The landscape contractor, most simply explained, calculates the cost of the "extended warranty" into the original cost of the project, and presents it to the potential client as an option.

"What if we offer an extended warranty and on the warranty we stipulate that we'll do site inspections on a scheduled basis. And we'll provide the customer with plant condition reports," says Lerner. "Maybe on this warranty we can write in a plant replacement clause to."

Clients buying an extended warranty afford the contractor the opportunity to stay in touch with them.

"I think it would indicate to the client that we want to see this property as much as we can to make sure everything is right," adds Lerner.

"Why not?", says Greg Carlson of Carlson Landscaping, Duluth, Minn.

"Extended warranties are done for just about everything else."

Even so, his warranty remains similar to most others in his northern Minnesota market, one year on plants and related services.

"You have to say that you'll stand behind your work, then honor that. Otherwise you'll never get a job," Carlson says.

Most contractors, in fact, agree that a long-term warranty program will work—as long as they're getting paid for it.

—Ron Hall

Environmental Design's Joel Lerner: Why shouldn't the customer have the option of buying an extended warranty?

“We have to use some judgement,” cautions McGrady. “We have to look at the job itself. For instance, if it’s a nice-sized job and it’s a valuable client, we don’t ask a lot of questions. We just take care of it.”

Deanna Walker of Turf Tenders, Bellingham, Wash., says her firm guarantees their plantings for one growing season. “We will give an added warranty if we maintain it for a full year,” she says, adding that seasonal, or one-year free replacement is “pretty typical” in her marketplace.

A new idea—But Joel Lerner, president of Environmental Design, Chevy Chase, Md., wonders why a warranty can’t also become an additional profit center for a contractor. He says he’s considering developing an “extended warranty” plan similar, in purpose anyway, to those offered by auto or appliance dealers. The landscape contractor, most simply explained, calculates the cost of the “extended warranty” into the original cost of the project, and presents it to the potential client as an option.

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Fighting weeds...and fires, too?

Lawn care technicians find that volunteering for the local fire department is a rewarding avocation.

What does Curb Appeal, a professional lawn care company, and the Stafford, Va., volunteer fire department have in common? They’re staffed by some of the same people, including Curb Appeal owner Charlie Robertson, a 20-year fire department veteran.

This spring marks the fourth year in continued on page 6L

“We work our jobs on a contractual basis,’ says Charlie Robertson.
CURB APPEAL from page 4L

business for Robertson and his lawn care company. In addition to Robertson, Curb Appeal consists of 7 to 10 part-time employees. All, with just two exceptions, are also volunteer fire fighters.

One of the exceptions is a county deputy sheriff. The other is a local high school senior that Robertson selects each season to learn the business. Last year's student employee is in college and now a volunteer fire fighter also.

Curb Appeal provides mowing, pruning, mulching and light installation and other maintenance services in central and northern Stafford County, a county of about 75,000 people. It’s located on the north side of the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg, and about 30 miles south of Washington D.C.

The area is rich in history. George Washington’s boyhood home is nearby, along with sites of important Civil War battles. But, it’s not too rich to live in. In fact, Stafford has become one of the communities of choice for career firefighters from larger communities in the northern Virginia/Washington metropolitan area.

The need is there—Robertson says as the community grew and became more prosperous, so did its need for a top-notch lawn care provider.

“There is an abundance of gypsy mowers and individuals out here with a pickup truck, weedeater, and blower. They have little or no background in the business,” says Robertson. “They’re highly responsible. They know how to deal especially well with clients. They know how to work with and, in many instances, repair the equipment on the job site.

“They take pride in their appearance and project an exceptional image for the company.”

What happens when Curb Appeal technicians get an emergency call that they must answer?

They secure the equipment, head for the fire station, get on the apparatus and respond, explains Robertson. When they're finished with the emergency, they put the fire fighting equipment back in service, then return to finish the lawn maintenance task.

Ready for action—For example, last fall Robertson and three other technicians were at the site for three hours. There were no injuries.

The technicians don’t respond to every call. Some calls, by their nature, are routine and handled by other volunteers, says Robertson.

But, when they’re needed, they respond to emergencies whether it’s an infant locked in a car or the freeing of a trapped accident victim.

“Our clients are understanding,” says Robertson. “We work our jobs on a contractual basis, not by hourly rates.”

It’s not uncommon on a work day to see Curb Appeal respond to an emergency still dressed in their Curb Appeal shirts and baseball caps, says Robertson.

—Ron Hall

New, bright colors for a new season

With so many ornamental varieties on the market, it’s easy to give commercial properties a completely new look every season.

Seasonal color displays can make a commercial development stand apart from all others.

Perimeter Center, a 400-acre suburban office and retail complex in north central Atlanta, demonstrates how color can be changed each season for a new look. Vibrant color combinations in mass plantings and the use of a central color theme give the Perimeter Center landscape its vitality and eye appeal.

Each year new varieties renew interest in the landscape.

The fall flower varieties are more limited, primarily, pansies, violas, parsley; thyme; mustard; kale; snapdragons and bulbs.

In plain view—Since flower color draws attention, the location of the beds on the property is also important.

Most of the beds at Perimeter Center are located in prominent areas along the main drive, at the base of pylons that mark

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