

Lawn & Landscape

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CAN AN INDUSTRY MARKETING CAMPAIGN

SURVIVE?

Lack of contractor awareness. The 24/7 business reality. *Lawn & Landscape* looks at these and other circumstances that try the success of Project EverGreen.

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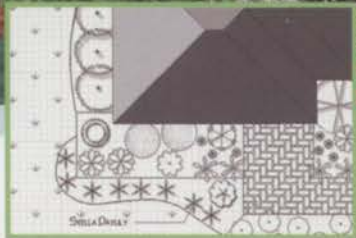


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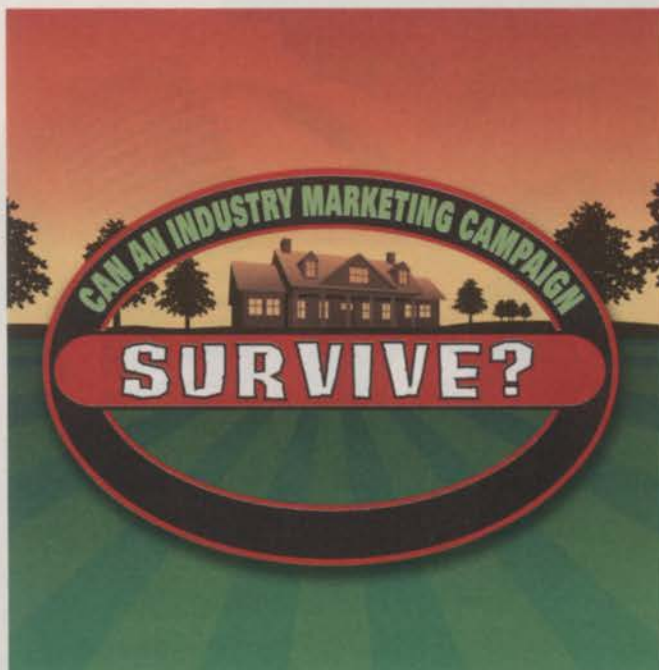
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Lawn & Landscape



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GREEN INDUSTRY & EQUIPMENT EXPO



Starting in August, *Lawn & Landscape* online will feature information about the Green Industry & Equipment Expo, to be held in Louisville, Ky., Oct. 25-27. The show, formed for the first time from the Green Industry and International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment expositions, will feature elements that attendees of both shows will recognize. At the same time, the combined show is a new experience for all and will introduce new aspects. Stay on top of all the changes and plan your trip by visiting www.lawnandlandscape.com and visiting the Green Industry & Equipment Expo section on our home page.

> H-2B DEADLINE NEWS

The H-2B returning worker exemption amendment expires on Sept. 30, leaving employers to worry that there will be a major guest worker shortage next season. Will Congress pass a last-minute, temporary fix for the program like they did last year? Visit *Lawn & Landscape* online for continuing coverage on this issue and all immigration news that affects the green industry.

> HOLIDAY LIGHTING EXTRAS

Lawn & Landscape has the scoop on the latest in holiday lighting trends, featured in this issue and continued at www.lawnandlandscape.com. Click on the issue's online extras section for information on the popularity of playful lighting displays and then learn ways to expand your sales base to new types of clients.



If you don't receive our e-newsletters, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com newsletter. In one simple step, you can register for our weekly news and product e-newsletters.

ONLINE POLL

As fuel prices rise and environmental issues continue to be discussed, contractors are turning to alternative fuel sources to operate equipment. Have you turned to this option? Visit *Lawn & Landscape* online during the week of Sept. 17, click on the Online Poll button and respond to the question, "Do you use alternative fuels?" Then fuel the debate on our online message board.

MARKETING ONLINE EXTRA

Our annual **Lawn Care Report**, featured in this issue (p. 64), continues on our Web site. Check out the online extras section for an article that outlines the latest marketing trends within the industry. Pick up some ideas to make your company's name more visible or see if your current marketing methods are popular among your peers. Log onto www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard and share your marketing ideas.

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Industry Reflections

Nearly 20 years ago, this magazine became *Lawn & Landscape*, a full-service version of its predecessor *American Lawn Applicator*. The move to *Lawn & Landscape* recognized the evolving market place in which single service contractors were beginning to see the value in offering multiple services to existing customers; thereby increasing revenues and hopefully improving customer loyalty.

The change didn't happen over night. *ALA* first became *ALA Lawn & Landscape Maintenance* as maintenance services were distinct from installation offerings. Through the 90s, contractors became more comfortable with their ability to offer mowing, lawn care, tree care, irrigation and installation services to both residential and commercial clients. Although companies today still exist to serve a specific service or group of related services, nearly 90,000 businesses in the marketplace are considered to be full-service. Several years later, both *ALA* and *Maintenance* were dropped to signify the shift.

I've reflected on the last two decades recently as I marked my 20th year with *Lawn & Landscape* magazine. It's been an amazing stretch of interaction with entrepreneurs from coast to coast. It's gratifying to see how the marketplace has matured. Some folks like Wayne Richards, Landon Reeve, Tom Tolkacz and Tom Leid are still at the helm of their businesses. Others like Rich Akerman, David Minor and Tom Garber, pioneers in the landscape industry, have moved on to other endeavors. And, sadly, others like Mark Phipps and David Luce have passed away, far too young.

The ability of the industry to keep re-inventing itself through market shifts and fluctuations is remarkable. The period most etched in my mind was in March of 1998 when the face of the lawn and landscape industry changed forever. That's when seven privately held companies rolled up under the umbrella of LandCare USA and in an equally bold move, TruGreen-ChemLawn acquired four companies to develop a new landscape management division.

Consolidation, acquisitions and the infusion of private equity have continued and the industry has enjoyed uninterrupted growth. In conversations, visits and stories some common threads have evolved over 20 years. Here are some of my observations:

- Lawn and landscape professionals are dedicated to their businesses and their employees. It's not just a job, it's a profession and career path.
- Contractors show an amazing ability to adapt to business climate and customer needs.
- Contractors show a willingness to try new things and accept the risks that come with it.
- The importance of hiring and retaining good people and its affect on business is acknowledged; although finding good people is still a challenge.
- Contractors are amazingly unselfish and demonstrate a willingness to pass knowledge on to peers and the next generation.
- Landscape professionals are a passionate bunch. It's hard to find a business owner out there who doesn't want to chat about his/her business.

A challenge moving forward is for all contractors – big and small – to represent the green industry vocally and proudly. We are the green industry. We are the stewards of the environment. Your work is on display in neighborhoods and business parks across America. Be an advocate for your industry. Get involved wherever and whenever you can. The industry – and the environment – need you. **LL**

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More Of My Biggest Mistakes

In my July column I outlined a few of my greatest snafus made during my 20-year career in the green industry.

We learn our greatest, and albeit most painful, lessons from our everyday errors. My intent was perhaps you could find value in some of these life lessons, but without the anguish of actually making the mistake.

To continue on that theme I've added a few more of my biggest mistakes. Please learn from these in a way that makes your landscape operation better.

NOT DEVELOPING A BOARD OF ADVISERS SOON ENOUGH. My board of advisers has pushed me and forced me to try new things, do what I said I would do, generate more sales, communicate more clearly and hold people accountable.

As entrepreneurs we need this structure. After all, who's holding us accountable? The bank? Our spouse? Our friends? I'm not sure anyone is. A board helps you see the trees through the forest and pushes and guides you toward success.

To my board, Ed, Les, Frank, and Karl, thanks for your help. And that leads me to my next regret.

NOT SAYING THANKS ENOUGH. There have been many people I haven't thanked enough. There was Eugene Gomolka, a UD professor who pushed me to continue on with my business when I thought I wanted to quit while in college. Unfortunately, he passed away unexpectedly awhile back.

There was my brother, Rich, who today is a successful money manager in Seattle. He was my first employee and overcame being fired a record 37 times to help me get the work done when we were starting out.

There was my dad, who is no longer with us, who helped me make my first

trailer and was always there to listen to me. My mom, who to this day is my biggest fan, and to my wife and kids; thanks for putting up with me and all my late hours.

But the people who have not been thanked enough are the folks who work at Grunder Landscaping Co. They are the true heroes. They help me make my dream a reality on a daily basis and don't get thanked enough.

Maybe in some small way, their reading this will help them realize how much I appreciate all their support.

KEEPING PEOPLE BECAUSE THEY WERE NICE AND TRIED HARD. Yep, I have done this and I'll bet you have, too.

No one wants to fire someone who is trying hard. But in business results matter, and if a member of your team clearly understands the expectations and still is not producing results, then you need to ask them to leave.

There is great question you should ask yourself about each person on your team: Knowing what you now know about that person, would you hire them again? If the answer is no, then the obvious question is what are you waiting for?

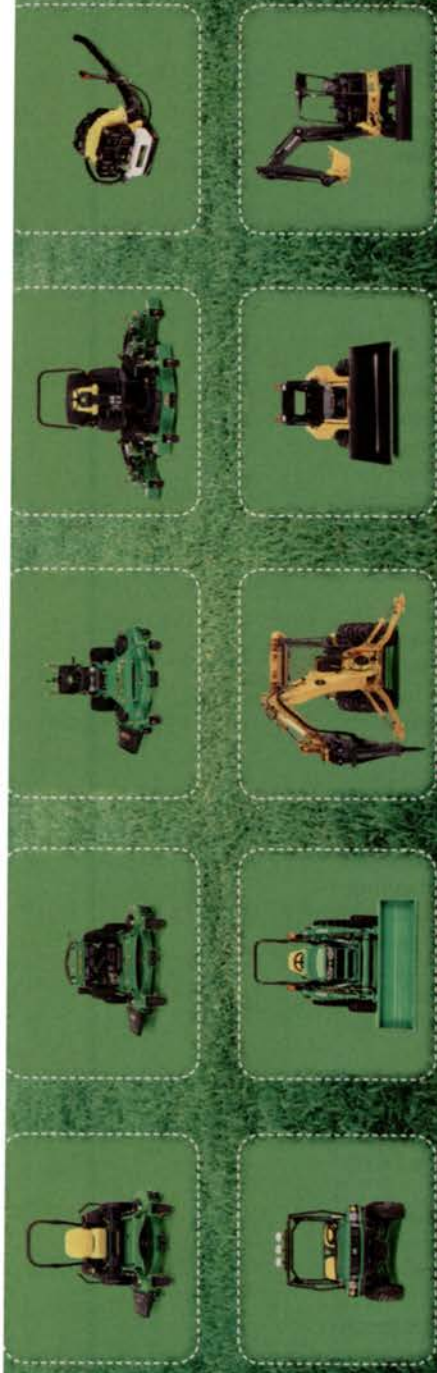
Companies all over America are full of underperforming employees and that's not their fault. It's our fault for allowing mediocrity to be acceptable in the workplace.

Candor is something that needs to be implemented more in companies. If we all just said what was on our minds and we were smart, professional and tactful about how we did it, we wouldn't have so many people who never realize their full potential.

I fired one of my best friends in 1989. He didn't speak to me for a long time until he saw me one day and told me that was one of the best things I could have done for him. Don't look at firing someone as a bad thing; look at it as what you both need to do to be successful. ■

marty grunder

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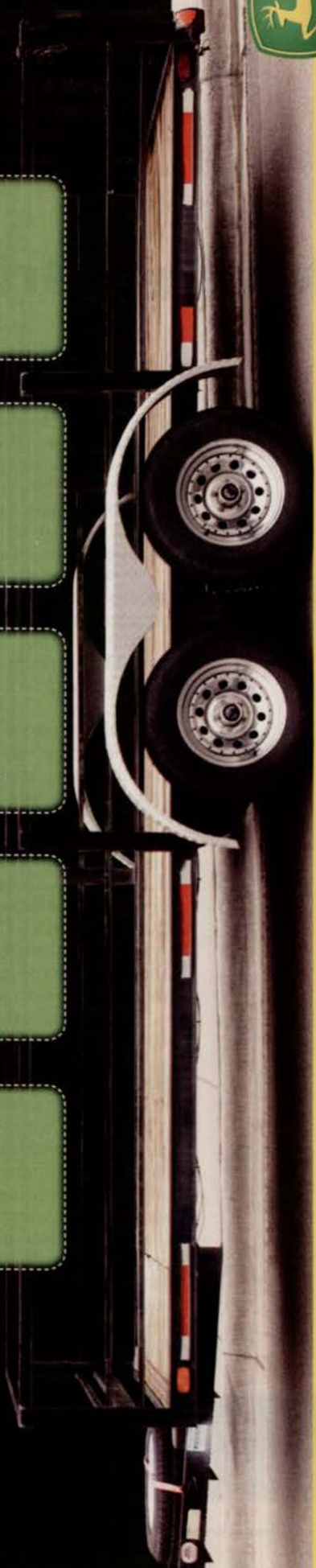
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Market-Driven Unit Pricing

Of the six bidding methods used in the green industry today, market-driven unit pricing is probably the fastest.

Market driven unit pricing also has the honor of being the method that is the least helpful when it comes to running your landscape company.

Don't make the mistake of assuming there's something inherently wrong with organizing and presenting an estimate in a unit price format. The format is not the issue. The issue is, however, the process (or lack of process) used to arrive at your unit price(s).

Market-driven unit pricing is easy to do. You simply do a material's takeoff and then you apply common market unit prices to your takeoff quantities.

For instance, you would charge \$4,500 for a 300-square-foot patio at \$15 per square foot. Irrigation contractors might charge \$600 per residential zone or \$125 per head. Landscape contractors could charge so much for a 1-, 2-, 5-gallon shrub — no production rates, site conditions, labor hours or market issues to consider or worry about. It's all pretty subjective.

If correctly calculated, unit prices can provide considerable insight into an estimate. They can also supply plenty of ammunition at the bid table when it's time to negotiate with clients.

For this reason, every time I bid a landscape project on the computer, the computer is programmed to simultaneously provide pricing in both a lump sum and a unit price format.

But the prices are calculated after all costs for materials, labor, equipment, subcontractors, general conditions and accurate markups are included in the estimate. These unit prices are then compared to ones normally found on the open market.

Landscape contractors who rely solely on the market-driven unit pricing method seriously shortcut the estimating and planning process. In turn, they short-circuit their business systems.

Key information and data needed to direct and control individual jobs are just not available. As a result, the company lurches forward in a fog, unable to see the economic factors around them or ahead of them.

It's hard to imagine an "estimating" method that is of less use to an owner running a company than factoring (materials times 2.0, 3.0, etc.) is, but the market-driven unit pricing method is ultimately of less use when used solely on its own.

Factoring, at least, forces you to build on the foundation of material costs. The market-driven unit price system operates totally independent of any relevant data, budgets, costs or strategic planning, whatsoever. Material costs, sales tax, field labor and burden, equipment, general conditions, G&A overhead, a contingency factor and net profit are "supposed" to be included. Unfortunately, that's rarely the case for a business owner.


No budgets! No planning! No cost data! No tracking system! Just how long do you think your company will last in the real world? If I were to venture a guess, I'd say not very long.

Can you organize and run your company in such a way that you can survive and make money by competing with the established market price?

Survival in any industry requires much more than a price. It requires an accurate price, a well-thought-out plan and a self-correcting process. Don't be lulled into thinking that a green industry contractor can survive on anything less. **LL**

jim huston

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Strategic People Planning

One of the toughest issues facing the owner of a growing landscape company is the challenge of building succession into the business by selecting and hiring people who will help the business survive long term. This is a tough, time-consuming effort because there are a few realities we all have to face about this subject. Here are a few to consider and see if any apply to your current or past experiences.

- Many entrepreneurs have what it takes to start companies, but they may not always have the skills and patience necessary to develop them into long-term success stories.
- Sometimes, people who start companies hire friends, acquaintances or relatives who, while loyal and hard working during the early years of the new business, lack the talent and expertise necessary to take the firm to its next level of development. The owner feels compelled to protect and reward these loyal employees despite their shortcomings and this causes problems with other employees.
- Founders of growing companies are among the world's worst delegators. Who can blame them? They have taken the ultimate risk in starting a new business, implemented their ideas and made decisions, and the fruits of their labor have paid off and their companies are growing. The idea of giving any part of this responsibility to someone else is a totally alien consideration.
- Finally, there is one additional reality or, in many cases, myth, many small business owners must face. They believe they don't have to worry about succession because their employees care so much about the company they will willingly come up with the cash to purchase it from the owner when the time comes. Many find out too late that this belief is absolutely false.

So, what's the answer? How does a landscape contractor respond to this business challenge?

- Take a long look in the mirror and ask yourself whether you are the type of owner who can consciously bring people into your company who are more proficient in certain areas than you are? Will you let them operate with the level of autonomy and freedom necessary to bring the best they have to bear on your firm?
- Will you look long and hard at every position that becomes available in your company that requires leadership and management expertise and hire the best people you can afford instead of selecting whomever happens to be available?
- Will you take a personal interest in constantly looking for the "up and comers" in your company and monitoring their progress? Will you see they are given additional responsibilities to test their potential for growth and that someone reports to you about how they performed these new duties?
- Will you stay abreast of the technology changes that affect your industry and watch for people who have an aptitude for this and find places for them in your firm?
- Will you make a resolution that your company will not miss a growth opportunity because you didn't have enough of the right kind of people to make it happen?
- Will you become such a proponent of selecting affordable talent that your current employees become the primary recruiters for your company?
- Will you seek competent financial and legal advice about how to structure equity positions in your firm well in advance of having to do it to hire someone?
- Assuming you are successful with some of these suggestions, would you take a day off and not call the office? **LL**

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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Fall Seeding Tips & Tricks

The fall season is an excellent time to seed because soil and air temperatures are ideal for fast seed germination. The warm soil temperature along with warm days and cool nights are perfect conditions for seed germination.

PURPOSE. The first step in seed preparation is to determine the site's purpose. For example, will the turf be used for aesthetic purposes, sports or athletic purposes, or as a play area or buffer area, or does the site need erosion control? Determining site use will help in selecting the correct seed for the job.

Then consider other factors such as whether the site receives full sun or shade, needs insect and disease resistance, needs wear and drought tolerances, has color and texture desires from the client or has drainage or irrigation concerns.

PREPARATION. Next is the seedbed preparation.

A soil test determines what will need to be done to ensure success in the entire seeding operation. A soil test indicates what amendments need to be applied to the soil along with fertilizer requirements during and after turf establishment.

The next step is actual preparation of the seedbed. All existing vegetation should be sprayed to eliminate established weeds. Once the weeds are eliminated, rototilling of the soil ensures good soil to seed contact. Rototilling should be performed to a depth of 4 to 6 inches.

Additional top soil may be needed to fill in low areas or build up the overall area to an acceptable grade.

Once the area has been tilled and the "rough grade" has been established, allow the soil to settle for awhile prior to completing the finished grade. Once the finished grade is completed, starter

fertilizer (18-24-12) should be applied at a rate of 1 to 1.5 pounds of phosphorus per 1,000 square feet.

SEEDING. Next, apply the seed. It is best to apply seed in low rates in multiple directions to ensure good distribution. It is extremely important to apply seed at the recommended rates.

After the seed and fertilizer have been applied, a light raking will be required to incorporate the seed and fertilizer into the soil. This helps establish the final grade for the project.

MULCHING. The final step in the seeding process is mulching. Mulching lightly over the top of the seedbed maintains water/moisture for improved and faster germination. Different mulching material is available but it is important to use a weed-free material to minimize weed competition in the seedbed.

IRRIGATION. Irrigation is an extremely important step to a successful lawn. Seedlings need to be kept moist, but not overly saturated. On the other hand, seed is very susceptible to desiccation, therefore it is important to not let the seedbed dry out.

Consistent light watering of the seedbed should be performed to keep the seed moist. Once the seed has germinated, watering should be altered to less frequent and deeper watering practices to encourage deep root growth.

FERTILIZATION. During establishment, it is best to apply another application of starter fertilizer four weeks after the initial lawn installation at a rate of 1 to 1.5 pounds of phosphorus per 1,000 square feet.

Once the lawn is established, a standard lawn program can be assembled based on the soil test results. **LL**

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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USE READER SERVICE # 17

what's the deal?

The editors of **Lawn & Landscape** and **COMMERCIAL DEALER** magazines believe ongoing dialogue between contractors and commercial dealers is essential. Each month, one contractor and one commercial dealer will address a question or issue posed by the editors.

This month's question: "Does warranty work cause friction between contractors and commercial dealers?"

THE DEALER:

Phil Babcock, Owner, EG Babcock, Fresno, Calif.



"If you don't pay your doctor for diagnostic work, do you want them to start cutting? Dealers are paid a flat rate for warranty work, regardless of how long it takes to diagnose a problem. Warranty work is a sore spot for most dealers. The first thing you do when you get a piece of equipment is figure out what's wrong with it. If you don't get paid for diagnostic work, how are you sure it's going to get done? This is a lot different than in the automotive industry,

where the dealer is reimbursed for the cost of figuring out the problem.

"It has the potential to put me in a bad spot. If a customer comes into the dealership having talked to the manufacturer, and believing the repair is covered under warranty, then I get put in the middle. If it's truly not covered by warranty, then I look like the bad guy by having to break the news to them.

"Do you think you could walk into a restaurant with some eggs and bacon and ask the employees to cook them up for you? Anymore, dealers are getting pretty black and white about it. We ask customers, 'Did you buy it from us?' The inference is, if you don't buy it from us, don't expect us to repair it."

THE CONTRACTOR:

Paul Rauch, Vice President, Wildrose Lawncare, Lutz, Fla.



"From the perspective of a commercial customer, how warranty work is handled is very important. I will bypass a 'super sale' at one dealership to buy from another dealer where I know I'll get good service. I'm in the business of selling service. The people we serve on our end will continue to come to us if we warranty our work.

"We base our reputation on saying 'no questions asked' when the customer has a problem and we take care of it. When I get a dealer who treats me in this same manner, I'm loyal to them. I'm more bound to go to that dealer and buy everything than to shop at a several dealerships for the best deal. So, when I have a piece of equipment that needs warranty work, I don't need for it to be complicated.

"The first question we ask is, 'How much time does it take to fix it in-house?' If we find it takes too long, then we take it to a dealer who we've worked with before. As a company, when my equipment's not working, I'm not working. I need transactions like warranty work to go smoothly. If I spend my time trying to battle someone at a dealership or the manufacturer over it, it's time that I could be spending outside making money. The dealerships I do business with understand this and take care of me. If I need to have warranty work done, my dealer has loaner equipment to keep my business up and running."

say what's on your mind

If you'd like to share your thoughts for future issues, please call or e-mail Mark Phillips at 216-925-5008 or mphillips@gie.net.

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USE READER SERVICE # 18

IMMIGRATION UPDATE

No-Match Rule Will Further Tax Workforce

With the H-2B deadline for a returning-worker exemption fast approaching at the end of this month, the repercussions of Congress' failure to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill this summer was highlighted in early August when the Department of Homeland Security announced new immigration enforcement reforms.

One rule of particular concern to landscape companies is the no-match regulation stating that employers who receive no-match letters may be held liable if they fail to take specified steps within 90 days of receiving the letter.

This new rule will take effect Sept. 14.

In addition, DHS officials indicated they would seek regulatory reform of the H-2B program and other temporary and seasonal non immigrant programs. Though employer groups expressed concern that such reform could take at least a year and will fail to provide the immediate relief necessary as a result of the final no-match rule, DHS says regulatory reform is the best solution outside of enacting comprehensive reform legislation, according to an analysis of the reform conducted by the American Nursery & Landscape Association's labor and immigration counsel.

Several key components of DHS' final no-match rule include a 93-day period after receiving a no-match letter, in which an employer must determine whether the employee provided correct information.

If the employer cannot obtain verification that the document in question is acceptable, the employer will have to



terminate the employee or face the risk that DHS may find it has "constructive knowledge" that the employee is illegal, according to the ANLA report.

Employers who follow DHS procedures will have a "safe harbor," even if the worker is later determined to be unauthorized.

Another issue that concerns employers, such as professional landscape contractors how use H-2B workers, is the possibility of discrimination allegations.

The rule says that employers who re-verify documents listed in no-match letters will have a defense against discrimination allegations based on document abuse provisions of current immigration law. — Marisa Palmieri

ASSOCIATIONS: ACTION NEEDED ON H-2B

The new no-match rule is expected to increase the industry's reliance on the H-2B program, industry associations say; however, Congress has not yet extended the return-worker exemption. If the current exemption that expires on Sept. 30 is not extended, it's estimated that more than 140,000 legal workers nationwide will disappear.

To encourage Congress to pass the Save our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act of 2007, visit these associations' sites, which provide legislative contact tools — <http://www.anla.org>, www.landcarenetwork.org and www.clca.org.

www.lawnandlandscape.com

To read the ANLA analysis and DHS' "Social Security No-Match: Safe Harbor Procedures for Employers Who Receive a No-Match Letter Final Rule," (a 56-page PDF), visit the September Online Extras.

An Immigration Attorney's View

Immigration attorney Carl Hampe, partner at Baker & McKenzie in Washington, offers some insight on the state of compliance for employers.

Q: What should contractors know about the new no-match rule?

A: This rule is not reason for panic and in fact clarifies an unreasonably ambiguous situation that has existed for years. There had not been clear guidance from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on exactly how to respond when a Social Security mismatch letter was received, yet ICE had relied on non-response to such letters in the past to justify its recent enforcement actions. While not every aspect of the new rule is employer-friendly, it at least clarifies an employer's responsibilities under the immigration law when such a letter is received. The rule should be read and followed carefully.

Q: What's let to increased ICE raids?

A: In response in part to pressure from Congress, ICE announced in April 2006 that it would restore the work site enforcement raids that had lain dormant since 2001 and it decided to use criminal law enforcement tools for investigations rather than the civil enforcement scheme developed by Congress in 1986. There is little doubt that the current public mood supports enforcement of the law against employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens. What the public does not understand as well is how difficult it is for employers to "know" whether they are "knowingly" hiring an unauthorized alien.

Q: What is the single most important thing contractors can do to protect themselves from ICE raids?

A: If an employer relies on an unskilled workforce and draws from the new immigrant labor pool, then it should retain immigration experts who can advise on the best methods to minimize their exposure to ICE, which include a number of steps beyond mere I-9 compliance, including electronic worker verification, screening for ID theft, responding diligently to mismatch letter and being diligent of the employment practices of any subcontractors.

GREEN INDUSTRY
and
equipment EXPO
gie-expo.com

GIE+EXPO: Gear Up for New Show

Landscape professionals seeking to scout out new equipment or brush up on their business smarts have a new venue to do so this fall. The Green Industry and Equipment Expo (GIE+EXPO) – an alliance between the Professional Landcare Network's Green Industry Expo and the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Expo – will debut October 26-27 at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville.

