

GUIDE TO LANDSCAPE AND GOLF COURSE EQUIPMENT

EQUIPMENT TIPS

Landscape contractors

- Use information from crew members to match the right equipment with the right job.
- If storage space is needed, consider providing landscaping for someone with storage space as a trade-out.
- Find one brand of equipment, and one vendor for parts.
- Send essential replacement parts with crews to the job site.
- Secure all equipment at all times from theft.
- Consider equipping a mobile repair shop.

Golf courses

- Let the operator know the cost of equipment and repairs; it might make a difference.
- Change oil religiously.
- Hold periodic equipment care reviews.
- Overhaul all equipment annually.
- Don't become "parts poor." Keep replacements for only the most breakable parts.
- Insist on good dealer service.
- Keep repair and storage areas neat. Know where everything is kept, and keep it there.

FOR LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS:

YARDMASTER Painesville, Ohio

Storage is the biggest problem for Yardmaster. Although the company holds annual used equipment sales, it still requires space for overhaul and clean-up.

Landscaping manager Ed Gallagher says the options are limited: "You either build storage, or push some other equipment out." But the company has found a partial answer to the space problem: it has a nifty trade-off arrangement with a neighbor, landscape services for storage space.

And then, of course, there's equipment costs.

Replacement parts have been referred to as the "black hole" on Yardmaster's balance sheet. Gallagher says that, if left unattended, parts expenditures put a serious dent in profits.

"Especially," he explains, "if you have several different models. You may find a problem with finding accessible parts."

"The best thing is to get one (brand), and one vendor for parts."

Gallagher suggests that high parts outlays might indicate equipment abuse.

"I sensed when I started here that we had a lot of spare parts," Gallagher remembers. "Our foremen weren't that willing to really take care of equipment, knowing there was another piece of equipment out there, or that there were ample parts. Once you squeeze that,



Yardmaster's Ed Gallagher: Keep an eye on parts expenditures.

they take better care of it."

The most breakable parts are belts, pulleys and bearings. Yardmaster mechanics change equipment oil twice a week, and do performance checks nightly. In addition, crew foremen are trained to do small on-site repairs. "Foremen have the essential tools and parts—belts, pulleys, blades, oil—to get through the day," explains Gallagher. "If they can't do the repair, the small engine mechanics go out."

THE PLANT CARE CO. Dallas, Texas

The Plant Care Co. has a continuing

problem with equipment theft while crews are manicuring commercial properties.

"A lot of it is employees of our accounts," notes vice president/general manager/managing partner Mike Choate. "We use locked Wells Cargo trailers with instructions not to take any equipment from the trailers unless it will be in use. But we've still lost \$2,000 in equipment this year, and in past years it's been much more."

Still, Choate and his partners are sticking to their system, which includes backup equipment locked in cages in the company's storage sheds. Their equipment expenditures-to-revenues ratio has been three percent in recent years, compared to an average of five percent for most other companies.

Though The Plant Care Co. doesn't have a mechanic on its payroll, it has a sweet arrangement with a shop within one-fourth mile of it. "We're No.1 on his list for immediate repair and we pay him well to do it. It's still much cheaper than having another employee," observes Choate. "We also bring him in periodically—usually during the winter—to sit down with our guys and go over equipment maintenance with them."

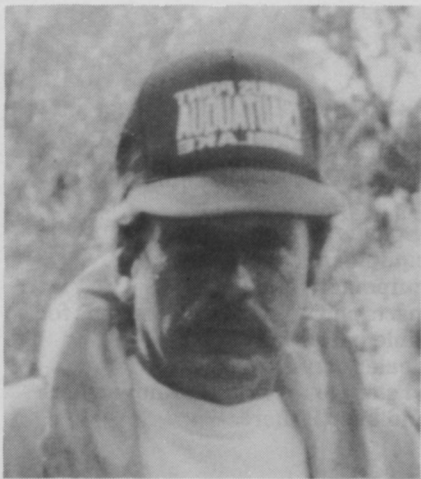
BUTLER LANDSCAPING Willoughby, Ohio

Richard Butler of Butler Landscaping

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maintains 80 lawns per week with a seven-man crew. Equipment breakdowns are something he can do without.

"We do between six to eight houses an hour," Butler estimates, "except for in early spring, when we do four



Richard Butler: Uses mobile repair van.

per hour. The worst thing you can do is to have seven guys with only two mowers working. We always have backups."

To "keep 'em cutting," Butler has a van he's turned into a mobile repair shop. "We come in with a good size crew. The thing to do is be prepared."

The van is equipped with most of the often-needed parts; a nearby Lesco outlet provides other parts as needed.

**LANDSCAPE SERVICES
Fort Wayne, Ind.**

Like the Ford Motor Co., with Landscape Services, "Quality is Job 1," says president and co-owner Dan Skinner. Likewise, finding the right equipment for the right job is a high priority.

"We count on our crews for their input," says Skinner, whose company will be expanding this season. "They're the ones using the equipment."

Because Landscape Services' cli-

entele is 85 percent custom luxury residences, "the 48- to 52-inch walk-behind is the backbone of the maintenance division. Riders have proven to be too big for our use," Skinner notes.

Special maintenance practices like turf fertilization and weed control, large tree work and irrigation installation are sub-contracted, thereby eliminating the need for specialty equipment and more employees.

**HICKORY HILL
Atlanta, Ga.**

Owner Ted Davis doesn't buy much equipment because of the size of his company, but he prides himself in being an astute buyer.

