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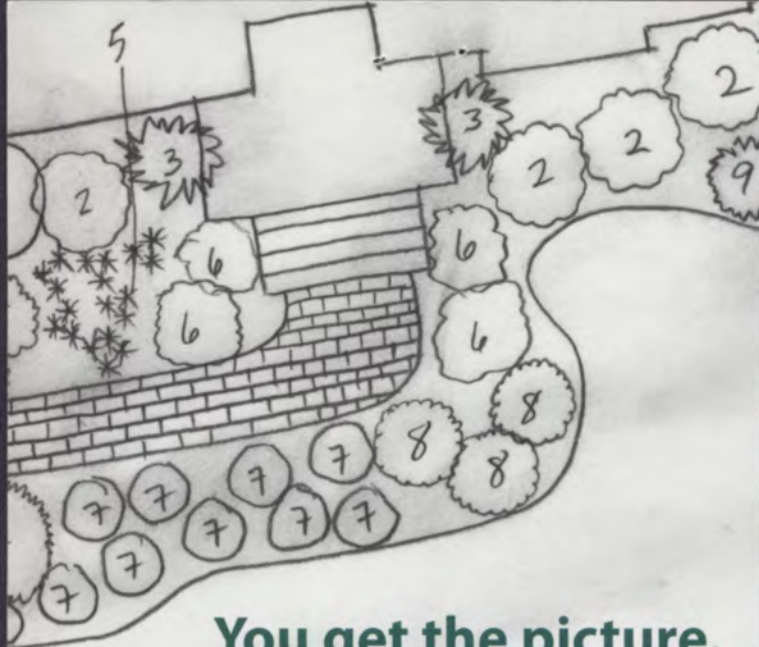
WIDE
OPEN
SPACES

INSIDE

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helps Hispanic
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Groupon: The big
deal, pg. 54



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Lawn & Landscape

E-Newsletters

Does your company do something better than the competition? Do you provide design/build, irrigation or lawn care services? If so, email Associate Editor Carolyn LaWell at clawell@gie.net with your story and you could be featured in an upcoming *Lawn & Landscape* specialty e-newsletter. You can sign up for our e-newsletters by visiting bit.ly/lnews.



TOP TWEETS

Some stories our Tweeps liked:

THE NEW RULES OF BUILDING CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Want your customers to stick to you like glue? Today it takes more than a punch-card or priority line. bit.ly/customerloyal

FACEBOOK EXEC SAYS TOOLS CAN PROMOTE SMALL BUSINESSES

You may be missing the advantages of the site, says a company executive. bit.ly/facebooktoolsb

LANDSCAPERS FAVOR SURCHARGE OVER PRICE INCREASES

Connecticut landscapers combat hike in fuel and material cost by adding customer surcharge. bit.ly/landsurcharge



Check out the latest multimedia from *Lawn & Landscape*

Develop a personal brand

Judy Guido offers advice on positioning yourself for success in a world of fierce competition and social networking. bit.ly/guidobrand



Meet PLANET's new president

Jerry Grossi offers an update on the association's future and how his own company, ArborLawn, is dealing with the economy. bit.ly/newplanetpres



Productivity pro

You make your money outdoors, but you still need to keep an orderly office. Laura Stack gives some tips on how to have a better performance indoors. bit.ly/lstack



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You can't be – or beat – Brickman

Michael LaPorte runs Commercial Scapes, and he's not happy.

A while back, he heard from a supplier that his competition had been referring to him as a low-baller, and he took offense at that. Then he emailed me.

Turns out, LaPorte's not a low-baller; he just knows his numbers and can price aggressively to compete in the already hyper-competitive D.C. market.



And while business isn't booming, D.C. has seen an influx of government spending that's helped buoy many companies – if they go out and get it.

"The housing market's bad – but it's not Florida, not Arizona, not Nevada," LaPorte told me. "A lot of guys are lazy and hoping the market's going to come back. I think it's going to be a long time, and I don't know if it's going to come back like it was."

To sit around and complain about another company's prices is a waste of time. You can't change their prices – you can only change your operation. That's what LaPorte did.

"There's a lot of room in the market. You can't be a Brickman," LaPorte says. "There's room for a niche. Brickman is very good at a lot of different facets. You can't beat Brickman."

What he's saying is really a version of the serenity prayer: God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference.

There are very few companies that

“There’s a lot of room in the market. You can’t be a Brickman.”

– Michael LaPorte

could realistically take on an \$800 million company with thousands of employees. At that point, it's a game of numbers and volume that most companies just can't play.

But what they can do – what Michael LaPorte did – is look at where they can compete, and do it. He's got 50 employees in the field and brought in \$6.5 million last year. They do 95 percent commercial installation,

and should grow more than 6 percent this year. But these days, his crews roll up to parks and libraries and hospitals to work, not

shopping centers.

"We've had to scramble to keep it," LaPorte says of his workload. "But it is out there."

He's not bidding to keep the lights on and cash coming in. He's got a handle on his costs and knows how to compete. That's not low-balling. That's smart business. – Chuck Bowen

Read more about simple ways LaPorte trimmed his costs to stay competitive at our blog, From the Field. bit.ly/lowball.



See my video blog at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

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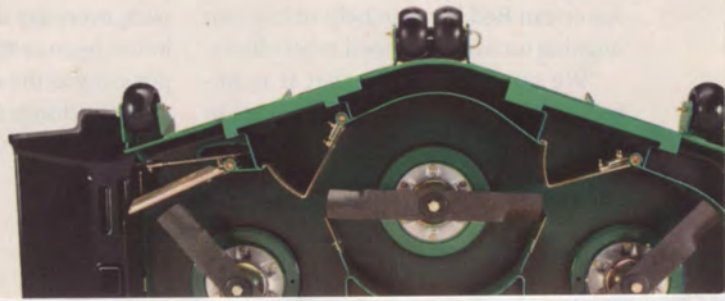
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Arbor Masters Tree & Landscape crews were met with destruction upon arriving in Alabama for storm response work.

Green industry aids tornado devastated areas

From sunup until sundown, for nearly two weeks, Jay Hager and six crews removed tree after tree from house, after house, after house.

Arbor Masters Tree & Landscape employees traveled throughout Alabama from Tuscaloosa to Birmingham to Cullman to Huntsville, cleaning up the destruction and chaos strewn by tornados in late April.

"The first day we were there we were in Tuscaloosa, and just seeing people and families walking around, apparently looking for their stuff – it's hard to handle, it pulls at you for sure," said Hager, Arbor Masters' Ocala, Fla., branch manager.

It's partly the nature of the business, partly the nature of the people in the green industry, but many companies have stepped up to help communities across the country devastated by the natural disasters that hit this spring.

BASF Corp., which has operations throughout Louisiana, Arkansas and Alabama, contributed \$100,000 to the American Red Cross to help strengthen ongoing tornado and flood relief efforts.

"We strongly believe that it is important to support the communities in which we operate, and with employees

and contractors living in the affected areas, these disasters are extremely personal to us," Deidra Jackson, BASF communication manager based in Geismar, La., told NBC 33 in Baton Rouge.

HMI deployed more than a dozen tree crews from its Authorized Member Network to assist homeowners in Alabama and Tennessee. Some of those crews were Arbor Masters.

The Shawnee, Kan.-headquartered Arbor Masters is primarily a tree and lawn care company, but assists in debris hauling after large storms. In fact, while its Florida crews were in Alabama, the company's Oklahoma crews were helping with efforts in their own state.

"It's very challenging," Hager said of the emergency storm response work. "The timing is difficult because there are still a lot of power lines down; debris is all over the place. It's very difficult to get around certain areas driving the big equipment. Getting down the road sometimes is a big challenge and finding paths to the work is difficult. Obviously every day that you're there it gets better because it's being cleaned up or put away as the municipality is trying to make things safe. But in general, it's a challenge." – Carolyn LaWell

Brickman enters LA market

LOS ANGELES – With its recent acquisition of Dworsky Cos., The Brickman Group has entered the Los Angeles market hoping to become a more dominant player in Southern California.

Since expanding to the West Coast more than a decade ago, Brickman has looked at opportunities for growth within the Los Angeles area and the state, said Mike Bogan, executive vice president. Brickman had a presence in Southern California with 11 branches from San Diego to Inland Empire, which is east of Los Angeles. But acquiring Dworsky Cos. was the prime opportunity to penetrate the central and northern portion of the city.

"We've had a presence in Southern California since 2000, and our business has grown to be a dominant market leader," Bogan said. "We've looked at the adjacent market in Los Angeles as holding an incredible amount of opportunity, and we wanted a business that had a great footprint across that market. That is what Dworsky represented.

"LA is probably one of the largest markets for landscape services in the entire country and holds a tremendous amount of potential."



Bogan

Dworsky was founded in 2002 by Dave Dworsky, a 20-year industry veteran, and is known for its award-winning landscapes at properties such as Hughes Center, Sun America and Nestlé. Brickman will absorb Dworsky's five locations and will have about 200 employees in the area.

"When we do acquisitions we absolutely evaluate the team and that is a large part of what we purchase," Bogan said. "It's not equipment, it's not contracts, it's the teams that do the work that are the acquisition. We are very happy to have their team in place, and we couldn't do the work without them."

Brickman will offer its full line of service in Los Angeles from landscape management to landscape construction to water management.

The company, which is headquartered in Gaithersburg, Md., generally anticipates its local businesses to generate double-digit



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LawnAmerica gets best in state

Tulsa, Okla.-based LawnAmerica was named best lawn service for the second year in a row by *Oklahoma Magazine* and GTR Newspapers. What sets the company apart from the competition? LawnAmerica President Brad Johnson gave away some of his secrets during a March *Lawn & Landscape* interview and when we caught up with him at The Real Green Users Conference late last year. Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "LawnAmerica" to see what he said.



organic growth on an annual basis, Bogan said. But he said he expects the Los Angeles branch to exceed that growth ratio because the company currently has such a small piece of the market.

As far as competing in ValleyCrest Landscape Cos. backyard – the Calabasas, Calif.-headquartered company is one notch above Brickman at No. 2 on *Lawn & Landscape's* Top 100 list – Bogan said he doesn't think it will be difficult being the new company in town.

"ValleyCrest is a great company and they have a great team and a great customer base, but Los Angeles is a huge market," Bogan said. "My experience has been where there are really strong competitors in a marketplace they raise the customers' expectation of what they demand out of their contractor and that narrows the playing field down to just a few of the best companies. I'd rather compete in that kind of environment than anything else."
– Carolyn LaWell

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FMC launches Blindside herbicide

PHILADELPHIA – A new herbicide offering a solution for challenging postemergence weeds like doveweed, dollarweed, buttonweed and sedges in warm-season turf is now available from FMC Professional Solutions, a business unit of FMC Corp.

Blindside herbicide can be applied to most types of warm-season turfgrass – even St. Augustinegrass, as well as Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue, providing transition zone flexibility.

Dual-action Blindside works through both foliar and root uptake to deliver faster control of more than 70 broadleaf weeds and sedges.

It is registered for use on established turf areas including residential, com-



mercial and institutional lawns, athletic fields and golf course fairways and roughs. A list of approved states can be found on the product website, www.fmcprosolutions.com.

“Blindside herbicide is fast, but it also features a unique mode of action that works underground to stop the reproductive structures of target weeds from germinating,” said Adam Manwarren, a turf product manager for FMC Professional Solutions. “With this extended soil activity, turf managers will notice a significant reduction in future populations of weeds next season, saving them time and money.”

An optimized combination of active ingredients, Blindside delivers visible

signs of control within a week. The label allows for a follow-up application under extreme weed pressure or for specific weeds.

“Blindside can also be applied in warmer temperatures without causing additional stress to turf,” said Bobby Walls, technical manager, FMC.

The dispersible granular formulation of Blindside is available in a tip-and-measure package with a dosing chamber that accurately dispenses enough material to treat 1,000 square feet at both low and high application rates.

This packaging minimizes the measurement challenges that can occur with some competitive products. Each half-pound package treats more than 50,000 square feet.

Purchases made between June 15 and Aug. 31 can be registered online for a \$10-per-bottle rebate.

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Ewing unveils Rain Bird product

PHOENIX – Ewing Irrigation has launched the Rain Bird High Efficiency Variable Arc Nozzle, a new irrigation product designed to help achieve water efficiency in landscapes and green spaces.

The HE-VAN, which Ewing has exclusive distributing rights to through 2011, offers higher distribution uniformity and a lower-scheduling coefficient, providing even coverage and shorter run times when compared to traditional VAN

or other fixed arc nozzles. The arc nozzle is easy to adjust and offers flexibility.

"It's our responsibility to help landscape and irrigation professionals grow their businesses through the adoption and wise use of water-efficient technologies," said Warren Gorowitz, vice president of sustainability and conservation for Ewing. "The HE-VAN represents an opportunity to offer our customers new choices and flexibility when designing, installing and maintaining water-efficient green spaces."

During the launch, the HE-VAN will be

distributed in California, Texas, Florida and other parts of the Southeast.

Wright Manufacturing initiates litigation

FREDERICK, Md. – Commercial lawn mower manufacturer, Wright Manufacturing, has filed a patent infringement complaint against The Toro Co. and Exmark Manufacturing Co.

in the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland.

The infringement complaint surrounds two of Wright's lawn mower deck life patents – U.S. Patent No. 6,438,931 and U.S. Patent No. 6,935,093. It seeks damages, injunctive relief and other compensation.

The complaint alleges the infringing mowers include Toro's Grandstand and Exmark's Vantage mowers.



Ewing has exclusive distribution rights through 2011.

Correction The "Fighting Grubs" article that appeared in the May issue of *Lawn & Landscape* mistakenly included crabgrass control options rather than grub control options. Some active ingredients that Weed Man finds effective for preventive control of grubs are: halofenozide, imidacloprid, chlorantraniliprole, thiamethoxam and chlothianidin. Some active ingredients that Weed Man finds effective for curative control includes: trichlorfon and carbaryl.

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Merit Injectable is available in leak-proof Tree Tech units in two different dosages, depending on tree diameter. Tough-to-control insect pests such as Asian longhorned beetles, emerald ash borers and hemlock woolly adelgid meet their match with Merit

Injectable. Other nuisance insect pests such as aphids, armored scales, Japanese beetles, lace bugs, leaf beetles, leafhoppers, mealybugs, psyllids, thrips, tip moths and whiteflies also get their due from Merit Injectable treatments.



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ANLA reacts to proposed H-2B program changes

WASHINGTON – The American Nursery and Landscape Association (ANLA) has taken action in response to the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) recently

proposed changes to the H-2B program.

Widely used by landscape installation and maintenance professionals and other seasonal employers seeking a legal workforce, these proposed changes would increase filing require-



ments and advertising timelines for employers seeking to fill positions. Employers

will be subject to stricter requirements to hire any and all available U.S. workers, despite historically low interest and retention of these applicants, according to ANLA.

"DOL's proposed changes will render the program unworkable for responsible landscape installation and maintenance employers seeking a legal, seasonal workforce," said Hadley Sosnoff, ANLA's director of government relations.

Submitting comments to DOL for review, ANLA is pursuing a three-pronged approach to defending the H-2B program:

First, ANLA joined partners in the H-2B Workforce Coalition to convey how the changes will negatively affect the program and employers. Second, ANLA joined PLANET to submit a set of comments to DOL that focus on the specific concerns of the green industry.

Third, ANLA joined other agents and associations to submit detailed comments researched by a legal team led by ANLA labor and employment law counsel Monte Lake, of CJ-Lake.

