found on hybrid bermudagrass greens

sand-based putting greens

Ophiosphaerellla agrostis

diseases or cutworm damage

exposure and good air circulation

Pathogen

Diagnosis

spores

Environment

Primarily a disease of young (1 to 2 years) creeping bentgrass on

Greens and tees renovated with methyl bromide have increased

· Initially appears as small, dime-sized indented spots with reddish-

brown or bronze tint that can resemble unrepaired ballmarks, other

. Spots can increase up to four inches in diameter and look similar to

dollar spot, but do not coalesce in the same manner as dollar spot

• In later stages, tissue dies and fruiting structures appear and release

Symptoms most often appear on highly managed sand-based greens

during summer stress periods when heat, drought and compaction

Often appears first on ridges or south-facing slopes with open

Most warm-season turfgrasses.

longed warm, wet conditions.

 St. Augustinegrass is particularly susceptible. · Ryegrasses and fescues may exhibit severe symptoms under pro-

Pathogen Pyricularia grisea.

- Diagnosis
- Round or oval gray spots on leaves.
- Spots surrounded by brown or yellow border. Leaves may be blighted gray, usually from tip downward.
- Environment Night temperatures > 70°F (21°C).
- More than 10 hrs. of leaf wetness per day for several days.
- Disease is severe in shaded areas or during periods of extended overcast weather.
- **Cultural Controls**
- Disease is more severe under excess nitrogen fertility.
- · Maintain balanced fertility throughout the growing season. Limit thatch thickness.
- Decrease shade and increase air circulation to enhance drying of turf.

Product Manicure Spectator

Extended leaf wetness may contribute to spore germination and pen-

· Relieve summer stress by raising mowing heights, syringing and cur-

· Frost slows the disease, but may not eliminate it

Promote root growth in spring and fall

Avoid topdressing when disease is active

Recommended LESCO Product

tailing traffic when possible

Cultural Controls

Gray Snow Mold

· Disease is severe at low mowing heights.

· Disease is severe on poorly drained soils.

- All cool season turfgrasses.
- · Bentgrass, annual bluegrass and perennial ryegrass are particularly
- Pathogen
- Typhula incarnata and T. ishikariensis.
- Diagnosis
- · Circular straw-colored patches of turf usually less than 10 inches in diameter, evident after snow-melt.

Brown Patch (Rhizoctonia Blight)

- Leaves at margins of the patches have gray irregular-shaped

Leaf sheaths at margins of patches are brown to black.

• Night temperatures >60°F (16°C) for cool-season turfgrasses,

More than 10 hrs. of foliar wetness per day for several days.

- Dark brown lesions may be visible on stolons.

50°-60°F (10°-16°C) for warm-season turfgrasses.

- Patches are surrounded by smoky-colored ring of mycelium on

All common species of turfgrasses.

- Circular patches of brown turf a few

inches to several feet in diameter.

lesions with thin brown borders.

close-cut turf (< 1/2 inch).

Warm-season turfgrasses:

Environment

Pathogen

Diagnosis

Rhizoctonia solani.

· Cool-season turfgrasses:

- · Orange, brown to black sclerotia form on leaves. Environment
- · Snow-cover is required for disease development.
- · Disease is severe when snow-cover exceeds 90 days. **Cultural Controls**
- · Avoid a fertility program that results in lush, fast-growing turf in late fall
- Maintain potassium levels according to soil tests.
- . Use snow fence, hedges or knolls to prevent snow from accumulating excessively on turf.
- Use dark-colored organic fertilizers or composts to melt snow in spring.
- · Physically remove snow in spring.
- · Prevent compaction of snow during winter.

Pythium Blight

All turfgrasses are susceptible.

Annual bluegrass and perennial ryegrass are particularly susceptible.

Pythium aphanidermatum and other species of Pythium. Diagnosis

- · Greasy brown patches of turf an inch or less in diameter, increasing to several inches and turning straw colored.
- · Grey-white, cottony mycelium observed in early morning.
- Environment Night temperature > 65°F (18°C).
- . More than 10 hrs. of leaf wetness per day for several days.

Poor surface and sub-surface drainage

- **Cultural Controls** Disease is more severe under excess nitrogen fertility.
- Maintain balanced fertility throughout the growing season. Maintain optimum plant calcium levels.
- . Decrease shade and increase air circulation to enhance drying of turf.
- Improve surface and subsurface drainage.
- when night temperatures are > 70°F (21°C).
- Avoid irrigation in late afternoon or in evening prior to midnight.

Avoid mowing susceptible areas when turf is wet, particularly

Mefenoxam

T-Storm

Bayleton

Cultural Controls

growing season.

Limit thatch thickness.

LESCO Product

Spectator

Manicure

· T-Storm

phosphorous and potassium.

· Mow at recommended height.

Disease is more severe on lush turf fertilized

with excessive nitrogen and on soils low in

· Decrease shade and increase air circulation to enhance drying of turf.

Avoid irrigation in late afternoon and in evening prior to midnight.

Maintain balanced fertility throughout the

Recommended LESCO Product



LESCO Product



Use light-weight moving equipment to reduce stress. · Plant resistant cultivars.

Red Thread

Pathogen

· Limit thatch thickness.

Mow at recommended height.

Cool Season Pythium

Can be difficult to diagnose; microscopic examination of roots and

Later spring symptoms include patchy turf with yellowish-orange to

· Fall patches can be quite obvious with chlorotic tan to brown coloration

Symptoms resemble other patch diseases or dormant turf

Daytime temperatures from 50°-70° F (10°-21° C) and

Critical times for disease: early spring after snow melts and

nighttime temperatures from 45°-55° F (7°-13° C)

· Creeping bentgrass and annual bluegrass

Slow return from dormancy in the spring

Poor drainage and excessive irrigation

· Highly maintained turf most susceptible

· Improve drainage and do not overwater

'Helminthosporium'

Bluegrass, bentgrass, fescue, perennial ryegrass,

Round to oval chocolate-brown spots on leaves.

Disease severity increases with increases in temperature.

Maintain balanced fertility throughout the growing season.

Decrease shade and increase air circulation to enhance drying of turf.

Avoid irrigation in late afternoon and in evening prior to midnight.

Disease is more severe under excess nitrogen fertility.

More than 10 hrs. of leaf wetness per day for several days.

Temperature of 77° - 95°F (25° - 35°C).

bahiagrass, bermudagrass, zoysia and buffalograss

Pathogen

Diagnosis

· Pythium spp.

Environment

· Cool, wet weather

Cultural Controls

Leaf Spot

Pathogen

Diagnosis

Bipolaris sps.

Environment

Cultural Controls

Spots may have tan centers.

Promote good air circulation

late autumn

crowns may be necessary

reddish-brown discoloration



· Fine-leaf fescues and perennial ryegrass are particularly susceptible

· Laetisaria fucuformis. . Red-brown patches of turf 1-4 or more inches in diameter.

Bentgrass, bluegrass, fine-leaf fescue, perennial ryegrass and

- Pink-red mycelium grows from tips of infected leafblades.
- Environment Cool temperatures of 40°-70°F (4°-21°C).

More than 10 hrs. of leaf wetness per day for several days.

- **Cultural Controls** Disease is more severe under low nitrogen fertility. · Maintain balanced fertility throughout the growing season.
- Maintain moderate to high levels of potassium and phosphorus according to soil tests. Reduce shade and increase air circulation to enhance drying of turf.
- · Avoid irrigation in late afternoon or in evening prior to midnight. Maintain soil pH at 6.5 to 7.0. . Mow turf at least once per week to remove disease portion of leaf blades.



· Properly manage thatch layer to allow for optimum water penetration

Fertilize to maintain vigorous root system

· Prodigy

Banol

Meterioxam

Recommended LESCO Product

Rust

Pathogen

All common species of turfgrasses.

Several species of Puccinia and Uromyces. Diagnosis

 Red-brown powdery masses of spores on leaf blades or leaf sheaths.

Environment Temperatures of 68°-86°F (20°-30°C).

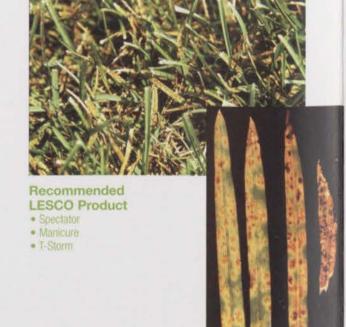
· Disease is severe on turf subjected to drought stress, low mowing, shade or poor air circulation.

Cultural Controls · Disease is more severe under low nitrogen conditions.

 Reduce shade and increase air circulation. Mow at recommended height. Avoid drought stress.

· Avoid irrigation in late afternoon or in evening prior to midnight.

Maintain balanced fertility throughout the growing season.



Recommended LESCO Product

18 Plus

Spectator

• T-Storm

Spring Dead Spot

- · Bermudagrass.
- Species of Leposphaeria, Ophiosphaerella or Gaemannomyces.
- · Circular patches of straw-colored turf up to several feet in diameter,
- Environment
- Disease is severe where average daily temperature in November is <60°F (16°C). Poor surface and subsurface drainage.

Thatch > 1/2 inch thick.

- Improve surface and sub-surface drainage. · Limit thatch thickness.





Recommended LESCO Product

Summer Patch

Bluegrasses and fine-leaf fescues.

Pathogen

- Magnaporthe poae. Diagnosis Circular patches of wilted to straw-colored turf,
- usually less than 10 inches in diameter. Leaves turn yellow or brown starting at tips. Roots are light to dark brown.
- Environment Daytime temperature >85°F (29°C).
- · High soil moisture. Poor surface or subsurface drainage.
- Low mowing height. Cultural Controls
- Maintain balanced fertility throughout the growing season.

Mow at recommended height.

Prevent stress.

 Improve surface and subsurface drainage. Reduce compaction.

Syringe turf with water when temperature >85°F (29°C).

Recommended LESCO Product



Take-All Patch

Pathogen

Only bentgrasses are highly susceptible.

· Gaeumannomyces graminis var. avenae. Diagnosis Wilted to bronze or brown circular patches of turf

Disease can be more severe on sandy soils.

up to several feet in diameter. Roots along margins of patches are dark brown. Environment Disease develops rapidly on cool, wet soils with pH >5.5.

- **Cultural Controls** Disease is more severe under low or unbalanced fertility conditions.
- Fertilize with acid-forming sources of nitrogen such as sulfur-coated urea.
- Maintain moderate to high levels of phosphorus, potassium and minor elements according to soil tests. Improve surface and subsurface drainage.

Avoid use of lime if pH >5.0.

· Avoid heavy, frequent irrigation.



Recommended LESCO Product Bayleton







· Avoid irrigation in late afternoon and in evening prior to midnight.

Pink Snow Mold

All cool season turfgrasses. . Bentgrass, annual bluegrass and perennial ryegrass are particularly

- Pathogen Microdochium nivale.
- diameter; common after 60 days or more of snow cover. Disease is common after at least 60 days of snow cover, but pathogen can infect turf in absence of snow.

Disease is particularly severe when snow covers unfrozen ground.

· Salmon colored to red-brown patches of turf 1 to 8 inches or more in

- Cultural Controls Disease is more severe on fast-growing, lush turf that receives high
- nitrogen and low potassium in late fall. · Maintain balanced fertility.
- Use snow fence, shrubs or knolls as wind-breaks to prevent excess snow from accumulating.
- · Prevent snow compaction by machinery or skiers. Melt snow in spring with organic fertilizers.

Physically remove snow in spring.

- Pathogen
- evident after winter dormancy. Roots at edges of patches are dark brown to black.
- Cultural Controls . Disease is more severe on soils low in potassium and on turf that receives excess nitrogen during late summer and fall.
- · Maintain balanced fertility throughout the growing season. Maintain moderate to high levels of phosphorus, potassium and minor elements according to soil test.



After snow melts, to prevent Fusarium Patch, decrease shade and

Avoid irrigation in late afternoon and in evening prior to midnight.

Mow at recommended height.

Bayleton

Recommended LESCO Product

increase air circulation to enhance drying of turf; avoid application of

Educated decisions, quality results.

Successful turf and ornamental disease management is a science in itself. Accurate pathogen identification, proper fungicide programming, systemic or contact mode-of-action, managing resistance, and granular or sprayable application are all factors to be considered.

For these reasons and many more, it makes sense to do business with LESCO. As the nation's largest supplier to the professional green industry, we offer a huge selection of fungicides, supported by technical expertise and service. In addition, we provide a full line of application equipment suitable for granular or sprayable application on the largest or smallest site.

Our selection of granular spreaders includes everything from state-of-the-art spreader/sprayer ride-on units to our standard-of-the-industry walk-behind rotaries, as well as drop spreaders and handheld models. The same is true for sprayers. The LESCO product line includes 50-gallon to 300-gallon tank sprayers, sprayer/spreader combos, backpacks and handheld units.

LESCO is the number one choice of turf, landscape and pest management professionals because we believe in putting the best products into the hands of our customers in the most convenient way possible. Quality products supported by service, expertise and value have been our focus since 1962 and remain our goal today.

Ask your LESCO sales representative about these new and proven products.

Our complete product line includes:

- Fertilizers
- · Seed
- Herbicides
- Fungicides
- Insecticides
- Specialty Products
- Pest Management Products
- Sports Turf Supplies
- Mulching Products
- Equipment
- Golf Course Accessories
- Ice Melt Products
- · . . . and more!

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smart business

Don't let common misconceptions about the

sales negotiation process stop you from

making that next deal. Negotiation is an

art form that anyone can master.

NEGOTIATION MYTHBUSTERS

ouldn't it be great if every client agreed to all the terms of a sale – no questions asked and no negotiation required? Although most people answer "yes" to this question, any salesperson knows that negotiating a sale is never that easy. And while negotiation is one of the most commonly practiced functions of communication, it is often the least understood.

Because most people don't understand the dynamics of negotiation, they may get nervous or apprehensive about the process. Even professional salespeople get sweaty palms and anxious stomachs before sitting down at the bargaining table. The

trouble resides in all of the myths associated with negotiation. But, regardless of what you're selling, you can make the inevitable sales process more productive when you understand and overcome the following seven myths of negotiation:

by john patrick dolan | contributing writer

negotiation improvement practices

Myth No.1 – To be a successful negotiator, you must be ruthless.

Mythbuster – This statement is completely false. In fact, most people are perceived as ruthless in sales situations because they are poor negotiators and must resort to ruthlessness to get what they want.

In reality, effective negotiation has a great deal to do with the attitude you bring to the table. If you approach negotiation as a win-or-lose battle, then that's exactly what you'll get. You'll struggle against the other party, waste time and energy defending positions and resort to sneaking things past your counterparts. Then when it's all said and done, you'll probably come away with less than if you'd have treated the negotiation as an opportunity for everyone involved to profit.

Myth No. 2 – Negotiating is synonymous with fighting.

Mythbuster – Fights generally break out when people can't negotiate effectively. When you understand effective negotiation, you can actually head off misunderstandings and conflicts that may arise in the process. You'll know how to settle issues with customers without fighting.

In many cases, you'll be able to mediate conflicts, misunderstandings and stalemates between other people and groups.

Myth No. 3 – Negotiating is a talent reserved for shrewd businesspeople and experienced diplomats.

Mythbuster – Anyone can learn to negotiate effectively without being a genius or manipulative. Most salespeople don't consider themselves negotiators, and certainly not professional negotiators. Many equate professional negotiators with hard-charging corporate raiders launching takeovers on other businesses, diplomats meeting to discuss the fates of nations, or lawyers settling million-dollar lawsuits.

But each and every person on the planet is a negotiator, and many times without realizing it. When you take time to learn the art of effective negotiation, you actually can get more of what you want. You can forge better and more productive relationships with your clients and all of the people around you in other areas of life. Without a solid strategy and the right tools for the job, you are likely to succumb to ineffective negotiation tactics and may end up losing sales or not getting the best outcome for you and your company. Use the following five negotiating strategies.

1. Be Prepared. All effective negotiations start before you sit down at the bargaining table. Don't jump in without research and planning. Consider your counterpart's situation. Ask yourself what they need from the deal and know what you can compromise.

Dealing for a year-long service contract will require more preparation than for a one-time service agreement. Regardless, use preparation to gain a comprehensive view of the situation. Planned alternatives will keep you stay through the negotiation. The more you know, the easier it will be to arrange the best solution for those involved.

- 2. Set Objective Negotiating Standards. Objective negotiating standards are a set of rules established before the process starts. In most cases, you can set your own rules. For example, if you're negotiating a lawn care service contract, you may approach your client with the competitor's price and what the client currently pays for regular treatments as some standards for the process. By setting guidelines prior to the negotiation, you ensure that everyone operates under the same standards and everything runs smoothly.
- 3. Work With Not Against the Other Party. Good negotiations mean all parties leave the table feeling good about the agreement and each other. For this to occur, everyone must strive for mutually beneficial solutions. When you approach the situation with this attitude of mutual satisfaction, the other party will usually disarm.

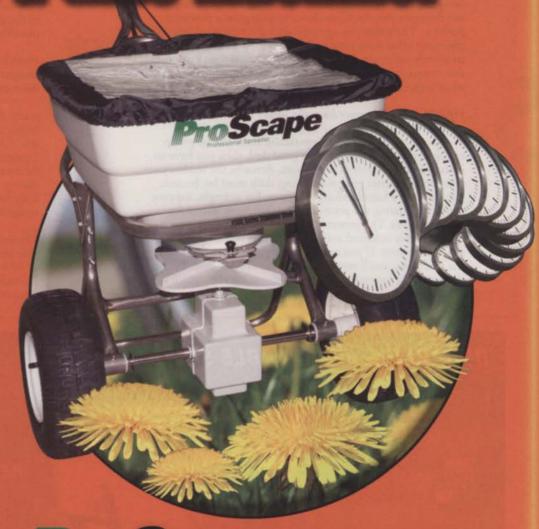
However, you may come across some people who don't agree with the concept of fair play – they immediately stoop to intimidation and manipulation. Do not stoop to their level.

4. Finalize All Agreements. The point of negotiation is to arrange the best deal for everyone, so ask plenty of questions. Don't let important details slip through; listen to the client's responses and concerns. If they are worried about customer service, the contract length or routine service questions, then address these issues with care. When the terms are settled, make sure everyone's perceptions match and recap the important details.

Depending on the impact of the deal, you may decide to put the terms in writing, such as a sales contract or agreement. Don't sign off until all parties understand the key points. Keep a copy for your records, and give the other party a copy as well.

5. Follow Through. Now it's time to do what you said you would do when you said you would do it and in the manner you said it would be done. For example, if you said you'd deliver a service on a certain day, then make sure it's done. If you can't follow through as expected, contact the other party and discuss alternative arrangements.

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Myth No. 4 – When you sit down at the bargaining table, you must abandon all ethics to get what you want.

Mythbuster – By understanding negotiation, you can prevent being conned into things you don't want to do or getting less than you deserve. Consider negotiating for a new sales position. The terms you agree on with the new employer will obviously affect your time with that company, and also your time with future employers. The compensation package from one company will set the level of income you can command when negotiating with other companies.

Myth No. 5 – You must have the upper hand to negotiate effectively.

Mythbuster – If you think negotiation involves one group trying to beat the other out of a good deal, then you have an inaccurate perception of the process. Actually, the weaker your position, the better your negotiating skills must be, because you can save a huge amount of money. For example, suppose you're negotiating the price of a new computer system for your company. The person selling the system knows your current system is outdated and that you must make a purchase to stay competitive. If you can bring the price down from what the seller asks, you'll save more than the upfront cost. By the time you add interest on a five-year financing plan, you'll have quite a savings that's worth the negotiating effort.

Myth No. 6 – Negotiating is a timewasting activity that clogs the wheels of progress.

Mythbuster – When done right, negotiating is an enormous timesaver because it makes everyone work together to find solutions. Rather than struggling through a one-sided sale, it is much easier when both parties understand how to negotiate and actively participate in the process to produce the best results possible for everyone.

Myth No. 7 – Negotiating is a formal process with clearly defined parameters and procedures.

Mythbuster – Negotiation actually takes many different forms – for example, haggling the price of an item at a garage sale. Chances are you negotiate more frequently than you think. In fact, any time you're making a deal, you're negotiating. And if you're conducting these daily negotiations effectively, you'll reach an agreement that satisfies both parties.

The author wrote the book "Negotiate Like the Pros." Reach him at 888-830-2620 or www.negotiatelikethepros.com. Purchase the book at www.lawnandlandscape.com/store.



USE READER SERVICE # 48

PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPT DESIGN

may/june 2007

inside

Deciding on Designations

The Future of Water Features

Upselling Irrigation

Designing Rec Spaces

Dream Weaver

Former Disney 'imagineer' Paul Comstock brings a philosophical mind-set to the ValleyCrest Design Group.

published by:

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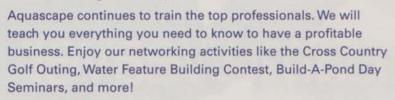




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dream weaver



Former Disney landscape executive Paul Comstock brings a philosophical yet practical mind-set to the design/build field.

Inspiration is difficult to pin down for a person of many parts like Paul Comstock. One of the newest additions to the ValleyCrest Design Group, the creative lead of Comstock Studio surges onto the design/build scene on the heels of a 20-year career with The Walt Disney Co.

As director of landscape design for Walt Disney Imagineering, Comstock epitomized Disney's dictum "If you can dream it, you can do it," by fusing horticultural knowledge and landscape architecture expertise with a whimsical, fertile imagination to bring to life more than 300 projects – including exotic, jungle-like animal kingdoms and lush formal landscapes at world-class hotel-resorts. His duties bridged the gap between design, flora acquisition, construction and maintenance, as he traversed the world in search of unusual horticultural specimens, executed large-scale international contracting projects and oversaw Disney's show-quality maintenance standards.

Today, Comstock is equally at ease collaborating with Italian architect Renzo Piano on a redesign of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art or dreaming up the design for a small residential garden. With degrees in landscape architecture, fine arts and mathematics, Comstock balances his practical, problem-solving nature with a philosophical side he's cultivated as an artist and classically trained professional percussionist.

Comstock recently spoke with *Professional Landscape Design* from his studio in Calabasas, Calif. Here's Comstock, in his own words, on challenges and opportunities in landscape design.

By Marisa Palmieri / Associate Editor

THE DESIGNER FILE

Paul Comstock Creative lead, Comstock Studio ValleyCrest Design Group Calabasas, Calif.

Education: Bachelor's degree in landscape architecture, UCLA

Client mix: 90% commercial; 10% residential

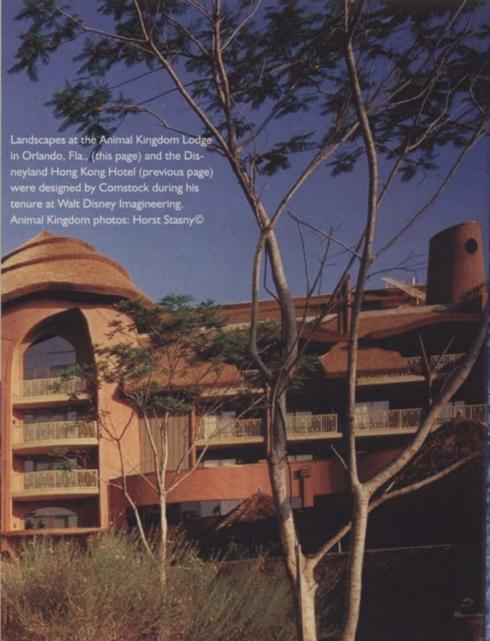
Project price range: \$1 million and up

First step in the design process?
"Sit quietly and watch the sun rise at the project site."



