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BY NICOLE WISNIEWSKI

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Scientists at Mississippi State University are looking to the ground, specifically to the mowed landscapes surrounding runways and terminals, for ways to reduce wildlife hazards and possibly provide biofuel sources.

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Follow your white rabbit

Alice in Wonderland has been called one of the best examples of the “literary nonsense” genre. Not really the biggest compliment. In fact, when the book was released in 1865 depicting a ‘Wonderland’ behind a small door reminiscent of the forbidden Cathedral Garden in which the author wasn’t allowed to play, it received little attention and poor reviews.

But by the end of the 19th century, Sir Walter Besant said it “was a book of that extremely rare kind which will belong to all the generations to come.” From nonsense to infamy.

Alice has been on my mind a lot lately. During February’s Great Big Home & Garden Expo in Cleveland, OH, landscape contractor exhibitors created gardens inspired by films. Attendees were lined up outside some of the most iconic, which included the Alice in Wonderland garden by Barnes Nursery. No one can deny the imagery an Alice-themed garden can inspire.

To become a literary classic, Alice in Wonderland had to be different, unusual. The author had to take extreme risks, fearing ridicule and failure.

As business owners, you make these same choices everyday. You can choose to follow the status quo, conduct business as usual and be moderately successful as a result (the straight and narrow path). Or you can step outside of your comfort zone and do something completely different, risking failure and remarkable success beyond industry expectations and business norms (Wonderland). It’s a classic gamble where the resulting failures and successes are equally great.

One of the best examples of a risk-taking innovator who took a chance on an idea and is today experiencing great success while its main competitor suffers great failure is Netflix. When Netflix execs first came up with their business model of mail-order video based on convenience and limited fees and labor costs, they took the concept to Blockbuster, and “they just about laughed us out of their office,” says Barry McCarthy, Netflix CEO.

Today, Blockbuster execs aren’t laughing. Netflix has more than 20 million members as of January. With a $9 per month membership fee, that amounts to more than $2 billion annually in gross revenue. Basically, “a small new entrant ran by a brilliant tech savvy individual tore the heart out of a giant video rental,” shares Don Seal of the Smallcap Network. “Blockbuster’s board members ... didn’t understand that generation ‘Y’ would rather watch TV on their laptops.”

Today, Blockbuster has stock trading at $0.09 and is going through a slow, painful bankruptcy, while Netflix remains one of the hottest stocks, trading at $217 per share, Seal explains.

All because one business was thinking outside of the box and the other was “too little, too late,” Seal says.

If the rise and fall of Blockbuster has taught us anything it’s “evolve or fall by the wayside,” points out Mike Schuster, a Minyanville.com staff writer.

While it’s not easy to translate Netflix’s idea to the landscape industry, it’s not as hard as you think to put a new spin on something you do. At PLANET’s Executive Forum this February, innovation was the theme, and I was surrounded by new ideas. Yardmaster’s Kurt Kluznik tried a weekend work schedule to gain better equipment utilization (see more on page 28). Davey Tree helped the USDA Forest Service develop i-Tree to track the relevance and value of trees on properties (see more on page 14). Dennis’ Seven Dees Landscaping’s David Snodgrass introduced “checkbook” thinking to his foremen to help them better understand job costs.

The ideas don’t have to be big or transform the industry. In fact, they may even prove unsuccessful. That’s the risk you take. If the new concept ultimately improves the way you and your people think, you win.

The lesson: Never be afraid to follow your white rabbit. You never know where it’ll take you.
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Consumer confidence levels got you down? Help clients relax ... in the landscape.

BY NICOLE WISNIEWSKI EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Buit or urban environments with the hustle and bustle of traffic, work and crime tend to evoke stress. Even just thinking about these spaces can make people feel edgy. Pile that on to recent low consumer confidence levels and the outlook is rather grim.

But there’s a reason why researchers say urbanites escape to beaches and parks for vacation: Natural spaces help them reduce stress by taking necessary breaks from these highly noisy and visually complex environments.

In fact, natural settings have been favored during two to 3 million years of evolution, so it’s possible people may even be genetically inclined to respond positively to them, according to Roger Ulrich, professor and director of the Center for Health Systems & Design at Texas A&M’s College of Architecture.

“While the sensory qualities of sight, touch, sound, etc. suggest something a bit different to each of us, we share common threads in our response patterns to natural elements,” agrees David Slawson, a landscape artist and designer with more than 30 years of experience and author of books on Japanese-inspired garden design. Slawson highlighted design inspirations that come from popular landscape elements during “The Art of Evoking the Natural World in Restorative Gardens” at the Cleveland Botanical Garden’s 6th annual Sustainability Symposium this February. “Certain natural patterns have universal appeal.”

“You can design an outdoor space that uniquely invites each person to be a part of the experience, connecting themselves to the larger world,” adds David Kamp, landscape architect and founder of Dirtworks, PC, as well as designer of the Elizabeth and Nona Evans Restorative Garden at the Cleveland Botanical Gardens and keynote presenter at the Sustain-

Compositions of water, plants and walls create distinct garden experiences. Thin rivulets of water fall into a shallow pool, creating a bright sound to help muffle nearby traffic noise.

continued on page 10
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continued from page 8

ability Symposium, speaking on “Creating Restorative Environments.” “We want to emphasize a close connection to nature in our design solutions — we believe this is essential to the health and well-being of ourselves and our communities.”

Both Kamp and Slawson shared their tips for creating these healing spaces with approximately 60 landscape professionals during the symposium. Whether creating a public garden or one intended for a client’s private use, there are restorative elements that can be used to make every space more memorable and valued, both professionals agreed. It all starts with the senses.

The sense of SIGHT: seeing is believing
Kamp uses plants as a veil to create intimacy in larger spaces but also provide a way to peek through and see more. Reflective ponds can also enhance the sense of sight by doubling natural images, he says.

Slawson draws visual inspiration from beautiful, well-loved landscape elements, such as a misty lake or a mountain ridge. He recreates these elements in a space by using various plants to replicate the inspiration — differing heights of spruce, for instance, to evoke a mountain ridge.

“Meandering lines always invite visitors to enjoy the journey,” Slawson adds, pointing out another visually intriguing element in landscape design. “An ‘S’ curve suggests hidden mysteries around the corner — people prefer them to straight lines every time.” Exaggerating this pattern, Slawson has also drawn landscape design inspiration from the spiral galaxy pattern of the Milky Way, another soft and home-inspiring shape people tend to embrace.

Mimicking the effects of weather on the landscape can also create inspiring visuals. Slawson suggests copying the look of wind-blown trees.

The sense of TOUCH: a touch of Zen
Kamp incorporated a variety of textured stones and planting pockets into a retaining wall in the Elizabeth and Nona Evans Restorative Garden. The 6-ft. wall creates separation for “private moments in a public setting,” Kamp says, and “ranges of touch within a small space.” This creates layers of sensation from the cool moisture of a water feature to fuzzy mossy plants, prickly leaves and hard and smooth rock edges.

The sense of SOUND: selective hearing
Slawson suggests landscape professionals study and copy water patterns in landscape design. Single thread water falls or braided falls, for instance, are not only peaceful to view, as people watch the water cascade over rocks in a specific pattern, but they also bring soothing and interesting sounds. In the case of the Cleveland Botanical Gardens restorative garden, these sounds also muffle other undesirable noises like traffic.

The senses of SMELL & TASTE: ‘scent’sational spaces
Creating areas of tension, as Kamp describes them, can enhance certain sensory experiences. In the Elizabeth and Nona Evans Restorative Garden, he created a wide path that slowly becomes narrow. This smaller pathway is then cascaded over on each side by various types of basil plants. The combination creates an intoxicating scent, “one that even goes home with you on your sweater as you brush by the basil,” Kamp says, adding that this could go one step further inspiring what that person then chooses to have for dinner.

Heightening the senses in the landscape by creating areas where people see a beautiful space, hear water and birds, “enjoy fragrances and catch their breath takes a level of detail and focus,” Kamp explains.

And designing to enhance the senses in a client’s space is worth it, Slawson adds, because it “makes customer experiences more memorable” - and you more memorable as their service provider.
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Seventy-five percent of today’s Standard & Poor 500 companies will disappear by 2020. That’s 375 out of 500 companies that will go bankrupt, be acquired by another or just fail.

This according to *Creative Destruction: Why Companies That Are Built to Last Underperform the Market—And How to Successfully Transform Them*, by Richard Foster and Sarah Kaplan, a book referenced in the Professional Landcare Network’s *Crystal Ball Report #30, Innovate or Die: How Green Industry Companies Will Thrive in the New Economy*.

Why will three out of four S&P 500 companies fail before 2020? Because they do not adapt to accelerating change, which will render their products and services obsolete. In other words, they lack innovation.

In other words, they lack innovation.

This fact inspired the topic “Technology & Innovation” for PLANET’s Executive Forum & Leadership Meeting Feb. 16-20 in Amelia Island, FL, where they debuted the new report (you can get your copy in the PLANET bookstore at http://bit.ly/h6Qfxg). “Innovation is the best way for many companies in the green industry to differentiate themselves, increase their profits and protect their futures,” the association says.

One Executive Forum session featured a roundtable of Crystal Ball Subcommittee members Dave Zerfoss, The Zerfoss NEWS+VIEWS

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Group (previously with Husqvarna); Shayne Newman, owner of YardApes in New Milford, CT; Todd Pugh owner of Todd’s Enviroscapes and Green Industry Innovators in Louisville, OH; and moderator Jim McCutcheon, owner of HighGrove Partners in Austell, GA.

The group shared their innovation secrets, inspiring discussion from the 113 attendees.

