

Spreaders and sprayers that last

BY CURT HARLER

“**I**t’s got to last.” That’s the first thing Jack Robertson, owner of Jack Robertson Lawn Care, Inc., Springfield, IL, has on his mind when he goes shopping for a spreader.

“Stainless steel components are a must,” he continues. He knows stainless is a mixed blessing — while it extends the life of the equipment, it adds cost.

The next thing Robertson looks at is ergonomics. “A spreader has to have good balance and be comfortable to use,” he says. “Height makes a big difference.” Not only does it make a difference whether the worker using a spreader is 6-foot-4 or 5-foot-4 in. tall, but even the handlebar height of individual units can change the “feel” of a spreader. While Robertson Lawn Care has about 20 spreaders — all LESCO models — Jack has learned that different models have different ergono-

mics. Today, most of his units are the same.

“Another key point is positive shutoff and start,” Robertson adds. This is vital. Applications must begin and end at the right place.

Spread and aerate

“Combine a good top-dressing program with aerification and you’ll tighten your turf carpet,” says George Kinkead, President of Turfco, Minneapolis, MN.

This rule of thumb holds especially true on high school and community sports fields. Like everything else, football fields are being asked to do more. There are few special-purpose “varsity” fields left. Instead, most fields are used for football, track and field, soccer and other events both by the school and the larger community.

One way to do the job more effectively, Kinkead says, is to buy a spreader that will do an even number of passes up and down a field. If a machine will hold enough fertilizer to do four passes (up, down, up,



Spreadex’s LG-375 spreader holds 275 lbs. of material.

down), it can be loaded at the same end of the field every time. That way, there’s no need to bring an empty unit across a field or, worse yet, bring a truckload of fertilizer over the grass to the spreader.

Look for a spreader that will apply both heavy and light applications — down to 1/32nd or 1/64th of an inch — on a field. “A good spreader will spread as light as a dry martini,” Kinkead says.

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Spreader buying tips

"When choosing a spreader, look for a tire pattern that isn't aggressive," advises Bob Oelke, Agronomist with Dakota Peat & Equipment, Grand Forks, ND.

Nothing messes up a lawn, sports field or golf course quicker than ruts from a spreader. Tight turns can tear turf, and too much downward pressure will leave noticeable lines in all but the toughest turf.

"I like to see a tire pressure of one-half pound per square inch or less," Oelke continues. As an agronomist, he realizes that the ideal isn't always possible. However, when buying a drivable spreader, a landscape manager should check the tire footprint. Generally, the bigger the tire on a spreader, the more it spreads the weight.

Oelke has some other practical buying tips. "Look for a versatile, multi-tasking unit that will hold up," he says. A good unit will top-dress lawns, spread seed on sports fields, or put a uniform coating of compost over a park.

He says to get a product demonstration at your facility or on a typical lawn.

Another good idea: Be sure the unit you're buying uses standard, off-the-shelf components. Hoses, bearings and other replaceable parts shouldn't be machine-specific.

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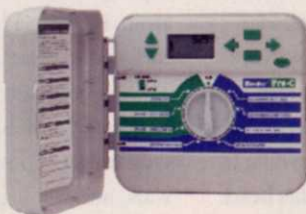
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