Last step in the design process?
"Sit quietly and watch the sun set at the project site."

How do you break a creative block? "I get on one of my surfboards and go ride a wave...I've been surfing for 40 years and each wave is different. Every time I paddle into a wave. I have a new experience in life. Many people would say, 'That's the same wave you rode last time,' but it's not. I would say, 'Wow, it's a completely new wave,' because every wave is different. They all start somewhere across the ocean far away; you paddle into the wave, choose a line and the wave takes you for a new journey. Fantastic! I think about that phenomenon everytime someone comes in with a new assignment - whether it's a roadway, small house, big house or a huge resort - it's another wave, another journey, another blank piece of paper waiting to be drawn."



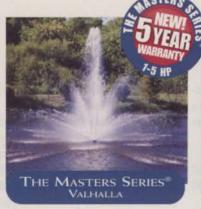
PLD: What mistakes do you see landscape designers make?

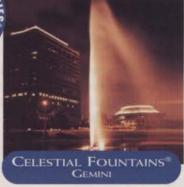
PC: Disinterest and non-attachment to the site and client. Unfortunately, with a large percentage of projects, you can immediately tell when there's a lazy attitude – when the designer's heart isn't in it. Many people have a limited vision, a lazy participation and an unwillingness to spend time to try to really improve the place. Often designers take on too many projects and cannot give adequate attention to all of them. Designers secure a budget, then sell an idea, their talent and their ability. Then the next thought after the budget approval is doing the design as fast as possible to maximize profit off of the design fee. That's a sad way to run a business. Designers do that in lieu of selling enough time to really think about the next project and take into account all of the environmental and usage considerations. The lack of attention is probably the source of the biggest problem and the biggest failure in commercial and residential landscaping.

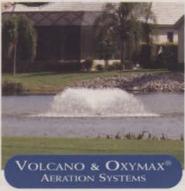
PLD: What can designers do to avoid this blunder?

PC: It reverts back to what the prerequisites to do a good job as a landscape architect are – to know the project, know the usage, know the client. Then it's our job to organize how people use and enjoy those spaces from both an aesthetic sense and functional sense.

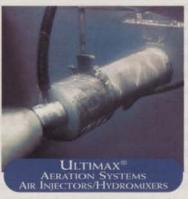


















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It's incumbent on us to avoid the distractions of our own personal desires and whims as designers and focus more on how we can meet the needs of clients.

PLD: What are your thoughts on the relationship between design and maintenance?

PC: So many designs I see are impossible or impractical to maintain. Designers often put in their favorite stuff – things they think are going to be really beautiful. Often, there's not enough thought given to how the owner is going to be able to maintain it.

Another big problem is a mind-set by a lot of designers that says, "I just do design. I don't know about construction." These designers alienate themselves from construction, which is a really sad thing. I don't know how someone can do a design and not be intimately involved with bringing that project to life and maintaining it. **PLD:** Did this mind-set come from working at Disney?

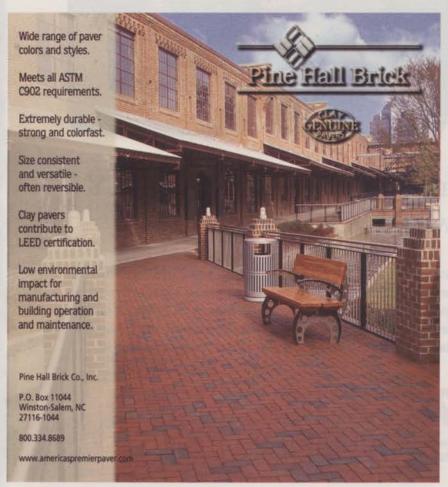
PC: I don't think Disney originated the union of design, budget, construction and maintenance, but Disney is a company that's absolutely fanatical about building something and having the highest standards of maintenance to protect that product because those constructed elements are the company's brand. People know if they go to one of Disney's projects they're going to be treated courteously and it's going to be a clean, incredible park-like environment. To achieve these goals, Disney has show-quality standards, or SQS. They sent me around the world every year to visit all the projects, and I'd write up a report with the horticulture department employees who maintained them. We would say how we could improve the maintenance and how we could modify the design. It was a seamless experience where we'd generate the concept, the design, the contracting, the installation and the maintenance, and develop a plan for the success of those created environments.

PLD: Can all designers use the 'SQS' concept in their practices?

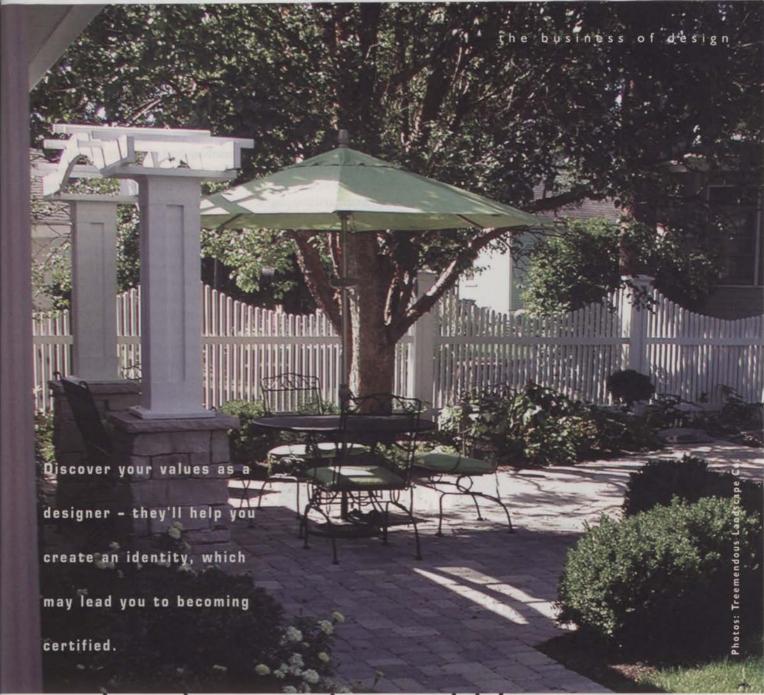
PC: The easy answer is yes. I know a lot of designers who are demonstrating to their clients an interest as the creators of these spaces. They periodically review and communicate back to ownership how the project looks, if it's being maintained well or if there are some areas where the maintenance is falling down. Demonstrating to owners our care and participation in the longevity or in the typical landscape architecture vernacular - 'the sustainability' - of these projects that interest and caring is something that would do an enormous amount for a designer's business and improve public relations of our profession as a whole. It's not by saying, 'Pay us some money and we'll go and view it and write you a report;' it's saying, 'Hey, the project generally looks great, but you could probably improve it by doing this or that and we'd like to help you.' It really pays off.

PLD: What can other designers do to maintain inspiration and creativity? What advice do you give students?

PC: I think as landscape designers, or any designers for that matter, we have to keep our eyes, ears and minds open to the incredible diversity and beauty of life and all aspects of the world that surround us. The singular piece of advice I have given frequently is to visit as many places as possible that have a different culture, art, flora and fauna than what you normally are exposed to. Nationally, internationally - just try to absorb as many diverse influences as you can. That can help you expand your design appreciation and palette, which you can apply to creative work. Also, I think you have to draw everyday - it doesn't matter what. Everybody's in a place where for five minutes, while they're doing something else, they could draw something. Just talking with you, I've been drawing a streetscape of a boulevard in Hollywood. I just think it's important to put a marking instrument onto a blank piece of paper and keep your hands moving. PLD



USE READER SERVICE # 51



designation dilemma

By Jeff Korhan / Contributing Editor



When I joined the green industry in the late 1980s, I left behind a sales and marketing career in the industrial chemical industry. There, credentials weren't an issue for me - my chemistry degree and MBA plus 10 years in the business gave me credibility with my customers. Looking around the green industry after founding a design/build and maintenance company, I realized I had no distinctive identity - I was nobody. That's when I began to explore how to establish my expertise in this industry.

One of my first steps was to associate myself with professionals. I joined the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association and then became aware of the International Society of Arboriculture. It was the only organization I knew of at the time offering a certification program. I became one of the first certified arborists in Illinois, with my production manager following right behind me. While not all of the program's criteria pertained to the work of our emerging landscape business, we weren't concerned because we were establishing ourselves as experts in our market. We were creating an identity.

In contrast to 20 years ago, the green industry today offers a multitude of certifications that recognize distinct areas of specialization. (See sidebar, "Designer-Related Affiliations.") The logical question is where do you fit? Which organizations are going to help you to achieve your personal

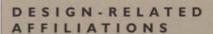
and professional goals?

A certification has to first be congruent with who you are and what you believe. Why? Those designation initials are going to go right after your name and actually become part of your identity. Today, with virtually all customers doing research and shopping on the Internet, your name may well be the most

important thing you have in today's market.

Do you need to be certified at all? Absolutely not. However, certification says something about who you are. Beyond credibility, it tells the marketplace what you value. It's important to consider what's important to you because you will invest a significant amount of time and money to achieve your certification. It's difficult to name an average cost for earning a designation because the initial costs vary so much, but they range from \$50 to several hundred dollars. The greater investment, though, comes with maintaining a certification - your time spent, annual association costs and the cost to attend seminars for continuing education units. That's why it's important not to view achieving a designation as an end of the education road, but as more of a beginning.

The author is founder of Treemendous Landscape Co., Plainfield, Ill. Among several other designations, he's a Registered Landscape Architect, Certified Arborist and Certified Landscape Professional.



American Society of Landscape Architecture

Certification program? Yes, exam and registration; www.asla.org

Association of Professional Landscape Designers Certification program? Yes; www.apld.com

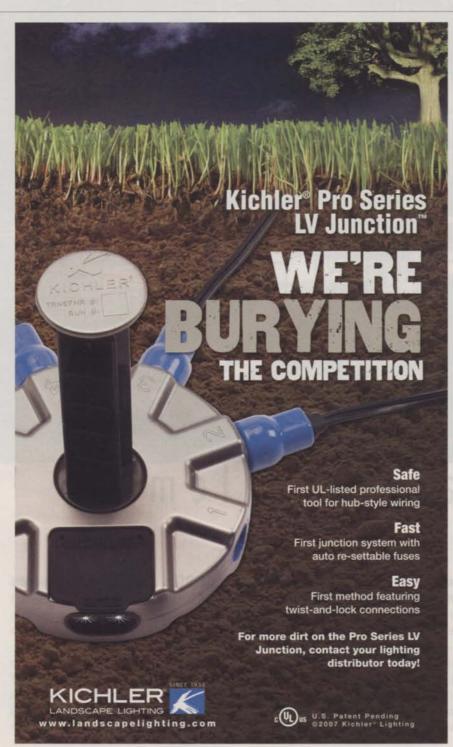
International Society of Arboriculture Certification program? Yes; www.isa-arbor.org

Irrigation Association Certification program? Yes, six different programs available; www.irrigation.org

Perennial Plant Association Certification program? No; www.perennialplant.org

Professional Landcare Network Certification program? Yes, various designations available; www.landcarenetwork.org

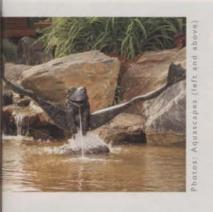
Society of Garden Designers Certification program? No, but offers "registered membership" for individuals; http://www.sgd.org.uk/





THE FUTURE OF WATER FEATURES

Emerging trends in water features help shape the future of the industry.





"Water gardening today is where lighting was 10 years ago," says Greg Wittstock, president of Aquascape, Batavia, III.

"It's now kind of a fringe, niche market, but the industry will ride the current wave and it will be a standard service in 10 years."

If Wittstock's prediction is correct, the water feature industry is in for a wild ride. With significant growth comes change, and with change come trends - both good and bad. The industry will get to observe as designers try to find what works and what doesn't when it comes to water features, and how to make water feature design and installation as profitable as possible.

Like any up-and-coming segment of business, designers need to be sure to educate themselves and their crews before incorporating water features into their landscape plans. After designers put together a plan "If designers install ponds poorly, it's going to create the reputation that having a pond is a lot of work," Wittstock says. "When it comes to water features, not investing in education is the most important thing that can be done wrong."

With the proper education under their belts, designers can then focus on specific trends, like how big or small water features should be, where on a client's lawn they should be located and how to make them cutting edge - information that will be important as the industry continues to grow and expand. "Water features just keep becoming more and more popular," says Kevin Garvey, owner of Garden Design/Build Group, Glenelg, Md. "More people ask for them every year, and I don't see the demand slowing down any time soon."

SMALLER SCALE. Today, many designers believe that bigger water features are better. Large-scale projects that are more "ego-gratifying" than "paycheck-gratifying" have left the entrylevel customer - and a profitable business opportunity - overlooked. "One of the biggest trends we're seeing is a backlash toward larger water features and the embracing of smaller features," Wittstock says. "Some companies have been burned financially on large projects because the

By Emily Mullins / Assistant Editor

work is long and the pay is often slow to come in. We believe there is an untapped market for smaller projects."

The standard large installation is an 11- by 16-foot pond that costs between \$7,000 and \$10,000, Wittstock says. Smaller features tend to be pondless, measure 6 by 8 feet and cost between \$2,000 and \$4,000. While these projects are indeed smaller, they require a lot less labor and materials and tend to have greater profit potential in the future. "Many clients looking to install their first water feature are more willing to spend between \$2,000 to \$4,000 rather than \$7,000 or \$8,000," Wittstock says. "But these small features get a designer's foot in the door and create potential for people to expand or upgrade in the future."

Small, pondless features can typically be installed by two or three guys with virtually no equipment in one day, Wittstock says, meaning more of these projects can be completed with half the amount of time and labor. Wittstock and others in the industry are currently trying to create awareness of the profitability of smaller water features

by holding seminars and promoting them in industry publications. "We're trying to dispel the notion that smaller features stifle a designer's artistic ability," Wittstock says. "We do the math for these contractors to show them they can do more of these projects at higher profit margins."

Wittstock says sales of small water features have doubled over the past few years, and their lack of maintenance makes them an easy sell. "People are buying them because there's no hassle of pond maintenance, but they still get the relaxing sounds and soothing atmosphere larger water features create," he explains.

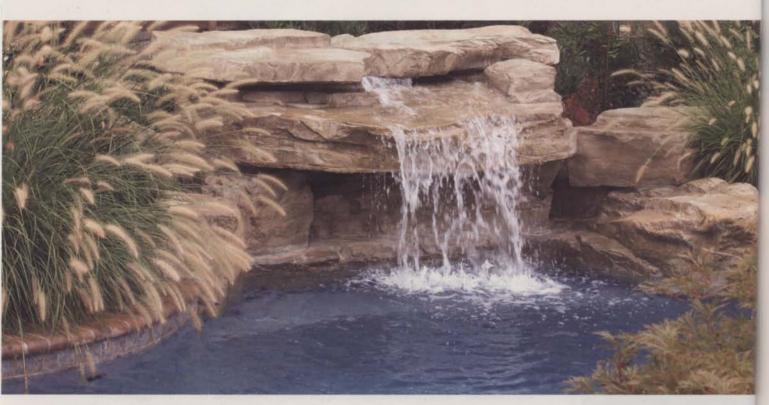
To enhance these serene settings, designers are placing water features closer to their clients' houses or patio areas. Not only does this location allow the client to enjoy the water feature just by stepping out of the door, but it also inspires them to maintain it on a more consistent basis because it's always within eyeshot.

LARGE AND IN CHARGE. While small water features are being embraced by

many first-time clients, large-scale features are still in demand by veteran, high-end customers. Certain emerging trends are making it easier for designers to achieve the "wow factor" of large-scale installations. One of these trends is synthetic rock. Garvey utilizes these rocks, which are cast from real boulders, to create natural-looking designs. "Using synthetic rock enables us to cut and paste the design, so to speak," he says. "We can build features that would normally take thousands of heavy rocks quicker and easier." The use of large-scale boulders makes the design look more natural than "little gravel mixtures," Garvey says.

This is important, he adds, as clients are asking for water features that look as natural as possible. Another way this natural look can be achieved is by building water features into a natural slope rather than creating a slope to build the feature into. "It just looks more natural," Garvey says. "I think not doing this is one of the biggest mistakes designers and architects can make."

For example, one of Garvey's Virginiabased clients wanted a water feature built



Clients are asking for water features that look as natural as possible. One way this look can be achieved is by building water features into a natural slope rather than creating a slope to build the feature into. "It just looks more natural," says Kevin Garvey. "I think not doing this is one of the biggest mistakes contractors make." Photo: Garden Design/Build Group

into his swimming pool. Garvey designed the feature into a natural hill and the waterfall spilled over into the pool

Garvey says that the combination of water features and swimming pools that look like natural ponds is going to be one of the biggest industry trends in the coming years.

Although water feature-pool combos can have beautiful results, there are a few things to avoid. "I've had clients want their pools to look so natural that they've asked to add aquatic plants like water lilies and lotus flowers to them," he says. "This can be problematic because you need different types of filters for plants and fish than you do for humans. I prefer to keep them separate." Garvey says his business of blending water features and swimming pools had doubled since last year.

Another trend in large installations is having more than one design firm team up to get them done, Wittstock says. These companies often meet via industry resources like online message boards. By collaborating, companies are able to split the cost of resources, sharing the financial liability. These firms then split the profit appropriately after the job is done. "This became really common this past year and will continue to be this common year," Wittstock says. "Many companies don't want to take on huge jobs that could sink their company if something goes wrong. This is a way to mitigate that risk."

EASY DOES IT. As water feature installation picks up as a service, Wittstock suggests that designers work with contractors to develop a system with which to complete each job. Building a solid partnership helps keep the project on an organized schedule and prevents bumps in the road.

"Landscape contractors have systems for installing everything from patios to retaining walls," he says. "Just because water features are creative and artistic doesn't mean they can't be completed while following a system. Without organization, each job will be a headache."

The lack of a systematic approach results in unnecessary hassles and poor customer service, which are two things that every landscape contractor and designer wants to avoid, Wittstock adds. The availability of more distributors is another trend that will simplify the ability for designers to add water feature design and installation to their businesses. This gives them greater access to more products, which alleviates the need to "jump through hoops" to find the necessary materials to get the job done. "In the very near future, designers will have the luxury of more

distributors in their areas," Wittstock says. "Having the necessary products on location will help fuel the future demand of water feature installation." PLD

www.lawnandlandscape.com

Check out the May Lawn & Landscape Online Extras section for more information on how fish can enhance water feature designs.



USE READER SERVICE # 53

including irrigation anyway



Photos: Hunter

By Marisa Palmieri / Associate Editor

Some companies add irrigation designs and estimates to landscape plans whether clients request them or not. Here's why.

All designers worth their weight in plant material know that the health and longevity of a landscape depends on proper irrigation. However, many of them have not been so successful in translating that knowledge into irrigation system sales.

One way that design/build firms nationwide can boost irrigation sales is to take a tip from a common practice in the South and include a set of irrigation plans with all landscape designs from the get-go, whether clients request them or not. In addition to added sales, landscape firms will benefit because their clients' landscapes will flourish – reducing warranty claims and increasing referral potential.

Joe Mumme, operations manager for McKinnon Associates, Houston, says that adding irrigation has become second nature for him over the last decade. "Twelve years ago, it was an option," he says. "But in order to guarantee a great landscape, you've got to have adequate water, so over the last seven or eight years it's become just about standard." Ninety-five percent of the designs McKinnon Associates draws up receive irrigation plans.

The same rule applies at Nature's Blueprint in Alva, Fla., where 98 percent of installations include irrigation. "The majority of our business is word-of-mouth," President Tom Super says. "To have the landscape be at a level we're proud of and guarantee us more referral work, we're really only interested

in installing a landscape package that's irrigated and preferably irrigated by us."

In the North where irrigation is often an afterthought, many designers don't press the issue if a client doesn't request an irrigation system.

Salmon Falls Nursery, Berwick, Maine, operated this way until a year and a half ago. Operational changes have allowed for a change in irrigation department procedure, and now the company is realizing the value of routinely providing an irrigation design and estimate with every residential landscape design.

"It's difficult to go back after the fact - and you're wasting the client's money," says General Manager Brian Beeler. "That's how we look at it. Yes, we could do this two or three years down the road, but at the expense of plants and reworking stuff."

So far, by providing an irrigation design and quote even if it's not requested, Salmon Falls' designers have been successful in upselling irrigation about 10 percent of the time. "It's not a great knock-down rate, but it's only something we started doing in the last year and a half," Beeler says. He expects this upsell rate to improve as designers get a better understanding of irrigation processes and costs.

Salmon Falls switched to this type of system for a few reasons. Naturally, one reason was to generate more revenue from the irrigation division, but another was simply to get the word out that Salmon Falls provides irrigation design, installation and maintenance. In this regard, providing the irrigation design up front functions like a mini master plan. If clients aren't sold on irrigation initially but decide to go for it down the road, hopefully they'll remember Salmon Falls already designed an irrigation plan for them, and they won't be tempted to shop around.

Another reason for automatically including irrigation designs is to market it as an insurance policy. Because 90 percent of plants die due to improper watering, Beeler says, the benefit to customers is the long-term insurance that their plants are properly irrigated. In addition, an irrigation system may reduce homeowners' water use and save them money. The benefit to the contractor is a decrease in warranty claims - as most installers warranty their plants for one year. "We definitely see it as a protection for the investment we have hanging out there for at least a year," Beeler adds.

INCORPORATING IRRIGATION DESIGN.

At Salmon Falls, the landscape designers pass off their completed landscape plans to the irrigation manager, who then adds the irrigation components. They shoot to complete the entire process in two weeks, and it takes the irrigation manager a week or less to turn around his portion of the plan.

Salmon Falls charges a flat fee for both landscape and irrigation designs and estimates. It generally charges a \$250 retainer. Beeler says this setup works for Salmon Falls because residential irrigation designs aren't the irrigation manager's only duty. "If he was only doing residential irrigation design, it would not be a profitable gig at this



point," Beeler says. "But he's here for commercial anyway and he's able to turn around residential projects so quickly, so we're definitely starting to see an impact in residential irrigation sales."

Though irrigation systems are standard at Nature's Blueprint, Super found a way to boost sales further by offering tiered packages. The gold package comes with standard heads, 4- and 6-inch sprays and a basic controller. The platinum upgrade, which includes pressure-regulating sprayheads, 6- and 12-inch sprays, drip and low-volume components and institutional products with a longer warranty, is 25 to 30 percent pricier than gold. The close rate on the upgrade is 80 to 85 percent.

Mumme's policy is always to start with a premium system. "We give them the best, most intricate design up front," he says. "We push for the client to always go for the way we recommend, but we could do it for less." Ninety-five percent of customers will go with what's first offered, Mumme says.

At Salmon Falls, some training has had to take place to incorporate the new model of including irrigation with landscape plans. Designers attended vendor-sponsored training both in-house and at irrigation supply houses. But the best training, Beeler says, is one-on-one interaction between the landscape designers and irrigation designer, Beeler says. "He can basically give them the same speech he'd give a client if he was on-site with them." PLD

Proper placement and smart planting are essential when designing landscapes with athletic courts, putting greens and other rec areas.



Photo: BackvardSportsCenter.com

rec creation

By Marisa Palmieri / Associate Editor

A pool was once the pinnacle of outdoor entertainment. Today, as elaborate water features and outdoor kitchens are commonplace in backyards nationwide, having a pool alone has become, well, passé. Homeowners are looking past the standard landscaped yard and swimming hole and are seeking to kick it up a notch.

