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Tending turf

Properly renovating turf is all about the science.

Renovation isn't just about repairing the turf — it's also about maintaining, says an Arizona-based landscape business owner.

BRIAN GOLEMBIEWSKI TAKES turf renovation seriously. He doesn't see it so much as an "add-on" service, but something that landscapers should already be doing to offer their clients the very best value. To him, turf renovation comes down to the soil. "Even though the turf is the indicator of a problem, it has less to do with the grass itself than the soil," says Golembiewski, president of Paramount Landscape & Maintenance, Inc., in Tempe, AZ. "Before you can even start solving the problem you have to know what you have in terms of the soil. We do soil samples where we'll plug 10 random locations and fill up a bag of dirt. Then we send that out to testing labs."

In Arizona, Golembiewski says they're dealing with a variety of soil types — everything from clay to sandy — and the issues can be very different depending on the area the client is based in. He says that makes a large part of the turf renovation job about diagnosing. "Diagnosing is really the key to success with turf renovation," says Golembiewski. "Say you go to the doctor with symptoms but they diagnose you with the wrong thing. You're going to get the wrong treatment, and it won't solve the problem. It's the same thing with grass, which is also a living organism. It needs to be properly diagnosed before any problems can be solved."

While it begins with the soil, Golem-

biewski says there are many other factors that come into play with turf problems like water, sun and disease. He says the issues need to be discovered so that they can be addressed and treated properly. On the properties he's already managing, Golembiewski does annual soil testing. This ensures Paramount is constantly monitoring the turf's condition and developing plans to head off any problems. It's just packaged right in with the service that Golembiewski already offers his existing clients.

However, he has picked up some new clients based purely on renovating damaged turf. "We have picked up properties that are a mess and the client wants us to fix it," says Golembiewski. "The thing is it takes six to 12 months for a landscaper to ruin a property. It's not something that happened over night. The previous landscaper wasn't doing the right things and the property was deteriorating over time. By the time that previous landscaper is fired, and we're brought in, it looks terrible and it can be expensive and lengthy to solve. That's not always something the client wants to hear."

Golembiewski says that means the service isn't always an easy sell with new clients, but being able to offer turf renovation services to existing clients — in terms of diagnosing problems before they become severe — is huge. "It's certainly a value-added service to our customers," says Golembiewski. "And it's a discriminator against our competitors. I would say turf renovation requires both offensive and defensive posturing because being proactive, and preventing problems in the first place, is a big part of the service."

Since Golembiewski is doing annual soil checks and looking for problems before they start, turf renovation is only a small part of his business. "It's maybe just five percent of what we do — and that includes fertilizing five times a year, doing some weed control, and checking soil annually," he says. "Keeping up with those things prevents us from having to do major repair work. We don't let it get to that point in the first place."

Golembiewski says there's no major cost to get involved with this type of service, but there is a need for education. "It wouldn't be capital that's required, it's intellectual," he says. "If you don't already have an understanding of these things, schooling would be necessary. There's a scientific element to turf renovation. And there's a lot more to soil than dirt!"

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

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY NAME: Paramount Landscape & Maintenance, Inc.

HEADQUARTERS: Tempe, AZ

WHY TURF RENOVATION? It's part of the overall maintenance service that Paramount offers its clients in ensuring their property is pristine year-round.

INITIAL INVESTMENT: Not much capital, but a need for education

WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT? Because it adds value. "It means a lot to the client in terms of long-term value of their property, says Brian Golembiewski, company president. "Part of turf renovation is keeping the value up all year — not letting it go. It costs a lot more money to bring back damaged turf than to just maintain it well in the first place."



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Chalet Nursery, a true Green Industry pioneer, began providing lawn care in 1981, as an adjunct to the company's landscape maintenance services. "We realized that if we were responsible for clients' landscapes, we needed control over the fertilizers and pesticides applied on them," says **William "Bill" Leuenberger**, soil and turf department manager. Leuenberger has more than three and a half decades in the industry, and he's seen lawn care evolve. "Our program has matured into our Soil and Turf Management Department. Our lawn services focus on improving the soil environment, the foundation for healthy, vigorous turf and ornamentals."

Bill, you spend a lot of your time with various industry associations and serving on a variety of industry committees monitoring and dealing with government and legislative issues. What are you seeing as big issues now? I thought the biggest battles for the industry would be with pesticides, but it turns out they're mostly about turf fertilizers, phosphorus right now. It's happening even here in Illinois, which also now limits the commercial applications of lawn fertilizers containing phosphorus. Working with the IPLCA (Illinois Professional Lawn Care Association), we were able to get pre-emption, which keeps cities and towns from making their own fertilizer rules. Otherwise, we weren't going to be on board with the bill. I'm worried that nitrogen is next on the list.

