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let's hear it

YOUR OPINIONS, COMMENTS, & QUOTES

Victim of efficiency

Several years ago, while trying to build my business, I purchased a new lawn tractor with a 38-in. deck and twin bag collection. I used this on my small- to medium-sized residential properties. It was a great mower, and I thought, "This mower will put me in a better position to attract some high-end customers." After a year, I bought a mower of another brand with a 48-in. cut. I felt I had made a good buy because this mower was faster and more maneuverable, plus it cut and vacuumed better.

But I experienced something I wonder if others have experienced. After buying the faster mower, two customers complained about their monthly service fee. They both said when I was using the slower mower they got a great cut and felt the fee I was charging was fair. When I switched mowers they said my mowing time was cut in half and expected me to cut my fee in half. I refused, and they left.

— Rick Hooper
Rick's Lawn Care
Taylors, SC

Break it down

I have my own landscaping company, and I was always taught if you're not making \$60 per hour (\$1 per minute), you won't be successful in this business. I do quality work at a quality cost, not quality work at

a low cost or low quality work at a high cost. I concentrate on older customers who appreciate my presence on more than a weekly basis. I try to break my pricing down into categories (edging, trimming, mowing, blowing), and not show just one price for mowing.

— John A. Morano
Morano Landscape &
Environmental Service
Sellersville, PA

Avoiding liability

Your article on mowing couldn't have come at a better time. My company does some mowing but our primary service is chemical fertilization. I started out as a franchise but became a victim of the ChemLawn buy-out, which turned out for the best anyway. I try to charge whatever the market will bear. In doing so, I can also do freebies without doing a change order.

Recently, a former county worker who took early retirement started up a mowing/landscaping business with his son. From what I've seen, he's getting his foot in the door and, along the way, desecrating the industry. He avoids licenses and carries minimal insurance and no workers' compensation because his son is a subcontractor (operates under the same company name, insurance, etc.)

Our city awarded this company with a three-year...mowing contract for a cemetery (es-

Editor's note: The following letters were written in response to our "Best Practices" article in February on what to charge for mowing. Due to the large number of letters we received, not all are published here. We will publish more as space permits.

timated avg. of 40 hours per week). I didn't bid, nor did the last two custodial contractors. A former county board supervisor thinks this is a good fee for equipment, wages, etc., yet the board member pays higher wages to county park maintenance employees. I need some facts and figures to present to an arrogant few on costing out mowing services without placing the community/customers in a liability situation.

— Name withheld upon
owner's request

Lowballing blues

In my area, I seem to be on the high end quite often, charging \$37.55 per man-hour. I know I'm not going to become a millionaire, but I would like to have something left at year's end. I've already experienced a few instances of lowballing this year — even the big "national leader" is lowballing. I'm amazed at the prices guys are offering. I say \$50 per cut, they say \$30. I say \$82 per cut, they say \$40. Come on fellas, let's make an honest living by

doing quality work for a profitable price.

