Three seasoned landscape contractors talk about how they use equipment maintenance products to keep their operations running smoothly.

Landscape operations wouldn't be complete without today's selection of maintenance products required to keep their equipment running. Popular shelf items include oil, filters, grease, replacement blades, blade sharpeners, belts, hoses and light bulbs — just to name a few.

Many contractors stick with one brand or manufacturer when purchasing various categories of equipment to make their inventories and part replacements simpler. They also troubleshoot problems early and call for outside technical assistance when needed.

On a scale of one to 10, contractors give preventative maintenance a 10 when it comes to keeping equipment costs down and service hours up. But they also know when it's time to give up that beloved walk-behind or trimmer.

We decided to ask three readers to give us their views on their own personal maintenance programs. Here is what they had to say:

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**LARGE CONTRACTOR**

**Name:** Mike Rorie  
**Title:** President/Owner  
**Company:** Groundmasters, Inc.  
**Location:** Cincinnati, OH  
**2000 revenues:** $9 million  
**Business mix:** 100% commercial  
**Employees:** 125  

**Company profile:** Began business in 1979, servicing primarily residential accounts. By 1982, Rorie's vision was to create a large equipment-intensive business, so the commercial market became the focal point of his operation. Today, his company is completely devoted to commercial accounts, catering to more than 500 sites. Maintenance services make up the lion's share of the contract work. The business grew throughout the '80s to about $1 million in revenue. In the '90s, Rorie added a facility in Cincinnati, Dayton and northern Kentucky. Today, the company employs 125 people, and revenues topped $9 million in 2000.

**Equipment arsenal:** Over 80 trucks, 30-plus trailers and over 400 pieces of additional equipment — everything from tractors to weedeaters.

**Maintenance plan:** An in-house, five-member fleet department at each branch managed by a fleet manager. "We do all our own preventative maintenance — whether it's a skid loader or a lawnmower." Maintenance/repair work is done the quarter of the year prior to the quarter of production — lawnmowers are fixed in the winter and snowplows in August. The fleet manager determines the standards the company follows when servicing a piece of equipment. "We don't want to underservice or overservice." Will send out the occasional engine overhaul or transmission repair work to an outside mechanic.

**Maintenance budget (labor and parts):** About 2% of total revenue. Company tries to determine the operation costs of a piece of equipment when developing a preventative maintenance budget. "Contractors need to track equipment just like job costs. We put hour meters on everything. It's the easiest way to track usage and determine preventative maintenance."

**An inside job:** "Hiring a mechanic will depend on the money you've invested in equipment and the money and time involved in going back and forth to get repairs done on the outside. You'll want someone who is readying the equipment as well as repairing and servicing it."

**Parts inventory:** Company stocks all the routine parts such as belts, hoses, filters, coils, hydraulic fluids, light bulbs, wipers and tires. All of these parts are part of its preventative maintenance checks. "If we need a new alternator or water pump, we'll access that part through one of our mechanics, but company is looking to hire its own part-time mechanic for equipment repair and maintenance work."

**Parts inventory:** "We used to stock a fair amount of parts but found that it was a waste. Now we only stock oil, grease, mowing blades, maybe one round of oil and air filters and anything that we must have on hand at all times. Replacement parts are purchased from our mechanic. We also try to stick with the same brand whether it's a blower or trimmer."

**Cleaning/painting:** "We have a hard time doing painting and cleaning because we don't have great access to water to wash equipment and trucks. Still, we try to

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**MEDIUM CONTRACTOR**

**Name:** Kris Hjort  
**Title:** President/Owner  
**Company:** K & H Lawn Services, Inc.  
**Location:** Fairfax, VA  
**2000 revenues:** $1.8 million  
**Business mix:** 80% residential, 20% commercial  
**Employees:** 10 full-time  

**Company profile:** Started business in 1984. About 55% of services are devoted to maintenance, 30% to design and installation, 14% to turf and ornamental and 1% to snow removal.

**Equipment arsenal:** Three pick-up trucks and four stake body trucks. Four of company's five vans are Super Lawn trucks.

**Other equipment includes:** 20 backpack blowers, 20 trimmers, seven stick edgers and an array of walk-behind mowers and riders.

**Maintenance plan:** Company performs minor maintenance such as oil changes on their trucks. Greasing and blade sharpening on other pieces of equipment are performed on a daily basis. Major repairs are sent to an outside mechanic.

**Maintenance budget (parts and labor):** About 2% of total revenue.

**An inside job:** Currently uses an outside mechanic, but company is looking to hire its own part-time mechanic for equipment repair and maintenance work.

**Parts inventory:** "We used to stock a fair amount of parts but found that it was a waste. Now we only stock oil, grease, mowing blades, maybe one round of oil and air filters and anything that we must have on hand at all times. Replacement parts are purchased from our mechanic. We also try to stick with the same brand whether it's a blower or trimmer."

**Cleaning/painting:** "We have a hard time doing painting and cleaning because we don't have great access to water to wash equipment and trucks. Still, we try to
local suppliers. We buy multiples of a particular brand. For example, we buy the same brand for our walk-behinds, and so on. This is so we can stock a modest amount of inventory that will fit every piece in a particular equipment category."