Traditionally, GIE had averaged about 5,000 attendees from the green industry and Expo drew as many as 25,000 visitors, who included contractors, equipment dealers and consumers. The organizers estimate the shows had minimal attendee overlap, about 10 percent. Prospective attendees who have not registered or booked their hotel space should do so as soon as possible, says Gerry McCarthy chair of PLANET's GIE committee. The Galt House, PLANET's host hotel, is already booked for the weekend, as are many of the hotels in the downtown Louisville area. It's likely rooms are still available near the Louisville International Airport (for more information, visit www.gie-expo.com/hotels.html).

Organizers hope they've taken the best from both shows to create a new show that delivers what both attendees and exhibitors want: excellent education and plenty of trade show and outdoor demonstration time.

The former GIE show used to have just one day of outdoor equipment demonstrations and test driving. This year, following Expo's traditional format, GIE+EXPO will host three days of outdoor-demo time. An added bonus is this attraction takes place on site, adjacent to the indoor exhibits, McCarthy notes.

On the education front, there will be a full line of educational offerings for landscape professional similar to the old GIE's sessions. Still called the Green Industry Conference, sessions include attendee favorites like Breakfast with Champions and facility tours. One highlight, McCarthy says, is the fact that several seminars will be repeated throughout the event.

New this year is a series of Green Industry Expo Workshops, which take place from 3:00-5:00 each day. At \$50 each, these sessions are targeted at walk-in attendees and are designed to be an introduction to the rest of the education available at the event. Speakers include Roger Cook, landscape contractor for "This Old House" and consultants Marty Grunder and Phil Sorentino. The cost to attend the entire Green Industry Conference is \$315 for PLANET members and \$445 for nonmembers. For more information, visit www.greenindustryconference.org. –Marisa Palmieri

A blue and white Ford Super Duty truck is shown from the front quarter view, parked in front of a large stack of cement bags. The bags are stacked in a grid pattern, filling the background. The truck's front grille, headlights, and bumper are visible. The text "Cement your reputation." is overlaid on the image in a white, sans-serif font.

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WEATHER WATCH

Updated Hurricane Season Prediction, Heat Provide Little Comfort

The updated Atlantic hurricane prediction from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has been slightly reduced, although the center continues to predict an above-normal season.

NOAA scientists are predicting an 85 percent chance of an above-normal season, runs from June 1 through Nov. 30. The center now predicts there will be 13 to 16 named storms, with seven to nine becoming hurricanes, of which three to five could become major hurricanes. The original prediction, which came out in May, noted there would be no more than 17 named storms, with seven to 10 becoming hurricanes. Climate factors through late summer caused the NOAA to slightly tighten the range of possible storms for the season.

The climate patterns responsible for the expected above-normal 2007 hurricane season are the same patterns that have spawned increased Atlantic hurricane activity since 1995. These patterns include warmer-than-normal sea surface temperatures in areas of the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea and the El Niño/La Niña cycle, according to Gerry Bell, Ph.D., lead seasonal hurricane forecaster at NOAA's Climate Prediction Center, based in Camp Springs, Md.

Warmer-than-normal conditions also have been used to describe temperatures this year, according to the NOAA. In fact, the first half of 2007 was the 18th warmest January-to-June period in the U.S. since records began in 1895. The lack of precipitation led to drought in much of the country, which triggered an early start to the wildfire season, crop losses and local drought emergencies. — Heather Wood

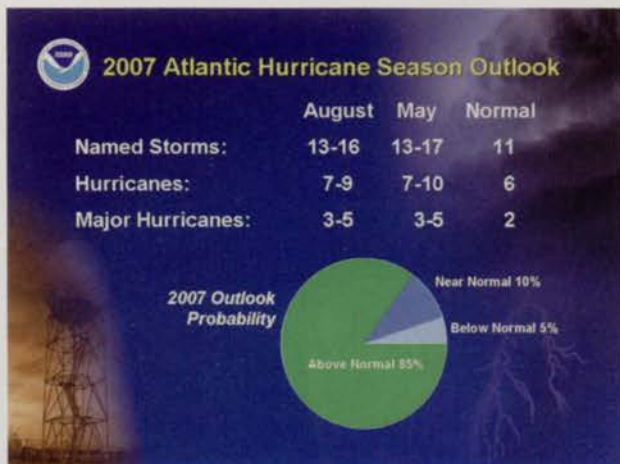


Chart: NOAA

NEWS

Dow Creates New Division

Dow AgroSciences has formed an Urban Pest Management business that combines its pest management unit with its turf, ornamental and technical products division. Forming an Urban Pest Management business creates synergy within Dow AgroSciences and with our channel customers, says Dave Morris, commercial business leader.

"It brings our best people together to more intensely concentrate on these important market segments, and allows us to be even more dedicated to insect, weed and disease problems in urban environments, including homes, golf courses and nurseries, while increasing our productivity and quality," Morris says.

TruGreen Drops Chemlawn Name

Lawn care provider TruGreen ChemLawn is now simply TruGreen. The company recently announced that it is dropping the second half of its name.

TruGreen and ChemLawn merged in 1992 when ChemLawn was purchased by ServiceMaster (which bought TruGreen in 1990). Both names were kept. "ChemLawn was a well known name in the industry and the company wanted to retain the customer recognition," according to the company.

TruGreen is the name most people recognize as the corporate brand. "Enough time has passed that we can drop ChemLawn from our name without losing brand recognition," according to a statement. "A shorter name is easier to remember, easier to say when answering the phone, easier to recognize on a truck and more flexible and inclusive when providing a vast array of customer services."

The parent company, ServiceMaster, entered into a definitive merger agreement in March to be acquired by an investment group led by Clayton, Dubilier & Rice (CD&R) for a total value of \$5.5 billion, which includes the assumption of \$800 million in debt. — Heather Wood

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USE READER SERVICE # 19

NEWS

2008 Snow EXPO to Return to Indy

GIE Media's *Snow Magazine* has announced it will return to Indianapolis for the 2008 Snow Industry Exposition & Conference.

The second annual show will take place May 4-6. The one-of-a-kind conference presents attendees an in-depth educational seminar schedule and unprecedented networking opportunities with the industry's leading suppliers and professional snow removal contractors from around the country.

"We looked into a number of different host cities for the 2008 Snow EXPO and the positive feedback we received from attendees about their Indianapolis experience in May

lead us to bring the show back there for our second year," says Kevin Gilbride, *Snow Magazine* publisher. "Our mission with the Snow EXPO is to meet

contractors' needs in providing the industry knowledge and education they're asking for to run their snow removal operations more effectively and efficiently. As such, the ease of getting to the host city and the ability to be in a centralized location played an important part in the decision."

Educational seminar and event activities are in the process of being finalized, Gilbride says.

"With the 2008 Snow EXPO we're bringing more of the educational opportunities snow contractors found valuable in our 2007 show, as well as additional offerings they've told us they'd like to see in the future," Gilbride says. "We expect snow removal contractors will be pleasantly surprised by the programs we're planning."

Check out www.snowmagazine.com for complete Snow EXPO 2008 preview coverage and updates, as well as coverage from Snow EXPO 2007. — Mike Zawacki



NEWS

Are You Addicted to E-mail?

You may think nothing of taking your portable hand-held device everywhere with you as you meet with commercial property owners or conduct meetings with a prospective new design-build client.

But is your need to be connected with your office feeding an e-mail addiction?

According to recent research, it may be. More Americans than ever before are using portable devices to keep tabs on their e-mail throughout the day and night, and from virtually anywhere — bed, cars, bathrooms and even church.

"E-mail is becoming more and more accessible and people continue to take advantage of that," says Regina Lewis, a consumer Advisor for AOL Online, which conducted the study. "Portable devices — like e-mail itself — are becoming more prevalent and easier to use."

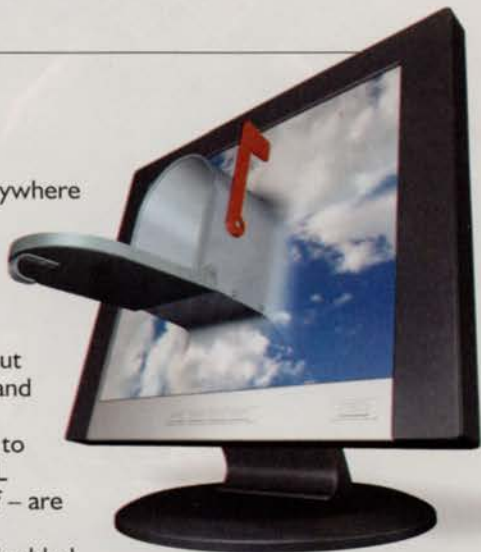
The research shows that e-mail use on portable devices has nearly doubled since 2004, and as a result, people are checking e-mail around the clock. According to the survey, the average e-mail user checks mail about five times a day, and 59 percent of those with portable devices are using them to check e-mail every time a new message arrives.

With or without portable devices, 15 percent of Americans describe themselves as "addicted to e-mail," according to the study.

Other significant findings include:

- Washington, DC is the most "e-mail addicted" city in the country. Rounding out the top 5 U.S. cities addicted to email are: 2. Atlanta; 3. New York; 4. San Francisco and 5. Houston.
- Women are more likely to describe themselves as addicted to e-mail than men.
- Forty-three percent of e-mail users check their e-mail first thing in the morning, and 40 percent have checked their e-mail in the middle of the night.
- Sixty percent of people to checking their personal e-mail at work an average of three times a day.

— Mike Zawacki





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USE READER SERVICE # 21

Aquascapes Makes Announcements at Pondemonium

Distributors, contractors and retailers from across North America came together in mid July for a week of water garden education and networking at Pondemonium 2007 in St. Charles, Ill.

During his opening address at Pond College, Aquascape founder and CEO Greg Wittstock preached the benefits of a balanced lifestyle and finding the right model to build a successful company, which was a theme for this year's event.

"Every year, the energy and passion demonstrated by both customers and employees makes me proud to be a part of this industry," Wittstock says. "This year was no different. Ideas were exchanged, friends were made, and everyone learned a thing or two. I call that success."

Wittstock also used the time to outline some of the major changes taking place at Aquascape.

Beginning in 2008, Aquascape will sell its products through a new Authorized AquascapePRO distributor, doing away with its traditional catalogue and Web-based business. In response to on how to service its clients best, Aquascape has established a nation-wide base of 348 dealer locations.

"The Aquascape you knew last year won't be the Aquascape you know next year," Wittstock says. "The mission and values will not change. What will change is the path to get there. 'Ponds done right, customers served right.' This is our mantra going forward."

In addition, Wittstock introduced attendees to T.D. Decker, Aquascape's new president.

Decker brings to the organization an extensive and diverse 25-year professional track record as an organization builder, change agent and leader. He previously served as president of Ritchie Capital Management, a \$3 billion hedge fund.

"I am thrilled to have the opportunity to lead Aquascape from 'Good to Great,' Decker says. "Having led process, product, service and financial service companies, I am now excited to learn how to run a niche distribution company."

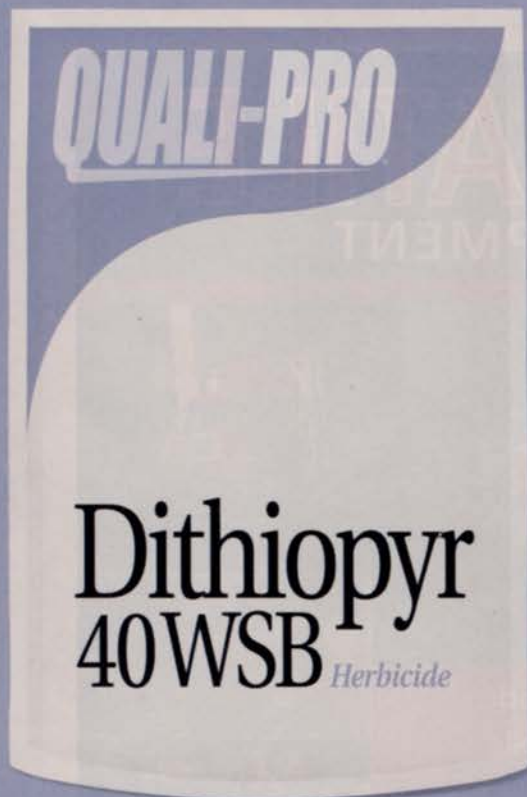
With Decker's addition as company president, Wittstock says his role with Aquascapes will change, too. His primary focus will now be establishing the corporate vision, spreading the company's passion for water features, relationship building and client development and guiding and guarding Aquascape's unique corporate culture.

"I am going to continue to focus on casting the vision, sharing my passion for water gardens, developing relationships throughout the industry and evolving our unique culture," Wittstock says of his new corporate role. "T.D. will ensure we have a solid foundation to continue to grow profitably."

Attendance at this year's event topped more than 1,000 industry professionals.



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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.

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1. ENGLISH: Can you work tomorrow?

SPANISH: ¿Puede trabajar mañana?
(pooH-EH-deh trah-bah-HAHR mah-nee-AH-nah?)

2. ENGLISH: I will pay you at the end of the week.

SPANISH:
Le pagaré al final de la semana.
(leh pah-GAH-reh ahl fee-NAHL deh lah seh-MAH-nah)

3. ENGLISH:
Do you want to take a lunch break?

SPANISH:
¿Quiere tomar un descanso para
almorzar?
(keeEH-reh toh-MAHR oon dehs-KAHN-soh PAH-rah ahl-more-SAHR?)

4. ENGLISH: Your work looks good.

SPANISH: Su trabajo se ve bien.
(soo trah-BAH-hoh she veh beEHN.)

5. ENGLISH:
Do you have a driver's license?

SPANISH: ¿Tiene licencia de conducir?
(teeEH-neh lee-SEHN-see-ah deh kon-do-SEER?)

USE READER SERVICE # 29



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market watch

58 million

The number of U.S. lawns, more than one for every two households. Homeowners spent \$29 billion in 2006 on their yards, up 9.4 percent from 2002.

Source: National Gardening Association



Drought Could Get Worse

The 2007 drought that has affected many parts of U.S. will get worse in the West between now and October, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, a conglomerate of government-run agencies that monitor climate data. In one community in Atlanta, where lawn-watering has been curtailed to one day per week, some residents have resorted to getting up in the middle of the night to water in order to skirt the restrictions.

As far as communities that will be seeing changes for the better, drought conditions in parts of Indiana, Ohio, down through Kentucky and south to Florida are expected to improve.



75%

Experts at the NOAA Climate Prediction Center project a 75 percent chance that the Atlantic Hurricane Season will be above normal this year. NOAA scientists predict 13 to 17 named storms, with seven to 10 becoming hurricanes. Three to five could become major hurricanes of Category 3 strength or higher.

Minimum Wage Boost

All the handwringing about the recent increase in the U.S. minimum wage isn't expected to have much of an effect on the economy, the *Wall Street Journal* reports. It's the first increase in the federal minimum wage since 1997. The increase will be felt more keenly in 20 states where the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour is currently in effect, and in sectors that rely heavily on minimum-wage workers, *The Journal* reports. The new minimum wage will be \$5.85 an hour. Opponents have said the increase would hurt employers and boost inflation.



132,000

Employment increased by 132,000 in June, the U.S. Department of Labor reports. The unemployment rate was unchanged at 4.5 percent. Employment rose in several service-providing industries, while manufacturing employment continued to decline. Average hourly earnings rose by 6 cents, or 0.3 percent, over the month.

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WRIGHT Z





CAN AN INDUSTRY MARKETING CAMPAIGN

SURVIVE?

by marisa palmieri | associate editor

Lack of contractor awareness.
The 24/7 business reality.
Lawn & Landscape looks at these and
other circumstances that try the success
of Project EverGreen.

Lawn care and landscape contractors often discuss their concern that the green industry has an image problem. Evidence lies in the fact that clients balk at the price of high-quality, professional green industry services, but don't hesitate to pay electricians or plumbers their trades' going rates.

One-sided stories in the news further tarnish green industry professionals' reputations when they criticize "the American lawn," chalking up turf as merely an aesthetic, water-guzzling luxury. Consumers don't know the many benefits of all things green like professionals do – that a 25-foot by 25-foot lawn provides enough oxygen for one person for an entire day. Or that landscaping can increase the value of real estate by as much as 15 percent.

The time is now for the green industry to better promote itself to consumers, industry leaders say. Strong messages about landscaping's benefits have the potential to be powerful marketing tools today with the media buzzing about climate change and environmental consciousness. Turn on any TV station or flip through any magazine – "going green" is ubiquitous. Celebrities extol the virtues of carbon-neutral lifestyles; businesses seek LEED accreditation and homeowners consider switching to organic or locally produced products.

At the same time, the tools contractors use to create and maintain landscapes are increasingly under fire. Pockets of local activists nationwide lobby for ordinances that restrict or ban the use of gas-powered leaf blowers, landscape irrigation and pesticides.

Contractors who don't see a threat only need to look to California, where hundreds of communities have restricted or outright banned the use of leaf blowers. Or to Canada, where activists have been successful in getting anti-pesticide legislation passed on the local

level. It's estimated that 35 percent of the Canadian population – including all of Quebec – live under strict pesticide restrictions.

What's the industry to do? While the onus is on each business owner to raise the level of professionalism and proactively promote and create an appreciation for the industry's benefits, such an informal plan of attack is unsatisfactory and difficult to quantify, industry leaders say.

A consumer marketing campaign has emerged over the last three years, spearheaded by Project EverGreen. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization is dedicated to promoting the environmental, economic and lifestyle benefits of well-managed landscapes.

Though most landscape and lawn care professionals agree the industry needs to improve its image, individual companies have not stepped up significantly to contribute to Project EverGreen thus far.

The difficulty the 3-year-old nonprofit has faced in gaining support from individual landscape and lawn care companies begs the question – can a consumer education campaign survive in the green industry?

MAGIC NUMBER. In theory, Project EverGreen's message – the tag line of which is "Because Green Matters" – may prompt those who enjoy and benefit from landscapes to seek professional services or advice about creating and maintaining green spaces. The thought is this greater awareness will ultimately grow the industries that Project EverGreen represents – lawn and landscape, tree care, irrigation, grounds maintenance and golf course and sports turf maintenance. In turn, service providers will be able to charge more for their services and be viewed as expert professionals when knee-jerk, business-limiting restrictions are brought to lawmakers' tables.

But the organization hasn't yet reached a

continued on page 42, sidebar on page 40



— PROJECT — EverGreen

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how does project evergreen stack up?

Over the last decade, "Got Milk?" has become the marketing world's measuring stick for consumer awareness initiatives. Though none of the following are true apples to apples comparisons to Project EverGreen, we take a look at "Got Milk?" – the pie in the sky ambition – and campaigns from the interiorscape and pest control worlds – two service industries with many similarities to the landscape sector.

PIE IN THE SKY: "GOT MILK?"

Contributors: In 1993 California Milk Processors Board debuted "Got Milk?" Two years later the CMPB licensed the campaign to the National Dairy Board.

Goal: Though much broader today, the original goal was to reverse a decade of declining milk sales in California.

Funding: Initially, members of the CMPB agreed to finance the campaign by contributing three cents for every gallon of milk they processed, allowing for a \$23 million annual budget. Today, the dairy industry, through mandatory assessments, spends more than \$150 million annually to promote the "Got Milk?" message.

Elements: At first campaign creators tapped into the "deprivation" factor of not having milk to go with cookies, brownies or peanut butter sandwiches (remember the popular "Who shot Aaron Burr?" commercial?). Later, "Got Milk?" was licensed to the National Milk Mustache Campaign, which created print advertisements featuring celebrities with milk mustaches. "Got Milk?" is also known for its guerilla marketing tactics, including point-of-purchase reminders, grocery store floor decals and stickers on bananas.

Results: In 1994, California's milk sales increased for the first time in more than a decade. Within months, "Got Milk?" had invaded the pop culture vernacular; a decade after the campaign was introduced, the tagline had a 95-percent recall rate among Americans.

MIGHTY MINI: GREEN PLANTS FOR GREEN BUILDINGS (FORMERLY PLANTS AT WORK)

Contributors: The interior landscape industry's Green Plants for Green Buildings is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that originated as an initiative of the Professional Landcare Network's predecessor association. Its contributors, called "investors," are interiorscape businesses and industry suppliers.

Goal: GPGB informs the public about the benefits of interior plants in the workplace. Key audiences include facility and property managers, building owners and human resources executives.

Funding: GPGB runs on an annual budget of about \$200,000, made up solely of donations from interiorscape firms and suppliers. Though GPGB suggests investors contribute one-tenth of one percent of their annual revenues, contributions are entirely voluntary. The average contribution is about \$2,000, says M.J. Gilhooley, media relations coordinator.



Elements: GPGB represents the interiorscape industry at six trade shows per year, gathering leads and providing them to its investors. It also coordinates a program in which it certifies interiorscape professionals to provide continuing education units to members of the U.S. Green Building Council and the American Institute of Architects.

Results: Key media relations placements include a one-page story in *Environmental Design & Construction* magazine, a trade publication for one of the industry's key audiences. Gilhooley expects the "train the trainer" program, which allows interiorscapers to provide green building professionals and architects with CEUs, to create the biggest impact moving forward, as it positions interiorscape professionals as experts and puts them face to face with potential clients. About 500 industry members have completed this training so far.

A DECADE IN THE MAKING: PROFESSIONAL PEST MANAGEMENT ALLIANCE

Contributors: PPMA is comprised of several sectors of stakeholders in the pest management industry, including pest management firms, suppliers and distributors.

Goal: PPMA serves as a unified, proactive voice of the pest management industry, working to increase consumer awareness of the value of professional pest management services, protect the industry's reputation and increase the size of its consumer and commercial markets.

Budget/funding: PPMA's 2007 operating budget was \$1.8 million. Two-thirds of contributors are individual pest management firms; the rest are suppliers and other industry stakeholders. All donations are voluntary. Contributors are asked to give one-tenth of one percent of their annual revenues, or a minimum of \$250.

Elements: In addition to public relations efforts, PPMA produces commercials and public service announcements that promote the industry. Also, in return for contributing, donors have access to the exclusive site www.ppmatools.org, home of customizable news releases, marketing tips, presentations, crisis communications tools, consumer market research and a variety of other tools.

Results: Efforts have contributed to growing the market by five million new homeowners using professional pest management services. In 2006, PPMA garnered media coverage equivalent to more than \$10 million in advertising value.



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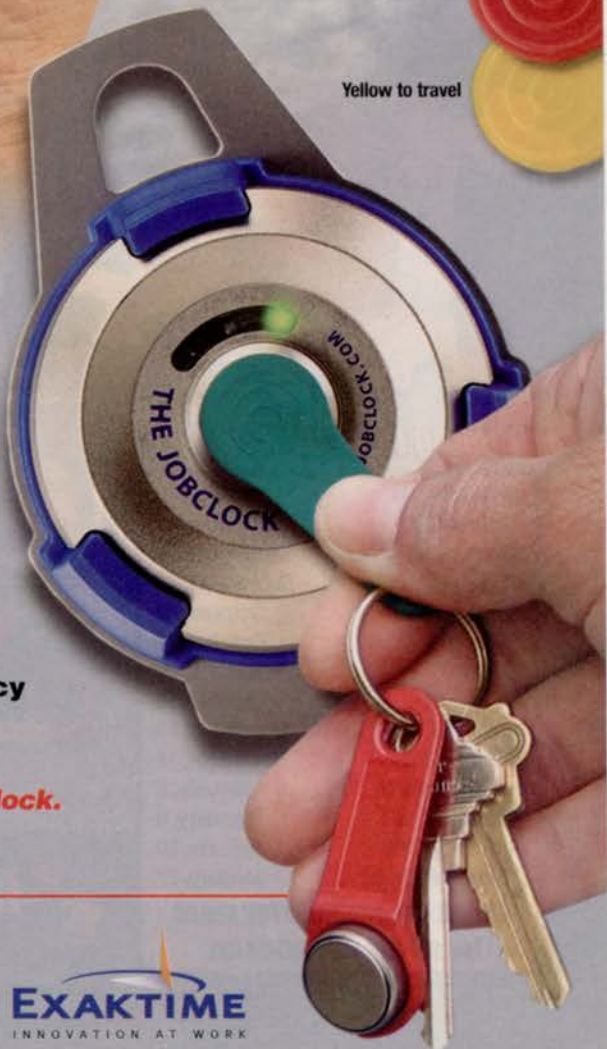
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level where it's able to affect significant change.

"We're at about \$1.2 million annually including pro bono contributions," says Den Gardner, Project EverGreen's executive director. "That's awesome. But over the next three to five years we have to get to \$4 million to \$5 million, which is the level that history and marketing experts tell us

well-managed green space looks like and the effort and expertise it takes to deliver such an asset, Gardner says. "We need that attitude shift in America today."

DO THE MATH. Project EverGreen has been successful in a number of areas, namely in gaining exposure for its service-oriented programs like Gre-

600 million impressions – marketing speak for the number of people who have been exposed to a message through print or broadcast media – or close to \$2.5 million in advertising and editorial value.

While visibility is good, it's not enough to propel an organization – or an industry – into the future. It starts with funding, and support for Project EverGreen has fallen short of expectations in getting individual companies to contribute financially.

About 50 percent of Project EverGreen's contributions are from suppliers and the corporate offices of the industry's national landscape and lawn care companies – the same folks who are consistently tapped for support and sponsorship dollars by associations and other organizations. Industry-related media companies and associations donate 30 percent and 11 percent of total contributions, respectively. Individual green industry service providers contribute the

"There is so much pressure today in just taking care of the business that there aren't enough people thinking about the long term." – Den Gardner

we need to be in order to make attitudinal changes in consumers."

Moving forward, Project Evergreen's target is to help consumers make the connection between what a

enCare for Troops, which sets contractors up to volunteer their services for families of service members deployed overseas. In 2007, Project EverGreen has already generated more than



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smallest piece of the pie, or about 10 percent of Project EverGreen's funds.

Gardner wants to see that change. He expects that 10 percent to triple – so at least one-third of the foundation's dollars are coming from landscape and lawn care companies.

"All end users need to understand the landscape is changing in terms of messaging," Gardner says. "After they understand that, we want them to think, 'It's important that my customers understand that managed green spaces are important.' And to get that story told, hopefully, they'll realize, 'I as an LCO or landscaper need to offer support, whether it's \$5 or \$500, to the organization that's promoting that message.'"

Though he'd love 100 percent participation from green industry members, Gardner says he'd be naïve to think that he could get even 80 percent of companies to contribute.

He's right. Only about 34 percent of industry members indicate they'd

be willing to support a national marketing campaign promoting the benefits of green spaces, a recent *Lawn & Landscape* study shows.