You seem to view issues like this pragmatically rather than confrontationally. The problem with us taking an extreme position is that it's unsustainable just like the extreme position activists take. While we haven't agreed with many of the positions activists have taken, especially the obviously unsound ones, their squawking has moved the industry toward more environmental practices. Give them credit for that.

Please describe Chalet's approach to lawn care. We used to have nine different programs. Now we have just two — organic and synthetic. We're talking about fertilization. Our organic program uses 80% to 90% organic fertilizers. We also use some organic fertilizer in our synthetic program. Our focus is more on training our people rather than applying

products. We realize that every company has to make sales, but we want to feel good about what we're doing and to feel good that we're doing it right

What changes or new initiatives are you making in Chalet's lawn care programs for 2011? We're focusing on improving our customer relations. We're already recognized as a leader in client satisfaction, and we want to keep that trust with our customers by constantly evaluating our service commitment and reinventing ourselves. Next, we want to continue improving our nutrient management programs emphasizing to our clients our dedication to appropriate fertilization practices. Finally, we're developing a Chalet accreditation for our employees in regard to all phases of responsible turfgrass care.

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Chalet Nursery

FOUNDED: 1917

HEADQUARTERS: Wilmette, IL

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 36

SERVICE AREA: Chicago and surrounding communities

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Long-time member of PLCAA and PLANET, PLANET Trailblazer, former president and founder of the Illinois Professional Lawn Care Association, board member of Illinois Turfgrass Foundation, member of Illinois Landscape Contractors Association serving on their Education Committee.

NUMBER OF CHALET LOCATIONS:

Three — Retail nursery and garden center, Wilmette IL, Landscape Division, North Chicago, IL and Chalet Farm, Salem, WI

EMPLOYEES: 275 in season

SERVICES: Landscape design/build, monthly maintenance, soil and turf management, arboreal services, retail nursery and garden center, perennial propagation

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS/HOBBIES:

Collect music (primarily music from the 60s & 70s), annual pilgrimage to Las Vegas

FAMILY: My wife of 28 years passed away in 2005, one son, one grandson (18 months old) and a second grandchild expected in August.

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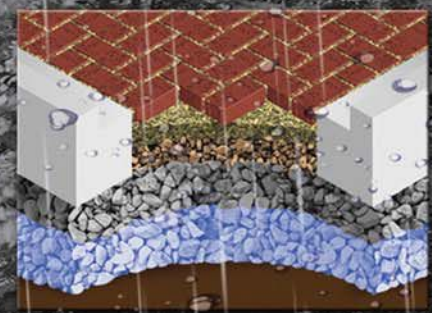
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LARGE HOP CLOVER

Trifolium campestre

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This winter annual has trifoliate leaves similar to white clover (see March, page 46).
- ▶ Leaflets have prominent veins, with the terminal leaflet on a short stem.
- ▶ Short, hairy, slender stems are reddish in color and have a tendency to sprawl.
- ▶ Bright yellow flowers grow in clusters; each produces a single seed.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Apply a post-emergent herbicide when clover is young and actively growing. All clover species are particularly susceptible to products containing clopyralid or fluroxypyr.
- ▶ Good turf maintenance ensures a thick stand of grass and will help keep clover from recurring. Consider adjusting your fertility program to include more nitrogen and less phosphorous.



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DANDELION

Taraxacum officinale

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This perennial weed thrives in weak, thin turf.
- ▶ Bright yellow blossoms have many petals, followed by puffball seed carriers.
- ▶ Long, hairless leaves have jagged teeth growing from a low rosette.
- ▶ Leafless, hollow stems emit a white milky sap when broken.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ A post-emergent application of two-, three- or four-way broad-leaf herbicides are most effective in spring or fall.
- ▶ Thick, healthy turf is important for managing this weed species. Properly mow, water and fertilize lawn to encourage healthy growth and minimize thin turf.

* Confront is not for sale or use in Nassau and Suffolk counties, New York. State restrictions on the sale and use of Confront and Lontrel apply. Consult the label before purchase or use for full details.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit www.DowProvesIt.com or call 800/255-3726.

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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S

PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

IPM in action

THE MISSION

Beneath the weeds and the grubs lies a beautiful lawn, waiting to be revived.

This residential lawn account was acquired by Farmside Landscape & Design in 2004. Kentucky bluegrass sod, specific cultivar unknown, was installed approximately five years before. It appeared the sod had been installed and maintained improperly. Layering had developed between native soil and sod layer, compaction was evident and roots were barely penetrating. Frequent shallow watering also enhanced shallow rooting. Thatch build-up was excessive, and very tough to penetrate. Grub history was evident, and disease activity was heavy, particularly those associated with poor construction, such as necrotic ring spot and summer patch.

