

Lawn & Landscape

March 2002

**Predict Spring
Turf Troubles**

**Discover Drip
Irrigation**

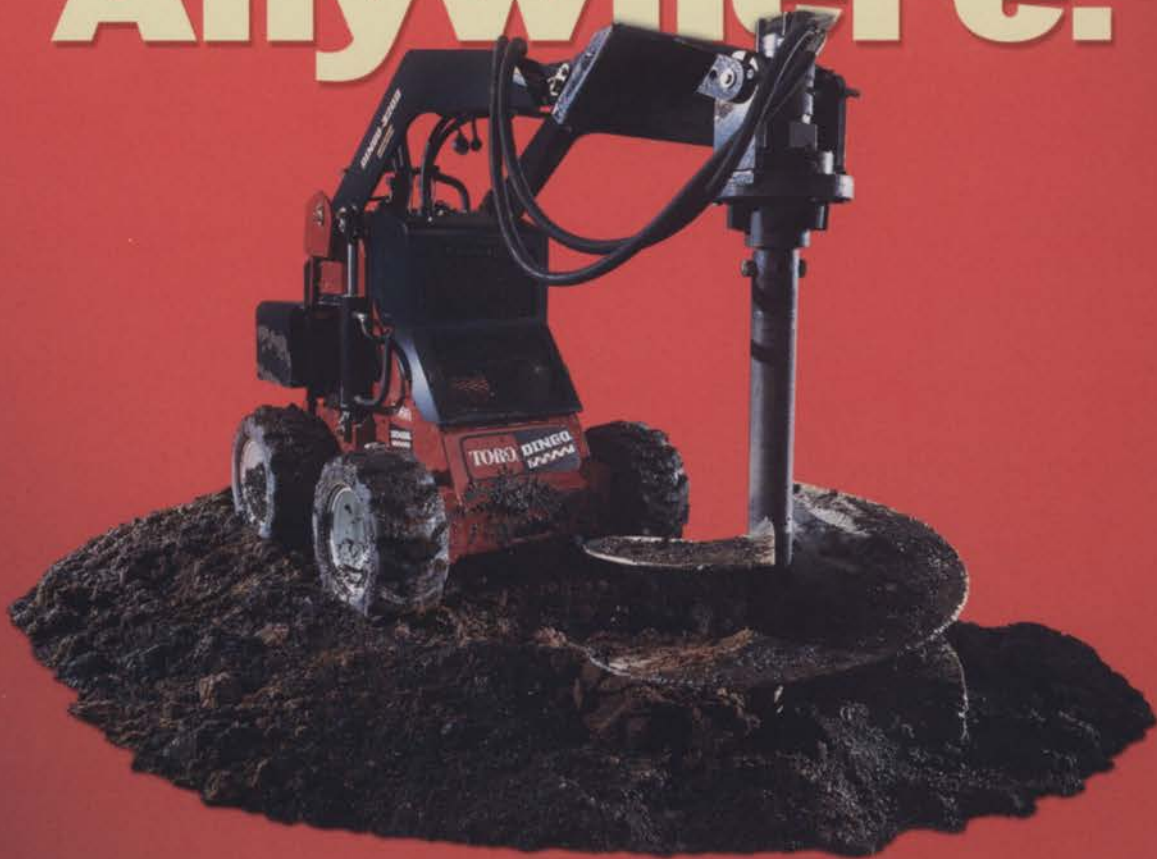
**Learn How to
Manage Difficult
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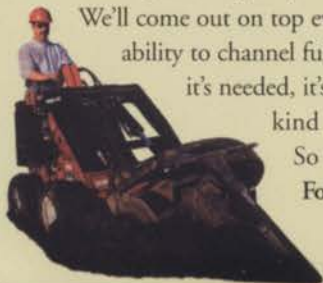
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BASF

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Cover photo:
Jill
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USE READER SERVICE #12

Lawn & Landscape

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USE READER SERVICE #13

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SPECIAL Features:

Don't miss original features, like our Message Board, found only on *Lawn & Landscape Online!*

"Z" and walkbehinds...again

Posted By "Matthew Morgan" on 2/4/2002 at 3:12 PM

OK, tell me this. You have the same size property that a Z or a walk behind can do comfortably. An average residential lawn for example. Who will get done first? Not running a race, but average times on the job. Same deck on both. How about at the end of the day?

I am a sponge on this walk behind thing, pour your knowledge out.

Re: "Z" and walkbehinds...again

Posted By Andy N. on 2/4/2002 at 3:16 PM

Problems w/ people seeing a "tractor" on their property, large ruts when it is wet, might as well run the walk behind!

Re: "Z" and walkbehinds...again

Posted By Gregg Williams on 2/4/2002 at 4:37 PM

The z is probably a little quicker, however I'm taking accounts from other contractors left and right because they are using "Z" on smaller properties. So is faster really better?

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- Picking Plants for Specific Zones
- Spray Drift Label Legislation
- Handling Difficult Clients
- Drip Irrigation

Lawn & Landscape

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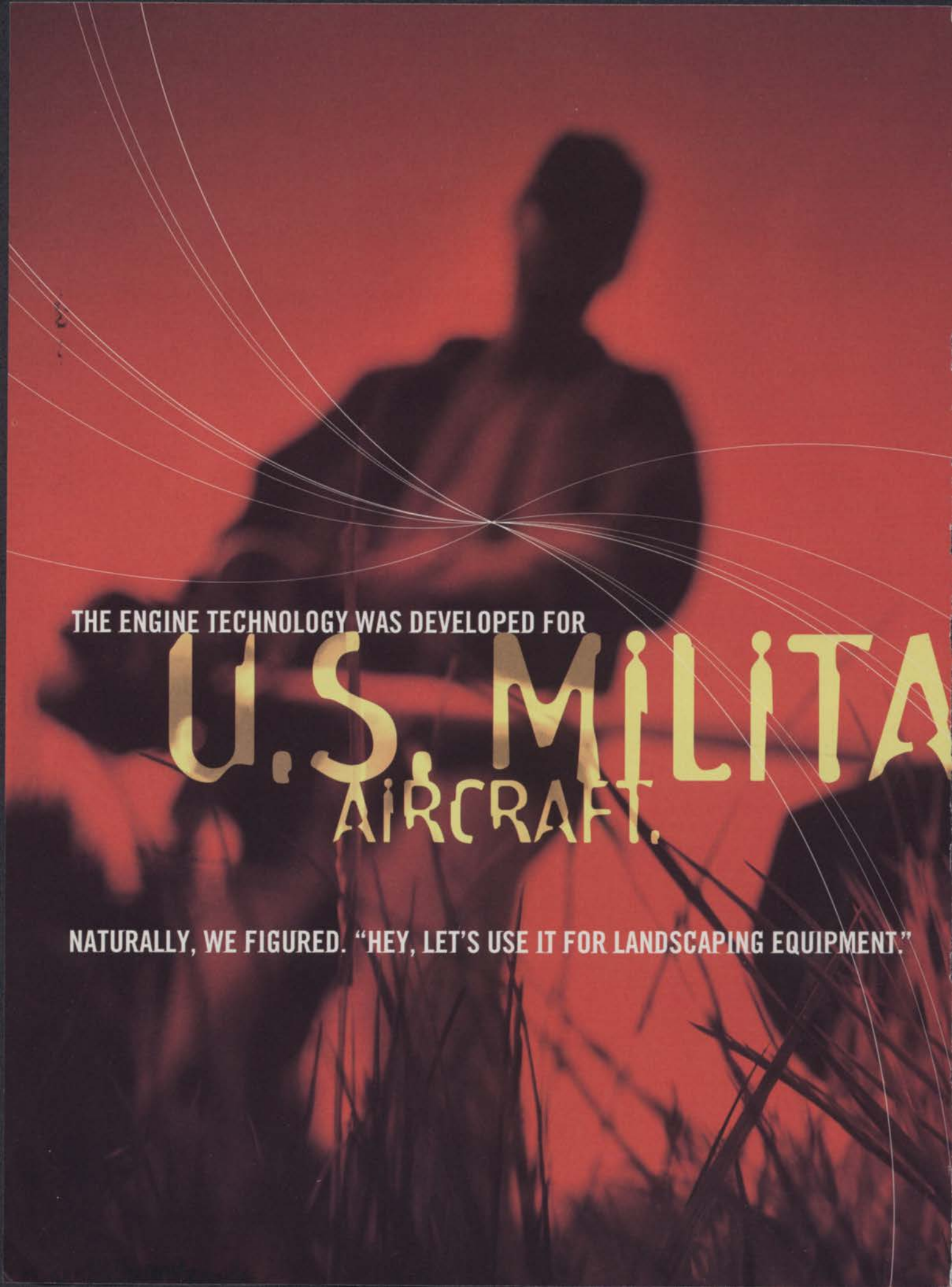
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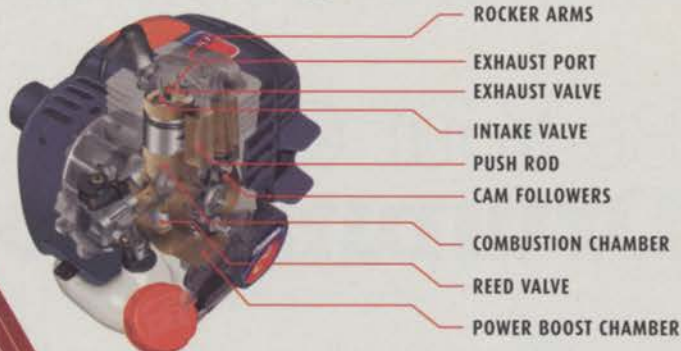