That 34 percent sounds about right to Gardner. "Do the math and think if we just got \$200 from a portion of the companies out there," he says, trailing off, running the numbers in his head. If Project EverGreen received an annual \$200 donation from one third of service providers in the entire green industry universe – estimated to be about 77,500 firms based on *Lawn & Landscape's* circulation – it would have a \$5.2 million budget.

Getting to \$5 million is Project EverGreen's goal over the next five years. Though still just a sliver of "Got Milk?" – the consumer awareness campaign against which all others are measured – meeting or exceeding the magic number would allow the nonprofit to greatly refine and expand its most successful initiatives, says Chris Kujawa, Project EverGreen's

incoming president and executive vice president for Milwaukee-based KEL, a full-service landscape company.

Specifically, Project EverGreen's EverGreen Zone concept would grow faster with such a budget, Gardner says. The EverGreen Zone effort, set to debut in Akron, Ohio, in 2008, involves enhancing and maintaining an area in a mid-sized city that's – in the words of Kujawa – "less than Mayberry-esque," and measures what impact the managed green space has on the surrounding area before and after the EverGreen Zone is established. This concept couples the consumer attitude metrics the nonprofit needs with the public relations and goodwill benefits of beautifying a community.

Project EverGreen's goal is to establish 20 EverGreen Zones in mid-sized cities throughout the country over the next five years. Achieving the magic number – an annual budget of \$5 million – will help the nonprofit more quickly achieve that goal, Gardner says.

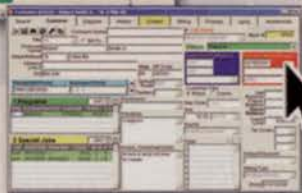


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WHERE'S THE SUPPORT? As the landscape industry is largely made up of independent-minded entrepreneurs who run local businesses, convincing people to lend their support for the good of the whole has been challenging, Kujawa acknowledges.

Lack of professionalism is a pervasive issue in the green industry – the

– who are often uneducated, uninsured and not paying taxes – to ante up to benefit the entire industry.

But lack of financial support for Project EverGreen can't be blamed on the fly-by-nighters alone, considering *Lawn & Landscape* research shows two-thirds of industry members would not support such a consumer

panies big and small prepared three-, five-, 10-year business plans," he says. "But there is so much pressure today in just taking care of the business that there aren't enough people thinking about the long term."

This trend is especially true for companies in the \$1 million and below club, says Bruce Bachand of Carol King Landscape Maintenance. That group, according to *Lawn & Landscape* research, is about 85 percent of the industry.

Bachand, who is vice president of the Orlando, Fla.-based \$8 million firm, associates with many small companies through his involvement in the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association. "Those guys for the most part are just worried about their businesses and making a living and don't necessarily worry about the bigger picture and where the industry is going to be in 10 years."

Another theory is the industry's sometimes cutthroat nature fosters an

"There are so many companies out there that won't lend their support to anything if they're not going to see a nickel go right back into their pocket for doing it." – Joe Lymp

low barrier to entering the business is no secret, encouraging part-timers and fly-by-nighters to swoop in to make a quick buck, leaving disgruntled customers in their wake. It's clear Project EverGreen can't count on these folks

awareness campaign.

Why so many naysayers? The main roadblock to support, Gardner believes, is the lack of business planning today – even among reputable companies. "Fifteen to 25 years ago, com-

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every-company-for-itself sentiment – one that detracts from efforts that seek to create a unified front.

That's not to say there's no camaraderie or fellowship in the green industry, but relatively low membership rates in major trade organizations

industry service provider members. The American Nursery & Landscape Association has about 500 members who report landscaping as their primary business type. Together, the membership of these two groups (which estimate little overlap in member-

to consultant Jeff Carowitz) and the Tree Care Industry Association has 1,750 contractor members (close to 10 percent of all tree care companies in the U.S., as estimated by TCIA).

Even at the local and state levels, industry members say interest in the good of the whole is waning. "I know in our state organization, we've had trouble getting the younger contractors to participate," says Joe Lymp, president of Deschutes Environmental Services in Sunriver, Ore. Lymp serves on the board for the Oregon Landscape Contractors Association and also is a PLANET member. OLCA has 361 contractor members, a spokeswoman says, noting membership has been "slightly down" in recent years. "There are so many companies out there that won't lend their support to anything if they're not going to see a nickel go right back into their pocket for doing it," Lymp says. "They're only out to make what they can make and they don't

"To me, the GreenCare for Troops campaign and some of the other things, while admirable, do not necessarily do the job of getting before decision makers and the public and letting them know what needs to be done."

- Bruce Bachand

suggest there's room for improvement when it comes to green industry involvement on a national level. For example, the Professional Landcare Network, the industry's national trade association, has about 2,700 green in-

ship), makes up only about 4 percent of the landscape universe's 77,500 or so companies. The Irrigation Association has about 900 contractor members (about 2 percent of irrigation contractor universe, according

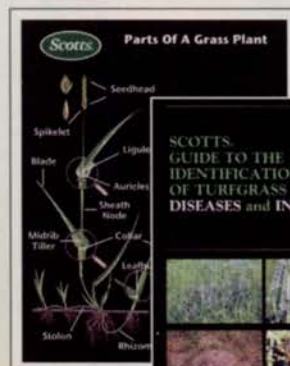
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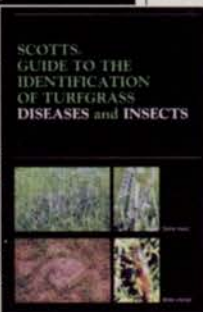
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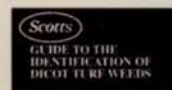
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have time for anybody but themselves.”

PLANET President Jim Martin disagrees, saying that though the sheer number of members may seem low, the level of support from active volunteers is above average. He points to industry certification testing and the Renewal & Remembrance beatification event at Arlington National Cemetery as two examples of excellence in industry involvement.

Regarding Project EverGreen, Martin – who has contributed financially and by participating in GreenCare for Troops – says the organization, though still in its infancy, seems to be on the right track. “Organizations take time to get clarity of purpose and to establish their tentacles in the marketplace,” he says.

Martin also offers a perspective on fundraising – a piece that highlights why GreenCare for Troops has been more successful than general fundraising. “If you just ask people for money and they don’t understand what it’s going to, it’s hard for people to relate,” Martin says. “But it’s easy to contribute when you’re being asked for something specific.” With GreenCare for Troops, contractors are asked to provide a specific service for a set period of time.

That’s not the case for general donations. Project EverGreen’s Web

site asks donors to “please consider making a generous donation that will truly support our mission to promote the significance of those like you who preserve and enhance green spaces.” Is that the strong call to action industry members need?

Project EverGreen could get more specific by taking the approach of groups that advertise “just a dollar a day can feed a child in Africa,” Martin says. An industry example of a “specific ask” would be to tell prospective donors that a \$200 donation will allow for a tree to be planted at a Habitat for Humanity site, or \$100

MARKETING CHALLENGES.

The greatest reason for lack of support, research shows, is lack of awareness. Seventy-eight percent of contractors who don’t contribute to Project EverGreen say they’ve never heard of the nonprofit.

Even though Project EverGreen’s ultimate goal is to market to consumers, getting the word out to industry members is essential for growth at this juncture, and the group doesn’t yet have a broad recognition in the marketplace. Lack of awareness, no doubt, is resulting in an untapped pool of supporters.

Only **34** percent of industry members indicate they’d be willing to support a national marketing campaign promoting the benefits of green spaces.

contribution would allow Project EverGreen to reach out to three more GreenCare for Troops providers.

“People can relate to that,” Martin says. “If you just ask for general contributions, that’s vague and nebulous. And with Project EverGreen, I don’t think most people know what the money is being used for.”

Lymp, who’s worked in the landscape industry for more than 30 years, feels an obligation to give back to the industry that’s allowed him to make a good living. When asked about a nationwide campaign to promote the value of green spaces to consumers, Lymp says he thinks it’s a good idea that would make a

the making of project evergreen

In 1998 the Professional Lawn Care Association of America redefined its educational and research arm and named it the Evergreen Foundation. PLCAA members had concluded that funding turf research was no longer a priority and decided instead to promote the benefits of green spaces by helping local groups with seed money and guidance for green space development.

In 2002 the Evergreen Foundation board asked Den Gardner, a communications professional with a background in the green industry, to determine the long-term viability of the foundation. “I didn’t see a future in the form that it was in – giving small grants to communities,” Gardner says, citing a limited budget and difficulty raising money to support the cause as reasons for his conclusion. “My recommendation was either to give the foundation’s money back to PLCAA or to create a whole

new focus and vision,” he says.

That new focus and vision was Project EverGreen. In June of 2003, Gardner organized a meeting with green industry thought leaders to brainstorm opportunities for the Evergreen Foundation.

Borne of that meeting was the concept and vision for a nationwide consumer awareness campaign to educate the public about the benefits of well maintained green spaces. Several months later a marketing committee voted to change the name to Project EverGreen to reflect a proactive organization with a sense of urgency, Gardner says.

The next step was to begin raising money and generating supporters, which the organization did for about a year before it began marketing to the trade and consumers in January 2005.



difference, especially if it coincided with today's discussions about global warming. "If people realized that an actively growing patch of lawn can produce enough oxygen for a family of four and realized we're improving living conditions – that would go along with all of the hype Al Gore is pushing," he says.

Lymp, however, has never heard of Project EverGreen.

CLEARING UP CONFUSION.

Others who are familiar with the nonprofit are confused about its mission or don't see the value. Bachand, for example, would like the group to directly promote "an awareness of the tools that we need to do our job on a consistent basis." Though Bachand is active in other aspects of the landscape industry, he elects not to contribute to Project EverGreen at this time. "To me, the GreenCare for Troops campaign and some of the other things, while admirable, do not necessarily do the job of getting before decision makers and the public and letting them know what needs to be done," he says.

There's a disconnect, however, between Bachand's and some contractors' expectations and Project EverGreen's capabilities. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Project EverGreen is not permitted

to lobby lawmakers. "That's the job of our partner associations," Gardner says. "It's their job to protect their membership through lobbying. Our job is promotion through education and information."

Chad Stern, owner of Mowing & More in Chevy Chase, Md., also was unclear about the group's mission. He had seen ads for it before, but he wasn't really sure what it was. "I thought it was some type of reforestation project that planted trees all over," he says. One day this past winter, something prompted him to look up Project EverGreen. He was surprised at what he discovered. "I didn't know it's an organization designed to promote public awareness of the green industry," he says. "I think it's a good idea."

The group's name is what caused Stern confusion at first. "Once I took the time to actually read the ad, then I understood more specifically the purpose of the organization. But the name – the word 'project' – sounds more like something that's a one-shot deal." (To learn more about the name, read "The Making of Project EverGreen" on page 47.)

There also is lack of differentiation between Project EverGreen and its flagship program GreenCare for Troops. Brad Tabke, president of

Quercus Landscapes in Shakopee, Minn., began volunteering through GreenCare after learning about it at last year's Green Industry Expo. But he acknowledges he's not very familiar with Project EverGreen as an organization and he's not sure the average contractor is, either.

"You would have to be fairly involved in the industry to know about Project EverGreen," he says. "And the average contractor probably isn't." **LL**

(Editor's note: GIE Media, Lawn & Landscape's parent company, is a financial contributor to Project EverGreen; Editorial Director Cindy Code is current president of the nonprofit's board of directors.)

About the Research

In July, *Lawn & Landscape* conducted a survey to discern industry members' opinions about a national consumer marketing campaign promoting the benefits of green spaces. The magazine's marketing and research department conducted a fax survey to a random selection of its subscribers and received 212 responses. The results of that survey are used throughout this article.

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EVERGREEN ZONES – The EverGreen Zone concept is one of Project EverGreen’s most sophisticated and ambitious undertakings to date. It involves transforming perceptions about the value of green spaces in a mid-sized city. In addition to beautifying and managing a “less than Mayberry-esque” area and targeting public relations efforts there, Project EverGreen will conduct market research to capture consumer attitudes and behaviors before and after the Zone is implemented. Akron, Ohio, will be the city to see an EverGreen Zone in 2008 and the organization’s board plans to extend this effort to 20 mid-sized cities over the next five years. **Results: To be determined.**

GREENCARE FOR TROOPS – One of the organization’s leading initiatives in terms of both attention and participation is GreenCare for Troops, which helps military families whose breadwinner is on active duty in the Middle East receive complimentary lawn care and landscape services. **Results: More than 1,000 volunteers donated landscape services to 4,000-plus families.**



PRINTED MATERIALS – Project EverGreen sells a “Because Green Matters” Calendar, “Down-To-Earth Tips” pocket guide and “Lifescapes” insert as tools for contractors to communicate the value of green spaces to their clients and prospects without having to create their own marketing pieces. **Results: Project EverGreen and contractors have distributed more than 20,000 “Lifescapes” pieces and 4,000 “Because Green Matters” calendars.**



YARD ENTHUSIASTS OF AMERICA – Project EverGreen created YEA, an affinity club and online community for people who love their yards, to allow individuals to share gardening and landscape advice and further promote the benefits of green space. **Results: Not available.**

AWARDS, SCHOLARSHIPS & PARTNERSHIPS– Project EverGreen awards two \$2,500 scholarships annually to students in green industry-related fields and gives out Because Green Matters and Stewardship Awards to honor groups and people that recognize the importance of green spaces. Partnerships include Habitat for Humanity projects, athletic field renovations, America in Bloom and the National Golf Course Publicity in Partnership with GCSAA. **Results: The efforts generate numerous public relations opportunities.**



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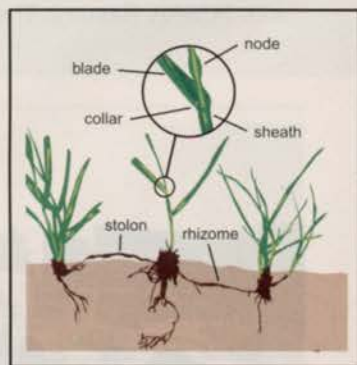
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Lighting Up Profits

The approach Robertson's Landscaping used to add a holiday lighting distributorship sheds some light on this wintertime service.

While "decking the halls" is a time-honored tradition at many households, it doesn't usually top the list of homeowners' favorite outdoor chores. Rigging up outdoor lighting exposes people to inclement weather plus various safety hazards, including getting on the roof, working with electricity and climbing trees.

A number of green industry service providers have discovered the profit potential in installing, taking down and storing holiday lighting – a service consumers value, but don't want to do themselves.

Over the last 50-plus years, Robertson's Landscaping in Colorado Springs, Colo., has positioned itself as a full-service landscape company – one that takes care of customers who don't want to do any work in their yards at all, says General Manager Steve Samuels.

Borne of this philosophy about 17 years ago was Robertson's holiday lighting division, which kept one crew busy hanging consumer-grade lights purchased from local retailers for 30 or so customers. "Most people love holiday lights, but they don't want to put them up themselves," Samuels says. "It started as a service that people asked us to provide, and we did it as necessary. We didn't do any marketing."

Photo: Brite Ideas Decorating

by marisa palmieri | associate editor

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Two years ago, Samuels recognized the greater potential of the holiday lighting division. Not only were there profits to be made, but boosting this side of the business would allow Robertson's to address a major labor concern – providing year-round employment for as many workers as possible.

To boost its holiday division, Robertson's became a distributor of commercial-grade holiday lighting. By ditching lights from Wal-Mart for their commercial-grade counterparts and instituting a sales and marketing plan, the company added two additional lighting crews and generated more than \$200,000 in revenue last season. With 100-plus holiday accounts slated for this season, Samuels hopes to devote 14 employees to the service.

GETTING STARTED. When taking its holiday lighting division to the

next level, Robertson's Landscaping partnered with a manufacturer's representative to become a distributor. For less than a \$10,000 initial investment, Robertson's gained access to the commercial-grade products for installation or retail sale, plus training, support and a la carte marketing materials.

Access to commercial-grade LED lighting (light emitting diodes) is

“Most people love holiday lights, but they don't want to put them up themselves.” – Steve Samuels

one of the first things that piqued Samuel's interest in a holiday lighting distributorship. “LEDs use one-tenth of the electricity and they last longer so there are fewer call-backs because strands aren't burning out,” he says. “They're four times more expensive initially, but most LEDs have a 10-

year lifespan.” (For more information on LED lights, see page 124.)

Last year, three-quarters of Robertson's holiday lighting sales were LED lights vs. traditional incandescent lights. “We really market the energy savings,” Samuels says. “Everyone's looking for green buildings, green cars – these are green lights.” An added benefit is the savings customers see on their electricity bills. “A lot of people had them up for three months last season vs. four weeks previously,” Samuels adds.

Lengthening the time clients can enjoy this service adds to its value, as holiday lighting can be a relatively pricey proposition for customers. Price points average around 1 percent of a home's value for a year-one installation, he says. The net profit margin on first-year installation – which is different from subsequent years in that it includes the initial product purchase as well as setup, takedown and storage – is

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about 30 percent, Samuels says. Robertson's prices the lights by the strand or piece; setup and takedown services are assigned hourly rates; and annual storage fees depend on the number of pieces being stored – it's typically about 10 percent of the cost of lights.

OPERATIONAL STRATEGY. The company's sales organization is made up of four project managers plus the owner and general manager who all sell the entire menu of services to their own accounts. Lighting is no different; it's just one more service they sell their clients. "We feel it's better to create a relationship with one person vs. being bounced around to different departments," Samuels says.

Generally, the salesman meets with clients and develops an estimate based on the products to be used and how long installation will take. When the job is sold, it's entered into the firm's scheduling software program, which is helpful, as there are some timing

concerns with holiday lighting. Many clients want their lights to be installed the day after Thanksgiving and Robertson's needs to begin installations in early October to fit them all in. While some companies offer discounts to encourage customers to sign up early, the market hasn't forced Robertson's into discounting yet.

Robertson's Landscaping has focused on advertising holiday lighting to its existing client base by including fliers about the service in literature the company sends regarding irrigation system shut-offs during the month of October. The cost per piece for the simple information sheets is just "the cost of a sheet of paper," Samuels says.

But word-of-mouth marketing has taken off, especially since Robertson's started installing LED lights, Samuels says. Neighbors of lighting customers frequently become new clients, even though the company does not offer incentives. Newly acquired holiday clients have boosted sales in other ar-

reas of the business, too, Samuels says. "We've picked up 10 to 12 jobs based on clients we hadn't known before."

The design software program that Robertson's has access to through its distributorship will add to its marketing efforts this season. The program allows project managers to input images of prospective clients' homes and then digitally augment them with holiday lighting designs. Samuels hopes it will allow Robertson's salesmen to "do estimates on the fly." For example, they could take digital images of the homes of clients' neighbors and show them the potential of professionally designed and installed holiday lighting displays. If, as the saying goes, seeing is believing, Robertson's should have no trouble racking up another record season of holiday lighting sales. **LL**

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Visit the September Online Extras section for more on holiday lighting trends.

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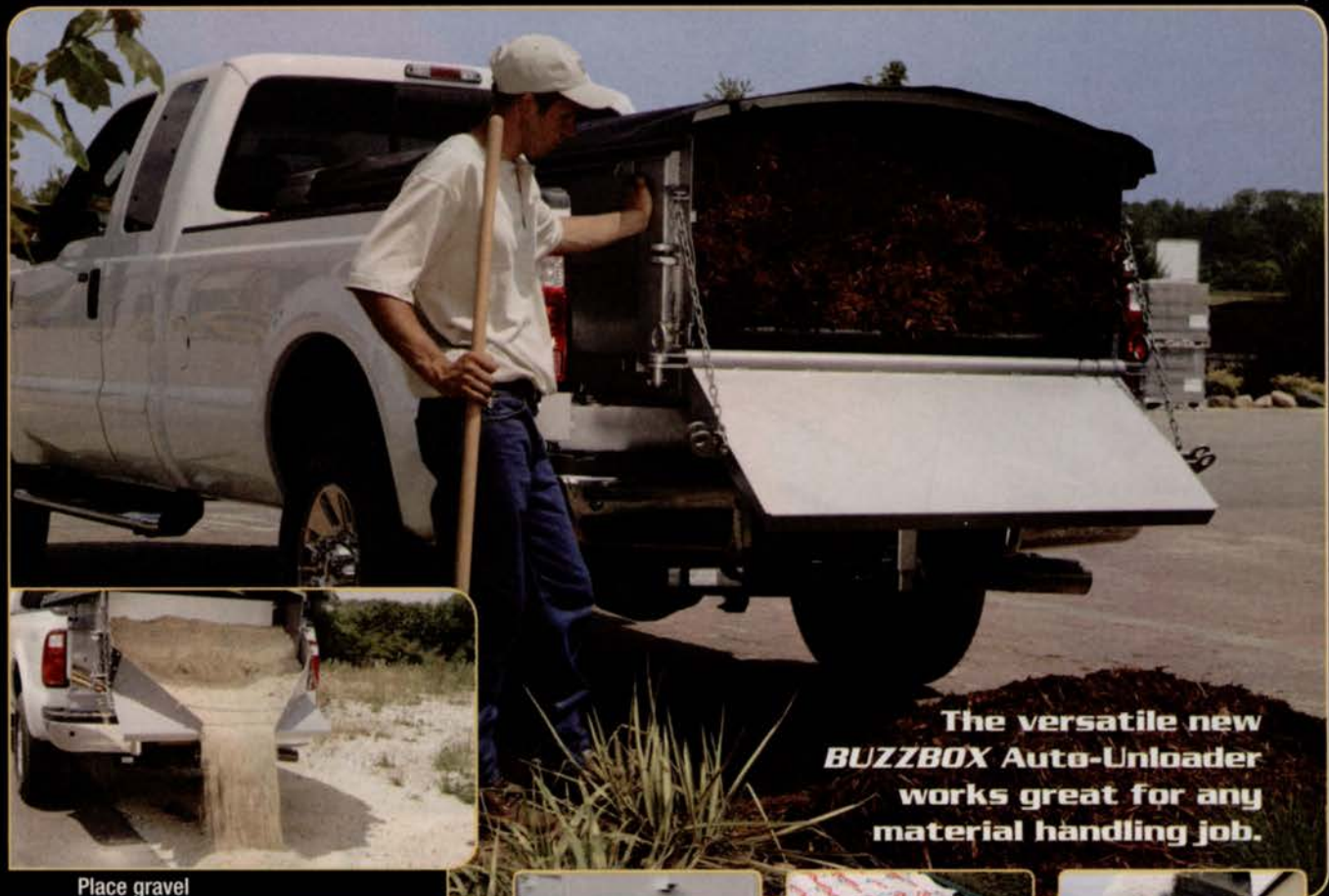
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Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board participants contemplate if big growth is the sole factor in a successful landscape company.

Growth Gone Wild

Landscape companies don't come with owner's manuals. Achieving success and managing solid growth is what every entrepreneur strives for when they hang up the sign that states "Open for Business."

Landscape Contractor Jamie Bush posted to the *Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board* whether the only measure of success was managing a big fat landscape company. Is it possible for a company to survive and compete in the green industry without aggressive growth, or is a stagnant company – one maintaining little to zero annual growth – merely a dying company? "Can a company set a sales goal and maintain it successfully, or is this a recipe for disaster," posts the president of Jamie's Lawn Service in Plano, Texas.

Many contractors questioned whether size was the ultimate goal of the landscape business owner, or whether simply being better than one's competi-

tion created enough opportunities to support or maintain an existing sales base.

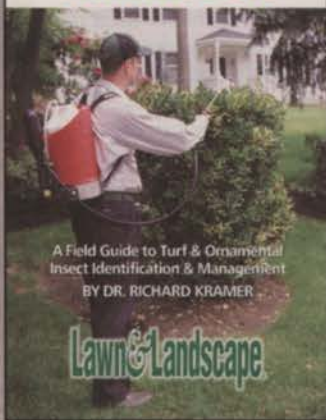
And a number of other contractors weighed in that they didn't believe growth was critical to survival. For example, if a landscape contractor's sales remain constant, his skilled and reliable employees can be retained and he is satisfied with the annual revenue level, then that company could be defined as "successful."

If an account is lost, replace it. Employees leave, replace them. Regardless, doing what it takes to find and maintain a sweet spot is the essence of zero growth.

Others, though, posted they prefer to regulate their companies' growth between active and non-active economic periods.

Instead of increasing in size and capacity, growth can focus on getting better and increasing client retention, posts Aaron Smith, owner of S&D Lawn Service in Essex Junction, Vt. "Setting

Technician's Handbook



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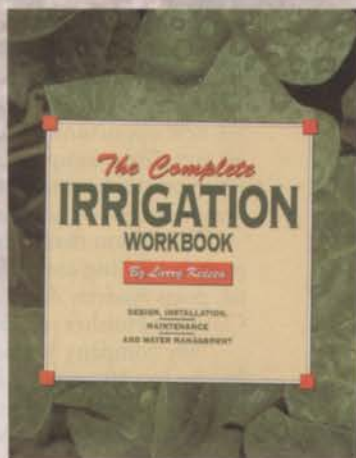
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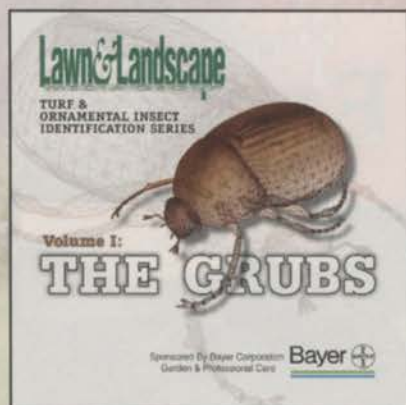
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yourself apart from the competition is what will save you from having to sell all of the time," Smith says. "Besides, if the business is not incredibly profitable then who wants to run \$6 million in headaches?"

With regard to employees, Chad Stern, owner of Mowing & More in Chevy Chase, Md. posts business growth and getting bigger provide attractive opportunities for workers. "If a company stagnates it is hard to create new opportunities for employees," he says. "As a company grows crew foremen can be promoted to production managers or account managers."

The notion that a stagnant company is a failing company is unfounded, posts Andrew Aksar, president of Outdoor Finishes in Walkersville, Md.

"My company has been stagnant for the last 10 years," Aksar says. "I have no true desire to grow. I have not grown. And actually, we're doing rather well."

Contractor Kelly Tohill agrees. He,

too, has not "grown" in several years and does not desire to expand the parameters of his landscape business in the foreseeable future, posts the owner of Atlanta-based Tohill Landscape Management. "What I do is try to get better accounts worth more money and get rid of the less profitable ones," Tohill says. "I am running a smooth operating machine at this point. It has been all about setting up procedures that help us do the same thing everywhere I go.