"I try to keep up with what's good in equipment by talking to different vendors," says Davis. "If I see a new piece of equipment on a lawn, I'll even stop and ask another contractor—even if he's a competitor. I always try to find someone who's got a certain piece of equipment before I buy."

Davis finds that being a very selective buyer, plus having a preventive maintenance program in place, means less downtime and more profit in the intensely competitive Atlanta area. □

CORE AERATOR GAINS POPULARITY

Lately, says Ed Devinger, the most popular piece of equipment among landscapers is the core aerator.

"Aeration is increasing by leaps and bounds," says Devinger of Reinder Brothers' distributorship in Milwaukee, Wisc. "We've been preaching that for a great number of years. It's the single most important thing you can do (for healthy turf). Unfortunately the equipment that was available years ago didn't do it very efficiently and it wasn't that profitable. Today, they have the equipment that'll do it."

Devinger thinks solid tine aeration is nearing a phase-out, as the benefit does not justify the cost. Other turf experts agree that the depression made by solid tines close up too quickly.

"The newest innovation is the Toro Hydroject 3000. If it works and can be produced at a more cost-efficient level, and we can get that into the lawn care market, now we're talking."

Devinger says the Hydroject, which uses high pressure water to make cores, eliminates the clean-up required with core aerators.

Devinger says Toro is trying to



Ed Devinger, Reinder Bros.

make the unit more affordable for the lawn care market.

How do they manage?

Devinger says equipment leasing is more popular than before. "(Customers) are riding out the payments a little more to match income."

Devinger foresees a good year for the industry. "If there is a downturn, I don't think our industry will see it in 1991; maybe 1992." But no matter what happens, "the people with

money to spend will spend it."

Expanding services

Contributing to the health of the industry, says Devinger, is the increased number of lawn care companies venturing into added services.

"Today, these (maintenance companies) are trying to do everything, because the demand requires it. They want one person to do it all: trim bushes, spray trees, plant flowers."

On the fairways

Devinger says golf course managers are moving toward downsizing, to minimize course wear and tear:

"Fifteen years ago they were going to as big a mower as they could to cut out as much labor as possible. Today it does not seem that the labor is that critical. They're demanding a finer groomed golf course. Every year it's getting more refined. They're raking sand traps every day.

"What membership is saying is that they want a tournament golf course every day of the week. It is just incredible the amount of labor it is going to cost."

—Terry McIver □

Landscape Equipment

Company	Revenues	Accounts	Acres	Walk-behinds, Push mowers	Riding mowers	Edgers, Trimmers	Blowers	Other	Mechanics	Budget
Butler Landscaping Cleveland, OH	\$250,000	80	36	11	3	3	5	1 Rototiller 1 Dethatcher	0	Buy as needed
Hickory Hill Atlanta, GA	Under \$100,000	25	5-6	8	1	5	5	1 Spray truck	0	\$6,000
Landscape Services Ft. Wayne, IN	More than \$1,000,000	38	25	11	2	3	5	1 Pickup 1 Dump truck 2 Trailers	0	\$10,000- \$15,000
The Plant Care Co. Dallas, TX	\$1,500,000	125	42	2	44	12	12	4 Vacuums 1 Tractor 2 Loaders	0	\$18,000
Summer Lawns Boise, ID	More than \$100,000	35	N/A	5	1	5	3	3 Tractors 2 Trenchers 1 Loader 6 Pickups 1 Hydroseeder	0	Buy as needed
Yardmaster Painesville, OH	\$6,000,000	130	N/A	50	16	47	10	14 Trailers 17 Pickups 10 Dump trucks 8 Loaders	5	\$100,000

FOR GOLF SUPERINTENDENTS:

SPRINGVALE COUNTRY CLUB North Olmsted, Ohio

Preventive maintenance begins with the operator, according to Springvale Country Club superintendent Bill Prest.

Riding equipment that doesn't require much physical labor is manned by an older, often retired worker. Prest swears that maturity counts. Older workers are more familiar with the equipment, and don't abuse it.

Seasoned workers also have a better ear for knocks and pings, and are flat-out more concerned and careful.

At Springvale, every operator reads the operation and maintenance manual first thing. Prest has four greensmowers, allowing for convenient rotation.

Prest is most concerned with service. The mower dealer he works with "will provide a backup piece if we have send the mower in for repairs. We try everybody's and pick the best one."

Prest looks at four things when buying equipment:

- ease of operation
- maintenance requirements
- parts availability



Bill Prest: Older workers care.

- availability of service

"This (part of the country) is competitive, so anytime we want a piece of equipment, (dealers) are more than happy to bring out a demo model."

TREYBURN COUNTRY CLUB Bahama, N.C.

Dale Miller doesn't mess around when it comes to taking care of equip-

ment. He recently persuaded his membership board to allot him \$125,000 per year until he does a complete turnover. He initially wanted \$250,000, but settled for half. He annually spends \$36,000 for repairs.

Miller says equipment replacement occurs in cycles. "After the third or fourth year you have to start turning over equipment, and might need in the vicinity of \$50,000 to \$100,000 each year," he says.

"I like to maintain a parts backup. We service equipment regularly, so we spend quite a bit of money on service. Just taking care, making sure it's working absolutely perfect. If the equipment out here wasn't so old, I'd say we wouldn't have to spend but \$25,000 a year. Right now we'll spend a lot in engine repair.

"We maintain an incredible backup parts supply. We can immediately fix everything that might breakdown, short of major repairs. And we always have backups."

Care is the watchword at Treyburn. "Each piece of equipment is steam-cleaned and pressure washed, and parked where it belongs.