Three landscape contractors discuss getting the most out of construction and installation equipment

Every landscape contractor knows that if his equipment "ain't workin', it ain't makin' money." That's why they look for equipment that's versatile enough to handle many tasks and productive enough to pay for itself in a short time.

Equipment with those qualities does exist in this industry, as you can learn by reading what the manufacturers have to say and reviewing the latest products in the pages that follow. First, read about what types of construction and installation equipment work best for three contractors we interviewed.

LARGE CONTRACTOR

Name: Frank Mariani
Title: President
Company: Mariani Landscape
Location: Lake Bluff, IL
2000 revenues: $23 million
Business mix: 97% commercial
Employees: 320

Company profile: Founded by Vito Mariani, Sr. in 1958, the company also has a satellite office in Bollingbrook, IL, to service the western suburbs. Located in Lake Bluff is its design/build and landscape management maintenance divisions hailed as its top two "profit centers." Both departments are operated with their own staffs. Maintenance crew sizes range from two and five people and construction crews may need between four or five, depending on the job. Crews may even be combined since construction projects can range from $2,000 to $2 million per job.

Construction/installation equipment: "We have close to 100 trucks. For safety rea-
sons, we decided eight years ago that any truck we purchased would have a crew cab and four doors. All our trucks are equipped with an enclosed trailer and outfitted with every piece of equipment necessary for a job. All equipment is turned in twice a week for maintenance. We have five full-time mechanics on staff. Our loading crews pull up to a marked spot near our garage where our trailers are undone and add a new set of equipment. We pattern our maintenance program after UPS's preventive maintenance program. We run a 4900 series International four-door dump truck equipped with a 12-ft. contractor's box and a side lift gate that can lift almost 3,000 lbs.

We like our Case skid steers because we do a lot of high-end residential work that requires a greater lifting capacity. We've also had one of our semi-tractors custom built with a heavy-laid-up crane."

Best features: "Our dump truck lets us load and unload plant material without damaging any of the plants. Also, the lift gates on our construction trucks save us a lot of time and labor."

Making a profit: "In our industry, it's important to follow a schedule where your crew is at the job on time. We pride ourselves in handling unapplied labor or labor that can't be billed to a job. We also have all our materials directly shipped to the site."

Purchase method: "We have our own leasing company." Equipment needs: "This year, we added seven maintenance crews, which means seven more vehicles, seven more trailers and all the equipment that makes up a maintenance crew. We also retire about 10% of our equipment a year to keep our stock fresh. Every 10 years, we have a new equipment base. We're buying based on need, and can identify that need far enough in advance."

Dream machine: "We would continued on page 42

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love a skid steer that was a little more com-
pact but with the lifting capacity of a larger
machine. I don’t know if that’s possible.”

**MEDIUM CONTRACTOR**

Name: Billy Gray  
Title: General Manager and partner  
Company: The Southern Landscape Group  
Location: Pinehurst, N.C.  
2000 revenues: $1.4 million  
Business mix: 81% residential  
Employees: 23  

**Company profile:** Company started in April 1999. Landscape construction en-
compases 68% of business, while the rest
is maintenance. Crews usually consist of
two people but, for construction, the crew
size can vary from two to five. Each crew is
headed by a supervisor.

**Construction/installation equipment:**  
Dump trucks, dedicated spray vehicles,
pickup trucks, a van dedicated for irri-
gation purposes, Bobcat 763 and a Toro
Dingo, both with various attachments,
New Holland and Mustang skid steer load-
ers, Ditch Witch trencher, and the King Of
Spades, one of Gray’s favorite tools.

**Best features:** “We like to use equipment
that can perform many tasks. With the
Dingo and Bobcat, you can switch out of
various attachments. We also try to keep

all our attachments centralized on a trailer
with the Dingo and the Bobcat. We’ll pull
the trailer to the job site and hook from
one attachment to another. The same goes
for the Bobcat. We like to take our loaders
into small areas without disturbing the ex-
isting soil.”