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USE READER SERVICE #14

RY

"The rewards in business go to the man who does something with an idea." – William Benton

Be Your Own Drummer Boy

I'm not a big fan of self-promotion. My feeling is that people or groups that need to beat their own drums for attention must not be doing their jobs well. After all, if they were handling their particular duties well, people would notice, right?

This idea has merit in theory, but it's not good business. Business success depends largely on sales, and that means differentiating yourself from your competition and letting your customers know about the quality work you do. If you're not going to do these things for your business, who will? Simply trusting your customers to notice the quality of your work is risky.

So, I write this column begrudgingly, but now, on to the self promotion...

As you've likely noticed, we've enhanced our editorial coverage lately to continue giving you more information than you'll find in any other landscape publication. Last year, we added industry veteran David Minor, and this year we've brought two more columnists on board.

We're very pleased to have Jack Mattingly as a regular contributor to *Lawn & Landscape*. Jack spent five years with Environmental Care and the last six years consulting with landscape companies across the country. He knows

the right way to run a landscape business and he understands the challenges contractors commonly face. His expertise will be shared through "Mattingly's Message," which can be found in our Market Trends section each month.


The other new face we've added to our pages is Jean Seawright, a veteran human resources professional who has worked with some of the largest lawn care firms around. Some of you may have met Jean at

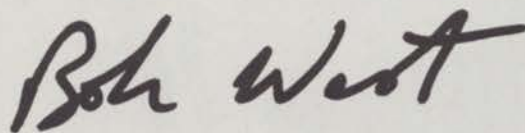
our Business Strategies or School of Management conferences, where she was one of our most popular speakers. Her information about managing people and personnel policies is right on the mark, and it has never been more pertinent than it is in today's litigious society where quality workers are so hard to find and keep. You won't want to miss a single month of Jean's column, "In the Office."

Of course, we're aware of other challenges you face in your business as well. One area is the myriad questions many contractors have about the paperwork they should use in their businesses. There are a host of forms that can help every company, but coming up with the time and the words to make them a reality is never easy. That's where "On Paper" comes in.

This monthly department features business forms that green industry firms use, along with a description of how each form is used in that business. Readers can use this information to create their own forms or visit the Business Tools section of our dynamic Web site, www.lawnandlandscape.com, and find electronic versions of the forms along with dozens of others.

Lastly, we all recognize the importance of continuing education, and books are a great vehicle for this. Unfortunately, picking the best read is a daunting task due to the incredible number of them. That's why you can find the L&L Book Report in our Market Trends section. Each month, a contractor will review a book he or she found particularly informative, with the hope that this will help you find new resources for your own ongoing learning.

Ultimately, our mission is to provide you with solutions to your challenges so you can operate more efficiently and profitably. No one will ever have all of the answers in business, but there's no reason you can't have more tomorrow than you have today. If there are issues that you'd like help tackling, drop me a line at 800/456-0707, ext. 239 or send me a note at bwest@gie.net. 





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Managing Unemployment Costs

Unemployment benefit payments are supposed to be available to workers (claimants) who are temporarily unemployed through no fault of their own and who are attempting to reenter the labor force. Unfortunately, the unemployment system has not been updated or revised in many years, so it is fraught with the potential for abuse that always seems to fall on the back of the employer.

Employees who quit their jobs without good reason connected with work or employees who are fired for misconduct connected with work should be disqualified from receiving unemployment benefits. Employers usually have to prove this misconduct. This is why it is so important for contractors to document employee issues and have employees develop and sign a written resignation letter.

Company unemployment taxes pay for unemployment benefits. For this reason, employers should become familiar with the events that disqualify former employees from taking advantage of unemployment.

Before an individual can receive unemployment benefit payments, several basic requirements listed below must be met. The claimant:

- Must show a prior attachment to the labor force.
- Must maintain an active search for employment.
- Must not have caused his or her unemployment. Benefits are paid only to individuals unemployed through no fault of their own. Of course, most states take the position that "poor job performance" is not the fault of the employee.



The author is president of Seawright & Associates, Inc., a consulting firm located in Winter Park, Fla. She can be reached via e-mail at jpileggi@seawright.com or at 407/645-2433.

TIPS TO KEEP COSTS DOWN. Although it seems that almost any person can collect unemployment for any reason, there are some proactive things you can do to help manage unemployment costs:

- Keep accurate records of employment agreements, employee performance, dates and details of warnings and other disciplinary measures.
- If you have received information that a claimant is not available for work, is not able to work, has refused to work or is employed elsewhere, be sure to notify the Unemployment Office immediately.
- Have new employees complete an "introductory period acknowledgment" form. Many states disqualify employees from receiving unemployment compensation if they are terminated within the first 90 days of their employment for unsatisfactory job performance. The acknowledgment form is your proof that the employee was

Employees who quit their jobs without good reason connected with work or employees who are fired for misconduct connected with work should be disqualified from receiving unemployment benefits.

under a trial period. (Note: The proper terminology is "trial period" or "introductory period," not "probationary period." The term "probationary period" can create a conflict with the Employment At Will doctrine.)

- Dismiss employees with unsatisfactory performance within the introductory period. This can help save on unemployment costs and, in most cases, the employee will not improve anyway. After all, the highest motivation to do well is usually when an individual begins a new job.

THE FIRST 90 DAYS. While unemployment regulations encourage you to terminate an employee with poor job performance within the first 90 days of his or her employment, you must still be able to prove that the termination was legal, fair, compliant and job-related.

(continued on page 16)



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USE READER SERVICE #16

In The Office

(continued from page 14)

If your decision gives the appearance of discrimination or if an employee believes that he or she is a victim of discrimination, a charge can be lodged against you. This is true even if the employee only worked for you *one day* (or one hour, for that matter!). The first 90 days is not a "free time" during which you can terminate an employee and not have to worry about meeting the burden of proof.

Also, it is perfectly acceptable to establish a trial, or introductory, period that is longer than 90 days. Some organizations have six-month introductory periods. Regardless of how long your trial period is, in most states you have 90 days during which to evaluate and terminate an employee for poor job performance before your account will be charged with any benefits the person receives.

One final thought about trial periods: if an employee transfers to a new position or is promoted into a new position, it is perfectly acceptable to place him or her under a new trial period. In most states, the unemployment benefit, however, only pertains to *new hires* during the first 90 days of their employment.

INVOLUNTARY SEPARATIONS AND MISCONDUCT. Involuntary separations can include termination for poor job performance (for example, excessive absenteeism or tardiness), termination for misconduct, layoff due to lack of work or position elimination.

