



Victims of our own promises?

It's mid-spring, and many of us are putting in 50 or more hours a week to meet property owners' expectations.

What level of expectations are we establishing with customers, especially in regard to landscape services? Are we promising perfection or near perfection? It seems many of us are, and, thanks to the knowledge we've gained about landscape care and to modern chemistry, we can almost make it happen. This in spite of unpredictable weather, techs who call in sick or mowers that go on the fritz midweek.

The bar is set high

There's a term for what some of us are promising. Let's call it the Augusta National Syndrome, after the private golf club in Georgia that each April hosts The Masters Tournament where an audience of millions is treated to days of televised coverage of images of perfectly manicured, weed-free, deep-green turfgrass in a landscape of spring-blossoming ornamentals in all of their pink, purple and milky white glory. I've often wondered if this spring spectacle — grass, flowers bluebirds and all — hasn't contributed to an unrealistic vision of what our own landscapes should look like.

I often wonder if we're **promising too much** and **doing too little** to provide customers a more sustainable understanding of their landscape care.

That kind of unnatural beauty comes at a steep price in terms of labor, equipment, chemicals and water. The golf club can afford it, of course, but can the rest of us. Or our environment, for that matter?

Yes, we in the landscape service industry have gotten expert in promising manicured, uniformly green and essentially weed-free turfsapes, not that the mowing, fertilization and pest control practices we've developed over the past half century haven't, served our clients and ourselves extremely well.

Even so, I'm beginning to wonder if we're promising too much and doing too little to educate ourselves, our teams and our customers to a more sustainable approach to landscape care.

I'm wondering if we're relying too much on many of the same practices that have gotten us to this point (for better or worse), and we're paying too little attention to the concerns of a growing segment of the public, lawmakers and regulatory authorities over issues such as emissions, noise, water waste, inappropriate chemical use and non-point-source pollution.

Yes, we know that by mowing turfgrass properly — no more than 1/3rd of the leaf blade and at a higher height — we can dramatically reduce weed populations using far less herbicides.

Yes, we know that once we improve clients' properties, following best management fertilization and pest control guidelines, we can maintain attractive lawns using far less pesticides. That's assuming we've established the proper level of expectations with our clients.

Yes, we know that bagging grass clippings is wasteful with little upside other than it allows us to meet the expectations we've set with certain of our clients — clients that don't understand the costs of bagging clippings, both financially and in terms of the environment.

Yes, there's a price to be paid for everything, and I'm convinced the closer we attempt to approach what I call The Augusta National Syndrome, the higher the price we pay.