Pugh, for instance, used USDA Forest Service innovation i-Tree, a software suite designed to measure and quantify the benefits trees provide a property, with a client who manages hospital grounds. Pugh was able to help the hospital’s management team transform its thinking about the cost of tree maintenance from being seen as an unwelcome expense to being a sound investment that adds measurable economic benefits to the hospital operation as well as to the surrounding community. “By switching the perception of ‘tree maintenance’ from a cost to a benefit, landscape management took on new importance, and even created a new marketing opportunity for the hospital,” explained Greg Ina of The Davey Tree Expert Co., one of the partnering companies that helped create i-Tree (itreetools.com). This innovation and others are highlighted in the report.

Part of the process of being an innovative business comes from creating an innovative culture. “When an effective leader shares his purpose and direction, he creates energy and excitement,” Zerfoss explained. Newman agreed. “Encouraging employees and rewarding them for great ideas is much bigger than a paycheck,” he said. “Creativity is just connecting things. If we can connect our ideas with customer needs, that’s how we’ll get innovative.”

The whole process can be a little uncomfortable for the owner, Pugh points out. “When you take yourself out of your comfort zone and push yourself, it’s a lonely place,” he admits.

But “if we don’t get comfortable being uncomfortable we won’t innovate,” Zerfoss added. “We have to move our people and ourselves past our comfort zones.”

Is the process worth it? According to these innovators, it will ensure their landscape businesses don’t end up on the failure list. As Newman says: “The only way to get ahead is to do something different than everyone else is doing.”
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Recession-proof your business

According to *U.S. News & World Report*, the best comparison to the most recent economic recession is the one from 1981-82. It lasted 16 months, had several quarters where the economy shrank 3% or more and saw unemployment rise as high as 10.8%.

The 2008-2009 recession was — if it is indeed over (nearly two-thirds of American believe the economy has yet to hit bottom, according to a *Wall Street Journal* poll taken in late 2010) — different from any other because of its depth and causes. “The first trigger was the drop in housing prices, which robbed many people of their primary access to capital,” explained Douglas A. McIntyre in a 24/7 Wall St. article appearing in the Yahoo Finance news section. “As that access disappeared, so did the availability of credit. Consumer buying power evaporated and businesses cut inventory and production. Joblessness rose. Finally, consumer confidence plunged.”

The latest “downturn was so great that in some months more than 500,000 people lost jobs,” he continued. “The unemployment rolls are now more than 8 million, and over 1.4 million people have been out of work for over 99 weeks.”

The statistics speak volumes. But what does the landscape industry think? Was the recent recession the worst they’ve ever experienced, particularly compared to the 1981-81 recession? We revisited 1982 issues of *Weeds, Trees & Turf* (Landscape Management today) to find out. In January 1982, Bruce Shank, then executive editor of *Weeds, Trees & Turf*, reported 1981 as a growth year for the landscape industry. But a survey he conducted revealed the challenges landscape contractors were facing and why they expected less growth in 1982.

› Nearly two-thirds of contractors delayed purchasing equipment in 1981 due to interest rates. The same number raised prices to cover higher interest costs.
› Half of respondents cut credit use to buy equipment and cut credit terms allowed customers.
› 40% of landscape contractors avoided using credit to finance expansions.
› Half of landscape contractors reduced their number of employees.
› More than 40% of landscape contractors expanded into new types of landscape services to counter rising costs (mainly design and lawn care).
› 33% of landscape contractors moderated growth goals, tightened routing and used smaller plant material when possible to cut operating costs.

Want to be better prepared for future recessions? Wilson noticed a trend. “The companies doing the best in this recession are companies that took cost cutting seriously and with a sense of urgency,” he explains. “Several people told me they made cuts in overhead they should have made a long time ago.”
Our changing landscapes?

Great Lakes winters can be long, cold and snowy. This one has been a doozy. So those of us living and working here look forward to escaping for a week or two mid-winter. We head south, way south, counting on the sight of green grass and colorful early spring bloomers to restore our dulled, salt-rusted spirits.

Florida is often our destination of choice. We crave the respite of sunshine and softly swaying palms as avidly as a starving man craves the prospect of a Ryan’s buffet.

But even after arriving and breathing in warm coastal breezes, many of us in the landscape business find it impossible to leave our professions behind. The Green Industry surrounds us regardless of where we live or travel. It’s a fact that I discovered again during a recent visit to southwest Florida.

Walking the streets in my son’s Ft. Myers neighborhood, I was struck by the diversity of residential landscapes there. Precisely trimmed ornamentals and the manicured, uniformly green and weed-free lawns of some of the properties strongly hinted at professional care. Most other properties in the same neighborhood were nice enough — St. Augustine-grass lawns, live oaks, pines, palms, citrus and other typically Florida foliage. These were obviously irrigated and being maintained by their owners.

Several properties, however, stuck out in stark contrast to the others. They had no turfgrass, at least none visible from the street. While neighbors or a passerby might view them as untidy, the residents likely see them as attractive, easy to maintain and environmentally responsible.

These properties, I surmised, were representative of the low-input (reduced mowing, irrigation and chemical use) landscapes advocated by environmental organizations and some governmental agencies. For example, the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences offers a Florida-friendly landscaping guide (fyn.ifas.ufl.edu) for homeowners and related best management practices (BMPs) for professionals.

These types of landscapes, dominated by stones and drought-tolerant native and regionally adapted plants rather than maintained turfgrass, are becoming the rule and not the exception in the arid U.S. Southwest. Their popularity in Florida (at least judging from the single neighborhood that I walked) doesn’t appear that strong yet. This is probably due to the large number of lawn-loving Yanks that have migrated or live there seasonally. Their tastes in landscapes could change, of course.

Regulations directed at the use of potable water for irrigation and fertilizer use on residential properties is growing in Florida. In the end, though, cost could be as big a factor — and not just in the Sunshine State. If the price of water, fuel, chemicals or professional services rises substantially, low-maintenance, low-input landscapes will certainly become more popular.
How do you raise pay rates when you can’t even raise prices? Experts share strategies in our exclusive WAGE & BENEFITS REPORT.

BY NICOLE WISNIEWSKI EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

BRIAN GOLEMBIEWSKI sometimes feels like he’s trapped in a vice grip. On one side, the president of $2.6 million, Tempe, AZ-based Paramount Landscape, must push his employees to do quality work and boost job efficiency, maintaining customer retention in the midst of stalled service pricing.

On the other side, he can’t reward his employees with a raise because margins are razor thin despite their efforts. It’s been two years since any of his workers have received one, unless they were promoted.

In the middle, he feels at times someone is twisting the two iron bars closer and closer together, squeezing him dry of a solution to this dilemma.

To gain some strength — and space — back, he stays focused. He has processes and systems in place to measure performance and quality. And he educates his team constantly, explaining why he can’t afford raises.

But, he says, “keeping employees doing good work when they aren’t happy because they’ve had no raise — that’s a challenge.”

Golembiewski isn’t alone in his struggle.

Tadd Cole froze pay rates last year “because we were down 10% of sales from the year before with lower profit margins,” says the president of Asheville, N.C.-based Highland Heritage Landscapes.

As a result of lost market share in most business segments due to a lack of new construction, the foreclosure situation and its affect on HOA work, and cut backs in both commercial and government contract services as well as increased competition for the work that is available, Orlando’s Carol King Landscape Maintenance has also had to be “very cautious with pay rates, raises and bonuses,” says Vice President Bruce Bachand. “In most positions, rates have been frozen and any decreases have been in the 5% or less range.”

And for Ron Skover, owner of Greenlawn, LLC in North Street, MI, “this will be the third year we’ve basically had a salary freeze, but I’m hoping to change that this year.”

According to PayScale’s 2010 review, wage levels by the end of 2010 were no higher than they were nearly three years ago (rising only 0.3%), although the cost of goods has increased by 4.5% in the same period. In fact, “2010 was a year when the economy really did not move up or down, rather it moved sideways,” says Al Lee, director of quantitative analysis at PayScale. “Mirroring the stubbornly high unemployment, pay was virtually unchanged in 2010, down 0.1% nationally vs. the year before. While better than the declining pay of 2009, it was a long way from the ‘normal’ annual increases of 3% or more before the recession.”

The outlook for this year, accord-
According to The Conference Board annual survey, is that employers will set aside an average budget of no more than 3% for increases.

For the landscaping field specifically, in 2009, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported an average wage for landscaping and groundskeeping workers at $12.18 and a median (or mid-point) at $11.29. Compared to PayScale’s $10.19 median rate for the same position in 2011, that’s a 0.97% decrease. Landscape Management Wage & Benefits Report research shows only 40% of employers gave 2011 raises to hourly/seasonal workers, 36% gave them to salaried employees and only 31% of owners/management team members were awarded 2011 raises.

The situation is tough but not insurmountable.

Using the research and intelligence we’ve gathered for this Wage & Benefits Report, Landscape Management can help you come up with a solid plan to overcome your labor woes.

