

Add-On Biz

BUSINESS

EXTEND YOUR BUSINESS

Hydroseeding

► Contractors find more efficient ways for sowing lawns

BY JANET AIRD

You always know where hydroseeders have been: they leave hillsides, golf courses and residential lawns a strange green-gray color that turns into tough native plants and lush, green turf.

Chris Haddock, owner of CBH Landscape Contractors in New Hampshire, added hydroseeding to his business in the early 1990s. The bulk of his company's work is residential, but he also does golf courses, shopping malls and new developments.

Obvious advantages

"Hydroseeding's a lot cheaper than hand-sowing seed," he says. "Hand-sowing a lawn takes about half a day. With the hydroseeder, it takes about an hour to an hour and a half. It doesn't take long to make up for the cost of the machine."

Hydroseeded soils hold moisture better than hand-seeded ones, Haddock says, so the seeds germinate more quickly. They usually have fewer weeds. Hydroseeding

also can increase the number of your customers. "We have customers who call about hydroseeding, then ask us to do more for them."

Lots of applications

Jim Listowich added hydroseeding to his business, Norpine Landscape, in 1988. He does mostly housing developments and condos, across Maine with his 3,300-gallon model.

"It's the right size for big jobs, but we can still do small jobs with it," he says.

These days, hydroseeding is used for everything from lawns to erosion control, hillside stabilization and vegetation restoration after wildfires. In some places, though, such as high-traffic areas, Haddock says, laying sod can be more appropriate.

Hydroseeding begins with a slurry of water, fertilizer and mulch. For lawns and golf courses, use a high quality grass seed. For erosion control and stabilizing slopes, use a tougher, less-costly grass, or native plants, whose roots hold the soil in place.

The slurry binds with the



(l. to r.) Christopher B. Haddock, owner CBH Landscape Contractors, Tim LeMien, landscape supervisor and Joshua Marceau, hydroseed foreman, standing beside one of their labor-saving units.

soil and helps prevent erosion. On steep slopes, adding tackifier, a gum-based solution, makes the slurry hold onto slopes even better.

Haddock has a 900-gallon unit that he pulls behind his one-ton diesel truck. "This seems to be the best compromise," he says. The machine is big enough for large applications, but small enough to go down a golf cart path.

Quality counts

As hydroseeding becomes more popular, new manufacturers have come out with less expensive models. This has allowed more landscapers to get into the business. But Haddock advises buying an established brand from a reliable dealer.

Hydroseeding is a great method for sowing seed, but it's a method with advantages, not a miracle, Haddock says. You have to use the right ingredients for the job in the right amounts, and mix the slurry properly or it clogs the machine.

Both men agree their biggest problem is that customers don't think they need to maintain their lawns, partly because they see tougher grasses growing on hillsides, and partly because their lawns come in so well.

They both give the same warning: "Take time to educate your customers."

— The author is a freelance writer in Altadena, CA.

Contact her at

janet.aird@earthlink.net