— Scott Hunt
Grand Rapids, MI

Confidence booster

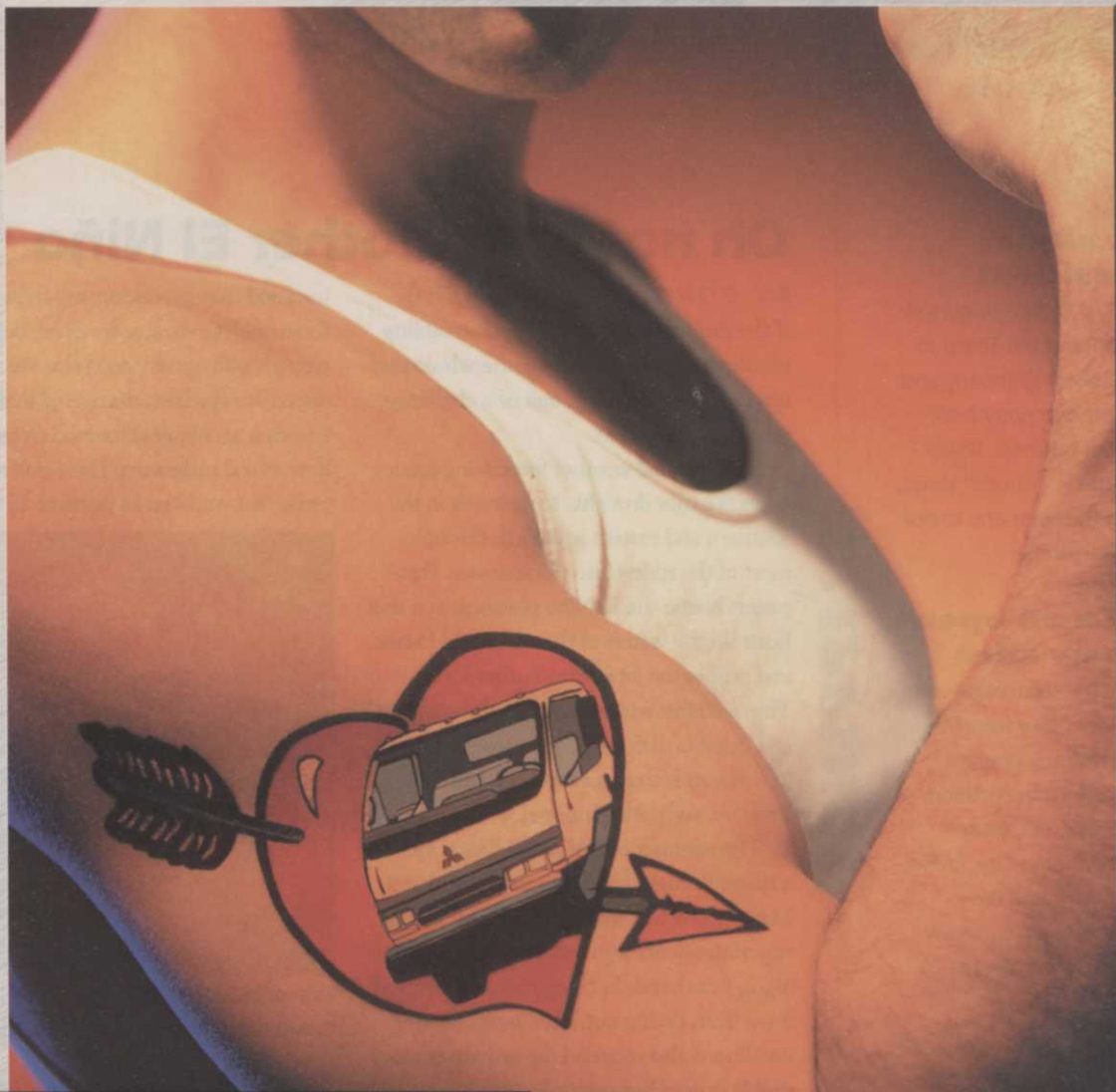
Your article on mowing rates was encouraging. We've been charging \$45 per hour for all our services. We job cost using CLIP and have a good handle on our expenses.

I recently started using Charles Vanderkooi's MORS system, which broke down our overhead by department and told us what to charge. The \$45 per hour charge held true, but our mowing charge came to \$35 per man-hour.

We've always had problems with our competition due to price. I feel the MORS system will help us. We've been mailing out proposals with new pricing, and even though I trust the MORS program, it helped to see we came in where your survey put us. Now I'm confident we made the right decision on adjusting our pricing!

— Randy Johnson
Reliable Landscaping, Inc.
Lowell, MA





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NEWS YOU CAN USE

Bobcat names new president

WOODCLIFF LAKE, NJ — Ingersoll-Rand Co. promoted Jim Sharp to president of Bobcat Company and president of the company's compact equipment business. Sharp succeeds Charles R. "Chuck" Hoge, who's leaving the company to pursue other opportunities.

Naturalawn opens seven new sites

FREDERICK, MD — Naturalawn of America Inc. lawn care franchise company has recently opened seven new locations in Portland, ME, North Denver, CO, Essex County, NJ, Oklahoma City, Provo, UT, Rochester, MN, and Providence, RI. Naturalawn currently has 55 lawn care franchises in 24 states.

Aquatrols' algaeicide approved

CHERRY HILL, NJ — Aquatrols has announced that state and federal registrations have been issued by the EPA for Radiance, a pre-emergent pond management tool.

Dakota expands production plant

EAST GRAND FORKS, MN — Dakota Peat & Equipment has completed expansion of its production facility here with an 80,000 sq. ft. building that will quadruple the company's production capability.

[CLIPPINGS]

Oh no! Not another El Niño

BY DONALD J. ARENBERG

If the limited water supply and possibility of rationing occurring along the whole eastern seaboard aren't enough of a challenge, now comes El Niño.

The national weather forecasting agency expects major droughts to continue in the southern and eastern seaboard through most of the spring into the summer. Forecasters blame the El Niño phenomenon that heats up the waters of the equatorial Pacific and pushes the jet stream farther south. They said this winter has been the warmest and driest in 105 years, and more than 70% of rivers and streams east of the Mississippi River are well below normal levels.