We can’t give your employees raises. We can’t make your customers pay a higher price. We can’t determine your benefits and health care strategy in the midst of new and changing legislation. (Even though we’d like to.) But we can help relieve some pressure from that vice by providing you with the information you need to help you better make tough employee decisions.
### Pay today

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Nat’l hourly rate</th>
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Source: PayScale, February 2011; all numbers are median or mid-point, not average

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### Grounds Maintenance Foreman

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- Overtime: $16.65-$24.39
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**HOURLY RATES BY STATE**
- Florida: $10.84-$15.42
- Texas: $10.93-$17.74
- Michigan: $11.40-$15.59
- North Carolina: $11.68-$13.80
- Ohio: $12.22-$17.33
- Pennsylvania: $12.35-$19.21
- Massachusetts: $14.89-$20.00

**HOURLY RATES BY EXPERIENCE**
- 1-4 years: $10.03-$14.12
- 5-9 years: $12.43-$16.52
- 10-19 years: $13.20-$17.97
- More than 20 years: $14.42-$20.95

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### Account Manager

**OVERVIEW**
- Nat’l salary: $38,155-$59,512
- Bonus: $1,238-$8,799
- Profit sharing: $1,017-$4,988
- Commission: $5019-$24,100
- Total pay: $38,380-$63,840

**SALARIES BY STATE**
- Florida: $34,408-$47,055
- Georgia: $36,176-$58,717
- Texas: $37,425-$56,586
- Illinois: $38,716-$58,858
- Massachusetts: $40,676-$58,800
- New York: $41,540-$67,193
- California: $42,179-$66,395

**SALARIES BY EXPERIENCE**
- Less than 1 year: $29,892-$41,158
- 1-4 years: $35,283-$50,577
- 5-9 years: $41,690-$62,010
- 10-19 years: $44,914-$71,840
- 20 years or more: $46,236-$76,890

Source: PayScale, February 2011

---

### Landscape Contractor

**OVERVIEW**
- Nat’l salary: $36,720-$73,407
- Bonus: $850-$9,887
- Profit sharing: $2,500-$40,000
- Commission: $509-$19,442
- Total pay: $33,529-$68,092

**SALARIES BY STATE**
- North Carolina: $39,305-$101,736
- Illinois: $45,000-$81,951
- California: $51,500-$92,500

**SALARIES BY EXPERIENCE**
- 1-4 years: $37,000-$57,519
- 5-9 years: $34,583-$50,868
- 10-19 years: $44,748-$81,748
- 20 years or more: $44,219-$77,425

Source: PayScale, February 2011

*Source: PayScale, March 2011*
Low Odor • Low Profile • Dead Weeds!

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BROADLEAF HERBICIDE

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one giant leap for broadleaf weed control.

DuPont™ Imprelis™ is the most scientifically advanced turf herbicide in over 40 years. Thanks to its innovative new technology, you can control even the toughest broadleaf weeds—like ground ivy and wild violets—with more application freedom than ever before. Apply Imprelis™ on rainy days, hot days, dry days, cold days ... even reseeding days, and experience longer-lasting residual control on a wider range of broadleaf weeds. Imprelis™ is easy on the environment too—with one of the lowest application rates in lawn care, combined with low mammalian toxicity. Make the leap with DuPont™ Imprelis™ herbicide.
**The benefits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Hourly/seasonal labor</th>
<th>Salaried employees</th>
<th>Executive/management team</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid vacation</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paid personal days</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>Paid sick days</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Vision insurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disability insurance</td>
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<td><strong>34%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Profit sharing</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company-supplied uniforms</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of company car</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of company cell/smart phone/PDA</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance bonus</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year-end/holiday bonus</strong></td>
<td><strong>53%</strong></td>
<td><strong>50%</strong></td>
<td><strong>38%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 raise/pay increase</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Landscape Management, February 2011*

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**Health inspector**

Tempe, AZ’s Paramount Landscape is right around the 50-employee mark. As a result, “I’m really on the fence on whether to pursue growth or not — all based on healthcare,” says company president Brian Golembiewski.

The reason for Golembiewski’s trouble is the Health Reform Act passed by Congress in 2010, requiring employers with more than 50 employees to provide health insurance or pay fines of $2,000 per worker each year if any worker receives federal subsidies to purchase insurance.

And he isn’t the only one who’s worried. The new health care legislation tops the list of landscapers’ employment concerns this year, followed closely by the lack of ability to offer all employees health care at No. 3 and competitively offering all employees a full array of benefits at No. 5.

As written right now, the current legislation could cost Golembiewski $100,000 a year. “The incentive to grow over 50 employees is just not there with this issue,” he explains. “Why would I want to grow my business and put up with these headaches? It’s just not worth it. Small businesses are trapped. If something doesn’t change, I’m going to be in a holding pattern.”

PricewaterhouseCoopers says landscape businesses offering health care will see their costs jump 5% on average this year with most employees paying higher deductibles as a result. — *NW*
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The workweek

HOURS LOGGED
How many hours per week do employees work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours Logged</th>
<th>Hourly/Seasonal Employees</th>
<th>Hourly/Salaried Employees</th>
<th>Owner/Management Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 40</td>
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<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employee experiment:
Working weekends to better utilize equipment

Many contractors have wondered, “How can I get more utilization out of my equipment to get a better return on my investment?” Kurt Kluznik is one of them. “Like most contractors, we typically worked Monday through Friday, so our equipment was idle nearly 30% of the time, not counting the five months of winter when the mowing fleet sits idle all of the time,” he says in Innovate or Die: How Green Industry Companies Will Thrive in the New Economy, PLANET’s 30th Crystal Ball Report.

“For 128 hours per week, your equipment sits idle,” agrees Langdon Morris, owner of Innovation Labs LLC, Walnut Creek, CA. Morris discussed Kluznik’s case study during PLANET’s Executive Forum & Leadership Meeting Feb. 15-20 in Amelia Island, FL. “Adding Saturday and Sunday to your schedule would give you a 33% utilization boost.”

Landscape Management research shows 82% of the industry follows the standard five-day workweek, but Kluznik decided to “try something different” and give working weekends a try.

Potential gains started adding up. “We could avoid rush hour traffic delays and work on commercial sites when parking lots were empty, allowing us to complete jobs in less time and minimize hand trimming around parked cars.”

The big challenge was employees. “It’s difficult to find qualified account managers and supervisors who want to work weekends,” Kluznik says. “To solve that problem, we developed a rotating schedule where each account manager covered one weekend a month and took a day off during the week.”

Kluznik also experimented with crew scheduling. Each week, one set of crews worked four 10- to 12-hour days and another set worked three 12-hour days. Every crew worked four days one week and three days the next. The rotation meant “no crews got stuck working all of the weekends, and everyone enjoyed working long days so they could get three or four days off each week,” he explains.

The advantages piled up, but so did the challenges. Different crews on sites could lead to continuity and quality losses, Kluznik recognized. Better documenting site and customer requirements to maintain service levels improved customer expectations and company operations.

“The benefit was that since we always had people with days off every day, we were able to call them in to cover for absences,” Kluznik adds.

Yardmaster operated this schedule for a few years. “We were able to improve profits, acquire new equipment and gain new customers,” Kluznik says. But in the end, we went back to a five-day schedule because our managers really didn’t like alternating weekends or the longer weekday routine.”

Even though the experiment is over, Kluznik calls it a success, saying it helped the business get to where it is today. “We would not hesitate to go back to this schedule,” he points out, “if business needs required it.” —NW
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For more information visit BackedbyBayer.com/Celsius

Murdannia nudiflora (Doveweed) is a summer annual identified by its fleshy, narrow lance-shaped leaves as well as its stems that root at nodes. Doveweed is also identified by short leaf sheaths with short hairs on the upper margins. Doveweed usually germinates later in the growing season than other summer annuals and can be found from Virginia, into Georgia, through Florida and west into Texas.
Saying goodbye to cost-of-living boosts

Only 11% of U.S. employers say they award cost-of-living adjustments to employees, according to a recent WorldAtWork study called “Compensation Programs and Practices.”

A cost-of-living adjustment is defined as an across-the-board wage and salary increase designed to bring pay in line with increases in the cost-of-living to maintain real purchasing power. Despite its low use, the practice still dominates in many workers’ perceptions of their raises, believing they are given to cover cost-of-living increases rather than reward them for job performance.

The more prevalent types of pay increases are characterized as promotional (94%), merit (92%) and market adjustments (76%).

“From a rewards perspective, it doesn’t make sense to base pay raises solely on the Consumer Price Index,” explains Kerry Chou, compensation practice leader, WorldAtWork. “Pay raises are a tool to motivate and retain employees. How motivating can it be for the top performer to receive the same base pay increase as a low or average performer?”

When asked how base salary increases are determined, 89% of U.S. employers select individual performance against job standards and or “management by objectives” over a general increase.

Eight out of 10 employers assess performance either formally (65%) or informally (15%), the study also showed. “Given the prevalence of tying pay to performance,” says Alison Avalos, research manager for WorldAtWork, “we expect the number of employers awarding cost-of-living increases to stay flat if not dwindle in the coming years.” — NW

FLOODED MARKETS

With a 12% unemployment rate in Florida, “we get plenty of applications,” reports Bruce Bachand, vice president of Orlando’s Carol King Landscape Maintenance. The problem is quality.

“Unfortunately, in most cases, people are looking for short-term jobs so they can continue seeking ‘better’ opportunities or they are lower caliper individuals who can’t meet our qualification requirements or have previous problems,” he explains.

Finding good, talented workers “is something that hasn’t changed just because there are more people looking for work,” agrees Ron Skover, owner of Greenlawn LLC, North Street, MI. In fact, where unemployment rates are highest, contractors seem to be having the most problems finding quality employees.

Here are the latest unemployment statistics by state, ranked from lowest to highest. Florida and Michigan are two of the top 10 worst states when it comes to unemployment. — NW
UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY STATE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Rate</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>South Dakota</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2010

TRAINING DAY?
Do you have an employee manual you hand out to workers when they begin employment?

No 35% Yes 65%

Do you have a formal employee training program you conduct with workers when they begin employment?

No 50% Yes 50%

Source: Landscape Management, February 2011

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PROBLEM 1

Texting. “No employee in the 18 to 24 age range will leave their phones alone during work,” says Chad Combs, owner of Landmark Lawn & Landscaping LLM in Janesville, WI. Sure, one text message is no big deal, explains Tony Brown, Tony Brown MBA Consulting. “You lose a minute or so of productivity per text message,” he says. It’s when those minutes add up “when someone receives and sends 30 text messages an hour as they carry on at least three conversations.”

SOLUTION

Linda Gravett, owner of Ohio-based HR consulting firm Gravett & Associates, advises companies to set up a code of conduct about text messaging and communications on the job.