Cleaning/painting: Cleaning is done in-house on a routine basis. Extensive cleaning, including steam cleaning engines and waxing, is done annually and sometimes bi-annually. Touch-up painting on trailers, mowers, pumps and sprayers is done in the winter months. Complete paint jobs are left to an outside paint specialist.

Equipment life: "Trucks and trailers are rotated between a 7- to 10-year period due to the wash trucks and equipment on a weekly basis. We do very little if any repainting of equipment."

Equipment life: "We're a little excessive when it comes to equipment — we don't want to go without. We'll try to allocate three spring trimmers to each of our two-men crews so they have a spare if one piece of equipment breaks down. Smaller pieces of equipment last between two and three years, while mowers can last as long as 10 years. We try to keep trucks as long as possible — the first truck I ever bought died in the fall of last year at 18 years old."

Equipment afterlife: "Once we're through with a piece of equipment, we'll often give it to charity. If we're still using that brand, we'll take the parts that are useful and keep them. If not, it'll go to the junkyard."
A real seal
Safety Tire Seal Corporation offers the Safety Seal, a self-vulcanizing external repair kit that needs no cement or vulcanizing fluids to make a permanent repair to tubeless tires used on turf equipment such as mowers, skid-steers, tractors, irrigation equipment, trenchers and bucket loaders, as well as cars, vans, trucks, trailers, pickups and SUVs. Get Safety Seal in its new molded, weather-resistant plastic case with enough material to make 30 repairs. For more information contact Safety Tire Seal Corp. at 800/233-8473 / Circle no. 282

Chock full o’ parts
Industrial Specialties Manufacturing Inc.’s new 230-page catalog describes its selection of fittings, tubing, mufflers, manifolds, valves, filters and accessories in a range of sizes. Products are available in materials such as brass, stainless steel and numerous plastic formulations. A full line of plastic tubing is also described, and includes a chemical compatibility chart and an engineering data section. For more information contact Industrial Specialties Mfg. at 303/781-8486 or www.industralspec.com / Circle no. 283

Air apparent
Northern Tool and Equipment Co.’s new line of professional grade NorthStar air compressors include three gas units as well as two electric models ranging in price from $599 to $1,469. Air compressors are manufactured with long-life cast iron sleeve pumps as well as Honda engines. For more information contact Northern Tool and Equipment Co. at 800/556-7885 or www.NorthenTool.com / Circle no. 284

Back to the grind
Bernhard and Company’s RotaMaster blade grinder features an automatic infeed with auto cut-off which can be left to complete the grinding cycle alone. Features include a quality balancer and automatic traverse with easily adjusted travel stops. With blades held securely in place, both ends can be ground at the same time. The blade grinder is encased and the grinding operation occurs away from the operator. Dust can be vacuumed away using the machine’s attachment. For more information contact Bernhard at 888/474-6348 / Circle no. 285

Chain gang
Husqvarna’s clamshell packaging for chains as well as bar and chain combinations allows retailer and consumers to match their needs with their specific product at a glance. Listed on the packaging are easy-to-read “fit-up” specs matching Oregon chains to Husqvarna chain saws. Chains come in both single and double packages. Bar and chain combinations are single-packed. For more information contact Husqvarna at 800/438-7297 or www.husqvarna.com / Circle no. 286

Motoring along
Briggs & Stratton’s new Etek electric motor system, a combination DC motor and electronic controller, is designed to power golf cars and other electric-power utility vehicles. The motor is 50% smaller and over 20 lbs. lighter than others, resulting in an efficient combination of power and torque. For more information log on to www.briggsandstratton.com / Circle no. 290

Clean engines
Kohler’s air cleaners for Command and Command Pro 18- to 25-hp engines are lightweight, compact and easy to install. A swirl design collects/ejects trapped dust. The main filter has 1,398 sq. ft. of effective area. An eight micron inner filter protects carburetor. For more information contact Kohler at 800/544-2444 or www.kohlerengines.com / Circle no. 291

Back to the grind
Bernhard and Company’s RotaMaster blade grinder features an automatic infeed with auto cut-off which can be left to complete the grinding cycle alone. Features include a quality balancer and automatic traverse with easily adjusted travel stops. With blades held securely in place, both ends can be ground at the same time. The blade grinder is encased and the grinding operation occurs away from the operator. Dust can be vacuumed away using the machine’s attachment. For more information contact Bernhard at 888/474-6348 / Circle no. 285

Paint job
Morgan Corporation has a new custom spray paint for repair jobs and touch-up applications. The paint is an exact match for OEM paint used on Morgan truck bodies. An over spray leveler is used as a finish product to smooth and even out paint applications. For more information contact Morgan at 888/545-7278 / Circle no. 288

Mower parts
Stens Power Equipment Parts, a subsidiary of Ariens Co., has a 2001 catalog out that features a large selection of drive, rider and pushmower parts. Included are replacement universal throttle controls, shift and clutch cables for Honda, starter solenoids for Ariens, rear end overhaul kit for Snapper and more. For more information contact Stens at 800/457-7444 / Circle no. 289