When an employee is terminated (a.k.a., involuntarily separated) he or she will be disqualified from receiving unemployment

whenever you can prove that the employee engaged in an act of "misconduct." Misconduct may be established where there was any of the following:

- Disregard of the company's interests.
- Willful violation of company rules.

(Note: An up-to-date, properly written employee handbook with a signed acknowledgement receipt can help prove that a policy was willfully violated.)

- Disregard of the standards of behavior that the company has a right to expect of its employees.

- Disregard of the employee's duties and obligations to the company.

If allegations of wrongdoing are more general than these, you may not be able to prove that the employee committed an act of misconduct and your unemployment case could be lost.

As a matter of practice, you should fight any claims that are unjustified. This could mean attending a phone or personal unemployment hearing during which you will need to present direct evidence of the misconduct (hint: hearsay is inadmissible) to meet the burden of proof. Your well-written, detailed documentation along with credible witnesses can help you win the case.

Here is one last thought regarding this issue: if the employee is unable to perform assigned work, you may terminate the employee for inability to perform, but their inability is not considered "misconduct" in the eyes of unemployment officials. This is because, many times, employees can establish their inability was something that they could not change.

You have to love the system. □

Select for Success

What about replacing these employees with qualified, valuable workers? Jean Seawright, president, Seawright & Associates, Winter Park, Fla., pointed out these essential employee traits for success:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| • Work ethic | • Integrity |
| • Loyalty | • Maturity |
| • Sense of humor | • Dependability |
| • Respect | • Intelligence |
| • Judgement | • Enthusiasm |
| • Flexibility | • Initiative |



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Market Trends

FIRST-QUARTER REVIEW

Business Bites

To gain some insight into landscape contractors' progress in 2001 and the first part of 2002, *Lawn & Landscape* conducted a reader survey, asking about growth, hiring plans, new services and equipment purchases.

The majority of respondents – 61 percent – reported 2001 growth. Of those that increased, 36 percent grew 1 to 10 percent, 35 percent grew 11 to 20 percent and 10 percent grew 31 to 40 percent. Many businesses – 27 percent – reported no growth, and only 11 percent experienced decline.

While most contractors – 50 percent – reported positive 2002 hiring plans, a good chunk – 33 percent – said they were not going to add to their crews. The majority of people who plan to add employees – 66 percent – will hire one to three people.

As far as new equipment is concerned, 45 percent of respondents said they plan to buy trucks this year, 34 percent said they plan to add walk-behinds to their equipment fleets this year, 30 percent will purchase riding mowers and 17 percent will acquire skid-steer loaders.

While the bulk of respondents – 72 percent – did not add new services in 2001, the most popular service additions included irrigation, landscape installation, tree services, pesticide and fertilizer applications, pond installation, maintenance and snow and ice management.



While price tops the list of client complaints for many contractors, followed by timeliness and responsiveness, according to a *Lawn & Landscape* Online survey, the Better Business Bureau (BBB) reported that customers will always complain when their expectations are not met.

Consequently, businesses that secure customer relations policies – even if they have few complaints – demonstrate their commitment to client satisfaction and are better prepared to handle grievances.

The policy should follow a specific procedure, the BBB recommended. First, log all complaints and dates. Next, investigate complaints. Third, inform customers of the time needed to satisfy complaints. Fourth, formulate solutions, taking into account contractual or warranty obligations, customer expectations, a cost/benefit analysis, the ability to deliver on decisions and the prospect that clients may reject solutions and seek other service providers. Then, warrant clear responses with respectful explanations. Finally, follow-up with clients, checking that matters were satisfactorily resolved.

See Customer Complaints on page 68 for more tips on managing difficult clients and securing a customer relations policy.

Customer CONTROL

What is the most common customer complaint?

COMPLAINT	% OF CONTRACTORS
Price	49%
Timeliness	12%
Responsiveness	12%
Job Results	10%
Other	6%
Contractual Items	5%
Servicing Times	4%
Types of Products Used	2%

Source: *Lawn & Landscape* Online Survey

lawnandlandscape.com



COMPANY DEVELOPMENTS

Omni: Ready to Grow

As the number of acquisitions made in 1998 and 1999 mounted, the most commonly discussed companies were TruGreen and LandCare USA, which ultimately became one organization, now known as TruGreen LandCare.

During that same time, another company entered the landscape industry via acquisition with a few significant deals between Atlanta and Philadelphia. That company, Omni Facility Services, set out to be a "true one-stop shop" for commercial property managers, according to then-CEO Betty Browne.

"One-stop shopping is growing based on customer demand, and this is a trend that is only growing in strength," Browne explained in late 1999. "We saw the outsourcing of services move from an experiment in business management to something that is a given in the corporate environment."

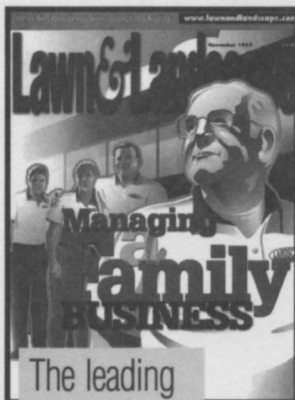
Omni jumped into the industry with both feet, acquiring \$7-million Heyser Landscaping in Philadelphia, \$15-million The Morrell Group, in Atlanta, Ga., \$3-million Spring Garden in Ijamsville, Md., and \$3-million Smith-Fox in Philadelphia, Pa. These deals allowed Omni to care for the inside and outside of clients' properties, which complemented the company's other service offerings of mechanical and electrical maintenance.

(continued on page 21)



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 - 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
 - 5. Irrigation Contractor
 - 6. Landscape Architect
 - 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

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- 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
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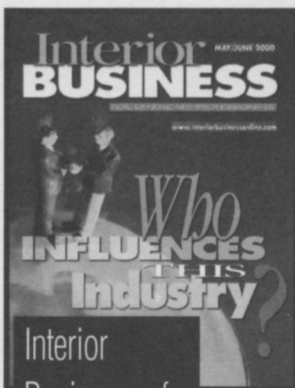
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- 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

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- 12. School, College, University
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People

Textron Golf & Turf named **Dennis Schwieger** executive vice president of sales and marketing – turf and Professional Lawn Care (PLC), **Ralph Nicotera** vice president of marketing and product management – turf and PLC, **Joe Thompson** vice president of sales – turf, and **Joe LaFollette** vice president of customer care – turf and PLC.

Shindaiwa hired **Mike Nichols** as director of marketing, **Stacy Smith** as sales support manager, **Jay Larsen** as product marketing and communication manager, and **Laura Sorrentino-Howard** and **Skye Watts** as marketing assistants.

The J.R. Simplot Co.'s Turf & Horticulture group named **Steve Franzen** western region director of sales for its fertilizer division and **Glenn Peterson** national fertilizer sales manager for Australia and New Zealand.

Exmark hired **Bruce Cooper** as national sales manager.

Contra Costa Landscaping, an American Civil Constructors group company, announced the promotion of **Jesse Maderos** to manager of its California Landscape Construction operations.

Glenmac announced the addition of **Jeff Caldwell** as a territory sales manager.

George Johnson has been named sales manager for Bluebird and Yazoo/Kees.



Steve Franzen (top), Dennis Schwieger

(continued from page 18)

nance, commercial janitorial, food sanitation and architectural maintenance.

Once these deals were complete, however, the company stopped making acquisitions and turned its attention toward integrating these businesses into its other operations. Now, two years later, Omni is seeking acquisition opportunities to bolster its landscape presence.

"The exterior marketplace has been shuffled through by the likes of TruGreen, so what we're looking for is the independent company that doesn't necessarily have to sell, but would like to be part of something of quality and of good management strength that they can gain from," explained current CEO Dick Cottrill, who took over from Browne in September 2000.