"The CJ-Lake team painstakingly researched the record of Congress since the mid-1980s," said ANLA's Vice President for Government Relations

Craig Regelbrugge. "What they found is that DOL is acting in direct conflict with Congressional intent; essentially, they lack the authority to do what they are doing." Sosnoff said, "The ongoing battle promises to be tough, and the stakes for the green industry are especially high given the large number of seasonal and agricultural jobs in landscape and nursery businesses. Thanks to all who are supporting ANLA's aggressive defense of the program." L&L

Keep reading

For more reactions to the H-2B programs proposed changes, see our interview on pg. 28 with Ralph Egües, executive director of the newly formed National Hispanic Landscape Alliance.

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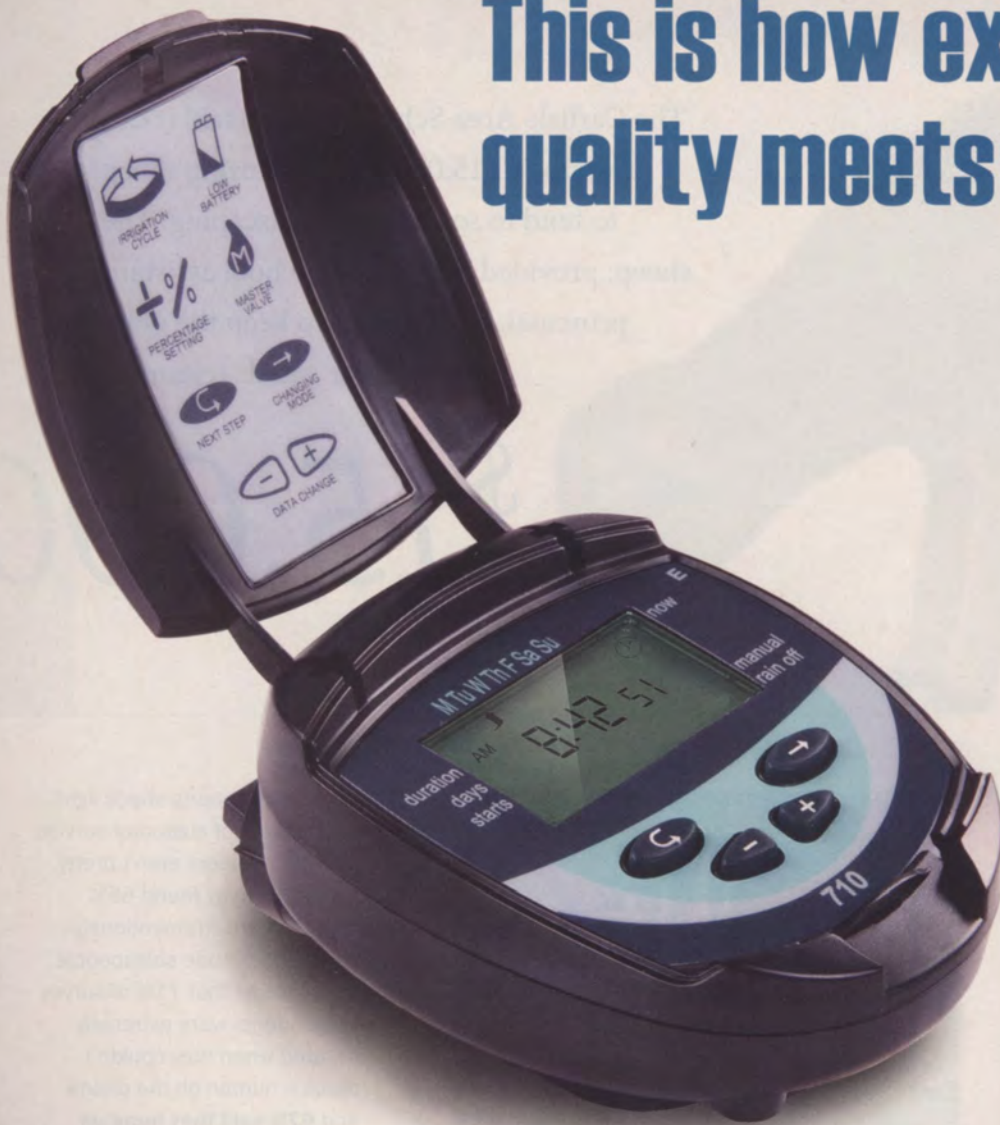
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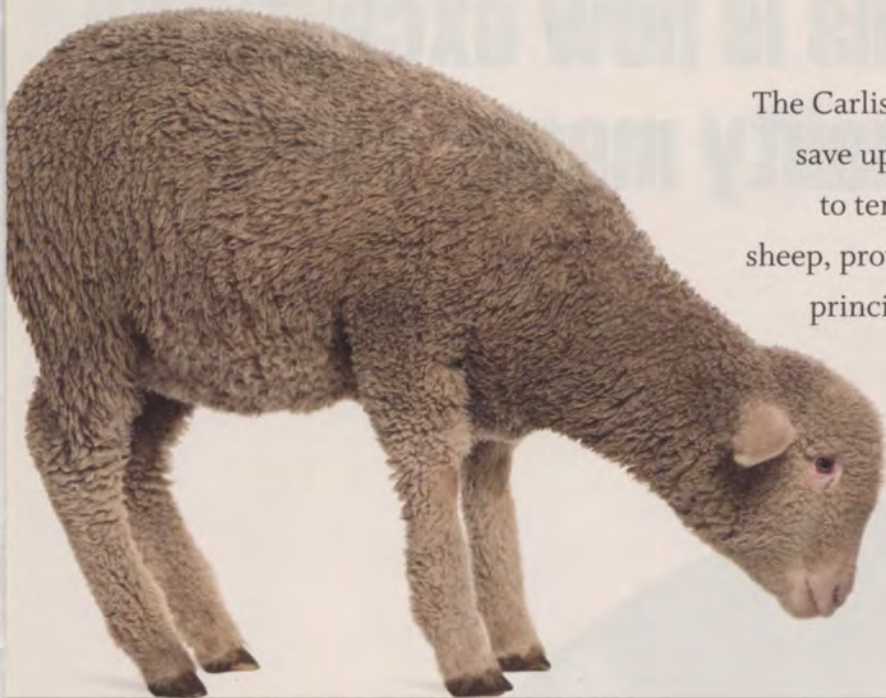
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RESEARCH



The Carlisle Area School District said it can save up to \$15,000 a year by using sheep to tend to some of its landscaping. The sheep, provided by a middle school assistant principal, will be used to keep the grass near its solar panels trimmed.

\$15,000



13%

Is your company on Twitter? Twitter is now being used by 13% of online adults, which is a significant increase from the 8% of online adults who identified themselves as tweeters in November 2010, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project. **In addition, Twitter use by Internet users ages 25-34 doubled since late 2010**, jumping from 9% to 19% and those ages 35-44 grew from 8% to 14%.



More than 60% of homeowners are planning to hire a home service professional in the next year, according to a new research study from Kudzu.com. **Of the list of professionals they plan to hire, 24% are lawn care companies.** "Homeowners understand the importance of good curb appeal," said Rhonda Hills, vice president and chief marketing officer at Kudzu.com. "Consumers know exterior enhancements can not only beautify their home, but it can also increase the home's value."

24%

Consumer Reports sheds light on the state of customer service, and the numbers aren't pretty. A recent survey found 65% of people are "tremendously annoyed" by rude salespeople. It also found that 71% of survey respondents were extremely irritated when they couldn't reach a human on the phone and **67% said they hung up the phone without getting their issue resolved.** "There's a feeling on the part of Americans that companies are deliberately making it difficult for them by burying phone numbers, sidestepping calls and steering customers to online FAQs instead of live human beings," said Tod Marks, senior project editor.

65%



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PURSUING PUBLIC WORK

ASK THE EXPERTS is presented in partnership with PLANET's Trailblazers On Call program. Trailblazers are industry leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to give back to the industry.

Q. We approached a quasi-state-run agency about submitting a bid for its landscape operations. This agency currently has a four-man seasonal crew that takes care of all landscape operations. It takes this four-man crew two weeks to complete one total mow and all crew members work 40 hour weeks. I have no way to verify if they have inefficiencies/poor machine choices, poor work practices, etc. The areas the crew covers are massive and complex. If the agency does like our offer, it would have to put it out to bid. I need some serious advice. I would rather walk away than make a mistake this size.

A. To pursue public work that is currently being performed by public employees is a contemporary idea that has merit. With the increased pressure on many government agencies from squeezed budgets and the current anti-political environment, there should be more opportunities for contractors to provide better service at less cost.

First, determine the following:

What is the motivation for the people you are speaking with? What is the decision-making process? How much time are you willing to spend pursuing this? Is there a scope of work? Are there prevailing wage requirements such as Davis

Bacon? Is it necessary for this to go out for bid? If this goes out for bid, is there a way to give yourself an edge, perhaps by requiring bonding or PLANET certifications, pesticide license, or other methods to minimize the bidding by unprofessional operators? What are the impacts to the agency if they out source? What happens with the personnel and equipment? What is the time line for making a decision?

What data is available from the client such as site maps and measurements, current equipment and manpower, payroll and benefit costs and support cost, such as repairs and maintenance? Under the Freedom of Information Act, you might be surprised at how much information you can obtain just by asking. Factor in work rules and the inefficiencies of public employees compared to private contractors, and this makes outsourcing pretty attractive.

If this is worth pursuing, you'll need to put together a compelling proposal. I suggest the following:

Have a few of your knowledgeable operators closely inspect the work area(s). They can identify the

functions that are necessary, such as mowing by type and size of mower, string trimming, debris removal, blowing off, traffic control, pruning, etc. Identify risks, such as dangerous slopes, protecting workers from traffic, parking and debris issues that will slow work. Is there highway debris that can become dangerous projectiles with string trimmers and rotary mowers that will cause insurance claims or worse? Are there opportunities to reduce labor with growth regulators or vegetation control?

If possible, observe the work of the government employees and the equipment used.

Are there efficiencies you can bring to the job? Are there ways you can improve safety or reduce the environmental impact?

Prepare an estimate. Start with the number of hours it will

take to do the work plus the cost of equipment. Be sure to factor in the safety risks involved with working along a highway. Most agencies have all the information you need to measure the site, such as site plans. If not, you can get a rough estimate by using Google Earth. Focus on making a compelling case for outsourcing and save the detailed estimating until the client is ready for an exact bid.

Provide a scope of work. Will the client write it, or would it be wise for you to volunteer to do so? If you do, be careful not to insult the client by painting its staff as being inept. Instead, emphasize how you can help solve the problem(s). Collect some articles and case studies showing the benefits and methodologies of outsourcing.

If you aren't comfortable or familiar with performing projects of this size or type, consider sharing your estimate information with a PLANET Trailblazer or have another company with municipal maintenance experience review your assumptions. Be sure it is someone you can confide in that isn't a competitor.

You may also want to look for people who have influence in the process that might even be more motivated to outsource such as



your mayor or state senator. Try to get their input and possible endorsement. Assuming you have convinced the prospect that outsourcing is beneficial and the project is defined and ready to price, you will undoubtedly know if it has to go out for bid.

Assuming it does, this is where the marketplace will determine how much it will cost to perform this work.

Advise prospects of the risks of open bidding and, hopefully, they will use criteria other than simply the lowest price to determine the contractor. **L&L**

Kurt Kluznik,
Yardmaster, Inc.

Have a question for the experts? Send it to llexperts@gie.net.



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Systemic Animal Repellent

The pitch: Repellex Systemic Animal Repellent systemically protects plants from damage caused by deer and other animals.

- Absorbed through plant roots.
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- Rainproof formula.
- One treatment lasts the entire growing season.
- Plant-derived active ingredient.
- Eliminates unpleasant scent and messy sprays.
- Evenly distributes through plant for improved coverage and protection.

Contact: www.repellex.com



Fuel Chief Gas Caddy

The pitch: The Fuel Chief Pro25-25-Gallon Steel Gas Caddy has replaced the JDI-25GC.

- A 25-gallon steel tank.
- Heavy-duty, UL listed, cast iron pump with carbon vanes with two-way operation for either siphoning or dispensing, moving 1 gallon for every 12 revolutions.
- For use with unleaded gasoline, kerosene and diesel fuels.
- Heavy-duty 10-inch steel wheels.
- Dolly handle for ease of transport.
- Ground wire and clamp.
- Fire-screened vent and filler neck combination.

Contact: www.johndow.com



Wood Chipper

The pitch: The CH4400 ECHO Bear Cat wood chipper is replacing two 4.5-inch chippers, the CH45342 and CH45390, and provides improved productivity.

- A double-banded belt drive creates an equal transfer of power from engine to chipping blade.
- An increased disc speed will allow an operator to chip more material faster.
- Has a 404-CC Overhead Cam Subaru Engine, designed with a cast iron cylinder liner to increase the integrity of the engine.

Contact: www.bearcatproducts.com



Walk-Behind Stainless Steel Frame

The pitch: SnowEx introduces the SP-85SS walk-behind broadcast spreader, which comes with a stainless steel frame.

- This new feature helps eliminate rust issues on the frame, while the hopper is protected by corrosion-resistant polyethylene construction.
- Offers a 160-lb. capacity and is capable of spreading bagged rock salt and pelletized material.
- For enhanced material flow, the unit contains a single-slot port design and extra wide throat opening.

Contact: www.trynexusfactory.com



RT Series Track Loaders

The pitch: These two Mustang models, the 1750RT and 2100RT, have new technology.

- Features the HydraTrac Automatic Track Tensioning System, which eliminates the need for manually tensioning the tracks on the loader before operation.
- Yanmar Tier III naturally aspirated (1750RT) and turbo-charged (2100RT) diesel engine with 179 ft. lbs. (242.3 Nm) and 206 ft. lbs. (279.3 Nm) torque, respectively.
- The standard 5x5 Drive Control System offers five settings that change five parameters to suit operator preference and application requirements.

Contact: www.mustangmfg.com



Refillable Propane Cylinder

The pitch: The 1-lb. refillable cylinder is convenient, economical, efficient and environmentally friendly.

- Commercial uses include lawn care equipment such as leaf blowers, string trimmers, generators, weed burners, hand torches, forklift applications and plumbing.
- This 1-lb. cylinder is significantly smaller than any catalog item the company has ever built.
- The positive shut-off valve allows the flow of propane to be stopped in the event of a damaged valve by turning the valve to its off position.

Contact: www.mantank.com





Government regulations

EDITOR'S NOTE: Every month, our columnists give their take on a common topic. Last month they revisited predictions they made earlier this year. This month they give insight into how government regulations are affecting the green industry.

Marty Grunder



I think I'm turning into a grumpy old man at age 43. It seems we are constantly bogged down with everything other than what we should be doing: selling and taking care of the customer. There is too much regulation in our world. And the government has proved time and time again that it isn't efficient.

Here are a few examples of how bad our government does things. Do the opposite and you'll find success.

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE. They lost more than \$7 billion in 2010. They lost another \$2.5 billion in the first quarter this year. That's no surprise, is it?

Ever go to the post office and leave impressed? Ever see a postal worker hustling? Have you ever gotten a dose of the

classic, business-killing line "We can't do that" from them? I know I have. Oh sure, I've encountered many good postal employees. But overall, the organization is so rigid, so structured, so set in its ways, they'll never make money.

Meanwhile, private endeavors like FedEx and UPS continue to take market share from them.

The message: Give your employees the freedom to get things done, take care of your customers and make them happy. It will pay off.

VARIOUS GOVERNMENT AGENCIES. I recently saw a state road crew of 12 installing rip-rap stone in a ditch. Why? Who knows. If a private contractor were doing the job, there would have been three people doing the work.

There seems to be no incentive for a state employee to work faster. Re-

cently, we had a person from the U.S. Department of Agriculture inspect our chemical records. He showed up (not in uniform) and spent hours looking through our files.

He didn't find much, and he was polite; I'll give him that. But why couldn't he have come to see us in January? Why'd he wait until the busiest time of the year? When he showed up, we had to stop everything to show him our records.