The reason? Employees presume they have a reasonable expectation of privacy in their personal communications (even on employer-issued devices). Thus, employers must draft policies that effectively limit their employees’ expectations of privacy, advises David B. Ritter, who chairs Chicago’s Neal Gerber Eisenberg’s Labor & Employment Practice Group where he represents management in all areas of labor and employment law.

“But employment communications policies are only effective if they are clearly communicated and consistently implemented,” Ritter says. “And any review of employee communications should be limited, reasonable and conducted in accordance with existing and up-to-date policies to avoid employer actions getting them into litigation trouble with employees.”
Today, employees call in sick or show up late at a disturbing percentage. A study by HR and employment law firm CCH, part of Wolters Kluwer/Croner, found personal illness accounted for only one-third of unscheduled absences by U.S. workers. The remaining two-thirds were a result of employees calling in sick last minute because they feel entitled to a day off, were stressed or burnt out, didn’t want to use up precious vacation time or had a family or personal commitment to which they didn’t want to admit.

More than two-thirds of employers also reported a discernible pattern in unscheduled absences with the most noticeable being workers calling in sick on Mondays and Fridays, followed by holidays and during flu and hay fever seasons.

One way to manage this problem, advises CCH, is offering an appropriate range of work-life and absence control programs, including compressed workweeks (ex. four-day workweek), telecommuting, flu shot and other wellness programs and alternative working arrangements.

Regardless of current policies or programs, make sure rules about tardiness and sick days are clear and up-to-date in employee manuals and communicated regularly.

When employees break rules, be firm but reasonable. If a worker shows up 4 to 5 minutes late occasionally, do not make a big issue of it. However, be careful not to let this become a habit by any individual or it will become an office wide problem, says FireHow.com.

Incentives may also work. One landscape company responding to Landscape Management’s Wage & Benefits Report survey pays a $1 bonus for employees who are on time every day and don’t call in sick for each entire two-week pay period.

Drug testing is an important safety practice in the workplace. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates drug use at work costs employers $75 to $100 billion dollars annually in lost time, accidents, health care and workers’ compensation costs. Sixty-five percent of all accidents on the job are related to drug or alcohol, and substance abusers utilize 16 times as many health care benefits and are six times more likely to file workers’ compensation claims than non-abusers.

As a result, the best thing to do in this case is to keep testing to avoid these additional costs, says Pre-Employment Drug Screening (PDS).

A drug-testing program should not be implemented without first establishing policies and procedures, the organization says. The most common type of testing program is pre-employment. Courts have consistently upheld the legality of requiring a pre-employment drug test as a condition of employment. It is a best practice to obtain consent and clearly indicate drug testing is an employment requirement.

For landscape contractors planning to conduct post-hiring testing for current employees, they should include training and education for supervisors and employees, as well as guidelines for discipline in the event of a positive test. Post-employment testing includes random testing for safety sensitive positions, post-accident testing, individualized suspicion testing and testing that is legally required in certain industries (ex. Department of Transportation requirements concerning truck drivers). Each of these types of testing is legally sensitive, and an employer should have a program in place before starting.

“We still have problems with people passing drug tests and having valid and trouble-free driver’s licenses,” shares Bruce Bachand, vice president of Orlando’s Carol King Landscape Maintenance.
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Finding people who want careers over jobs. “Our greatest challenge is getting competent and caring workers who are looking for career positions in one of the green industries and not just short-term employment,” Bachand says.

“It’s not so hard to find a laborer but it’s hard to find someone who really wants to do the best they can and are committed,” agrees Jason Raney, president, Raney Landscape, Little Rock, AR.

Ron Skover, owner of $570,000 Greenlawn in North Street, MI, says workers in his region have “a factory mentality. They want to come in, put in their eight hours and then clock out for the day.”

But Skover is in a unique position — he wants an employee who can recognize a long-term career opportunity. “I’m at an age where I’m looking to scale back,” he says. “I need to find someone who wants a career and can care about this business like I do.”

SOLUTION
Raney tries to alleviate this problem during the hiring stage. He has noticed a pattern. “Most of the time, a single guy in his 20s isn’t as committed,” he says. “But a family guy has people to support and is more likely to be long-term.”

When it comes to managing and motivating Generation Y employees, Fortune’s management and career expert Annie Fisher says they may need more direction on tasks that require face-to-face contact. For instance, if they are going to greet customers, be specific and explain you want them to make eye contact, etc. Then demonstrate how you want it done.

For Generation X employees, provide them with job descriptions so they feel like valued co-workers and additions to the team.

Incentives that enhance or grow employee careers in the landscape field may also help. Skover is offering students the opportunity to win a $2,000 scholarship per year to Michigan State University if they pursue the turfgrass/landscape management field. “I’m hoping it will draw someone to work here and consider my business for a future career,” he says.

“Even if it turned into an internship initially, I want to help someone who is interested in the field, and who’s really going to try and do a good job and enjoy what they do.”

WEB EXTRA
For PLANET’s analysis of 2009 compensation practices, check out the 2010 Employee Compensation Report for the Green Industry in the LM Bookstore at shop.landscapemanagement.net.

WEB EXTRA
PROBLEM

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Delegate for success

One of the things we do as consultants when we look at a company is to evaluate how well a team functions. We frequently see companies that work very hard, but always seem to be playing catch up. We also notice that many people in middle management, such as account managers and production supervisors, seem to be doing the work of their subordinates. This occurs through all levels of management — even owners doing things that should be done by someone else.

The simple cause of this is the willingness to accept upward delegation. It sometimes starts at a crew leader level. The crew leader is doing too much work himself or riding the large mower — because that is what he did so well to become the crew leader — and neglects his crew leader duties. The result is the crew leader’s supervisor, a production manager or account manager picks up the slack and gets consumed doing crew leader work, thereby neglecting his own work, which in turn gets delegated to his boss.

This ultimately results in a dysfunctional team. Often, criticism is directed at the affected manager, saying that he is disorganized or is unable to multi-task. To a degree it is true, but it is also a result of a dysfunctional culture. Lack of proper delegation becomes a destructive habit of an organization. It’s like the whole organization becomes addicted to urgency. People like to get things done and do not take the time out to look at what is really happening.

So, how do you correct this problem? I think it is similar to an addiction. First, you have to realize that you actually have the problem. Recognition starts the road to recovery. Individuals must then take two key steps:

1. Stop accepting upward delegation. If an employee is not getting the job done, stop doing it for them.
2. Learn to develop the discipline to delegate.

People tend not to delegate for several reasons, including that it is sometimes easier to do it themselves. The person who should have done the task does not learn, and you are set up to continue to have to do it for him or her. Another reason can be timeliness of getting it done. It must be done now. If you do it, no one learns — and you are set up to continue in that pattern. A lack of trust can also contribute to the problem.

You have to break the pattern and start holding people accountable. I recommend starting each day by looking at your to-do list with the specific goal of identifying the things that should be delegated. Then, delegate them.

Success in delegation starts with clear instruction and some coaching. Some people like to have the person receiving the delegation repeat back what he or she was told to ensure that it is understood. This takes time, but saves time in the long run. Successful delegation is completed when you follow up to see that what was delegated was accomplished.

If you can get everyone on your team delegating properly, you will see a tremendous improvement in your organization. It will not solve all problems, but it will make most people more effective — and you will see an improvement in organizational accountability.
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Mariani Landscape continues to defy the odds. According to the Family Business Institute, only 30% of family-run firms make it to the second generation. Mariani Landscape has done that — and is hoping to get to the third-generation now that Frank Jr. has joined the company.

The company is not only surviving generational changes, it is thriving and was ranked No. 27 last year on LM’s list of top landscaping companies in the country. LM spoke with owner Frank Mariani and Carrie Woleben-Meade, ASLA, LEED AP, director of the design/build division, to find out just how the company stays so strong for so long.

**TRENDS**

› **Value.** We need to educate our clients on the meaning of value. For us, value equals good service at a fair price. Anyone can do a job cheaply, but we’re proud of the work we do, and we refuse to compromise on quality.

› **Sustainability.** We are seeing an increase in the client’s willingness to commit to new projects. In addition, we’re developing our native plant program, which will help us become a leader in sustainability. We practice this as much as we preach it. Recently, the firm adopted sustainable business practices, such as the use of bio-diesel to fuel trucks and its 100% organic lawn care program.

**OBSTACLES**

› **Distraction.** We need to keep associates energized to differentiate ourselves by keeping an intense focus on delivering a superior product. We need our team to believe in the products and services we offer so our customers will. Developing an energized workforce will also help us retain key associates as the economy picks up.

› **Focus.** A challenging market makes it easier for us to lose our focus on our core market. While they can be enticing, we need to let go of projects that don’t fit.

› **Inefficiency.** In down economic times, we need to go lean to eliminate waste. Every extra dollar we can save goes straight to the bottom line. For example, we’re using technology to help improve routing efficiency and tracking time.

› **H2B.** The unreliability of the H2B visa program makes it more difficult to maintain the skilled, legal workforce we’ve relied on for many years. We’re hoping Congress does the right thing and restores the returning worker exemption from the visa cap.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

› **Lean.** We have an opportunity to capitalize on our associates’ increased focus on efficiency and revenue. The economy has made our staff more aware of how they use their time — and more aggressive with prospecting.

› **Revenue.** We have the ability to raise prices. Some of this comes through customers continuing to demand green maintenance practices incorporated into their programs.

› **Staycation.** Our goal is to take advantage of the continued desire for our residential market to make their homes their retreat. Instead of taking big vacations, many of our clients are spending that money on their homes, making them more appealing and more comfortable.
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The total package

Adding an irrigation division made Hayden Landscaping a one-stop-shop.