**Making a profit:** “We purchase all multi-
function equipment that’s easy to operate
and efficient. Our employees are more pro-
ductive and the morale is high because
they are less tired at day’s end.”

**Purchase method:** “Always buy new.”

**Equipment needs:** “We believe in preven-
tive maintenance and regular cleaning of
our equipment and vehicles. For bigger re-
pairs, we take our vehicles to one centrally
located outside mechanic. We have all ve-
hicles professionally cleaned bi-weekly be-
cause our company is big on image. New
purchases depend on what our needs will
be for the following year.”

**Dream machine:** “A small loader that can
pick up heavier material and move a sub-
stantial amount of weight.”

**SMALL CONTRACTOR**

Name: Richard and Ann Marie Breimann  
Title(s): Co-owners  
Company: Breimann’s Landscaping, Inc.  
Location: Allentown, NJ  
2000 revenue: $350,000  
Business mix: 75% residential  
Employees: 8  

**Company profile:** Founded in 1986, the
company provides a 50/50 mix of land-
scape and maintenance services performed,
mostly, by three-man crews.

**Equipment:** A dump truck with an alu-
mimum bed, Kubota tractor/front-end
loader, a roto-tiller, a bed edger, several
barrels and shovels.

**Best features:** “The tractor has helped with
loading topsoil and mulch. The new bed
digger lets us prep beds in 15 minutes. The
roto-tiller has also helped us get through
some of the heavier clay soils.”

**Making a profit:** “It’s important to order
your materials ahead of time. I personally
pick up our plant materials from the nurs-
ery before heading to a job, and I always
make sure we’re getting a good price.”

**Finance method:** “We initially lease, then
purchase later.”

**Equipment needs:** “We usually base any
purchases on the contracts we currently
have. We plan to offer irrigation services,
which means we’ll need to invest in a
trencher and other pieces of equipment.
We’d also like to get a sod cutter.”

**Dream machine:** “A Finn mulch blower. It
would free me up and maybe allow me to
stretch the season by subcontracting it out
to other companies.”
Rough and tough

Manufacturers tell about the versatility, toughness and power contractors want in construction/installation equipment

BY VICKY POULSEN

Construction and installation equipment versatility makes it hard for contractors to say "no" when it's time to buy. With so much popularity, manufacturers are introducing new equipment that can handle more add-ons.

We went right to the source — the manufacturers and here's what they had to say:

ALLMAND BROTHERS, INC.
Rick Veenstra, Product Manager
Product: TLB loader-backhoe tractors
Design trends: "We have five loader-backhoe tractors that can perform many jobs traditionally reserved for larger machines."

Accessories & attachments: "One new feature that is not currently available is a combination loader bucket and grapple fork that can pick up and transport debris."

Special features: "We have quick-attach plates for loader arms that permit the use of pallet forks or a hydraulically driven auger. The TLBs are available with an auxiliary hydraulics circuit. The front loader joystick control has a built-in bucket float position for quicker, more precise grading and back filling. The backhoe can also be equipped with an optional hydraulic breaker."

Finance terms: "Our experience tells us that many contractors lease their machinery, but others purchase them outright."

BOBCAT
Paul Anderson, Attachment Business Manager
Product: Skid steer loader
Design trends: "Users want tools that help them do jobs faster and more comfortably. That's why operator cab options such as air conditioning in our larger Bobcat skid steer loaders are so popular."

Attachments & accessories: "Landscapers want flexible tools, and the compact Bobcat 463 is ideal because of its size and versatility. Finance terms: "Contractors generally purchase the smaller equipment."

Special features: "Our skid steer power-V plow adapts to any position — V-, scoop, straight or in between. It features a hydraulic side-to-side tilt option."

JOHN DEERE
Design trends: "Contractors want machines that are powerful, versatile and compact. We've designed our products based on what our customers in the field have told us."

Attachments & accessories: "Over 100 attachments fit on these skid steers. This may allow contractors to take on more business. With today's tight labor market, they need equipment that can do many tasks quickly and efficiently."