The message: Make sure you have a professional appearance and think about when your services, calls or other customer contact is convenient for them.

TSA. I travel a lot as a professional speaker. A few months ago, I cut my finger severely getting off a plane in Chicago. Still don't know how I did it, but I had blood everywhere.

I ran straight to the TSA station with blood dripping from my hand and asked the TSA agent if she had a Band-Aid. She glanced at me, turned away and said, "No." I asked her if she knew where I could get one, to which she said, "No." I went to the gift shop and bought a Band-Aid.

The message: No one in your company should ever say – or even think – "That's not my job."

Customers view you as a resource, and not just for landscaping. Be there for them.

It's really hard for me to see a lot of the government does well. I see waste, I see arrogance and I see lack of vision in most governmental agencies. And that's the problem.

I can't do much to change how the post office or TSA operate, but I can change how I coach my team and how I lead my company.

Take a lesson from the government and don't over-regulate your employees. They'll take care of your customers better, and your company will be better for it.

MARTY GRUNDER is a speaker, consultant and author; he owns Grunder Landscaping Co. See www.martygrunder.com; mail mgrunder@giemedia.com.

Jeff Korhan

Regulations are one of those aspects of business that seldom concern us until we personally feel their impact. This is why it is essential that you freely share your expertise with the leaders and influencers in the communities you serve.



In late April, the Maryland legislature passed SB 487 and HB 573 into law to address the impact of fertilizers on the Chesapeake Bay. A key element of the legislation is to protect the Bay from the incorrect application of fertilizers that could adversely affect the natural balance.

The logical and reasonable approach for accomplishing this is to reduce the amount of nitrogen that can be applied to properties in the area – both on a per-application and annual basis. This works in theory if all products and application methods are uniform, which they aren't.

Prior to the passing of the new legislation, Ken Mays, president of Baltimore-based Scientific Plant Service was using a product that allowed him to use 35 percent less nitrogen per year. However, it is applied in as few as one annual application, which would have precluded it from being used under the new regulations – even though it was technically environmentally friendly.

Along with other green industry leaders, Ken reached out to the Chesapeake Bay Commission to educate them about Polyon. Made by Agrium Advanced Technologies, the fertilizer is designed specifically for situations that the Maryland legislature was addressing. Polyon's proprietary technology releases nitrogen in a controlled release fashion that is not affected by moisture – clearly a benefit for sites in proximity to wetlands.

As a result of this effort, an exemption for products like Polyon was written into the legislation – specifically identifying them as “enhanced efficiency fertilizers.” SPS can now continue their usual best practices – respecting the environment, while also maximizing profits by minimizing the number of applications necessary for treating their properties.

Decisions are being made every day by legislators, and those decisions are only as good as the information they have available to them. While they are charged with protecting your best interests, they can only do their job well if they are adequately informed about our industry and your business practices.

JEFF KORHAN is a speaker, consultant and top-ranked blogger on new media and small business marketing at www.jeffkorhan.com; mail jkorhan@giemedia.com.



Jim Huston

Intent of the Founders.

“Sometimes you're the windshield. Sometimes

you're the bug.” So goes the Mary Chapin

Carpenter song “The Bug.” So it is with government. You're either the regulator or the regulated.

The founders of this country were activists. They had a unique relationship with the government that they formed. They got together and created a unique nation in an unprecedented manner. Prior to the United States of America, no other state was ever formed by an individual or group who first drew up a constitution by which it would be ruled and regulated. They established rules for both the regulators and the regulated. This was unprecedented.

It seems fair to say that the founders desired for the citizenry to take an active part in the government. Individual members of the state were encouraged to participate in the “rough and tumble” debate of ideas in the public square. They were *not* to be subservient “subjects.” They were to be active “citizens.” There's a big difference. Subjects were what they were under the king. Citizens were what they were to become under the Constitution.



Have we gone astray? Thomas Paine is credited with saying, “Government is best which governs least.” There are those who believe that we, as a nation, have forgotten our roots. Government and its regulations, they say, are ubiquitous – creeping into and regulating every part of our lives and businesses. And they say it's getting worse.

They have a point. The National Labor Relations Board won't permit Boeing to move portions of its production to South Carolina. The EPA's environmental regulations are often excessive and lacking in common sense. For example, in the early 1990s, homeowners in Southern California were not permitted to remove flammable dead brush around their homes due to its being habitat for the endangered kangaroo rat. Many homeowners ignored the regulation and removed the hazardous material. In October of 1993, a wildfire swept through Laguna Canyon near Laguna Beach destroying hundreds of homes. Many of the homeowners who ignored the regulation and removed the hazardous brush saved their homes. Unfortunately, many of those who obeyed the irrational regulation not only lost their homes in the inferno that was in no small part fueled by the brush, they also lost the kangaroo rats living therein.

Many argue that as government grows, it's becoming more partisan and ineffective.

Immigration reform is essential for American small businesses but politicians use it as a political football to score points with voters. Effective immigration reform probably won't happen for years. The financial regulations, or lack thereof, of the last 30 years created the recent financial-system meltdown. Small businesses took the brunt of this unnecessary economic disaster, while government gave Fortune 500 companies bailouts, loans and unprecedented assistance.

The list goes on and on – regulations abound regarding: water, credit, car standards, OSHA, new construction, etc. Have you tried to get an SBA loan lately? Not that regulations are all bad, they just seem excessive and ineffective to boot.

Get involved. Modern life is dynamic and often crazy. Government is simply

“Government is best which governs least.”



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the agency by which men and women come together to enact public policy so that we can all live together as harmoniously as possible, given all the tumult, change and chaos of it all.

Governmental regulations affect the green industry perhaps more than any other. Issues concerning such topics as: immigration, water usage, the environment, contractor licensing, safety, finance, credit, insurances, ad infinitum appear endless.

Our system of government not only encourages us to get involved in the process of governing, it requires it. Due to the complexity of modern life, no elite body of bureaucrats can effectively run things from the top down. Top-down management doesn't work. Grassroots, bottom-up input is what is needed if regulations are to be effective and realistic. You may disagree with it, but the Tea Party did not even exist four years ago. Today this bottom-up organization is having a huge impact on the very direction of our government.

There are two types of citizens: Those who regulate and those who are regulated. The choice is yours. Get involved. Start with your local community and associations. Make a difference. If you don't like being the one who is always regulated, become a regulator. Bugs have no choice in their destiny. You do. Take advantage of it.

JIM HUSTON runs J.R. Huston Consulting, a green industry consulting firm. See www.rhuston.biz; mail jhuston@giemedia.com.

John Ossa



In this era of environmental concerns, water shortages and growing populations, federal, state and local governments feel compelled to mandate change.

In California, a well-intentioned Assembly Bill (AB1881) provides the basis for The Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELO). Most new and rehabilitated landscapes are subject to a water efficient landscape ordinance. Public landscapes and private development projects, including developer-installed single-family and multi-family residential landscapes with at least 2,500 sq. ft. of landscape area, are subject to the MWELO.

The provision in the statute that ensures a landscape is allowed sufficient water is a water budget. There are two water budgets in the Model Ordinance. The Maximum Applied Water Allowance (MAWA) and the Estimated Total Water Use (ETWU). The MAWA is the water budget used for compliance and is an annual water allowance based on landscape area, local evapotranspiration and an ET Adjustment Factor of 0.7. The ETWU is annual water use estimation for design purposes and is based on the water needs of the plants actually chosen for a given landscape. The ETWU may not exceed the MAWA.

Many people agree that some mechanism to set a water allowance is fair and necessary. In some areas, local municipalities take the budget concept further and add layers of prescriptive requirements on top of the basic budget concept in an attempt to determine an outcome for every eventuality. This is where many of the problems originate.

It may be a far better approach to simply define the desired outcome (X amount of water per sq. ft.), and let the free market economy solve the different problems that

may arise. Instead of legislating against certain types of plants or irrigation hardware, allow the creativity and innovation in the market to create solutions. The green industry has rapidly accelerated its ability to create ecological solutions over the past few years. There is every reason to believe that landscapes can become far more resource efficient and truly sustainable without prescriptive intervention from local government agencies.

A consequence of overzealous regulations and permitting requirements is the requirements for plan checking and interpretation of required documentation has overtaxed existing municipal staff. Not only is the subject matter expertise often lacking, the manpower may not even exist to make plan-compliance decisions. This dysfunction has created a dynamic where the very contractors who have taken the time to become licensed and certified are penalized the most by virtue of the fact local municipal agencies cannot enforce the overly complicated regulations they promulgated. The outcome of not adequately introducing, supporting and enforcing regulations has driven a significant amount of business to the underground economy.

Even this level of dysfunction could be overcome if the pricing of water was congruent with its true cost and value. However, the price of water is suppressed – and this fact, as much as any other, undermines the desired outcomes and devalues the many hard working and skilled professionals that are in the best position to drive the change our society requires. **L&L**

JOHN OSSA is the national accounts director at Irrigation Water Technologies America and owns Irrigation Essentials; mail jossa@giemedia.com.

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A new voice enters national dialogue

The recently formed National Hispanic Landscape Alliance seeks to advance professionals and their businesses within the industry and community.

Back in early March, a group of Hispanic green industry professionals gathered in Washington. Some were there to see a years-long dream of unifying within the industry come true. Others made the trip with hopes of influencing policy in a way that would better their business.

No matter what the thoughts were going in, at the end of the two-day meeting, one vision emerged in the form of the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance. The organization's goals: Give Hispanic-Americans working in the landscaping industry a voice on the issues that most concern them and communicate the benefits of the industry to the U.S. Hispanic community.

"With approximately half a million U.S. Hispanic households depending on the landscape industry for their livelihood, there should be no doubt that the concerns of the land-

scape industry are concerns of Hispanic-Americans across the country," says Ralph Egües, the executive director of NHLA. "We see our association as uniquely able to connect the dots and make this fact clear."

Hispanics make up 65-80 percent of the landscaping industry, according to NHLA. Here Egües talks to us about what NHLA hopes to accomplish in terms of educating landscapers and the community, influencing policy and increasing membership.

Why form the alliance?

The National Hispanic Landscape Alliance was formed out of a realization of three key factors.

First of all, that we're not sufficiently engaged in the important

policy discussions that impact our livelihood. And to the extent that we're not, others dictate our future. Secondly, while huge attention is being paid by both political parties in Washington to Hispanic issues, the concerns of the landscaping industry have not been identified as among those. Third is the simple fact that there has been tremendous growth in the number of Hispanics working in a wide range of capacities and settings within the landscaping industry.

I suppose that these factors can best be described as an awakening of needs and opportunities that were experienced by a diverse group of Hispanic industry professionals across the country.

What industry concerns do you mean, specifically?

The concerns that we have are concerns that many in the industry have. In terms of what we hope to accomplish, I think, first and foremost, we need to do all we can with and for our members to maximize future business opportunity for them.

We see two aspects to this: First of all, engagement with policy leaders, and secondly, education of the Hispanic community.

How do you plan to accomplish these goals?

With respect to the former, a big part of our effort is connecting with those most concerned about Hispanic issues and making the connection with them about the importance of this industry to our community, and the impact of the unintended consequences of some policies that have been adopted without sufficient consideration to the environmental and human health benefits of our work. Ours is the original green industry. We don't just care about the environment, we care for it. But frankly, the environmental dialogue has been hijacked by others, and we need to take it back.

With respect to the latter, we need to recognize the importance of educating the public and helping to form public opinion. A simple example of an increasingly popular myth is that turf increases the carbon footprint because it's maintained by power equipment. When the truth is that a well-managed lawn can capture four times the carbon that is produced by the equipment that maintains it.

The National Hispanic Landscape Alliance especially sees its role as getting the



Ralph Egües is executive director of NHLA.

truth out, certainly with Hispanic communities around the country. We understand the contribution that well design, installed, managed landscapes can make in addressing clean water ambitions and insuring efficient water utilization in appropriate input use, improving the physical and mental health of those in the community that we serve. It's time that we make sure others know that, too. All these benefits and our livelihoods are at risk if we don't.

As for other member services, one key is understanding what members need. We intend to do that through a series of meetings that we'll be conducting around the country. Fortunately, we formed a really great relationship with PLANET. We look to leverage certain appropriate programming that PLANET has already offered and perhaps wrap around it additional programming that we will develop to meet specific needs of NHLA members.

We also look to partner with other Hispanic associations. One thing that is very key to who we are is that we don't want to be duplicating the efforts of others.

What policies does the alliance hope to influence?

I think it's fair to say that we're already accomplishing quite a bit. After meeting with us, U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) agreed to write the EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson regarding his concerns that the EPA WaterSense 40



The National Hispanic Landscape Alliance was formed in March and will work on policy and educational issues specific to Hispanic-Americans in the industry.

percent turf requirement has failed to meet the goals of the WaterSense program, was inconsistent with the approach taken on building interiors, it failed to consider the benefits of turf and climatic variances across the country, and it put hundreds of thousands of landscaping companies across the country at risk.

That's not the only area we've been active in.

What other areas has NHLA tried to influence?

We've also been highly engaged in raising concerns about proposed changes to the H-2B regulations with elected officials in both parties and with the Department of Labor directly.

In these conversations, we have pointed out how important the H-2B program is for many of our members and the important role the program has played in creating career advancement opportunities for Hispanic Americans, who, by virtue of their linguistic and cultural competencies, are especially

well suited to assume the supervisory, managerial and mechanic roles which require close interaction with H-2B workers.

We've explained that the predictable labor pool that the H-2B program provides makes possible year-over-year growth by reputable companies – growth that also requires the employment of additional staff in sales, in support roles, including human resources, accounting and estimating.



During many of our meetings, we have been told that our explanation that the jobs that H-2B workers make possible are jobs that the American workforce wants to fill is frankly one that others hadn't heard. Of course, we're preparing a formal response to the proposed rules and the wage increase schedule that goes into effect in January 2012.

But we believe in consultation. We think it's important to understand what others are thinking, and share our thoughts and try to find ways to accommodate those things that are important to our industry.

How does NHLA plan to build its membership?

This is really grass roots. Our members are talking with others that they know, their colleagues in their communities, others that they know from their past associations.

Obviously association staff is supporting these efforts, but the key is really member-to-prospect contact. The excitement of our members is really the most effective way to reach out to others.

I think the reasons folks are joining is this is a very proactive organization. It's an organization that is making the most out of a very real opportunity that exists – the heightened awareness of the growth of the Hispanic portion of the U.S. population, and with those increased numbers, the concentration of political influence.

It's very important that our industry, which employs up to 500,000 Hispanic-Americans, be recognized as important to the Hispanic community and that our issues are key to the livelihood of 500,000 Hispanic families in the U.S. – that's a lot of people. **L&L**

The author is an associate editor at *Lawn & Landscape*. She can be reached at clawell@gje.net.

Surely it sounds peculiar, but one of the hottest trends in landscaping is taking place in urban centers.

Cities are looking to control storm-water runoff, increase air quality and reduce the urban heat island effect. Companies and property managers are looking to save on energy costs, increase the value of their property and provide green space for workers and residents.

Through green roofs, landscapers can capitalize on those needs in big ways.

"There is no other type of building technology that provides the same scale and scope of benefits as does a green roof system," says Steven Peck, founder and president of the organization Green Roofs for Healthy Cities (GRHC).