Landscape designers and architects have responded with basketball courts, putting greens, bocce ball courts, detailed children's play structures – nothing is out of the question for some active families. Well-thought-out designs and good vendor relationships allow landscape companies to turn once-average gardens into mini resort settings. Some savvy designers and installers have even created niches for themselves in court consulting and contracting.

With a profit margin of about \$3 and up per square foot, according to landscape contractor Darin Chamberlin, designing and installing recreation areas is a field that deserves some consideration.

About five years ago, Chamberlin, president of Cedar Rapids, Iowa-based Chamberlin Landscaping and Backyard Sports Center, began investigating athletic court installation for part of a \$100,000 backyard he was designing. With no court-installing companies in his area, he sourced the materials himself, successfully completed the construction and soon received a slew of referrals. "By the end of

the first year I did five courts and thought, 'What a nice little add-on for my landscaping business."

Chamberlin, who also installs putting greens, says greens and basketball courts typically cost \$12 to \$15 per square foot. Bocce ball courts, another popular backvard recreation offering, cost \$19 to \$25 per square foot, says David Brewer, owner of Brewer Landscape Construction and its bocce court-building division, Bocce Brew, in San Rafael, Calif. He has designed and constructed more than 100 bocce ball courts at homes, bed-and-breakfasts and wineries in Northern California over the last decade. At 12 feet by 60 feet, bocce courts are popular because they take up less yard space than tennis courts or basketball courts.

Like any new service offering, there are challenges to creating recreation areas in backyards, designers say. Careful court placement, softening harsh edges, deliberately dividing up spaces and creating privacy are important things to remember so clients – and their neighbors – aren't left with unsightly, institutional views.

Safety is one major concern, especially when it comes to children's play areas. "You want to hide them so they blend in, but so you're not obstructing views from an area where parents are sitting and are able to watch their kids," says Brent Menghini, landscape designer/project manager for Highland Outdoor, Kansas City, Kan.

Rec area placement is probably the most vital when it comes to design because the courts and structures themselves are often unattractive. "The biggest thing is making sure it doesn't stand out and irritate the neighbors," Menghini says.

Chamberlin agrees that the neighbors are one concern, but homeowners themselves often have to reconcile aesthetic issues before installation. "Wives can be upset sometimes when the husband wants a court with bright colors," he says. In these situations, he suggests clients nix team colors and logos and instead choose rich colors that blend well with the landscape, like forest green and burgundy, and possibly even leave off the lines on basketball courts or soccer fields. This typically isn't an issue with the more natural-looking putting greens or bocce courts, designers say.

Another way to naturalize courts, fields

and putting greens is to use meadow grasses to transition from the synthetic area to the lawn. "We've used grasses that can take foot traffic and a lot of abuse – like a red festuca," says Bud Stuckey, owner of Felton, Calif.-based Gardens by Design and former test gardener for Sunset magazine.

Creating an organic feel and carefully selecting plants around the rec structures is crucial, designers say. "These areas can look ugly, especially if they're just giant courts with nothing around the perimeter," Chamberlin says. "That's like installing a water garden with no plantings – it looks like a giant bird bath."

Practical plant choice and smart design are what elevate them from the neighborhood eyesore to a fun, attractively landscaped yard.

When selecting a plant palette, consider the guidelines for landscaping around pool areas. Many of the same rules apply, like avoiding thorny plants that could scratch family members and fragile plants that are vulnerable to being trampled. Designers also should leave enough room for walkways and spectators, Stuckey says.

To make these areas as low maintenance as possible, choose low-litter plants, avoiding those that will drop flowers or fruit onto the playing surface. Some plants that may be appropriate for rec area landscaping include: ferns (any kind), palms, Dracaenas, Agapanthus, cannas and daylilies.

Using plants to create screens is another technique that many rec area designers use. "These areas can be unattractive and there can be hooping and hollering, so privacy is a concern," Stuckey says. Hedges are one solution, but may be too severe or require too much maintenance for some clients. The right mix of evergreens, other trees and shrubs that grow 6 to 8 feet may be a better idea. For lower-growing screens (less than 15 feet), Wilson Bros. Nursery in Mc-Donough, Ga., recommends selecting about eight plants, grouping them in twos, threes or fours and planting them in a staggered line to provide a better visual, wind and sound barrier than planting in a straight row. This strategy looks natural, adds interest and minimizes the risk for the spread of disease. Depending on climate, Wax Myrtle, Cleyera, arborvitae, Honeysuckle, juniper, Sweet Olive and privet are appropriate plants for creating privacy. PLD

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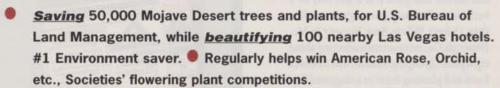
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business opportunities



Concrete curbing can be an effective way

for boosting profits fast. Just ask contractor

Bowie Retzlaff.

owie Retzlaff is pumped up for this coming busy season. His start-up landscape installation business has taken off over the last few years thanks to concrete curbing, a business offering he discovered on the Web a few months before launching his company in 2004.

Although Retzlaff had never heard of the service before, he was confident he could master the hands-on side of the business, considering his background in landscaping, remodeling and masonry, which he learned growing up while working for his uncle, a mason.

learned growing up while working for his uncle, a mason.

A quick flip through the local Yellow Pages convinced Retzlaff

curbing would be a good offering.

The phone book listed zero companies as concrete curbing providers, but it did advertise more than 50 landscape businesses. What a great differentiator this concrete curbing would be for his new business, he thought.

Curb 'n Décor, Retzlaff's Green Bay, Wis.-based landscape installation business, was incorporated in December of 2004. He was installing concrete curbing by springtime.

by marisa palmieri | associate editor

business opportunities

This year, just his third season in business, Retzlaff hopes to double his concrete curbing sales to more than \$150,000.

In 2006 curbing made up 70 percent of his firm's revenue. "If I can make it 90 percent curbing I will," Retzlaff says. "You're in, you're out, the profits are excellent and when the homeowners come outside and see what you've done, the look on their face is amazing."

Concrete edging brings a decorative element to the practical purpose for landscape edging; keeping mulch in place and adding an overall tidiness to beds.

It offers an artistic touch that plastic, metal and natural edging don't. Another benefit is longevity – concrete is a permanent solution compared to plastic and metal edging that needs to be replaced in as few as three years, bricks that can shift and crumble and timber, which can rot.



Decorative curbing, though sometimes requested by commercial clients, is typically a residential offering, Retzlaff says, noting 90 percent of his curbing clients are homeowners. Curbing appeals to a wide variety of residential customers, from those in modest middle-class ranch homes to high-end homes in brand-new neighborhoods, Retzlaff says.

An average job is about 200 to 250 feet of curbing – though he's done smaller ones and has bid on jobs up to 1,000 feet. A job in the 200-foot



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business opportunities

range would earn Retzlaff about \$1,500 with a profit margin close to 60 percent.

That's much higher than the 25 to 30 percent profit he gets from his company's other landscape services.

SYSTEM DETAILS. The concrete curbing process entails removing sod from application areas (typically around bed edges), laying down the concrete, adding color, texture and stamping the pattern on top. Finally, the contractor applies a sealer.

There are several different types of concrete curbing systems on the market that vary in application method and curb size and style.

For example, some systems lay down 6-inch curbs; others produce 7-inch curbs. Some require a threestep process: one pass for laying down concrete, a second for adding color and third for stamping.

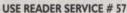
Other systems eliminate the color application step because color



Retzlaff says an average residential job is 200 to 250 feet of curbing and customers typically choose to upgrade with all of the decorative "extras," like color, texture and a stamped pattern. Photos (this page, page 88 and page 96): Bowie Retzlaff

is mixed directly into the concrete. There are benefits to each type, says Retzlaff who owns two different concrete curbing systems. He first bought a machine that produces 7inch curbs, which requires the threestep process in addition to adding a return trip several days later to apply







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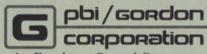
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sealer. This machine allows a threeman crew to install about 300 feet of curbing per day.

When adding a second machine to his operation, Retzlaff decided to go with a different type of machine that allows him to install 600 feet of curbing per day with a three-man crew. Additionally, this brand does not require an additional pass for color application or a second trip for sealer application.

"The whole process is a lot faster," he says. "With the same crew, I'm able to do 600 feet a day without having to return. I can throw a sealer on top of it once it sets up and walk away and not have to come back."

However, he still runs the first machine he bought. Keeping both systems allows Retzlaff to offer clients two sizes, 30 different colors and 30 different patterns.

BUYING DECISIONS. For contractors interested in entering the decorative curbing business, manufacturers offer a variety of equipment-purchasing options, too. Contractors' options range from purchasing the machine and cement mixer only, to entire franchises or turn-key packages.

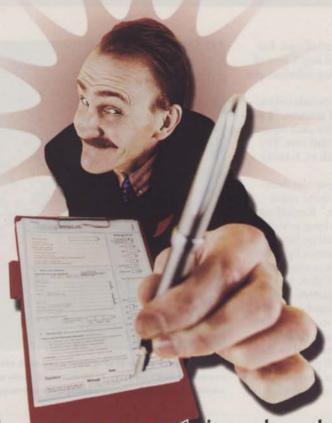
chises or turn-key packages. When Retzlaff first entered the concrete curbing business in early 2005 he declined to purchase a \$45,000 package the manufacturer offered, which included a trailer, wheel barrows, other tools, training, marketing and support. Instead, he purchased just the curbing application equipment and sourced other materials separately. His initial investment was about \$10,000 and came with one day of hands-on operations training, but no marketing or business training. Retzlaff says a contractor can enter the curbing business today for between \$15,000 and \$20,000.

PRICING POINTERS. Curb 'n Décor's concrete curbing prices range from \$3.50 to \$7 per linear foot. Customers have a lot of choices in curb style, which accounts for the



Retzlaff sees the merits of running two different types of decorative curbing systems – the combination of the two allows him to offer clients 30 color choices and 30 patterns. Photos (this page, page 87 and page 94): Tygar Manufacturing





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www.irrigationdirect.com the grass just got greener Irrigation Direct 877,436,6922 variation in price, Retzlaff says. For example, \$3.50 would buy 1 foot of an institutional-looking colorless, patternless curb.

Upgrade options include colors, stamped patterns and textures. "I personally add 50 cents for each separate service per foot," Retzlaff says. The size of the curb (7-inch vs. 6-inch) also adds to the cost.

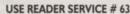
What's the most popular decorative selection? "All three: color, stamping and texture," Retzlaff says. "Customers figure as long as we're here they might as well go for the gusto. You can lay down a light-colored gray curb and then a medium gray texture on top of that, and then a darker grey stamp pattern and you've got a multicolored curb that goes really well with stone or siding."

Keeping the concrete curbs covered with a sealer is essential to their longevity, and Retzlaff plans to turn this light maintenance into an add-on service as his customers' curbs age.



Concrete sealer, similar to what contractors apply over stamped concrete patios, is required to ensure a curb's longevity. As his customers' curbs age, Retzlaff plans to add a maintenance service that includes pressure washing curbs and reapplying sealer.







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He applies a concrete sealer with each installation, and says sealer should be reapplied every three to five years (depending on the type of concrete and sealer used) to preserve the look and integrity of the concrete. 'I give the customer the information that if it starts to dull they can go to Home Depot and buy a concrete sealer," he says. "Otherwise I offer a service where I can come back for a set rate and take care of everything for them." Since his curbing business is less than three years old, Retzlaff has only done this a few times upon special request. The process entails pressuring washing the curb and applying sealer. He charges \$100 per visit plus 25 cents per foot.

MARKETING METHODS. So far. Retzlaff has marketed his business mostly through home and garden shows and the Yellow Pages. "I know other entrepreneurs and business owners and they recommended home shows," he says. "By meeting the customer face to face, I think it gives them a sense of security knowing who you are, rather than just calling a number out of the phone book and having somebody show up at your house. It also helps because they get to physically see the product first.

Retzlaff, whose marketing budget is between \$7,000 and \$8,000, exhibits at about three shows each season.

Depending on the show, a 10-foot by 10-foot booth costs him \$230 to \$850, and this year he bought larger spaces to differentiate himself from his competitors and better showcase his landscape work. "I can use the bigger booth to show off my retaining walls



One way to let help customers select curb colors and styles is to take samples of popular curb styles on sales calls. Clients like to touch and see the real products, holding them up to their homes and their landscapes, Retzlaff says.

and paver patios and surround the whole thing with curbing, shrubs and mulch," he says. "The 20-foot booth catches a lot more people's attention."

Home shows were Retzlaff's only marketing effort his first year in business and the leads he received there kept him busy all summer. "I try to hand out cards and information and go that route," he says, noting he's not a high-pressure salesman. He displays a voluntary sign-up sheet so he can follow-up with prospects who have expressed their interest as winter ends.

When he receives a call from a prospect, Retzlaff visits the site to measure bed areas with a measuring wheel. "We just walk around and discuss colors as I'm measuring," he says.

In addition to keeping a portfolio

of past jobs and letters of recommendation, Retzlaff keeps a few 1-foot samples of decorative curb in this truck so prospects can see and touch the real thing. If clients are still unsure, Retzlaff directs them to several installations he's done before. "I have some customers who offer to have people come by and take a look at their homes," he says. "I keep those addresses on me when I'm visiting customers, and I usually just ask the customer not to bother the homeowner, but to go check it out.

"A lot of my customers have exist-ing landscapes," Retzlaff adds. "It's taken 15 years to grow everything to full size and they just want to put the final touches on it and curbing is perfect way to do it." III



USE READER SERVICE # 66

Welcome

То

keep

up with their

labor needs, landscape

contractors may give former employees

a second look. Lawn & Landscape Message Board

participants discuss the merits of hiring a boomerang worker.

Photo: Robert Young/Dreamstime.com

n today's competitive labor market a landscape contractor may hire a boomerang, or a worker who rebounds with his or her former employer. And the practice of welcoming back a boomerang worker is more common among business owners than some might

In fact, 54 percent of employers indicated they would hire back former employees, according to a study conducted by Right Management Consultants. The top reasons for doing so, according to the study, include the former worker's familiarity with the position (52 percent), he or she is a proven fit to the company's business culture (18 percent) and it minimizes the chances of making a bad hire (18 percent). Likewise, 10 percent sited no good reason for doing so, according to the research.

Recently, landscape contractors posting to the Lawn & Landscape online message board debated

the merits of the boomerang worker. And while there are no hard statistics to prove otherwise, outside of the apparent cardinal sin of rehiring a fired worker, welcoming back former workers is a common practice in the landscape industry.

Contractor Todd McCabe posted to the message board that he was considering hiring a former employee and wanted input on whether this was a sound business decision.

"He was an excellent worker," posts the president of McCabe Landscape Group in Wrightsville Beach, N.C. "But he disappeared and everyone said they had no clue as to what happened to him. But he called me recently to see if I had an opening for him. Would you bring him back or not?"

Message board participants were suspicious and many advised caution when dealing with rebounding, boomerang workers.

"I've tried to rehire in the past and the chances of them working out are slim," posts Contractor

www.lawnandlandscape.com



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Dave Reynolds, of Alpine Sprinklers and Landscape, Kalispell, Mont. "I would have a job description ready for him or her to sign and then hold them accountable to the details in the job description."

Some contractors posted that, in McCabe's situation, the worker has shown blatant disrespect for authority by taking off without warning. Others added that this show of disrespect is indicative of an individual who most likely takes no pride in his or her work, so why waste time and energy worrying whether an unreliable worker will show. However, others could relate to McCabe's exact situation.

Kelly Tohill, owner of Atlantabased Tohill Landscape Management, posts he has rehired a "disappearing act" – twice. "I talked to him and told him to tell me the next time he wanted to leave and he did," Tohill says. "Then he disappeared again but I rehired him. Then the last time he left he told me he would be coming back (this year). I wonder if he will tell me at the end of the year if he is disappearing again?"

Returning workers may turn into career-long employees, posts Steve Cissel, founder and CEO of the green industry online directory, GIYP.com.

"At some point, the guy will see the grass isn't greener over the fence," Cissel says. "Then you'll have a lifer." "My first thought would be not to hire him. But it's doubtful that anyone other than you can make this call. In order to make this kind of judgment call I would have to sit down and get to know the guy."

- Patrick Johnson

POOR BACKGROUNDS. Many contractors, in a similar posting, debated the pros and cons of hiring back a former work with a history of substance abuse.

Some leery contractors comment that a rehabilitated employee will do OK for awhile, but most likely will fall back on their nefarious ways.

There is trepidation among owners about choosing to rehire someone who has taken a wrong turn in life and made some bad choices, says John Palasek, owner of JonKar Design Group in Yaphank, N.Y.

"It all depends on how committed this guy is to remaining clean and sober," Palasek says. "Clean and sober should never be confused with simply being 'dry.' There are many folks in this world who have quit using drugs but have done nothing to change the person who began using them in the first place. Those folks are just passing time until the next event."

However, Palasek is willing to give an individual the benefit of the doubt, adding that recovery and living a new life is never easy for a former abuser.

"Hiring a person in recovery, especially one in the early stages of recovery, can be risky but it may be the vote of confidence a person needs to reinforce their choice to change from the destructive behavior which gave them so much grief and anguish," Palasek posts. "It's risky, but it may turn out to be one of the greatest gifts you could offer to a person in need of nothing more than an affirmation that they're doing something positive."

While this is a complex issue, a lot depends on how long the individual has been clean and sober and how determined he or she is to maintaining that lifestyle, posts Patrick Johnson, owner of Reflective Gardens in Knoxville, Tenn.

"My first thought would be not to hire him," Johnson posts. "But it's doubtful that anyone other than you can make this call. To make this kind of judgment call I would have to sit down and get to know the guy.





boomerang guidelines

As with many labor issues, there are marked advantages and disadvantages to hiring back former employees. The National Federation of Independent Business offers a few guidelines to avoiding making costly hiring mistakes.

KNOW YOUR HISTORY. Find out exactly why the employee left in the first place. Did they leave in good standing? Where they dissatisfied and, if so, what were their issues? Did they get along with coworkers and were they team players?

CHECK WITH OTHERS. Seek input from any companies the applicant worked for since leaving your business. Speak directly with the owner or a supervisor. Inquire about performance and why the individual left these other jobs.

DISCUSS PERFORMANCE ISSUES. If the former employee was fired for poor performance or other factors, be up front and discuss these with the applicant. Determine if he has taken measures to improve. Has he corrected any inadequacies?

ACCOUNT FOR TIME. If it has been some time since the former employee was with your company, ask if she has upgraded her skills in any way. This may indicate a desire to advance her position in your company.

SALARY. If you go ahead with a re-hire, offer the same or increased salary as a show of good faith. Make it clear you expect him to perform at an even higher level than before.

Palasek agrees and adds relapses are a possibility. However, it is debatable whether the likelihood of a relapse increases or decreases when the individual is given a second chance and rehired with the firm.

"The more time a person has under his belt the less likely he is to relapse," Palasek posts. "In fact, a person with more than five years sobriety is about as likely to begin using again as a person who never did drugs and decides to use them for the first time.

"While I won't argue that a recently clean user is likely to backslide, I could just as easily make the case that this new direction – this second chance – could be just what he needs to continue towards a productive and rewarding future," Palasek adds. "No one is asking that this guy be nominated for Pope, all he needs is a chance to put his life back in order."

Not all contractors agree with giving a second chance in circumstances of substance abuse. Many posted that, while it's a difficult endeavor to build up a landscape business, it's very easy to damage or lose it through a poor business decision.

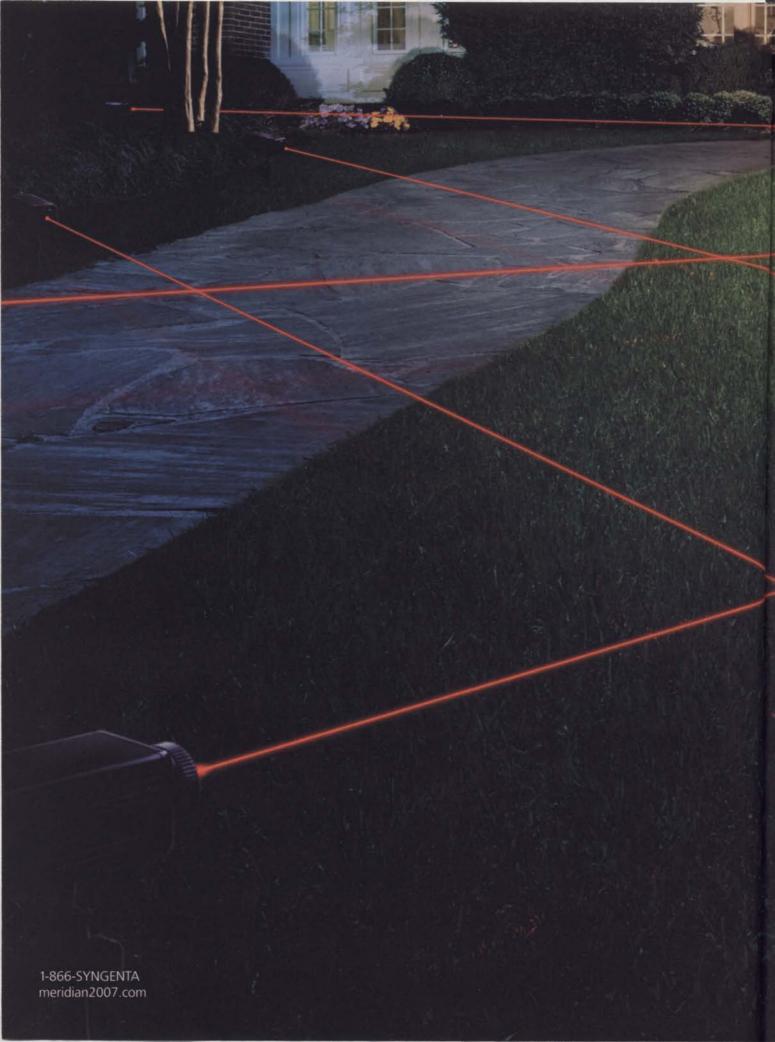
"If you hire him back and he screws you then you just set the stage for your own consequences," posts Bill Schwab, president of Naturescape Landscape Co., Solana Beach, Calif.