"This has worked for me," he adds. "And I'm happy and get to do pretty much what I want. You boys can have it. I don't care about having a huge company. Work less, I say. You're going to look back and say I should have done more things."

If a landscape contractor isn't growing through revenue, doesn't he still grow in other areas of his business that positively impact the bottom line, asks Bill Smallwood, owner of W.I. Smallwood Landscaping in Sa-

lem, N.H. "If you are able to increase productivity or efficiency, thus reducing the cost of doing business, you are growing," Smallwood posts. "If you are able to get better pricing on materials through negotiations, you again are growing."

Some contractors argue that a landscape firm in zero-growth mode isn't necessarily a stagnant or dying company. For example, a contractor focused on servicing 200 accounts may make more money on those clients than a large-sized landscape firm tending 1,000 customers simply from having to deal with less day-to-day headaches.

"I fired and lost a good deal of customers this year," posts Matthew Schattner, owner of Mat'z Snow & Lawn in Kansasville, Wis. "But I replaced them in a nearly equal dollar amount of work. The new ones are all far closer than what I got rid of. So, did my business actually shrink? Yes, but I'm far more profitable." ■

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USE READER SERVICE # 44

Growth pushes business owners to work hard, but grow too quickly and you may have trouble keeping up. Unhappy customers and uninspired employees can ruin those big growth gains. The National Federation of Independent Business offers business owners five tips on how to manage growth gone wild but keep your company firmly planted on the fast track.

SET YOUR OWN PATH. Planning for unprecedented growth may sound like an oxymoron, but whether part of the original business plan or added after the business takes off, a growth plan is essential for any business.

KEEP YOUR HEAD ON STRAIGHT. Growing a company requires careful consideration, which means taking a frequent look at cash flow and understanding your business' limits. Growing successfully requires big choices, but it's just as important that owners make the right business choices.

HIRE SHARP PEOPLE. Whether it's your first employee or your 50th, hiring indiscriminately produces more problems than not hiring at all. You can't hire people you like. You have to hire people who are good at their jobs.

REVISIT THE DRAWING BOARD. You can crave growth so much that you expend all your energy on creating growth and you forget what you're doing. Growth should be natural. Some people want to beat existing quotas every year. What about being a great business? Reevaluating your plans is as important as making a plan in the first place. If several signs indicate that your original plan isn't working, be willing to change course.

GET BACK TO THE BASICS. If the notion of "out with the old, in with the new" ever grabs hold of you, it might be time to take a step back. No matter how big you grow, remembering where and with whom you started keeps you grounded.

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USE READER SERVICE # 46

THE GREEN IN MAINTAINING GREEN

Adverse economic conditions have not reduced lawn care's viability as a solid profit center for landscape contractors.

Despite increases in fuel prices, odd weather extremes, low-ball competitors and increasing demand for qualified technicians, lawn care professionals say business is solid, and for some, it's only getting better.

Overall, more than 67 percent of lawn care operators (LCOs) indicated their total chemical lawn care business increased over the last year, according to research conducted by *Lawn & Landscape*. That growth, on average, was about a 22 percent increase and is in line with what many LCOs are seeing in their financials.

"I haven't experienced a downturn on the lawn care side of my business," says Wayne Shiveley, president of Pine Ridge Landscaping in Chantilly, Va. Lawn care makes up about 10 percent of Shiveley's overall revenue and he's seen consistent 15 to 20 percent annual growth in the chemical lawn care service segment. "We're strictly commercial focused and the commercial market in the D.C. area is very strong," Shiveley says.

Roger Meyer, president of American Beauty Landscaping in Boardman, Ohio, agrees. "We continue to grow our lawn care service at about 25 percent annually," he says. "In fact, we're planning to be more aggressive with advertising our lawn care service going into 2008."

Despite drought conditions in the South, historical trends provide LCOs with opportunities to recoup lost lawn care revenue, says Sam Lang, president of Fairway Green in Raleigh, S.C. For example, drought traditionally cuts into fungicide revenue. "The flip side is when you have a drought you need to replace all of that dead fescue, so your reseed sales go up," Lang says.

Overall, LCOs see about a 27 percent profit margin from their chemical lawn care service, the data says. In addition, more than 60 percent report that the profit margin for chemical

lawn care services was either higher or the same as the other services they offered.

For the lawn care industry, many negative national and regional economic trends are cyclical and don't necessarily spell doom for an LCO, says Neil Cleveland, managing director for Bayer Environmental Science in Research Triangle Park, N.C. Many times these adversities can be managed through careful business practices. "LCOs seem to be upbeat and confident that they've been able to grow their businesses," he says. "It's true that cost increases are concerns for LCOs and all of us in this industry, but any lawn care professional who's been in this business for any length of time knows that these types of issues come up and they need to be managed through careful monitoring of a contractor's costs."

Cultural and generational trends also drive growth in this market segment, says Tom Kroll, product manager with Nufarm Americas, Burr Ridge, Ill. "Even though there are local impacts on dollars spent, with the exception of the impact of oil prices, an aging consumer is demanding more free time and less burden from the daily chores of lawn care," he says.

Besides fuel prices, LCOs indicated they face a lack of qualified technicians and government restrictions and regulations, the data says.

So what does the typical LCO's operation look like? According to the research, the average LCO is a full-service landscape contractor who included chemical lawn care as part of his overall service menu. The contractor derives nearly 30 percent of his overall profit from chemical lawn care services. His client portfolio, on average, is 57 percent residential, 30 percent commercial, 8 percent multi-family and 3 percent municipal. His top selling services include fertilization plus herbicide treatments (38 percent), weed control (20 percent) and fertilization plus insecticide treatments (13 percent). ■

by mike zawacki | managing editor



WEST

Contractor Profile

- 58% Full-service landscape contractor
- 16% Chemical lawn care operator
- 26% Landscape maintenance and lawn care contractor

Pesticide Percent Profit:

23%

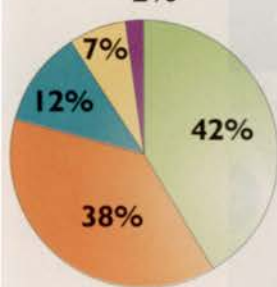
Pesticide Application Breakdown

- 65% Turf
- 10% Tree
- 22% Ornamental
- 3% Other

Account Breakdown

- 44% Residential
- 37% Commercial
- 11% Multi-family
- 6% Municipal
- 2% Other

2%



SOUTH

Contractor Profile

- 59% Full-service landscape contractor
- 20% Chemical lawn care operator
- 21% Landscape maintenance and lawn care contractor

Pesticide Percent Profit:

28%

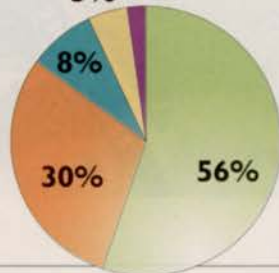
Pesticide Application Breakdown

- 68% Turf
- 9% Tree
- 20% Ornamental
- 3% Other

Account Breakdown

- 56% Residential
- 30% Commercial
- 8% Multi-family
- 5% Municipal
- 1% Other

5% 2%



MIDWEST

Contractor Profile

- 51% Full-service landscape contractor
- 17% Chemical lawn care operator
- 32% Landscape maintenance and lawn care contractor

Pesticide Percent Profit:

29%

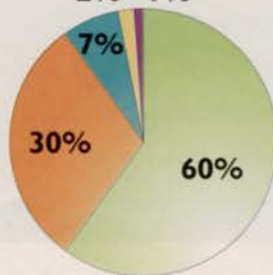
Pesticide Application Breakdown

- 84% Turf
- 6% Tree
- 8% Ornamental
- 2% Other

Account Breakdown

- 60% Residential
- 30% Commercial
- 7% Multi-family
- 2% Municipal
- 1% Other

2% 1%



NORTHEAST

Contractor Profile

- 74% Full-service landscape contractor
- 10% Chemical lawn care operator
- 16% Landscape maintenance and lawn care contractor

Pesticide Percent Profit:

28%

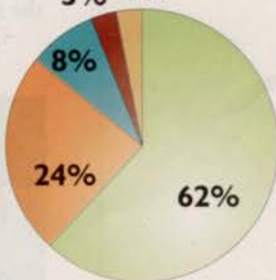
Pesticide Application Breakdown

- 76% Turf
- 6% Tree
- 16% Ornamental
- 2% Other

Account Breakdown

- 62% Residential
- 24% Commercial
- 8% Multi-family
- 3% Municipal
- 1% Other

3% 3%



SOURCE: Lawn & Landscape via InsightExpress

COST AND QUALITY

Though they are enticed by generics' cost savings, LCOs still put their faith - and dollars - in products that produce results.

Pesticide expenditures in the chemical lawn care market, according to *Lawn & Landscape* research, continue to increase.

In 2006, 59 percent of lawn care operators report they spent \$10,000 or less annually on pesticide products while about 41 percent spent more than \$10,000, according to research conducted by *Lawn & Landscape* via InsightExpress. This remains unchanged from the previous year.

So are LCOs spending more or less on lawn care products?

Nearly 72 percent of LCOs, slightly more than the previous year, reported their pesticide expenditures increased in 2006. That spending increase, on average, was about 27 percent, the study says.

The trend toward high expenditures, according to industry insiders, will increase for the foreseeable future as the costs for goods, labor and transportation increase. Not surprising, product cost (63 percent) remains the top factor influencing LCO purchasing decisions, followed by dealer/salesperson recommendations and efficacy. Only among Western contractors did "safety" rank among the top three factors when making a purchasing decision, the data says.

So does cost influence the choice between a generic or a name-brand product?

More than 53 percent of LCOs who cited cost as an influence on their purchasing decisions have used generic pesticides, the data says. Likewise, of that 53 percent, more than half believe generic pesticides work just as well as brand-name pesticides, the study indicates.

Generic products are leveling the playing field for LCOs by allowing smaller com-

when are LCOs making purchases?

PESTICIDE PURCHASING TIMETABLE

QUARTER	% of LCOs
Q1 (January - March).....	14%
Q2 (April - June).....	32%
Q3 (July - September).....	2%
Q4 (October - December).....	4%
Year-round	48%



by mike zawacki | managing editor



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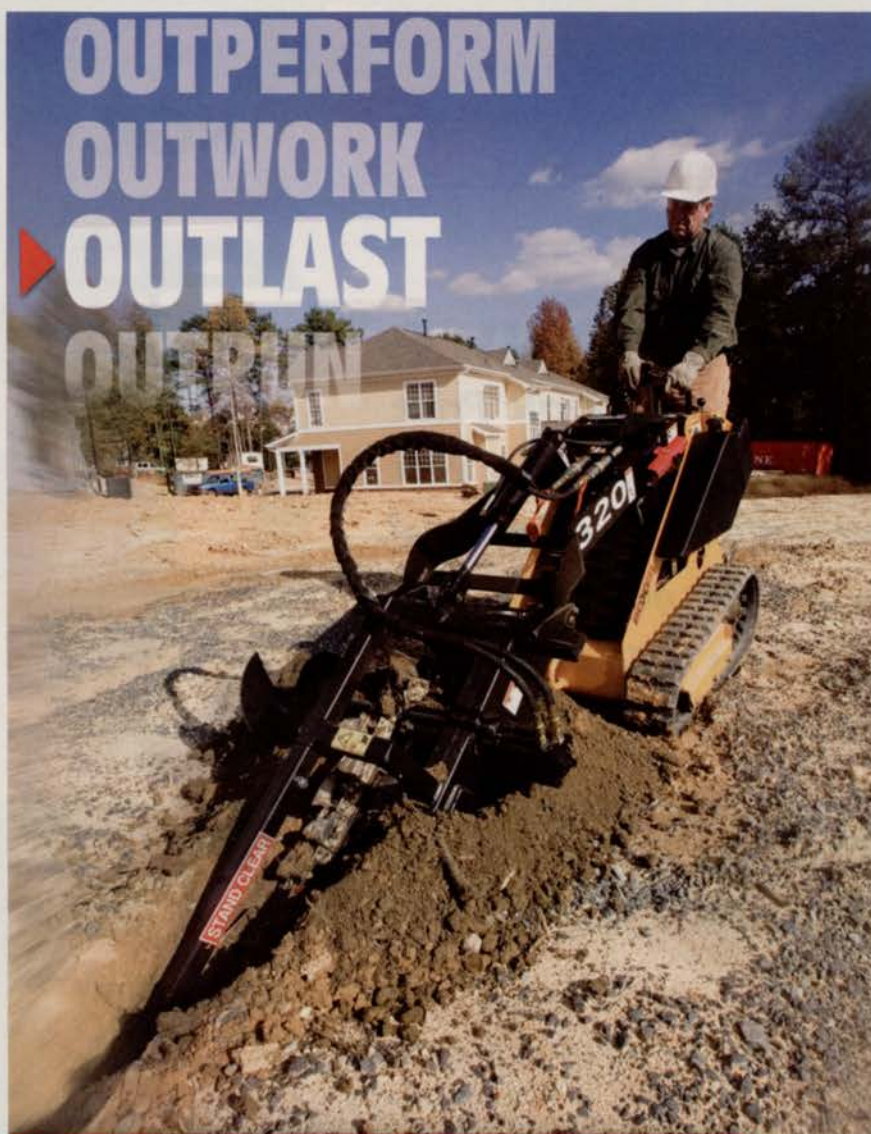
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panies to compete against the larger national firms, says Bob Yarborough, business unit manager, turf and ornamentals, at Advan in Roswell, Ga. "As more products become generically available you're going to see more LCOs using them because they can reduce costs and make them more competitive," he says.

However, name-brand pesticides still play an important role with LCOs. Rarely does an LCO solely use generic products in his chemical lawn care operation, the research says. And more than half of LCOs who ranked cost as the top influencing factor indicate brand-name pesticides offer superior service and support com-



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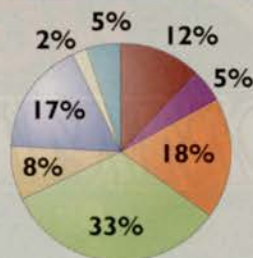
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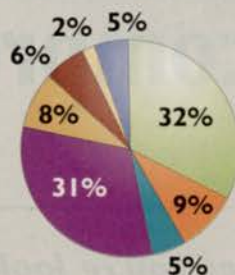
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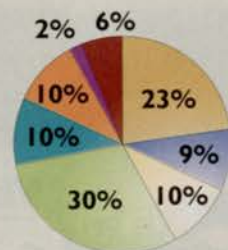
Percent turf products purchased

- 12% Insecticides
- 5% Fungicides
- 18% Herbicides
- 33% Fertilizers
- 8% Fertilizers plus insecticides
- 17% Fertilizers plus herbicides
- 2% Plant Growth Regulators
- 5% Organics



Percent of tree products purchased

- 32% Insecticides
- 9% Fungicides
- 5% Herbicides
- 31% Fertilizers
- 8% Fertilizers plus insecticides
- 6% Fertilizers plus herbicides
- 2% Plant growth regulators
- 5% Organics



Percent ornamental products purchased

- 23% Insecticides
- 9% Fungicides
- 10% Herbicides
- 30% Fertilizers
- 10% Fertilizers plus insecticides
- 10% Fertilizers plus herbicides
- 2% Plant growth regulators
- 6% Organics

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pared to generic products.

While generic suppliers provide LCOs with technical support, Yarborough concedes it's not on the same magnitude as the support supplied by brand-name manufacturers.

"A name-brand company may have 50 sales reps across the U.S. while a generic maybe has four or five," he says. "Does that mean an LCO can't get his question answered? No." Yarborough adds distributors also play an important role in disseminating information and answering LCOs' technical questions.

LCO's such as Greg Scharf, owner of Greg's Lawn Service in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, are comfortable using a combination of name-brand and generic chemical lawn care products. While cost plays a factor, the common denominator is quality and efficacy.

"Price is really important," Scharf says. "But the product also has to be a quality product. I don't want to have to send a technician back to do a lawn

twice because the product didn't do what it was supposed to do."

It's easy to understand why the industry trend is for LCOs to gravitate towards the lowest-priced product, says Mark Urbanowski, senior marketing specialist for U.S. turf and ornamental business at Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis. However, Urbanowski urges LCOs to weigh the pros and cons of forsaking name-brand pesticides to save a few dollars with a generic product. You don't have to look very far to see examples of this, he says.

"LCOs often look at generics as a great deal because they can pocket that cost savings," Urbanowski says. "But last year was a horrible crabgrass year and the basic products were on the ball while the generics missed it."

As a premium is placed on improving lawn care client retention, Sean Casey, vice president sales at Nufarm Turf & Ornamental in Greenwood, Ind., believes LCOs will trend toward

products designed to provide better results and more satisfied customers. Choosing the most effective products, and maybe not the least expensive, can result in an overall decrease in an LCO's cost of doing business, he says.

"Reducing customer cancellations or costly re-treatments will have a significant impact on the LCO's bottom line," Casey says.

Wayne Shiveley, president of Pine Ridge Landscaping in Chantilly, Va., says, in his mind, the jury is still out on whether the cost savings outweigh the quality issues inherent with integrating generic pesticides into a quality lawn care program.

"We're really not done testing and researching whether generics will work for us," Shiveley says. "The programs we're using now are the same programs that have worked well for us for a number of years and are proven to be effective. And with over a 90 percent renewal rate, I'd say they're working pretty well for us." ■

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SPECIAL OPS

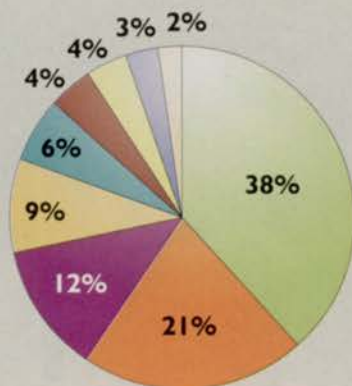
Lawn care continues to be a growth market, but contractors can optimize their growth through additional service offerings.

Joel Wollum realized his mistake just in time. To compete against a new low-ball lawn care franchise that had come to town and was gobbling up clients, Wollum reduced his lawn care service prices by 5 percent. It proved to be a misguided decision. "I brought my prices down but soon realized it really wasn't working for me like I thought it would," says the owner and CEO of Emerald Lawn Care in St. Joseph, Minn. "So I raised my prices 10 percent and that was the key. I attracted a better quality of customer who had a better quality of lawn than those clients I was attracting when I lowered my price to compete with the low-ball guy. Suddenly, I'm tending lawns where the weeds aren't so bad, there are less client complaints and virtually no call backs."

Wollum, like many other lawn care operators (LCOs) throughout the United States agree that the lawn care market is primed for continued and sustained growth. Nearly 68 percent of lawn care operators indicated their total chemical lawn care business increased in 2006, an 8 percent increase from the previous year, according

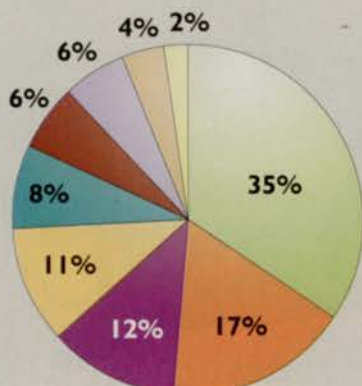
WHICH CHEMICAL LAWN CARE SERVICE GREW THE FASTEST IN 2006?

- 38% Fertilization plus herbicide treatments
- 21% Weed control
- 12% Fertilization plus insecticide treatments
- 9% Fertilization only
- 6% Organic applications
- 4% Fungicide treatments
- 4% Insect control
- 3% Other
- 2% Plant growth regulator applications



WHICH CHEMICAL LAWN CARE SERVICE DO YOU EXPECT TO GROW THE FASTEST IN 2007?

- 35% Fertilization plus herbicide treatments
- 17% Weed control
- 12% Organic applications
- 11% Fertilization plus insecticide treatments
- 8% Insect control
- 6% Fertilization only
- 6% Fungicide treatments
- 4% Other
- 2% Plant growth regulator applications



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by mike zawacki | managing editor

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to research conducted by *Lawn & Landscape* via InsightExpress.

As *Lawn & Landscape* has historically seen from its research, fertilization plus herbicide treatments continues to be contractors' fastest growing lawn care service. LCOs cited this service offering grew, on average, nearly 40 percent in 2006 and project it will grow about 34 percent this year. The trend is consistent geographically, as well, with nearly 50 percent of Midwest LCOs reporting fertilization plus herbicide treatments as their top lawn care service.

The average hourly rate for chemical lawn care in 2006 was a little more than \$9 per 1,000 square feet, according to the research data.

Plant growth regulator applications continue to see slow growth trends, with only 3 percent of LCOs reporting this as a rapidly improving revenue stream, according to the data. However, the service made slight strides over the 1 percent of LCOs

who reported it as their fastest growing service the previous year.

Nearly everyone in the industry agrees that untapped lawn care opportunities exist and can be new profit centers for landscape contractors from add-on services. For example, tree and ornamental care is still an unrealized service opportunity for many LCOs.

Contractors can broaden their service portfolios and expand their revenue streams by leveraging the relationships they've built with clients through chemical lawn care, says Neil Cleveland, managing director, Bayer Environment Science, Research Triangle Park, N.C.

"This is a trend we've observed over the last seven to eight years," Cleveland says. "Many LCOs see that their customers are satisfied with their lawn care services and when you develop that relationship you can come in and make a suggestion for a trunk injection program or even a full-service tree and ornamental program."

Tree care has become one of the most important growth components in lawn care, says Tom Kroll, product manager with Nufarm Americas, Burr Ridge, Ill.

"Much of the technology for delivering product to the tree has made it easier," Kroll says, "and as a consequence, has provided the lawn care specialist with an opportunity to expand his or her service offerings."

Roger Meyer, president of American Beauty Landscaping in Boardman, Ohio, recently added tree and ornamental care and reports no problems selling it as an add-on service to his existing customer base.

"Tree care is growing well and we're continuing to grow that aspect of our lawn care service," he says. "So far, we're seeing about 20 to 25 percent growth in this service segment every year."

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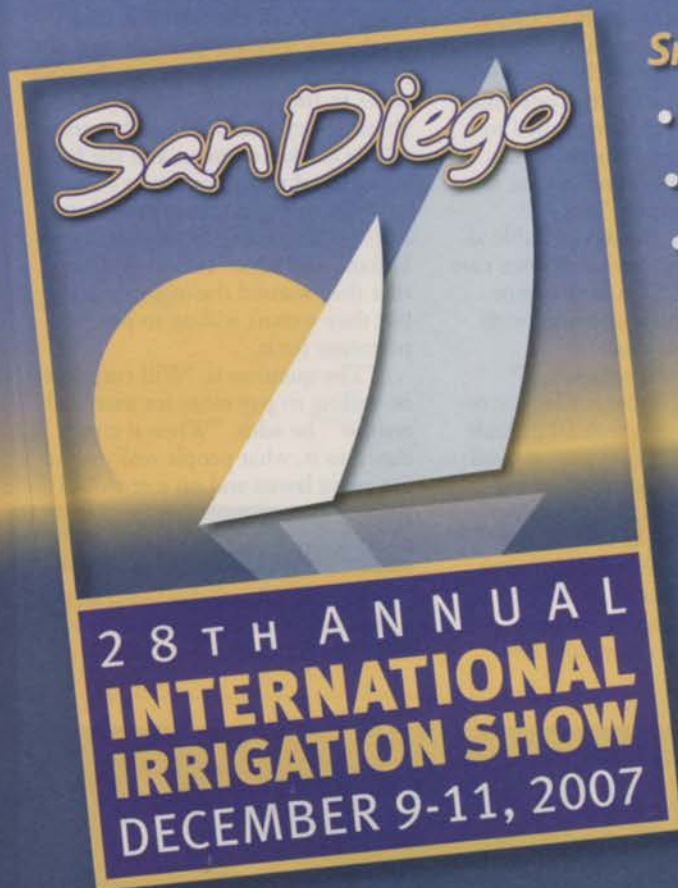
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Southern states were cited by LCOs as other services with solid growth potential, according to the research.

Without a doubt, LCOs will continue to face a more demanding consumer in the future. Nationwide, clients are becoming more wary of pesticides, according to the research. While half of LCOs says they've witnessed no change in attitude towards chemical lawn care services, 41 percent of contractors indicated their clients are concerned about potential environmental risks associated with pesticide use, and increase from 35 percent from the previous year, the data says.

Coinciding with increased regulatory pressure, LCOs operating in the Western states and in the Northeast expressed the highest frequency of client concern, with 58 percent and 50 percent, respectively, according to the research. In contrast, 60 percent of Midwestern LCOs witnessed no change, the data says.

"While the consumer demands performance No.1, the homeowner is much more conscience about being environmentally responsible," Kroll says. "While the use of chemicals may be equally responsible, the consumer doesn't have time to be educated to the testing that supports chemicals. As a consequence, they revert to the most recognizable approach."

In some cases, the recognizable alternative is an organic-based lawn care program. Some LCOs have begun to cater to this consumer need with organic-based programs.

According to the research, 37 percent of LCOs indicate they use organic pesticides, of which 60 percent indicate they use organic-based products alongside synthetic pesticides.

However, 57 percent of LCOs indicated they were unsure whether organic products provided the same level of performance as synthetic pesticides, according to the data.

While offering an organic lawn

care service could be a potential growth opportunity with high margins, Mark Urbanowski, senior marketing specialist for U.S. turf and ornamental business at Dow AgroSciences in Indianapolis, cautions LCOs about the cyclical and trendy nature of this market segment and the fickle attitudes of many consumer clients.

"The last cycle for organic lawn care was about five to six years ago," Urbanowski says. "Folks said then that they wanted the organic service but they weren't willing to pay the premium for it."

"The question is, 'Will consumers be willing to pay more for marginal results?'" he adds. "When it comes down to it, what people really want are green lawns and no weeds." **LL**

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Visit the September Online Extras section for how LCOs are using marketing to increase their client base and drive revenue.