Cottrill said Omni's plan doesn't involve coast-to-coast locations or call for the company to be the biggest firm in the industry. "We just want to offer an uncompromising service for which people are prepared to pay,

(continued on page 25)



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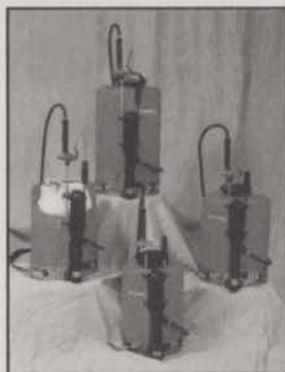


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Market Trends

Calendar of Events

TO ENSURE that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to Kristin Mohn, Lawn & Landscape Calendar, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113. You can also fax or email the information to Mohn's attention at 216/961-0364 or kmohn@gie.net.

MARCH 21-24 ALCA Student Career Days, East Peoria, Ill. Contact: 800/395-2522.

MARCH 22-24 Earth & Turf Expo 2002, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: 770/888-0576.

MARCH 27 WALP Seminar Series - Poa Annua Control, Seattle, Wash. Contact: 800/833-2186

APRIL 4 New York State Turfgrass Association Adirondack Regional Conference, Lake Placid, N.Y. Contact: 800/873-8873.

APRIL 5-6 North Carolina State University Laying the Groundwork Symposium, Raleigh and Durham, N.C. Contact: 919/515-8340.

JUNE 6-8 Snow & Ice Management Symposium, St. Louis, Mo. Contact: 814/835-3577.

JUNE 10-12 2002 Interior Business Conference & Trade Show, Delray Beach, Fla. Contact: 800/456-0707.

JULY 11-14 ANLA Convention & Executive Learning Retreat, San Diego, Calif. Contact: 202/789-2900.

JULY 17-18 National Power Equipment Dealers' Convention, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 703/549-7600.

JULY 17-19 Turfgrass Producers International Summer Convention and Field Day, Fort Collins, Colo. Contact: 847/705-9898.

JULY 19-21 OPEI EXPO 2002, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 703/549-7600.

JULY 22-23 PLCAA Legislative Day on the Hill, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/458-3466.

AUG. 2-4 Southern Nurserymen's Association Convention 2002, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: 770/953-3311.

AUG. 7 Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Outdoor Summer Field Day, Hampshire, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.

AUG. 9-11 ALCA Maintenance Symposium, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: 800/395-2522.

AUG. 16-18 2002 Nursery/Landscape Expo, Houston, Texas. Contact: 800/880-0343.

AUG. 17 Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Certified Landscape Technician Exam, Joliet, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.

AUG. 18-22 American Society of Landscape Architects Expo, San Jose, Calif. Contact: 888/999-2572.

AUG. 22-24 2002 Farwest Show, Portland, Ore. Contact: 800/342-6401.

OCT. 9-10 Southern California Turfgrass Council Turfgrass, Landscape and Equipment Expo, Pomona, Calif. Contact: 800/500-7282.

OCT. 20-21 American Society of Landscape Architects Annual Meeting & Expo, San Jose, Calif. Contact: 202/363-4666.

OCT. 23-24 Western Nursery & Garden Expo 2002, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: 800/517-0391.

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Market Trends

(continued from page 21)

and I think there is room in most major markets for that," he related, adding that Omni remains open to making acquisitions in its current markets as well as new markets. "Initially, we'll concentrate on the area from Washington, D.C., south to the Florida line and west to the Mississippi River."

Building more of a regional presence will still allow Omni to compete for the prized national contracts that other consolidators have talked about using their national network of locations to pursue, according to Cottrill. "In the past, it has been easy to assume that if you're a national company you'll be able to get national accounts," explained this service industry veteran who spent 35 years working with Orkin and Rentokil. "I think our best customers are better than that because they know that a national company doesn't necessarily deliver the same level of service nationwide."

Cottrill also thinks Omni's focus on creating one company out of the earlier acquisitions before purchasing additional businesses

strengthened it for the future. "I think I learned that approach in my Rentokil experience," he commented. "Over the years in interior landscaping and pest control, I made more than 70 acquisitions. One of the key things I learned is if the company was good, it was good for one reason—the quality of the ownership. I have always strived to keep the owner if he or she wants to stay because that's the secret, that's where the jewels are kept—in the owner's mind. We're looking to combine

our experience with the owners' experiences so we can achieve a strong product."

Some people may be surprised to see anyone interested in spending money on acquisitions in the midst of such an unpredictable economy, but Cottrill isn't concerned about the market for landscape services. "I have a great deal of confidence in all of the business streams that we're in," he maintained. "They are all necessities—the lawn has to be mowed."

On the WEB

Timber Creek Design – www.timbercreekdesign.com

Harvest Lawn Care – www.harvestlawn.com

University of Missouri

Horticulture Publications – muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/agguides/hort/index.htm

Ford Commercial Trucks – www.commtruck.ford.com

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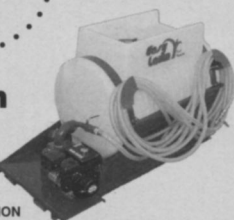
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Market Trends

CONSOLIDATION UPDATE

Scotts Lawn Service Acquires J.C. Ehrlich's Green Team

MARYSVILLE, OHIO - Scotts LawnService acquired the lawn and tree care services of the J.C. Ehrlich Co.'s Green Team division.

J.C. Ehrlich's Green Team, Reading, Pa., totaled \$10.1 million in 2000 revenue, according to *Lawn & Landscape's* Top 100 List, but the sale only added \$7 million to Scotts LawnService's \$42-million total revenue, according to Mark Long, Scotts LawnService's vice president of business development. The Green Team's tree surgery and grounds management services were sold to a local tree company in the area, while the company held on to its vegetation management portion of the business, according to J.C. Ehrlich President Victor Hammel.

J.C. Ehrlich is a \$75-million company that
(continued on page 28)



L&L

Book Report

FOCUS

by Al Ries

A natural tendency for an entrepreneur is to create – to constantly brainstorm, experiment, tweak and tinker. But many times, this diversified approach sways innovative business owners from focusing on strengths. "Entrepreneurs are always looking for some new venture," remarked Marty Grunder, president, Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, Ohio. After reading *Focus* by Al Ries, he noticed this "scattered" trait in his own management techniques and sought to correct it.

Instead of branching business into several sectors that were not all successful, Grunder reshaped his mentality and redi-

rected his attention to the 20 percent of his clients that brought in 80 percent of his revenues, he said.

Focus outlines the importance of sticking to strengths, Grunder identified, citing the following passage: "When a company is unfocused, you can't dramatically improve results by doing the same things only better. It's like a photograph not in focus. You can enlarge it, increase the contrast, color it and print it on better paper, but you're not going to dramatically improve the results until you get the picture in focus."

The book explores companies like IBM and Coca-Cola, but it also targets the small entrepreneur. "*Focus* is story after story about small and large companies who found success by focusing on core products and getting rid of the extra, energy-wasting ventures," Grunder related. – **Kristen Hampshire**

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Market Trends

(continued from page 26)

offers primarily structural pest control. The company decided to sell the Green Team portion of its company to focus more on its core services, Hammell said.

After three years of keeping in touch with the J.C. Ehrlich Co. to exchange business updates, Long said Scotts LawnService was intrigued by the company's reputation for quality service in its pest control business, and was confident in its discovery that the same was true for the lawn care business. "I saw that their retention of customers was high and that their revenue per customer was very high, so we confirmed this quality reputation through due diligence," he said. "It's obvious that over three generations, Victor Hammel and the Ehrlich family have put together a top-notch quality business."

According to Long, this acquisition, as well as a few others made in the fall and winter after the end of its fiscal year, has brought Scotts LawnService to approximately \$55 million in corporate revenue, not including its \$10 million in franchise revenue. The

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company grew from \$27 million in 2000 revenue to \$42 million in 2001 and plans to continue growing in 2002. "System-wide right now, we're probably at around \$65 million, but by Sept. 30, 2002, we plan to have \$78 million in corporate revenue," he said. "Overall, Scotts LawnService combined revenue should be around \$90 million by the end of September."

When acquiring companies, Long said Scotts LawnService doesn't want to "go into a city with the object of buying everybody," he said. "Instead, we look at it as finding what company would be a good fit for us in terms of how we can grow the business. We ask ourselves, 'Do they emphasize service? Do they emphasize revenue per customer and offer enough services per customer?' We use those criteria to begin with and out

of that falls the companies we have a purpose in acquiring that are in a market we want to expand into. We're also very judicious about our due diligence process to make sure a company we acquire is going to fit and work with our company."