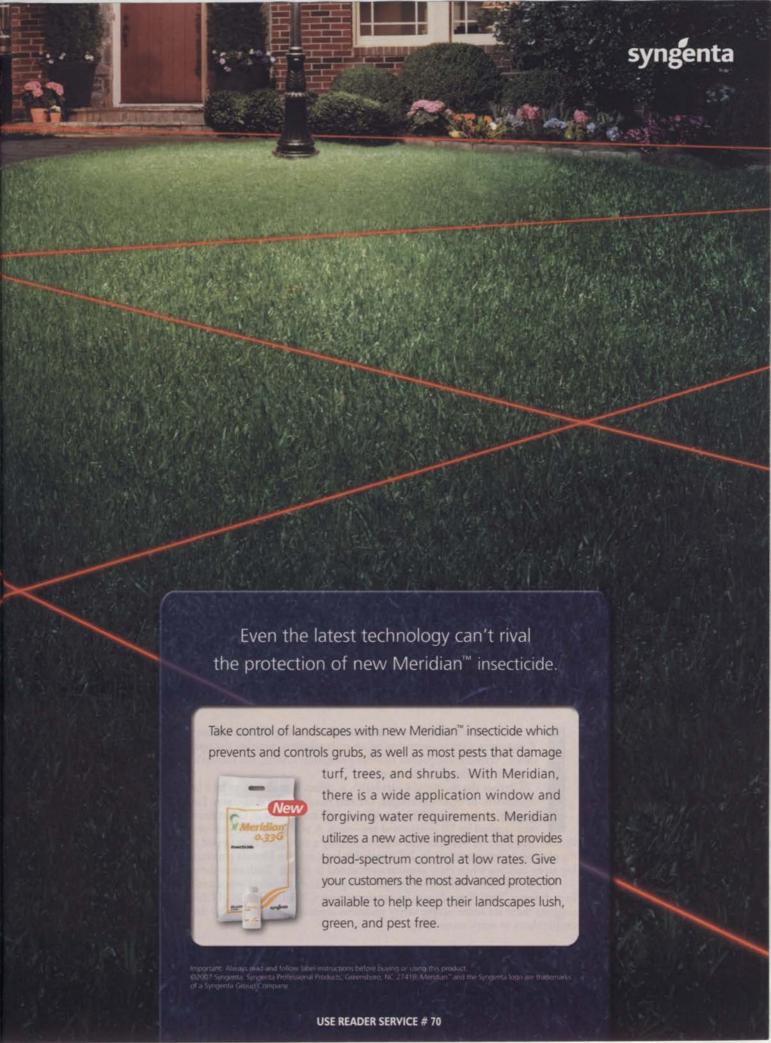
Contractor Jamie Bush says he rehired an individual who defrauded his business and the second chance he gave the worker did not end up working out. Rehiring is a mistake, posts the president of Jamie's Lawn Service in Plano, Texas. "If you want to feel good about helping someone in a tight spot, volunteer in a soup kitchen," he says. "When it comes to your business, make sound decisions."

While he does not have first-hand experience with this particular issue, Chad Stern, owner of Mowing & More in Chevy Chase, Md., says if the individual can serve as an asset to the business and contribute to its success, a contractor should consider rehiring the former employee.

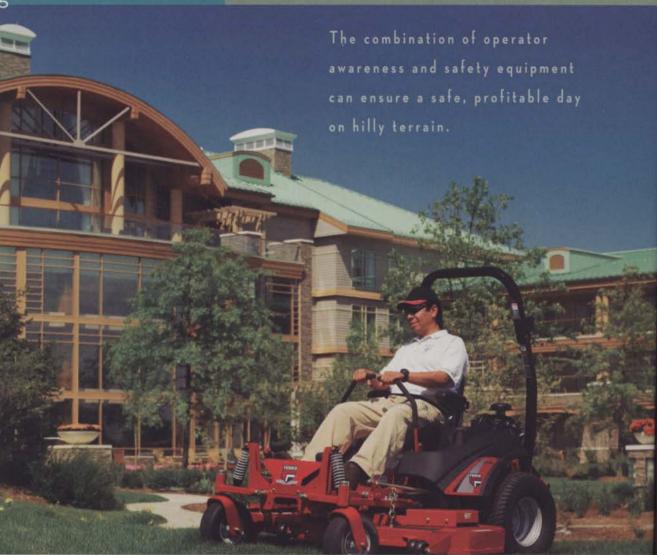
"Just make sure he is, in fact, an asset to the company," Stern says. "At the first sign of trouble, show him the door."







mowing



Photos: Ferris (above and page 114)

ON THE EDGE

t can turn a successful day of incident-free mowing into an instant nightmare: A zero-turn mower overturns on an embankment, pinning the operator upside down. Without the proper rollover protection system, the mower's weight could crush the landscape contractor.

Whether the potentially survivable accident is made worse by a lack of safety equipment or operator fatigue, the end result can be disastrous. For instance, tragedy occurred in 2003 to a 42-year-old contractor in Greensboro, N.C., who was crushed by his overturned zero-turn. A year later, a 57-year-old contractor in Illinois died after he was knocked unconscious by a zero-turn that tipped over from a tire slipping on a drainage pipe. In 2005 and this January, two Florida contractors were mowing steep inclines when their mowers overturned in ponds. Both men drowned.

"These are some examples of people doing routine landscape work and they lost their lives doing it," says Tony James, an executive with CNA Insurance, of Chicago, Ill. James suggests there are some simple safety measures contractors could follow daily that could enable them to work more safely.

by mark phillips | associate editor

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For instance, mowing on shifty or hilly terrain can be done accident-free through a combination of operator know-how and safety equipment, but equipment alone shouldn't lull anyone into a false sense of security, experts say. "There is no substitute for good judgment on the part of the equipment operator," says R.A. Stucky, of

Moundridge, Kan.-based Grasshopper. "If there is any uncertainty about the safety of mowing in a particular area or on a slope, don't attempt to operate there."

ROPS TO THE RESCUE. The biggest single safety development in recent years has been the standardization of

Rollover Protection Systems (ROPS), says John Cloutier of Beatrice, Neb-based Exmark. Used in conjunction with a seat belt, ROPS won't prevent a mower from overturning, but can protect the operator from serious crushing injuries or death.

The system works like this: A stationary or foldable rollbar helps protect the operator if a zero-turn mower overturns. But an important and often-overlooked part of the system is the safety belt. If it's not used, the system won't work. "When the ROPS is up, should it roll, the operator is in a safety zone," says Roy Dust, product specialist for Munsville, N.Y.-based Ferris. "But he's only in a safety zone if that safety belt is used. Otherwise, he could be pinned in a rollover.' Experts caution that the use of ROPS should by no means give operators the feeling they can take risks or mow in hazardous conditions.

ROPS is offered as standard equipment on most new models of zeroturns. Many manufacturers offer both fixed and foldable ROPS systems, while others offer retrofitting kits for older mower models.

Manufacturers rely on a combination of safety standards, such as those from the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and additional safety elements based on historical experiences when designing systems such as ROPS.

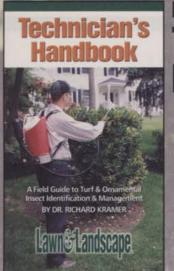
Systems like ROPS should always be utilized, but it's not a magic wand, Stucky says. "ROPS is a precaution that contractors want to have in place; they don't want the responsibility of not providing it to their operators. But don't let ROPS provide a false sense of security in hazardous areas," she says. "All these standard features combined with the good judgment of the operator contribute to safe operation of the mower."

A ROPS system can add between \$600 to \$1,000 per mower, with \$750 being the average, Dust says, adding that price shouldn't be an issue concerning safety. "I think ROPS is a must-have," Dust says. "Even if you're mowing on a flat area, there's always going to be a slope. It doesn't have to be that high to have a rollover. I consider ROPS to be mandatory equipment."

Because the rollover bar sits higher than the user, in some instances it could become entangled in low-hanging tree limbs or brush. But experts



USE READER SERVICE #72

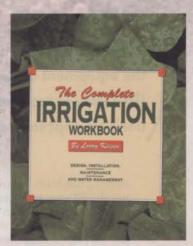


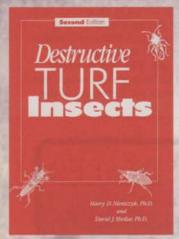
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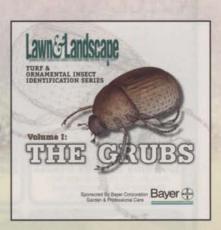
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say those situations should never be a determinant not to utilize ROPS.

"There are applications where the vertical profile of the ROPS can result in snagging on limbs or prevent access onto an enclosed trailer," Cloutier says. "However, this fairly infrequent Aside from the obvious injuries or deaths that can occur from rollovers, utilizing safety equipment such as ROPS is just good business. An accident such as a rollover can easily cost from thousands into the millions in worker's compensation claims and in-

Stucky says. "It shouldn't be an option to go without."

Other safety features that have become standard and most desired by contractors include a hinged discharge shield that can be raised or will bend to pass through narrow openings and return to mowing position immediately; an ergonomic cushioned highback seat with padded armrests and a seat switch that shuts off the engine when the operator leaves the seat without placing the levers in neutral position; and a disengagable PTO drive, Stucky says.

The seat switch is an indispensable addition to a mower, Dust says. "The biggest advantage is for someone who gets off of the seat to pick up something and accidentally slides their foot underneath the deck while getting back on," he says. A seat switch adds only about \$100 to the cost of the mower, he says. The only disadvantage could be having a seat switch that doesn't account for the weight of the

"There is no substitute for good judgment on the part of the equipment operator. If there is any uncertainty about the safety of mowing in a particular area or on a slope, don't attempt to operate there." – R.A. Stucky

mowing condition is a small price to pay should your machine roll over."

When equipped with foldable ROPS, only fold down the ROPS to pass through storage doors or to pass into enclosed trailers, Stucky cautions. creased liability insurance premiums, depending on the severity. "Consider the cost if a rollover occurred and the mower was not equipped with ROPS and seat belt, or equipped with a folded ROPS that was not deployed,"





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rider, Dust says. In some instances, a lighter operator could hit bumps and come out of the seat just enough to start and stop the mower blades several times. Seat switches have become more accurate in recent years, he adds. A well-padded ergonomic seat will pay big dividends to the operator. "When someone's on a machine for an extended period of time, a quality

seat is well worth the cost," Dust says. "Although a good seat might add \$400 to \$700 to the cost of the mower, operators really appreciate a quality seat."

PRECAUTIONS ON ZERO-TURNS.

With the nimble nature and potential speed of a zero-turn, an operator can sometimes forget the inherent dangers of this useful machine. And when contractors spend an average of \$9,976 on riding mowers each year, according to Lawn & Landscape research, protecting this investment with proper practices is crucial.

Common sense should apply when deciding not to use a zero-turn due to the conditions. Cloutier suggests a few rules of thumb to avoid the most common accidents that result in injuries on hilly terrain.

 A hillside that exceeds the recommended degree of gradient should always be mowed with a walk-behind or a mower that was specifically designed for extreme gradient mowing

applications.

A zero-turn should never be used on a slope greater than 15 degrees. To check a slope in doubt, the operator should attempt to back up to the slope with the cutter deck down, according to Mayville, Wis.-based Scag. If the zero-turn can't back up without the wheels slipping, avoid cutting the slope with the machine.

 Avoid hillside mowing with heavy moisture after recent rainfall or wetness as a result of morning dew.
 Properties that operators have mowed for years take on an entirely different feel and risk factor as a result of precipitation on the grass. Contractors should plan their day so that hilly properties have an opportunity to dry out, Cloutier says. If contractors have no choice but to mow early, he suggests utilizing walk-behinds.

 Mowing around the perimeter of waterways and retention ponds or retaining walls requires extreme caution. Always leave at least two cutting paths to the edge of these hazards.

If a zero-turn simply isn't practical due to the slope, a walk-behind mower might be a better choice. Operators should use walk-behinds across the slope, as opposed to up and down the slope for zero-turns. Going across the slope can reduce injuries to hands and feet should the operator fall. If a landscape contractor falls using a walk-behind uphill, for example, the mower could roll back and injure him, even if the control bar is let go. Mowing up and down a slope using a zero-turn can help avoid tipping.

PUTTING SAFETY TO WORK. It's easy to focus on just the machine and forget how the operator is an integral part of the overall safety picture. Some



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ALWAYS READ AND FOLLOW LABEL DIRECTIONS BOTHS 34" is a registered trademark of PBV Gordon Corp. basic precautions can put the contractor on the path to a safe day on the job. Loose-fitting clothes, for example, are a safety hazard. All clothing should be snug and shirt-tails should be tucked in and long hair should be tied into a ponytail and tucked under the shirt, industry experts say.

Fatigue is another issue that plagues daily mower operators. But a zero-turn riding mower itself can instill safer operation in the first place. "Using a rider for all-day mowing will eliminate operator fatigue from excessive walking, and eliminate knee and joint stress injuries," Stucky says. "An ergonomic zero-turn mower not only enhances the operator's quality of life but helps avoid accidents that can occur with poor judgment induced by fatigue.'

It's also important for the contractor to walk the grounds to be mowed to ensure there are no rocks, sticks or other foreign objects that could be thrown by the blades. Tall, overgrown



Mowing on shifty or hilly terrain can be done accident-free through a combination of operator know-how and safety equipment. However, equipment alone shouldn't lull anyone into a false sense of security. Photo: Exmark

vegetation and rough or unfamiliar terrain is better maintained with a hand-held string trimmer, walk-behind mower, four-wheel drive or slope mower, Stucky says. And contractors should discuss with clients that plant-



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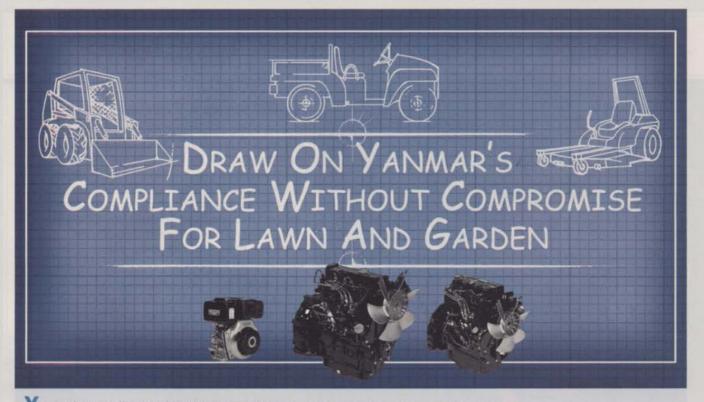
ing vegetation that does not require moving is often the best solution for problem areas.

Safety measures are important not just for landscape contractors, but bystanders near the work site, as well. Contractors work on uncontrolled job sites where people just passing through could be injured by errant rocks or sticks struck by a blade. "Operating with a commitment to mower safety frees employees to do their best work, and avoids the pitfalls of dealing with accidents or property damage which take away from the desired outcome of a job well done and a happy customer," Stucky says. "Accidents are costly to those involved and to the company as a whole.'

The best-laid plans for mowing can go awry if the machine isn't properly maintained. Basic maintenance can cause potentially catastrophic accidents. Improper tire pressure, for example, can cause a loss of traction, which could cause a rollover on hilly



It's easy to focus on just the machine and forget how the operator is an integral part of the overall safety picture. Some basic precautions can put the contractor on the path to a safe day on the job site. Photo: John Deere



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safety tips

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute and the Consumer Product Safety Commission suggest these tips when using riding mowers on slopes. These tips are approved for commercial equipment.

- . DO mow up and down slopes, not across.
- DO watch for holes, ruts, bumps, rocks or other hidden objects. Uneven terrain could overturn the
 machine. Tall grass can hide obstacles. Beware of overhead obstructions (low limbs, etc.) and
 underground obstacles (sprinklers, pipes, tree roots, etc.). Choose a low ground speed so you will not
 have to stop or shift while on a slope.
- · DO NOT mow on wet grass. Tires may lose traction.
- · Always keep the machine in gear when going down slopes. DO NOT shift to neutral and coast downhill.
- DO NOT start, stop or turn on a slope. If the tires lose traction, disengage the blade(s) and proceed slowly straight down the slope.
- NEVER tow on slopes. The weight of the material may cause loss of traction and loss of control.
- · Be careful when approaching blind corners, shrubs, trees or other objects that may obscure vision.
- Keep all movement on slopes slow and gradual. DO NOT make sudden changes in speed or direction, which could cause the machine to roll over.
- DO use extra care while operating the machine with grass catchers or other attachments; they
 can affect the stability of the machine. DO NOT use on steep slopes.
- DO NOT try to stabilize the machine by putting your foot on the ground.
- DO NOT mow near drop-offs, ditches or embankments. The machine could suddenly roll over if a wheel goes over the edge or if the edge caves in.

terrain. One easy way to remember safety tips is to review the safety decals on the machine before beginning operation each day, Stucky says.

"Your mower is a tool that is very safe in design when used as suggested, however you cannot lose your attention and focus," Cloutier says. "Construction workers use rotary saws all day everyday but put their safety at risk by taking their tool for granted. Operators of mowers should always understand the tool they are utilizing and not let their guard down."

Beyond simply forgetting safety basics, contractors can get into trouble by ignoring safety features. Bypassing safety switches, such as operator presence detectors or removing protective devices such as ROPS, seat belts or discharge deflectors can lead to injury or damage to property. "Operators should be taught and expected to take responsibility for seeing that all safety shields and devices are properly installed before operation," Stucky says. Follow all warning decals and instructions in the operator's manual. These are designed and intended to remind operators of safe operation and warn them of potential hazards or dangers of power equipment."

Stucky suggests machines be assigned to one operator. "When he's familiar with the machine he will be able to operate more safely by understanding the ins and outs of how the machine operates and by taking

responsibility for proper operation and maintenance," she says.

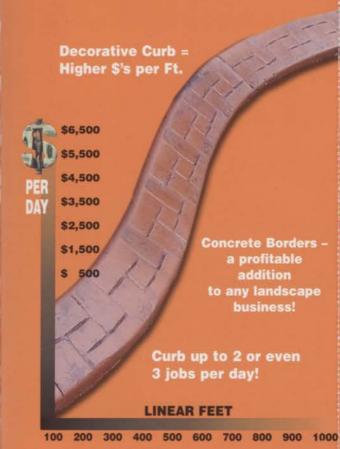
Cloutier suggests operational and safety programs. A study by the Construction Industry Workforce Foundation shows programs of this kind pay off handsomely. For each dollar spent on safety training, firms get \$2 in return, not to mention a 17 percent increase in productivity and 19 percent reduction in turnover and absenteeism.

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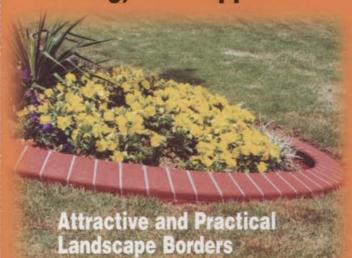
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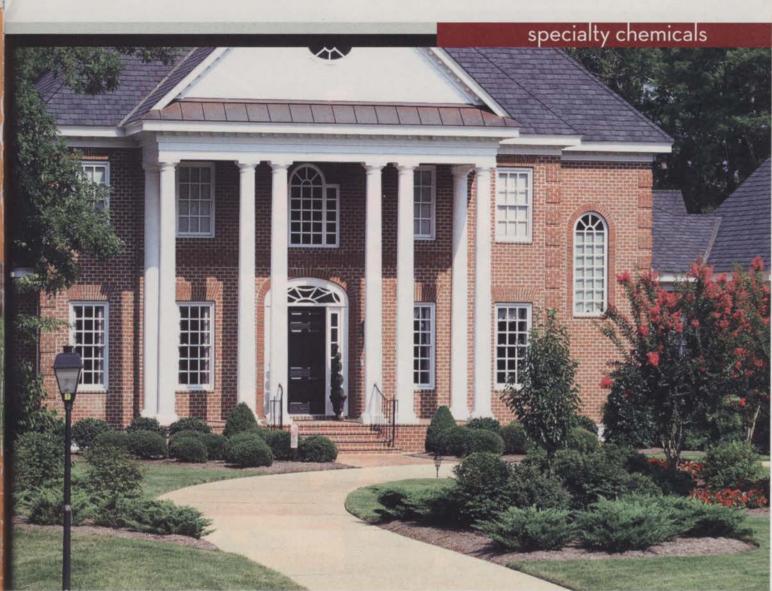
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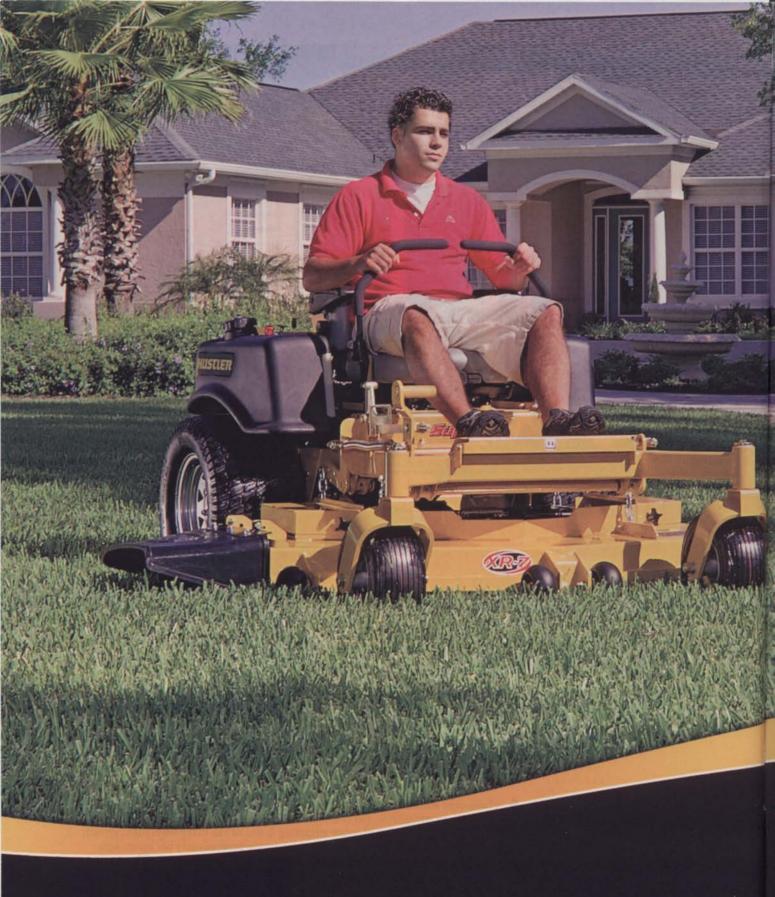
t landscape seminars, Doug Oberman always asks attendees to raise their hands if they like to string trim. No one ever does.

Easing the burden of string trimming is one of the many ways plant growth regulators (PGRs) make a lawn and landscape professional's life easier, says Oberman, product manager for PBI Gordon, Kansas City, Mo. The products also eliminate the need for weekly mowing, resulting in fewer clippings to clean up after a job and keep shrubs neat and orderly with less pruning. In all, PGRs reduce the time LCOs and landscape contractors spend performing mundane tasks, which can then be used for other, more profitable jobs.

continued on page 118

by emily mullins | assistant editor

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continued from page 115

"PGRs are used to reduce labor, which is then available to go to other or additional jobs," Oberman says.
"Contractors profit because they are able to reallocate that time.'

PGRs come in handy when labor is in short supply. Qualified employees are often hard to come by in the landscape and lawn care industries, and contractors are always looking for ways to cut corners without sacrificing the quality of their work. "PGR use is really starting to take off in the landscape industry," says Roger Storey, vice president of turf and ornamental business, SePRO Corp., Carmel, Ind. "Lawn care operators want to address their No. 1 concern, which is labor, and are seeing that using PGRs can really pay off.

TURF PERKS. Different types of PGRs do different things, but their primary purpose is to slow down a plant's vertical growth and increase its lateral growth by altering its

hormones. There are PGRs for turf and ornamentals that come in liquid, powder and granular forms. But, no matter how you spread or spray it, PGRs reduce mowing, trimming, pruning and clipping cleanup by as much as 50 percent, Oberman says.

On turf, PGRs slow the vertical growth of grass, enabling landscape contractors to stay on top of their mowing duties, particularly during the spring and summer heavy growth periods. "In the spring months it can be hard to stay ahead of mowing, and using PGRs can reduce the need to mow from twice-a-week to once-aweek," Storey says. "Even if a client's contract requires their lawn to be



At this Charlotte, N.C., location, the shrubs in the foreground and the hedges and trees in the background had not been sheared for seven weeks after being treated with a PGR.