The summer of the last El Niño caused a major drought condition in the Midwest. Many sports turf managers and golf course superintendents watered their courses all night, but that didn't stop many fine turfed areas from drying out. The unusually dry conditions also retarded the growth of desirable grasses but multiplied problems caused by *Poa annua* and other weeds.

Take immediate action

You can mitigate many problems caused by another El Niño if you immediately start changing the build-up of harmful conditions created this winter.

The question most turf managers want to know the answer to is, "What can we do with limited water to keep the turf looking good and healthy?" One proven method involves increasing the plants' ability to absorb and retain water during a drought with catalytic enzymes. Recent discoveries have uncovered many natural catalytic enzymatic compounds that stimulate critical internal micro-biological reactions within plants. These reactions don't occur unless these specialized catalytic enzymes are present.

Studies of turfgrass, agriculture, horticultural

and crop-producing soils show that as these catalytic enzyme levels are depleted, the crop's health, quality and value are also reduced. It's also been discovered that specific enzymes are required for food crops, trees, flowers and turfgrasses. There isn't a single enzyme that works on all plants or all soils.



This sports field at River Forest H.S., Oak Park, IL, was left untreated after El Niño's last attack.

These catalytic enzymes stimulate and force the plants' own catalytic reactions but don't become part of the reaction. They're absorbed by the plant and are available in the plant to react when reacting conditions prevail.

These catalytic enzymes remain in the plant and are able to react again when the correct conditions occur. Each specific group of enzymes yield specific end results, but since most of the enzymes are compatible, multiple enzymes can be blended together to produce different desirable results.

In hoping for the best but planning for the worst regarding El Niño, start now to prepare your turfgrass for a stressful season. — The author is a consulting agronomist and naturalist from Northbrook, IL, and has been in the turfgrass industry since 1956. For specific information, fax Arenberg at 847/272-8844.

New herbicides debut in '02

BY FRED YELVERTON, PH. D.

Four new herbicides are available for use in turfgrasses this year. This is great news for two reasons:

1. These four herbicides will be beneficial tools in turfgrass weed management.
2. Because various manufacturers are making significant financial investments in turfgrasses, they're optimistic about the future of the turfgrass business.

The following is a description of each new herbicide, including their trade names with common names in parentheses:

Tranxit GTA 25DF (rimsulfuron) is marketed by Griffin LLC and is a sulfonylurea herbicide for postemergent control of weeds in bermudagrass turf. It can be used on golf courses, sod farms, and professionally-managed college and professional sports fields. Most warm-season turfgrass species have tolerance, but Tranxit is currently registered only on bermudagrass. All cool-season turf species are injured to some degree. However, there are differences in tolerance among cool-season turf species. Perennial ryegrass appears to be the most sensitive. Tranxit will be used to control poa annua in bermudagrass and to remove perennial ryegrass from overseeded bermudagrass. Use rates will be 1 to 2 oz./acre.

Speed Zone (28.6% 2,4-D + 5.9% MCPP + 1.7% dicamba + 0.6% carfentra-

zone) will be used for broadleaf weed control and is manufactured and sold by PBI Gordon Corporation. This new herbicide mixture is similar to the older Trimec Classic herbicide but has the addition of carfentrazone, which is a new herbicide. Trimec Classic often was referred to as a three-way mix. Speed Zone may be referred to as a four-way mix. The addition of carfentrazone results in faster activity on various broadleaf weeds compared to Trimec Classic and other three-way mixtures. Speed Zone can be used on common and hybrid bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, Kentucky bluegrass, annual bluegrass, annual and perennial ryegrass, tall, red and fine leaf fescues, and creeping and colonial bentgrass (not putting greens). It can be used on golf courses, sod farms, commercial and residential turf and various other institutional and non-cropland sites. Use rates range from 2 to 5 pints per acre.