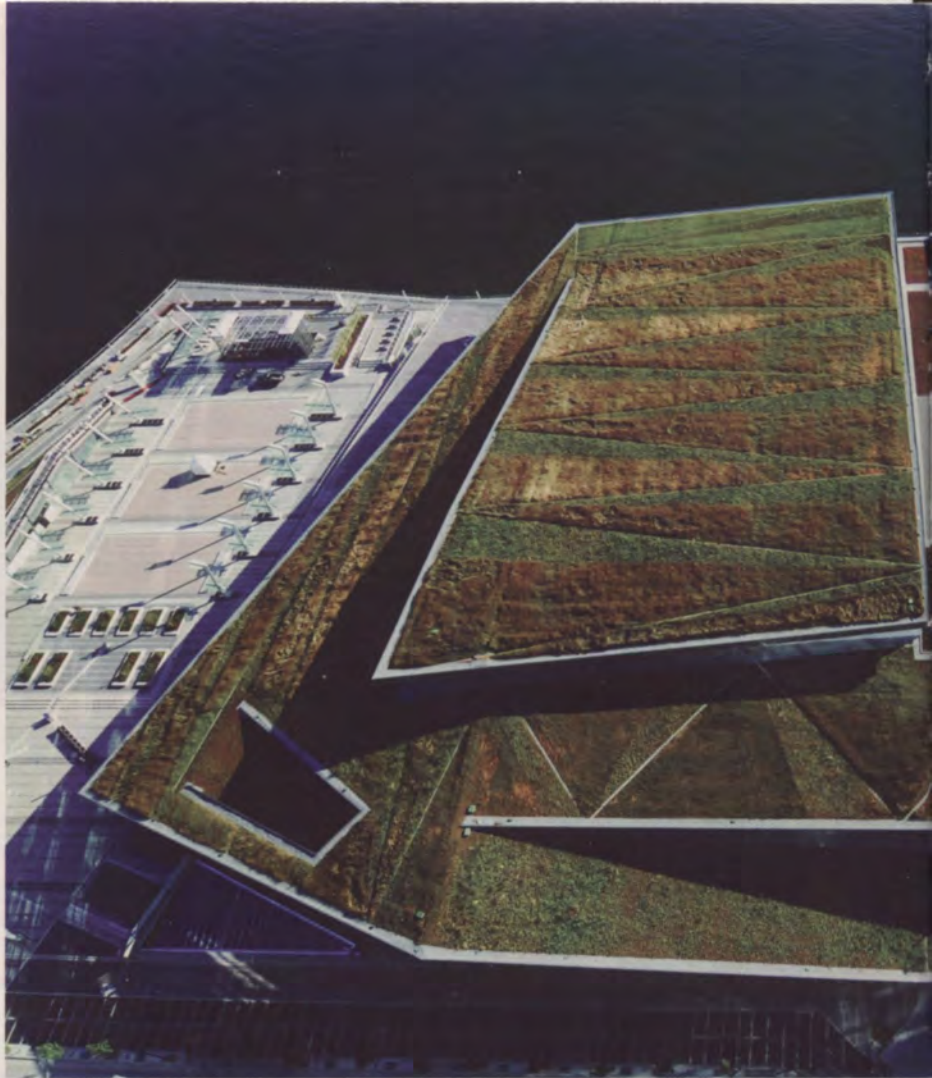
A growing number of consumers are buying into that theory. The North American green roof industry grew 28.5 percent in 2010, after seeing 16 percent growth in 2009, according to GRHC's annual survey. More than 700 projects that represented 4.3 million square feet of installed green roof space were listed in 2010.

And the growth isn't expected to stop anytime soon.

"I think the industry is poised for some significant growth without a doubt, because we have a tremendous need to use roof space, to have our roof space help clean the air, and manage stormwater, and provide green space and grow food in our cities," Peck says. "These roofs can do a lot for us and there is just a ton of roof space available. But it has to be done by professionals."

DESIGNING LANDSCAPES FOR A ROOF.

The idea of working with a blank slate might sound intriguing. But remember, everything changes 10 stories in the air.



WIDE OPEN SPACES

Want double-digit growth? The green roof market is exploding. Brush up on the basics and take your company to the next level.

By Carolyn LaWell



The North American green roof industry grew 28.5 percent in 2010, according to Green Roofs for Healthy Cities annual survey. The extensive green roof (above) on the Vancouver Convention Centre won a 2010 Award of Excellence from GRHC.

ONLINE EXTRA

For more on entering the market, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "green roofs."

You'll find extra features on selling and marketing green roofs and education and training.

“There are a lot of rules and regulations and there are more coming out every day it seems like.” - Alex Fransen

There are two factors that need to be considered before the design process begins. “No. 1, we have to know what the structural load capacity is for the rooftop. That is going to tell us how much additional weight we can put on that roof, if any,” says George Irwin, president of manufacturer Green Living Technologies International, which is headquartered in Rochester, N.Y. A structural engineer will need to be consulted and should provide a signed letter with the precise weight limit allowed.

“No. 2, there’s no reason to go into a lengthy, costly design process with the client until we know what we’re designing for,” says Irwin, who taught a green roof course at the GIE+EXPO in 2010.

Green roofs are popular because they provide extra amenity space and an aesthetic to buildings. They also offer economic savings, as well as environmental benefits.

Economically speaking, green roofs protect the roof membrane, which results in an estimated lifespan of two times longer, and depending on the type of green roof they can significantly reduce heating and cooling costs. GRHC cites a field experiment in Canada that found a 6-inch-deep extensive green roof reduced heat gains by 95 percent and heat losses by 26 percent.

Environmentally speaking, buildings are the worst emitters of carbon dioxide, says Irwin, who started as a landscaper and grew his green roof company into a one-stop shop as a designer, installer, maintainer and manufacturer. Green roofs can reduce the amount of carbon dioxide and can be used as a retainer for stormwater runoff.

One of the first conversations with the client should entail what they hope to get out of the space.

Depending on how the client wants to use the space, how they want it to perform and how much weight the roof can hold, the green roof can take on different forms. There are two main types of green roofs –

intensive and extensive – the difference being the soil profile, plants and how the systems are installed. In 2010, 3.1 million square feet of extensive green roof space was installed compared to 172,000 square feet of intensive and 312,000 of semi-intensive/mixed, according to the GRHC’s annual survey.

“Anywhere from 3-6 inches (of soil) is a typical extensive system,” says Alex Fransen, landscape development manager of Steele Blades Lawn & Landscaping Services in Louisville, Ky. “Then anything from about 6 inches up is going to be an intensive system. Typically on your inten-

sive systems you're going to see your normal landscaping plants like shrubs and trees."

As the vision for the green roof takes shape, it's important to understand the codes and regulations that need to be included in the design.

"There are a lot of rules and regulations and there are more coming out every day it seems like," Fransen says. "There is a lot of fire safety stuff now that you have to be aware of – a lot of roofs they want irrigation systems on per code for fire suppression also."

Steele Blades entered the

green roof market about three and a half years ago, and Fransen's experience has taught him to constantly look for regulation updates on GRHC's website and for information on local and national codes. The big concern last year, he says, was cutting back on plant material that could easily dry or die and would be susceptible to burning, whether because of cigarette ash or solar activity.

Picking the right plant material is essential for the green roof's success and it's one of the biggest mistakes designers make.

The plants growing on the roof will face wind, temperature and growing conditions unseen on the ground. Recommended vegetation will vary based on location, but native, drought tolerant, hardy plants that can withstand thin soil work best.

"The traditional European sedum varieties – that's where green roofs started – there's no reason to abandon them, they're made for green roofs," says Roger Grothe, president of Aloha Landscaping, headquartered near Minneapolis. "They're drought tolerant, very hardy, color-

ful, and there's probably 40 varieties."

Grothe, who has been working with green roofs for eight years and is getting his Ph.D. in environmental science and green roofs at the Finnish University of Helsinki, is researching green roof plant varieties. "Each area, whether it's Guam, whether it's Minnesota, Georgia, there's just a little trial and error and each roof is a little different."

As the design process takes place, that's the best time to create a maintenance plan.

The layers of a GREEN ROOF

Green roofs are multifaceted, to say the least. Here is a breakdown of the basic components, based on a study by the National Research Council Canada.





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A perk for landscapers installing green roofs is the additional revenue of then maintaining the system. "The best practice for maintenance is to have a five-year maintenance plan, not a one-year-maintenance plan or a two-year," Peck says.

“You have to evaluate each situation, then try to design a system that is going to work.” - Roger Grothe

INSTALLING A GREEN ROOF. The most important aspect of a green roof isn't installed by a landscaper – at least, it

shouldn't be. A reliable waterproofing membrane will make or break a green roof. And most say laying that layer is a job better left to those who specialize in that area, roof or waterproofing contractors.

"Unless you have someone who has several years in that industry and knows what they're doing, I would suggest not trying to do that," Fransen says. "It's another beast, and it's nothing we want to get involved with, we have our hands full as it is."

Once the roof is properly waterproofed and tested for leaks, the remaining components of the green roof can be installed. Still, it's not as easy as creating a landscape on the ground.

When it comes to putting people and products on the roof, safety is a huge issue – not only for the people on the roof but those on the ground. "Working on the roof is much different because No. 1, you're elevated and there are elements on the roof top that don't particularly apply to ground-level landscaping," Irwin says. "One is wind and environmental conditions. It's much different when you're four stories in the air because even a single piece of plastic that flies off the roof can be detrimental."


Also, if an error is made during the installation process, it could puncture the waterproofing membrane, essentially killing the project before it's completed.

Proper training and planning goes a long way. The project should outline variables such as the materials that are going to be installed on the roof and their weight, how they're going to get on the roof, who is going to be involved in the process and what specifically will each person be doing.

"Most roofs now are under very close scrutiny by OSHA because there have been so many problems," Grothe says. "A lot of roofs you have to have what they call a pick plan, where you specifically outline all of the weights and all of the angles and the certification of whoever is

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Talkin' Tech



with Jerry Corbett

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COVER STORY

Incentives to GROW

The installation of green roofs has taken off in certain cities — Chicago, Washington and New York City lead the pack. The strong growth in these areas is directly linked to government policy and incentives.

Those incentives include: The building owner pays **fewer taxes** or **fewer stormwater fees** and developers are able to **add floor space** to a project in exchange for a green roof. Grants can also

be awarded to those hoping to fund a green roof.

In 2010, these 10 metropolitan regions installed the most green roof space, according to Green Roofs for Healthy Cities 2011 Annual Green Roof Survey.

Chicago was No. 1 with more than 500,000 square feet of green roofs installed. Cincinnati ranked No. 10 with about 50,000 square feet installed.



operating that crane. It's not something you can just call up and say, 'Yeah, put this up on the roof and haul up this soil.' You really need to understand how all of that is changing."

The green roof is going to involve a drainage system, a filter layer, an irrigation system and some form of growing media along with the vegetation — and all of it is built, not dug. This is where understanding the products on the market and how green roofs work comes into play.

Green roofs aren't a rubber stamp situation, Grothe says. Different products might be better and easier to install on different roofs. "You have to evaluate each situation, understand what's going on, and then try to design a system that is going to work," he says.

Green roofs can be built traditionally by bringing in each component and building a system. Or there is also a modular or tray system, which can

best be described as putting together a puzzle. The layers of the green roof are compacted into the modular system and then placed side by side on the roof. An ideal situation for a modular system would be installing a green roof on a 20-story building that has elevators, but no access for cranes.

Grothe estimates 70 percent of the green roofs installed in the U.S. are traditional and 30 percent are trays.

"Understand what the different systems are and how they go on," Peck says. "The green roof industry is complicated, there is a lot of complexity there and it's really important that people take the time and make an investment — it's a relatively modest investment — in getting the proper training, otherwise they can cost themselves a lot of hardship and potentially damage the industry."

The author is an associate editor at *Lawn & Landscape*. She can be reached at clawell@gjie.net.



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Paperless TRAIL

Eliminating paper files might scare some, but the switch kept one landscaper in business.

By Brian Horn



From the sounds of it, going paperless was a good move for John Newlin and his company, Quality Sprinkling Systems Services. In fact, that's probably an understatement.

"I'm probably not too far off by saying that's the reason we're still in business," Newlin says.

It's a bold statement, but with paper work not being turned in on time, and parts not being charged out, going paperless made the company more efficient.

The biggest challenge was convincing himself, the boss, that it was the right thing to do. He finally committed after having to read one too many reports where the handwriting was illegible. Newlin says one of his work-

ers took notes on cardboard. Even though they were detailed, good luck deciphering that back at the office.

"The nature of the beast is, the fellas are hands-on people," Newlin says. "They don't like to write."

Now, everyone has a laptop. The office manager schedules all the work on her computer and everybody synchs daily with her computer and uploads the current jobs. Completed jobs are also downloaded with the parts they've used and any other pertinent information, such as assessments that were done on site.

"What this program did was took it to the next level for us as far as being able to capture our production, being able to capture the parts

being charged. That was huge," says Newlin, who uses the software, HindSite.

Jim True, VP of business development for Cabinet NG, a document management software company, says if you are thinking about going paperless, find your pain point and start with that.

Every business has an area where they are dealing with paper that becomes problematic like managing contracts with outside vendors or keeping track of accounts payable and receivable activities.

"Pick the area that's generating the most heartburn for you because that is going to produce the most benefit immediately for

you," he says.

True says to then implement it in incremental steps, instead of trying to do it all at once.

"The people we see that are most successful tackle the big problem first ... and they learn a little bit more about the software and as they implement it in other areas it's probably a little more streamlined and quicker for them," he says.

Newlin says one of the most important steps he took was showing employees he believed in making the switch.

"Employees will see it's a half-hearted effort and they'll half-heartedly go about it," Newlin says. "It's one of those things you've got to jump in on it with both feet."

Newlin says to go completely paperless, you'll spend about \$350 each on the laptops, and the software he uses is \$100 a month for two licenses, so if you had six employees, you'd need three licenses. He spends about \$50 every two years to have his information backed-up.

Newlin says that the licenses can be cancelled in the off-season.

After making the switch six years ago, he went from having two and a half people doing office work, to only one in the office.

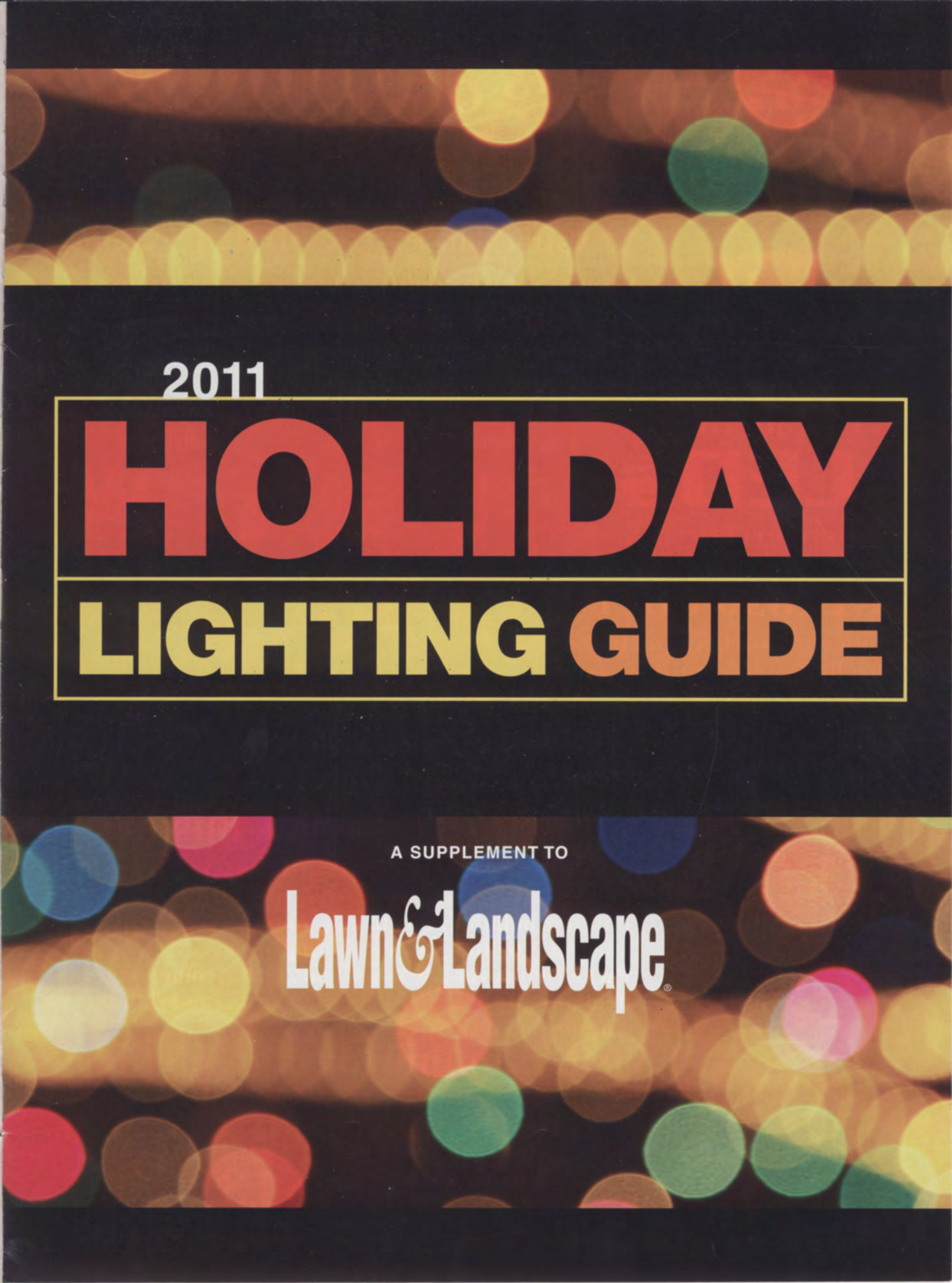
And, while some business owners need an actual paper trail to feel comfortable doing business, Newlin says that isn't the case with him.