Special features: "All our models feature our Quick-Tatch system, which uses a self-cleaning, rotating paw to stop dirt from clogging levers. Also, contractors want equip-
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Finance terms: "We probably see more attachments rented than skid steers because it's often cheaper to rent different attachments that you use only once a year."

JOHN DEERE  
Terry Brown, Product Manager/Compact Tractors  
Product: 4000 series compact utility tractors

Design trends: "Contractors want versatility, convenience and serviceability."

Accessories & attachments: "Adjustable sway bars make attachment and removal of implements to the three-point hitch easy."

Special features: "A well-designed product should have a dual element air cleaner with a primary air filter on the outside. We've equipped these tractors with an air cleaner restriction indicator that warns the operator when the air cleaner needs to be serviced and put all essential service checks on one side of the machine."

Finance terms: "Many contractors rent equipment locally, then make a purchasing decision."

DITCH WITCH  
Richard Greenwell, Product Manager/Compact Line  
Brent Bolay, Product Manager/Heavy-Duty Line  
Product(s): 3700 compact trencher; 1030/1230 pedestrian trencher; HT25 light utility trencher

Design trends: "Contractors want units that can get into tight places but have as much power as the larger units."

Accessories & attachments: "The most common attachments are augers and power heads. For waterscapes, you can dig 36-in. holes with our machines and use a trencher with a reversed chain to sculpt the sides."

Special features: "Our universal faceplate allows the use of all standard mini-skid steer attachments currently on the market. Another important feature is the ability to haul the compact skid steer with up to 10 attachments on a trailer."

Finance terms: "We see a mix of both leasing and purchasing."

FINN CORPORATION  
Dana Ellefson, Director/maintenance product division  
Product: Eagle skid steer 250 (compact)

Design trends: "Our sod cutter offers an exclusive 4-wheel drive design, which increases traction and requires less operator effort. Our Power Cutters have an ergonomically designed handle and "air injection" system."

Accessories & attachments: "End-users want machines that can perform multiple tasks."

Special features: "With our Power Cutters, a contractor can change the type of blade to perform different tasks or purchase a portable cart and water cart for larger tasks."

Finance terms: "Some contractors believe in leasing this type of equipment; others purchase outright or look for financing options."

Finance terms: "We see a mix of both leasing and purchasing."
KANGA
Brent Matthews, Vice President
Product: Mini-skid steer loader
Design trends: "There will be smaller versions of these machines getting into smaller areas."
Attachments & accessories: "We design and manufacture most of our attachments, so they’re built to work with this machine. A hot item is our new Kanga Kid, a 30-in.-wide, 13-hp skid steer that can fit into tiny places."
Finance terms: "The average contractor will keep a machine for three to five years. When they update, they purchase a new one."

TORO
Marc Bowers, Marketing Manager/Toro
Sitework systems
Product: Dingo compact utility loaders
Design trends: "There are an ever-expanding number of attachments for compact utility loaders that increase the number of applications, and manufacturers now offer walk-behind track-driven units."
Attachments & accessories: "With over 40 attachments available, a compact utility loader can accomplish anything on a job site. Some of the more popular attachments are the trencher, auger, adjustable forks, leveler, multi-purpose tool and buckets."
Special features: "Toro has introduced the Dingo 420 TX, a walk-behind, dedicated track drive machine that provides more ground engaging, power reducing slippage, single-hand steering and joystick-operated loader arms."
Finance terms: "The most economical, long-term solution is to purchase a compact utility loader with three or four attachments. An advantage of leasing is that the company or person leasing the equipment is often responsible for maintenance and repairs."

TEXTRON GOLF, TURF & SPECIALTY PRODUCTS
Peter Whurr, Vice President/Product Management
Products: Cushman, Turf-Truckster, Cushman, Commander, Ryan Jr. Sod Cutter
Design trends: "We’re interested in designing equipment that reduces noise, eliminates noxious fumes and features a tighter gap between service intervals. We’re also interested in operator comfort and safety."
Attachments & accessories: "The back end of our trucks can take a PTO, so any PTO-driven piece of equipment up to a certain horsepower can be used with this product."
Special features: "With our sod cutter, controls are within easy reach. With our Truckster, the carrying capacity is 2,500 lbs. for the three-wheel version and 2,850 lbs. for the four-wheel version."
Finance terms: "We see a mixture of both leasing and purchasing."