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mowed twice a week, the amount of clippings to clear away will be drastically reduced."

Turf has to be actively growing for a PGR to take effect, so one application in the spring and one in the fall should suffice for most areas, Oberman says. Each application generally lasts between four to six weeks. "You don't want to apply PGRs during the stress period of July and August when it's hot and dry or in the winter when it's cold because grass usually goes dormant under these harsh conditions," he says.

Certain PGRs have the tendency to cause discoloration to turf. To avoid this, Oberman suggests an application of liquid iron to retain a lawn's green color. This can be applied before the PGR is sprayed or tank mixed and sprayed at the same time. Applying lower rates of PGRs can also limit discoloration, he says. "Discoloration depends on the product you use," Oberman says. "It is not a com-



Shrubbery at this condo park residence in the greater Sarasota, Fla., area is treated with an ornamental PGR on a four-month cycle. After stopping PGR use for one cycle, the shrubs needed to be trimmed every 30 days.





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Saving you time. mon issue with ornamental PGRs." Andy Kadrich, owner of Turf Masters Lawn Care in Woodstock, Ga., tested turf PGRs on his most diligent lawn care customers two years ago. He chose to test the product on his lawn care customers who he knew would keep impeccable watering and

"PGRs are used to reduce labor, which can then go to other, additional jobs."

- Doug Oberman

mowing habits, which would help the PGR work as well as possible. These customers were able to go from mowing twice a week to, in some cases, once every three weeks, Kadrich says. "On the turf, the growth regulators passed with flying colors," he says.

The compliment the company

receives most often about its PGR use on turf is how much better their customers' lawns look, Kadrich says. The product promotes lateral instead of vertical growth, so grass looks tighter and fuller and, because it's not mowed as often, the grass retains a much greener color. The company

> now offers turf PGR application to all of its lawn care customers. "You're not cutting the leaf tissue off as often and our customers notice better color and overall appearance," he says. "From a

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grass standpoint, our customers love the service.

ORDERLY ORNAMENTALS. When working with ornamentals, PGRs not only keep shrubbery looking neat for longer periods of time, but also can improve the quality of the plant mate-

rial. By promoting lateral growth, PGRs enhance the flowering of shrubs and ornamentals which results in greener, fuller plants with more bud tips and interior branches, Storey says. "Flowering usually happens at a plant's tip, and if you constantly prune a shrub's branches, you prevent the flowering from occurring," he says. "Continual aggressive pruning can weaken the plant overtime and have a negative effect on appearance."

Most ornamentals need only one PGR application a year, as each application can last for up to 12 weeks. Only in areas like the deep South where the growing season lasts six months or more could ornamentals require more than one treatment, Oberman says. "Three months is the biggest part of the growing season, or at least the peak of the growing season, in most areas," he says. "One treatment should do it in most places, but two might be necessary in the South because the growth season never really stops."

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Last year, Turf Masters incorporated full-service maintenance into its lawn care mix. To save time on pruning and trimming duties, the company will offer ornamental PGRs to its maintenance customers this year, and will offer it to lawn care customers in the future. "We don't have a lot of experience with ornamental PGRs yet but, like with turf, we think it will help us stay on top of our game," Kadrich says. "We're going to offer it to our maintenance customers first because, being on their properties every week, we can more easily see the benefits firsthand."

PICK YOUR PRODUCT. The type of PGR a contractor uses depends on personal preference. Some contractors find granular is best for treating ornamentals because it's easier to spread the product underneath shrubs and ground covers for absorption through the roots, rather than spraying the product to be absorbed through the

leaves. "Penetration into the inside leaves is necessary," Oberman says. "You can't just spray a light coating on the outside of the plant – you have to get inside of it too, which can take a bit more time."

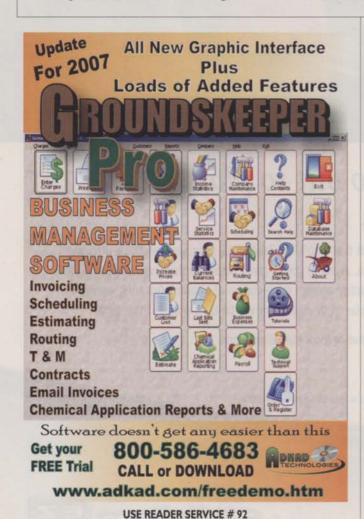
Storey agrees. "Granular formulations seem to be the preferred method when treating landscape ornamentors need to make sure their walkbehind and handheld spreaders are properly calibrated to achieve uniform coverage. They also have to apply the PGR under the drip line of plants that grow all the way to the ground. Often, this requires raking back mulch to apply it underneath. They also need to be aware of the type of soil

"In the spring months it can be hard to stay ahead of mowing, and using PGRs can reduce the need from twice-a-week to once-a-week."

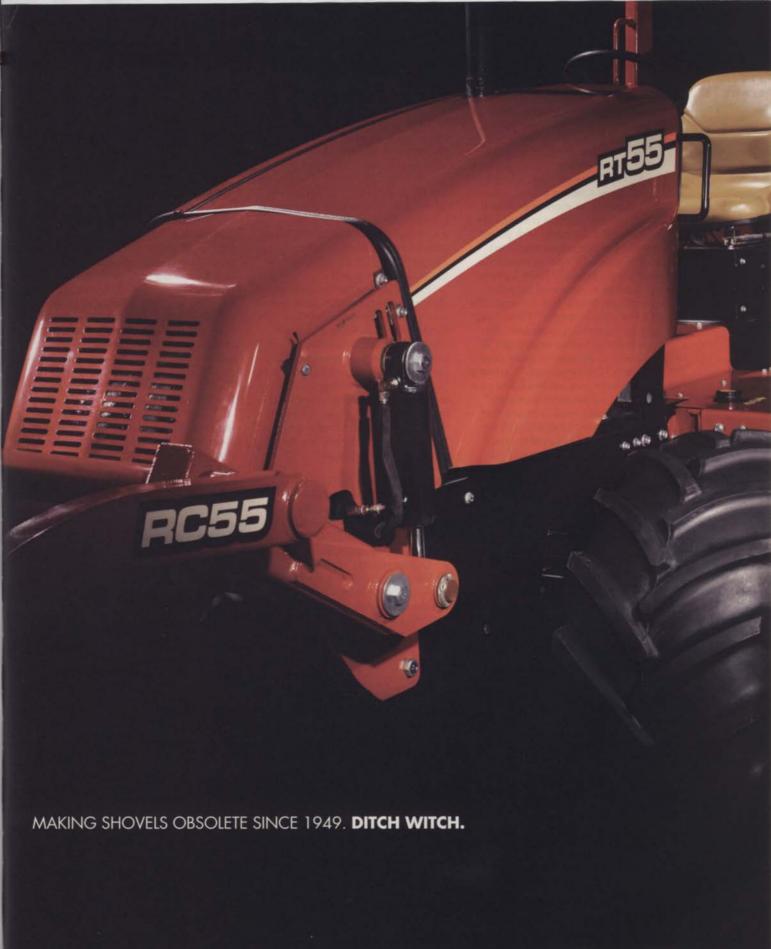
- Roger Storey

tals," he says. "Also, granular PGRs don't need to be mixed with water like liquid formulations do, so that step is eliminated."

When using granular PGRs on both turf and ornamentals, contracthey're working with because it can be more difficult for granular PGRs to pass though heavier, clay-type soils to reach the roots where it is absorbed, Oberman says. Regardless of soil type, granular PGRs need to be watered in







within a few hours of application for the product to properly take effect.

Liquid PGRs can be applied with either backpack or power sprayers, and are usually the preferred product for turf applications. Depending on how large or small an area is, one or the other may be more appropriate. Many say that uniform coverage can be achieved more easily with power sprayers because contractors don't have to manually operate the device to apply the product. From a physical standpoint, mounted powered sprayers are usually best for large jobs of a few acres or more. "When using a backpack sprayer, sometimes the application is weaker or stronger in certain areas because it's being done manually," Oberman says. "Čertainly backpack sprayers can work, but you have to be a little more thorough."

Contractors need to ensure that the weather forecast doesn't call for rain for 12 to 24 hours after liquid applications, Oberman says. This gives the product time to be absorbed through the leaves and take affect. For turf applications, Kadrich's crews use liquid PGRs applied with 200- to 600-gallon truck-mounted sprayers. Sticking with the general consensus that they're easier to use, Kadrich plans to use granular PGRs for ornamental applications this spring.

Manufacturers agree the price of PGRs is extremely rate-dependant. Turf applications can cost anywhere from about \$35 to \$60 an acre, Storey says. Ornamental PGRs can cost from \$15 to \$70 per 1,000 square feet of treated area, depending on the application rate and what kind of species are being treated. "Even though it doesn't sound like much, 1,000 square feet of shrubs is a lot of landscaping," Storey says. "If you have a hedge that is 3 feet wide and 20 feet long, that is a 60-square-foot hedge. The value proposition of the PGR is very good compared to labor needed to prune the hedge over a season."

PGRs can be a bit more costly than other lawn care products. For example, some preemergent herbicides cost from \$3 to \$3.50 per 1,000 square feet. However, the time contractors can save by using PGRs can usually compensate for their cost. "Labor shortage is always an issue in the green industry and lawn and landscape contractors are forced to do more with less," Oberman says. "When doing more with less, using premium products helps."

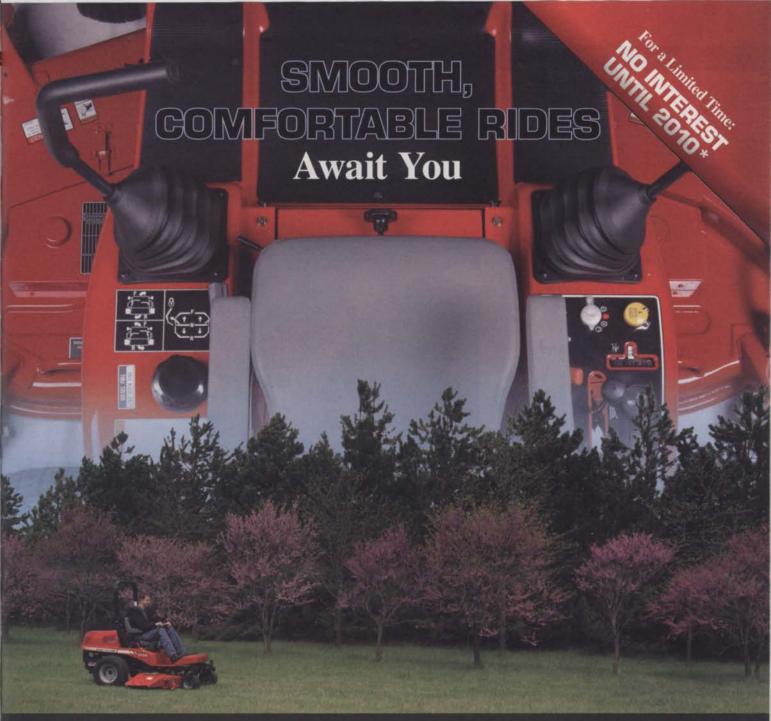
LABOR SAVERS. PGRs make doing more with less a feasible task. Manufacturers say the products can cut labor associated to mowing and trimming in half, and many contractors support this statistic.

During routine maintenance, Kadrich says his crews spend half the amount of time maintaining PGRtreated lawns than untreated lawns, and using PGRs keeps them a few steps ahead of the competition. "In the green industry, the weather is always a factor that makes you want to pull your hair out," he says. "But even if it rains for a week and we can't get out there and mow, our customers' lawns will still look good and we can stay on top of the game."

Not to mention the service can be profitable. Last year, Turf Masters generated an extra \$30,000 in revenue from PGR applications alone. To price his PGR services, Kadrich charges 1½ times the price of a regular lawn chemical application. For example, if a client pays \$40 for his regular lawn care routine, he will pay an additional \$60 for a PGR application. Kadrich's average customer receives seven lawn care treatments per year and four PGR treatments per year, with each PGR application lasting from four to five weeks.

To sell PGR services, Kadrich includes information and promotional coupons in the company's newsletters that go out before each of the seven regular lawn chemical applications, which the company calls "rounds." Each round's newsletter highlights a different service, and the current round's service is PGRs. "Round 3, which we're in now, is when lawns come out of dormancy, so it's a good time to get the word out about PGR applications," he says. "The service has treated us really well ever since we started offering it. I'm kind of curious as to why more people don't use PGRs."





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TIPS TO TRENCH

s trenchers have evolved over the years, they've became easier, safer and more productive to use. Today, the machines meet most landscape contractors' underground needs, including irrigation installation, outdoor lighting installation, water feature construction, downspout and drainage system installation, root pruning and tree planting, to name a few.

Because trenchers are specific to underground duties, manufacturers suggest contractors know their uses for the machine to ensure they choose the right one for them. "The first thing that comes to my mind when advising contractors how to choose the right trencher for them is that they really need to know their job requirements," says Brent Bolay, senior product manager, Ditch Witch, Perry, Okla. He suggests contractors consider how deep and wide they will need to dig, what type of soil they'll be digging in, the kinds of jobs they will perform and how long will they have to get the work done. "Most contractors make money based on how many jobs they can do, so purchasing a machine that their crews can operate quickly and efficiently is important," Bolay says.

by emily mullins | assistant editor



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NOW AND THEN. While the basic idea of the trencher has not changed much over the years, the ability of the machine to perform its job has improved. "Today's systems are much more refined, with more safety features for the operator," says Jon Kuyers, compact solutions manager for Vermeer, Pella, Iowa.

Today's machines come with hydrostatic rather than mechanical systems, eliminating most of the exposed gears and belts that caused performance problems and downtime in the past, Kuyers says. They are also more advanced in terms of ergonomics, with fewer, more accessible controls.

For example, some manufacturers

identify the controls on their trenchers using a color-coding system that expands across their product line.

"This can help the novice operator recognize the control functions and be a productive member of their crew more quickly," Bolay says.

Operator safety has improved over the years with features like automatic

trencher versatility

Skid-steer loaders are one of the most versatile machines available to landscape contractors. With the variety of skid-steer attachments contractors can choose from, there's not a whole lot the machines can't do.

Trencher attachments for skid-steers can help contractors perform their underground duties and are gaining popularity in the industry. "We're seeing a very strong demand for trencher attachments," says Jon Kuyers, compact solutions manager for Vermeer, Pella, Iowa.

Landscape contractors use trencher attachments to lay water lines and irrigation systems, install fences and plant trees, says David Kweram, work tools sales support consultant for Caterpillar's North American commercial division, Peoria, III. "The trencher attachment is sold to make a trench in the ground, but it carries with

it the selling capability to do a lot more," he says. "Trenchers are tools that can be used for a lot of things and, as more people get their hands on them, that task list will no doubt increase."

Costs of trencher attachments range anywhere from \$4,000 to \$12,000 depending on what the unit can do, Kweram says. The trencher attachment's boom, or the arm, comes in lengths of 3, 4 or 5 feet. Chain widths can range from 6 to 12 inches to handle different types of soil. There are even trencher attachments that come with or without chains so contractors can mix and match the best machine for them.

"It's important for manufacturers to be able to tune the tool to meet the customer's application needs," Kweram says.



oto: Ditch Witch

stop and electrical protection. "With today's trenchers, if you let go of the handle, the machine will stop running, when before it would continue running until you physically disen-gaged the clutch," Kuyers says. "In addition, electrical protection protects contractors in case they cut through an electrical line or wire while digging underground."

ONE OR THE OTHER. Ride-on and walk-behind trenchers are the most common varieties, though both have their own advantages. Walk-behind, or pedestrian, trenchers are more popular in the landscape industry because they easily fit on residential properties, Bolay says.

The preference toward one type of machine or another is driven by the job it has to do," he says. "If most of your jobs are in suburban backyards, you probably won't need to invest in a ride-on trencher. But if a contractor is involved in commercial landscaping and has bigger jobs of, say, 5 acres or more, he might look into a larger

chains are the most common for contractors to choose from.

The market also offers trencher attachments to use with skid-steer loaders. Prices of these devices range from \$4,000 to \$12,000, depending on their capabilities, says David Kweram, work tools sales support consultant for Caterpillar's North American commercial division, Peoria, Ill. (For more information on attachments, see "Trencher Versatility" on page 130.)

OPTION TO BUY. Until a contractor's trencher needs are firmly established, renting machines on either a monthly or as-needed basis is common practice. "Many contractors rent trenchers before they purchase them, so they need to evaluate how often they use a trencher versus their rental costs," Kuyers says. "If they are renting three or four times a week, purchasing might be a better financial investment.

The price of renting a trencher will vary depending on the type of machine. Most manufacturers agree

"Most contractors make money based on how many jobs they can do, so purchasing a machine that their crews can operate quickly and efficiently is important." - Brent Bolay

machine with more capabilities."

Trencher price also influences which machine a contractor chooses to purchase. Walk-behind machines cost from \$5,000 to \$14,000, Bolay says, depending on the type of chain, horsepower and digging capabilities. Ride-on machines cost from \$25,000 to \$40,000, varying for the same reasons.

Digging capabilities and horsepower go hand-in-hand, so Kuyers suggests contractors purchase a trencher with horsepower that reflects how deep they will need to dig. Walkbehind trenchers have horsepower suitable for digging 12 to 36 inches deep. Ride-on trenchers are better for installation depths of up to 4 feet. Chain type also depends on how deep the trencher will need to dig, as well as what kind of soil the machine is digging. From basic to most powerful, cuptooth, shark-cutter and rotary

that a standard walk-behind trencher can be rented for \$120 to \$200 per day. The rental of smaller trenchers can range from \$45 to \$60 per day and renting larger trenchers can cost from \$70 to \$100. Renting ride-on trenchers can cost from \$150 to \$400 per day, Bolay says.

Most manufacturers offer financing options, which vary depending on a contractor's credit history, as well as the cost of the purchase being made. By working closely with a local supplier, contractors can determine the best purchasing method.

It's beneficial to work closely with your sales rep or dealer to work through issues from financing to determining which machine is right for your business," Kuyers says.

Bolay agrees that establishing a relationship with a trencher dealer before investing in a machine has benefits that last long after the purchase.

"Most manufactures have complete confidence in their dealers to help customers identify the best machine for them based on their individual information," he says. "This communication gives the customer the opportunity to see the dealer's support system and to know that there will be supportive service for them after the sale. By the very nature of what a trencher is asked to do, there is going to be some wearable parts, so it's reassuring to have a dealer you can trust to back your machine

ROUGH AND TOUGH. Trenchers are often asked to do some strenuous work, so this support can come in handy should performance problems arise. The chain is usually the first part of a trencher to need some work, as it is arguably the machine's hardestworking component.

The chain is the piece of the machine that is actually doing the work of excavating the soil and pulling it out of the trench," Bolay says. "With tougher soil conditions, you have to move to a different type of tooth and chain that gives more cutting ability."

Cuptooth chains, sometimes referred to as entry-level chains, are the most common in the landscape industry and are great for working with light soils. Shark-cutter chains are another good all-purpose chains, Kuyers says, and they work particularly well in hard-packed or clay soils. Rotary chains are powerful enough to dig through hard, rocky soil. "If a contractor is in Florida and usually works with sandy soils, a cuptooth chain would be fine, but in Montana's rocky conditions, a sturdier chain should be used," Bolay says.

Despite wear and tear, like any machine, the life of a trencher can be extended with proper use and preventive maintenance.

"Depending on usage, trenchers can last from three to 15 years, and proper usage and maintenance can prolong that," Kuyers points out. Use it for what it was intended - don't use it to try to cut through a concrete parking lot.'

The specifics of preventive maintenance are usually spelled out in the owner's manual, but some commonsense tasks include changing the oil

continued on page 134



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continued from page 131

and replacing the air and oil filters every few months, and adjusting the chain, sharpening the blades and greasing the bearings before or after each use. Trenchers should be winterized by draining the fuel, repairing the filters and placing it in a dry area before being stored away for winter.

"If the machine's joints are not greased regularly you'll have metal-on-metal wear and the machine will have to work harder to do the same amount of work," Bolay says. "If the chain is adjusted too

tightly it will wear out faster because it's being strained, but if it's too loose it will jump off the sprockets."

Such problems result in downtime of the machine and lost money for the contractor. This used to be a common thing for Mark Levi, owner of Levi Landscaping in Riverside, Calif., who uses his trenchers for installing irrigation systems and drain lines and digging holes for trees. Levi began using trenchers 25 years ago and has found that ones with too many mechanical parts tend to be problematic.

"The trenchers we used to use had too many moving parts which resulted in too many breakdowns," he says.

Levi invested in hydraulic powered

this preventive maintenance in house and it is absolutely required," he says.

Levi prefers using walk-behind trenchers because he finds they create less mess and less potential for damage than ride-on machines. However, he says that every contractor has a personal preference for which machine is

best for his or her company.

"Everybody has equipment that works for them," he says. "I personally prefer walk-behind trenchers, but some contractors only use riding trenchers. It just depends on what

they perceive to be better."

Taking advantage of manufacture demonstrations is a good way to test the machine before making a final decision, Levi says. "A company representative came out and demoed all of my trenchers before I purchased them," he says. "I found that very helpful when choosing the right machine for me."

"Depending on usage, trenchers can last from three to 15 years. Use a trencher for what it was intended – don't use it to try to cut through a concrete parking lot." – Jon Kuyers

trenchers and discovered that fewer

moving parts mean less maintenance

and repairs. "The hydraulic machines

move slower, but they break down less

often," he says. "From a productivity

standpoint, I'd say it was a trade-off."

Levi requires his crew to change the

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ere today, gone tomorrow is the philosophy associated with many of today's technological tools. Computers become obsolete in a year's time and cellular phones that can perform new, often unbelievable, functions are available everyday. Cars that can't tell you where to go are old news, and people are replacing standard TVs with ones that can hang on the wall.

However, if it ain't broke, don't fix it seems to be the mentality most commonly associated with irrigation systems. Despite the new advancements available, irrigation system upgrades are often last on many technological "to do" lists. "It can be a process their irrigation systems," says Mark D'Alonzo, vice president of

to get people to upgrade their irrigation systems," says Mark D'Alonzo, vice president of Cow Bay Sprinkler Co., Port Washington, N.Y. "They've had it in the ground for so long and it seems to have been working fine in their eyes."

by emily mullins | assistant editor

What makes a rotor a Hunter rotor?





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But the truth is, most irrigation systems installed 15 or 20 years ago use too much water inefficiently. By upgrading to a newer system, less water can irrigate plants and turf more effectively in less time, saving homeowners money on their monthly water bills and saving irrigation contractors time from having to repair

out-of-date irrigation systems.

Not only do technological advancements in irrigation systems make an upgrade a money-saving investment, the recent emphasis on water conservation may soon make it a mandatory one. The service can not only be profitable for irrigation contractors, but it's also beneficial environmentally. "We suggest upgrades to irrigate more efficiently, as well as to save the homeowner money on water usage and benefit plant material," D'Alonzo says. "It's not always an easy sell, but once clients are informed, they tend to open up their minds to it and see the benefits."

SOMETHING OLD. SOMETHING

NEW. Many of the irrigation systems D'Alonzo encounters that are in dire need of an upgrade were installed 15 or 20 years ago, he says. These systems were basically installed to replace the hassle of a manual sprinkler. "The way older systems were installed wasn't focused on just watering the plant material and the lawn, it watered everything - the front walk, the house, you name it," he says. "Now that the industry is so focused on water conservation, we don't want water everywhere. To upgrade, we usually have to go back and redesign most of the system.'