"When we had the paperwork, we couldn't find it," Newlin says. "So, it's so

(continued on page 52)



True

The background of the entire page is a bokeh effect of out-of-focus, colorful lights in shades of yellow, orange, red, green, and blue. The lights are scattered across the dark background, creating a festive and vibrant atmosphere.

2011

HOLIDAY

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Winter windfall

Holiday lighting can boost offseason profits.

2011 HOLIDAY LIGHTING GUIDE

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Selling the season

Closing deals on holiday lighting takes a knowledgeable staff and the right positioning.

Stories by Peter Chakerian, a freelance writer based in Bay Village, Ohio.



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On the bulb

Learn lessons in organization and planning from year-round holiday lighting companies.

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WINTER WINDFALL

Holiday lighting can boost profits.



Holiday lighting is a great way for landscape and lawn care companies to boost their cash flow and maintain high visibility during the winter months – all while keeping their crews working and offering their customers another valuable service.

Not every company can make a holiday lighting business work. In fact, some seasoned professionals will tell you not to – at least not without the necessary research and training, anyway.

The appeal is understandable, but as with all niche businesses, proprietors can face unique challenges.

In the case of holiday lighting, adding it as a service could push activity levels to a point at odds with the holiday spirit, good cheer and visual joy of “decking the halls” at best. At worst, it can disrupt the solvency and economic viability of a longstanding company unprepared for the workload and demands.

Still, there’s plenty to attract landscapers, irrigators, pest control specialists, outdoor lighting specialists, pool/spa technicians and electricians to add holiday décor to their working repertoire. With increasing numbers of double-income families having less spare time and more discretionary income, new holiday-based prospects exist for many service industries.

If the approach to the new business is thoughtful and well-executed, it can be tantamount to a “Christmas in July” feeling most of those companies have during booming, warm-weather months.

A holiday Hallelujah!

During the past several years, landscape contractors have begun adding holiday light installation and decorative work as a “bring us out of the red” revenue stream. To hear some principals tell it, holiday work felt like a natural and easy business to enter into.

“As a teenager, I used to decorate my parents house as a hobby,” says Brad Finkle, principal of Creative Decorating in Omaha, Neb. “My folks always took us out on Christmas Eve to look at other homes, and the more I saw homes decorated, the more I wanted to do ours. It grew into a tradition so big that neighbors finally came by asking to help them and started paying. I thought, ‘Hmmm, get paid for a hobby? I kinda like this.’”

For most contractors, adding holiday lighting service isn’t always a predestined flight of fancy or family tradition disguised as intuition. To these people, “adding holiday lighting was more of a sound financial decision,” says Scott Heese of Holiday Bright Lights, Omaha, Neb. “The demand from customers for the service is what pulled me in. I realized that the more work I did, and the more tinkering I did with a light set, there was a niche for a different product line – so we eventually started manufacturing our own.”

Michael List of Christmas Décor of Northern Kentucky in Lexington, Ky., has a similar sentiment, “We were asked by some of our customers if we could hang their Christ-

mas lights. Two years later, we were busy enough that we decided we would buy a Christmas Décor franchise and operate as a way to generate income and keep our people busy.

“We’re in an area of the country where you cannot depend on snow,” List says. “So it was a way of retaining our guys and keeping them busy 11 months out of the year.”

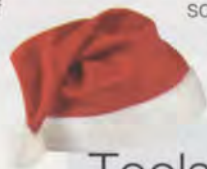
An evergreen business.

To wit, many parts of the country see winter without the “snowplow eyes” that contractors in the Midwest and Northeast do. What they do see is a really slow time – where the dormant lawns and foliage put a dent in work flow, which inevitably leads to layoffs and starts a seasonal cycle.

Overhead, rent and equipment payments – unlike nature – never sleep.

“Holiday lighting definitely helps you retain good workers,” List says. “It really takes the seasonal nature and removes it from your business model. And that can change everything.”

Beyond employee retention and expanding the skills of your existing



Tools of the (tinsel) trade

Once a contractor has made the decision to move into the holiday lighting business, thoughts usually turn to preparedness. To that end, we have a tongue-in-cheek Top 5 List of tools a contractor will need but might not already have. Add these to the list and fortify your preparedness:

While most lawn and landscape contractors consider gloves second nature, it can get awfully cold out there. Think hard about sporting a **hat**, **scarf**, and **handwarmers** if your winters get cold enough. And certainly, if you’re going to be working with electricity, consider **insulated boots** (with rubber soles) to prevent electrocution.

Finally, keep **something with you that evokes the spirit of the season**. You may not feel like wearing a Santa hat while installing holiday lights, but should tensions run high during a cold-weather installation, it might be enough to break the tension with your clients and co-workers.

In other words, we’d like to think no one would attack a Santa.

workforce, holiday lighting work can offer an amazing ROI and a profit margin that can push "as high as 60 or 70 percent," Heese says. "It's a solid profit-generating business with a short season that fits well into many companies' schedules."

How it fits into the financial scheme of things on the front end can be another story altogether.

With little in the way of front-end cash to spend on a new endeavor, many holiday lighting businesses fail because of the quality of products and the training of existing employees – who are often asked to don the Santa hat after Labor Day is over but may not know how to "drive the sled," so to speak.

And yet, due to economic factors, new holiday lighting service providers are more likely to cross-train existing crews for this line of work than hire new ones. So, in essence, one's mowing and spray techs end up switching gears and hanging lights. But what if they're not the outdoor lighting-certified type?

Allow our experts to translate: existing employees get overworked, and with little in the way of direction, product knowledge or design chutzpah, end up doing a disservice to the company they work for – sloppy jobs, sorry customers, serious problems and maintenance calls that are anything but joyous.

Feliz franchisee.

Some companies will go so far as to franchise with a large supply and design company to avoid these pitfalls. It can be expensive for a contractor or company just entering the holiday lighting business, but Finkle says that training and materials often make that franchising worth the time, money and effort.

"Some people are just looking for a side business, and they don't want to spend a large amount of money to start," Finkle says. "But sometimes working with a franchise or becoming one makes sense. Franchises can be expensive, but they do offer more support, consistency in product and in the background train-

ing, seminar videos and classes – but it might not be an option when your investment money is at a premium.

"It really comes down to how far (you) want to take the business venture," he added. "As with anything else you do in life, it makes sense to do a lot of research and get as much information as you can before making a decision."

So how does one choose a holiday lighting supplier?

manpower."

Beyond that, List says it all comes down to details.

"We have over 450 companies that we service and they make decisions based on who can offer (franchise) members the most for the dollar spent," Heese says. "In realizing that, we went out there and designed our own software program and means to 'map out' the product lines as they would appear on a home



Holiday lighting can boost a landscaper's bottom line, but proper training is a must to succeed.

"Going with recommendations and quality of product makes the most sense," says Paul Sessel of Creative Displays in Stilwell, Mo. "A lot of people will find us on the Internet after some word of mouth has happened."

Christmas Décor was a franchise opportunity for List's company.

"They had it all down pat with the products we could buy, and the quality level was there," he says.

"When you go with a higher quality, it's a lot like it is in life: you may pay more up front, but have less to pay down the road in terms of additional expenses, replacements, maintenance hours and

or business. And we have an estimator program, which helps a lot of customers understand how the project breaks down for them, financially.

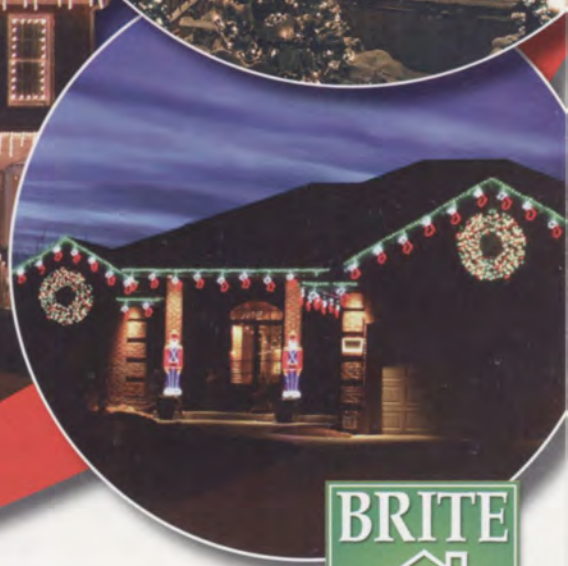
"For a lot of people, this is an add-on business, and what a franchise can do is make their transition easier – which really can help identify the profit margin on it – and can offer support, help with sales, give members their own website, and adequate training for superior products. That beats getting something out of a box and trying to fake it," Heese says. "That approach is not likely to win too many companies a second look – or at least not a flattering one." 🍷

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Closing deals on holiday lighting takes a knowledgeable staff and the right positioning.

You've made the jump into the holiday lighting business, trained your employees, found a great supplier, or integrated with the talent and resources that a franchise situation offers.

Now it's time for that moment of truth that every contractor in every line of work knows: the sale.

The old adage is that holiday lighting services are easy to sell to the right customer, but there's a lot that goes into a successful sale. Brad Finkle, principal of Creative Decorating in Omaha, Neb., says that the successful sale – like any successful installation – starts and ends with people.

"It's very cyclical," Finkle says. "The more information and better items your people have, and the better they are

trained, the better the work and the designs will look. And that is critical in starting the word-of-mouth ball rolling for your business."

Closing the deals.

You have the sophisticated lighting techniques and knowledge of the products down pat.

You're producing great work and your first few customers are happy. What happens now? And whom should you target – existing customers or new ones?

Paul Sessel of Creative Displays in Stilwell, Mo., had great success with his existing customer base as a "jumping off point" for holiday lighting jobs.

"That will be your cheapest source for customers and work up word of mouth," he says. "From there, you can expand

to direct mailing, door hangers and so on to expand your customer base. My opinion has always been, 'dance with who brung ya.'

Once you've started down that road with your clientele, go after your customer's friends and family and "build up that level of trust with them," Finkle says.

Another suggestion, "hit a couple high-end parts of town with flyers, brochures and get a couple jobs under your belt in those areas," he says.

Instead of driving all over town trying to market yourself, start working one neighborhood, Finkle says.

When you land a gig there, your truck will be there for a few days and that kind of exposure to the neighbors will build the word-of-mouth following you need to be successful.

"Your existing customers are certainly a marketing base, but we have consistently found that existing customers from our (landscaping) division only represents about 10 percent of our client base on the holiday lighting side," says Michael List of Christmas Décor of Northern Kentucky in Lexington, Ky.

"We marketed outside of our client base and rely heavily outside of the base. It's a good place to start, but we have found going outside the base is where most customers come from."

Image and positioning.

Some contractors begin marketing and estimating in August or September, and begin installing in October – knowing that residential customers are going to make decisions fairly quickly because of the convenience factor.

John Trimble, national sales director for Brite Ideas in Omaha, Neb., suggested that presenting an image that is consistent with the quality of your work is the most important thing any holiday lighting startup could do and helps speed the decision making along.

"There's a lot to inking a sale once



Putting forth the right image will help you add high-end clients to your holiday lighting service.

you start talking about high-end residential," Trimble says. "It's not just positioning yourself as the holiday lighting expert in your town.

"You need to find a way to work within a budget with somebody, and appreciate the value they place on image. The average clientele you're aiming for is driving a BMW no older than three years old."

Trimble adds that products such as those offered by Brite Ideas "might not match the quality you're offering if you're a small mom-and-pop operation," Trimble says.

"We qualify a lot of our companies. A product like mine might not be the best for a mom and pop. If you're branding yourself as the holiday lighting business, your products and results have to match the quality and appearance you put forth," he says.

"High-end clients don't want to be surrounded by people they perceive to be 'eight-buck-an-hour' employees. If you can't put forth the right image – or you don't appear the way you need to in order to sell it – you won't close those deals. People who are desperate to get above the red don't always think in those terms, but they should."

List says that it is important to understand the difference in selling residential and commercial holiday lighting.

"Christmas is an emotional sell, especially when you're talking residen-

tial. Christmas is different, people are visual and so enthusiasm is a necessity," he says.

Begin with residential.

Companies might give you more volume, but establishing yourself in residential first will help build the confidence to sell those smaller commercial jobs.

"Start out residential for at least the first year or two," Finkle says. "Commercial is time consuming, and it can become expensive figuring out the 'how' making clients happy.

"For commercial clients, holiday lighting is a 'need' for their business in attracting their customers, where residential is more of a 'want' and an emotional sell and the spirit of the sale is different. In residential, you're just dealing with one person."

When getting into commercial accounts, you could be dealing with a board of multiple people, Finkle says.

"The timeframes are far different and everyone has their own opinion on what they want in a commercial scenario," he says.

"Of course, the pay is better, but you also work harder to sell. Commercial clients may take months to decide and usually don't want (lights) up until after Thanksgiving," Finkle continues. "Where a residential client usually wants to flip the switch on them after that night." ❖

ON THE BULB

A lesson in organization and planning from year-round holiday lighting companies.

Many lawn and landscape contractors add holiday lighting as an offseason endeavor, but what do the small percentage of companies who concentrate on the holidays most of the time do? What does their off-time look like? Do they pick up gigs mowing and spreading?

Not exactly. Companies like Paul Sessel's Creative Displays of Stilwell, Mo., don't see much of an offseason, given that holiday lighting constitutes 100 percent of what his company does.

"There really is a lot of marketing and planning involved and, come Jan. 1, we take on a big preorder sale for our customers," Sessel says. "At that time, we give the biggest discounts of the year to those who preorder their holiday items and place (our) delivery for summer."

To Sessel's way of thinking, that gives his company a heads-up for what items they'll need to focus on in the coming year. He says it even has helped his company see LEDs emerging as a customer favorite.

"The first three months of the year,

we're into cataloging, repricing our website, working on marketing collateral and the general planning for the season – all of which is informed by our previous year. Then after that we start receiving product, we take stock and get organized," Sessel says. "By June we've received most of our product and the warehouse is packed and we're starting to deliver."