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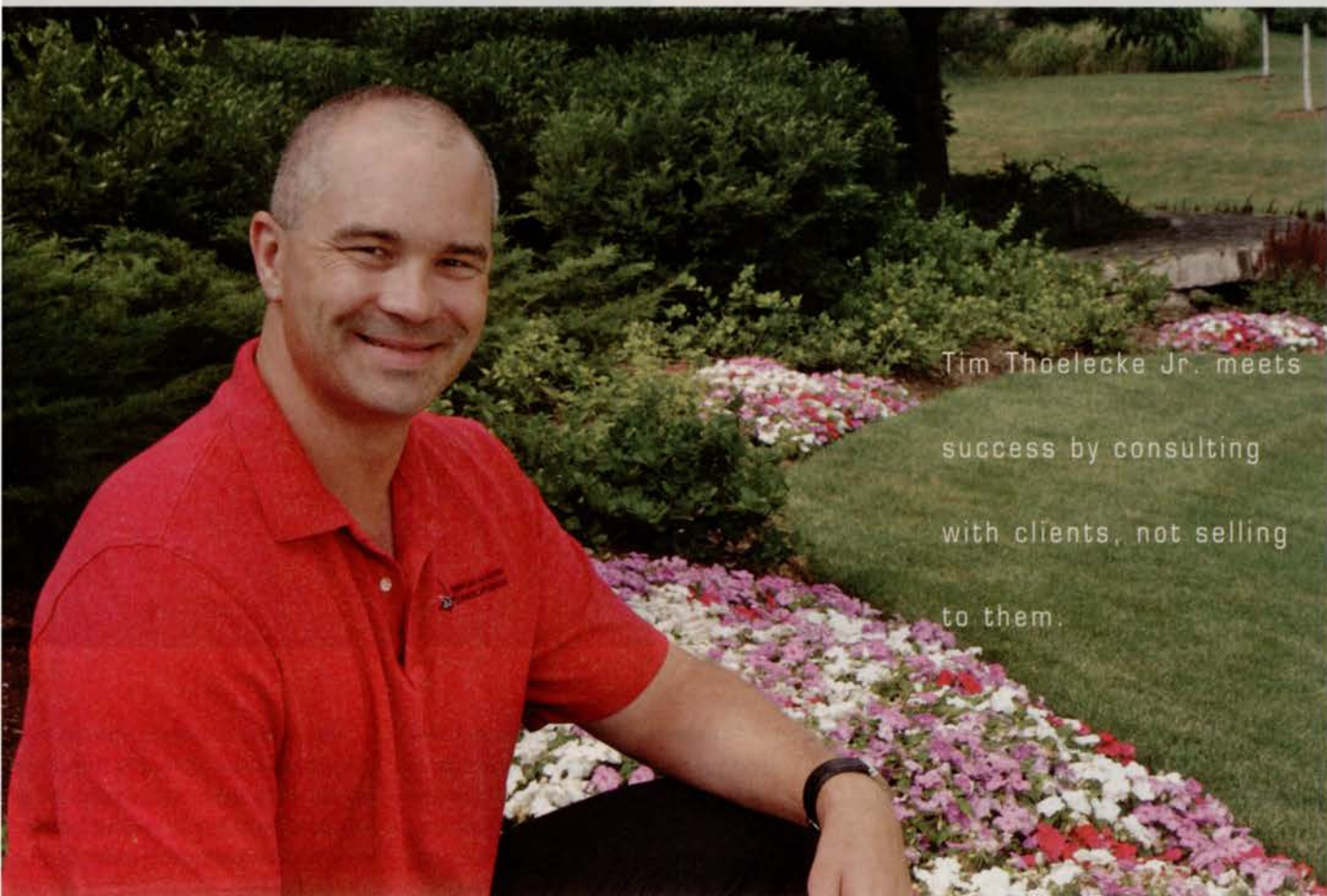

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USE READER SERVICE # 57



Tim Thoelecke Jr. meets success by consulting with clients, not selling to them.

Photo: Art Z Angel

trusted adviser

Tim Thoelecke Jr. has a working list of words that should be banished from landscape designers' vocabularies. "Decorate" is one of them. The phrase "for interest" is another – as in "We're going to put this flowering tree here for interest."

Maybe it's the former English major in Thoelecke, landscape designer/project manager for Schmechtig Landscapes, Mundelein, Ill., that has him hung up on word choice. Or the fact that he comes from a family of educators and recently has become one himself. (In 2006 Thoelecke founded the American Academy of Landscape Design, which he runs in the off season.) Or maybe it's his strong emphasis on what he calls "design thinking."

"The design itself is about creating spaces that have a relationship to one another," Thoelecke says. "I love a well-conceived movie or book just the same. When you see a well-designed landscape, everything is motivated – the view from the kitchen table, the relationship between the architecture and a hardscape element like a pergola, patio or swimming pool." So-called designers who are "decorating" or adding plants "for interest" probably aren't correctly following the design process and are doing their clients a disservice, Thoelecke says. He knows there are a lot of landscape designers committing these faux pas – "Look at all the ugly landscapes," he says, half seriously.

There's another word Thoelecke says designers should banish – this one's on the business side of the profession and it's a biggie: *sales*. The thought of not saying this vital term probably sounds like heresy to business owners, but, Thoelecke cautions, "People don't like to be sold to, but people love to buy." Using "consult" instead will do a lot to gain clients' (not "customers") trust. (For more words landscape designers shouldn't use, see "Vocabulary Lesson," on page S5.)

By Marisa Palmieri / Associate Editor

THE DESIGNER FILE

Tim Thoelecke Jr.
Designer/project manager
Schmechtig Landscapes
Mundelein, Ill.

Founder
The American Academy
of Landscape Design
Glenview, Ill.

Education: Bachelor's degree in landscape design, Duke University; year-long "total immersion" program at London's Ichbald School of Design

Client mix: Nearly 100 percent residential

Project price range: \$50,000 to \$1 million+

First step in the design process? "I'll begin with the house and evaluate views of and from the house and explore ways to extend the architecture into the landscape. My goal is for the landscape and the house to appear as one, not for the landscape to look like an afterthought."

The last step? "If there is time, I walk away from the design for a day, then give it a fresh look. I'll mentally walk through it and try to experience every view, every space, as if I'm living in it. If I don't have overnight, I at least try to do something else for an hour or so and then come back."

On breaking a creative block: "It's been years since I've had such a block. My method for getting a design started is just that – method. Sure, the artistic element is always part of it, but for getting started, you don't have to be in that creative mode. As for what to tell others who get blocked, deal with it the same way a writer deals with writer's block. Go back to No. 1. Draw lines on the plan, extending architecture and views into the property and see what jumps out, or what fits among those lines. If it fits, it will relate in some way to the house. This methodical approach is what I teach. I'm not sure you can teach someone to be an artist, but you can teach them to understand basic design principles, and they will get better and gain confidence."



Photo: Tim Thoelecke Jr.

"The biggest challenge in our industry is getting contractors and designers out of the mind set of selling stuff," Thoelecke says. "If we want to be perceived as someone other than 'the landscaper,' we need to act differently." To do so Thoelecke says designers should position themselves as an advocate. "Clients can be intimidated," he says. "So if we put ourselves in the position of being their advocate or adviser, we gain their trust. And the sales will take care of themselves."

During the 17 years he ran his own company, Garden Concepts, Thoelecke learned that a slower than typical design process allowed him to exercise his philosophy of design thinking while pleasing clients. The steps he takes before getting to the drawing phase have helped him maintain the mentality of crafting well-conceived gardens – and not just selling stuff. Take a look at Thoelecke's approach and see what tips you can take away.

1. Phone call. During the initial inquiry, Thoelecke works from a set of talking points to get a feel for whether the relationship will be a "good fit" – in terms of property, budget and designer-client rapport. **Quick Tip:** Always discuss design fees. To avoid pinning yourself down before understanding the scope of the project, consider quoting a range of fees for a "typical" quarter-acre subdivision lot.

2. First meeting. During this "get acquainted" meeting, Thoelecke scopes out the property, further discusses fees and assigns homework – a short questionnaire. **Quick Tip:** Tell couples that you expect their survey to come back with two different types of handwriting, encouraging both decision makers to express their opinions early in the process.



Tim Thoelecke Jr.'s design philosophy is influenced by the New American Garden style and creating landscapes that are practical to maintain.

Photo: Tim Thoelecke Jr.



VOCABULARY LESSON

Tim Thoelecke Jr. is particular when it comes to word choice. As a landscape designer who's a stickler for professionalism, he believes the language designers use in their client relationships contributes to the public's thoughts about the business of landscape design. Here are few of Thoelecke's recommendations for sprucing up your design vocabulary.

COMMON WORD

landscaper

bush
customer
dirt
maintenance
employee
sales call/salesman
site
decorate

PROFESSIONAL ALTERNATIVE

landscape contractor, landscape designer, landscape architect, landscape professional
shrub
client
soil
management or plant health care
team member
consultation/consultant
home
use design language instead

3. Second meeting. Upon return of the questionnaire, Thoelecke revisits the home to take measurements and share an idea book with more than 100 photos of various landscape styles and designs. **Quick Tip:** Number each photo and ask clients to log which photos they like and, more importantly, dislike.

4. Concept stage. After gathering information, Thoelecke presents clients with a conceptual drawing as well as a conceptual budget. This stage gives clients an overall feel for their new landscape, like the connections between the garden and the architecture of the home, and an idea of price range. "It's not a budget or contract - it's giving them an idea if it will be \$5,000 or \$500,000," Thoelecke says. **Quick Tip:** Frame your pitch within terms clients care about - don't just tell them what plant will go where. "Talk about what it's going to feel like when they walk through."

5. Drawings/proposal. Finally, Thoelecke presents working drawings and a proposal. "I really work hard not to sell them something they don't need," he says, noting phases are always an option. "I'd rather do one portion well and leave a good taste in their mouth than do all of it poorly." **Quick Tip:** "Always think, 'If it were my money, how would I spend it?'" **PLD**

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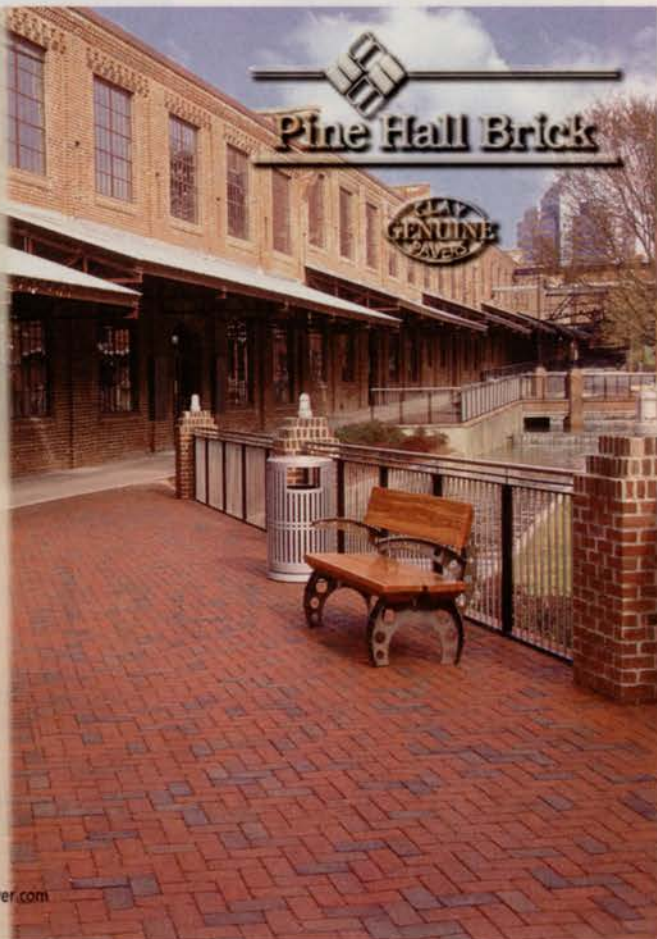
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USE READER SERVICE # 58



green roof primer

By Marisa Palmieri / Associate Editor



Walker Macy Landscape Architects won a Green Roof Award of Excellence for its design of the intensive green roof on The Louisa, a high-rise apartment building in Portland, Ore. Photo: Green Roofs for Healthy Cities

Landscape firms

can't ignore the

opportunities

in sustainable design.

Sustainability is a word you can't ignore in today's eco-conscious world.

Everywhere we turn there's talk of "going green." For consumers, this may mean making simple changes like switching to energy efficient appliances or taking public transportation. For businesses, however, getting serious about sustainability means making infrastructure changes that lead to improved performance in energy efficiency, water conservation, indoor environmental quality and more.

For green industry businesses – especially those providing design and architecture services – a shift toward sustainability opens the door to an area of opportunity: green roof design and installation.

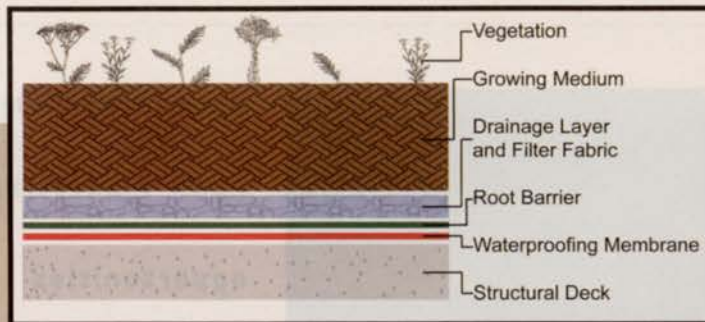
The green roof industry grew 100 percent from 2004 to 2005, says Steven Peck, founder and president of Toronto-based Green Roofs for Healthy Cities, the nonprofit organization working to promote green roofs throughout North America. As the green building movement expands (and it will – the U.S. Green Building Council just reached the 10,000 member mark in July), so will the demand for green roofs. "Green roofing is a very important piece of that big-picture puzzle," Peck says. "That's a trend that's not going away."

OPPORTUNITIES. McCrae Anderson, principal designer for McCaren Designs, a St. Paul, Minn.-based interior and exterior landscape services firm, entered the green roof business about four years ago. "I could see it was a trend that was developing just from what I was reading and with the work of the U.S. Green Building Council." The USGBC connection, Anderson says, is one major factor driving interest in green roofs – installing a green roof can earn a building as many as 15 credits towards LEED certification.

Not surprisingly, the environmental benefits of green roofs are many, including a reduction in storm-water run-off, heat and sound insulation, energy savings, improved air quality and reduction in the urban heat island, Peck says. Added benefits are increased park space, improved aesthetics, biodiversity and the potential reduction in a building's heating and cooling costs.

The business opportunities for landscape designers in the green roof arena are plentiful and diverse, too. The opportunities available to landscape designers are a "mixed bag," Peck says. "Some companies do everything from design, to install to maintenance. Other companies only play a role on the design side."

McCaren Designs is focusing its marketing efforts primarily to architects, says Anderson, who has designed or remodeled a number of green roofs. Several have been street-level projects built over parking garages; one currently under construction is a green roof for a church in Duluth, Minn. A smart company willing to invest the time and money to become educated and eventually accredited in green roof design may carve out a niche that will be hard to touch as the industry matures. "If companies are looking to get into green roofs, they need to get into



Green Roofs for Healthy Cities

GREEN ROOF BASICS

COMPONENTS

At the minimum green roofs, whether they're modular with components prepared in interlocking grids or with each element installed separately, include an existing roof structure, high-quality waterproofing and root-repellant systems, drainage systems, filter cloths, lightweight growing media and plants.

TYPES

Extensive – Typically less than 6 inches of growing media; low plant diversity that may include sedums, herbs, meadow grasses and perennials

Semi-intensive – Typically has growing media 25 percent ± 6 inches; greater plant diversity than an extensive roof; may be partially accessible

Intensive – Growing media deeper than 6 inches; great plant diversity that may include small trees; requires high maintenance; often accessible

ADVANTAGES

- Controlling storm-water runoff
- Improving water quality
- Mitigating urban heat island effects
- Extending the service life of the roof
- Reducing a building's heating and cooling costs
- Reducing sound reflection
- Improving aesthetics

COSTS

Costs are wide-ranging depending on growing media, plants, use of irrigation, accessibility, type of roof, etc. As an example, an extensive green roof can cost \$10 to \$24 per square foot.

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Photo courtesy of R.L. Karnes Designs, Florida

it quickly before other companies get a lot of experience," Anderson says. "Experience means a lot when doing green roofs."

CHALLENGES. Experience and education are vital because there's a lot of room for error, Peck says. "People tend to underestimate some of the complexities around the design and building of green roofs. It's not the same as doing landscaping around a building – it's an artificial environment with climate extremes, so it's a less-forgiving environment."

Anderson, who has taken two courses through GRHC, urges landscape professionals to take classes, read the industry's trade journals and attend seminars. "There are so many mistakes you can make – especially if you start cutting corners and try to value engineer certain things," he says.

Currently, GRHC offers three courses related to green roof design, installation and waterproofing. The fourth course, which should debut next spring, focuses on plants. GRHC also has an accreditation program in development that's expected to launch in 2009. Peck says it will likely require a professional to have taken the four courses in addition to pursuing some type of continuing education. **PLD**

USE READER SERVICE # 60



revamping established landscapes

Improving existing landscapes can be just as challenging as designing a brand new space.

A customer calls and wants you to create a design for the family's front yard to match the sophisticated look of their newly remodeled home.

Later, a new building owner calls and wants to freshen up the look of his property. As you plan for each project, you realize the different challenges associated with designing for an established landscape vs. working on a naked canvas.

- Before: A look at a Peabody Landscape Group installation before renovation. Photos: Peabody Landscape Group

ESTABLISHED VS. NEW. "For me it is more challenging working on an established landscape because there are certain limitations you are going to have," says Bob Donnan, owner of Donnan Landscape, McMurray, Pa. These include specific plant removals, as plants and shrubs become overgrown over time, and existing irrigation systems. Moving them can be costly, therefore designers and contractors often work around current irrigation systems instead, tweaking designs accordingly.

Concrete curbing and dog fences are becoming more popular, but these items can be a nuisance for designers who have to find a way to work around them. "In the end, designers only have control of the final design to a certain degree," Donnan says. This is especially true when customers want to keep a certain part of their landscapes the same even through it doesn't fit with the overall design. When this situation arises, designers suggest compromise as the best solution. For example, take a homeowner who doesn't want to move his or her gazebo even through it's obstructing the flow of the backyard. In this case, Tom

By Katie Morris / Contributing Writer

After: An after-shot of a Peabody residential renovation project.



Fochtman, co-owner of CoCal Landscape in Denver, would ask the clients what their gazebo is used for, how often it's used and whether it's used for dining or entertaining. These answers can lead to a solution. For instance, the homeowner might not want to carry food 40 feet away from the kitchen to dine outdoors, so maybe the contractor could move the gazebo closer to the house to make it more functional for both the homeowner and the designer.

During residential renovations, Pat Lynch, landscape design/sales representative for Peabody Landscape Group, Columbus, Ohio, suggests helping homeowners assign value to existing features. "If they have a large expensive shade tree, you should design around it," he says. Each item holds a different value and it's part of the designer's job to help customers figure out what's valuable and what's not.

Working on a new site gives designers the freedom to create whatever they want without worrying about sprinklers, concrete curbing or already planted materials. But with this freedom comes a different set of concerns. The goal of working on a new site is to provide clients, whether they're homeowners or commercial property managers, with landscapes that suit their needs. Designers must consider a number of on-site and off-site challenges. These may include the slope of the land on the property or off-site issues like blocking the view of a neighbor's RV parked on the side of the house. "Picking plant material is the

easy part," Fochtman explains. "Creating the structure of the design, capturing the views and getting the scales right is the hard part."

Budget also plays a part in designing for both types of spaces. In some cases, customers overestimate their budgets and in the end can't do everything the design entails. When this situation occurs, designers either have to plan to install the project in phases or make cutbacks. "It's frustrating to design the way you want to install it but due to budget you have to cut back," Donnan says.

That's part of the reason, Lynch uses a multi-step design process. He starts with a loose conceptual plan, gives clients time to look it over and reconsider their budget before he creates a master plan, which contains all the details including exact costs, sizes and materials. And to ensure he's suiting his clients' needs, Lynch aids clients' decision making by allowing them to look at an online design-element library, which contains categories such as hardscapes, patios, fences and decks. Under each category customers can view hundreds of pictures that he can then incorporate into the design.

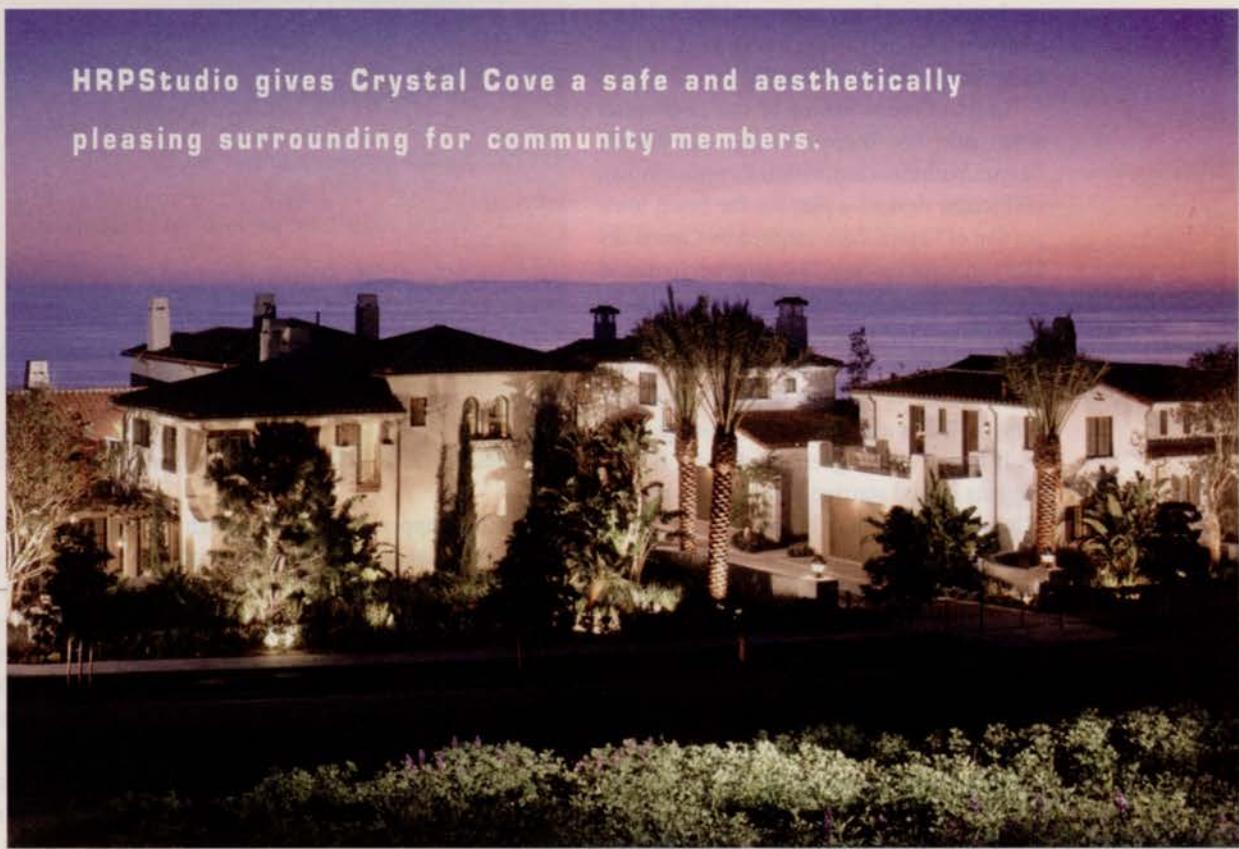
RESIDENTIAL VS. COMMERCIAL. Revamping commercial spaces is easier than renovating residential spaces, Fochtman says. "Building managers want two things: image and function. They want the building to look nice and have

the amenities tenants need." Generally, building owners aren't as quick to renovate commercial property landscapes because they don't live there – they're not as personal, so they might go 20 years before receiving renovations. "On the other hand, homeowners want the image – nice grass, swimming pools, decks and curb appeal. More emotion goes into residential design," Fochtman explains.

For this reason homeowners have their landscape redone more frequently than commercial spaces. If plants and flowers were correctly spaced in the beginning, Donnan gives homeowners 17 years before they should redo their landscape. Designers can help extend the longevity of a landscape by designing with proper spacing in mind when it comes to foundation planting. "If you plant shrubs too close together, in five to 10 years you are going to have a crowded situation," Donnan says. "Plant spacing presents gaps so the plant has room to grow and fill in the gaps." Plants growing up windows, over sidewalks and growing into one another are all signs to homeowners that renovations are in their future.

No matter what type of a site a designer is working on, in the end a talented designer can reach a solution if he listens to the clients' wants and needs. As Fochtman says, "I like the freedom of a new site, but renovating a site and turning it into something special for the customer is more rewarding for me." **PLD**

HRPStudio gives Crystal Cove a safe and aesthetically pleasing surrounding for community members.



the beauty of safety

By Heather DeAngelis / Contributing Writer

Imagine the task of designing paradise – a place where people can go to relax, live out their dreams, play, shop and still call “home.”

That was the mission of Santa Ana, Calif.-based HRPStudio while creating Crystal Cove, a gated community on the Southern California Pacific Coast of Newport Beach. The design planning and construction for Crystal Cove began more than 20 years ago, and it is still being developed. Kurt Buxton, senior principal at HRPStudio, a part of the ValleyCrest Design Group, says the project is in its final years of construction with its No. 1 goal being to combine a reliable, secure feeling with aesthetic beauty.

THE VISION. The Crystal Cove community is on the east side of the Pacific Coast Highway, with Crystal Cove State Park on the west. Crystal Cove itself slopes up away from the ocean with a bluff-like condition. It ends up on top of a substantial hill overlooking the Pacific coastline. The property has a number of components,

Crystal Cove is situated alongside a hill overlooking the Pacific coast in Newport Beach, Calif. Photos: HRPStudio/ValleyCrest Design Group

PROPERTY DETAILS

including a retail section by the highway, the gated community, a multi-family product and single-family residences.

The general inspiration for Crystal Cove's landscape was the Italian coast, Buxton explains. "Crystal Cove was broken up into two distinct areas: beach town – lower town – and the backdrop bluff that is behind the beach town and takes you up to the top of Crystal Cove," he says.

Crystal Cove is framed by two canyons on either side: Los Trancos Canyon and Muddy Canyon. With the ocean, bluff and canyons in play, HRPStudio devised a plan for the beach town portion of Crystal Cove inspired by Corona del Mar and Santa Barbara. "We definitely looked at the beach towns as influences, which tend to be more textural and more eclectic in their landscape than some of the more refined landscapes that are in the rest of Newport Coast," Buxton says. "Crystal Cove is a little more garden-esque."

If a case of "designers block" hits, Buxton suggests a good starting point for any project: "There's usually a story behind the design, and we start with a design process that talks about building on what's there – what's the history of the land? What's the topography right now? What's the surrounding context? This worked with Crystal Cove."