ICK HAYDEN WAS on the brink of losing jobs. His clientele wanted a one-stop shop that offered an irrigation package along with everything else he did for them (seeding, install and design). Because he struggled to find good subcontractors offering the service, it came down to adding the division himself or losing the work. Hayden, second-generation owner of Hayden Landscaping in Greenup, IL, knew expanding was his best option. That was in the 1980s, and it’s remained a profitable division ever since, comprising approximately 40% of the company’s annual revenue.

Back then Hayden was doing a lot more commercial work. Today, about 65% of his jobs are residential as the need for residential irrigation work has grown. Regardless of going commercial or residential, his biggest piece of advice to other contractors looking to enter the field is to get educated. “Whether it’s through your local supplier or the Irrigation Association, there’s a lot to learn, so it’s important to find a good source of information,” he says. “This is not something you can just jump into.”

TRAINING TECHS

Hayden says the biggest obstacle he’s had to overcome is finding other qualified irrigation techs to work with. “When you grow big enough where you can’t do it all yourself, finding qualified help can become a problem,” he says. “You can’t just go on the street and find someone. There’s a lot of education and training involved.”

Hayden has overcome that challenge by being diligent in good hiring and also cross-training all of his full-time employees. “Now if one of them is off, each employee can handle almost any other job, at least temporarily,” he says.

Irrigation can be a tough field to break into if there’s steep competition, but Hayden says in his area, even today, there are few competitors. What has been another challenge, though, and may be keeping competition at bay, is the red tape involved in this field. There are a lot of rules and regulations to adhere to, so keeping up with the latest information is critical.

BUILDING UP

When Hayden first added the division, he had a large existing base of customers who were already requesting the service to tap into. As a result, without much marketing effort, he was able to secure a lot of work. And since he lives in a small community, word-of-mouth spread fast. Hayden says even today he gets a lot of jobs through referrals.

In terms of initial output, Hayden says the diagnostic tools to trace wires, locate valves and do repairs are a necessary investment. “Any type of diagnostic tool is money well spent,” he says. “Other tools like a plow could be rented, and most contractors probably already have the standard tools they’ll need.”

In addition, it’s helpful to carry a fairly extensive inventory at all times so “you can pull into a job and get it done on the spot,” says Hayden. Making multiple trips to a job is money lost, so a well-stocked inventory should also be viewed as an investment.

Today, Hayden says he can’t picture the company without its irrigation division. It’s become a solid part of his business. But, most importantly, it’s helped him retain clients by fulfilling their needs.

The author is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.
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For nearly a quarter of a century, Robert Windish has owned and operated Fairway Green, serving the homeowners of central New Jersey. He’s learned a lot in those years and, like many leaders, he’s decided to share that knowledge with the rest of the industry. Windish is one of the Professional Landcare Network’s (PLANET) Trailblazers, a program that gives less-experienced lawn service professionals an opportunity to spend time and learn from lawn care veterans.

Robert, tell us how and why you became involved. The Trailblazer program is a great opportunity to give back to the industry and help someone from a non-competing market who’s just getting started or needs some help. When I became a PLCAA member more than 20 years ago, I got involved with the education committee. The others on the committee were older and more experienced in the industry than I was. I felt quite comfortable talking lawn care, both technical and business with them — kind of like today’s Trailblazer program.

What have you found to be most rewarding about being involved with PLANET? The friendships you develop. I look forward to seeing them at industry events and sharing experiences with them, what’s working and not working.

In a nutshell, describe your market and your customers. We’re about a 50-minute drive from New York City if there’s no traffic. We provide services in about a 25-mile radius in central New Jersey. The lawns we treat are large compared to other regions of the country. They average about 22,000 sq. ft. There are a lot of professional people in our market, and they don’t have time to do their own lawn care.

How would you describe your growth strategy? I grow my business based on the quality of people I can bring into the business. For the most part, I’ve been lucky. There was a time after I started the business when I wanted to grow it into multiple branches. As I got older, maybe I got smarter. I decided I didn’t want to go that route.

Describe the biggest competitive challenge facing your company. Over the past few years, more customers purchase by price — so we’re constantly battling against lower prices offered by the largest lawn care companies. We may be one of the most expensive companies in our market — maybe the most expensive — because we offer superior service.

Share any changes you will be making in your marketing or operations for 2011. We continue to search for superior products that will add efficiencies in delivering our services.

How do you see the 2011 season compared to 2010? It looks like the people who normally spend money on services will continue to do so. But new customers who have not typically purchased service-related products will continue to be hard to find.

What are your feelings regarding the proposed Child Safe Playing Field Act that, if passed, would ban pesticide use on all New Jersey school grounds? The Green Industry has to unite and take a stand on issues that threaten our industry, the loss of thousands of jobs and our personal livelihoods. Too many companies are unaware of this proposed legislation that ultimately will affect them. Whether you’re a small one-man company or a multiple-branch national company, you have to get involved. Once we concede an issue like this, which is purely emotional and has no scientific basis, what’s next? We’ve all seen what’s happened in Canada, where lawn care chemicals have been banned. It could happen here.
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WHITE CLOVER
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IDENTIFICATION TIPS
› This low-growing, creeping winter perennial has stems that root at nodes.
› Its tooth-edged elliptical leaves, in groups of three, usually have a light-green or white band like a watermark.
› White to pink-tinged flower clusters grow from long stems that usually rise above the leaves.
› Active growth from seeds or plants begins with cooler temperatures and increased moisture.

CONTROL TIPS
› Mechanical or physical removal is not recommended. Stolons may break, which increases the potential for more infestation.
› Apply a post-emergent granule herbicide labeled for white clover control, ideally prior to flowering in fall or late winter. Follow the label directions for appropriate timing and spread rates.

CARPETWEED
Mollugo verticillata

IDENTIFICATION TIPS
› This low-growing, creeping winter perennial has stems that root at nodes.
› Its tooth-edged elliptical leaves, in groups of three, usually have a light-green or white band like a watermark.
› White to pink-tinged flower clusters grow from long stems that usually rise above the leaves.
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CONTROL TIPS
› Mechanical or physical removal is not recommended. Stolons may break, which increases the potential for more infestation.
› Apply a post-emergent granule herbicide labeled for white clover control, ideally prior to flowering in fall or late winter. Follow the label directions for appropriate timing and spread rates.

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YOU’VE JUST sent out a bid for all the plants on a big residential landscape. The bid comes back, you tell the designer everything is set and place the order … only to find the size you specified isn’t actually available. Back to the phone you go.

While buying live goods that can sometimes take years to grow is never going to be as easy as picking up a carton of milk, there are ways to make the process go more smoothly.

Communicate with all involved

Jim Reddington has been a buyer at LP Statile, a re-wholesaler in Springfield, NJ, for 27 years. He has seen what causes bottlenecks and misfires in the plant sourcing pipeline.

“The biggest thing is when a contractor comes in with a plan for a job that was designed by an outside architect, and the material specified is not available in that variety or size,” he says. “Landscape contractors are often reluctant to communicate with the architect to make changes.”

Reddington says quite often the architect is not familiar with the local market and availability of the plant material. Also, there is usually some lag time between the design and installation, during which continued on page 50

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the material becomes unavailable.

“In the case of a job designed by an outside architect, get communication going with them to find out what they’re open to in terms of substitutions,” he says. “A lot of times contractors feel bound to the design and maybe the architect is completely open to substitutions.”

The same advice holds true for landscapers who deal directly with homeowners. Giving them several options upfront depending on availability can avert disappointment down the road.

“When I first started doing this, I was more flexible with substitutions,” says Cecily Gordon, an estimator at New Canaan Landscaping in San Jose, CA. The company focuses on high-end residential landscapes. “Now I am true to my list. If there are problems where something is unavailable or needs substitutions, I give notice to the architect. Sometimes they don’t care and roll right with it, and sometimes you find out the client had their heart set on this specific plant or tree.”

Build relationships

The landscape industry needs each other. Landscape architects need contractors, contractors need wholesalers, and wholesalers need growers. The right relationships are critical to business, but oftentimes there is a disconnect among the many moving parts of the landscape supply chain.

Colby Jordan, founder of findyourtrees.com, says he saw that disconnect when his father ran into plant sourcing issues and Jordan, still in his 20s, couldn’t believe he was not able to find plants online. After a year of testing, Jordan launched his plant sourcing site a year ago.

While some may think of intermediate sites as being efficient but impersonal, Jordan sees it as a networking tool.

“I see our tool as building relationships between buyers and suppliers,” he says. “We’re getting people to respond to each other and making sure everyone’s introduced.”

Gordon also stresses the importance of building relationships.

“I am working with growers and nurseries who know me and know the company,” she says. “They know the quality we demand and I know what they provide. There’s a significant amount of energy saved knowing I can trust our partners to provide what we expect. It’s worth the time building that relationship upfront.”

Once trust is built, says suppliers are often able to provide photos of their stock with size and quality specifications — saving the landscape company from hand picking many of its orders.

Have a plan

Upfront organization also pays off exponentially when sourcing plants.

Gordon enters all the bid information she receives in a template to record the plants, sizing and source.

“Many times, we bid a project and then six months or a year later you need to find it,” she says. “It’s important to create a system that others can step in and use. Creating that type of system will save time over the long haul.”

It also helps to plan orders in advance. But that’s easier said than done.

“The bulk of our customers are walk-ins,” says Reddington. “They come in and purchase that day. But it does help to pre-order, even if it’s just a day or two. That allows us to assemble the order in the yard to make it easier to pick up.”

Planning is especially important for hard-to-source items, such as large specialty trees, native plants and bulbs — anything that is out of the ordinary.

Gordon says native plantings are a good example. Designers may specify a native meadow with thousands of plugs

Findyourtrees.com has partnered with industry associations to offer discounts on its plant sourcing services.

continued on page 52
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that have to be grown under contract, and that could take months for them to mature to the proper size.