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All power
Allmand Brothers, Inc.'s TLB-220 compact tractor loader backhoe can maneuver in tight areas. It's 3,100 lbs. and features a Robin EH65D air-cooled gasoline engine that generates 20.5 hp at 3,600 rpm. A Kohler 20-hp air-cooled engine is optional. The backhoe features 2,875-lbs. of digging force as well as an 8-ft., 4-in. digging depth. For more information contact Allmand Brothers, Inc. at 800/562-1373 or www.allmand.com.

The ace of spades?
Bamboo Gardener's King Of Spades is designed for harvesting or planting trees, shrubs and bamboo. Made of 1/8-in. thick steel, the blade is ground to a self-sharpening tip. Spades come available in a traditional straight blade or diamond point. A 13-in. or 15-in. blade length is available in both designs. For more information contact Bamboo Gardener at 206/782-3490 or www.bamboogardener.com.

No small deal
Bobcat Company's ultra compact 463 skid steer loader nicknamed the "Mini-Bob" is the smallest model in Bobcat's loader line. It has a 700-lb. rated operating capacity. Measuring 3-ft. wide and 6-ft. tall, the 15.7-hp loader can power numerous attachments with its 10-gal.-per-minute hydraulic flow and 2,450 psi hydraulic system pressure. For more information contact a Bobcat dealer or visit www.bobcat.com.

Power plow
The Boss skid steer Power-V plow adapts quickly and easily to any position. Designed for moving snow or dirt, it can also be used for light trenching, grading, leveling and bulldozing. For more information contact Boss at 800/286-4155 or www.bossplow.com.

Ditch your problems
Ditch Witch's HT25 is a compact light utility trencher that, at 35 1/2 in. wide, can access confined areas. It can be equipped with a cab, backhoe, backfill blade and one of three available digging attachments: centerline, wide centerline and offset. An optional drilling attachment allows contractors to make installations under sidewalks and driveways. It's mounted on rubber tracks with hydrostatic ground drive and independent track controls. For more information call the Ditch Witch at 800/654-6481.

Skid steer here
John Deere's 240 and 250 skid steers feature a low center of gravity, high ground clearance and long reach. The 240 features a 53-hp (gross) John Deere 3029D engine. With almost 4,200-ft.-lb. of torque, the 240 has a rated operating load of 1,500 lbs., a lift height of 9-ft., 6-in., a 29-in. reach and breakout force of 5,500 lbs. The 250 is equipped with a 64.4-hp (gross) John Deere 3029T engine with a 1,750-lb. load capacity and a bucket breakout force of 5,500 lbs. For more information write John Deere at P.O. Box 12217, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709.

Hole everything
Husqvarna's 19-Series aerator features a free-wheeling outer tine system, minimizes turf damage around corners and in tight areas, and features variable depth to 3 in. It comes available with Briggs & Stratton or Honda engines from 3.5 to 4 hp. For more information contact Husqvarna at 704/597-5000.

Quite a load
Kanga's mini skid steer loader is a compact, multi-purpose machine that's ideal for laying turf and drainage, trenching, tree planting, digging/leveling/transporting soil, fencing post holes, installing irrigation systems, horizontal boring and snow plowing. For more information contact Kanga at 918/252-7930 or www.kanga-loader.com.

Fine line
Kubota's L48 compact loader/utility tractor line includes the L48TL compact loader and L48TLB tractor/loader/backhoe. The L48 features higher horsepower. With the loader and backhoe mounted, length is 241 in., width is 75 in. and overall height is 113 in. It has a maximum bucket lift capacity of 2,540 lbs. and 3,000 lbs. of lift capacity at the pivot pins. For more information contact Kubota Tractor Corporation at 800/458-2682, ext. 900 or www.kubota.com.