

LAWN/TREE CARE

It's bed time

Landscape bed weed control is an attractive service opportunity, says one LCO.

By MARISA PALMIERI

Lawn care companies that haven't yet embraced the business opportunity of landscape bed weed control should rethink their decision not to provide this service. So says Phil Fogarty, owner of Crowley's/Weed Man of Euclid, Ohio, which has a 90 percent renewal rate for bed weed control program.

There are a few reasons why he called this service area a "tremendous opportunity" for lawn care operators (LCOs) during a webinar *Landscape Management* hosted in April, sponsored by Valent Professional Products. These include the advantages of serving a niche, offering high-quality services and customer satisfaction.

In Fogarty's area, other lawn care companies don't market weed control in both turf and landscape beds, so it's an advantage for Weed Man to offer both.

"There aren't other lawn care companies customers can call to get both services done at the same time," he says.

Quality control is one of the biggest advantages to taking care of both services.

"The customers we're doing lawn care and bed weed control for, we have fewer service calls on both sides because we have control over both," Fogarty says, explaining there's less movement of the weeds between the beds and the turf. "We've become irreplaceable for these customers."

SELLING IT

When it comes to adding this service, Fogarty recommends selling the bed weed control as recurring service that's part of a program.

Due to preemergent herbicide application costs and the labor that may be required on the first visit for this service, an LCO is going to spend more money on the front end than later in the year.

"You want to prevent the customer from taking just one application," he says. For example, his company's bed weed control program typically includes four visits per year at an annual rate of about \$400 for a 1,500 sq ft to 2,000 sq ft lawn. Fogarty emphasizes that prices vary.

The best time to add new bed weed control clients is in the summer.

"It's easy in June and July when you see people with big weed problems and can tell they haven't gotten ahead of it," he says. "A well placed phone call or flier in the door can work very well."



Phil Fogarty

To market to existing clients, Fogarty suggests using any potential customer touch points to promote the service. "Just giving someone a bill is wasting a great sales opportunity," he says. "That contact with the customer is a natural opportunity to remind them of other things you do."

Setting expectations upfront with customers is very important.

"There's going to be a weed from time to time," Fogarty says, adding his company instructs customers to alert the office for a free service call when that happens. Why? Some weeds like nutsedge get worse when customers pull them versus letting a technician treat them with glyphosate.

UP AND RUNNING

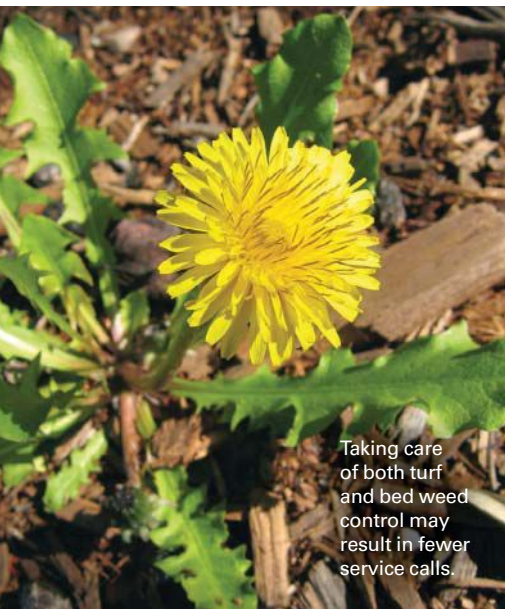
Staffing is crucial when it comes to adding bed weed control, Fogarty says, noting the knowledge base and techniques are different from treating lawns. Having a technician with ornamental plant knowledge is vital because some perennial plants may be easily confused with weeds.

"You can't send your average guy out there," he says. "You need someone with knowledge and experience."

For example, spraying bed weeds is different from spraying weeds in turf—applicators must take care not to overpressurize sprayers or glyphosate may come in contact with trees, shrubs, perennials or annuals, he says. Another tip is to train applicators to put themselves between what they're spraying and what plants they don't want to be exposed to a control product, to act as a shield.

Similarly, Fogarty recommends keeping a separate route, truck and equipment for bed weed control due to the possibility of mixing up products or other risks.

"You don't want someone walking across a lawn without changing their shoes and you don't want backpack sprayers, hoses and tanks going back and forth," he says. "Our equipment is sequestered." **LMI**



Taking care of both turf and bed weed control may result in fewer service calls.