Speed Zone St. Augustine Formula (10.5% 2,4-D + 2.7% MCPP + 0.7% dicamba + 0.5% carfentrazone) from PBI Gordon will be used for broadleaf weed control and has the same four herbicides as the above-mentioned Speed Zone, but the concentrations are lower. Use rates range from 2 to 6 pints per acre. Speed Zone St. Augustine can be used in common and hybrid bermudagrasses, bahiagrass, zoysia-

QuickPRO gets OK

Monsanto's new QuickPRO herbicide recently received registration from the Environmental Protection Agency. It's now available to professional landscapers, lawn care operators and other vegetation management specialists in limited areas this spring. It isn't labeled in all states. QuickPRO is the next generation of Roundup PRO herbicide. "QuickPRO shows results as much as four times quicker than Roundup Pro on weeds," says Monsanto marketing manager Richard Morris.

grass, buffalograss, St. Augustinegrass, centipede, seashore paspalum, kikuyu-grass, Kentucky bluegrass, annual bluegrass, annual and perennial ryegrass, tall, red, and fine leaf fescues, and creeping and colonial bentgrasses (not putting greens). It can be used on golf courses, sod farms, commercial and residential turf and various other institutional and non-cropland sites.

Power Zone (42% MCPA + 5.4% MCPP + 2.7% dicamba + 0.5% carfentrazone), the third new herbicide from PBI Gordon, will be used for broadleaf weed control. It's a four-way herbicide mixture but contains MCPA instead of 2,4-D. Use rates range from 2 to 6 pints per acre. In areas where 2,4-D use is a concern, Power Zone may be a viable alternative. Power Zone can be used on common and hybrid bermudagrasses, zoysiagrass, Kentucky bluegrass, annual bluegrass, annual and perennial ryegrass, and tall, red and fine leaf fescues. It can be used on golf courses, commercial and residential turf, sod farms, and various other institutional and non-cropland sites.

— *The author is turfgrass extension specialist, North Carolina State University. Article from the NCSU Turffiles, www.turffiles.ncsu.edu.*

Landscape specification guidelines now available in Spanish

The Landscape Contractors Association (MD-DC-VA) announces that the Landscape Specification Guidelines, 5th Edition, is now available in Spanish.

The 114-page book includes sections on landscape installation, landscape maintenance, seeding and sodding, soils, tree preservation, non-tidal

wetland planting, interior landscape installation and maintenance, and irrigation.

The cost per book is \$65 for LCA members and \$130 for nonmembers. Order forms can be found under "publications" on the LCA Web site at www.lcamddcva.org.

Baker: Simplot turf and horticultural ready for action

BY JASON STAHL

Born and raised in Boise, Idaho, Joel Barker says he did what most everyone who's born in Idaho does after graduating from college: he took off to see more of the "real world" for 10 years, then came back when he realized Idaho was really the best place for him.

J.R. Simplot Company, headquartered

in Boise, turned out to be a perfect fit for Barker. He joined the company in 1989 as an accountant, then five years later became controller of the dairy product division. In 1999, he became vice president of finance for the turf and horticulture unit. Effective April 10, Barker will become that unit's general manager after playing an integral role on its strategic leadership team.



Joel Barker's glad he came back to Idaho.

Barker says his immediate intent is to make an aggressive move in the golf/landscape/ sports turf market.

"Over the last couple years, in building our turf business, we've

had to look inward to structure ourselves properly and gain the focus and alignment we needed," he says. "I feel we've done that now, and we now have something of value to provide customers."

Barker didn't rule out acquisition as an aggressive growth strategy. "We will continue to grow but not at a huge pace," he says. "It will be very strategic and based on acquisitions that fit our core businesses and ultimately benefit the customers because we have more services and products to provide."

The sluggish economy doesn't dampen Barker's spirits, but he's definitely aware of current changes in the marketplace. "With golf course construction at a standstill at this time, there's less opportunity there at this time. But that may only be temporary so we won't shut the door on that."

Scotts LawnService acquires The Lawn Company

BY JASON STAHL

The Scotts Company continued its path on the acquisition trail last month by purchasing The Lawn Company, a \$8 million lawn care service company in the Boston area.

The acquisition comes on the heels of Scotts' purchase of J.C. Ehrlich Co.'s lawn and tree care division in February. Thus far in 2002, Scotts LawnService has also acquired businesses in Memphis, Charlotte, Dayton, Milwaukee, and expanded its presence in metro Detroit.

"Our recent acquisitions keep us on target with our goal of having a substantial presence in the top 100 lawn service markets within the next several years,"

says James Hagedorn, president and CEO of The Scotts Company.

The Lawn Company owner Ed McGuire, who's been in the lawn care business for 25 years, says, at 57 years old, he's ready to retire. Asked what his plans are for the future, McGuire said he will pursue other business opportunities outside of lawn care.

"I own some real estate in the area now, and I may expand," he says. "I'm going to sort of take things as they come, maybe do some fishing this summer."

McGuire says he will continue his involvement with the Green Industry Alliance in Massachusetts, which he's been active in since the late '80s.



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