Crystal Cove has a lot of history, so designers built upon the landform based on how it moves up from the coast highway in a dramatic

- **Property:** Crystal Cove
- **Where:** Newport Beach, Calif.
- **Owner:** The Irvine Co.
- **Designer:** HRP Studio
- **Installation:** 60 percent completed by ValleyCrest Cos., including the Ocean Garden
- **Total gross acres:** 805
- **Total number of residences:** 800
- **Total miles of coastline:** 3.5
- **Total percentage dedicated to parks/open space:** 53 percent

fashion to the upper bluff area. The beach town in the lower section has smaller lots – not quite as wide, but deep – which is typical of historical beach towns, Buxton explains. "Views are paramount throughout the project; both views from within the neighborhoods out to the ocean and the adjacent canyons, as well as the views from the overall Newport community looking

back at Crystal Cove."

HRPStudio wanted to create a place that is not only visually appealing, but emotionally appealing as well. "We work very hard to avoid the feeling that you're just part of the thousands of other houses out there and no one would be able to tell your community from any other one," Buxton says. "In a community design, there's a sense of entry and identity. When you go home you want to know you're home, and that it's your community, and you want to feel special and that you've arrived."

PLANNING AHEAD. Making commercial sites beautiful is only part of the designer's responsibility. Safety should be at the top of the priority list to ensure that the site will remain inviting for the clients and residents. Buxton strongly recommends incorporating safety features and guidelines early in the design process.

"Usually if you can be involved early, and think of safety features as you go into the bigger design picture, you avoid a lot of the Band-Aid fixes that happen later in design," he says.

Looking ahead and using your common sense will keep a landscape design safe, he adds. Necessities like creatively looking at the building codes, providing signage and way-finding points and taking



Unique plant choices, like these Birds of Paradise, added to the visually and emotionally appealing design at Crystal Cove.

KNOW THE SAFETY ZONES

action to prepare for natural disasters will help to ensure a secure site. In wildfire-prone California, HRPStudio had to consider fire safety when designing. "Crystal Cove is a high-fire zone, so we incorporate fire-fuel modification areas within the guidelines of the county, which include permanently irrigated zones at the rears of houses that back up to the canyons," Buxton says. "The plant palette within those zones are limited – the fire authority has a list of plants that are not allowed."

The plant materials that are excessively flammable had to be eliminated from the design plans. Pine trees, sage and buckwheat were replaced with plants like acacia and Catalina Ironwood trees. Monkey flowers are used in abundance, as are coral trees.

Preventive measures should be taken when considering any potentially-dangerous situation. Site lighting should be incorporated into any design that requires aesthetics mixed with safety, Buxton advises. "Some of the secluded open spaces and parks that we have out here, we definitely have pathway lighting for evening use so that people can get to and from their homes and their cars," he adds. "It's a combination of mood lighting and design lighting, but having enough so that it stays safe."

In the areas designated as Crystal Cove's "tot lots," the safety of the children in particular has to be taken into account. "If you have kids in the area, you don't want to be using cactus or poisonous plant materials," Buxton suggests. Also, HRPStudio focused on providing parent seating near "tot lots" so they could

When designing a site, there are many safety zones that need to be considered and planned out appropriately. Some things to keep in mind are:

- Equal access for ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements.
- If designing near a water source, consider the use of the water quality basin. The sensitivity of the water source has to do with the safety of the overall environment.
- Take a look at circulation, how people get from one point to another and provide safe ways to do that: pathways and connections that are separated from cars should be considered in early design
- If there are retaining walls, use them sparingly and watch their proximity to where people are circulating. Use barrier rails on top of the retaining walls so maintenance people will not get hurt.
- The use of guard rails where needed: stairways, uneven landscape, etc.
- The use of signage and way-findings so people know where they're going and they're aware of the conditions they are in.
- Appropriate lighting for evening safety.



Such a large, extensive job requires a number of safety considerations, like guard rails, lighting and signage.

have constant visual access and can keep an eye on their children at all times.

KEEPING IT UP. Maintaining a property once it is finished is an ongoing, and sometimes difficult, process. HRPStudio designed Crystal Cove with maintenance in mind from the beginning, preparing its future residents by making the properties as low-maintenance as possible and providing them with a maintenance guideline book.

"Maintenance is just integral with what we do, especially with the homeowner's association," Buxton says. "It would be terrible to spend all the time designing this community to be rustic and have great plant materials, and then have someone come in who doesn't understand the intent and start hedging and clipping and not correctly maintaining the plant materials, or not doing the proper maintenance on a monthly basis."

HRPStudio's maintenance guideline book is almost as thick as a phone book because of all the limiting factors in Crystal Cove in terms of fertilizers and water restrictions. Providing such a book for the client helps avoid lawsuits and other potentially hazardous conditions with all the litigation, especially in California, Buxton says. "We also assist our clients in hiring maintenance contractors; we have strong recommendations of who should do that," he adds.

With everyone working together, Crystal Cove will be a haven for the fortunate citizens who experience it for years to come. **PLD**

The plant material in Crystal Cove's 'Ocean Garden' is meant to emulate a coral garden in the ocean.



HRPStudio provided the client with a maintenance guideline book to ensure the quality of their design didn't fall by the wayside.

STAYING CREATIVE WITH THEMES

With the Crystal Cove project, HRP Studio has the advantage of nature to inspire beautiful landscaping. To separate the area from other California beach towns, themes were incorporated to draw on the beauty of Crystal Cove's natural landscape. Kurt Buxton, senior principal of Santa Ana, Calif.-based HRPStudio, shares one of the unique ideas included into the design of Crystal Cove.

"Within the different gardens, we pick up on the ocean themes," he says. "There's actually one called 'The Ocean Garden' on the base of the bluff overlooking the Pacific. As you go through the neighborhoods, it's a pedestrian space that you come upon and it's this large, pristine lawn that's a functional lawn overlooking the ocean and the rest of Crystal Cove. It's very highly detailed with special plant materials. The plant materials are meant to emulate a coral garden in the ocean, and so there's use of a number of interesting textured species – some are kinds of desert plants – but the composition we put together recalls a coral garden."





understanding native vs. exotic species

By Michelle Buckstrup & Nina Bassuk

When choosing plants for your clients' landscapes, the best bet is to know the site to prevent problems down the road.

Landscape designers enjoy an unprecedented wealth of plants to choose from in the quest to bring clients the perfect landscapes. But recently, some designers have chosen sides and believe that native plants are better plants.

In the sometimes-heated discussion about native plants in the landscape, it is important to define terms. The very definition of what is "native" is elusive and is not always agreed upon. Designers should consider the problems and benefits of both native and exotic species and the role should the site should play in the decision about what to plant.

NATIVE VS. EXOTIC. We generally depend on local floras, inventories of the uncultivated plant life of a given region, to tell us which plants are native. However, these inventories are sometimes flawed and are subject to continual debate. Only fossil records can prove that a plant evolved in a certain place, and even these can be misinterpreted. If we arbitrarily pick a point in time and say "plants in this place before this date are native," we may not be acknowledging that for centuries, indigenous peoples, explorers and botanists have had an impact on regional floras with their activities.

Geopolitical and ecological boundaries also play a role in defining native plants. To say a plant is "native to North America" or "native to New York State" implies that it is suitable for growth throughout North America or New York State, when in fact it may only occur naturally in limited microclimates or regions and thus only be suitable for growth in equally limited landscape situations. Ecotypes are plants of the same species that are found in different habitats and have evolved specific adaptations to their differing environments. Red maple, for example, is native from Florida to Canada, but populations have adapted to dry or wet sites, cold or warm climates. Although red maple is technically native to a large section of North America, seed harvested from one ecotype will not necessarily perform successfully in another site because it is not adapted to the new site's conditions.

Invasive plants, such as purple loosestrife in the Northern U.S., reproduce quickly, displace many of the other species in their domain and are difficult to eradicate.

Photo: John D. Byrd, Mississippi State University, Bugwood.org



Red maple is native from Florida to Canada, but populations have adapted to dry or wet sites, cold or warm climates, so seed harvested from one ecotype will not necessarily perform successfully in another site. Photo: Robert L. Anderson, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Exotic plants, also known as non-native, introduced or alien plants, are species that occur in cultivation or in the wild and were transported across boundaries over time.

One-fifth to one-third of the plant species encountered north of Mexico have their origins in other continents, according to The Flora of North America. Many exotic plant introductions, such as lily-of-the-valley, daylilies and daffodils, have become naturalized, meaning that they have succeeded in reproducing and spreading to a limited extent on their own. Unlike invasive plants, however, most naturalized plants are not a severe threat to other species or to an ecosystem. In fact, a small percentage of naturalized exotic plants become invasive, or those plants that reproduce quickly, displace many of the other species in their domain and are difficult to eradicate. Purple loosestrife in the northern U.S. and kudzu in the southern states are classic examples of invasive plants that greatly affect the landscape.

PLANT SELECTION — NATIVE OR EXOTIC?

One main reason people promote native plants is to avoid the damage that invasive plants may bring. Why do a small percentage of plants exhibit invasive tendencies, while the majority of plant introductions are benign or beneficial? The answer lies in the combination of two factors: traits that invasive plant species share and traits of the site that make it susceptible to invasion. No plant is inherently invasive and native plants also can become invasive. Native grape vines like fox grape form thickets over shrubs and rapidly climb trees, threatening to out-compete their hosts for light. Though native to parts of North America, wild grape is an indisputable pest.

Another factor is the interaction of native plants with the non-native environment. In an urban setting, for example, there is no planting site that is equal to what would have been there prior to urbanization. To put a native tree on a median strip planting on a downtown street because it is native

to the surrounding countryside would be foolhardy unless the tree is known to tolerate asphalt heat, car exhaust, salt from the snowplows, a limited root zone, intermittent flooding and periodic drought.

NOT EITHER/OR. If native plants are used simply because they are native, without proper regard to site conditions, the results may be unsatisfactory. The most critical issue is not native vs. exotic – it is appropriate vs. inappropriate plant selection, given the constraints and opportunities of the site in mind. The more closely a plant's characteristics match the site's, the better chance for its survival and vigor.

In the quest for a diverse, healthy landscape, which may be a mix of native and exotic species, a little research before selecting plants can save time, money and

aggravation. Reference guides may warn that a plant is invasive under certain circumstances, but they may not, and nursery catalogs frequently won't. Phrases like "a very vigorous grower" can be euphemisms for potential invasiveness. Treat such phrases as red flags.

Be sure to look in more than one reference to gather more than one perspective on any species you have in mind, especially if you suspect it may be invasive. After invasive potential is ruled out, the physical limitations and possibilities of the site should be the first and most important consideration in the exciting process of selecting new plants for our landscapes. **PLD**

The authors are with The Urban Horticulture Institute, Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture, Cornell University.

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by emily mullins | assistant editor

A Fall Fix

Fall fertilization repairs summer's wear and tear and prepares lawns for winter dormancy.

Russell Stout's fertilization program begins in the spring and wraps up in the fall. During this roughly eight-month period, a six-step program ensures his clients' lawns are fed with the appropriate nutrients and are free of weeds and diseases. Steps five and six, which focus specifically on fall fertilization, rescue lawns from the often harsh affects of hot, dry summer weather.

"These steps take place when droughts finally let up and the weather starts to cooperate again," says the owner of Complete Lawn Service based in Vienna, Va. "Fall fertilization allows turf to recover from the summer blues."

Fall fertilization repairs turf from summer stress and prepares it for winter dormancy. Fertilization also increases root mass and promotes root growth and carbohydrate reserves. Most every lawn care company offers some sort of fertilization program. In fact, *Lawn & Landscape* research shows that 68 percent of lawn care operators (LCOs) purchased fertilizer last year, spending an average of \$8,500, and 58 percent plan to purchase fertilizer products this year. Whether the program is year-long or season-by-season, accurate timing during the sometimes short fall season is the most important aspect of a successful program. "Appropriate timing is important," says Ray Buckwalter, senior marketing manager, Lebanon Turf, Bloomsbury, N.J. "You don't want to start fall applications if the conditions are still too hot or dry."

continued on page 96

Photo: Lawn & Landscape archive





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continued from page 93

There are many tips LCOs can follow to ensure a successful fall fertilization program. By knowing the difference between cool- and warm-season turf, quick- and slow-release formulations and the importance of essential nutrients, LCOs can keep their client's lawns green even during stressful times.

"When done right, there are only pros to offering fall fertilization services," Stout says.

NECESSARY NUTRIENTS. When it comes to fertilization, the selling point for many clients is a lush, green lawn, and most fertilizers contain the ingredients necessary to achieve

this desired effect. "Even though it's dormant, turf is still physically alive and growing through the fall and winter so it needs plant nutrients," says Bill Vogel, owner of Spring Valley, Jackson, Wis. "Fall fertilization provides a lawn nutrients to store as sugars during these times which it can use as extra energy to help it green and warm up in the spring."

While 16 micro- and macronutrients are necessary to keep a lawn completely healthy, most fertilization programs focus on the big three: nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. (Micronutrients are just as important to a lawn as macronutrients, however they are needed in smaller amounts.) As the most abundant nutrient in plant tissue, nitrogen weighs in as the most important of the three. It helps produce chlorophyll, so the higher the nitrogen content, the greener the turf.

Most fertilization programs are based around an annual nitrogen requirement. For fall fertilization, Stout applies about 2½ pounds of nitrogen to Virginia's cool-season turf between two visits, which is about 2/3 the total requirement of nitrogen for the year. The first visit includes an application of 1 pound of product with 50 percent slow-release nitrogen. During the second visit, he applies 1½ pounds of nitrogen, last year using a product with 24-2-12 release. These applications are consistent with recommendations he receives from area universities, Stout says.

Mature, cool-season turf should receive three or more annual nitrogen applications totaling 2 to 5 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet to maintain greenness and density, says Cale Bigelow, assistant professor of agronomy and turfgrass science at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind. Between 50 to 75 percent of the annual nitrogen requirements should be applied over several applications beginning in late summer and continuing throughout the fall. For both warm- and cool-season turf, apply the rest of the nitrogen in mid to late spring, and little to none during mid summer to avoid damage caused by drought or other stresses, such as disease, Bigelow says.

For warm-season grasses, such as Bermudagrass or zoysiagrass, one to two annual nitrogen applications totaling 1 to 3 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet applied from June



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through August will meet the needs of these grasses, he says.

Nitrogen products come in water soluble quick-release and water insoluble slow-release formulations. A good nitrogen fertilizer program utilizes both sources and various quick and slow mixtures at different points during the growing season, Bigelow says. Quick-release nitrogen sources include urea and ammonium sulfate. Both dissolve easily in the presence of water and will green turf in just a few hours. Bigelow suggests an application rate of no more than 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of turf to avoid burn and potential loss to the environment.

Common slow-release nitrogen sources include sulfur-coated urea, polymer-coated urea, methylene ureas and natural organics, such as manures.

Slow-release formulations require more than just water to release their nitrogen, Bigelow says.

Mechanisms, such as protective coatings and microbial decomposition, control how quickly the nitrogen is released. LCOs can apply slow-release nitrogen at higher application

“Appropriate timing is important. You don’t want to start fall applications if the weather conditions are still too hot or dry.”

– Ray Buckwalter

rates – 2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet – without a significant risk of burning, he says.

Unlike quick-release formulations, slow-release products do not cause rapid greening, Bigelow says. However, the advantage slow-release formulations provide is extended feed-

ing, often for two to three months or even longer.

HOW TO DO IT. During the first fertilization visit in early fall when the weather is still warm, Stout applies 1 pound of product with 50 percent slow-release nitrogen. During the second visit, which takes place later in the fall when the weather starts to cool down, he applies a product with more nitrogen and slower release. Late-fall applications in particular should consist of slow-release sources, Buckwalter says. This ensures any

nitrogen unused by the plant will not be lost to leaching and will be available the following spring. Typically, applications should not be made more than two or three weeks after the last mowing or when the soil is frozen or water logged, he adds.

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toward the lawn care industry, it's important to consider client perception when offering chemical services

This comes into play when choosing between liquid and granular products. Stout has "dabbled" with both in the past and says both work as well as the other. Today he uses strictly granular for its flexibility and for the fact that his clients prefer granular to liquid applications.

"People don't like to see big tankers spraying gallons of liquid all over their lawns," Stout says. "Many of my customers ask me what I use and they prefer granular."

Granular products are more popular in the industry, particularly for fall applications, Buckwalter says. Fall morning temperatures can dip below freezing, he says, which is too cold for effective liquid applications. There are also more granular products available

to LCOs on the market in slow-release formulations, which is important for this time of year.

Stout prices his fertilization services per 1,000 square feet and implements a 3,000-square-foot minimum.

"Fall fertilization allows turf to recover from the summer blues." – Russell Stout

The price per square foot differs based on the type of product used, as some lawns require more expensive fertilizer to treat specific problems. However, the minimum price of an application is about \$42, Stout says. An average-sized job is about 5,000 square feet, and as a lawn gets bigger, the price goes down, he adds.

Most of Stout's marketing efforts for his fertilization services take

place in the spring when he sends out direct-mailing fliers, but he also runs a Yellow Pages ad, keeps up with his Web site and relies on customer referrals throughout the year. If the year brings an unusually hot or dry

summer, Stout focuses his fall fertilization marketing efforts on the renovation of a potential client's lawn.

"In terms of marketing, we don't really do anything exotic, but it can change from year to year depending on the weather," Stout says. "As a full-service company, our goal is to meet all of our customers' lawn and landscape needs." **LL**

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For information about accurately timing fall fertilization applications, visit the September issue's online extras.



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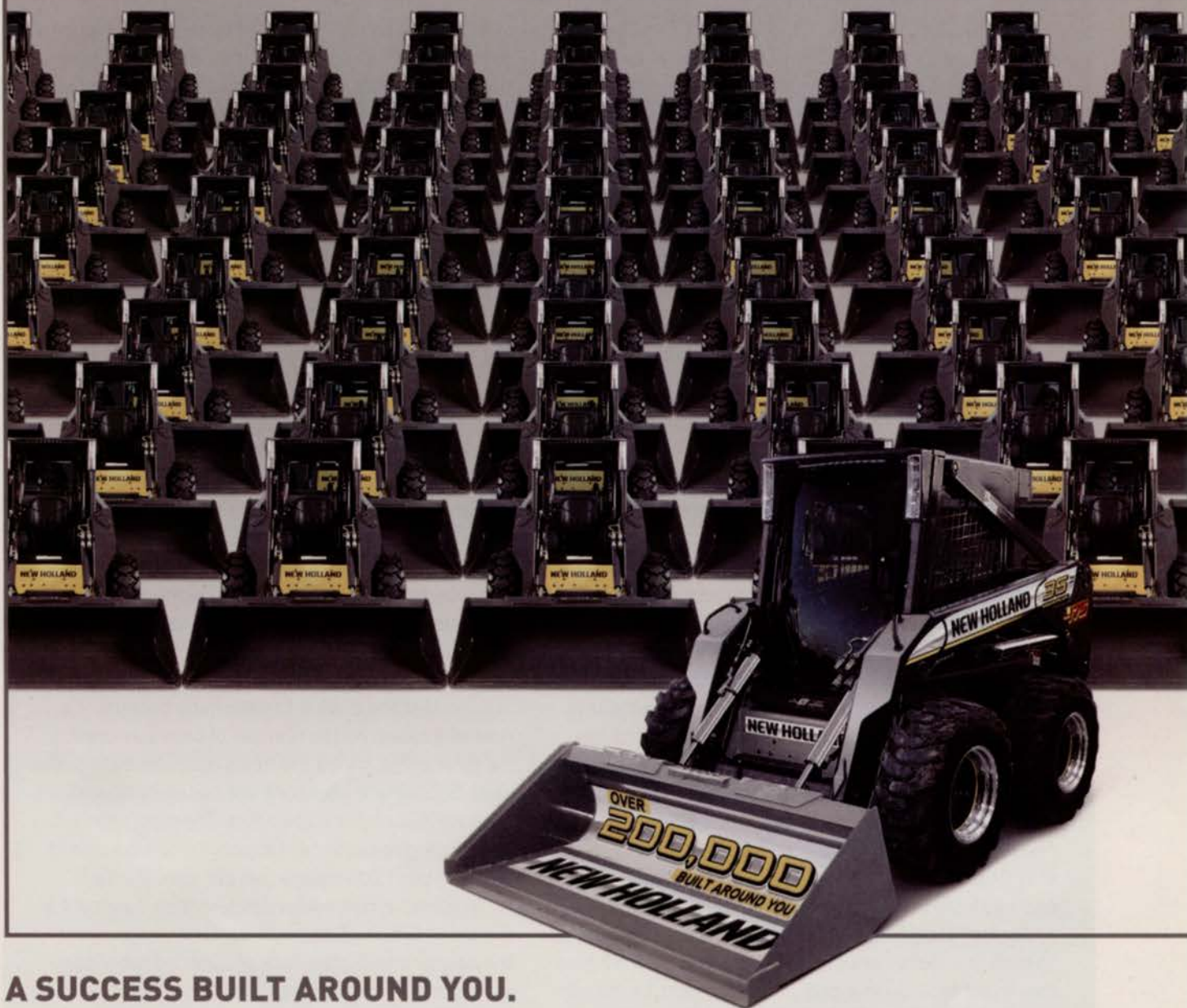
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disease-free trees

Just like turf, trees need nutrients too. The best way for a lawn care operator (LCO) to keep a tree properly nourished, while generating extra revenue, is through fertilization. "Offering tree fertilization can be an inexpensive way for lawn care operators to increase service offerings to customers," says Marianne Waindle, product development manager, J.J. Mauget, Arcadia, Calif.

There are four main methods of tree fertilization, Waindle says. One is subsurface soil injections (formerly known as deep root feeding), where 2 to 3 gallons of liquid fertilizer are injected 6 inches below the soil with an injection lance, usually at the drip line of a tree in a grid-shaped formation. A second is microinjection, where fertilizer is injected directly into a tree's vascular system through its trunk. This method can be used for routine fertilizer applications or rescue treatments addressing disease or nutrient deficiencies. Foliar sprays, a third option, are liquid treatments sprayed on a tree's leaves to alleviate a deficiency.

Though slightly outdated, using tree spikes is a fourth method, Waindle says. Dry, compacted fertilizer spikes are pounded into the ground at predetermined intervals around a tree's drip line. Tree spikes are commonly used to correct deficiencies in palms because they're easier to insert into sandy rather than clay soil, Waindle says.

Mark Leahy, owner of Blades of Green, Churchton, Md., began offering tree fertilization services as a result of customer requests. He mostly performs subsurface soil injections, as the only additional equipment he needed to purchase was a \$200 injection lance, Leahy says. The stainless steel instrument has replaceable tips and has lasted for more than 10 years, he adds.

For trees larger than 20 feet, Leahy's crews create an 18-inch to 2-foot interval around a tree's drip line where they inject fertilizer in a grid-shaped pattern. Leahy will also offer foliar sprays for trees smaller than 20 feet because their leaves are easier to reach, he says.

Leahy likes to offer his tree fertilization services in the fall, but his location allows him to offer them in the winter and early spring, "just as long as the ground isn't frozen," he says, adding it's difficult for fertilizer to reach a tree through frozen soil.

Timing of tree fertilization depends on the type of product – slow- or quick-release – being used, Waindle says. Trees allocate carbohydrates at certain times of the

year depending on the cycle they're in, she explains. In the fall until early spring, trees allocate carbohydrates to the root system. When the soil temperatures warm up in late spring and early summer, carbohydrates are reversed and reallocated to the upper portion of the tree for leaf growth. "If you want to fertilize a tree to stimulate root growth, fall and winter applications would be best," she says. "If you want to stimulate above-ground growth, then spring and summer are better times for those applications."

Leahy usually prices his tree fertilization services per tree, factoring in the tree's size and materials used. The price of larger jobs of 20 to 30 2- to 3-foot caliber trees is based on time and labor plus the cost of materials. An average job costs between \$1,000 and \$1,500, with less than \$100 geared toward the cost of materials, he says.

For microinjection, most LCOs charge between \$3 and \$10 per caliper inch, depending on the number of trees treated, the type of chemical used and the distance from the service point. Pricing, though, depends on many factors, Waindle says, such as a tree's size and how long a job takes, and varies from contractor to contractor. The cost to treat via trunk injections is the easiest to determine because it's normally based on the number of capsules used. To determine this, divide the tree's diameter by two, she says. Subsurface injections are priced by how much product is used per square foot. The most efficient, long-lasting fertilizers will supply 1½ to 3 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year, she says.

Tree fertilization comprises less than 1 percent of Blades of Green's total revenue, Leahy says. While the service could grow, lack of qualified labor prevents Leahy from pushing the service. "More training is required for tree fertilization, and we don't have enough qualified technicians to market the service very heavily," he says. "It's definitely a labor issue."

To ensure profitability, Waindle suggests considering slow- vs. quick-release formulations. While quick-release forms are less costly, they tend not to last quite as long in the soil, narrowing the application window, she says. Slow-release products will nourish a tree for a longer period of time, up to two years, widening the application window.

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Photos: Toro

Small But Mighty

By helping contractors gain access to tight spaces on residential properties and saving them labor costs, mini skid-steers gain popularity.

Anthony Beudet remembers the job very well. The owner of Beudet Earthworks, in Honokaa, Hawaii, was hired to install a small pond on the lower level of an existing office complex. He wondered how he would complete the required excavating and backfill work. The work was too much to try to accomplish by hand. "What machine could he get through the front doors of the office building?" he wondered. The answer came in the form of mini skid-steer.

"It was the only machine that could possibly get through the doors," Beudet recalls, describing the feeling of power he got from such a small machine as "awesome." One mini skid-steer and an operator, he says, easily replaces six workers. "It just was used every day. It definitely paid for itself."

For Beudet, the versatility of a mini skid-steer and its many attributes



by mark phillips | associate editor

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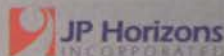
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construction equipment

have helped bolster profits by saving money on labor to eliminating potential damage to turf and other surfaces that a mini-skid steer's larger, heavier brethren can inflict. There are myriad reasons why contractors would opt for using these nimble machines.

Contractors can expect to pay for the versatility and labor-saving abilities of these machines, though they won't have to break the bank. A machine with a standard bucket ranges between \$13,000 to more than \$20,000, depending on the attachments. Due to rising steel prices, the units have become a bit more expensive than they have been in the past, manufacturers say. Depending on the fuel platform chosen, the final cost could increase or decrease, as well.

WHY GO MINI? The decreasing size of residential lots in recent years has led to wider need for compact, yet powerful and versatile landscape tools.

"Home builders are maximizing land by placing larger homes



There are many reasons landscape contractors have been opting for smaller construction equipment, including accessing tighter areas and getting work done at faster speeds with less labor. Photo: Bobcat

on smaller lots and building homes closer together," says Aaron Kleingartner, loader product specialist for West Fargo, N.D.-based Bobcat Co. "Landscape contractors have less space to maneuver when completing tasks

such as grading, sod and irrigation installation, and placing hardscape materials."

