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Circle No. 117 on Reader Inquiry Card
Think you have problems? Check out these 10 very challenging landscapes that require the professional touch

**Graceland Mansion, Memphis, TN**
The biggest challenge at Graceland Mansion, Memphis, TN, is its 650,000 annual visitors.

"My crew starts blowing driveways and pathways and checking the gravesite at 7 a.m.," says maintenance manager Jimmy Gambill.

"Our work is dictated by the climate. Last summer, we had consistent temperatures in the 90-to-100-degree range with little rain. We have no sprinkler system (Elvis installed a lot of TV and security wires and cables—a major barrier to installing an irrigation system), so we do all watering by hand."

**Utah State University’s Logan Campus**
Standards are high at Utah State University in Logan, in part because of a top-notch landscape architecture department on campus. The campus is also part of the state arboretum.

Local conditions also make things challenging. It’s not necessarily warm in May in Utah, but the campus expects flowers in bloom for early May graduation. Ellen Newell and her staff use the winter months to get as ready as possible, and plant pansies and other flowers that should bloom in time for the event. To address water restrictions, Newell installed a Maxicom satellite system for more efficient water use.

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**Overpeck Park, Bergen County, NJ**
Todd Cochran, regional director of the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS), is the assistant superintendent of parks for Bergen County, NJ. The challenge there is environmental: much-visited Overpeck County Park is built on a reclaimed landfill. "Every few feet, the soil type may be different," Cochran explains. It also sits at the edge of a protected wetlands that is the source of salt water infiltration and debris.

Other challenges? The ground settles often, making sinkholes that General Supervisor Mike Gallucci and his crews must keep refilling. A constant wind dries things up, and methane gas from garbage buried in the landfill hurts trees. The park also adjoins the New Jersey Turnpike, one of the most traveled highways in the world...and one of the biggest litter producers.

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**Villanova University, Philadelphia, PA**
As campus Superintendent of Grounds, Kevin O’Donnell has a classic task at Villanova University: keeping a large, semi-urban academic landscape beautiful despite substantial foot traffic and public events drawing large crowds.

O’Donnell and his crew of 16 grounds employees have a clear strategy for the 150-year-old campus designated as an arboretum: "Take care of the basics first," O’Donnell says. "Keeping litter off the ground helps maintain a pleasant atmosphere and the beauty of the landscape. We think today’s effort results in less litter being deposited in the future because, when an area is clean, people tend to leave it clean and respect it."

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**Groundmasters, Cincinnati, OH**
For Mike Rorie, president of Groundmasters, it’s not the landscape that’s challenging but the...
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continued from page 32

client. Groundmasters has a sub-specialty in homeowners' associations (HOAs), and the typical client is a board of volunteers, none of whom are landscape professionals. "They are under tremendous budgetary pressure from their fellow homeowners, creating an intense focus on price," Rorie says. "Plus, as soon as an individual develops expertise in landscaping, he or she is replaced by someone else and we start the learning process all over again.

The best way to deal with this, Rorie says, is to "know the players and educate them about the details of the agreement and the recent history of the community's landscaping."

Hilton Grand Vacation Club, Orlando, FL
Adam Koenigschnetz is an account manager with Environmental Care Industries, Orlando, FL, where his responsibility includes the Hilton Grand Vacation Club, a high-end time-share with a strong appetite for attractive landscaping. It's a large property with 13 units containing timeshares, plus the clubhouse and a sales center. A multi-year drought, however, has made his job a lot harder.

"Florida irrigation systems were installed to supplement rainfall water, not replace it," Koenigschnetz says. "Without rain, the dropping groundwater causes problems with pumps, coverage pressure and everything else having to do with irrigation."

The key to success is an educated client. "As the account manager, I'm constantly keeping the client aware of the changing water restrictions and ways to deal with them. It's time-consuming, but it's my job.

Busch Gardens, Tampa, FL
Ron Schmoyer is president of OneSource Landscape and Golf Services, Tampa, FL, which maintains both Busch Gardens theme parks (Williamsburg, VA and Tampa Bay). The Florida theme park is the most challenging because of the state's drought and its year-round operation.