Apart from hanging lights, a holiday lighting contractor "has a lot to do during downtime – especially when it comes to offseason marketing, customer feedback

Here's who we talked to

COMPANY NAME	PRINCIPAL	LOCATION	YEAR FOUNDED	ANNUAL REVENUE	EMPLOYEES	CUSTOMER BREAKDOWN	SERVICES OFFERED
Creative Displays	Paul Sessel	Stilwell/ Kansas City, Mo.	1959 (he has owned since 1994)	n/a	3	40% residential; 60% commercial	Imports and sells throughout the country and Canada
Creative Decorating	Brad Finkle	Omaha, Neb.	1980	\$400,000	6	70% residential; 30% commercial	Holiday lighting, full decorating for special events, parties, full line of training materials for start-up businesses
Brite Ideas	Travis Freeman	Omaha, Neb.	1990	More than \$1 million	30 full time	75% residential; 25% commercial	Holiday, one-stop shop for interior and exterior design, commercial specific products
Holiday Bright Lights	Scott Heese	Omaha, Neb.	2003	n/a	23	80% residential; 20% commercial	Holiday lights sales, supply and support year-round
Christmas Décor of Northern Kentucky	Michael List	Lexington, Ky.	1999 grounds; 2001 holiday	n/a	11 full time	50% residential; 50% commercial	Grounds maintenance, holiday décor

and storage," says Michael List of Christmas Décor of Northern Kentucky.

"And actually, the storage is part of the attractiveness to having professionals decorate," he says. "There's big appeal for commercial and residential clients alike in that. You need a facility of some type – be it a garage, warehouse, or whatever – and remember that heat and dust are the biggest enemies of Christmas decorations and lights. With all that heat and dust, the glue starts to come undone, the contacts get dirty and other troubles come along, so being an active caregiver in the offseason for your decorations is important and a valuable use of your time."

List also says that customer feedback is an important endeavor for offseason time.

"You need to take that time to connect with your customers right after the holidays while you're still fresh in their minds," List says of his customers. "In January, you're just trying to get things down and done. But in those first six weeks after the New Year, getting your client a survey, following up with a call – a friendly voice – means a lot." As would be expected, handling that follow-up with a commercial/corporate client is handled a bit differently – at least according to List.

"Most residents are generally not accustomed to having a lot of marketing material for Christmas in July or August," he says with a laugh. "But with big box stores gearing up for the holidays earlier and earlier all the time, tagging them with some marketing collateral is becoming more prevalent."

In the end, List says the off-peak time is all about organization and planning.

"You have to have support staff, get your next round of training in order if need be and help gear up your techs and staff to be prepared to work 70 hours a week during peak season, but your office personnel and staff need a game plan to get everything geared up.



Holiday lighting is hard work, even when snow isn't on the ground.

"When the time comes to pull that trigger, you're not scrambling trying to figure the finer details," he says. "It's the key to the holiday business, and to have someone who can orchestrate a symphony of workers."

The biggest thing in the holiday lighting business is being organized because of the timeframe, says Brad Finkle, principal of Creative Decorating in Omaha, Neb.

"There's such a limited window of opportunity with the holidays, and it can be even more crunched if the weather turns bad. More organized and prepared you and your company is for any potential situation, the more homes you'll be able to do properly in a month.

"Right now, we're already refurbishing trees and wreaths for the upcoming season," Finkle says. "This way, we're not scrambling ... we will have everything ready for install on Oct. 1 for all our customers."

Finkle also says that this kind of planning is not exclusive to holiday-only companies and actually benefits com-

panies where holidays are a secondary or tertiary income stream even more.

"When you have another business, if you're in a climate where weather hasn't changed – and yet you have landscaping and Christmas at the same time – there's so much work you can't handle if you're not prepared. And that can be damaging to your credibility if you can't handle it," he says.

John Trimble, national sales director of Brite Ideas in Omaha, Neb., says holiday lighting comes down to one thing: Planning.

"Holiday lighting can be an immensely valuable part of your business, but if you're just trying to shore up numbers and get out of red and into the black with adding holiday lighting, that's the wrong thing to do without proper preparation," he says.

"You can do your business a great disservice – or even ruin your business – by spreading yourself thin. If you're looking for holiday lighting to be a savior for your bottom line, whether it's your primary or secondary focus, if you're not willing to put the time, effort, research and engagement into it, that can only make things worse when you're trying to make things better." 🍷

"Holiday lighting can be an immensely valuable part of your business."

– John Trimble

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COVER STORY (continued from page 38)

much more efficient. I can find files.”

True says that going paperless actually is more secure than using paper.

“With a paperless system you’re able to keep track of all of your documents, you’re able to control who has access to them, you’re able to track what users have done with it,” he says.

True says if you don’t want to delete a specific document, you can buy a retention policy, which makes the document permanent.

And as far as the time it will take to scan your old documents into the computer

system, Newlin says it was a gradual process. He held on to most documents for about five years, and anything that wasn’t scanned was later shredded.

While going paperless can help with efficiencies, True says you can also use it as marketing tool for a landscaping company.

“It’s always a good message when you can make the claim that not only is our landscaping earth-friendly, our entire business is run with the environment in mind,” he says.

The author is an associate editor with *Lawn & Landscape*. He can be reached at bhorn@gje.net

Reclaimed WATERS



Using wastewater can be a solution for areas hit by droughts. By Frank S. Rossi

The recurrent droughts experienced through the United States each year have given the turf industry pause. Watershed commissions that cross state lines, water management districts that determine water needs and municipal water suppliers continue to question the use of potable water for recreational (read: non-essential) use.

The Northeast Climate Center reported that 2010 in the Northeastern U.S. was the driest in recorded history. The Southeast U.S. is in the throws of the most significant drought in the last 100 years. The Florida turf industry may soon be facing phased-in restrictions that will allow watering of lawns once per week or not at all.

(continued on page 80)

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GROUPON®

THE BIG DEAL

How low can you go? Appealing to Groupon subscribers means crafting a sweet promotion and likely losing money on the service. But is it worth the cost to gain new clients? By Kristen Hampshire

Customers are going ga-ga over Groupon and similar group buying coupon sites like LivingSocial. Who wouldn't want to find a down and dirty deal in their email inbox every day? We're talking restaurant meals valued at \$50 for \$15, \$100 massages for \$25 – and now, \$55 weed control applications for \$30 or even an \$873 spring planting deal for \$249.

"It's something a little different than relying on your website and the old search engine on the Internet, or word-of-mouth marketing," says Christopher Greer, vice president/designer at John's Landscaping in San Antonio.

The sheer demographics of Groupon's membership turned Greer and other landscape professionals on to the daily coupon service. Why not give it a try? For instance, Greer estimates that 35 percent of the approximate half-million people in San Antonio subscribe to Groupon.

Groupon is in 500 markets and has 70-million subscribers. Its staff is 1,500 strong and the company famously rejected Google's offer to buy the fast-growing site for \$6 billion.

Groupon is a big deal.

And that's exactly why the professionals *Lawn & Landscape* spoke with this month decided to give the coupon giant a shot. Read on to find out what sort of deals your peers are offering on sites like Groupon, and the pros and cons of marketing via a "daily deal."

Attracting new clients

Christopher Greer was looking for an out-of-the-box tactic to advertise John's Landscaping's services to fresh prospects. Rather than spending thousands on TV commercials or radio ads, he turned to his email inbox for inspiration.

Greer is a Groupon member, but he bucks the trend of Groupon's typical demographic: "Most of them are single women ages 25 to 40," he says. His target market is generally married couples ages 35 to 55.



John's Landscaping

Christopher Greer, vice-president/designer **LOCATION** San Antonio **ESTABLISHED** 1991 **EMPLOYEES** 16 **2010 REVENUES** \$900,000 **CUSTOMERS** 80% residential; 20% commercial **SERVICES** maintenance, design/build

John's Landscaping's Groupon experience was so successful it ran a second deal three months later.

Running a deal on Groupon wasn't exactly hitting the company's sweet spot, but it was something new. So John's Landscaping ran its first Groupon in December, the day after Christmas.

Takers could cash in on a design consultation, four flats of annuals and four yards of mulch for \$249 – a value of \$873.

"For being such a high price point and being the day after Christmas, Groupon told us they would be happy if we sold 16," Greer says.

The first day of the promotion, 63 Groupon members bought John's Landscaping's deal. By the third day, that number had climbed to 107 purchases from brand-new customers. "Basically, we got 107 new clients who didn't know us or anything about us before Christmas," Greer says.

Groupon urges companies to run down and dirty deals. Members want their inbox to flood with offers for 50 to 80 percent off.

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QUICK TIPS

Think like a customer. Would you use Groupon to purchase services like yours? "We are all shoppers and consumers in this world – so think about what you would appreciate," Greer says.

Go ahead, take a risk. Greer wasn't so sure he'd have any takers running a Groupon the day after Christmas. But his deal worked. And the next time, the price was even higher – and that worked, too.

Devise a service strategy. If you sell a hundred or more Groupons, how will you manage the influx of phone calls – how will you fulfill your promise? Decide how much man-power you need to deliver, and ramp up accordingly.

It works for the demographic who subscribes to the free coupon service, and the companies who post offers can win by earning volume sales. Reeling in lots of buyers is important because the profit margins on coupon sales are skimpy at best.

"Our first offer was priced

to cover our hard costs and overhead – that's it," he says.

Groupon took 50 percent, plus a 2.5 percent credit card processing fee because members pay with plastic. So John's Landscaping took home 47.5 percent of the \$249 service price, making about \$10 on each sale.

But that cost analysis doesn't paint the full picture. "Eighty-seven percent of those 107 people added work to the Groupon," Greer says. One customer signed on for a \$25,000 project. About a dozen became regular maintenance customers.

Overall, Greer's first Groupon effort was a success – so he decided to run another offer in March 2011. This time, he pushed the price point even higher, up to \$2,995 for a 20-by-20 foot flagstone patio valued at \$5,500. Thirty-six customers took advantage of the offer.

The Groupon split on the second deal was 70/30 in favor of John's Landscaping,

so the company essentially broke even.

"I'm not sure you can put a value or price point on new clients that end up being thrilled with your work," Greer says, figuring that Groupon will spark word-of-mouth advertising – more free marketing.

To manage the volume, Greer hired three new employees, which was in line with the growing company's business plan, and because many of the customers decided to wait until spring to take advantage of the annual flats/mulch offer and flagstone patio, he could plan these projects and ramp up accordingly.



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EWING

Sparking service interest

What would it cost to make contact with 134 fresh prospects and close sales with each of them? Jeremy White can't pin down a number, but he knows that the estimated \$3,000 cost of offering a Groupon weed control deal more than paid for itself. The reward was exposure and an opportunity to get clients hooked on his service.

"We've tried Valpak coupons and we've run ads in the paper, we have signs on our trucks – but we haven't

Midwest Lawn and Landscaping

Jeremy White, president **LOCATION** Oklahoma City, Okla. **ESTABLISHED** 1999 **EMPLOYEES** 7 **2010 REVENUES** \$500,000 **CUSTOMERS** 90% residential; 10% commercial **SERVICES** maintenance and lawn care

been very aggressive with our advertising for the most part," says White, president of Midwest Lawn and Landscaping in Oklahoma City, Okla. "For many years, we were frozen and maintained our clientele."

A couple years ago, White decided to ramp up his weed control service. "Groupon was one of our interventions to grow that business," he says.

Pricing out the alternatives, he found that Valpak costs about \$1,000 in his region for a coupon ad that reaches 40,000 people. In the past, White has received about 10 jobs from these efforts. A pre-purchased coupon like Groupon that is Internet-based appealed to White.

Midwest Lawn and Landscaping offered a \$20 Groupon for \$40 in



weed control (an estimated 4,000 square-foot property). Groupon takes half of the \$20 plus the credit card fee, so White received slightly less than \$10 for each purchase. But 134 Groupons were sold, and the phones began ringing immediately the week after his two-day promotion ran.

"That was a challenge," White says. To manage the volume, he left instructions on his voicemail guiding customers to his website. "We asked them to fill out our contact form, which was emailed back to us."

Calls flooded the office for a week to 10 days, and then White worked jobs into routes according to geography. Because he specified his service area in the Groupon, all of the coupon takers lived in his coverage area – except for one. "I gave them the option to get their

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QUICK TIPS

Structure a solid deal. Groupon and other coupon companies want businesses to quantify exactly what customers will get for their money. So choose a service you can spell out specifically, such as White's deal for 4,000 square feet of weed control.

Add some fine print. Consider the possible ways a customer could use your Groupon and eliminate loopholes that could cost you more than you bargained for. For instance, consider limiting the Groupon to one per customer so no one buys multiples and pre-pays for a super-cheap year of services.

Know your geography. Set service area parameters if you don't want crews hauling to areas that are miles away from your sweet spot.

money back and they did that through Groupon," White says.

Another tricky situation White ran into was when a Groupon buyer purchased multiple offers for her 10,000 square-foot property. White honored the deal, but he was relieved that no one else had purchased in bulk. "If I were to run the Groupon again, I would include a disclaimer that says one coupon per property," he says. "Essentially, someone

could buy an entire year's worth of weed control at a very cheap cost."

All told, White received about \$1,000 from pre-paid Groupon purchases and invested \$4,000 in services. That \$3,000 won him 134 opportunities to sell services to clients he didn't know before the promotion. "Of those, 15 are confirmed repeat customers and a good 30 of them are potential repeat customers (for a lawn care program)," White says.

Layering promotions

"I'll try anything once," says Jeff Kollenkark, president, Weed Man of Fresno, on why he decided to give Groupon a shot when the company called asking him to run a promotion.

"My greatest fear is that we would have a lot of our customers getting offers that are cheap – that they'd be buying the Groupon and then we'd lose money," Kollenkark says. But only 8 percent of the 212 people who purchased the offer were existing clients. The Groupon was for a \$25 one-time fertilization/weed control (up to a \$55 value – and beyond that, customers must pay full price).

Another fear: Looking like a bargain-bin provider. "I don't want to get a



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reputation for being deep discount," Kollenkark says. "I'm not the cheapest guy in the market, and I don't want to be."

But through Groupon, Kollenkark wanted to reach out to new customers in the Fresno/Clovis, Calif., market who are interested in improving their lawns.

Better yet, he signed on 15 new lawn care program customers.

"We did Groupon to get some face time," Kollenkark says, noting that his technicians did not go out to service coupon buyers' lawns unless residents confirmed they would be home at the



Weed Man of Fresno

Jeff Kollenkark, president **LOCATION** Fresno, Calif. **ESTABLISHED** 2001 became Weed Man franchise (1994 started in lawn care)
EMPLOYEES 14 **2010 REVENUES** \$2.1 million
CUSTOMERS 98% residential; 2% commercial
SERVICES lawn care

time of application. "We talk to customers when we are treating their property – that's what makes us different."

A layering approach to marketing gives Weed Man of Fresno the type of exposure it needs to ramp up sales year-round and in the spring. It spends about \$115,000 on door-to-door marketing, TV ads and home shows each year.

"I didn't pay anything for Groupon other than my lost revenue, but that was from business I didn't have in the first place," he says. "I didn't pay them to run the ad. They sent me a check for \$2,500 for 212 Groupons that were purchased."

Kollenkark calculated \$4,000 of new business from the 15 people who signed on for a lawn care program. He figures he "lost" about \$2,600. "I offered \$30 bucks off for the chance to talk to someone new – that's reasonable," he says.

The appealing part of the promotion is that for a relatively low cost, interested customers basically came to Weed Man of Fresno's door. "They raised their hands and basically said, 'Talk to me,'" Kollenkark says. **L&L**

The author is a frequent contributor to *Lawn & Landscape*.