To make integration of acquired businesses and management of day-to-day operations run more smoothly during Scotts LawnService growth spurt, the company has added to its management team, Long said. Tony Colatrella, who was the chief financial officer of the Scotts Co. North America, is now the senior vice president of Scotts LawnService, providing internal support to the growing division, Long said. Currently, Long's duties focus on acquisitions and franchise development.

(continued on page 32)

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Market Trends

(continued from page 28)

ACQUISITION NEWS

Finn, Express Blower Team Up

CINCINNATI, OHIO—Finn expanded its product line in a big way—literally—when it added Rexius' Express Blower line of products after Finn's parent company, DHG Corp., purchased the assets of Express Blower from Rexius Forest By-Products, Eugene, Ore.

"We're ecstatic about the opportunity this deal gives us," explained David Nelson, president and chief executive officer of DHG, adding that the two companies will operate independent of each other and Express Blower will remain in Oregon. "This gives us a strong position in the market—there's obviously a tremendous demand for labor-saving machines."

The Express Blower units resemble tractor/trailer trucks and generally have a 40-cubic-yard capacity, and they complete the product lineup for Finn, which already had a series

(continued on page 34)

Association NEWS

The **Professional Lawn Care Association of America** announced its award winners at the annual meeting and dinner during the Green Industry Conference in Tampa, Fla.:

- Environmental Improvement Award—Spring-Green/Olympia, Olympia, Wash.
- Community Service Award—Clean Lawn, Johnstown, Tire Hill, Pa.
- Picture Perfect Award:
 - Cool-Season Turf/Residential—Chalet Nursery and Garden Shops, Wilmette, Ill.
 - Cool-Season Turf/Commercial—Spring-Green Lawn Care, Plainfield, Ill.
- Best Yellow Pages Advertisement Award—Robertson Lawn Care, Springfield, Ill.
- FitzGibbon Scholarship Award—Andrew Kurth, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisc.

Pendulum Awards, sponsored by BASF and Lawn & Landscape magazine:

- Marketing of Services Category—Quality Seasons, Savage, Minn.
- Employee Retention and Recruitment Category—Swingle Tree and Landscape Care, Denver, Colo.
- Customer Relations Category—Prairie State Landscaping, Hazel Crest, Ill.

The **Associated Landscape Contractors of America** installed its new officers at its Executive Forum in February. They are: Rick Doesburg, president; Michael Byrne, president-elect; Kurt Kluznik, secretary/treasurer; and Drew St. John, immediate past president.

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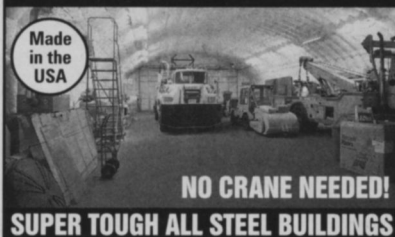
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USE READER SERVICE #73

Market Trends

(continued from page 32)

of skid-, trailer- and truck-mounted bark blowers with capacities from 1.5 cubic yards to 16 cubic yards. "We now have all of the machines for contractors' needs," pointed out Wally Butman, executive vice president of Finn.

Regarding the market for these machines, Nelson predicted that it will continue to grow. "Mulch application is so labor intensive that contractors who put down mulch need a better way to do it, and even the ones who only do a little mulch still apply hundreds of cubic yards," he noted. "The bigger contractors put down thousands of yards every year, and that justifies the investment in a pneumatic machine pretty quickly."

BUSINESS BASICS

Hiring the Right Consultant

ARLINGTON, Va. - Do you have a problem in your company or need expert advice on how to develop a program or plan? If so, hiring a consultant may be the answer. However, the Better Business Bureau (BBB) cautions companies to research their options - sometimes you don't always get the advice you need. While the right consultant can help you improve efficiency, use technology more wisely or target new markets, the wrong consultant can harm your company by wasting time and money and alienating employees.

The BBB offers the following tips to help you pick the right consultant:

- Consider whether your immediate problem is a symptom of a larger problem. By carefully thinking things through, you may discover that you don't need an outsider - maybe one of your employees has the ability and desire to do the job.

- Ask people you trust for referrals of qualified consulting firms or sole practitioners. Contact each referral with a brief letter or phone call describing the problem you need to solve, your industry conditions and your management style.

- Schedule an introductory meeting with three or more of your best prospects. This will allow you the opportunity, by asking pointed questions, to verify that the consultant has experience with the specific problem and your industry.

- Check references thoroughly. Reputable consultants should be able to provide refer-

Mattingly's MESSAGE

EDITOR'S NOTE: Every month, industry consultant Jack Mattingly will offer suggestions on key tasks for contractors to focus on. Here are his March thoughts.

It's all about man-hours. There is no magic to keeping labor cost down. It's a matter of focus. And, the primary people who should focus are the account managers, field supervisors and, particularly, the foremen. It is your responsibility as owners and managers to provide these people with the tools to manage the field labor. Here are a few "tools" for your consideration:

- Share all budgeted hours with your field employees. They need this target and they will respond accordingly.
- Make it a rule to never ask crews to perform work without first providing the total budgeted man-hours in writing.

- Feedback is critical. Provide each crew with what I call a scorecard each week. This scorecard should list each project the crew worked on and the budgeted hours vs. the actual hours. I recommend posting this in an area that all crews congregate by no later than Tuesday afternoon before they arrive. They now know quickly where they stand as of the end of last week.

- In landscape maintenance, you also need a monthly report showing not only the total budgeted hours vs. the actual for last month, but also the total budgeted hours year-to-date vs. the actual year-to-date. This is a fantastic management tool and I guarantee this will keep you disciplined and focused.

- With landscape installation, you also need similar reports by crew, particularly the weekly scorecard listing the crews' projects.

- Consider an incentive plan for your field employees based on how well they perform relative to the budgeted hours. I do not suggest you commence with this program until you have fine-tuned and tested all your reports for at least two to three months. This might be an implementation target for the summer. You absolutely need a program for quality control if an incentive is tied to budgeted hours.

- Indirect hours – those hours that people work but do not charge directly to a job, such as travel time, shop time, etc. – are arguably the Achilles heel of managing man-hours. You must budget and monitor these indirect hours by crew, just the same as you do a job. If these hours are not part of your budget, you will have a big black hole and wonder why you are not making more profit when your reports show that your actual hours spent on the jobs are OK. Be sure to budget and track indirect hours by crew.

One final thought: With a lame economy, resist the urge to squeeze costs and hope things improve. Prospering landscape companies find new markets and redesign operations to serve the client better for less cost.

Jack Mattingly is a green industry consultant with Mattingly Consulting. He can be reached at 770/517-9476.

ences readily, while would-be-consultants will have few, if any, to offer. Also, check to see if the consultant is accredited by a national association. Some associations do extensive background checks and their members usually must be in business for at least five years.

- Get a written proposal. Reliable consultants will provide a written, detailed proposal before the contract is signed.


- Clearly spell out all fees. Consultants can charge a fixed fee or an hourly rate. Hourly rates could raise your costs substantially, so ask the consultant to put a ceiling on the job to cap your expenses. Also, beware of the consultant who asks for all of the money up-front. It's customary to pay as much as one-third in advance, with the rest due on specific dates or at project completion.

BUSINESS ALLIANCE

Lawn & Landscape, PlantFind.com Form Partnership

CLEVELAND /BOYTON BEACH, Fla. – *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and PlantFind.com announced that they formed an exclusive partnership to develop a dynamic Internet site that help contractors simplify the plant purchasing process.

"The tools that PlantFind.com has and is developing are exactly the type of tools that we have looked for in a partnership and that we can bring to our subscribers to help enhance their business without putting a dent in their pocket," said Cindy Code, group publisher for the *Lawn & Landscape* Media Group. "This allows our customers to take full advantage of the Internet."