"We have hundreds of pots and baskets of annuals to keep watered. The restrictions come from a local water management board and change from time to time as the drought conditions vary," Schmoyer says. Another challenge is fixing the damage caused by guests who Busch Gardens believes should have a "hands-on experience" with the landscape. Landscape features are not barricaded and fenced off, which means the crew has to replace many flowers.

The Grand Casino, Tunica, MS
The Grand Casino, Tunica, MS, lists landscape maintenance challenges that are built into the soil and water itself, according to project manager Scott Brewer and director Rod Rotolo, both of whom work for Jack's Landscape in Mississippi, a subsidiary of Randall and Blake, Littleton, CO.

The property and landscape is designed around a sizable barge casino. The resort's parent company, Park Place Entertainment, demands that the property look first class. That, however, isn't easy. "We're situated in the Mississippi Delta on land that has different soil types with pH levels that have to be adjusted," Brewer says. "Also, our service road is a seven-mile and 4 to 5-lane 'highway' that requires a lot of landscape maintenance."

City Place, West Palm Beach, FL
Rick Leal, vice president of Vila and Son Landscaping Inc., Miami, takes care of City Place in West Palm Beach, a retail/residential complex in the city's downtown area.

The demands are similar to Graceland's: "Watering the pots and keeping the flower beds intact is a challenge given the several thousand people who walk through every day," Leal says. "Because the aesthetic standards are high, we have to get the place looking good by morning when the stores open for business."

Universal Studios, Orlando, FL
The most formal landscapes at Universal Studios Orlando are at the entrances. The Resort Garden Walkway has no hours of operation, so guests come and go at all hours. Employees must be out of guest view by 7 a.m. every morning and stay out of view until 2 a.m., 365 days a year.

Rainfall is another big problem. Some years, it's 30 inches. Others, it's seven inches. This keeps some of the 100 employees running around adjusting irrigation computers and programs all the time.
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Circle No. 120 on Reader Inquiry Card
Get into irrigation

Find the right niche and start increasing your bottom line by creating an irrigation service for your customers

BY JIM DAVIS

Many landscape contractors handle nearly every aspect of creating beautiful landscapes — except irrigation system installation. This is usually because it makes more sense to focus on their specialty, which is landscape design and planting, and subcontract the irrigation to others who specialize in that trade.

The presence of too many irrigation contractors in some markets makes it not feasible to start an operation within your company to compete against them. However, there may be niches in the marketplace that encourage you to start that irrigation branch. The questions you need to ask yourself in considering whether to add irrigation installation to your service offerings are:

- Are there gaps in the irrigation industry in my marketplace?
- Are existing contractors doing mostly residential or commercial work?
- Do those contractors offer irrigation services exclusively, or do they also install plant material and lighting?
- How many other companies offer a full spectrum of services: planting, lighting, water gardening, decks/patios and irrigation?

Start with servicing

One of the first things contractors do to begin their irrigation installation service is get involved in the "service" side of the business. When requested by a homeowner or builder, offer to repair an area that was disturbed by sitework modifications. This type of involvement requires few, if any, extra tools or equipment, yet may serve as a springboard for further work. Soon, you’ll learn several tricks of the trade and eventually gain the confidence to take on a new installation job.

Capital investment

Because of market conditions or the availability of key people, some companies decide to jump right in and activate a crew devoted solely to irrigation. If you want to do this, there’s a minimum of six things you need:

1. Crew of two or three workers, one of them to be a team leader.
2. Trencher/vibratory plow (and trailer) with plow blade, one or two pipe grips and boring rod/attachment.
3. Truck or van with pipe rack, or an enclosed box van.
4. Hand-tools, including shovels, pipe cutters, hoes, saws, drills, rakes, crowbar and tamps.
5. A relationship with a distributor and a line of credit.
6. Someone capable of making sales calls, visiting the site and understanding the scope of work, and developing and presenting a thorough, profitable bid/quote.