Mini skid-steers can fit between narrowly placed homes, narrow backyard gates and into other confined areas, he says. Plus, since they're small, they have a light footprint that minimizes or eliminates damage to the job site. Wide tracks ensure flotation that allows the mini skid-steer to work in sandy or muddy conditions.

Because mini skid-steers gain access to confined areas, contractors can mechanize jobs that could only be done by hand before, Kleingartner says. "Instead of hiring two or three extra workers to dig holes for trees and shrubs," he says, "one operator can mechanize these tasks in half the time with an auger attachment on the mini track loader."

Many homes in Beaudet's service area have rock wall foundations that are close together. "There's no easy access to the backyard," he says. "If you have a load of soil dropped off in

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the front yard, the only way to get it to the back is either through a wheel barrow or a mini skid-steer.”

If given a choice, he'll gladly take the mini skid-steer, Beaudet says.

Mini skid-steers were developed to assist contractors looking for a machine that could help reduce their dependence on labor and bulkier pieces of equipment, says Greg Lawrence, marketing product manager for the Dingo product line of Bloomington, Minn.-based Toro Co.

“Since landscaping requires so many specialty tools to be used at any given time – and the tools can vary from job to job and season to season – the landscape contractor's fleet is an ideal home for a versatile machine,” he says.

Common mini skid-steer attachments include an auger, trencher, vibratory plow, hydraulic breaker, backhoe, leveler, tiller, cultivator, hydraulic blade, power box rake and more. In addition, attachments such as rotary brooms, hydraulic blades



When first introduced, compact utility loaders were wheeled, dedicated ride-on loaders. Since then, the selection has expanded for contractors to include tracked designs with both ride-on and walk-behind capabilities. Photo: Toro

or snow throwers allow contractors to easily expand their offerings to include year-round services.

“On most landscape jobs, there are several small tasks,” Lawrence says. “Mini skid-steer loaders shine in these situations because they are capable of using a variety of attachments in a short amount of time.”

Attachments can quickly be changed out, oftentimes by simply

turning two locking pins and connecting hydraulic lines. “They maximize productivity while remaining extremely efficient,” he says.

Though a mini skid-steer doesn't possess the lifting capacity of its full-size counterpart, the machines are equipped to easily lift materials and perform smaller duties, Klingartner says. Many mini skid-steers can lift around 550 pounds.

“A contractor might use a mini skid-steer to access a residential backyard to install a retaining wall, trees or an irrigation system,” he says.

The versatility of mini skid-steers enables contractors to carry sod and paving stone, drill holes for trees and fence posts, or install irrigation and drainage systems. Other tasks include

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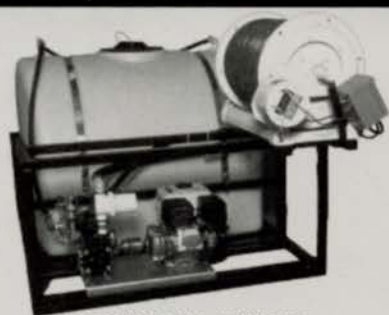
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grading in a constricted area, digging holes for fence posts, demolishing a concrete patio or steps and sweeping driveways and sidewalks. In addition, the same small frame of a mini skid-steer that allows it to move easily

buy them or lease them outright, the machines are becoming more popular in the rental market. Contractors like using them because many mini skid-steers can utilize the same attachments as larger skid-steers, Kleingartner says.

“Mini skid-steer loaders shine on the job because they are capable of using a variety of attachments in a short amount of time.”

- Greg Lawrence

between narrow gates enables it to easily move from job site to job site.

THE RISE OF THE MINI SKID-STEER. Mini skid-steers have become a must-have in some contractors' arsenals, mostly because of their versatility. While some contractors

“A hydraulic breaker, for example, may be used with a mini skid-steer, skid-steer loader, compact excavator and loader backhoe.”

Many operators prefer to use walk-behind units over dedicated, ride-on models, Lawrence says.

“This may be because a walk-be-

hind machine is less intimidating than a ride-on machine,” Lawrence says. “This is particularly true in the rental industry, where having a walk-behind machine is important for novice operators not familiar with operating equipment.” But the application and frequency of use will dictate whether a contractor requires a walk-behind or ride-on unit.

“If a contractor is working in confined spaces and is only using the loader here and there, a walk-behind unit may be the most efficient option,” he adds. “However, if the machine is being used for material handling while covering a lot of ground, a ride-on unit may best fit the need.”

Some machines let contractors do both. Some mini skid-steers feature a platform that allows the operator to ride on the machine.

“It helps decrease operator fatigue and increase comfort, especially in applications requiring extensive hauling or covering substantial distances,”

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Lawrence says. The platform bolts onto the compact utility loader and can be folded up and stored against the machine in a locked position when not in use.

While mini skid-steers come in either gas or diesel fuel platforms, diesel-powered mini skid-steers continue to gain in popularity, Lawrence says. "These units are in demand because diesel engines deliver a flatter torque curve, which gives the operator more usable lugging power at all engine rpm levels," he says.

Gas units, though, remain a favorite among many contractors, Lawrence adds. The reasons may include the ease of maintenance of a gas-powered unit vs. a diesel unit, fuel availability or perhaps the smaller up-front investment when compared to a diesel machine, Lawrence says.

ATTACHMENTS THAT ARE TOPS.

Much like its larger counterpart, attachments truly make the mini

skid-steer. Many attachments can often replace dedicated machines for the contractor, which further adds to the machine's value. But a few are must-haves.

The bucket is essential and can be used for digging, grading and hauling material, Kleingartner says. The trencher is used extensively in landscaping and aids in the installation of irrigation, drainage or electrical lines. Pallet forks allow the operator to easily carry pallets of paving stones, bags of rock, small trees and small amounts of sod, Kleingartner says. Tillers break up hard ground or an area for seeding and when used along with a soil conditioner, a landscaper can easily prepare an area to be seeded, he says.

The soil conditioner provides a smooth, even seedbed to properly grow grass, Kleingartner says. An auger is another useful attachment to drill holes for fence posts, deck post footings, trees or junction boxes in irrigations systems, he says.

These machines have gone beyond just an added efficiency on the job site – they are another way for contractors to expand the number of services they provide to customers, Lawrence says.

For example, many irrigation contractors employ a host of attachments to supplement their fleets and grow their businesses, Lawrence says.

"They use trenchers and vibratory plows for installing pipe, trench fillers for covering open trenches, underground boring units for pulling pipe under driveways and sidewalks, augers for installing valve boxes, and buckets for hauling materials," Lawrence says. "Other contractors use the backhoe, pallet forks and bucket attachments to build decorative ponds." **LL**

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Dive Into Drip

Drip and other forms of microirrigation make up one of the fastest growing segments of the irrigation industry.

When Ron Newberg started offering drip irrigation services 25 years ago, he bought the necessary equipment from a local supplier on an as-needed basis. Now, he needs one or two semitrailers to deliver the necessary materials every two to three months.

The fifth edition of the Irrigation Association handbook, printed in 1983, has information pertaining to drip irrigation scattered throughout its pages. The sixth edition, available in late 2007 or early 2008, will have three chapters dedicated to drip in the landscape and agricultural industries.

Needless to say, microirrigation – the industry's term for all forms of low-volume irrigation – is growing. And as water restrictions pop up throughout the country, this growth will no doubt continue. Experts estimate drip and other forms of microirrigation use 30 percent less water and are 90 percent more efficient than overhead systems. But additional factors, such as positive client perception and healthier plant material, also contribute to the growth of the microirrigation industry. According to *Lawn & Landscape* research, 82 percent of contractors use drip or microirrigation products and another 8



Photo: Rain Bird

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percent plan to use them this year.

WHY DRIP? Newberg began his St. Petersburg, Fla.-based business, Newberg Irrigation, 35 years ago and first considered low-volume about 25 years ago. At the time, the decision was aesthetic, he says, as installing drip was a way to eliminate the film overhead sprayers would leave on low-standing office windows. It was also a better way to water hard-to-reach areas like hanging planters.

But as he tries to comply with the ever-emerging codes and restrictions prevalent in South Florida, Newberg says drip has evolved into a water conservation issue. Because of its efficiency, microirrigation is often exempt from the restrictions and watering schedules that irrigation contractors installing conventional systems must abide by.

"Right now, because of the drought, contractors can only irrigate one day a week – except for those offering a form of low-volume, which is unrestricted," Newberg says. "Now, we have seven days to water everything with low-volume and one day to water with spray."

From January to May this year, South Florida received only 3 to 4 inches of rain. The area's summer season brings even less rain, along with hotter temperatures and relatively low humidity. "In these conditions, plant material will die using spray irrigation only once a week," Newberg says. "Irrigation contractors have basically been backed into a corner – the only way to keep plant material alive around here is with drip. The price of irrigation just went up."

While the South and West were the first regions to embrace the use of

drip, contractors and manufacturers say the service will spread to all parts of the country as people recognize its benefits and water becomes scarcer. "As I talk to irrigation contractors around the country, more and more of them are looking into micro," says Ronald Sneed, irrigation consultant and Irrigation Association committee chairman, Raleigh, N.C. "For now, the South and the West are seeing more growth than in the East, but I'd say the service as a whole is growing at about 1 percent a year. You can see that by looking at the offerings of any major distributor of irrigation products."

Awareness contributes to the growth of water-conscious irrigation, as well. Water conservation and other environmental issues are hot topics and more people are aware of what they can do to make less of an impact.



Public perception has helped grow microirrigation and contractors can use this when selling systems. Photo: Rain Bird

"A day doesn't go by that you don't see something about water conservation in the newspaper or on the news – there is quite a glut of information reaching homeowners," Newberg says. "If they hear it from enough sources, they become receptive."

David Laybourn, senior product manager, Rain Bird, Azusa, Calif., agrees public perception is a main component in the growth of microirrigation and that contractors can use client awareness to their advantage. "A lot of clients have a desire to show a commitment to sustainability and conservation and want to show that in their landscapes," he says. "They don't want their neighbors or other businesses to see them wasting water."

"Every contractor should aim to be the first in their area to be recognized as a drip expert," he adds. "It shows that he or she is ahead of the curve." Laybourn suggests contractors monitor their first two or three drip irrigation installations, consider-

ing costs, materials, problems and solutions, and use the information as case studies when selling future jobs. "Contractors should keep well-documented case studies to show potential customers that it works – and works well – and that they know what they're doing," he says. "This expertise can generate great word-of-mouth."

IRRIGATION INCENTIVES. Drip irrigation applies water directly to a plant's roots where it is most needed, resulting in virtually no evaporation or water waste. Currently, drip is most often used for plant material with a wide root base, like rows of shrubs and hedges, containers and hanging baskets. It is not ideal for turf because each small area of grass is its own plant with a small root base, and if grass roots plug an emitter, the grass around it suffers, Laybourn says. Future advancements, however, may alleviate this problem.

Drip irrigation provides higher

uniformity by applying the same amount of water to every area of a landscape, promoting healthier plant material, Laybourn says. Similarly, drip irrigation caters to landscapes composed of a variety of plant material by programming each control valve to run at different times.

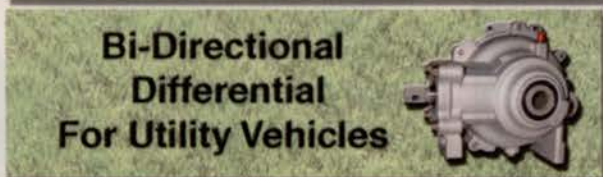
"Turf and plants require different amounts of water and microirrigation allows contractors to water them separately," Sneed says. "Most of all lawns are multi-landscaped, and drip can eliminate the problem of over or under watering."

Another reason contractors may opt for microirrigation is the system's underground installation makes it impervious to vandalism or damage from foot traffic. "A lot of drip systems are out of sight, unlike microsprayers which are exposed," Sneed says.

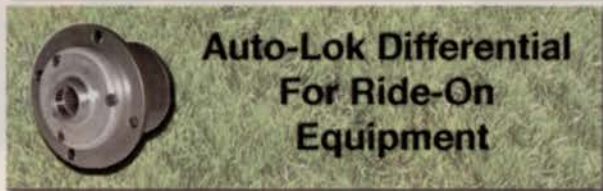
The price charged to clients to install a microirrigation system can be about 20 percent more than for a conventional system, Newberg says.



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Cost factors that often come into play are additional parts, such as filters and flush and air relief valves, as well as the additional labor and necessary training.

While contractors are able to charge the same or more for drip irrigation installation, some manufacturers say a contractor's costs to install a drip irrigation system vs. a spray system are considerably less – up to 70 percent less depending on the size of the system, says Ben Raines, marketing specialist, DIG Corporation, Vista, Calif. For example, drip irrigation nozzles cost around 50 cents each, while spray heads cost \$7 or \$8 dollars each, he says. Half-inch drip tubing costs less than 10 cents per foot, while ¾-inch PVC, the standard material for sprinkler system pipes, costs about 68 cents

per foot, Raines adds. In terms of labor, drip irrigation installation does not involve digging trenches and can be done with simple handheld tools, Raines says. "There are many factors,

"A day doesn't go by that you don't see something about water conservation in the newspaper or on the news – there is quite a glut of information reaching homeowners."

– Ron Newberg

such as type of landscape and layout of the land, that can affect the price of an irrigation system installation," he says. "But the cost of drip irrigation systems can be much less, especially

the installation process."

Laybourn suggests contractors stress the potential long-term savings and the rising costs of water in all areas of the country. "People are coming around to the fact that any irrigation systems installed today will run with water priced at tomorrow's rate," he says, comparing the situation to the recent surge in gas prices and the purchasing of fuel-efficient cars.

PIECES AND PARTS.

Microirrigation equipment has come a long way. "People used to punch a hole in polyethylene pipe and call it drip irrigation,"

Sneed says. While many manufacturers only sell certain pieces of microirrigation systems, he says some companies are trying to provide a full

continued on page 122, sidebar on page 120

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"The problem with microirrigation is that many contractors don't know what they're doing and, more importantly, they don't know what they're doing wrong," says David Wickham, irrigation consultant and owner of David Wickham & Associates, Lake Mary, Fla.

With water conservation on the rise, it's important for irrigation contractors to know how to irrigate consciously. Wickham discusses some common mistakes microirrigation contractors make and how and why they should be avoided.

1. START WITH A GOOD SYSTEM DESIGN.

When installing a microirrigation system, some irrigation contractors forget to consider the same common design issues that they would for the design of any irrigation system, Wickham says.

These design issues include: flows, velocities, pressures and application rates, among others.

Without a good design, the system just won't work properly, he adds.

2. FLUSH OUT ALL SYSTEM LINES.

A common mistake irrigation professionals make is applying their regular flush program for spray and rotor systems to microsystems, Wickham says.

A microirrigation system's parts are much smaller and flushing practices need to reflect that. Doing this improperly can result in clogged lines and emitters and the need to re-flush the system entirely.

3. USE AUTOMATIC FLUSH VALVES ON THE ENDS OF ZONES.

Wickham suggests installing automatic flush valves rather than "figure eight" end closures at the ends of zones, noting that, no matter how efficient a microsystem's filters are, contaminants can still accumulate within a system's lines. Automatic flush valves will flush a zone each time it operates, eliminating the need for a crew member to do it, and can also act as zone vacuums or air relief valves, Wickham says.

Figure eight end closures also have the tendency to crack and leak and can easily get lost underground if not installed inside a valve box, Wickham says.

4. BURY AND PIN ALL SYSTEM LINES.

Another common mistake contractors make when installing microirrigation systems is installing lines on top of the soil and then covering them with mulch, Wickham says. Most manufacturers agree that permanent and even

temporary microirrigation lines should be buried at least 1 to 2 inches below ground to protect them from exposure, harmful ultraviolet rays and wear and tear. These lines should then be pinned at 2- to 3-foot intervals using wire staples to keep them firmly in place, he says.

5. CHANGE THE ORDER OF THE ZONE CONTROL DEVICE.

Generally, the recommended order in which to install zone control devices from the upstream end to the downstream end starts with the shut-off valve and then moves to the filter, the remote control valve and lastly the pressure regulator, Wickham says.

The shutoff valve should come first so the water can be turned off to perform any maintenance and service to the other zone control devices.

The filter should come next so contaminants can be trapped before they damage or clog the remote control valve and the pressure regulator.

The pressure regulator should always be downstream of the remote control valve so the pressure regulator doesn't create opening and closing problems that can occur because of lower system operating pressures, Wickham says.

6. TRAIN AND GAIN EXPERIENCE.

Extensive employee training and experience using microirrigation is the key to becoming an adept installer of these systems, Wickham says.

Likewise, irrigation contractors should leverage their know-how as selling points and marketing tools for both current customers and potential new clients, Wickham says.

"You would be surprised how many clients appreciate your looking out for their short- and long-term operation and maintenance costs," Wickham says of these selling points.

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 **BUCKLE UP**

continued from page 118

line of equipment to become a drip irrigation one-stop shop. "The industry is maturing and trying to work out the kinks," Sneed says. "There are a number of manufacturers who will soon do nothing but microirrigation." A properly installed, well-maintained drip irrigation system with great filtration can last 25 years, he says.

Quality filters are the most important components of drip irrigation systems. The water passageways of drip irrigation systems are quite small, ranging in size from 1/2 inch to 5/8 inch, so it's common for systems without proper filtration to clog with bits of rust, sand and other contaminants. There are a few different types of filters, such as mechanical or screen filters, media and disk filters.

Pressure regulators are important to keep the system from busting at the seams. Drip irrigation systems should run no higher than 30 to 40 psi, Laybourn says. "Even if the fittings holding a drip irrigation system

together are of good quality, they will fail prematurely and could wash out surrounding plants if they're under too high of pressure for a long period of time," he says.

A drip irrigation system uses an emitter to deliver water to the plant. This is where the biggest difference between micro and overhead irrigation systems comes into play because, unlike overhead systems which deliver water in gallons per minute, microirrigation systems deliver water in gallons per hour. There are four main types of low-volume irrigation emitters: inline drip tubing, point source emitters, microsprays and bubblers.

Inline drip tubing has emitters placed regularly throughout the tubing and is usually buried under mulch or just below the soil surface.

Point source emitters are placed externally where they are needed most and are usually used to water individual plants.

Microsprays are small sprayheads

located above ground to irrigate areas slightly larger than a plant's root base and are also often used in beds.

Bubblers emit, or "bubble," water over an area a few inches wide. This is ideal for areas like containers and planter boxes that require more water than other micro-emitters will allow.

Although different, microirrigation can be a simple way for irrigation contractors to keep their clients' landscapes looking great despite the obstacles up against them. "It's really nothing more than a precise application of water at a plant's roots," Laybourn says. "But it's growing faster than any other segment of the irrigation industry." **LL**

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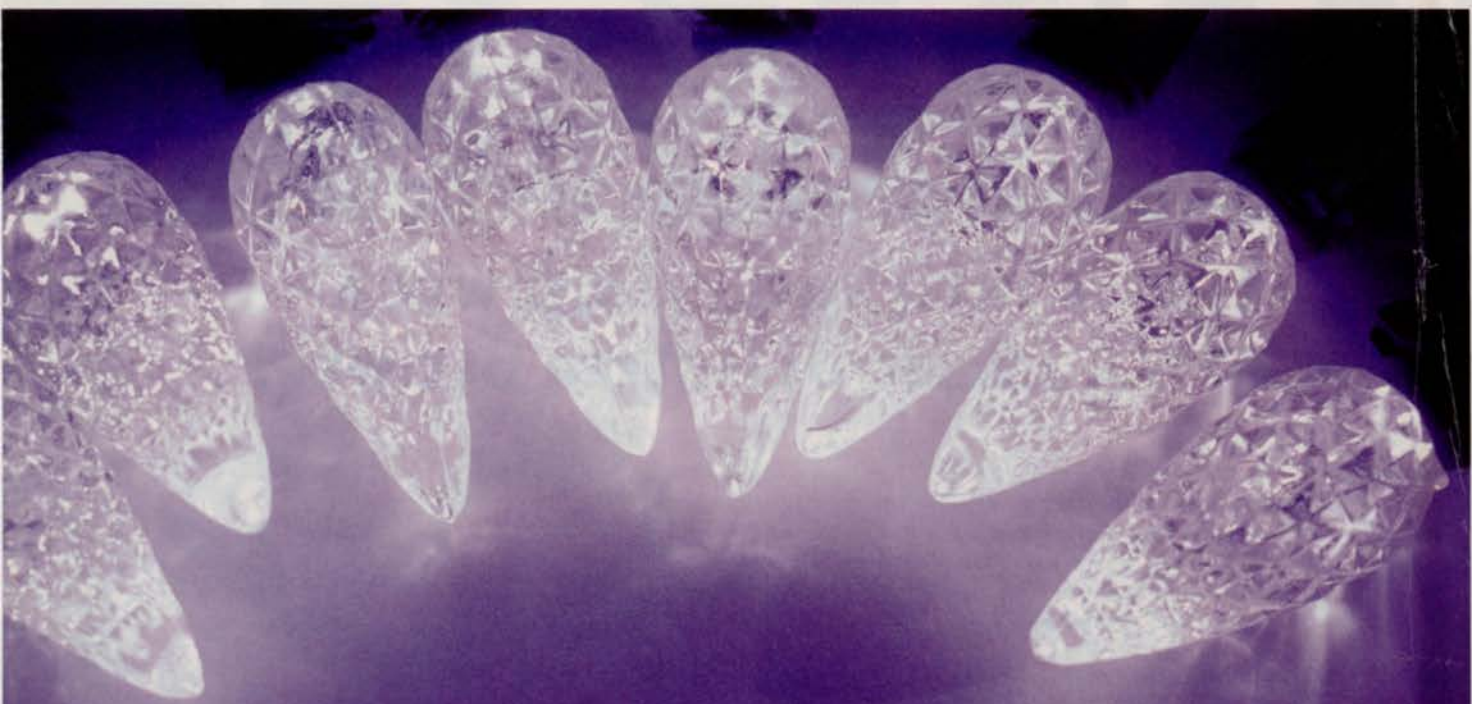
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LEDing the Way

Energy efficiency and a brighter glow add to LED lighting's reputation as holiday decorating's 'next big thing.'

The warm, candle-like glow of clear, incandescent lights have for years been the most popular holiday lighting selection, holiday decorators say. Consumers like the traditional look of all white lights, which decorators often dress up with wreaths and greenery. While white lights remain popular, the trend that's giving this monochromatic look a run for its money, however, is the advent of LED lights. "LEDs are increasingly popular because of the green movement," says Travis Freeman, president of Brite Ideas Decorating, an Omaha, Neb.-based network of holiday decorating product distributors. "The vibrancy of the colors also provide a new look. It's really the next big thing."

The movement toward LED bulbs, or light-emitting diode bulbs, is a trend in itself, but it also may be in part driving another trend: consumers' willingness to experiment with colorful displays rather than all white ones.

BENEFITS OF LEDS. LED bulbs offer an array of benefits that their incandescent counterparts don't. The No. 1 attraction is energy savings – LEDs typically consume 90 percent less energy than incandescent lights. The U.S. Department of Energy calculated in 2003 that the potential energy savings of a complete shift in the holiday lighting market from incandescent

by marisa palmieri | associate editor

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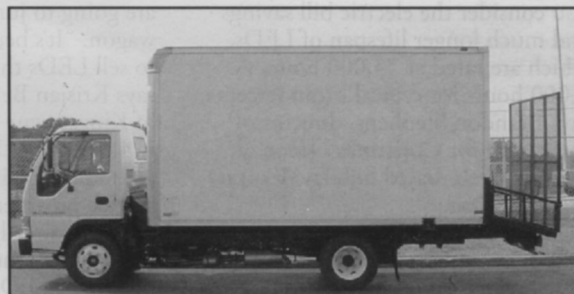


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bulbs to LEDs is approximately 21.9 trillion Btu – the equivalent of the annual amount of electricity consumed by more than 600,000 households, according to the Energy Information Administration.

One concern for holiday lighting customers, though, is the initial investment, as LED lighting products can be up to four times more expensive than traditional lights. However, the lifetime cost of LED bulbs is cheaper than incandescent bulbs when you consider the electric bill savings and much longer lifespan of LEDs, which are rated at 75,000 hours vs. 3,000 hours for typical incandescents, says Brandon Stephens, director of marketing for Christmas Décor, an Omaha, Neb.-based holiday decorating franchisor.

Even though LEDs are a greater initial investment than incandescents, upselling customers to LEDs should be fairly easy because holiday lighting services are typically geared toward

homeowners with disposable incomes.

The average cost of a holiday lighting installation is between \$1,500 and \$2,600, according to several national suppliers. LED installations are typically 25 percent more, or around \$3,300, Freeman says. “LEDs are more efficient energy-wise, and we deal with a pretty affluent customer who’s conscious of that type of thing,” Stephens says. “It makes sense for them long-term.”

But that’s not to say all customers are going to jump on the LED bandwagon. “It’s been a little more difficult to sell LEDs than we anticipated,” says Krisjan Berzins, vice president of Kingstowne Lawn & Landscape in Lorton, Va. His company became a holiday lighting distributor and service provider in 2000. “We’ve taken an already expensive service and made it that much more expensive,” he says of LEDs. Berzins and other contractors expect more customers to migrate to LEDs as the prices come

down and their existing lights need to be replaced.

Installing LED lights is advantageous for a contractor, too. LEDs use less energy per bulb, thus less energy per installation, so more light strings can be connected end to end, which means fewer extension cords are required. LEDs save contractors on labor, as well, because of a reduction in service calls, says Brad Finkle, owner of Creative Decorating, an Omaha, Neb.-based holiday decorator and supplier. “With traditional lights, you get bulbs burning out in a year or two and a lot of service calls going back and forth to replace lights,” Finkle says. “LEDs last 10 times as long, so you save on repairs and labor there.”


Some customers have resisted moving to LEDs because they don’t like the look. People perceive them to have a bluish tint, as compared to the yellowish glow they’re used to with incandescents. But manufacturers say LEDs’ quality and crispness have im-



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USE READER SERVICE # 92

proved greatly since the first generation was introduced a number of years ago and LEDs of today look more like incandescents. "It's personal preference," says Scott Heese, president and founder of Holiday Bright Lights, an

with LEDs because they're trying to find something unique and different."

TRENDWATCH. With LEDs, clients are more inclined to use color, Heese says. "While the majority of sales – at

"With traditional lights, you get bulbs burning out in a year or two and a lot of service calls going back and forth to replace lights. LEDs last 10 times as long, so you save on repairs and labor there."

– Brad Finkle

Omaha, Neb.-based holiday lighting membership system and manufacturer. "A lot of customers still request the incandescent lights because they prefer the look, but a lot of them go

least 80 percent – are still clear lights, color is becoming more popular because the LEDs are more brilliant."