Doug Heller, owner of Northwest Iowa Sprinkler, Milford, Iowa, says the decision to upgrade also can depend on whether or not the system's pieces and parts are still manufactured. "Sometimes we have to upgrade the system because the equipment is outdated and no longer produced," he says. "If the homeowner wants to change their landscape, we have to change their irrigation system using available components."

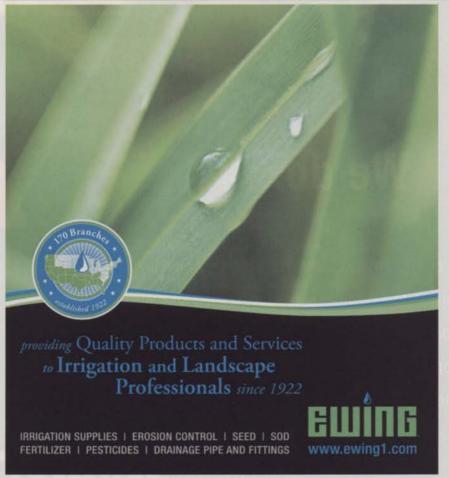
Another common reason for an upgrade is that the landscape has simply outgrown the irrigation system that was initially installed, says Bill Knight, owner of Knight-Scapes, Yorktown, Va. As bushes and trees become bigger or beds are added, more irrigation zones may be needed to sustain the growing landscape. "In some cases people have to add additional zones because of different or changing landscapes," he says. "This can also result in the upgrade to a controller that has the capacity to handle more stations."

Still another common reason for a system upgrade is because the first system was poorly designed or poorly installed. "In some cases we know a system needs upgraded as soon as we turn it on," Knight says. Some clues are pipes located too close to the surface, improper head placement resulting in inadequate watering and a lack of check valves.

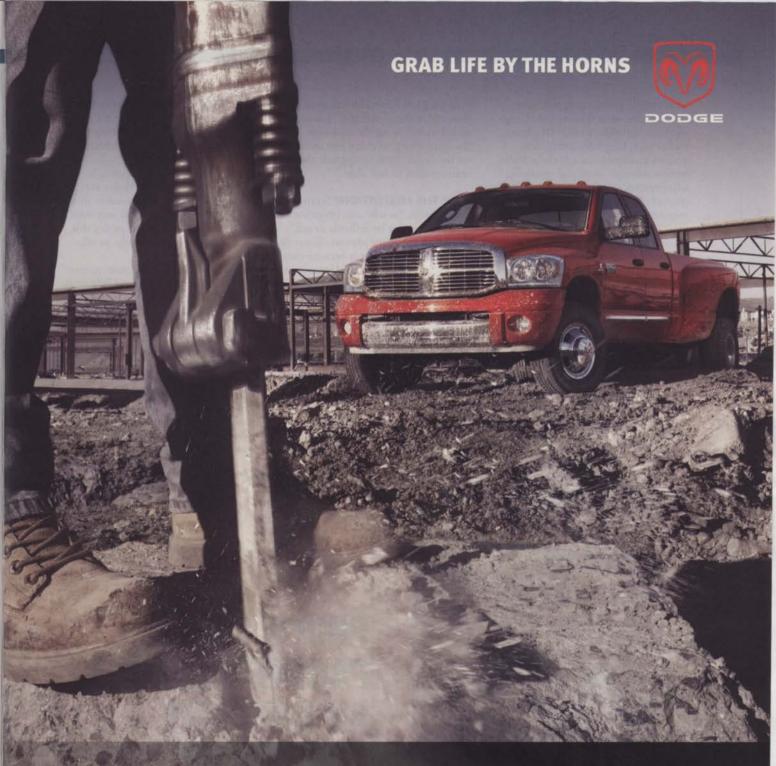
An irrigation system upgrade can







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be as simple as changing to a new style of head or as involved as changing from sprinkler to drip irrigation, Heller says. Upgrades differ from general maintenance, which includes system startups, head and controller adjustments, nozzle cleanings and general checkups. Most irrigation companies offer winterization in their maintenance packages as well. "Generally, maintenance is servicing the existing system and its parts, and upgrading entails replacing all or part of a system with components that work better," Heller explains.

There are certain signs irrigation contractors can watch for that indicate an upgrade on a client's system is in order. Dry or soggy patches of plant material and failure of parts on a consistent basis are a few, D'Alonzo says, adding that he likes to take a proactive approach by stressing an upgrade after he's received two to three service calls for problems like broken heads. "Heads are usually the first

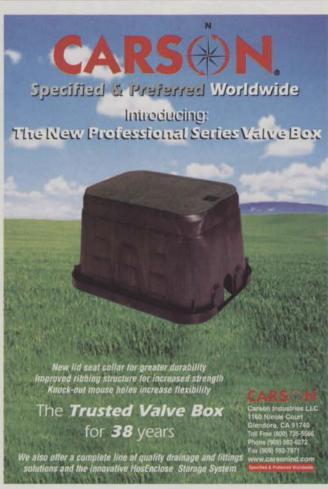
parts to go, followed by valves and then controllers," he says. "Instead of nickel-and-diming the customer by changing one part every few months, we try to get them to upgrade the entire system in one shot."

WHY THE HESITATION? Sounds easy enough. So why can irrigation system upgrades be difficult to sell? One of the primary reasons clients decline system upgrades is because they don't see a need for it, D'Alonzo says. "Your clients don't go to trade shows or read up on the newest irrigation trends," he says. "They're happy with what they have and aren't aware of the reasons why they should improve it." Along these lines, many times people aren't comfortable with change. With upgrades like drip irrigation, which takes place underground, people can't visually see the system working like they could when water was everywhere. "I've found that people like to see the water spraying because

that's what it takes for them to know it's working," he says. "It's hard for them to reach that same comfort level without seeing it working, because, in their mind, it's not."

Another common response is "We'll do it next year," Heller says. "Clients often try to rationalize that the summer is already half-way over, or it hasn't been very hot or dry this year or it's been rainy lately, so why bother."

To avoid this back-burner mentality, D'Alonzo says June and July are the best months to do irrigation system upgrades, which also serve as a way to fill time after the busy spring startup and new install rush and before winterizations begin. "We do our startups from April to May," he says. "Doing upgrades during that down period from June to July is a good way to bring in extra revenue. Any later than that and people begin thinking that summer is basically over so they'll just do it next year."



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SALE AWAY. Heller sells most of his upgrades to his existing customers who come to him and ask for them after being introduced to the idea by his technicians during routine maintenance visits or by reading the company's informational brochures. The real selling point is the money they will save on their water bills, which can be as much as 50 percent, he says. "After a client shows interest, I go out and physically inspect their property. During this visit, I explain to them the reasons for water restrictions and also discuss the rising price of water," he says. "I show them an estimate of their savings and they see that the system will really pay for itself in nine or 10 months."

D'Alonzo agrees that irrigation upgrades can be a great add-on service and that an existing customer base is the best place to market the service, as new clients get up-to-date systems installed rather than old ones revamped.



Market irrigation upgrade services to your existing customer base, suggest contractors who have been successful at adding the service. Photo: Rain Bird



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Both companies distribute general information about efficient irrigation in the form of fliers, newsletters and pamphlets at the same time they send out start-up reminders and maintenance notices. Winter and early spring is the best time to do this, Heller says, because it gets people thinking about the summer months ahead.

Both men also encourage their technicians to establish dialogues and relationships with their clients during routine visits to create a level of trust. "We begin an upgrade sale with the technician informing the client that there are ways we can improve their existing system, such as by installing drip irrigation," D'Alonzo says. "They prime the pump and then report to me which clients seem interested.'

After a client expresses interest, D'Alonzo figures up an estimate and pays a visit to the client to "tie together the meeting" with the technician. "I think this involvement shows my clients that I'm not just a

guy servicing sprinklers, but that I'm involved in the industry and knowledgeable about cutting-edge technology," he says. D'Alonzo sees an annual success rate of about 50 percent of his clientele who invest in an upgrade.

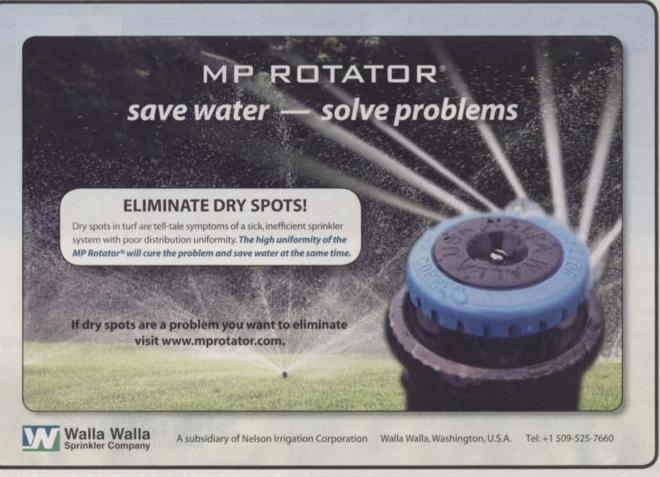
Heller spends anywhere from \$1,000 to \$2,000 on marketing costs each year and says it varies based on how many customers he has to send information to. He designs the fliers and sends them to a printing company for production. "Printing and mailing costs can add up pretty fast," he says. "But if you do it right, you can pay yourself back 20 times over."

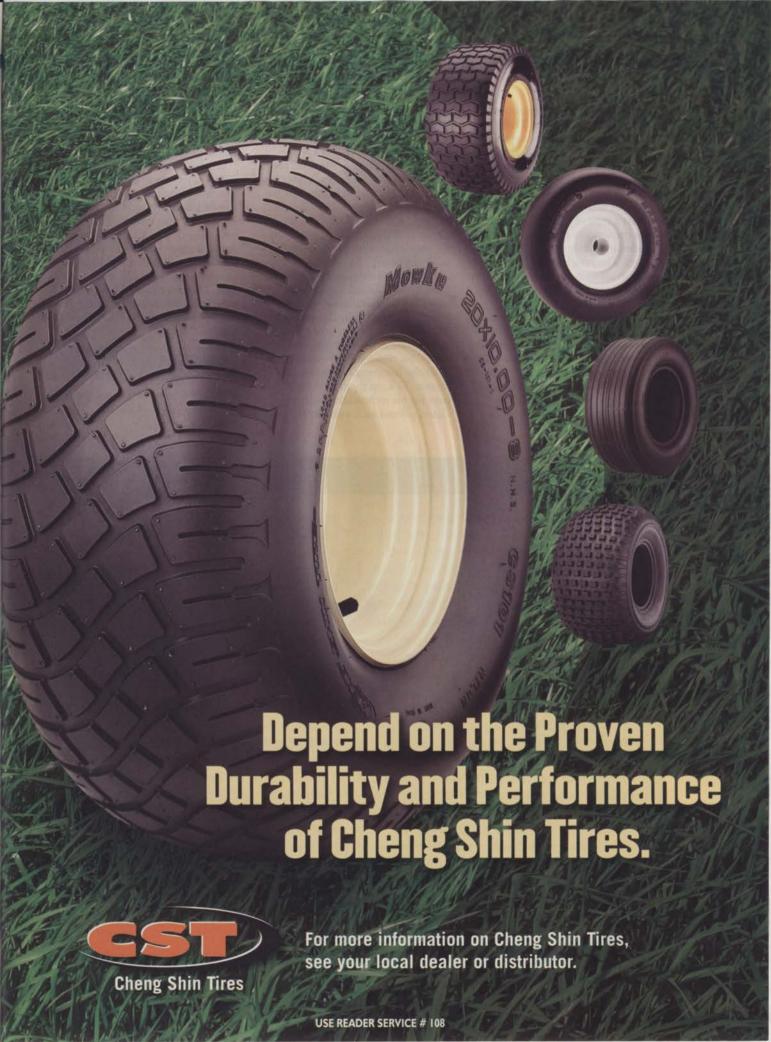
Knight doesn't do any advertising and gets all of his business from customer referrals, he says. As an incentive for his customers to refer his company to their friends and family, Knight offers a refund of 50 percent of the price of their maintenance contract, which amounts to \$65 to \$125 depending on how big their system is. "Our clients see that as a great dinner

out or a really good bottle of wine," Knight says. "Our referral system works out very well for us.'

PERSONAL PRICING. Because each upgrade is different depending on the condition of the irrigation system, pricing the service can be difficult, D'Alonzo says. "We charge on a percall, per-house basis," he says. "The needs of each system will be different so we can't really work it into a regular maintenance plan; rather, we have to tailor each upgrade specifically to the client." An average upgrade of a mist system to a drip system costs between \$850 and \$1,000, he says.

Heller also prices his upgrade services on an individual basis. He goes out and inspects each property to see what exactly will be necessary to get the landscape in healthy condition and considers the number of heads, property size, number and type of controllers and the number of zones. The cost of an average residential





upgrade of new heads, controllers and valves can range from \$1,500 to \$2,000, he says. "When it comes to upgrades, each client is different," he explains. "We first have to physically see the property and take note of dry spots and things like that."

Knight usually considers an upgrade a type of maintenance and prices the services similarly, which includes an hourly rate plus the cost of parts. The hourly rate for Knight's two-man crews consists of \$65 for the crew leader and \$25 for a technician, or roughly \$100 an hour. Rotary heads can cost from \$12 to \$15 each and spray heads can cost from \$4 to \$5 each, depending on where they are purchased. Because most of the plastic parts are oil-based products, the cost of the service can increase as the price of oil increases, Knight says. "We don't add a gas surcharge onto our

services, so we make a little profit off of the cost of parts," he explains.

GETTING IT DONE. An average irrigation system upgrade takes about half a day, Heller says, and either his installation or maintenance crew has the skills necessary to do each job. "The guys on the install crew do this day in and day out, so they take on the major upgrades like replacements of all the heads," he says.

D'Alonzo's company has a regular account with a local bank that requested the installation of a drip irrigation system. His technicians were then required to learn how to install and operate drip irrigation, which means his two-man crew can service all of the company's irrigation accounts. To keep them fresh, D'Alonzo pays for his technicians to attend classes offered each year through the

Irrigation Association and irrigation manufacturers. The classes are offered in both English and Spanish to benefit all of his employees.

Although there's a little legwork involved to inform customers of the benefits, irrigation system upgrades can be a beneficial add-on service in more ways than one. Utilizing the new irrigation products available is just one more way to stay up on the latest technology. "The older systems out there are practically from the stone age," D'Alonzo says. "It's all about customer education and taking the time to explain to the client all of their options."

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What is your take on irrigation upgrades? Share your thoughts on the message board.

additional add-ons

rrigation contractors are taking advantage of technological advancements to offer their clients add-on services that are useful – and profitable. One such service is drip irrigation in potted plants. Mark D'Alonzo, owner of Cow Bay Sprinkler Co., Port Washington, N.Y., began offering the service this spring start-up season and is optimistic about client response. "You can't get to potted plants with a regular irrigation system," he says. "This service intends to eliminate the need for watering cans and hoses and give people one less thing to do."

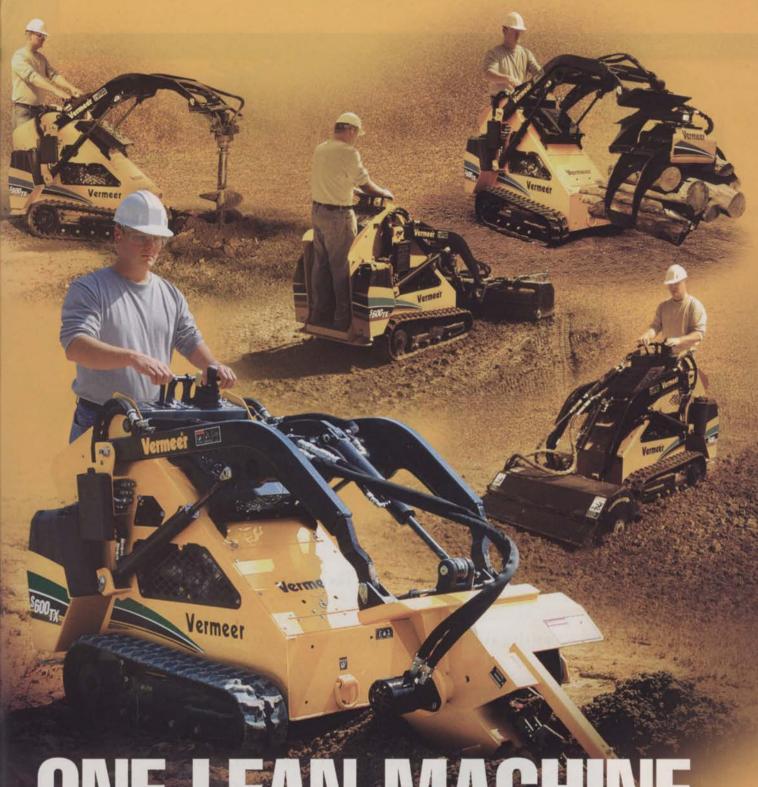
The key to offering new services is to not expect clients to break the bank in order to get it, D'Alonzo says. "You have to keep the prices of services reasonable so people won't be turned off by it." he says. He plans to offer his potted plant irrigation service for around \$300 or \$400 a year.

Remote-controlled irrigation is another recent advancement contractors can offer that can give them the ability to manage a client's irrigation system off-site. "With this, you can pull up Mr. and Mrs. Smith's account on your computer and see how much water their lawn received yesterday," D'Alonzo says. "This is where the

industry is heading, but I don't feel my technicians and I are familiar enough with it to offer it just yet."

Adding a weather station is another upgrade that is relatively easy to push because they are relatively affordable, D'Alonzo says. These devices use the weather to determine when and for how long an irrigation system will run and can save significant amounts of water by not running when it is raining or very windy. D'Alonzo began offering weather station upgrades last year for about \$500 each.

The smart controller is another advancement available for irrigation contractors to offer. Like weather stations, these units irrigate a lawn based on the weather and automatically update themselves as the weather changes. "I am working on selling smart controllers right now," says Doug Heller, owner of Northwest Iowa Sprinkler, Milford, Iowa. "They can be hard to sell because of their price of up to a few thousand dollars each," he says. "But they are relatively easy for the homeowner to use and they save significant amounts of water, which are factors I stress to my customers."



ONE LEAN MACHINE.

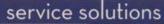
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pricing scenarios can help you do this correctly.

5

now removal, sanding and/or salting work can be profitable – just don't depend on the weather. If you don't have a well-thought-out business plan and accurate pricing that minimizes risk while optimizing chances for increased profitability regardless of the weather, the biggest snow job you may face is a diluted profit and loss (P&L) statement that gives you a false sense of security.

THE SCENARIO. John owns a full-service landscape company. He wants to reevaluate his pricing structure for his winter snow removal and sanding work. The market for winter work is competitive. The going rate for sanding is \$100 per cubic yard and \$75 per hour for snow plowing with a 1-ton truck. However, John isn't sure the \$75-per-hour rate covers his crew's drive time and 30 minutes of prep time before and after each storm. John has five drivers who plow snow. Three of the drivers also spread sand.

John's crews will be paid an average of 10 hours per storm. Eight hours will be spent on site, plowing or sanding. The other two hours will include drive time from job to job and a minimal amount of prep time at the yard before and after each storm. The typical winter will have 10 storms, and three drivers will spend approximately five hours sanding per storm.

by jim huston | contributing writer



Photo: Boss

The average driver will be paid \$15 per hour and will put in approximately 100 hours sanding and/or plowing. Sand mixed with salt costs \$25 per cubic yard. Sales tax is 6 percent on materials. A driver can spread roughly 2 cubic yards of sand mix per hour, including load time, using a 1-ton truck. Labor burden is 25 percent. The overtime factor is zero.

The owner wants a risk factor of 20 percent included in the labor rate to offset any error in the average drive time estimated for the two scenarios and a minimum net profit of 20 percent on all winter work. G&A overhead costs for the year are \$100,000. Billable field labor hours during the regular season total 10,000. Dividing the G&A overhead amount by the billable hours produces an overhead per hour (OPH) cost of \$10. Even though all G&A overhead for the year is theoretically covered during the regular season, John wants to add \$10 OPH to each hour of winter work.

He also wants to calculate a minimum curb-time rate for snow plowing and a per-cubic-yard rate for sanding. Most importantly, he wants to know if he can make any money at current market rates and how much winter work contributes toward his G&A overhead costs.

To price his winter work, John prepares a bid scenario for a typical storm for both plowing and sanding/salting.

PRICING SNOW REMOVAL WORK. John breaks the bidding process for snow removal work into three phases (see Chart No. 1 on page 150). The first phase contains the labor and equipment costs when the driver is on site plowing. The second phase contains the hookup and drive time for the truck and driver when both are not on site plowing. The total should equal the total of paid hours for a driver for the day. The third phase includes the margins and markups for the bid.

Phase I – Providing the Service. John increases the driver's labor rate of \$15 by the 20-percent risk factor to get a rate of \$18. He then multiplies that by the eight hours of Phase 1 plowing time and enters it on his bid worksheet.

John's 1-ton truck costs him \$7 per hour to operate. He doubles this amount to cover the extra wear and tear winter work may cause. John then calculates his plow cost per hour (CPH) by dividing the purchase and lifetime maintenance costs (\$4,000 plus 1,000 equals \$5,000) by the projected lifetime billable hours for a plow (eight seasons times 80 billable hours per season equals 640 hours). He rounds the 640 to 650 and divides projected lifetime costs by this (\$5,000 divided by 650 hours equals \$7.69), which he rounds up to an \$8 CPH. John then adds the doubled truck CPH to the plow CPH and multiplies this total by the Phase 1 equipment hours (eight hours times \$22 equals \$176). He enters the total on the bid worksheet.

Phase 2 – General Conditions. John calculates general conditions just as he did Phase 1 costs, but he doesn't include the cost of the plow in the equipment calculations because it's not being used or incurring wear and tear during general condition time.

Phase 3 – Margins and Markups. John multiplies his labor cost in Phases 1 and 2 by the 25-percent labor burden amount and enters it onto the bid worksheet. He multiplies the 10 labor hours in Phases 1 and 2 by the OPH of \$10 to determine how much G&A overhead to add to the bid worksheet. He then totals all of these figures to determine the break-even point (BEP). Finally, John adds his desired 20-percent net profit margin to the BEP.

