

The ticket to weed control

A client's desire for weed control leads Allan Cole to WeedEnder — and a profitable niche.

When Allan Cole's client asked him to control her weed problem, he found the perfect solution.



WHEN ALLAN COLE'S longtime client asked him to eliminate the weeds around her fenced-in property, it launched for Cole an add-on business.

Cole, who owns Willow Springs Nursery & Landscaping in Rubicon, WI, had been spraying around his client's fence annually, but the weeds returned year after year. While researching a better solution, Cole came across WeedEnder, a vegetation control-matting product by U-TECK. Made from post-consumer recycled materials, the green product prevents unwanted vegetation growth by depriving root systems of sun, yet it still allows water and nutrients to move through the fiber.

For Cole, it was the perfect solution.

"The client loved that it was made from recycled materials, and it also worked absolutely fantastic," recalls Cole of his first experience with the product. "It was really way above our expectations. I was so impressed that I called the company and asked about getting a distributorship... It has been an excellent fit for our business."

Though WeedEnder was developed for commercial use, the company is now pushing more into the residential landscape industry. U-TECK Vice President of Sales Russ Mason III says "never having to deal with weeds again" is a benefit homeowners can appreciate.

"You can use it in bed gardening," says Mason. "We can cut a series of holes into the sheet so you can plant bulbs through it. It not only kept weeds out of the beds, but it also helped keep the plants moist by reducing some of the evaporation."

A SPRAYING ALTERNATIVE

Because spraying is often a component of many landscape companies' maintenance divisions, some professionals may be wary about selling a one-time product that promises to get rid of weeds forever.

But Cole has an answer for that.

"That part of the maintenance business may be starting to go away anyhow, as it becomes so heavily regulated," he says. "Pesticide or herbicide spraying, particularly in areas where children are present, is becoming banned or heavily controlled. The handwriting is on the wall. Now is the time to adopt a different solution."

For Cole, WeedEnder has been that solution. But the product's high cost deters potential buyers. Mason admits it's not cheap.

"It was first invented for use with the U.S. Department of Transportation for roadside weeds, so it had to be able to withstand the rigors of having tractors and mowers run over it," he explains. "It's incredibly tough. But making it nearly indestructible drove the cost of the product up. The typical homeowner might not be inclined to choose this product at first."

That's why having a landscape professional involved in the sale makes sense, Cole says, noting that his clients are more receptive to WeedEnder after being convinced of its long-term potential. It's an easier sell with municipal customers such as school districts, where pesticides often are the only weed solution.

"What I tell my homeowner and municipal customers is that there are no recurring costs," says Cole. "You never have to go out and spray or string-trim weeds again. In the long run, the product is a money saver. And it's good PR for places like schools, too. It doesn't look good having someone walk around with a sprayer when it's a place where kids play."

"I definitely think it's a good fit for the landscape industry," he concludes. "It's an easy business to move in to."

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

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

WHY WEENDER? "It's a great solution for people who are not happy with spraying herbicides. It becomes a great add-on service for those customers," Cole says.

INVESTMENT? "That's the great thing about the WeedEnder product. You have to pick up very few tools to start installing the product. A landscaper would already have most of the tools, and you can pick up some of the specialized tools from U-TECK. If not considering the advertising and strictly just the investment in tools, I'd say it's under \$2,000."

LEARNING CURVE? "The learning curve is the same as any other installation skill a landscaper learns, such as building retaining walls. You just need to pay attention to the specifications that U-TECK puts out, and you'll have an easy installation."