

PROFESSIONAL PEST CONTROL: PART OF THE DISNEY MAGIC

For Bill Tanner, pest control supervisor at Walt Disney World's Lake Buena Vista Communities, maintaining the area's beautiful appearance is anything but magical. "We've got at least 76 different types of trees, five different grasses and over 300 varieties of ornamentals," he states, "and they all require a great deal of care."

A unique vacation community located on approximately 4,000 acres of Disney's expansive property in central Florida, Lake Buena Vista combines resort hotels, vacation villas, an office park, outdoor recreation, and a shopping village in a setting of grass, gardens, lakes and forests. Like all Disney World facilities, it is kept in top-notch condition all year round.

"Disney's concept was to create a total destination resort where we could house guests and provide them with all their needs, from the theme park itself to evening entertainment and tourist shopping," says Tanner, who came to Lake Buena Vista in 1978.

Of the community's 4,000 acres, 500 are what Bill refers to as high maintenance landscape areas. These are highly visible sites around Lake Buena Vista Village itself, and all areas developed for rental units or hotel sites.

"The village was designed like a New England seaside village, where everything surrounds an inlet," Bill explains. "There are 27 unique shops and a variety of places to eat."

Chinch Bug Resistance

"Because grass areas in the village are heavily trafficked, we elected to plant a certified, blue tag variety of St. Augustine Floratam." Developed by Florida State University and Texas A&M, Floratam is resistant to chinch bugs, a real menace to St. Augustine strains in Florida. "We try to keep a handle on factors that might stress our grass in any one area," Tanner points out, adding that they choose between Floratam, Ar-



Lake Buena Vista Village gives Bill Tanner a wide assortment of vegetation to pamper under heavy traffic conditions.

gentine Bahia, Zoysia, Bermuda and Centipede in selecting a variety to suit the theme and growing environment of each area. "The traffic in the village and the resulting stress make the area weed prone. This causes enough problems without adding chinch bugs."

All grass areas are under irrigation, a program Tanner feels is necessary to maintain the high quality appearance Disney is known for, but the beauty is also accompanied by a healthy dose of complications. "We are on a timed pop-up irrigation system all year round," Bill explains. "But we also get more than our share of rain. In September of 1979, for instance, we got 17 inches in 30 days and were forced to shut the system down, but that still didn't solve our problems."

Most of the landscaped areas Tanner works with are land fill created from soil dredged out to create the lakes. "It is a morrow clay or loose sand, so the water either runs down to the bedrock or hangs in the morrow. This keeps the root systems too wet too long," he laments, noting that defoliation often results.

This situation, coupled with Florida's warm days and cool nights, also sets up an almost ideal environment for the development of fungi such as pythium, leaf spotting and bacteria wilt in the annual flower beds, not to mention various insect problems. "We get leaf miners in our marigolds, cutworms and large green hornworms in our poinsettias, and webworms, thrips and aphids everywhere," Tanner complains.

Prevention Best Cure

To protect the annual plants which cost anywhere from 65 cents to \$4 each, Bill again relies on preventive measures. "We will often have 2,000 plants in one bed for up to 2 months, so we try to nip these problems in the bud. We apply fungicides on a 4- to 7-day schedule and rely primarily on systemic-type insecticides, going to contact killers only on an as-needed, symptomatic basis," says Tanner, a certified pesticide applicator in the State of Florida.

Bill tries to base all his pest control programs on the theory that dealing with a problem before it manifests itself is the best approach. "When it comes to weed control, we feel pre-emergent treatment is the best management tool," says Tanner, a member of the Florida Turf Grass Association. "Our goal is to prevent the weed from germinating in the first place. Once it does come up, due to excessive rainfall or chemical leaching caused by heavy irrigation, we make use of postemergent herbicides, as well."

Pre-emergent chemicals are applied to each annual plant bed as needed. "Our first mission is to prevent seeds from an old variety or weed seeds brought in by the wind from germinating in the high-quality growing medium we create for the desired annuals," Tanner explains. The bed also receives a preplant application of insecticide and fungicide so the plants will take up these chemicals as they grow. Bill feels this gives him a head start on pest control.

Mulch A Problem

Despite these efforts, Tanner still experiences his worst weed problems in established ornamental beds. "These beds are planted and then mulched over," Bill

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observes. "We get re-introduction of weeds from the mulch, and it also works against the preemergent chemicals as it decomposes."

To control the resulting weeds, Tanner often uses glyphosate (Round up) herbicide. "We need to use a non-selective chemical, but can't risk any residual soil activity whatsoever. The best answer we've found to this predicament is to apply a 2 percent solution of glyphosate in water using a 2-gallon compressed air sprayer. Our control has been excellent," he says.

Tanner also uses glyphosate to control weeds growing in concrete expansion joints, or to eliminate existing growth in areas slated for total renovation. "We had one bermudagrass lawn surrounded by shade trees," Bill recalls. "The trees had grown so large the grass was no longer getting adequate sun. It was under constant stress."

Applying the same 2 percent solution of glyphosate to the area, Tanner waited seven days and then came in with a sod cutter to take off the top inch of the soil. "We started with glyphosate because we had to be sure the bermuda was dead, roots and all. We knew just removing the top inch of soil could not get that job done. Then we replanted that lawn with St. Augustine Floratam. It's been more than a year now, and we still haven't seen a trace of bermuda yet."

Tanner has assigned one of his six staff members to full-time duty making spot treatments with the "translocated" herbicide, but has by no means left himself shorthanded in carrying out other responsibilities. "We have an extremely experienced staff," he boasts, with good reason. "One man is a graduate entomologist and another is a graduate horticulturist." While their specialties are not ignored, Bill insists each staffer be well-versed in every area of pest control.

One Man, One Area

In fact, Tanner's management system assigns each man total responsibility for a particular area. "Each man has to be able to function in any pest control capacity, so we don't just hire anybody. An applicant has to have a great deal of experience under his belt," Bill states, pointing to insistence on following label directions for the products he uses to the letter. "We can't afford to have someone go out and do the wrong thing in the wrong place. That can be very costly, and it's not what we want our guests to see."

According to Bill Tanner, a great deal of the success and beauty of Disney World has to be attributed to the people who work there. "Our employees are treated very well, and I think they project that to the guests," he explains. "There's a feeling you can't put a name to, but the guests get it everywhere they turn—from the person that helps them park, to the person who drives them back to the lot that evening. Disney's concept was a park that would appeal to the kid in everybody," he says proudly, adding that he visits the facility twice a month himself.

"The number one priority of every Disney employee is the comfort and safety of the guest," Bill Tanner concludes. "My responsibility is to see that Lake Buena Vista is maintained as close to perfectly as possible. At Disney World we do everything 100 percent. I guess that's the real magic behind the magic." **WTT**



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