Numerous training opportunities offered by irrigation distributors or the Irrigation Association (703/536-7080) throughout the country cover design, installation...
Typical components of irrigation systems

- Water tap & meter (municipal water source)
- Backflow preventer
- Ball valves (for shutting off the system)
- Quick coupling valve or coupling for compressed air connection (winterization)
- Booster pump (if necessary)
- Mainline pipe (usually PVC)
- Schedule 40 PVC fittings
- Electric remote control valves
- Valve boxes
- Lateral pipe (either PVC or poly-pipe)
- Gear-driven rotary sprinklers (large areas)
- Spray heads (small areas)
- Drip tubing (optional for planting beds)
- Control wire (between valves and controller)
- Solid state controller (clock/timer)
- Rain sensor (connected to controller)

and service issues. These classes are the best source of irrigation installation information and technical training.

Bidding and estimating
Once you learn how to install irrigation properly, learn how to do it profitably. One way is to learn from consultants who focus on landscape and irrigation operations. In addition to providing energetic and enlightening seminars, many of these groups have workbooks that show how to analyze your company’s specific equipment and work habits so that you can profitably bid on projects. A few of the basics you’ll learn are:
- Allowing for “mobilization” time/labor (planning, coordinating, loading, driving).
- The four basic components of a bid: cost of materials, labor rates (public jobs may require prevailing wage rates), equipment costs (includes depreciation expense for each piece of equipment to be used on the job), profit and overhead (usually figured as a percentage — 10% to 20%).
- Remembering to allocate time for: site clean-up, punch-list corrections, compilation of “as-built” drawings and system review/training with the owner.

Project budget parameters
Evaluate project-specific vari-

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As with any service, your best advertising is word of mouth. To get established, though, be assertive with the people you meet by letting them know your company installs irrigation. Potential customers are those already on your mailing list. Eventually, you will get irrigation installation work by:

- learning of a project and contacting a general contractor,
- being contacted by a general contractor to bid on a prepared plan, or
- being asked by a homeowner or builder to develop a plan and submit a quote.

Hand tools are just one category of products you’ll need to start an irrigation service.

Network like crazy
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Property at a glance

Location: Oasis Pines, Las Vegas, NV  
Staff: J.R. Landcare Group, Inc.  
Category: Condominium Complex  
Total budget: $41,530  
Year site built: 1996  
Acres of turf: 5  
Acres of woody ornamentals: 4  
Acres of display beds: 3.5  
Total paved area: 5 acres  
Total man-hours/week: 48.5

Maintenance challenges

- Combatting desert heat
- Dealing with pets and their deposits
- Handling tenant vandalism

Project checklist

- Turf reduction
- Installation of irrigation controls
- Irrigation renovation/upgrades

On the job

- 20 full-time staff, 20 seasonal employees

Oasis Pines

The 2000 Grand Award Winner of the Professional Grounds Management Society for Condo, Apartment Complex or Planned Community

The desert can be rough. Just ask the employees of the J.R. Landcare Group, who have grown accustomed to 100-plus degree temperatures and bone-dry conditions working on landscapes in and around Las Vegas, NV.

As everybody knows, water is gold out west, which is why the J.R. Landcare Group is big on designing water-efficient landscapes. The company's also good at it, having recently won first place from the Southern Nevada Water Authority in the category of commercial maintenance for designing a landscape judged to be both beautiful and water-efficient.

One example is the grounds at Oasis Pines, a gated 320-unit condominium community nestled in the Mojave Desert that features pools, spas, gazebos, barbecues, picnic areas, beautiful paseos and desert garden areas.

Within the last two years, crew members have reduced the amount of turf on the grounds and upgraded the irrigation system without sacrificing the natural beauty of the site. In between, they've also managed to handle the continual cleanup of fecal matter from residents' pets and mend the occasional tire track from a late night "turfing" session.

J.R. Landcare Group president Rob Diaz casts a critical eye over one of Oasis Pines' many flower beds.

Editors' note: Landscape Management is the exclusive sponsor of the Green Star Professional Grounds Management Awards for outstanding management of residential, commercial and institutional landscapes. The 2001 winners will be named at the annual meeting of the Professional Grounds Management Society in November. For more information on the 2001 Awards, contact PGMS at:

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