“Deal with the trouble spots first and get those conversations going as soon as possible,” Gordon says.

Advanced planning also helps with shipping considerations. Specialty plants and trees often can’t be ordered in small quantities. If they’re being shipped across the country, they need to fill up the truck.

Gordon’s planning starts before she places an order. Because there is often significant time between the landscape design and the actual bid — and changes may have occurred that will impact the plant list — she checks the plans.

“I have to do some research on the lists,” she says. “I confirm the legend matches the planting plan. Often the legend is made during the first round of the process and can change dramatically when the planting plan is made. Also, sometimes landscape architects will source a plant that they don’t know about — it might come from England, for example — then we have to get into quarantine research and shipping costs to see if it’s viable.”

Keep your options open
With the variables specific to live goods, such as size, variety, season and condition, it’s important to have as many sources as possible. Most landscapers have their “go-to” suppliers, but it’s wise to have backup.

“What we’ve been finding is that most contractors have good relationships with a few local suppliers, but sometimes architects specify a particular plant that is not available in large quantities in an area,” says Jordan. “Inventories are constantly changing, so you have to start shopping around. That’s when time gets drained.”

Online brokers like Jordan and re-wholesalers like Reddington provide another avenue to plant sourcing. Reddington buys stock from nurseries across the country and brings it into a central location. Jordan’s findyourtrees.com enables landscapers to submit a list of plants through the site, which is automatically sent to different nurseries to bid on.

“The beauty of brokers is you can find everything in one place,” Gordon says. “It can be expensive, but sometimes it’s worth the money.”

Gordon says New Canaan’s normal approach to sourcing begins with growers or wholesale nurseries. Sometimes branded plants are needed from retail nurseries, and sometimes they go online to source specialty plants.

Use today’s technology
The Internet and digital photography has changed the way plants are sourced, but change has come slowly.

“I think with this industry, they’re not as tech savvy as some others,” says Jordan. “That’s a challenge we face. Landscapers are kind of nervous about tying out a technology-based product. We spent a year working with landscapers to make our service simple to use.”

Reddington says his company’s site is used as a source for plant availability information, and LP Statile implemented an email sourcing and availability program last year that has become popular.

Still, it’s not an Amazon.com model. “The product we’re selling is not a manufactured item that can be duplicated,” says Reddington. “Sometimes we can’t just special order it. These products might take five or six years to produce. We can’t pay more money to get them to grow quicker. Sometimes the customer just doesn’t understand that.”

Re-wholesalers constantly bring in new plants and trees so they can provide one-stop shopping for landscapers.
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This … is Garden Idol!
During the January 2011 American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) Clinic, First Editions Little Devil from Bailey Nurseries took top honors at the ANLA “Garden Idol” live event. Voted the best new plant introduction for 2011, this compact ninebark captured the attention of the judges and attendees. Growing only to 4 ft., it makes a great background for a flowerbed or as a shrub border. Little Devil packs a lot of color and texture into a small package, featuring deep burgundy foliage throughout the season and small white-pink clusters of flowers in June. Videos of all the Garden Idol contestants will be released in the ANLA Knowledge Center soon. The second phase of ANLA’s online voting began on March 1, 2011. BaileyNurseries.com

British beauty
Named for a lake in northwest England, the repeat-flowering Rosa ‘Windermere’ (Aushomer) from David Austin Roses features about 80 petals. Its rounded buds open to full, cupped flowers. The blooms are cream at first, paling to white. They have a fruity fragrance with a hint of citrus. This is a free-flowering variety that continues to bloom until late in the season. Its attractive, neat and compact bush produces several basal shoots with few thorns. The plant grows to about 3 x 3 ft., and is hardy in USDA zones 5-9. DavidAustinRoses.com

Cool kale
As the 2011 Cool Season Bedding Plant Award Winner, American Takii’s ‘Glamour Red’ F1 is All-America Selections’ first winning kale (edible or ornamental) in 78 years of trialing. The ornamental kale features shiny, waxless leaves. It is a fringed leaf type Brassica oleracea, with a flower head size of 10 to 12 in. Leaf coloring begins when night temperatures fall below 55°F for approximately two weeks. Expect good disease tolerance in all regions for this full sun annual, with frost-tolerant blooms from November to March in warmer climates. Takii.com

Gorgeous gaillardia
The blooms of Benary’s Gaillardia ‘Arizona Apricot’ have yellow edges that deepen to apricot in the center. Boasting 3- to 3.5-in. daisy-like flowers, it will bloom from early summer into autumn. The compact, 12-in.-tall plants offer bright green foliage and a uniform habit best viewed when planted to the front of the flower bed. The plant is free-flowering, blooming heavily without vernalization, covering the plant with bright blooms that look great in mass. This long-flowering perennial is hardy in USDA zones 2-10, is relatively maintenance free, and drought-tolerant once established. Benary.com

Waterlily winner
Nymphaea ‘Wanvisa’ was recently honored by the International Waterlily and Water Garden Societies as the Best New Waterlily for 2010 and the Best New Hardy Waterlily, from more than 30 entries in the contest. It was also named as one of the society’s 2011 Collector’s Aquatic Plant of the Year (CAPY). The lily boasts salmon pink to peach-colored flowers with flecks of cream to pale yellow accents. The leaves display a marbled appearance. ‘Wanvisa’’s story of recognition was nearly bypassed entirely because it was viewed as an abnormality in a cultivated water lily field in Thailand. The water lily nursery owner was concerned it would contaminate her prized Nymphaea ‘Joey Tomocik,’ a vibrant yellow hardy water lily that was growing alongside ‘Wanvisa.’ But water lily hybridizer Dr. N. Nopchai Chansilpa immediately recognized there was something extraordinary about this plant, and helped bring it to its current prominence. ‘Wanvisa’ is available in limited shipments in April, May, June and July 2011. IWGS.org/2011-CAPY-Purchasing.html
A dirty, dusty job isn’t so bad when you’ve got room to breathe. In fact, it’s pretty nice with Bobcat’s unique, curved door pocket and one-piece door seal. They provide a best-in-class, pressurized environment that keeps dust to a minimum. From startup to shutdown, you stay clean and comfortable. There’s only one manufacturer with standards as high as yours. Find out more at www.bobcat.com/standard5
How to coach a salesperson

1. **Ineffective qualification of prospects.** Salespeople can’t meet goals if they don’t grow and nurture a large pool of warm leads. To do this, the sales manager must focus the salesperson on allocating time to this task, counting and testing the quality of the leads weekly, and providing simple networking call scripts for turning cold/warm leads into hot leads. A good sales manager reviews and develops canned emails and voicemails, and helps the salesperson strategize ways to get in the door. Poor writing and phone skills with lack of creative follow-up narrow the lead pool.

2. **Insufficient lead pool management.** Failure to qualify a hot lead as a high probability close opportunity will always produce lots of bidding activity, with relatively little result other than wasted time. Given the low close rates in the industry, wasted time is a luxury they can’t afford. A sales manager can test the quality of an opportunity by asking a few simple questions.
   - Do we know who really makes this decision?
   - Will we have the opportunity to close it face to face?
   - Have we established a clear need (point of pain), and connected that to our service proposition in a way that establishes a “fit”?
   - Do we understand the job specification and budget range, and can we shape it?

A good sales manager provides scripts, practices how to ask the right questions to elicit these responses, and shows the salesperson how to close on an advancing action. If the salesperson cannot confirm a clear fit or a face-to-face, then closing success will be low.

3. **Ineffective negotiation under pressure.** The art of deal-making — also known as negotiation — takes practice. But the skill set is rather straightforward. The poised and patient salesperson turns an objection into an opportunity by validating the objection, clarifying it, turning it back as a question to the prospect, then closing on the response with an offer, concession or assurance. This simple method gets salespeople past the “deer in the headlight” moment of truth that happens right after a brilliant presentation is followed by a question about matching the lowest price. A good sales manager prepares “objection cheat sheets” and a 4-minute canned “needs/solutions” presentation to arm the salesperson with proper tools. But this is not enough without grilling sessions to produce fluency. At the end of the day, a sale is not made in the presentation, but in the negotiation.

How do you motivate landscape and lawn care salespeople and get better performance? Teach them how to win. For salespeople, winning is the ultimate motivation.
You have enough things to worry about. But with FreeHand® 1.75G herbicide, money-draining re-treats aren’t one of them. FreeHand 1.75G enables you to control a wide range of grasses, broadleaf weeds and sedges with one application. And since FreeHand 1.75G utilizes two highly effective active ingredients and two unique modes of action, it’s a great resistance management tool, too. Don’t lose profits to re-treats. Treat it right the first time, with FreeHand 1.75G.

betterturf.basf.us
MAINTENANCE:
COMPACT CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT

General Equipment Co.
The 240 hole digger features the construction industry’s first use of four-stroke engine technology on a one-man, handheld hole-digging product. A 1.6-hp Subaru EH035 engine supplies the power. The four-stroke engine also eliminates the need for premixed fuel and oil solutions, effectively removing any worries of engine damage caused by improper mixing techniques. A Magna twist grip throttle controls engine speed for optimal power output. A spur gear transmission, produces a maximum drilling torque of 55 ft-lbs. Its all-metal centrifugal clutch slips on overload or when the auger makes contact with a buried obstruction. The 1-in.-diameter driveshaft connection accommodates the use of earth augers ranging from 2 to 8 in. in diameter. The standard digging depth is 30 in., which can be increased with an available 15-in., non-flighted extension. GeneralEquip.com