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Get face time. Make personal contact with Groupon buyers so you take advantage of the opportunity to turn the one-time sale into a regular gig.

Mix it up. Offers like Groupon fit into an overall marketing program that includes a variety of efforts at Weed Man of Fresno.

Save it for special occasions. If your business strategy is to provide premium services, consider whether a deep discount falls in line with your mission. "We used Groupon as a chance to speak with people who care about their lawns, but I don't want to be there because people are looking for a one-time lowball deal," Kollenkark says.

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HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE

By Matt LaWell



EDITOR'S NOTE:

To help out busy contractors, each month throughout 2011, *Lawn & Landscape* will run a review and synopsis of a business book – either from the accepted literary canon or a more modern classic. The seventh installment is Dale Carnegie's "*How To Win Friends and Influence People*." The rest of the year's reading list includes:

212: The Extra Degree

Sam Parker

7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Stephen Covey

The Prince

Niccolo Machiavelli

Marketing Warfare

Al Ries and Jack Trout

See You at the Top

Zig Ziglar

The E-Myth Revisited

Michael Gerber



Good to Great

Jim Collins



The Essential Drucker

Peter Drucker



Getting Things Done

David Allen



Outliers

Malcolm Gladwell



Linchpin: Are You Indispensable

Seth Godin



I was 10 years old the first time I read "How to Win Friends and Influence People." Seriously.

My life had been easy to that point, my childhood spent in comfortable suburbs that shielded me and so many of my friends and classmates from the evils and the hard truths of the world, my only struggles fleeting creations of my active imagination. *Why did I receive an A-minus in Science instead of an A? Why did Math homework take an hour to finish instead of 45 minutes? Did Mrs. Smith call us in early from recess?*

But I managed to grow up that year, too, and I started to wonder about more important things, like friends and perception and the mirage of popularity. I started to wonder whether people actually liked me. I convinced myself that they didn't.

I probably inflated the whole situation out of proportion – I seem to remember talking with my parents about it in the middle of the night – but the end result is all that matters now, almost 20 years later. My dad, who worked for decades in public affairs, pulled his Dale Carnegie classic from the shelf and handed it to me. "Read this," he said. "There's a lot of good information in here."

Right, because doesn't every 10-year-old read "How to Win Friends and Influence People"? Thing is, it worked. I read Carnegie and applied his techniques – use first names, never criticize, smile all the time, among so many others – and never wondered again whether people liked me.

I hadn't spent much time since then with Carnegie and what is probably the most important business book out there – even now, 75 years after its initial publication – until it popped up on the Business Bookshelf reading list.

What a mistake. It's even better now:

Allow people to talk about themselves. None of us knows more about anything than

we know about ourselves. None of us loves to talk about anything more than we love to talk about ourselves.

The sweetest sound to our ears is that of our own name. The whole first half of this book review was a personal childhood story. Why? Because, even if I wind up teaching his courses, I'll never know more about Dale Carnegie than I already do about my own life. And that goes for every one of us. If we can get others to talk about themselves, we've won them over. "If you aspire to be a good conversationalist, be an attentive listener," Carnegie writes. "To be interesting, be interested."

Don't beat up people while they talk.

Not physically, of course, and not verbally, either. Best to avoid arguments (even the winners lose), show respect for folks and never tell them they're wrong (even if they are) and, if you're wrong, admit it quickly (even if you have to suck up some of your pride). Carnegie quotes thinkers, authors and regular folks throughout the book. One of them is Lord Chesterfield, who, in one of his famous letters to his son, said "Be wiser than other people if you can, but do not tell them so." Another is Socrates, who simply said, "One thing only I know, and that is that I know nothing." Not a bad strategy to take when talking with others.

Take responsibility before blaming.

Carnegie trumpets the humble leader. Praise first, he says, talk about your own mistakes before you criticize others, let others save face, build them up rather than rip them down. Over and over, Carnegie quotes Charles Schwab (the steel magnate, not the investment titan). "Be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise." Why drive people to failure when you can help lead them to success? **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



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INSURANCE

Common claims

Simple steps to trim your insurance costs.

By Matt Lyon

One of your employees is traveling between job sites when he receives a call on his cell phone. As he leans over to grab the phone, he doesn't see the car in front of him brake and hits the other vehicle from behind at 35 mph.

Unfortunately, this is a common accident scenario. It can result in workers' compensation and auto insurance

claims for your business, as well as increased premiums on your insurance policies at the next renewal, lost productivity and lots of paperwork.

When buying insurance, landscapers and their insurance agents often focus on the worst types of claims that could happen. But it's equally impor-

tant to focus on the scenarios most likely to happen.

These are the types of accidents and mishaps that can drive up insurance costs, strain relationships and hurt a company's reputation with

suppliers, customers and employees.

In a recent review of thousands of claims involving small business cus-

tomers, The Hartford identified several of the most common categories of insurance claims for landscapers [see the chart to the right].

Consider these common claim scenarios for landscaping businesses.

EMPLOYEE INJURY. Lifting, digging and working with mowers are all in a day's

For more of this article, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "insurance."



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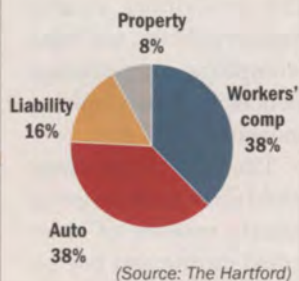


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Common claim categories for landscaping businesses



work for landscapers. Given the physical nature of the work, on-the-job injuries can be more severe for landscapers than other industries, costing employers more and requiring longer recovery times.

Back, leg and other general strain injuries are particularly common. Workers' compensation claims can impact a business in multiple ways.

An employer may need to hire replacement help while an injured employee is recovering. Also, since premiums are often based on a company's prior claim experience, a significant claim can trigger a cost increase at policy renewal.

DAMAGE TO PROPERTY. You're completing a job for a client that involves planting several large exotic trees. You have purchased the trees – \$3,000 each – from a nursery where you have a longstanding relationship.

While moving the trees from the nursery's delivery truck to the final planting destination, one of your seasonal employees drives his front loader down a steep hill, and two trees fall off, resulting in split trunks and ruined trees.

These types of claims, commonly known as "property damage as a result of handling," accounted for approximately one in four liability claims for landscaping companies.

While they tend to be less costly and resolution is faster and easier than other types of liability claims, they can impair relationships with both clients and suppliers.

THEFT OF EQUIPMENT. You just bought a new zero-turn mower to increase productivity. While a mower may seem too big to steal, the potential for theft is actually very real. Our review of claims found that theft accounted for nearly three in four property claims among landscapers.

Smaller, more common tools and equipment, which can be easily hidden and removed from job sites, are more often the targets of theft, but larger equipment is stolen as well. **L&L**

“On-the-job injuries can be more severe for landscapers than other industries.”



The author is with the the small commercial insurance division of The Hartford Financial Services Group. He can be reached at mlyon@gjmedia.com.



Just treatment

Don't be unfair to your employees by violating the Fair Labor Standards Act. By Steven Cesare, Ph.D.

This is the ninth in a series of the top 10 most serious HR mistakes landscape contractors make. To read previous installments, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "Cesare."

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) is one of those laws that most landscapers have never heard about by name, but are constantly aware of, due to its widespread effect on them. This law addresses numerous compensation issues that affect all employers, especially landscapers, including: overtime, travel time, training time and hourly versus salary status.

It is critical for landscapers to know what is and what is not legally required (e.g., vacations, holiday pay, discharge notice) by the FLSA,

and how it corresponds to respective state laws.

To that end, this article provides basic information outlining the penalties associated with FLSA violations, summarizes common FLSA violations and presents best-in-class practices to help ensure legal compliance.

Common violations include: Not paying for unapproved overtime, allowing employees to waive their overtime pay rate, not paying for travel time and not defining the workweek.

PENALTIES. When federal investigators encounter FLSA violations, they often recommend changes in employment practices to bring the employer into compliance,

and require payment of back wages for up to three years due to employees, an equal amount in liquidated damages and attorneys' fees. Beyond those penalties, willful violators may be prosecuted criminally and fined up to \$10,000, and a second conviction can result in imprisonment.

Employers who willfully or repeatedly violate the minimum wage or overtime pay requirements are subject to civil money penalties of up to \$1,100 per violation.

BEST-IN-CLASS PRACTICES. These best-in-class practices can help landscapers mini-

mize exposure to violations:

- **Employee handbook:** Clearly identify all relevant FLSA guidelines, related company policies, and legally-compliant compensation practices in their employee handbook.

- **Time sheet attestations:** Should show employees: (a) accurate number of hours worked during this pay period, (b) took the required meal period each day during this pay period and (c) were not injured at work during this pay period.

- **Classification analysis:** Conduct rigorous and well-documented FLSA exemption analyses (e.g., salary test and duties test) on all positions claimed to be exempt.

- **Record keeping:** Maintain the 14 types of payroll records required by the Department of Labor for each non-exempt employee and retain all payroll records for three years and records on which wage computations (e.g., time sheets, wage rate table, wage deductions) are based for two years.



Cesare

SUMMARY. While landscapers may have a basic understanding of compensation guidelines, it is in their best interest to become familiar with the FLSA as well as their respective state wage and hour laws. This can save landscapers time, worry and legal costs associated with FLSA non-compliance. **L&L**

The author is an industrial psychologist with the Harvest Group, a landscape consulting group. You can send him your questions at scesare@giemedia.com.

For descriptions of common FLSA violations, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "Cesare."



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Conduct a water audit

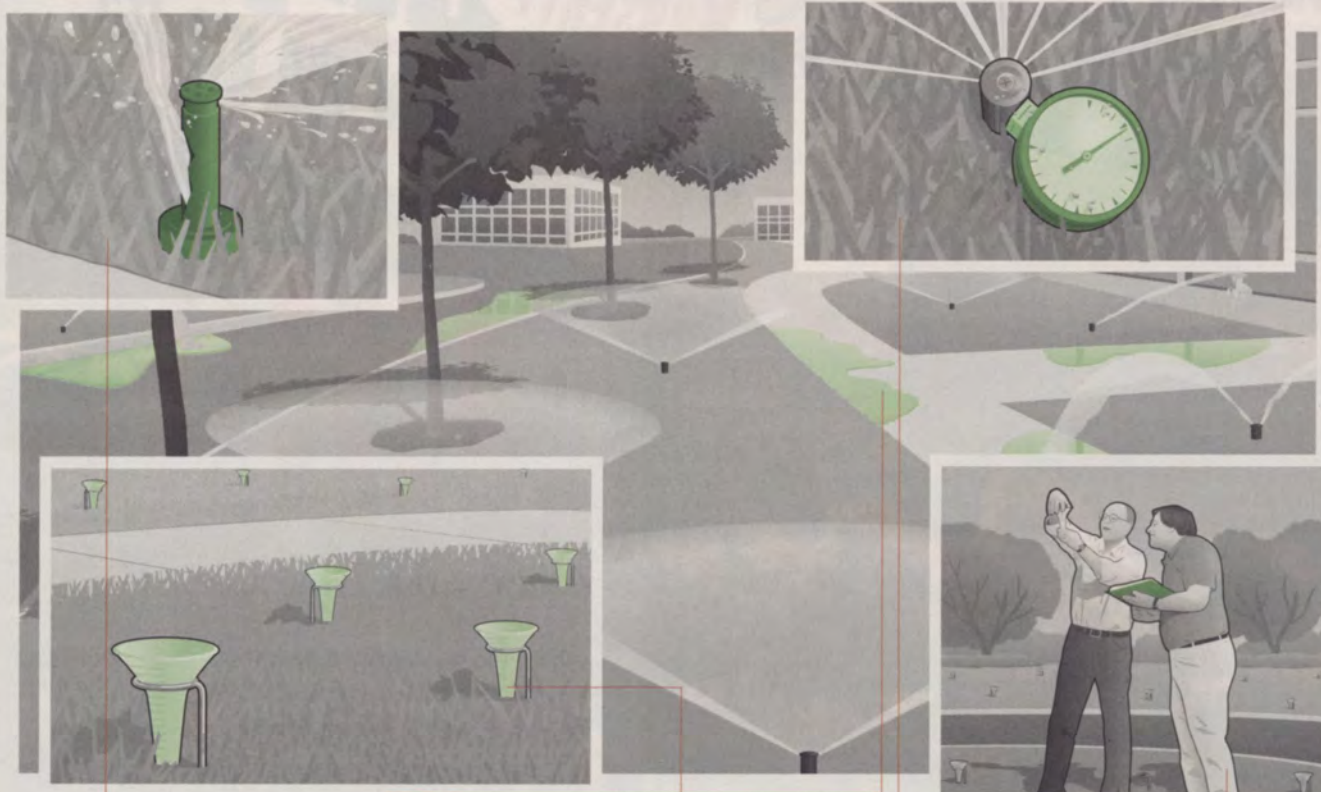
Take a drive through a typical office park or suburban neighborhood and you're almost guaranteed to see irrigation systems that take a sort of shotgun approach to watering.

Rotors spray into the street. Misting nozzles coat the sidewalk. One zone looks more like Old Faithful than anything resembling a graceful arc of water.

Too often, contractors miss an opportunity to tune up irrigation systems they install or service. With many municipalities cracking down on water use and water districts raising rates, a simple water audit could save your clients a lot of water and money – and help your company stand out in a crowded and competitive field.

"A water audit provides the opportunity to evaluate and improve the reliability and efficiency of your irrigation system," says Craig Borland, senior customer resource specialist for The Toro Co.

Here, Borland lays out how to measure a system's performance and make sure it's operating at peak efficiency. – *Chuck Bowen*



1

Inspect the entire system. Run through all the zones and measure the water pressure while the sprinklers are operating. Record wind speed and look for worn or leaky sprinkler seals as well as heads that are below grade or crooked.

2

Look for signs of overwatering. If you see puddles, water running down the street or geysers of water shooting from a broken head or pipe, make a note and inspect these sites for repairs.

3

Set out cups, also referred to as catchments, in the lawn to measure the dispersal of water.

4

Measure the water dispersal and the pressure on the system. If the amount of water captured in the cups differs widely, it's a sign of inefficient water usage. Even levels indicate uniform watering. You can download a whitepaper on calculating uniformity at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

5

Repair and report. Raise or lower sprinkler heads to grade, patch or replace broken water lines and adjust spray arcs so you're only watering things that need water. After you've improved the system's efficiency, give your client a report outlining what you did and any water savings they can expect.

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Horizon
The Edge You Need

Nitrogen needs

How higher prices and new science could change your application rates.

By Frank S. Rossi

Mark Twain once wrote, "There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale returns of conjecture out of such a trifling investment of fact." Oddly this is the best way to describe how the "dogma" of late season nitrogen and fertilization has evolved in turf.

For much of the last 40 years, few have questioned the value of applying high rates of nitrogen to almost

dormant turf just prior to the onset of winter. There appeared to be a significant benefit. Fertilizer was relatively inexpensive when compared to other inputs, and it provided an additional service opportunity to most lawn and landscape firms.

However, during the last decade, growing concern for the effect of nitrogen on water quality and the overall effect of global fertilizer

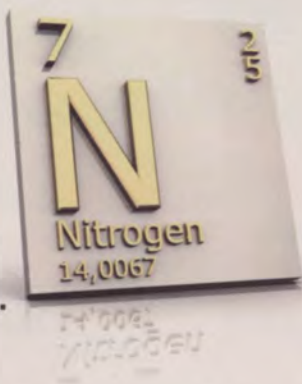
demand on price called the questions: How real is the benefit of late-season applied nitrogen? And if there is a benefit, how much is enough?

LATE-SEASON NITROGEN.

Some of the oldest turfgrass research has espoused the benefits of applying nitrogen to turf at the end of the growing season prior to the onset of winter.