Michael Ferraro, president of PlantFind.com, which currently offers more than 238 million individual plant listings from more than 1,700 growers and comprehensive customer support programs online, also commented that the partnership will help build landscape contractors industry knowledge through the Internet. "This partnership is in line with our business strategy to bring the best partnerships and the best minds together that will assist the nursery and landscape industry in education and take full advantage of the Internet as an everyday tool," Ferraro said. 

Nursery Market Report

SPRING FLOWERS

Bulb FAQs Answered

The first tulip or crocus bloom starts the spring explosion of bulb color. Though such plants are typically low maintenance, some common problems and questions do pop up. Here, experts at the Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center answer your most frequently asked questions about bulbs.

Q: Why can't I plant tulips in spring?

A: Spring-flowering bulbs, such as tulips and daffodils, must be planted in the fall or early winter to bloom in spring because they require a long period of cool temperatures to spark the biochemical process that causes them to flower. Consult the U.S. Department of Agriculture's hardiness zone map for further guidelines on when to plant in your climate.

Q: Is planting earlier or later in fall better?

A: Planting times vary, depending on your climate zone, but as a general rule, earlier is better. Bulbs need to establish strong root systems before winter frosts set in. Remember to plant bulbs in an area that drains well and water newly planted bulbs to help roots grow.

Q: Spring weather is often so erratic. What should I do if we get warm weather followed by a cold snap and my client's bulbs are already "up?"

A: Nothing. Tulips and other spring-flowering bulbs are tough. Snowdrops and crocuses come up in early spring, even peeking through the snow. They can usually take what Mother Nature dishes out. A short freeze won't do lasting damage to young bulb shoots and buds, though it may burn open blossoms.

Q: How do I grow spring-flowering bulbs in warm climates?

A: Growing spring-flowering bulbs in

zones 9 and 10 is possible, but the blooming season in these zones is much earlier than in cooler zones.

To ensure success, choose cultivars that do well in warmer climates. A few examples are Amaryllis, Anemone de Caen, Dutch iris, Freesia, lilies and daffodils.

Optimally, such bulbs should be put in the ground in December or early January. Plant them about 6 to 8 inches deep, water well and spread a layer of mulch to retain moisture and protect them from heat.

Q: Should I apply mulch? How deep? When?

A: Mulch is not required, but it is often beneficial, and 3 inches is plenty. Wait until the ground cools down to apply. Applying mulch too early in the fall, when the ground is still soft and warm, can invite infestations by field mice and other pests that like to burrow in to establish winter quarters and dig up tasty tulip treats.

Q: Should I fertilize bulbs?

A: If you're planting bulbs for only one year's blooms, fertilizer is not needed. Bulbs already carry a season's supply of food in the moist tissue surrounding the flower.

Q: Do tulips prefer sun or shade?

A: Tulips are sun and shade lovers, but when planting in fall, don't be fooled by the patterns of sun and shade in the fall landscape. Come spring, when tulips bloom, all the deciduous trees will be leafless, which means there is a lot of sun in the spring landscape.

Q: Why should I plant bulbs in clusters?

A: Groups of bulbs make a nicer show than individual soldiers marching single file. For greater color impact in the landscape, plant clusters of same-color flowers together in blocks or "bouquets." Visually, your clients will get more bang for the buck. One trick - try positioning similar bulbs in a triangular planting pattern with the point of the triangle toward the front and the long leg toward the back. The result is that it will look like you planted more flowers than you actually did. Generally, larger bulbs should be planted 3 to 6 inches apart and smaller bulbs 1 to 2 inches apart.

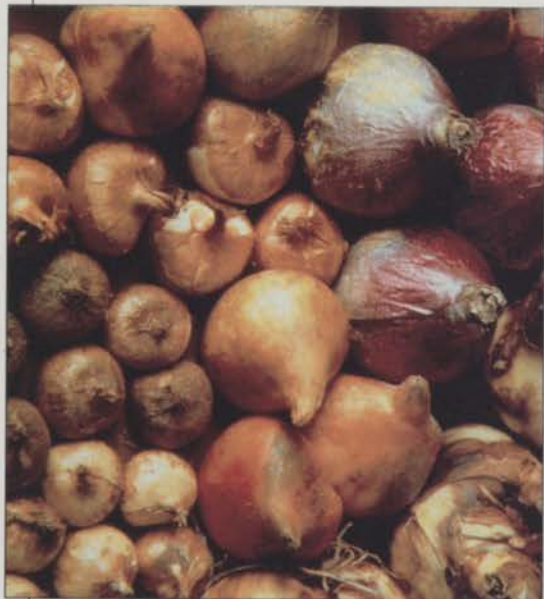
Q: I have seen the same variety of bulb priced very differently - some very inexpensive and others quite expensive. What's the difference?

A: In the Holland auctions, bulbs are gauged by the measurement of their circumference. For each variety, more mature bulbs are larger and yield bigger flowers, so they demand a higher price. For high-profile bed plantings, the higher price is worth it. But younger, smaller bulbs, often sold at lower prices, offer a great way of adding color to large or marginal areas, where they can be left in place to naturalize and mature, gaining in size over time. **ll**

Bulb Bonanza

For more information on bulb planting, care, history and fun facts, see www.bulb.com.

Spring-blooming bulbs, like tulips, crocuses and daffodils, require fall planting.
Photo: Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center



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LANDSCAPE BENEFITS

Mulching Matters

Mulch is often thought of as a necessity in the landscape. When someone asks whether or not they should mulch after planting, the answer is always, "Yes, of course," without much thought being given to application methods and questions or mulching options and advantages.

Mulch is as common in a landscape setting as the ever-present red pygmy barberries and moonbeam coreopsis. In fact, mulch is such an everyday landscape asset that most landscape contractors take it for granted—possibly forgetting why it is there at all.

BIG BENEFITS. There are four benefits of mulch in a landscape:

1. *Water savings.* Compared with non-mulched or bare-soil plantings, properly mulched landscape plantings conserve more water. Mulch coverings, especially organic mulch coverings, buffer wind's drying effects, holding moisture in the soil. To observe



Not only does mulch offer aesthetic appeal to this flower bed, but it also reduces weed seed germination. Photo: Mary Buck

this in a landscape, thoroughly water a bare soil landscape and a mulched landscape after planting. Then, check the soil moisture with a screwdriver every other day for a couple of weeks. The soil in the mulched landscape will remain moist longer, reducing the need for future watering.

2. *Weed suppression.* Mulched landscapes usually have fewer weeds than non-mulched areas. Mulches block the sunlight from reaching the soil, reducing the germination of undesirable weeds. Sure, weeds can grow in mulch. But, in general, they are greatly reduced. Fewer weeds are a plus because, as a result, less labor and materials are needed for weed control.

3. *Cooling effect.* The blocking of the sunlight not only suppresses weeds, it also cools the soil. In fact, the lighter the color of mulch, the cooler it tends to be underneath due to the light being reflected rather than absorbed. Bare soil is dark—whether it's red Oklahoma clay or deep black Iowa corn ground, and it can cause a landscape to heat up quickly.

4. *Aesthetic appeal.* Natural-colored mulch can produce both enhancing and neutralizing effects in the landscape. This is quite helpful from an appear-

(continued on page 40)

Cheers & Jeers

MULCH

River Rock, Stone

ADVANTAGES

Stays put, resists wind

DISADVANTAGES

Hot—adds heat and stress to plants, can be used by children to break client's windows, doesn't suppress weeds well

Wood Chips, Bark

Cools soil, suppresses weeds, breaks down to enrich the soil

Needs to be replaced occasionally

Decorative
(Cocoa bean hulls, cottonseed hulls)

Aesthetic appeal
Scent

Costly, needs to be replaced occasionally

Colored Rubber
Nuggets

Stays put, permanent, provides cushioning

Hot—adds heat and stress to plants, may create strange aesthetic effects with color combinations in landscape



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OSHA & You

Getting into trouble with OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, often results in lost management and production time, costly legal expenses and large government fines.

Many employers – unaware of how they are affected by OSHA regulations – are caught off guard when a serious injury occurs or a disgruntled employee files a complaint and an OSHA inspector unexpectedly shows up on their property. They're also unaware that a single "repeat" or "willful" violation can result in a penalty as high as \$70,000.