Paul Sessel agrees. "White lights dominate the marketplace, but I'm

seeing more colors being used with LED lights because the colors are so rich and vibrant," says the owner of Creative Displays, an Overland Park, Kan.-based holiday lighting distributor. The color blue is one example. Incandescent blues can be difficult to see, Sessel says. "But the LED blues really pop out."

Though LEDs have been slow to catch on among Billy Leavell's clients, the trend toward using color is strong.

"When we first started holiday lighting four years ago, the trend was pretty much all white lights," says the president of Turf Managers, Nashville, Tenn. "We're seeing that customers definitely want some more color in their displays now. That's the true part of this season – having bright festive lights like when we were kids." **LL**

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For more on creative holiday displays, visit the September Online Extras section.

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by katie morris | contributing writer

make every cut count

With more contractors offering tree and ornamental trimming and removal services, it's imperative to have the right tools.

In the field, landscape contractors have a wide variety of pruning equipment at their fingertips, everything from hand-held tools that trim delicate branches to heavy-duty, gas-powered chainsaws that easily slice through thick tree limbs.

Each tool performs a specific function in arbor care, and thoroughly understanding those roles helps contractors increase job site effectiveness, efficiency and – when it comes to the gas-powered cutting tools – overall safety.

According to recent *Lawn & Landscape* research, nearly 55 percent of landscape contractors offer tree and ornamental trimming and removal services. And of those contractors providing the services, 17 percent indicated their revenues from arbor and tree care services increased from 2005 to 2006. With more contractors offering these services to boost revenue, it is imperative to have the right tools to do the job correctly. However, a mistake many contractors make is confusing cutting and pruning products designed for homeowner use with those products intended for professionals, says Rod Buff, owner of Buff Landscaping in Libertyville, Ill. The consistent use of some landscape tools, such as saws and pruners, requires contractors to invest in professional-grade equipment, Buff says. "A homeowner would edge their grass about once a week whereas a landscape contractor would be getting 10 times more use out of the same piece of equipment in a day," he says.

A cutting tool made for the average homeowner is not going to have the same durability as a product made for arbor care professionals, Buff says. Contractor-grade cutting equipment is going to stand up to the rigors of daily use, he says, whereas lesser-grade tools lack dependability.



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When purchasing professional-grade cutting and pruning tools there are specific quality features contractors will benefit from, says Anita Gambill, a representative for Stihl in Virginia Beach, Va. "Contractors should look for hand tools that have rust resistant blades that can be sharpened and eventually replaced, a quick release blade lock and a comfortable non-slip grip," she says. Corroded cutting equipment will not work correctly and contractors will end up replacing tools more often if they are not rust resistant, she adds.

maples and Dogwoods," says Erich Schneider, CEO and founder of Schneider Tree Care in Greenville, S.C.

The lopper is the pruning shear's bigger cousin. This hand-held cutting tool provides more control and power over the cut because the user is able to grip the tool with both hands.

"The lopper can be thought of as a long two-handed pruning shear," says Rob Fanno, owner of Fanno Saw Works in Chico, Calif. "It has a bigger hook and blade so it can cut through thicker branches."

Gripping a lopper with both hands

contractors to move them from job site to job site.

When choosing between the conventional saw tooth and the Japanese-style teeth, many contractors prefer the Japanese style, Fanno says. The Japanese style blade provides more slicing action making it easier for users to quickly cut through hard woody material. Hand saws cut limbs between 1 to 12 inches in diameter and, on average, cost between \$15 and \$40.

Pole saws, on the other hand, allow a contractor to keep both feet on the ground while making cuts to a tree's canopy. A pole saw resembles a hand saw but with a longer handle that can cut limbs between 1 to 8 inches in diameter. However, workers can also use a pole saw to reach outer limbs while in the tree, Schneider says. Besides trimming a tree's outer branches for aesthetic purposes, these saws are used to trim back branches from utility poles.

These extension saws cost between \$15 and \$70. Pole saw handles come in lengths anywhere from 2 to 16 feet and are made from either wood or fiberglass. Handles are available with additional sections to increase a saw's length.

ENGINE POWER. Every morning, Sam Hill, owner of Sam Hill Tree Care, Dallas, Texas, arms each employee with a hand pruner, hand saw, pole saw and small chainsaw so they can begin another full day of pruning and tree removal.

The chainsaw, however, is the bread and butter of Hill's tree pruning business. Valuable time and business would be lost without them, Hill says, which is why he keeps a couple of older, but functional, units to put into service when the others breakdown.

Chainsaws have been available to landscape contractors for some time. The first chainsaws used a scratcher chain which ripped its way through wood but did not pull the chips out, says Andy Kuczmar, senior director of product training and support, Echo, Lake Zurich, Ill. In 1946-47 the chain was refashioned in the form of the letter C and the front was sharpened to have a knife-like edge. This new chain works in two parts. The first part severs the grain and the second part acts as a chisel and pulls the chip out. This invention cut down on the amount of time it took to cut a piece of wood.

pruning safety

Pruning tools, especially chainsaws, are extremely dangerous, and users are not always aware of the safety features or the proper safety gear when operating them. Here are some ways you can protect your limbs:

1. Make sure your chainsaw has all the safety features, including a chain brake, low kickback capability and a chain catcher.
2. When replacing a chain note that there are chains available that are safer than others.
3. Generally, safety glasses and gloves, as well as long sleeves, are sufficient when using hand pruners, hand pruning saws and loppers. However, when cutting a limb above your head, with a chainsaw and even with a manual pole saw, a helmet is recommended.
4. Wearing a face shield keeps shavings and debris out of your mouth and eyes.
5. Wearing ear plugs protects eardrums from prolonged engine noise.
6. Steel-toed boots come in handy as foot protection if the saw blade accidentally comes in contact with the operator's feet.

MAN POWER. Hand-held pruning shears are the smallest of the cutting tools available and are beneficial when tending to small-sized plant material. There are two types of pruning shears contractors use in the field. Anvil pruners squeeze the branch between a blade and a flat cutting surface and use pressure to snap the branch. Bypass pruners, though, scissor the branch between two sharp blades for a cleaner cut. Both are handy for removing easily accessible branches at the ground level, especially hedges and ornamental bushes. They cut through limbs up to 3/4 of an inch in diameter. A quality pair of professional-grade pruning shears will cost a contractor between \$10 and \$50.

"Pruning shears are useful for ornamental pruning like Japanese

allows the user to tap into his or her upper-body strength to cut branches between 1 and 2 inches in diameter. Contractors normally use loppers to cut thicker and harder branches, such as those on rose bushes and fruit trees. It also provides contractors with a reach capability for limbs that don't require a ladder but are beyond a worker's reach. On average, a professional-grade pair of loppers costs between \$35 and \$85.

If hand-held shears and loppers don't make the cut, a contractor should upgrade to saws. There are two types of hand saws: folding and non-folding. The folding saw blades range between 6 and 18 inches whereas the non-folding saw blades range between 8 and 26 inches. The folding saw's smaller blade size and folding capability makes it more convenient for



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That chainsaw weighed 70 to 80 pounds and needed two people to operate it. "What changed the industry was not the chainsaw itself," Kuczmar says. "What revolutionized the whole industry was the design of a new chain that would actually cut," he says.

Over the years chainsaws have become smaller, lighter and more contractor-friendly. "There were noticeable improvements made in vibration reduction throughout the 1980s and 90s while in recent years the industry has seen continual improvements in cleaner, more fuel-efficient two-stroke engines," says Andy Stanush, product manager of chainsaws and power cutters, Husqvarna, Charlotte, N.C.

Even the materials chainsaws are made from have changed. Before, the body of the chainsaw was made from aluminum, but today manufacturers use engineering nylons. "There are three advantages to using nylon," Kuczmar says. "Nylon will absorb vibrations. Nylon will not corrode. Nylon is lighter." These advancements have made it easier to carry and use chainsaws when working up in trees.

Chainsaws are ideal for extensive cutting and pruning. "Tree care professionals prefer lightweight and high-performance tools due to the amount of time they spend using the saw while in the tree or in bucket trucks," Stanush says.

Chainsaw costs vary depending on a unit's size, weight and bar length. The average cost for a small but high-performance professional chainsaw ranges between \$400 and \$500, Stanush says. The top-handle chainsaw and the rear-handle chainsaw are two types of saws recommended for landscape contractors performing tree trimming services. Logically, the top handle has its controls – the pull throttle, primer and the choke button – on top of the chainsaw while the controls for the rear handle are located on the rear of the unit. Their uses, though, differ. A top-handle saw, for example, is used for tree trimming by those in buckets or on rope, whereas a rear-handle chainsaw gives the operator more control because the controls are spaced further apart. "For a beginner I strongly suggest the rear-handle saw because it provides more control and stability," Kuczmar says. "The top-handle saw is for those who know what they are doing."

Along with size and weight,



Each piece of pruning equipment performs a specific function in arbor care, and thoroughly understanding their roles helps contractors increase job site effectiveness and efficiency.

Photo: Crawford Landscape

contractors should consider chainsaw features such as air filtration systems, easy access to fuel and oil filters, adjustable chain tension, automatic oilers and vibration reduction systems.

Some contractors choose to use their chainsaws until they die while others dispose of their old ones to upgrade to newer products. Sometimes it is easier to buy a new chainsaw than it is to repair a 6-year-old machine, some contractors say. For example, with an older machine a contractor will wait longer for repair parts compared to modern parts.

"Chainsaws will last as long as you are willing to repair them," Buff says.

Keeping tools clean also extends their lives. For example, Hill's crews begin each day cleaning and servicing their tree-cutting equipment. Before leaving the yard, air filters are checked and chainsaws are cleaned with compressed air.

Chainsaws need to be oiled and air filters changed regularly. Continued use of a dirty filter is detrimental to the machine. Buff makes sure there are plenty of extras around so dirty ones are replaced right away.

A mistake many contractors make when purchasing a chainsaw is not knowing how to properly select one. "Select a size that will take care of approximately 75 percent of your needs," Kuczmar suggests. Contractors should also shop for the right weight, balance and power. Contractors should not purchase on bar length alone.

Most contractors believe the longer the bar length the more work they will get done. What they should be thinking is engine size and the horsepower they are going to get from the chainsaw, meaning the more work

they will complete, Kuczmar says. If contractors only consider bar lengths they will end up with a heavy tool that creates more friction and cuts slower due to the excessive length of the bar.

Finally, contractors should consider the type of equipment dealer they want to buy their chainsaws from and their experience in working with arbor care professionals. "Do they have the replacement parts, and is the company available when you need them?" Fanno says.

Buff was looking for a reliable company with quality products and a fast turn around time when it came to acquiring replacement parts. "I was willing to pay more to get a good product because I didn't want to lose labor," he says.

Hill cautions against going places other than a professional equipment dealer to purchase chainsaws and other cutting tools. For him it's a service issue. "You buy enough tools from a dealer they start to know you," he says. "They have all your records of purchases, repairs and warranties in their system. The benefit of going to a dealership is they can direct you to the right tool for your needs."

Quality cutting tools, however, are only as good as the worker using them. Equipping ill-prepared workers is a common contractor mistake, Fanno says. As soon as an untrained employee picks up a tool they become a liability, he says.

Contractors say it is not uncommon to see unprepared workers holding chainsaws one-handed and lifting them above their shoulders. "It is very dangerous because the lightness of the chainsaw gives them a false sense of security," Hill says.

Providing employee training can help reduce the amount of on-site accidents. Buff's various crews have weekly meetings on safety and afterward employees must fill out a report on what was discussed, who was there, and any suggestion they might have. They also have meetings to introduce new products and, if an accident has occurred, they meet to talk about it. **LL**

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For tips on protecting cutting and pruning tools from theft, visit the September Online Extras section.

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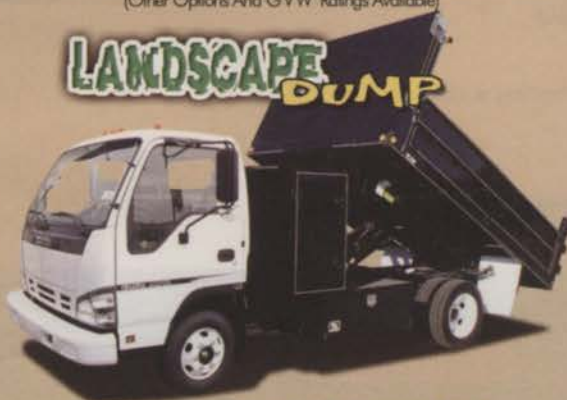


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Sterling 360

- Low cab-over truck
- New model features increased horsepower and a lowered chassis
- Has a gross vehicle weight rating of 12,500 pounds
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Toyota Tundra CrewMax

- 31 model configurations available
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Green King Deep Drip Watering Stakes

- Conserves water by directing it underground
- Can be used independently or with an automatic 1/4-inch drip line
- Hose can be used in place of an irrigation system
- Installation is finished after the stakes are placed into the ground and the drip line is inserted
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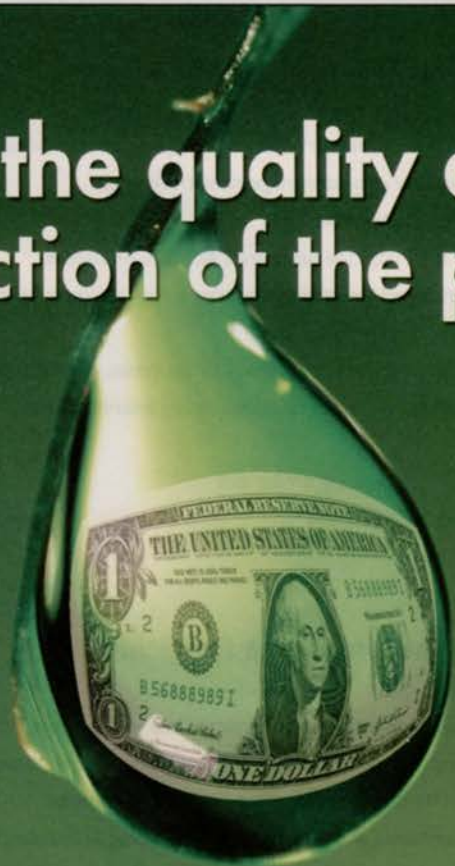
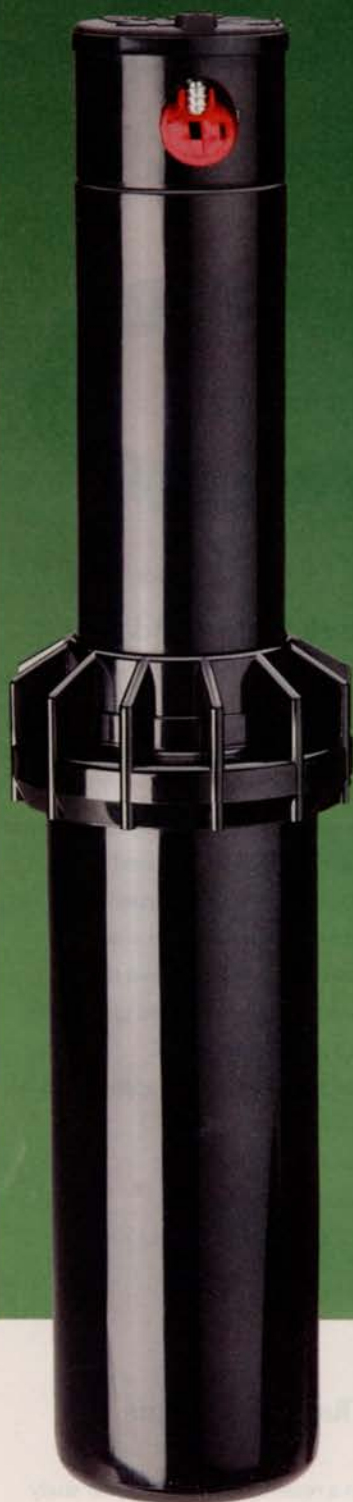
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- Charts also provide a side-by-side overview of primary target pests, chemical group, active ingredients and trade names, as well as restricted entry interval and use sites for each product
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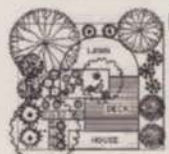


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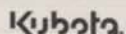
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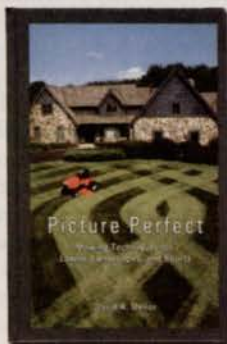
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Steve Hansen is owner of Hansen Landscape Contractor in Castro Valley, Calif. He can be reached at 510/537-0464 or hansen.steve@comcast.net.

Hansen Landscape Develops Clients Through its Show Yard

You can place purchasers of landscape services into two main categories. One contains cost-sensitive individuals looking for the best deal, and the other has those who seek quality work with the goal of successful completion. Hansen Landscape seeks the latter and we've developed an outdoor landscape show yard to attract those clients.

It started 10 years ago when a potential client was having a hard time visualizing a water feature we had discussed at his home. I invited him to come see the waterfall and pond at my personal residence. While he visited, he could see and hear what he was considering to purchase from our firm. He left assured of what we were capable of installing and educated about how we operate as a landscape company.

What started as an impromptu walk through my yard has developed into a half-acre outdoor landscape show yard. Since our first visitor, we have had no less than 1,000 families tour the show yard. The process is simple, streamlined and rarely varies from one visitor to the next.

When the family arrives, they are thanked for taking the time to visit Hansen Landscape and told that the main reason we have them visit it to make sure they are comfortable with our design style and aware of the many items we have available for them to consider in their own project. Furthermore, if they appreciate what they see here then we will not surprise them with anything in their project.

To avoid conflicting appointments and "drop ins," the landscape show yard's address is only provided once an appointment is scheduled. In addition, we kindly request guests not arrive early so as not to disturb the experience of an existing visitor. Also, we request the guest not bring pictures or drawings of their project at this time as we will see all of these items at a future site visit. This makes more efficient use of everyone's time and allows us to see more visitors.

People are urged to walk the show yard at their own pace. Butterflies abound and shade trees help set a tranquil landscape theme. Hidden speaker rocks mix soft background music with the surrounding subtle sounds of various water features.

Ten mini vignettes, each with similar design style, share various types of hardscapes, including stamped concrete, flagstone, redwood and synthetic wood decks. Here, the potential client will see a built-in barbecue and food service area, patio covers, water features, a synthetic lawn and all the plants and trees we recommend.

All of these elements are connected to create a unique design preview experience for visiting families while developing client confidence in our abilities and anticipation of their own successful project. Most importantly, there are no signs that say to "Stay off the grass!"

Following completion of their stroll through the show



What started out as an impromptu walk through Steve Hansen's yard has developed into a half-acre outdoor landscape show yard.



Through the show yard, clients are able to see firsthand Hansen Landscape's landscape installation abilities. Photo: Jessica Hansen

yard, guests are invited to come into a comfortably decorated sun room located in the middle of the show yard where they can view all the surrounding landscapes they just toured. Windows open, the visitor can hear the sound of the water features and, on occasion, feel a gentle breeze.

Inside, the sun room is framed with design awards, magazine and newspaper articles along with a sampling of special letters written by satisfied past clients. Guests are suggested to sit and relax and look at various portfolios that include pictures of past projects, client testimonials and inserts detailing our company history and how the organization operates.

We request they fill out a simple single-page questionnaire that asks their contact information, includ-

ing e-mail address, a checklist of the items they are considering in their own project (which often includes items they would not have considered had they not seen or been inspired by it here) and finally it gives them an opportunity to "check" a box for a follow up landscape design consultation.

From our experiences, seven out of 10 visitors to the landscape show yard "check" this box and make out a check that is requested to be paid in advance for \$250. A consultation calendar of available appointments is situated nearby and provides guests the opportunity to select the date of their choosing to meet at their home.

As the show yard is meticulously maintained by our gardening division, we have gained many new gardening clients from these visits.

In the days following their tour, guests are sent a short e-mail thanking them for visiting us. If they did not set up a consultation, the e-mail includes an overview of why the consultation is a valuable tool in their process to establish a design direction and budgets.

Our advertising pieces promote that we have an outdoor show yard. Since the visit is by appointment only, not all callers desire to follow our program. Most of those who do not simply seek a free estimate or perhaps don't care to invest an hour of their time as their project size or goals don't warrant it. This simple process helps us prequalify future clients.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, an outdoor landscape show yard is worth a million. **LL**

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DIFFERENTIATE YOUR BUSINESS

To stand out from the competition, Weed Man suggests landscape contractors embrace systems, create solid growth and develop a winning culture.

With business comes competition. There isn't a single company in the green industry that doesn't want to stand out from the other similar businesses in the area. After all, differentiation is vital to growing market share and boosting a company's reputation and value in the eyes of current and potential customers.

But it's not enough just to demonstrate that you can deliver what the customer wants – you need to look beyond what everyone else is doing and position your service as clearly different and better than what the competition offers.

Differentiating a business can also help a company from becoming stagnant. Constant improvement enhances quality, which in turn raises client retention and attracts new customers to your business.

According to Weed Man, a lawn care franchise business, three key areas of business improvement that can help differentiate a landscape business are developing a growth plan to improve market presence, setting up systems to enhance efficiency and cultivating a winning culture – areas that the company has perfected over its more than 35 years in business.

STEP NO. 1 – develop a growth plan

The first part of differentiating your business is defining what stage you're at so you can establish a growth plan. There are three business stages:

1. **THE INFANCY STAGE** – You are typically owner-operated and wearing all of the hats in the company. You are in a growth mode.
2. **THE ADOLESCENT STAGE** – You are still in a growth stage but you identify the need for help. To move beyond this stage, an owner needs to get the right people on board and develop the right environment for continued growth. This transition includes building procedural type systems, creating solid business plans and developing training programs and measurement systems.
3. **THE MATURE STAGE** – This business stage takes systems, training and constant verification that the company is sticking to its mission. Here, the business owner must develop a culture that has a passion for building a business that works. Once an owner identifies what business stage he or she is at, growing can happen in one of four ways – organically, via expansion of existing services, through diversification or by means of acquisition.



Organic growth takes an owner with a lot of energy who has a commitment to creating systems to enable employee success and the patience for slow and steady growth.

When it comes to expanding existing services, there are many benefits. First, an owner can add services customers are requesting, addressing their needs. This enables an owner to retain customers and begin to addict customers to the company as their one-stop shop for outdoor services. Cross-marketing techniques are best used to alert customers to these new service opportunities.

If a business' growth has stagnated, profit margins are low and your core service does not create equity or resale value for homeowner clients, that's the perfect time for diversification. Here, efficiencies can be created between existing and new services that can grow the business more quickly and augment customer satisfaction and retention.

Finally, acquisition of local competitors can ramp up revenue quickly and enable an owner to retain talent from a new company, boosting efficiency and creating expansion opportunities.

If done properly, growth can increase profits and make a business stronger, allowing key employees a chance for continued growth within the organization.

STEP NO. 2 – cultivate a winning culture

One of the best ways to differentiate a business is to build a team made up of people who exude positive attitudes in the field in front of clients, which builds customer confidence in your services.

To understand the state of a landscape company's current culture, understanding the characteristics of poor vs. great culture is essential.

For instance, a company with a poor culture typically has the following characteristics:

- Limiting compensation
- Management based on fear
- Lack of clear career paths
- Poor performance tolerant
- Lack of rewards for superior work
- An overall lack of appreciation
- No care for quality
- Poor work habits
- Poor communication
- Lack of initiative
- Unwillingness to go the extra mile

In contrast, a company with a great culture usually touts the following characteristics:

- Employees and managers with contagious positive attitudes and enthusiasm
- An overall sense of pride
- An environment of constant improvement
- Fair compensation
- Is made up of role models – not just leaders
- Celebrates successes regularly
- Has an appreciation for "The Golden Rule"
- Is a place where people strive for creativity and innovation

Improving a company culture takes what Weed Man calls "The Three Cs" –

1. Confidence
2. Commitment
3. Competence

To build employee **confidence**, owners and managers must also have confidence and communicate this confidence to their teams. Employees operate best when they are aware of company operations and receive regular feedback and communication. For instance, regular meetings are a way to keep everyone informed of company procedures. Then, taking that one step further with focus groups to improve various operations and internal confidential surveys to gain employee ideas empower employees and show them that their opinions matter. Plans should have vision, timetables, budgets and be regularly measured and followed up on. Owners should communicate successes to employees so they can see how their ideas are developing into action plans for the company.

Commitment is the simple rule of delivering to customers exactly the service that was promised to them, at the right time and level of quality that was agreed upon. To ensure this is getting done from concept and sale to service completion means putting systems in place to perfect internal and external communication.

A **competent** owner is one who hires well by asking the right questions, recruiting the best people and handing out job descriptions so new employees have a good foundation from day one. He or she also must train regularly to advance employee knowledge and growth, enabling promotion and career development and building retention within an organization.

As Weed Man franchise owners explain, "Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress and working together is a success."

STEP NO. 3 – set up systems that work

Every landscape business owner knows that systemizing even the most basic processes can result in saved time, increased productivity, more focused employees and a better bottom line. This alone differentiates a business from its competition by boosting confidence and performance – something every customer will notice in their service quality and something every owner will benefit from by the decrease in customer callbacks and/or complaints.

When creating a system, Weed Man recommends a business owner start with the end in mind. For instance, if an owner desires completed and balanced financials by the first week of every month, he can then define what he needs to get there. In this case, that could mean a created chart of accounts that is in line with the budget, accounting software that allows budget comparisons, a training system that measures employee expectations and measurements to help follow-up on expectations.

Another example of a system could be an employee training program. When an owner sets this up, first he must think about the end goal, which is to make employees the best they can be. Then training tools and delivery methods are developed to achieve this goal. For instance, Weed Man embraces all the senses when delivering its training programs, so part of the program takes place in an auditory classroom setting where company culture and systems are discussed, and another part takes place in the field where employees can see tasks in action and touch the various tools necessary to complete them. Once training is finalized, the key to success is to measure performance and then follow up with employees to discuss adjustments or success. As an owner, it is important to remember that training is not always perfect, and you need to continuously measure, follow up and adjust your training to reach your goals.

STEP NO. 4 – differentiation made easy

If you are interested in embracing differentiation in your business, but the work necessary to get there seems overwhelming, there is a way to learn from others and adopt proven and tested systems to speed up the overall process.

Weed Man already has these systems in place and a sub-franchisor network of professionals able to coach business owners through incorporating these systems into their companies.

To schedule an initial consultation to see if Weed Man is right for you, contact your local Weed Man sub-franchisor at 888-321-9333 or visit the company's Web site – www.weedmanusa.com.

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