Analysis. On average, John must bill \$661 in a 10-hour period of snow removal to cover all costs and make a 20-percent net profit margin. G&A overhead recovery accounts for 15.1 percent of the total. Adding these two produces a gross profit margin of 35.1

Chart No. 1 - Snow Plowing Pricing Sheet

Scenario cost data		\$ or %	Remarks				
Crew size (# people)		1.0	Driver				
Crew average wage (C	(WA:	\$15.00					
Overtime factor (OTF)		0.0%	None				
Risk factor (RF)		20.0%					
Crew average wage w	OTF & RF	\$18.00					
Labor burden		25.0%					
Sales tax		6.0%					
G&A overhead per hou	ur (ORH)	\$10.00					
Net profit margin		20.0%					
One ton truck		\$14.00					
Curb-time man-hours	mar day	8.0					
Number of units	her nay	1.0	Typical day o	Fatanian .			
ryumber or units		3.0	(Abirra) gray o	a picking			
Scenario	Material	s Labor		Equipment			
I. Production (on-sit	e or curb-tin	ne costs)			CPH	Hours	Item
	5-	8.0 Ma	in-hours	\$ 176.00	\$ 20.00	8.0	One for truck with plow
	\$			\$	5-	0.0	
	\$	\$ 18.00		\$	3	0.0	
	\$	\$144.00		\$ 176.00			
II. General condition	ns (off-site or				Town town		125 / D D D D D D D
		2.0 Man	hours	\$ 28.00	\$14.00		One fon truck without plo
		0.0		\$	\$	0.0	
	\$-	\$ 18.00		\$	\$	0.0	
	S-	\$36.00		\$ 28.00			
Subtotals	\$-	\$ 180		\$ 204			
III. Margins & marks	ips						
A.Sales tax	\$						
B.Labor burde	en.	\$ 45					
Subtotals	\$-	\$ 225		\$ 204			
Total direct cost	s (TDC)	3.1450		17. 37.		\$429	TDC
C. G&A overhead cost						100000	377
		n-hours x OPH		\$ 10.00	-	\$100	
BEP (TDC +				(4.70/00)		\$529	BEP
D. Contingency factor		cauj			3.	2000	or.
E. Net profit margin	20.00%				197	\$132	
F. Total price	20,000				\$661		ue goal per storm
r. total price					3001	reven	ide goar per storm
IV. Scenario analysi	s						
A. Unit price		# units)					
\$661			1 =		\$661.25	Revenu	e goal per storm
		al price + all ho	nurs)				
\$661			10.0 =		\$66.13	SPH or	RPH
		A overhead + N		istal price)			
				Electric Property	35 100	GPM	
\$ 230	2 divided by	1	\$661 =		35.1%	GPM	

percent. To determine the hourly curbtime rate, John divides the desired total billable amount per day by the projected number of curb-time hours (\$661 divided by eight equals \$82.63).

Dividing the total direct costs of \$429 per day by the eight curb-time hours produces the direct costs per hour amount (\$429 divided by eight equals \$53.63). The BEP per hour is calculated by dividing the BEP total of \$529 by the eight curb-time hours (equals \$66.13). In other words, for John to cover all of his direct costs, he must bill at least \$53.63 per curb-time hour. Any amount billed above \$53.63 goes toward gross profit.

Snow Removal Conclusion.

John can't match the market rate of
\$75 per curb hour while maintaining

both a 20-percent net product margin and two hours of non-billable general condition labor time per day. However, reducing general condition labor time to one hour (if possible) per day drops John's rate to \$73.44 (\$661 divided by nine on-site or curb-time hours) while maintaining his goal of a 20-percent net profit margin.

Reducing net profit to 10 percent produces a rate of \$73.50 (\$588 divided by eight equals \$73.50) without reducing general condition time. Reducing both net profit margin and general condition time to 10 percent and one hour, respectively, would allow John to drop his price to \$65.33 (\$588 divided by nine equals \$65.33) if market conditions dictated.

John has one other option. He

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1.800.438.8892 Fax: 1.800.438.8894 www.sheffieldfinancial.com could possibly reduce his non-billable drive time to one hour if he could add five to 10 minutes of drive time to the bills for each of his customers if he's billing on an hourly basis. Of course, customers should be aware of this practice prior to receiving their bills.

There are two important things for John to note from this exercise. The first is the impact non-billable time has on hourly curb-time rates. The second is that any billable amounts above direct costs contribute directly to the bottom line of the company at the end of the year. Therefore, it's important for John to focus on his direct costs per day and per billable hour. These two numbers will provide him with easily targeted minimum billable amounts, ensuring that he covers all of his direct costs, no matter what the scenario.

PRICING SANDING/SALTING. John prices out his sanding work as outlined on Chart 2 (below). The sander cost per hour is \$13. With a 20-percent net profit margin on top of all his

costs, John must bill a minimum of \$621 per driver per storm. This translates into a unit price of \$77.58 per cubic yard, within the market price of \$100 per cubic yard.

A more accurate GPM for sanding work at the market rate of \$100 per cubic yard is 44.1 percent ([\$800 minus \$447 TDC] divided by \$800 equals 44.1 percent). John could improve his GPM by increasing his production above his benchmark of 2 cubic yards per curb-time hour. Decreasing the general condition hours through better scheduling and/or more efficient loading would also increase the overall GPM on sanding work.

John could also increase his GPM by charging a minimum 1-cubic-yard amount (e.g. \$100) for sanding on smaller jobs requiring less than 1 cubic yard of sand. By doing so and by "stacking" these jobs back to back, John could bill up to \$200 to \$300 per curb-time hour. The GPM on this type of work could surpass the 44.1 percent figure by another 10 to 20 percent.

Sanding/Salting Conclusion.

The key is for John to bill a minimum of \$200 per curb-time hour (when drivers are sanding) and a minimum of \$800 per storm per driver. Meeting these criteria ensures they make money.

To answer John's initial questions, his winter work is profitable, sanding being at the top of the list. But John must keep in mind that with winter work the market sets the prices. He has to be able to play the market's game and win. He must understand his numbers and how drive time and prep time, as well as scheduling and establishing minimum prices and targeted minimum hourly and daily billable dollar amounts, can affect his profitability.

John's question regarding the winter work contribution to G&A overhead costs can also be answered. Included in John's winter prices is \$10 for each labor hour drivers are paid. The total hours paid to drivers is 500 (five drivers times 10 storms times 10 hours per storm). We obtain the amount of G&A overhead costs included in the winter billings by multiplying the 500 hours by the \$10 OPH equals \$5,000. Winter work contributes \$5,000 toward G&A overhead costs.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.

P&L Statement. In order for John to monitor the profitability of winter work, the company P&L statement should identify the sales and direct costs for both snow removal and sanding. Preferably, winter work should be its own division with its own P&L statement. This helps identify its GPM.

Company P&L statements become diluted if winter work isn't separated from work performed during the regular season. Because winter work can often realize a GPM of 50 to 60 percent, it will distort figures and profit margins for other divisions. Once any type of work comprises more than 20 percent of total company sales, it's wise to separate it from other work by means of its own P&L statement.

Contracts – Residential. Residential plowing is usually done on a per-push basis. The best way to ensure you're pricing correctly and making money is to prepare a scenario analysis using your costs and production numbers. Be sure to include the net profit you desire. After each storm, you should enter your actual costs, hours and revenue into the scenario format to see how much money you made.

Chart No. 2 - Sanding or Salting Pricing Sheet

Scenario cost data	\$ or	A Participant				
Crew size (# people)		.0 Driver				
Crew average wage (CA						
Overtime factor (OTF)	0.0	None None				
Risk factor (RF)	20.0	96				
Crew average wage w/5	OTF & RF \$18.0	00				
Labor burden	25.0	No.				
Sales tax	6.0	Sh.				
G&A overhead per hour	IOPHI \$10.	00				
Net profit margin	20.0					
One ton truck	\$14.0	00				
Curb-time man-hours p						
Number of units		Cubic Yards				
Scenario	Materials	Labor	Equipment			
I. Production (on-site	or curb-time costs)		CONTRACTOR OF THE PARTY OF THE	CPH	Hours	Item
8.0 Sand Mix CY	\$200.00	4.0 Man-bours	\$ 108.00	\$27.00	4.0	One ton truck with sander
\$25 per CY	\$		3	\$	0.0	
	4	\$18.00	5	5	0.0	
	\$200.00	\$72.00	\$ 108.00	- N		
	1012727 (01)	2.2				
II. General conditions	(off-site or non-curb-t	ime costs)	\$14.00	\$14.00	1.0	One ton truck without sander
		0.0		\$ 14.00	0.0	One for truck without sande
			\$.	3 -		
	1	\$18.00	\$14.00	3	0.0	
	* -	. #150991	.811000			
Subtotals	\$ 200	\$ 90	\$ 122			
III. Margins & markup	08					
A. Sales tax	\$12					
B. Labor burde	n	5.23				
Subtotals	\$ 212	\$113	\$ 122			
Total direct costs					\$447	TDC
C. G&A overhe	ALC: UNIVERSITY OF THE PARTY OF				7377	
	mber of man-hours x OP	HI	\$ 10.00	-	\$ 50	
	G&A overhead)		- F. 19009.		\$497	BEP
	y factor (if desired)				1	(C)
E. Net profit m					\$124	
F. Total price	angles animose				\$521	Revenue goal per storm
F. Total price					3021	rtevenue goai per storm
IV. Scenario analysis						
	ste (Total price + Curb tir	me hours)				
5 621	divided by	4.0 =		\$155.16	Curb-ti	me rate
B. Unit price p	er cubic yard (Total price	+ units)				
\$ 621	divided by	8.0 =		\$77.58	TDC re	
C Gross worth	margin (IG&A overhead -	Not really a Total	(majorial)		300.	
		\$.621 =	Princes	28.1%	COL	



Contracts - Commercial.

Commercial plowing and sanding is quite another story. One contractor billed his commercial accounts strictly on a per-push basis. The other had a fixed monthly billing amount for the four months of December through March. The total of the monthly billings covered a fiveyear average for the amount of inches of snowfall for the winter. Anything over the average was billed out on a time and materials basis at the end of April. To make this type of contract more appealing, the contractor would plow up to 10 inches above the average at no charge. I call this a fixed/variable or "flex" contract.

In the mid-1990s, the East Coast went through a five-year period of record snowfall, followed by a year of almost no snow at all, and then another record year. The contractor with the flex contracts was happy. His revenue reflected the change in snowfall from year to year. Most

importantly, he covered his costs during the year when there was almost no snow at all. His clients were also happy because they had set budget numbers to deal with. While they didn't like the extra billing in the record snowfall year, they did get a price break.

The contractor on a strictly per-push basis couldn't win. One year he'd have minimal revenue, which didn't even cover his costs to have the equipment and labor standing by. He wasn't happy, but his clients were. The following year he had record revenue amounts. He was happy, but his clients weren't.

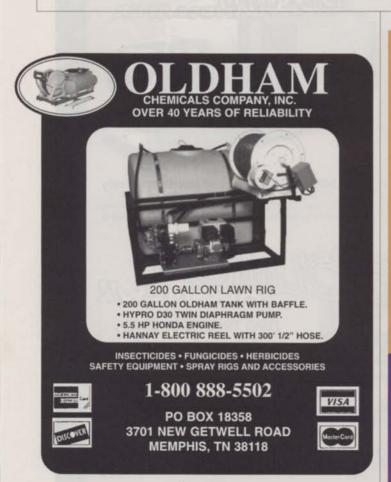
At the end of one of the record snowfall years, he charged one of his "best" clients \$80,000 for one storm at the end of March. The client had already been charged for more than his budget allowed. The \$80,000 bill, while legitimate according to the per-push contract, was the straw that broke the camel's back. The client only paid \$40,000 and told the contractor to sue if he wanted more. No one was

happy at the end of that season.

Winter work can be profitable, but it can cause a lot of trouble if you don't manage both your risk and your client's risk properly. Setting revenue goals for snow events and job costing each storm afterward will help ensure that you're not the one getting snowed. III

EDITOR'S NOTE: The costs used in our scenarios are for illustration purposes only. Your costs will vary. Build your typical one-day scenario. If your costing structure is accurate, the rates you calculate should be close to your current ones and to those general seen in your market.

The author is president of J.R. Huston Enterprises, a Denver, Colo.-based consulting firm. Reach him at 800-451-5588, jhuston@jrhuston.biz or via www.jrhuston.biz. You can buy his book, "How to Price Landscape & Irrigation Projects," in hard cover or audio versions for \$150 each at www. lawnandlandscape.com/store.



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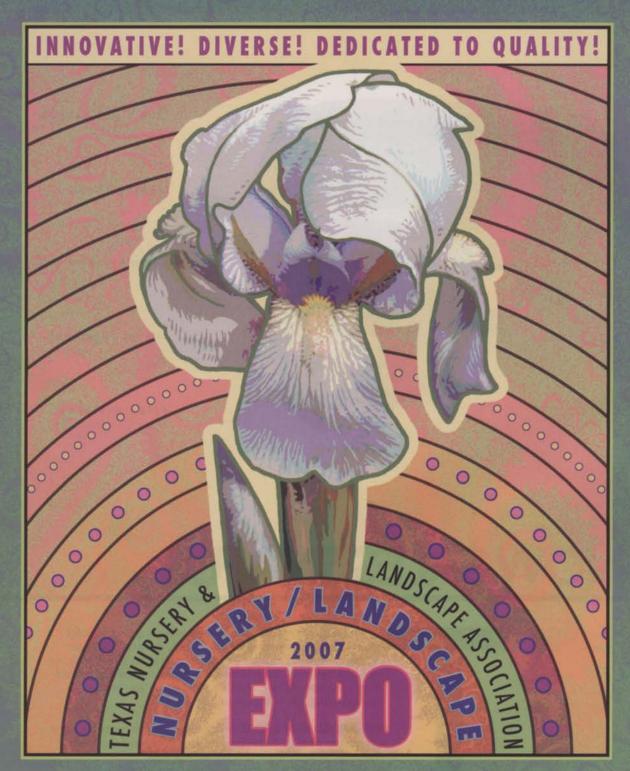


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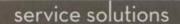


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Don't get caught

making these

common snow and

ice management

sales mistakes.

SNOW SALES SNAFUS

he sales season for snow removal work can get quite hectic for contractors. New clients are being wooed. Existing clients are getting re-signed. Deals are getting done. It's easy to overlook the avoidable mistakes that can hit a snow contractor where it hurts most – the bottom line. Here are some tips as you prepare for the upcoming 2007-08 snow selling season.

MISGUIDED SALES FORCE. Before clients sign contracts, snow contractors need to determine just what portion of the market they hope to serve in the coming snow season.

For example, maybe your particular snow operation is best equipped to handle small- to medium-sized retail parking lots, but not the local Wal-Mart. Or, you'll stand to make a bigger profit bidding on a contract for the local community college rather than wasting your time and resources plowing a

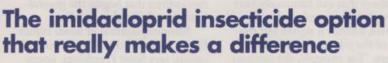
condo community's small parking lot.

Often a sales person will want to go out and sign everyone and every job they can for the coming winter. And they can't be blamed for their actions, because that's what a sales force does. However, a snow contractor needs to educate them on the operation's strengths and

hotos: Be

by mike zawacki | managing editor

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weaknesses, as well as the type of clients they should seek, says Justin Gamester, business development manager at Piscataqua Landscaping in Eliot, Maine.

"Find those markets you're best suited for and go after them instead of dabbling into a little bit of everything," Gamester says. "Getting into a contract you're not quite sure about probably means you won't be making the profit you should in the end."

One solid method of determining which markets you best serve is to review the snow operation's performance during past winters. Which contracts were profitable? What jobs cost more time and resources to maintain than they were worth? These considerations allow a contractor to zero in on the jobs his operations and capabilities can best exploit.

THE OVER PROMISE. Every snow contractor is aware of the dog-eat-dog nature of the industry. Likewise, the sales force will want to move fast to secure a contract. To facilitate a client signing on your dotted line and not a competitor's, assurances and services are offered that may prove to be undeliverable or not feasible for the snow contractor when winter arrives.

The tried and true mantra of the snow industry is to not push someone's snow for free. Overselling drastically cuts into profits and is not a sound method of acquiring new business, most snow contractors warn.

"Often salesmen go out and sell a client by saying they can do this or that without checking with operations first," says Roger Nair, president of NLCI Land Management based in Brunswick, Ohio "Or they'll quote a client costs before considering all the information for the job. In the end, you end up losing money."

Contractors suggest briefing sales people on what is allowed as a sales incentive. Any new approaches to pricing, additional services or altering established snow removal policies should be first cleared by management before being added to a contract.

MISSING DETAILS. Sometimes a client will provide his property's unique specifications, but will not include every detail a contractor requires to fulfill the contract. It's important for sales to ask questions about jobsite specifics prior to sealing the deal. It's those details a contractor doesn't

more sales mistakes

Your snow and ice removal business cannot survive for long with continued mistakes made by your sales force. Knowing where to look for mistakes and how to quickly fix them goes a long way to ensuring that not only will your clients re-sign for another contract, but you're turning a profit as well. The National Federation of Independent Businesses suggests a few common sales mistakes and how they can be avoided.

Lack of Preparation. Does your sales staff know enough to sell your service? Have one sales person try to sell your snow service to another sales person who is playing the role of a property manager.

Boring Presentation. Generic sales presentations don't result in contracts. Customize the sales pitch for each client.

No Follow-up. Often sales is so consumed with adding clients they don't make time to service the needs of their existing customers. Call clients after a big snow or ice storm to gauge their satisfaction.

The Wrong People. Are there members of your sales staff who are just terrible at sales? One of the biggest mistakes a sales contractor can make is tolerating an unproductive sales team. Cut the fat and keep your team lean and productive.

know about that can financially hurt the company at winter's end.

"Often a client is signed but the details of the job are thin or sparse," Nair says. "For example, the contract just says "deicer" but it doesn't specify whether that's calcium chloride or rock salt. The difference may not make a job as efficient or profitable."

Snow contractors should establish check lists for their sales people to review with each client before a contract is signed. This list should cull specific data that can impact pricing, reveal the amount of deicing materials needed for the job, as well as the specifics on the scope of the service expected by the client.

POOR RELATIONSHIPS. Most snow contractors admit poor communications is often the culprit of sales snafus. Good communication stems from solid relationships between the snow contractors and clients. The sales force is often the first delegate between the

two entities that begins the groundwork for relationship building.

Misinterpretation of needs comes from a lack of face-to-face communication, says Scott Hutchings, operations manager for Grant and Power Landscaping in West Chicago, Ill.

"This doesn't come from the first phone call or the first meeting," Hutchings says. "Eventually you build on that and you get to the point where you can ask the questions and voice your concerns to the client.

"Assuming anything without asking all the questions is the wrong way to do business," he adds. "Sales needs to get everything straight before jumping into a contract feet first."

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 of a straight-blade plow
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 position to reduce spillover and utilizes the entire blade width for higher-capacity windrowing
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- Intended for ¾-ton and super-duty trucks
- Stainless-steel, corrosion-free moldboard, which includes an installed molded poly deflector
- 70-degree attack angle for scraping, rolling and throwing action
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- · Heavy-duty covered power unit
- Quick mount system
- HD series, for use on ½-ton and ¾-ton trucks, available in 7-foot and 7.5-foot widths
- Buyers Products 800/841-8003, www.buyersproducts.com

Circle 204 on reader service card

Fisher XLS Snowplow

- Expands from an 8-foot retracted straight-blade to a 10-foot expanded plow to a scoop width of nearly 9 feet
- Will fully angle while in the scoop position to maximize plow handling and capacity
- Ideal for carrying large quantities of snow or plowing around corners, congested parking lots, street curbs and sidewalks
- For windrowing, the leading wing can angle forward to corral snow into the moldboard, eliminating spill-off
- Fisher's Minute Mount 2 attachment system is standard
- Features a trip-edge design which maintains the load when an obstacle is encountered
- Fisher Engineering 207/701-4200, www.fisherplows.com

Circle 205 on reader service card







Hiniker Scoop Snowplow

- Concave shape provides greater capacity, less spillage and faster plowing
- · 20-degree fixed-angle outer ends help the plow capture snow
- · Available in 8- and 9-foot lengths
- Features a high-impact polyethylene moldboard that creates a low-friction, corrosion-free plowing surface
- 3-section trip-edge with a 9-inch pivot point provides protection from curbs and parking barriers
- Hiniker Co. 507/625-6621, www.hiniker.com

Circle 206 on reader service card





Honda HS1132

- Walk-behind, commercial-grade, track-driven snow blower
- Capable of clearing a 32-inch swath
- Can move 71.7 tons per hour at a discharge distance as far as 56 feet
- Available in easy-starting manual or electric starter-equipped models
- Honda Power Equipment 800/426-7701, www.honda.com

Circle 207 on reader service card

Meyer Super-V Plow

- Available in 8.5- and 9.5-foot sizes, and at 30 inches, purported to be the tallest v-plow in the industry
- Bottom-trip design holds most of its load if an obstruction trips the plow and allows the plow to trip regardless of how the wings are configured
- · Equipped with a 70-degree attach angle
- · Provides snow-rolling performance similar to a highway plow
- · Three-year warranty includes both parts and labor, as well as a five-year structural steel warranty
- Meyer Products 216/486-1313, www.meyerproducts.com

Circle 208 on reader service card



Boss Super-Duty XT Snowplow

- Available in three models 8 foot, 8 foot 6 inches, and 9 foot
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- SmartHitch 2 attachment system; snowplow sight system
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- SmartShield baked-on PowerCoat paint finish with a zinc primer
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- Two-year limited warranty
- BOSS Snowplow 800/286-4155, www.bossplow.com

Circle 209 on reader service card



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Circle 212 on reader service card

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- System features an expanded impeller housing and chute base as well as a non-stick surface that minimizes snow build up
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Circle 213 on reader service card

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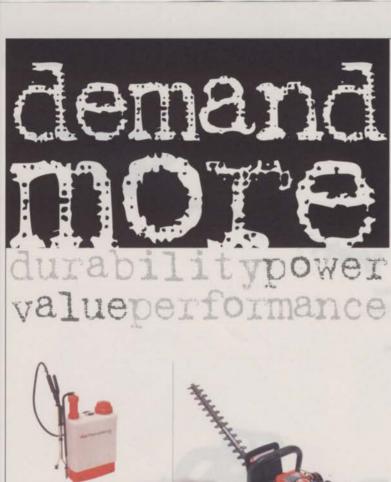
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- John Deere 309/765-8000, www.johndeere.com

Circle 220 on reader service card



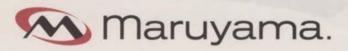












PREMIUM OUTDOOR POWER EQUIPMENT www.maruyama-us.com



DEMAND MARUYAMA

Because good enough just isn't good enough. Because extraordinary quality, proven durability and superior performance still matter. Because commitment to service and support still count. Because we build the tools of your trade, the tools you depend on, everyday. Demand Maruyama. Because anything less just isn't good enough. All commercial outdoor power equipment is not created equal.