Case Construction Equipment
New pallet forks are specially designed for use with Case’s skid steers and compact track loaders. They are available with either 48- or 42-in. tines, in a choice of Heavy Duty, rated to 5,500 lbs., or Standard, rated to 4,000 lbs. Case pallet forks feature a rugged, reliable frame and outstanding visibility to the tines for safe, easy loading. The frame’s mounting angle assures proper forward tilt for loading and excellent rollback for transporting loads. The design offers ample room between the frame and the cab, providing easy access to and from the cab. CaseCE.com

continued on page 60

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continued from page 58

**John Deere**
In response to customers’ needs for faster travel speed across job sites, John Deere introduces a two-speed option to its mid-frame 318D and 320D skid steer loader models. The new option increases ground speed as much as 62% on both manual and E/H controls machines, from 6.8 mph to 11 mph. It’s engineered to provide a second gear for a variety of work, including landscaping. Shift on-the-go capability allows operators to kick into higher travel speeds with a simple flip of a toggle switch on the left-hand joystick. Electronically controlled shifting allows for seamless transition during upshifts and downshifts. The 318D and 320D are part of Deere’s customer-inspired D-Series skid steer line, featuring 24% larger cabs and 6 in. of additional headroom than their predecessors. They are also quieter because of a hydraulic fan drive and engine auto-idle, and positively pressurized for better air temperature control. [JohnDeere.com](http://www.JohnDeere.com)

**New Holland Construction**
New Holland introduces pallet forks specially designed for use with its skid steers and compact track loaders. They feature a rugged frame and visibility to the tines for easy and accurate loading. The fork assemblies are available with either 48- or 42-in. tines, with a choice of 5,500- or 4,000-lb.-rated tine sets. The frame’s mounting angle ensures optimum forward tilt for load pick-up and rollback for transporting loads. The design offers ample room between the frame and the cab, providing the operator with easy access to and from the cab. [NewHolland.com](http://www.NewHolland.com)

**Bobcat Co.**
The new, 12,678-lb. T870 is the largest compact track loader the company has ever manufactured, and the 10,008-lb. S850 (pictured) is its largest skid loader. Both new loaders provide operators with more powerful hydraulics, increased fuel capacity, higher lift capacities and reach, increased pushing power and higher horsepower than any of Bobcat’s current loader models. In addition, the loaders will enable the operator to accomplish more work through performance and durability enhancements that provide more power and keep the loader working longer, while increasing operator comfort with a new cab-forward design with improved visibility and a more spacious and comfortable cab. Job-enhancing features were also added to the optional Deluxe Instrumentation Panel featured in these machines. [Bobcat.com](http://www.Bobcat.com)

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Ditch Witch

Ditch Witch now offers a heavy-duty track option with two of its Zahn compact trenchers: the two- and four-wheel-drive models of R230 and R300. Unlike competitors’ tracks, these heavy-duty tracks “walk,” or oscillate, 12°, which helps provide greater stability when loading, unloading and maneuvering over curbs or other rough and uneven terrain. Another benefit of these tracks is their high-flotation design, which helps minimize surface damage to turf and enables the operator to work confidently on and around sensitive landscapes and established lawns. Tracks do not increase the width of the R230 and R300, so each machine can still fit comfortably through a standard 36-inch (0.9 m) yard gate. DitchWitch.com

Massey Ferguson

The 25-hp MF1526 compact tractor features a three-range hydrostatic transmission and improved ergonomics. It’s powered by a Tier IV interim-emission-compliant Iseki three-cylinder liquid-cooled diesel engine. An electro-hydraulic independent rear PTO engages smoothly and allows the operator to separately manage PTO speed and ground speed. The semi-flat ISO-mounted platform puts rubber bushings between the platform and the frame to soak up vibration. An easy-to-read instrument panel helps keep the operator informed of the tractor’s performance. A full line of attachments, from loaders and mowers to brooms and blades, is also available. MasseyFerguson.com

Gehl

The all-new model V330 skid loader features more than 131 in. of near-vertical lift height, thanks to a state-of-the-art lift arm design that provides extended reach and lift height for easy truck and material loading. The lift arm design provides optimal views to the sides of the loader and a direct line-of-sight to the bucket cutting edge. Thick steel plating braces the lift arm, providing additional strength and durability. The loader also features an 84-hp, turbo-diesel engine and a rated operating capacity of 3,300 lbs. Equipped with electronic engine control and a foot throttle, the V330 can be operated at partial throttle as the workload allows for lower sound levels and reduced fuel consumption. Plus, an all-new, ergonomic cab design includes fully adjustable joystick controls and an optional air-ride seat. Extra-large side screens and an optional wide-view front glass door provide visibility to the bucket cutting edge and front work area. The new side-folding restraint bar and armrests feature multiple adjustments to enhance operator comfort and safety. Gehl.com/verticalimit
Kioti Tractor
Kioti introduces a completely new line of implements and attachments for its compact tractors and utility vehicles. The new line is comprised of more than 60 brand-new models designed to bring added productivity and profitability to more than 30 Kioti prime movers. The line includes a full range of three-point implements, including mowers, cutters, tillage and landscape implements as well as implements designed for ATVs and UTVs. All products feature Kioti’s proprietary and new E-Coat (Electro-Deposition Coating), Premium Powder Coat or the Powder-over-E-Coat finish. All products are made from high tensile-strength steel with a base rust inhibitor, then feature a baked-on finish for corrosion resistance. Kioti.com

Volvo Construction Equipment
The all-new, 2-ton EC20C compact excavator is powered by a Tier IV-compliant, 16.2-hp diesel engine and sports a new cab and digging equipment design. The operator can now use an electro-proportional fingertip control on the joystick for swing and offset movement at the same time. This enables the EC20C excavator to deliver faster and more precise performance, while reducing operator fatigue. The attachment circuit and offset function foot controls have been replaced by the joystick button — providing operators with more leg and foot room. Maximum hydraulic oil flow for the first auxiliary circuit can now be set to adjust the maximum speed of a tilting ditching bucket. The adjustment is easily made from the right-hand joystick using the proportional roller and maximum flow switch. In addition, the Volvo Care Cab provides a roomy operating environment that meets or exceeds TOPS, ROPS and OPG1 (Object Protective Guard) standards of protection. An adjustable seat has ergonomic armrests for operator comfort. A new instrument panel provides comprehensive information for all key operating functions, while a digital hour meter displays total engine running hours and can be viewed from outside the cab without starting the engine. The design of the EC20C has reduced the tail swing by 7% compared to its predecessor, the B-series excavator. The shorter tail swing footprint, along with the rounded design and cast-iron rear counterweight, offers maximum rear protection to the excavator. VolvoCE.com/na
Kubota Tractor Corp.
The new KX-4 Series compact excavator is designed to provide operators with enhanced performance and increased stability in open areas. It offers an optional hydraulic float angle blade with 25° pivot angle for increased productivity. Its conventional tail swing provides stability in open areas, even when a thumb and wide buckets are used. With a 476-gross-hp, direct-injection Kubota diesel engine that features single-side servicing, this machine includes an auto idle feature that conserves fuel and reduces noise level. A new, load-sensing hydraulic system employs a combination of closed and open center controls to ensure strong digging forces and minimize slowdown during travel when using attachments. The advanced load-sensing system provides optimum oil flow to each cylinder for smooth multifunction operation and enhanced fuel economy. Auto-downshift travel motors on the KX057-4 offer smooth transitions through turns, and the optional hydraulic angle blade improves backfilling efficiency. Float is standard equipment on all blades and combines with high traction force to speed the operator on to their next job. These blades include a reversible bolt-on cutting edge to reduce operating costs. Two auxiliary hydraulics ports are also available, expanding attachment versatility. Kubota.com

Caterpillar
The Cat 907H, the latest addition to the Cat Compact Wheel Loader range, fits between the 906H and 908H models. The 70-net hp model features a skid steer loader style coupler, auxiliary hydraulic system, Cat C3.4 diesel engine, two-speed hydrostatic drive, standard differential locks in both axles, parallel-lift Z-bar loader linkage and high-visibility operator’s station. Optional features – including high-flow hydraulics, ride control and speeder transmission – enhance the 907H’s performance. The hydraulically actuated skid-steer-loader-type coupler allows the 907H to be integrated into existing small-equipment fleets. Standard auxiliary hydraulics, proportional third-function valve and continuous-flow capability provide a complete control package for work tools such as trenchers and stump grinders. Cat.com

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Steiner

The new, compact Steiner 235 FWD tractor combines speed and agility with traction and power. It’s powered by a 25-hp Kubota diesel engine, and uses hydrostatic front-wheel-drive and rear-power steering for infinitely variable speed control up to 10 mph for open areas — and a tight 14-in. turning radius in cramped, tight spaces and niche areas. Other features include wide 350 Mag 6-ply front drive tires, a low center of gravity, a transmission differential lock that links both drive wheels for even traction, and a TRACTION-MAX Weight Transfer System. Front-mount attachments include an aerator, machinery hitch, mower decks (rotary and specialty), blades, snow blower, scoop, sweeper, tiller and turbine blower. Operational features include a simple two-point Quick-Hitch system that requires no tools to connect or change attachments, a fingertip-control console, and foot-controlled forward and reverse that leaves no operational distraction from work.

SteinerTurf.com

continued on page 66

JCB

The new 515-40 is JCB’s most compact telehandler to date. It’s just 5 ft., 11 in. tall, 5 ft., 2 in. wide and 9 ft., 6 in. long. It weighs 7,672 lbs., with an all-new, off-set single-spine main frame. As a result, the machine boasts a full-size cab with easy accessibility and plenty of operator space. The design enables the machine to break through a barrier that previously prevented many compact telescopic handlers from use in smaller workspaces. It offers 8 ft., 6 in. of forward reach, 13 ft., 2 in. of loading height, and a 9-ft. turning radius. Equipped with 4-wheel steering, 4-wheel-drive, a hydrostatic transmission and exceptional ground clearance, the machine can easily traverse challenging outdoor conditions. Powered by a 50-hp engine, the 515-40 can carry a payload of 3,300 lbs. It comes standard with a universal skid steer quick attach, opening it up to a vast range of attachments.