Lawn care and landscape businesses are by no means immune from enforcement of OSHA regulations. One of the most recent OSHA standards to go into effect that will impact your operation is OSHA's new ergonomics standard. This controversial standard mandates that by Oct. 14, employers must provide employees with basic information about musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), their signs and symptoms and how to report them. After that date, employers must take certain specific actions in response to employee reports of MSDs in the workplace.

With legislation like this being enacted, understanding how OSHA affects you and identifying some of the basic policies you need to follow to stay out of trouble with this government agency is critical.

SAFETY CONCERNS

An OSHA Checklist

Staying on top of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) legislation means keeping a few office basics in mind.

- Post OSHA's Job Safety & Health Protection poster in a prominent location where employees will see it.
- Maintain an OSHA No. 300 illness and injury log (the OSHA Form 300 log replaced the 200 log effective Jan. 1) for the current calendar year. Record all job-related illnesses and injuries. Make sure the log is accessible to employees.
- Complete an OSHA 101 Form (or an equivalent) for any work-related injury or illness.
- Retain OSHA No. 300 logs and OSHA 101 Forms for five years beyond the end of the current calendar year.
- Notify OSHA within eight hours of any work-related incident that results in the death of a worker or the hospitalization of three or more workers.
- Have a written Hazard Communication Program that includes a current listing of all hazardous chemicals used in your operation, plus a HAZCOM training program for employees.
- Keep a written record of all employees who receive HAZCOM training.
- Maintain current MSDS sheets for each hazardous chemical used in your operation.
- Keep current medical records and records of employee exposures to hazardous substances.
- Have a written safety program that includes safety training. – *Gempler's*

EDITOR'S NOTE: This copyrighted checklist is being reprinted with permission from Gempler's *How to Avoid an OSHA Nightmare: A Guide for Ag/Hort Employers*.

OSHA BASICS. OSHA was developed to reduce injuries and illnesses and to improve the health and safety of workers in the United States. In order to do this, the federal agency has numerous safety-related standards lawn care and landscape businesses must comply with, legislating everything from the use of pesticides to the proper use of respirators and other personal protective equipment.

Even when OSHA does not have a specific standard that affects your operation, an OSHA inspector can cite you and fine you thousands of dollars for violations of its "general duty clause." OSHA's general duty clause requires employers to furnish places of employment free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to employees.

In other words, regardless of whether or not you are covered by a specific OSHA standard, if an OSHA inspector spots a serious hazard on your operation that he or she thinks you should have recognized, you can be cited and fined under OSHA's general duty clause.

Also, make sure you know whether you live in a state regulated by federal OSHA or a state that has its own "state-run" OSHA plan. Twenty-four states plus Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, have their own state-run OSHA programs,

(continued on page 44)

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USE READER SERVICE #26

Environmental Forum

(continued from page 42)

which have regulations that are at least as strict, if not stricter, than the federal OSHA standards. These states are: Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Wyoming, New Mexico, Minnesota, Iowa, Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Vermont, New York, Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Jersey, Alaska and Hawaii.

What are some of the "basics" an OSHA inspector will look for when he or she shows up on your property? These include:

- OSHA's Job Safety & Health Protection poster (or the agency's new workplace safety poster entitled: You Have a Right to a Safe and Healthful Workplace: It's The Law!). See www.osha.gov for more information.

- An OSHA No. 200 illness and injury log properly completed to date for the current calendar year

- Evidence of a written Hazard Communication Program that includes a listing of all pesticides used in your operation and training for employees

- Current material safety data sheets (MSDSs) for all hazardous chemicals used in your operation

- A written safety program that includes regular safety training for employees (Also see the accompanying OSHA Basics Checklist sidebar on page 42.)

OSHA PENALTIES. One good reason why you want to stay out of trouble with OSHA is because of its severe penalty structure. OSHA may cite you for one or more "willful," "repeat," "serious," or "other-than-serious" violations. You may also be cited for a "regulatory" (record keeping or reporting) violation.

Penalties for a single willful or repeat violation can be as high as \$70,000, while "serious" violations must carry penalties of up to \$7,000, and "other-than-serious" violations may carry penalties of up to \$7,000. The failure to post the required workplace safety poster (in a prominent location where employees can see it) can result in a \$1,000 penalty – as can the failure to maintain a current OSHA No. 200 injury and illness log.

Also, an employer's failure to notify OSHA within eight hours of any work-related incident that results in the death of an employee or the hospitalization of three or more employees can result in a \$5,000 penalty.

Lastly, OSHA inspectors rarely cite an employer for just one violation – it's much more probable that if you undergo an OSHA investigation, you will be cited for a number of violations, which can quickly add up to thousands of dollars in penalties.

The author is editor, Gempler's ALERT. For more information on How to Avoid an OSHA Nightmare, contact Gempler's at: 800/382-8473, or fax: 800/551-1128, and request information on Item No. 929704. You can also visit www.gemplersalert.com. **LL**

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article includes material from Gempler's How to Avoid an OSHA Nightmare: A Guide for Ag/Hort Employers, copyrighted and published by Gempler's, Inc., Web site: www.gemplersalert.com.

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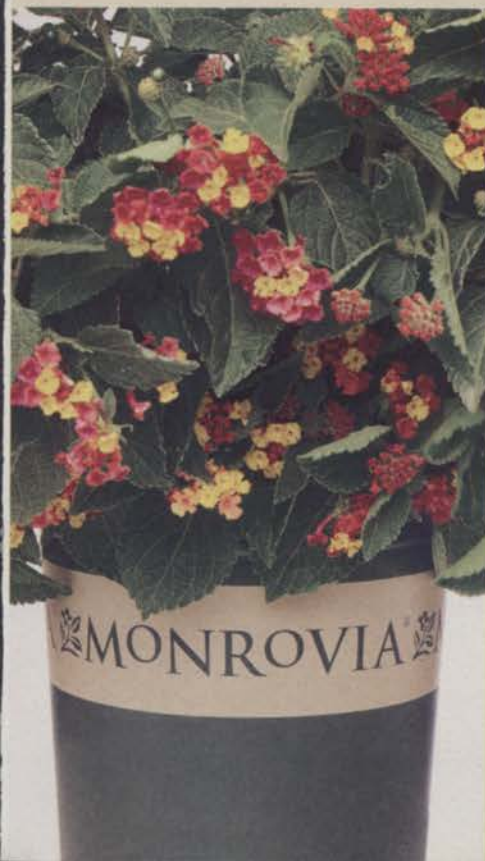
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PESTICIDE SAFETY

Debating Drift

Pesticide spray drift occurs as a normal, yet harmful, side effect of most pesticide applications. While applicators cannot eliminate drift across the board, they can minimize its consequences and consider appropriate procedures when applying pesticides.

Debate currently surrounds Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-proposed blanket labels on pesticides that attempt to reduce spray drift violations, but no legislation or regulation revisions have been passed as of press time. Nevertheless, for basic environmental health and safety, lawn care operators should review their knowledge and limit pesticide spray drift on their properties.

DRIFTING AWAY. Spray drift occurs when pesticide particles move through the air to a site, plant or object other than the intended application target. The National Coalition on Drift Minimization (NCODM) is an organization consisting of representatives from the EPA and U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as manufacturers, scientists and other individuals concerned about spray drift. This organization attempts to further industry education on the topic, and identifies two types of spray drift: physical drift and vapor drift. Physical drift occurs from small pesticide droplet sizes, inadequate boom heights and high wind speeds. Vapor drift is affected by wind speed, but can be caused by volatility, air temperature and humidity.

Contractors can control drift simply by minimizing spray pressure and increasing droplet size, advised John Buechner, director of technical services, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J. "Just watch your pressure and your droplet size, which can be controlled right at the sprayer if the system is set up properly," he said, adding that droplet size may be increased by adding surfactants to the tank for that purpose. Keeping the spray nozzle as low to the ground as possible also helps minimize unnecessary drift.