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PREFERRED SUPPLIER OF PORTABLE OUTDOOR POWER EQUIPMENT

Metabo HS65 Hedge Trimmer

- 26 inches long
- Features improved cutting performance due to its double-sided, hardened steel blades that reciprocate in opposite directions while reducing vibration
- I-1/8-inch space between the cutters allows the trimmer to be used for both large and small jobs
- Includes a specially ground 30-degree blade angle
- Other features include safety switches and a hand guard that protects the user from scratches and prevents the hand from slipping onto the blade
- Has a maximum torque of 53 inch-pounds and operates at 3,200 strokes per minute
- Metabo 800/638-2264, www.metabousa.com

Circle 221 on reader service card

Shindaiwa 490 Chain Saw

- Features 47.9-cc displacement
- Weighs 10.2 pounds
- Powered by a 3.5-horsepower engine
- · Equipped with a durable hand guard and inertia chain brake system
- · Includes an anti-vibration system for reduced operator fatigue
- Chain-tensioning adjustment screw is located on the side of the clutch cover for easy access
- Shindaiwa 800/521-7733, www.shindaiwa.com

Circle 222 on reader service card

SOLO 656 Chain Saw

- Ideal for thinning medium-sized tree lots
- Features a narrow body, neutral center of gravity and smooth underside
- Powered by a 56-cc two-cycle engine
- Includes a Nikasil-coated cylinder wall for added protection and longer life
- Weighs 11.6 pounds
- SOLO 757/245-4228, www.solousa.com

Circle 223 on reader service card







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Due to more stringent emmission laws on commercial vehicles, the price of trucks produced after Jan. 1st, 2007 will increase \$3,000 - \$5,000

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\$36,816

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- Allows the user to safely maneuver large-balled trees with minimal effort
- Dolly will not tip
- · Tree points away from the user
- Equipped with a safety handbrake
- Can be towed with a small garden tractor
- Collapsible sides on the basket allow it to function as a stable containment device during shipping
- Wheels are easy to move and attach without tools
- Tree Handling Solutions 800/947-9763

Circle 224 on reader service card



Tanaka TPS-260PF Power Tree Pruner

- Cuts branches as thick as 8 inches in diameter
- Powered by a 25-cc, 1.3-horsepower PureFire two-stroke engine
- Comes with an Oregon 10-inch bar an chain
- Features an overall length of 7½ feet
- Includes a lifetime drive shaft warranty
- Weighs 11.4 pounds
- Tanaka 888/282-6252, www.tanaka-usa.com

Circle 225 on reader service card



Vermeer HG200 Horizontal Grinder

- Shares the same platform as the BC1000XL brush chipper
- Powered by an 85-horsepower turbocharged diesel engine
- Has a gross weight of 5,500 pounds
- · Can be towed with a 1-ton truck
- Hammermill drum can process light contaminants including nails, small gravel/stone fragments and plastics
- Produces mulch that can be used for general ground cover or landscape mulch
- Vermeer 888/837-6337, www.vermeer.com

Circle 226 on reader service card



For when you want it gone and you want it gone fast

Customer callbacks – they're a part of the business. Did you spray these weeds? Why aren't they dying? These calls take time to answer – time you don't have!

Razor Burn[™] is the new post-emergent, systemic herbicide that controls weeds quickly and easily in ornamentals, in bed maintenance, for crack and crevice treatments, brush and vine clearing and perimeter treatments. Visible results occur in 24 to 48 hours!

This unique liquid formulation is a great product for situations where mechanical efforts are not suitable or other herbicides don't provide the speedy visual results.

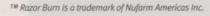
- ► The complete control of glyphosate combined with the quick burndown of diquat – visible results in as little as 24 to 48 hours
- Unique, liquid formulation is easy to pour, measure and mix and will not settle out in solution and is essentially non-volatile



- ➤ Squeeze-and-measure container ensures there is no waste and no worries about over-application that might lead to incomplete control
- Reduces applicator followup, creating more productivity and customer satisfaction



Contact a Nufarm representative or your local distributor for more information: 800-345-3330 • www.turf.us.nufarm.com



Always read and follow complete label instructions.



Home of Riverdale Brands

Diggin' It

These excavators and trenchers can help break new ground on projects.

compiled by heather wood | web editor

Bobcat LT414 Trencher Attachment



- · Features a 4- or 5-foot dig depth
- Provides an option to contractors needing a trencher with high-flow performance that doesn't require the heavy-duty capabilities of the LT405
- Hydraulic flow capability of the trencher motor will accept flow ranging from 26 to 40 gpm to accommodate loaders with auxiliary hydraulic flow up to 37 gpm
- Ideal for medium- to high-production trenching applications
- · Comes standard with hydraulic side-shift
- Bobcat 800/743-4340, www.bobcat.com

Circle 227 on reader service card



Boxer 530X



- Powered by a 30-horsepower Kohler Command Pro air-cooled gas engine and a tow-pump 3,000-psi, 14.5-gpm hydraulic system
- Can handle a 48-inch trencher
- Offers an integrated track system that retracts from a fully extended
 43.5 inches to a width of 35 inches
- Updated operator controls allow for safer and easier operation
- Tip capacity was increased to 1,650 pounds
- Boxer Equipment 800/476-9673, www.boxerequipment.com

Circle 228 on reader service card

Coyote Compact Excavators



- Line includes seven models
- Engines range from 7.4 to 55.5 horsepower
- · Operating weight ranges from 1,676 to 16,600 pounds
- Maximum dig depth ranges from 5 feet, 1 inch to 13 feet, 3 inches
- Coyote Loader Sales 888/269-6830, www.coyoteloaders.com

Circle 229 on reader service card



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Questions?

Ditch Witch XT850

- Cross between the mini skid-steer and mini excavator series
- · Powerful, lightweight excavator-tool carrier
- · Options include trailer, stands and various attachments
- Features the 260-degree excavator sweep, which allows offset digging capability from one point
- Ditch Witch 800/654-6481, www.ditchwitch.com

Circle 230 on reader service card



Gehl 383Z Zero-Tail-Swing Excavator

- Zero-tail-swing maneuverability allows the machine's superstructure to rotate entirely within the tracks
- Can operate close to walls and obstructions without risk of contact
- Weighs 7,825 pounds with a canopy and 8,002 pounds with a cab
- · Powered by a 29-horsepower Yanmar diesel engine
- Operator has more leg room because the engine is on the side of the machine and the hydraulic and fuel tanks are on the rear of the machine
- · Operator's compartment has an adjustable seat and armrests
- Gehl Co. 800/628-0491, www.gehl.com

Circle 231 on reader service card



Komatsu Compact Excavator

- Power angle blades available for PC35MR-2 and PC50MR-2 models
- Angles 25 degrees left and right
- · Standard bolt-cutting edge allows easy replacement
- Optional blade is 5 feet, 9 inches wide on the PC35 MR-2 and 6 feet, 5 inches wide on the PC50MR-2
- Komatsu America Corp. 866/513-5778, www.komatsuamerica.com

Circle 232 on reader service card

Kubota KX080-3 Excavator

- Designed for work where space is limited, but additional power, capacity and efficiency are required
- Weighs 8 tons
- · Offers more than 14,000 pounds of breakout force
- First Kubota excavator with a fuel-efficient direct-injection engine
- · Includes an ergonomic, user-centered cab
- Kubota Tractor Corp. 800/458-2682, www.kubota.com

Circle 233 on reader service card



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lawnandlandscape.com

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MAY 2007

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- 1. Landscape Contractor
 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company
- excluding mowing maintenance service)

 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor

 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service

- □ 5. Irrigation Contractor
 □ 6. Landscape Architect
 □ 7. Other Contract Services (please describe)

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- IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:
- I 13. Extension Agent [Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency]
 14. School, College, University
 15. Trade Association, Library
- Others (please describe)
- 2. What services does you business offer?
- National Services along your busing the services and the services and the services and the services are services and the services and the services and the services are services are services and the services are services and the services are services are services are services and the services are services are services and the services are services are services are services and the services are s

- Landscape Maintenance

 9. Landscape Renovation

 10. Turf Fertilization

 11. Turf Aeration

- ☐ 13. Tree & Stump Removal ☐ 14. Irrigation Maintenance ☐ 15. Erosion Control
- ☐ 12. Tree & Orname mental Care
- Pesticide Application

 16. Turf Disease Control

 17. Turf Insect Control

 18. Turf Weed Control

 19. Tree & Ornamental Pesticide Application
- Other

 20. Mowing

 21. Hydroseeding

 22. Snow Removal

- 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.\$30,000 to \$209,999

 - 5.\$300,000 to \$499,999

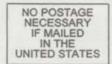
 - 6.\$500,000 to \$699,999 7.\$700,000 to \$999,999 8.\$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999 9.\$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999

 - 10.\$4.000.000 to \$6.999.999
 - 11.\$7.000.000 or n
- 7. What percentage of growth do you anticipate?
- 8. What year was your business founded?
- 9. What is your business mix? (%) Residential ___ Other
- 10. Is this a Headquarters or
- **Branch location?** 1. Headquarters 2. Branch 3. Single Office
- 11. What best describes your title?

- G7XLN 15. Consultant
 16. Technician
 17. Serviceman
 18. Other (please describe)
- 11. What best describes your title?

 1. Owner

 1. President
 1. Entomologist
 2. President
 1. Entomologist
 3. Vice-President
 1. Entomologist
 4. Corporate Officer
 5. Partner
 1. Entomologist
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 10. Specialist



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New Holland Trenchers

- Units feature a removable right auger and side-shifting capabilities
- Model 625 standard-flow trencher offers 30-, 42- and 48-inch booms
- Model 640 high-flow trencher offers 30-, 36-, 38- and 60-inch booms
- Both models are compatible with most New Holland skid-steer loaders
- New Holland 888/290-7377, www.newholland.com/na

Circle 234 on reader service card



Toro Dingo Trencher Attachments

- High-speed model features an auger speed of 187 rpm at 11 gpm and 442 foot-pounds of torque at 300 psi
- High-torque model produces an auger speed of 120 rpm at 11 gpm and 675 foot-pounds of torque
- · Both models fit most compact utility loaders
- Ideal for projects including irrigation, drain tile or valve box installations and tree planting
- Includes a 3-foot boom and safety bar that can trench as deep as 42 inches
- Can be outfitted with an optional 2-foot boom that for depths up to 29 inches
- Toro Dingo 800/344-8676, www.toro.com/dingo

Circle 235 on reader service card

UTI Trencher Parts

- · Line includes chains, cutting systems and sprockets
- · Parts are coupled with the DirtSmart technical service
- · Made of heat-treated steel and carbide
- Lab-tested and field-proven for durability
- Underground Tools 866/488-3478, www.undergroundtools.com

Circle 236 on reader service card



Vermeer RT200

- Powered by a 23-horsepower Kohler engine
- Includes a fully hydrostatic system that eliminates gears, belts and pulleys
- Unit can trench to up to 48 inches deep and 4 to 8 inches wide
- Features durable steel shielding, a cost-efficient reversible boom, an operator-presence system, color-coded controls, standard tow valve and a park brake
- Vermeer 888/837-6337, www.vermeer.com

Circle 237 on reader service card



Take Control

Plant growth regulators create better results with less work.

compiled by heather wood | web editor

Monterey Florel Growth Regulator

- Prevents unwanted fruit or nuts from producing on trees and shrubs
- Causes the blossoms to abort when applied as a foliar spray at bloom time
- One of the only products registered for use for mistletoe control
- Monterey 559/499-2100, www.montereylawngarden.com

Circle 239 on reader service card



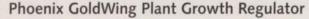


PBI Gordon Atrimmec Plant Growth Regulator

- · Reduces labor and disposal costs
- · Slows the growth of trees and shrubs by 50 percent or more
- Features easy spray application
- · Does not affect turf growth
- · Creates fuller, more compact, uniform shape
- Labeled for use on more than 50 ornamental landscape species
 PBI/Gordon 800/821-7925, www.pbigordon.com

Circle 240 on reader service card







- · Type III plant growth regulator
- · Works by inhibiting the formation of gibberellic acid
- Contains trinexapac-ethyl
- · Promotes root mass development
- · Increases lateral stem growth while inhibiting vertical stem growth
- · Can be used for pre-stress conditioning
- Available June 1 in a low-odor, 2-pound MEC formulation that stays clear in suspension
- Phoenix Environmental Science 888/240-8856, www.phoenixenvcare.com

Circle 254 on reader service card

SePRO Cutless Granular Landscape Growth Regulator



- Registered for systemic suppression of woody plants and perennial ground covers
- Results in a more compact growth form and reduced need for trimming
- Contains the active ingredient flurprimidol, which interferes with the biosynthesis of a plant growth hormone
- Stimulates branching and promotes darker green foliage
- Available in a 40-pound resealable bag or the original 21-pound pail
- SePRO Corp. 800/419-7779, www.sepro.com

Circle 241 on reader service card





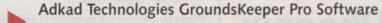
Syngenta Primo MAXX



- · Slows turf growth
- · Instead of becoming taller, turf becomes thicker, greener and healthier
- · Reduces the amount of mowing and hard work needed
- · Reduces the need to edge
- Syngenta Professional Products 866/796-4368, www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com

Circle 242 on reader service card





- Features scheduling, routing, billing, customer account maintenance, job estimating, customizable customer lists and business expense tracking
- · Easy to navigate
- · Can hold as many as 10,000 customers
- Includes invoices for regular repeating services and estimates as well as special services
- Adkad Technologies 800/586-4683, www.adkad.com

Circle 243 on reader service card



Bird-X Woodpecker PRO

- Creates a danger zone using recorded distress cries of flicker and downy woodpeckers, yellow-bellied sapsuckers and others
- · Also uses the natural calls of four predators to scare the woodpeckers
- Cries are programmable for volume, time off periods, hours of operation and random or sequential play
- Weighs 4 pounds
- · Unit covers as much as 4 acres
- Bird-X 800/662-5021, www.bird-x.com

Circle 244 on reader service card

Bri-Mar Low Profile Heavy-Duty Dump Trailer

- · Designed for a range of applications and capacities
- Trailer's deck is positioned between the wheels
- Tires and fenders are outside the frame and body of the trailer for a wider, more stable wheelbase and lower center of gravity
- · Each model has an 81.5-inch-wide and a 12-, 14- or 16-foot-long bed
- · Can accommodate small backhoes, skid-steers and mowers plus extra equipment
- Feature a GVWR or 10,000 to 14,000 pounds and payloads ranging from 6,600 to 9,750 pounds
- Bri-Mar 800/732-5845, www.bri-mar.com

Circle 245 on reader service card



Caterpillar D6K Track-Type Tractor

- Comes standard with a hydrostatic drive train, a SystemOne undercarriage and seat-mounted electro-hydraulic controls
- Powered by a 125-horsepower Cat engine with ACERT Technology
- Hydrostatic drive allows for maneuverability, power turn capability and variable speed control
- Weighs 28,409 pounds; extended length undercarriage weighs 36,690 pounds
- Caterpillar 309/675-1000, www.cat.com

Circle 246 on reader service card



Christy's Easy Lifter

- Ergonomically-designed wheelbarrow reduces the effort in moving, lifting and dumping loads
- Allows the user to change the position of the wheel to accommodate different load sizes and terrain conditions
- · Unit's parallel bar frame improves stability during dumping
- · Allows a complete vertical stance if needed to fully empty the tray
- · Features removable handles that allow for compact transport and storage
- · Made of double-welded steel and includes a 6-cubic-foot tray
- T. Christy Enterprises 800/258-4583, www.tchristy.com

Circle 247 on reader service card



DewEze All Terrain Mower

- · Hillside mower features a new hood and cowling design
- · Design allows for easier access for maintenance
- · Powered by a 30-horsepower diesel engine
- Includes a hydraulic deck drive, power steering, propulsion, auto leveling and deck fit
- Split 72-inch deck design follows contours and allows cutting v-ditches and crowns
- Harper Industries 800/835-1042, www.harperindustries.com

Circle 248 on reader service card

John Deere Scrapers

- Carries up to 42 cubic yards of material per cycle
- Can be pulled as a single unit or in tandem
- 10-, 10½-, 12-, 14- and 14½ -foot cut widths are available, with a ground clearance of 20 inches
- Heaped capacities range from 21 to 21½ cubic yards, with about
 42 cubic yards for the largest scraper in the line if used in tandem
- · Can be direct loaded or top loaded
- · Ejector models can be push loaded; 10 models available
- John Deere 309/765-8000, www.johndeere.com

Circle 249 on reader service card



Hunter Root Zone Watering System

- Features the StrataRoot design, which consists of a series of internal baffles
- Comes pre-assembled
- · Versatile enough to be used with drip or bubblers
- Vandal resistant due to a enclosed design featuring a grate that protects irrigation hardware
- Available in 10-, 18- or 36-inch lengths
- Includes versions that accommodate customer-provided irrigation hardware or with premium pressure compensating bubblers and swing joints
- Hunter Industries 760/744-5240, www.hunterindustries.com

Circle 250 on reader service card

National Mower I-6026 Zero-Turn Riding Mower

- · Features a 60-inch, 3-blade cutting deck
- · Deep-deck design gives the mower the capacity to quickly cut heavy grass
- · Extra-wide discharge tunnel features a rubber chute to expel clippings
- Cutting height ranges from 1 to 5 inches
- Powered by a 26-horsepower liquid-cooled Kawasaki engine
- · Offers a variable ground speed of up to 13 miles per hour
- National Mower 888/907-3463, www.nationalmower.com

Circle 251 on reader service card

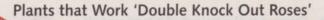
Phoenix Hawk-I Insecticide

- Contains the active ingredient imidacloprid
- Offers season-long control of grubs
- Also controls annual bluegrass weevils, black turfgrass ataenius, Japanese beetles, oriental beetles, mole crickets and Northern and Southern masked chafer
- Provides suppression of cutworms and chinch bugs
- Product can be used on trees, shrubs, flowers and foliar plants around commercial and residential sites
- Offered in two-pound flowable and 75WSP formulations
- Phoenix Environmental Care 888/240-8856, www.phoenixenvcare.com

Circle 252 on reader service card







- · More compact and upright than the Knock Out
- Feature full, rich, cherry-red blooms
- Display a show of color from early June to hard frost
- Disease and pest resistant; grows in full sun
- · Reaches 4 feet high and wide
- Hardy in USDA Hardiness Zones 4-9
- Novalis 888/845-1988, www.plantsthatwork.com

Circle 253 on reader service card

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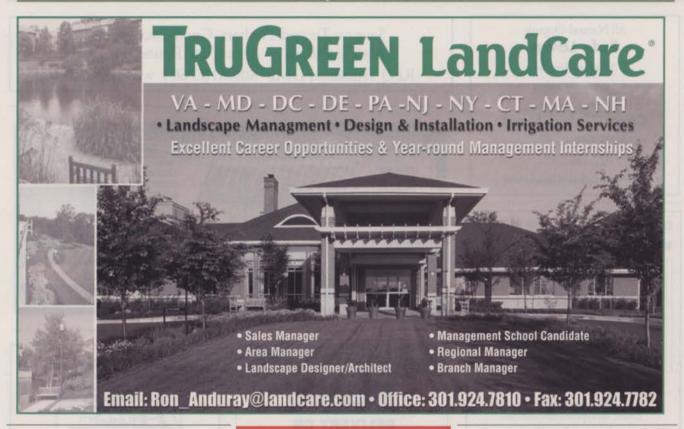
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Landscape Unlimited Secures Sales With Blogs

ost people doing business in the landscape community realize the potential inherent on the Internet. And at this point, the savvy owner of a successful landscaping outfit fully utilizes an interactive Web site and e-mail to connect with clients and strengthen his marketing message.

Besides my company's Web site (www.landscapingunlimited.com), I've had success with a facet of the Internet know as "blogs," or personal Web logs. While not a new concept, the format has only recently begun to gain modest interest from the landscape community. As an added bonus for me, outside of the time spent creating content, is that I've developed the blogs at no cost.

For me, this online initiative began a year ago when I signed on for Yahoo's web-hosting services. As part of my service package, I could create a blog for free. At the time, though, I had no idea what blogs were all about. So I did some research and learned that blogs

are no longer a non-traditional marketing method. In fact, they've become a mainstream marketing tool.

While I did not contract with a Web development firm to assist in creating my blogs, I consulted a friend, who is a green-industry consultant, who advised me on the correct way to build success through the content on both my Web sites and my developing blogs.

My first step was to name my blogs. After some research I discovered there were no landscape-oriented blogs listed on the Internet for my geographic market, which is the Suffolk County/ Long Island, N.Y. region. I wanted to achieve the same name recognition and marketing results with the blog that I've generated with my Web site. To do this I created two blogs, Suffolk County Landscaping Blog and Long Island Landscaping Blog.

Next, I developed the online content for the blogs, which involved very few setbacks or problems. Essentially, if you

5 Keys to a Successful Online Blog

- I. Set goals. What do you want to accomplish with this online forum? Should it be a place for tips and ideas, an industry-only site for area colleagues to discuss business issues or a combination of both?
- Spread the word. Make sure your clients know you have an active blog. Work
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- 3. Choose content wisely. People frequenting your blog will have various interests, so keep the content varied with various landscape topics.
- 4. Remember to link. When applicable and appropriate, link to other online forums, industry-related Web sites and online directors to drive traffic to your blog.
- 5. Keep it current. Give clients a reason to check out your blog on a regular basis. Provide valuable information, such as practical helpful tips, and updates to your service offering. In addition, use the blog to advertise special seasonal offers.

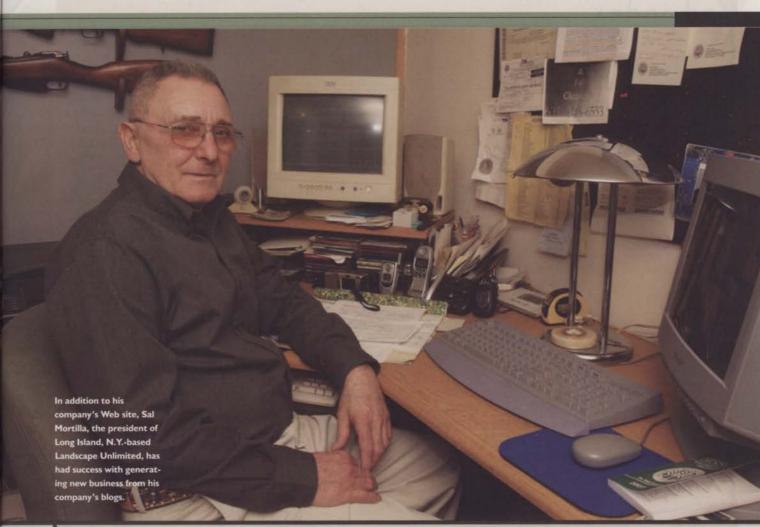


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are proficient with a word processor you can create a blog. For a blog to be effective it must hold the reader's interest. Because the people frequenting my blogs have various interests, it's important to maintain up-to-date online content that covers a variety of landscape topics and issues. I also added a number of photos along with payment options to purchase software directly from the blogs.

Once the blogs went live I informed my clients of their existence through e-mail, regular mail and direct phone calls. I also promote my blogs on my landscape company's Web site.

Next, I added a number of links to my site and to other blogs, which increased my page ranking with various online search engines.

With blogs, it's all about linking to one another. Other bloggers love the practice, as do search engine spiders, or online programs that automatically fetch Web pages for search engines based on specific content. My landscape blog is linked to my software forum/message board for customers to use and support. Likewise, my software site is linked to that blog and visa versa.

My customers like the blogs and they appreciate receiving updates on special offers and new services via my blogs. Likewise, I was surprised by the amount of new business the blogs have generated. My landscape business only provides design/build services. Last season, my landscape blog (http//landscapingunlimited. com/blog/) resulted in signing 15 design/build projects and six pond and waterfall systems. The software blog (http//landscapedesignimagingsoftware.com/blog/) was responsible for four software sales within the first week it was active.

At this time, I don't specifically track blog traffic. However, user traffic to the blog has grown considerably over the last year because of the number of inquires I've received from people asking how to subscribe to my blogs.

My blogs have one purpose, and that is to generate new business. In the future, I plan to use both the blogs and my Web sites as my only means of marketing.

Landscape contractors, regardless of their specialty, should take full advantage of any medium that, other than the time it takes to develop and update content, is as productive as online blogs. – Sal Mortilla

We Want Your Feedback

Do you have a successful business system at your company that you would like to talk about in our How We Do It section? If you do and you're willing to share details about how and why you implemented this system, as well as the costs associated with it, contact Lawn & Landscape's Mike Zawacki at 800/456-0707 or mzawacki@gie.net.

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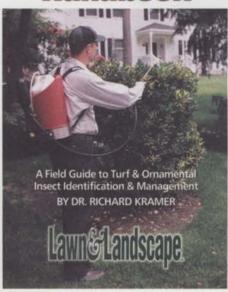
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