The property is also bordered on both sides by poorly maintained lawns with high weed populations. A large row of deciduous trees running the length of the lawn had created a microclimate where the trees, surface roots and turf competed for nutrients and water in approximately 25% of the lawn area.

Rick Kalish, turf health care manager for Farmside Landscape & Design, led a team to help bring the lawn back to life.

The basic management strategy on this lawn is a six-visit program based on integrated pest management (IPM). Soil testing was done at the start and approximately every three years to address pH. Fertilization is done five times a year using 25% to 50% slow-release nitrogen sources.

Exact phosphorous and potassium ratios are manipulated to meet those needs as indicated by the soil test. Late spring through late fall applications use organic-based bridge fertilizers with 30% to 50% organics.

Initially, core aeration was done annually to help break down thatch and increase nutrient and water penetration. It also helped reduce compaction and encourage deeper root development.



PHOTOS COURTESY: FARMSIDE
LANDSCAPE & DESIGN

THE WORK



1 | Sweat equity. While Farmside initiated the overhaul of the lawn and does scheduled visits, some of the responsibility is shouldered by the homeowner, who does his own mowing and cleanups. An automatic underground sprinkler helps with irrigation.

2 | Proof of program success. Exposure on this lawn is a combination of full sun and partial/heavy shade. The turf is healthy and weed-free, even with the little sunlight it receives in the shaded areas.



3 | Root of the issue. One of many shallow roots in the lawn area, competing for nutrients and water with the turf.

4 | Here comes the sun. This north-facing photo shows shade in the foreground from the trees along the southwest property line, with roadside and driveway trees in the distance. The turf is exposed to full sun in the middle ground.

5 | On the shady side. Tall deciduous trees reside across the lawn by the street, with a few on the opposite border of the yard.



6 | A noticeable difference. A fairly distinct line separates the lawn of the client, right, and his southwest neighbor's lawn.



Headquartered in Wantage, NJ, Farmside Landscape & Design offers a complete range of services, from design concept, hardscape construction and landscape installation, to plant and turf health care and maintenance. This particular project garnered a 2010 Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). Learn more at Farmside.com.

Author's note: These photos were all taken on June 25, 2010.



THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kkehoe@questex.com.

How to manage a salesperson

PART 2

What keeps salespeople from achieving greater success? My observations suggest there are several areas where salespeople can improve with the help of a sales manager. If you are willing to take the time and work with your sales team to address the issues most relevant to them, they will get better. The areas where they can benefit most include the following:

▶ **Time:** Salespeople waste time working on “low-return” opportunities. You can help them by insisting they produce a two-week plan every week that identifies their lead, call, appointment, bid and presentation activities. The key is to ask, “Will that activity get you closer to your goal, and have you allocated too little or too much time to it?” Then be willing to help them rearrange the calendar.

▶ **Process:** Salespeople should spend time on high-value activities. These include networking, cold calling, appointment setting, phone call and email follow-up, face-to-face meetings, presentations and closing. You don’t hire them for their measuring, estimating and proposal-producing skills. You can help them by delegating these important tasks to others.

▶ **Product:** In recent months, it has become painfully apparent to me that many salespeople do not truly understand the product they sell — in a way that matters to the customer. While they do not need to be horticultural experts, they must

understand how your service benefits the customer in terms of your service features. For example, a basic knowledge of irrigation technology and its application to proper lawn care can demonstrate a practical problem-solving expertise that can close a sale. You can help them by identifying their gaps in product knowledge and training them.

▶ **Story:** Many salespeople talk too much — often without saying a lot. This is especially true when responding to the most important customer question they face: “Why should we hire you?” You can almost hear the rambling begin and the wincing that follows. A simple, value-based story communicated in three to four sentences is sufficient to answer this question. You can help them by having them commit your story to memory.

▶ **Personality:** Account managers are gatherers, and are good at it because they have a need to be liked. Great salespeople are hunters, not gatherers, and are not as concerned with being liked. They are more concerned with winning. As a result, they will generally be better at qualifying and not waste theirs or the customer’s time. You can’t really train this demeanor; you have to hire it. That’s why I tend to shy away from great talkers and hire hunters to sell.

▶ **Poise:** Many sales are lost in negotiation. A negotiation starts after the first customer objection — “you are too high-priced,” “we like our current contractor,” “we are in year two of a three-year contract,” etc. Lots of salespeople freeze up at this critical stage, including myself. You can help your sales team keep their poise by role-playing a simple formulaic method: Validate the objection, ask a question to clarify it, restate the objective, provide a possible solution, then trial close on the solution.

Salespeople respond to coaching if they believe it is honest, direct and practical, and will help them win more often. Don’t wait for them to learn on their own time. Observe their performance and address the right issues.

Great salespeople are hunters, not gatherers, and are not concerned with being liked. They are more concerned with winning.