Still, as the discussion about nitrogen has evolved to include water quality, research has indicated that independent of the source of nitrogen the later in the season the application is made the more leaches into the groundwater. Clearly there is an environmental concern related to late season nitrogen use, in spite of the well-established agronomic benefits. It then becomes a question of balancing the two needs.

Several studies have investigated sources and timing to reveal some interesting results. Oddly, while most of the research was conducted with various nitrogen



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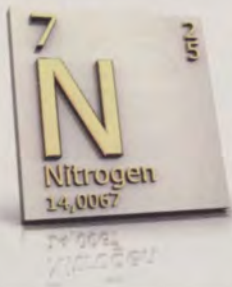
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FALL FERTILIZATION



“As an industry, we need to be open to the evolving ideas that science brings to enhance our precision. In the end, it will lead to improved efficiencies.”

sources, it was always applied at the “sacred” 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 100-square-foot rate.

More recent cool-season turfgrass research on Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and here at Cornell University has begun investigating reduced rates using different nitrogen sources applied at different timings from September through December. To date, it appears the agronomic benefit from late season nitrogen can be achieved by applying inexpensive forms of water-soluble urea or ammonium sulfate at 0.3 - 0.5 pounds per 1,000 square feet in September or October.

These earlier application times combined with the lower application rates provide adequate agronomic benefits with reduced overall leaching problems. This is the kind of research we need to get out into the hands of practitioners and regulators to help them enact enforceable, science-based regulations. Not regulations based on conjecture.

As an industry, we need to be open to the evolving ideas that science brings to enhance our precision. In the end, it will lead to improved efficiencies. Heck if we get the same response with less nitrogen that was leaching anyway and the sources we use are less expensive, who'd argue with that?

Of course many scientific and logistical questions remain about late season nitrogen. There are questions concerning uptake mechanisms, evapotranspiration, disease issues and further refining application strategies before a complete picture can be drawn. But for now, as Twain would say, let the conjecture begin. **L&L**

The author is an associate professor at Cornell University.

To read more on fall fertilization, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search “nitrogen.” For more research on this topic, as well as other fertilizer and water issues, visit bitly.com/lawntolake.



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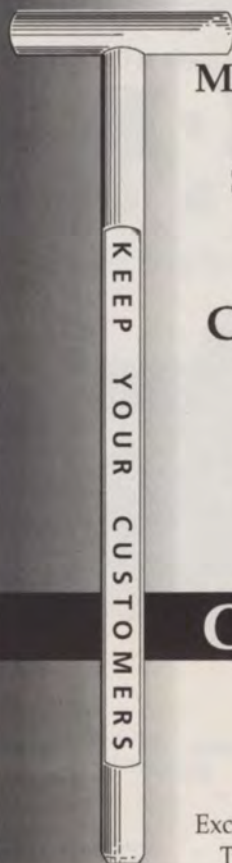
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PLANT DISEASE PROFILE

(Left to right): Necrotic ring spot (*Leptosphaeria korrae*) and Summer patch (*Magnaporthe poae*) both are common in northern home lawns comprised of Kentucky bluegrass and fine fescue.



Necrotic ring spot and Summer patch

Managing the diseases once considered Fusarium blight. By Ron Smith

Fusarium blight was declared an extinct disease by J.M. Vargas Jr. in his 1994 text on turfgrass disease management, and separated into Necrotic ring spot (*Leptosphaeria korrae*) and Summer patch (*Magnaporthe poae*), both of which commonly occur on northern home lawns comprised of Kentucky bluegrass

and fine fescue. It was through critical research that the disease moniker went from *Fusarium* to the *Leptosphaeria spp.* and with that, a critical integrated management program has evolved.

CULTURAL APPROACHES. With any patch disease, basic good lawn care goes a long

way. That is: balanced fertility, proper irrigation and mowing practices and core aeration to control thatch buildup.

- Fertility needs of turfgrass should be met following soil test recommendations. In most instances, turfgrass fertilizer comes with a high percentage and ratio of nitrogen when compared

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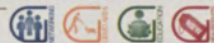
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PLANT DISEASE PROFILE

“With any of the patch diseases, basic good lawn care will go a long way.

with the other two macro-elements of phosphorus and potassium.

Many times the key to better disease management is to increase the level of these two elements with separate applications as a result of soil testing. The basic application of typical spring and fall lawn fertilizers will help to maintain a sufficient balance for healthy turfgrass growth.

- In both instances of Necrotic ring spot and Summer patch, light daily syringing cycles from the irrigation

system at mid-day to lower heat stress on the turf will reduce the symptoms of these diseases and encourage redevelopment of the damaged roots from these pathogens.

- Mowing in the evening hours when temperatures are dropping and heat stress is minimized is better for the grass plant than early morning mowing.

Mowing should be at 3 inches or higher with cool-season grasses with the clippings returned, and should continue right through the

fall as long as it is growing, with the last one at a lower mowing height with the clippings being collected.

- Core aeration along with timely power raking when the grass is actively growing will help to correct chronic patch disease problems.

With lawns established from peat sod rather than mineral sod, a bulk density difference between the sod backing and the soil it is placed upon will contribute to patch disease development. The peat sod is preferred by both homeowners and contractors because of its generally more attractive appearance and easier handling.

Knowing that peat sod will

be placed on a mineral or clay based soil should alert the homeowner that regular coring and power raking will be required for the following three years after rooting in to keep the grass from developing this disease syndrome.

CHEMICAL CONTROL. For fungicide treatment, it is suggested to use either an acropetal systemic or any product that contains thiophanate-methyl as the active ingredient, or a Strobilurin class such as products that contain the active ingredient azoxystrobin or trifloxystrobi. L&L

The author is a horticulturist and turfgrass specialist at North Dakota State University.

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Deer

The right plant selections can keep deer away from your customers' yards.

By Ron Smith

With estimated populations of deer increasing every year throughout the country, their natural predators decreasing in number and their natural habitat being continually destroyed by human development, expect to have an ongoing deer predation problem. Here are some suggestions that will work for some of you some of the time, but not for all of you all the time. The tactic for best deer control is to anticipate their damage and head them off with one or a combination of the suggestions in this article.

DIVERSIFY PLANT SELECTIONS. As a nation, we have a love for certain plant species, many of which turn out to be on the deer population's hit list of favorites: arborvitae, yews, tulips, fruit trees (crabapples, peach, apple, etc.), petunias and just about any vegetable garden medley. While the total abandonment of these and other such species are not rec-

Deer will stay away from some plants, but if they're starving, they'll eat anything.



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ommended, serious thought should be given to species diversification in plant selection. Why? Like humans, deer have a preference list for consumption.

A wildlife specialist told me that deer and rabbits would never graze on Colorado spruce. I took that as gospel until it was witnessed the grazing taking place on just those plants in the landscape.

Given a variety of plants that would be classed as a "low priority" for the deer, damage from their grazing can then at least be limited. For a list of these plants in your location, contact the county extension office to get hooked up with a university horticulturist who should be able to provide a list of probable selections that would be adaptable to your area.

The following is a scattering of plant materials that I have observed being left alone where deer predation is evident in the immediate area.

TREES: Holly, oak, pine, spruce, sweetgum, and black walnut;

SHRUBS: Juniper, Oleander, Rhododendron, Rosemary, Shrub Cinquefoil, Cactus, Yucca, Forsythia, Spirea, Lilac;

HERBACEOUS PLANTS: Bugleweed (*Ajuga* spp.), myrtle (*Vinca* spp.), bells of Ireland, Canterbury bell, daffodil, daylily, yarrow, Russian sage, hollyhock, bee balm (*Monarda* spp.) and *Verbena*.

In some instances, deer may come and sample one of these and other recommended species, then leave them alone. Personal experiences had me alter some of my landscape plantings. Finding it impossible to grow tulips due to predation, and noting that plantings of daffodils went untouched, I reset the tulips to be intermingled with the daffodil bulbs.

When the tulips begin showing as

the daffodils are beginning to decline, they are left alone to express their long-awaited beauty.

Keep in mind that just about any freshly installed plant material will pretty much attract deer and rabbit populations in the area. Give the plant material protection for several years with some of the following suggestions until they can get big enough to sustain a curiosity nibble from our hoofed and furry visitors.

PRODUCTS. Commercial products containing capsaicin, garlic, ammonium soaps of higher fatty acids, dried blood meal and/or rotten eggs will work if applied before feeding starts, are reapplied according to label directions, and starvation is not at a do or die level. **L&L**

The author is horticulturist and turfgrass specialist at North Dakota State University.

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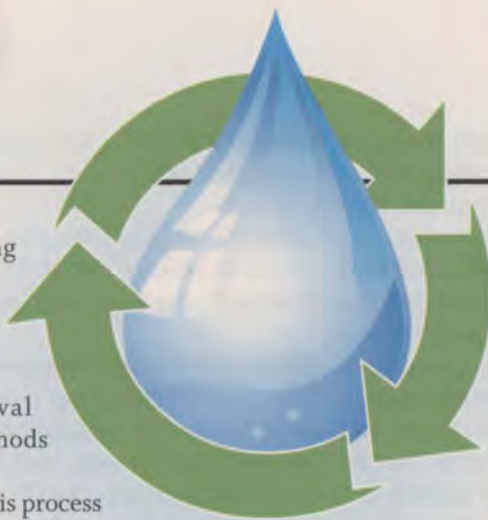
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COVER STORY (continued from page 52)



With less than 1 percent of the world's water available for human consumption and 80 percent of the fresh water consumed for agriculture, concern is growing in the industry on water used for maintaining greenspace.

WASTEWATER LAWS. With population growth and the demand for potable water expected to increase, the turfgrass industry can no longer take a passive approach to water use issues. The Western U.S. receives only one-third of the nation's rainfall, yet uses 80-85 percent of the nation's fresh water.

Effluent wastewater can be delivered following primary, secondary or tertiary treat-

and include using chemicals to flocculate remaining solids, then through more sediment removal and various methods of filtration.

A reverse osmosis process or chlorinating can occur prior to release, producing highly purified water.

In the end, the water will likely contain a variety of nutrients (from the waste), metals (from the flocculation) and salts (from the purification) that will require careful management to minimize their impact on turf quality.

Interestingly, real estate developments are constructing their own wastewater or

“Sodium salt can have a direct influence on plant growth in a manner similar to how dog urine burns leaf tissue.”

ment at a wastewater treatment facility. Primary treatment mechanically removes the majority of the solid waste with screens, grinders and settling tanks.

While primary treatment involves mechanical removal of solids, secondary treatment engages biological processes to remove the majority of the remaining solids.

Secondary treatment may also involve chlorinating prior to discharge. Water for turf and landscape uses must be at least experienced secondary treatment.

Several processes may follow secondary treatment

desalinization treatment facilities. Several Audubon International Signature Properties are leading the way with small facilities that utilize ultra filtration and biological reactors to treat wastewater before reusing.

Estimates are that the \$500,000 price tag can be recovered in a few years based on the increasing cost and restriction placed on irrigation water in South Florida.

INCREASED AWARENESS. Lawns managed with effluent water must realize that quality can be variable and will always have a variety of

“contaminants” that will require specific management practices.

Professors Bob Carrow and Ronny Duncan from the University of Georgia authored “Salt Affected Turfgrass Sites” in an effort to bring together the best thinking on managing turfgrass with poor quality water. The title of the Carrow and Duncan book clearly identifies the major challenge with effluent irrigation water – high salt content. But it is not the only issue.

The major agronomic and environmental issues suggest that the first step to using effluent water is to establish a regular monitoring program.

SALTY TURF. In a presentation at the 2010 Florida Turfgrass Conference, Carrow stated that “The three most important aspects of managing high salt content irrigation water is leaching, leaching, leaching.”

This is not simply a matter of copious amounts of water that keep salts moving downward, the you must know the type of salt that must be leached, rainfall amounts, turf species tolerance range and time of year.

Sodium salt can have a direct influence on plant

growth in a manner similar to how dog urine burns leaf tissue (although dog urine is a different salt).

However, while the direct burn from high salt content irrigation water is rare, high sodium content soils often produce plants that have restricted rooting and develop drought stress symptoms. Depending on the water source and rainfall pattern, the long-term effects of sodium on soils is well documented.

As sodium content increases in the soil, the vital process of aggregation is disrupted. Sodium molecules absorb large amounts of water and swell.

The swelling prohibits silt and clay particles from making larger aggregates that offer a variety of pore spaces for water and nutrients.

WHERE TO NOW? Most landscape managers, especially in areas with adequate rainfall take their high quality irrigation water for granted.

If the population continues to grow, the leadership effort by the turf industry in using effluent water could be viewed as facilitating “smart growth.” In other words, communities will need landscapes as outlets for societies waste, whether it is water or compost. **L&L**

The author is an associate professor at Cornell University.

For more of this article, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search “reclaimed water.”



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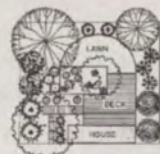
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Rick Brandenburg

William Neal Reynolds professor of entomology at North Carolina State University.

What have you been up to since you won the award in 2007?

Obviously, the fact that we've been in this recession and virtually every industry's been hurting, we've been trying to address a lot of the issues, looking for more cost effective ways of doing business.

From my perspective, that has a lot to do with, "Can we reduce rates of products we use and how well do generic products work?" – just a lot of issues that deal with cutting costs and improving efficiencies. Our program's been pushed in that direction to try and help the industry. ... The pressure to move in that direction has been a lot higher because of the economy.

Has that been a challenge or a smooth transition?

I don't think it's really been a challenge from the perspective of "Can we do it," be-

cause we certainly can. And we try to follow the needs of the industry. And as the industry has asked for more and more efficient ways of doing business, it's been something that we just have been encouraged to move in that direction.

If there is a challenging part, just like everyone else, universities are having a hard time financially in finding sponsors for that type of research. Even though people are interested in it, people just don't have extra money sitting around to support those things.

It's a challenge for everyone, including universities, just finding the funding to do the things you want and need to do.

Have you seen more students get into the green industry?

Not in the last two or three years. In fact, our numbers are down a little bit, and I think people just looked at it and they see that a lot of opportunities haven't been there the last couple of years. And students oftentimes, there's nothing we can do about it, are a little behind

the curve because we can't always give them good leadership, as far as the areas to go into.

And even though we know a lot of industries, including the green industry, are going to recover and come back very strong, we can't forecast where or when or what the job market is going to look like in a few years.

I think typically, and I can't blame anyone, when you go to school and you want to get degrees and advanced degrees, you really want to make sure there is a job out there, and it's hard to make promises.

Students are often reluctant to get into areas where they are uncertain and right now that's almost every area. But our numbers are down and I can't say that our numbers are down more than any other particular area.

You said in your 2007 profile that you leave work at work and that makes you a better entomologist. Is that still the case today?

I would say the last few years have been more challenging because I'm just like everybody else. It's been a difficult period and it takes more hours and more energy to

keep afloat right now, and it has taken a lot more work the last few years to deliver and provide the funding to keep my projects going. So, it has been a challenge for everyone, myself included, of keeping everything in perspective.

What's the best advice you've ever received?

My dad always told me to "Be nicer than necessary; you don't know what battles they are fighting."

I do remember my dad treating others with great respect and always trying to be helpful. I remember we sold a lot of fruits and vegetables on the farm and he would always give people 14 ears of sweet corn when they bought a dozen and so on.

If people didn't have the money to pay, he would tell them to pay him when they got a chance. I don't know if they ever did but he stayed with that philosophy. I think there is still a place for treating people with decency, respect and kindness.

My father passed away this past February and while the work ethic he taught me is a valuable component of what I do, I think the lessons about how to treat others is his greatest legacy to me. **L&L**



Read more from Brandenburg, including his 2007 Leadership profile, at www.lawnandlandscape.com/leadershiplessons.



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