

## Educate to aerate

Knowledge is the power to getting more clients signed up for aeration services.

Core removal through aeration helps breathe life into a lawn.

**N**EW ENGLAND IS a good market for aeration. The clay soils, thatch build-up and soil compaction issues make it a valuable service to improve the overall condition of turf. However, Cliff Drezek, general manager of Arbor-Turf Services, Inc., in Marlboro, MA, says that doesn't necessarily make it an easy sell. When the company first introduced the service in 1995, it didn't catch on right away. He saw a need for it among his existing clients' lawns, but it required education for them to understand that need for themselves. It's just one of those add-ons that takes persistence, says Drezek. You often need to pitch the service and remind clients about its benefits several times before they give it a shot. Once they do, and they witness the benefits, making the sale next year is much easier for this annual service.



Cliff Drezek

One reason aeration can be initially tricky to sell is clients don't really understand the benefits. Drezek says a big part of selling the aeration service is being knowledgeable and fine-tuning the sales pitch to the client's needs. "Whether it's a thatch problem, a soil compaction issue, or maybe even drought, you need to explain how the process will stimulate grasses to fill in and improve the overall quality of the lawn," he says. "The long-term benefits in the health of the turf are very noticeable."

But it's not something that looks different overnight, so that's where education comes in. Once they see those long-term benefits, they'll understand and likely become repeat clients for the service.

### LESSONS LEARNED

Marking sprinkler heads on a property that's about to be aerated is a service Drezek says the company now charges

to handle. His employees used to spend as many as 45 minutes marking all of the heads on a large property, which was time and money lost. "Now we add it as a priced service in contracts if clients don't want to do it themselves," he says.

But no matter how diligent crews or the client is in marking heads, puncturing an irrigation system can still occur. As a result, Drezek recommends crewmembers are trained to do some minor repairs, such as fixing a damaged irrigation line. That also requires having basic parts and tools on hand.

Another challenge the company has faced since they began offering this service is finding out the hard way that irrigation systems aren't the only on-site concern. After damaging a few invisible fences, Drezek says the company quickly learned how important it was to communicate with the client. "In terms of a lesson, that was baptism by fire," he says. "We hit a few invisible fences and found they are very expensive to repair. It could be \$500 just to fix one damaged area of the fence. You realize how important it is to make sure you know who has one and where it's buried."

In terms of marketing, Drezek says he uses leave-behind printed materials and talks one-on-one with the client to pitch the service. It all comes down to education. They have to know what it is and why they need it. "Overall, it's a very good service to add on, and the customer will get a lot of value out of it since it will make their turf that much better," adds Drezek. "And it can be a great enhancement for business, as far as profitability is concerned. Like anything else, it's just a matter of getting your clients initially interested."

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

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY NAME:** Arbor-Turf Services, Inc.

**HEADQUARTERS:** Marlboro, MA

**WHY AERATION?** The clay soils and thatch problems in the region made it a no-brainer.

**INITIAL INVESTMENT:** You can start out with a walk-behind aerator, which is easier to get to the site. If using a tow-behind aerator, you'll need the tractor to pull it and a trailer to haul it. You'll also need some tools for making minor irrigation repairs, hand tools to do minor lawn repairs on any area that gets torn up, and flags to mark the sprinkler heads if you plan to offer that service.

**INVESTMENT RECOUP TIME:** First year, if you have a client base.

**WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT?** They get an overall healthier looking lawn.