

## Tending turf

Properly renovating turf is all about the science.

Renovation isn't just about repairing the turf — it's also about maintaining, says an Arizona-based landscape business owner.

**B**RIAN GOLEMBIEWSKI TAKES turf renovation seriously. He doesn't see it so much as an "add-on" service, but something that landscapers should already be doing to offer their clients the very best value. To him, turf renovation comes down to the soil. "Even though the turf is the indicator of a problem, it has less to do with the grass itself than the soil," says Golembiewski, president of Paramount Landscape & Maintenance, Inc., in Tempe, AZ. "Before you can even start solving the problem you have to know what you have in terms of the soil. We do soil samples where we'll plug 10 random locations and fill up a bag of dirt. Then we send that out to testing labs."

In Arizona, Golembiewski says they're dealing with a variety of soil types — everything from clay to sandy — and the issues can be very different depending on the area the client is based in. He says that makes a large part of the turf renovation job about diagnosing. "Diagnosing is really the key to success with turf renovation," says Golembiewski. "Say you go to the doctor with symptoms but they diagnose you with the wrong thing. You're going to get the wrong treatment, and it won't solve the problem. It's the same thing with grass, which is also a living organism. It needs to be properly diagnosed before any problems can be solved."

While it begins with the soil, Golem-

biewski says there are many other factors that come into play with turf problems like water, sun and disease. He says the issues need to be discovered so that they can be addressed and treated properly. On the properties he's already managing, Golembiewski does annual soil testing. This ensures Paramount is constantly monitoring the turf's condition and developing plans to head off any problems. It's just packaged right in with the service that Golembiewski already offers his existing clients.

However, he has picked up some new clients based purely on renovating damaged turf. "We have picked up properties that are a mess and the client wants us to fix it," says Golembiewski. "The thing is it takes six to 12 months for a landscaper to ruin a property. It's not something that happened over night. The previous landscaper wasn't doing the right things and the property was deteriorating over time. By the time that previous landscaper is fired, and we're brought in, it looks terrible and it can be expensive and lengthy to solve. That's not always something the client wants to hear."

Golembiewski says that means the service isn't always an easy sell with new clients, but being able to offer turf renovation services to existing clients — in terms of diagnosing problems before they become severe — is huge. "It's certainly a value-added service to our customers," says Golembiewski. "And it's a discriminator against our competitors. I would say turf renovation requires both offensive and defensive posturing because being proactive, and preventing problems in the first place, is a big part of the service."

Since Golembiewski is doing annual soil checks and looking for problems before they start, turf renovation is only a small part of his business. "It's maybe just five percent of what we do — and that includes fertilizing five times a year, doing some weed control, and checking soil annually," he says. "Keeping up with those things prevents us from having to do major repair work. We don't let it get to that point in the first place."

Golembiewski says there's no major cost to get involved with this type of service, but there is a need for education. "It wouldn't be capital that's required, it's intellectual," he says. "If you don't already have an understanding of these things, schooling would be necessary. There's a scientific element to turf renovation. And there's a lot more to soil than dirt!"

The author is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY NAME:** Paramount Landscape & Maintenance, Inc.

**HEADQUARTERS:** Tempe, AZ

**WHY TURF RENOVATION?** It's part of the overall maintenance service that Paramount offers its clients in ensuring their property is pristine year-round.

**INITIAL INVESTMENT:** Not much capital, but a need for education

**WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT?** Because it adds value. "It means a lot to the client in terms of long-term value of their property, says Brian Golembiewski, company president. "Part of turf renovation is keeping the value up all year — not letting it go. It costs a lot more money to bring back damaged turf than to just maintain it well in the first place."