JCBna.com
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Designed for use on warm-season turf, Specticle delivers residual, broad-spectrum control and a use rate that is the lowest in the industry among preemergent herbicides, according to the company. With use rate flexibility, lower use rates provide from three to four months of control — and with higher use rates, Specticle can last eight months. Featuring the active ingredient indaziflam, a cellulose biosynthesis inhibitor (CBI), Specticle’s recommended use rate for is 2.5 to 5 oz. per acre, depending on the weeds to be controlled and length of control desired. The product has shown control of Poa, crabgrass, goosegrass and broadleaf weeds. It can be used on a variety of warm-season turfgrasses including Bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, centipedegrass, St. Augustinegrass, and seashore paspalum. Specticle is formulated as a wettable powder available in pre-measured water soluble packets. For convenience, two package sizes are available: six bottles with eight 0.625-oz. packets each and four pouches with seven 2.5-oz. packets each. BackedByBayer.com

PBI/Gordon Corp.

T-Zone provides broadleaf weed control in cool-season turfgrass. It contains four active ingredients including triclopyr (“T”), a proven ingredient for hard-to-control weeds. Energized with sulfentrazone (“ZONE”), T-Zone is fast-acting with visible activity in hours. Weed death can occur within seven to 14 days. Sulfentrazone, a protox inhibitor, works by preventing a key enzyme required for chlorophyll production. Tests have consistently shown control of tough weeds like wild violet, ground ivy, black medic, oxalis, clover, spurge, speedwell and lespedeza. The oil-based formula cuts through the cuticle of the toughest weeds. Hard-working triclopyr, when combined with fast-acting sulfentrazone and precise ratios of 2,4-D and dicamba, provides premium weed control. T-Zone affects multiple sites within broadleaf weeds with symptoms including rapid leaf and stem curl, twisting, yellowing and browning. As a bonus, the sulfentrazone provides suppression of young and actively growing yellow nutsedge. PBIgordon.com

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Dimension specialty herbicide provides preemergence and early postemergence control of crabgrass, and preemergence control of more than 40 grassy and broadleaf weeds, including crabgrass, goosegrass, spurge, creeping woodsorrel, bittercress and Poa annua. With multiple formulations, including the water-based Dimension 2EW, Dimension can be used over the top of landscape ornamentals and in established lawns without staining surroundings. It can be used on established seeded, sodded or sprigged turf. Dimension also is labeled for use on more than 180 tolerant ornamental plant varieties, which makes it an ideal wall-to-wall solution for weed control in turf and landscape. 
*DowProvesIt.com*

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**Nufarm Americas Inc.**

4-Speed herbicide provides fast, effective postemergent control of a wide range of broadleaf weeds. Proven performers 2,4-D, dicamba and MCPP-p are aided by pyraflufen-ethyl and a blend of premium emulsifiers to add speed to performance. In as little as 24 to 48 hours after application, the company says lawn care professionals can begin to see control of troublesome weeds such as dandelion, white clover, buckhorn plantain and other broadleaf weeds.

NuFarm.com

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**United Turf Alliance**

New ArmorTech Threesome Three-Way Selective Herbicide combines 2,4-D, mecoprop-p and dicamba to selectively control weeds such as clover, henbit and wild onion in most turfgrass species, including bentgrass. In addition, new ArmorTech QuinPro is a dry flowable quinclorac herbicide offering flexibility and a low use rate, while controlling both broadleaf and grassy weeds. Both products are available from United Turf Alliance member companies and select distributors.

UTAarmortech.com

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**BASF Professional Turf & Ornamentals**

Onetime herbicide is a soluble liquid formula- tion that controls more than 70 annual broad- leaf and grassy weeds. Onetime combines liquid-quinclorac-based Drive XLR8R herbicide with MCPP-P and dicamba, which provides fast entry into the plant, rainfast- ness in 30 minutes and more effective, consistent control of grassy and broad- leaf weeds than other products. Onetime can be applied to both cool- and warm- season grasses, as well as tank-mixed with other commonly used products, including pendimethalin-based Pendulum herbicide, to enhance residual control.

BetterTurf.com
**LebanonTurf**

ProScape LockUp enables postemergence control of annual and perennial broadleaf weeds in residential lawns, golf courses, parks, sports fields, sod farms and other established turfgrass. The granular product provides activity at low use rates — generally 0.02 to 0.06 lbs. of active ingredient (penoxsulam) per acre — and can be used on wet or dry foliage and on warm- and cool-season turf. The specialty herbicide also includes LebanonTurf’s MESA, the first nitrogen source to combine ammonium sulfate with methylene urea in a single particle. LebanonTurf.com

**DuPont Professional Products**

As what the company describes as the most advanced turf herbicide in more than 40 years, DuPont Imprelis herbicide allows turf professionals to control dandelion, clover and plantains, plus the toughest broadleaf weeds — like ground ivy and wild violets — even during reseeding or rainy days. Its single active ingredient has low application rates, low toxicity to mammals and low environmental impact. Since 2006, independent university researchers and contractors have conducted more than 400 field trial protocols to evaluate Imprelis. Studies show it is effective against many hard-to-control weeds, is not impacted by rain, hot temperatures or cool temperatures, and provides unprecedented levels of broadleaf weed control when applied on granular fertilizer. Imprelis is available in 2.5-gal., 1-gal. and 4.5-oz. bottles. ProProducts.DuPont.com

**Engage Agro USA**

Under a new distribution agreement, German-based Neudorff has assigned exclusive distribution rights to Engage Agro USA to market its new bioherbicide, Fiesta Turf Weed Killer, for all U.S. professional turf markets. It is considered to be an alternative to traditional synthetic chemical weed control products like 2,4-D. Fiesta is made from iron, and provides fast control of broadleaf weeds under a wide range of temperatures. It even works in cool temperatures as low as 45° Fahrenheit. EngageAgro.com

**Valent Professional Products**

SureGuard Herbicide and BroadStar Herbicide provide Green Industry professionals with long-lasting, preemergence control of annual grass and broadleaf weeds in two distinct formulations: SureGuard, a sprayable formulation, provides extended residual weed control and enhances the performance of glyphosate. BroadStar is said to be the longest-lasting residual granular herbicide on the lawn care professional market, providing lasting activity on difficult-to-control grass and broadleaf weeds. ValentPro.com
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TELL THEM YOU SAW IT IN

landscape management
Bill Schwab believes people are good — for the most part — but he learned the hard way that a signed contract is still a necessity.

**THERE WAS A TIME WHEN A CLIENT’S WORD WAS AS GOOD AS A WRITTEN CONTRACT.**

Bill Schwab, owner of Naturescape Landscape Co. in Encinitas, CA, says he can remember those days when he was a young man helping his uncle build golf courses. When he started his own business, Schwab felt comfortable taking work on handshake agreements alone. But after a few bad burns — including one that landed him in court — he did a serious overhaul of how he handles business.

Willingness to do work without a contract typically happens with people you already know or friends of someone you know, says Schwab. There may be a level of comfort that doesn’t make a contract feel necessary. Schwab was introduced to a couple by one of his old friends and took on some work for them with a written proposal, but no signed contract. From the start, there were indications the job was in trouble when the couple couldn’t agree on the plans for the project. It became complicated even more and put on hold when wild fires swept through Southern California. A month later, when the job was back up and running, the homeowner had decided he wanted additional work done. “I assumed he understood that meant more money,” says Schwab. “But that was my biggest problem — I assumed.”

When he sent the homeowner his weekly bill, including the new work, the homeowner called with six simple words Schwab says left him shocked: “Get your equipment off my land.”

In the end, the dispute went to court, an experience Schwab says made him realize that unless you truly earn enough money to make court worthwhile, “the only person who wins is the lawyer!”

“That job cost my company $32,226,” admits Schwab. “After that lesson I started keeping a Post-It note on my computer with that number. At the very least, it’s a reminder of what happened as a result of no contract.”

Since then, Schwab has made two significant changes to the way he does business. First and foremost, everyone signs an itemized contract. And not just any contract — the specific one that he draws up. That’s important because Schwab says some clients may want to create their own terms.

Second, Schwab also has his foreman keep a journal in which everyday functions, conversations and phone calls are logged. He says this minimizes liability if a court case were to arise. “This is held consistent as a legal document in a court of law,” says Schwab. “It is often classified as a legal record and can actually save your hide.”

Having everything written out in an itemized contract also limits liability, says Schwab. “With an itemized contract the only thing you can be held liable for is the item in dispute — and it’s all there in black and white,” he adds.

Today, Schwab’s contracts are as detailed as possible. “It is quite common to have 20 pages detailing every item, right down to the screws and minor hardware,” he says. “A non specific contract can be as loosey-goosey as a handshake. I’ve seen $50,000 jobs from my competitors that were written on one page. Without exact definitions of the scope of work, how can you possibly manage the expectations of your client and turn a profit?”

Schwab says his mistake in working off handshake agreements has been a costly but valuable lesson. While he still believes, for the most part, that people are good, he also knows now that it’s critical to his business that he draws up specific terms in a signed document. The bottom line, he says, is not to do anything until you have that signed contract in hand.
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Landscape pros like Alan know about the smooth handling that comes with a ZTrak PRO 900. With exclusive features like our cross-porting hydraulic system, our integrated ground drive transmission and tuned response control levers, operators get sports-car handling and confident traction. And there are the other legendary benefits of a Ztrak PRO 900: ease of use and exceptional mowing performance.

Alan Kelley accepts nothing less than the ZTrak PRO 900 for his business. Ask your local dealer what it can do for yours.

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