Drift usually is not a problem with turf applications because of generally low pressures and high volumes of water, Buechner continued. Tony Mills, vice president, Southern Greens Lawn Care, Brandon, Fla., agreed, noting that for residential applications, his company uses 4- to 5-gallon-per-minute spray nozzles that give out large droplets to begin with. "We're not using mist sprayers on large condos, and most of the time you're getting spray drift off the fine mist sprayers."

In fact, most lawn applications, when made in liquid form, incorporate large-droplet spray nozzles so that spray drift is "essentially nil," remarked John Thatcher, director of technical services, TruGreen-ChemLawn, Delaware, Ohio. However, lawn care operators must still consider where they are spraying to



When applying pesticides, contractors should pay attention to the droplet size, sprayer nozzle height and pressure, and weather conditions in an effort to limit potentially harmful pesticide spray drift. Photo: Syngenta

avoid contaminating sensitive areas, he reminded. "Our company stays 3 feet or so away from bodies of water. We call it our 'ring of responsibility,'" he said. "Drift can be a big issue when it happens, since plant damage can occur and it's a violation to apply pesticides in a manner that affects humans, etc. It's bad business."

After contractors check droplet size, set ideal pressures and maintain the correct water volume, they should set a proper nozzle height for the application. The NCODM suggests a height of 18 to 20 inches above the application target for vehicles with boom sprayers. However, even when these factors are controlled, a worn or damaged nozzle can spark spray drift.

Finally, certain wind speeds may accelerate drift from a pesticide application, and many states have regulations as far as a maximum wind speed for safe pesticide applications, Buechner identified. The NCODM lists 5 mph as a safe limit to avoid wayward pesticide spray. "Just use common sense if you are going to spray on a windy day when you are still legally able to," Buechner continued. "If you get too much material off target, you have to be careful of aquatic life, sensitive plants, over-drift to neighbors' clothes and toys, yard items, picnic tables, etc."

On the other hand, high winds can be used to the benefit of some tree applications, Thatcher noted. "There is value to having some movement of the material with wind," he said. "You basically have to get full coverage of the leaves for disease and insect protection, and the only way to get good coverage is to spray with the prevailing wind so the wind carries the spray into the tree canopy. Just make sure it's not overly high wind velocity so the material doesn't go beyond the tree."

In general, applicator education about drift, as well as keeping up with any labeling changes that may occur, can only serve to further lawn care interests and increase proper health and safety measures, Thatcher stressed. "The most reasonable approach is to continue licensing applicators to ensure training has occurred, and have states regulate their own pesticide usage and detection of residues," he said. — Kristin Mohn

The author is Assistant Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

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On

Paper

Keeping Score


Creating a team approach to quality lawn care is a top priority for Ed Reier, vice president of operations, Tecza Environmental Group, Elgin, Ill. To that end, his company created an annual client survey that serves as a scorecard for each foreman.

"This form helps to quantify each foreman's work during their annual review," Reier explained. "The two main things this form is used for is to evaluate job profitability and quality. You can't have one without the other."

Reier remarked that using this form has helped each foreman see how he or she can grow personally, professionally and financially, which has helped employee retention. "The percentage of employee retention that we get is outstanding - it's over 85 percent every year," he enthused.

The form, which has long been used by the company to improve employee performance, is also used by Reier to prepare an annual report regarding job quality and profitability to the rest of the organization. In addition, the forms are scrutinized during meetings Reier holds with the company's account managers every other week. "These forms are a regular part of that meeting," he noted. "We learn from each other and if a negative point comes in, the team takes it as a strike against it rather than the individual account manager."

To receive a 35 to 40 percent return rate each year, Reier acknowledged that

the company tried to make the form as easy to fill out and return as possible. "The form is short and easy to complete," he commented. "We even include a self-addressed stamped envelope for clients to send it back in." - Cheryl Green 

The author is Internet Editor of Lawn & Landscape Online.

LET US KNOW HOW WE'RE DOING!

Your help in completing this brief questionnaire will allow us to determine how well we are meeting your needs.

Please rate us with 9 being the highest 'grade' possible, 1 being the lowest.

Who is your account manager: _____

1. Account Manager

- Meeting your needs and expectations
- Explanation of company's capabilities
- Knowledge of the landscape industry
- Follow-through on requests & changes
- Neat, clean & professional manner

Circle One Number

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

2. Miscellaneous Additional Services

- Unique and creative design
- Quality of plant material
- Thoroughness of site cleanup
- Neat, clean & professional manner
- Communication with site personnel

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

3. Maintenance Services

- Ability to accomplish tasks at hand
- Quality of work completed
- Communication with site personnel
- Follow-through on requests
- Thoroughness of site cleanup
- Neat, clean & professional manner

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

4. Administrative & Corporate Services

- Communication with corporate staff
- Invoices accurate and understandable

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

Overall Value & Quality of Products & Services 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

What is one thing you like best about how we service your needs?

What is one thing we could do better to satisfy you?

Other comments? _____

Name (Optional): _____

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Mapping Out Meetings

Meetings are like a team huddle. They build morale and provide a place to hash out issues, learn new tactics and discuss plans of action.

But, in a setting where time is money and client visits cram schedules, finding time for crews and managers to touch base can be a challenge. "You have to make sure everyone slows down and talks to each other," stressed Steven Bruce, operations manager, TruGreen LandCare, Tampa, Fla. "The key to meetings is getting back to the basics and keeping everyone fresh."

Since time is so valuable, covering key issues in a modest time frame is a priority for many companies – like N.D. Landscape in Topsfield, Mass. Chuck Morgan, production manager, brings a stopwatch to his 39-minute meetings and clocks each segment of the meeting, from employee reports to positive feedback. Thirty seconds from the end of the meeting, he issues a warning.

"What used to happen is we would get stuck on one subject and talk about it for an hour and a half – things were becoming unproductive," he explained.

While this regimented timing method might seem extreme to some, Bruce also keeps meetings to a half-hour per person and there are five other managers present at each meeting.

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Check this story online for sample meeting agendas/planning sheets.

Besides keeping time, organizing a structured agenda also keeps managers and crew members on task during meetings, Bruce added. "For efficiency, it's important that thoughts are gathered and points are bulleted and addressed," he

emphasized. "The point of understanding your business and being pointed, direct and efficient is key. I tell managers if they organize how they communicate, they will be successful."

Bruce put it this way: "Organization equals profitability." This is why he hands out agendas to his managers on Thursdays before Friday morning meetings, so each person has time to prepare their report. Bruce keeps a notebook of issues he addresses throughout the week,

also jotting down notes in his dayplanner as issues arise so he doesn't forget events. He compiles his notes and reports from managers he receives during the week, which include client contact sheets, labor variance reports and monthly quality audits. Managers supplement this information at meetings by spending their half hour discussing pending projects and new sales.

Meeting minutes are typed and compiled for reference, Bruce added. Then, managers can share these issues with their crews during Monday meetings. "Whatever we address needs to keep filtering down," he said.

To supplement this communication, the enhancement department has added hands-on lessons with on-site training sessions during the crew's Monday meeting. Bruce would like to see other crews implement these as well.

"You show proper ways to do things, and the guys will bring out issues, too – things we can do better," Bruce noted.

Morgan also keeps a strict agenda for his meetings, beginning weekly crew training gatherings with the mission statement, a plant of the week and, then, the meeting focus, which can be anything from role playing customer service to plant identification, he said. His management meetings start with one positive situation from each manager, followed by reports from each person.

But Morgan doesn't stop with these reports. He brings an action planner that is filled out during the meeting to enforce accountability. "We put up a name and date and when the task will be complete," he explained. "It's hard to get away from the task if it is written down, and then during the meeting we can address whether it is almost done or where it stands."

Since N.D. Landscape plans to jump from \$3 million to \$6 million in revenue in two years, company development updates are crucial, Morgan added. "If we didn't [have the meetings], we're going in so many directions in this office, even though we're sitting 3 feet away from each other, we're going so fast that if we didn't talk once a week the company wouldn't gel," he said. – **Kristen Hampshire**

The author is Managing Editor – Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine.

by Kristen Hampshire

HIGHGROVE PARTNERS

HEADQUARTERS: Smyrna, Ga.

BRANCH OFFICES: Alpharetta, Ga., Charlotte, N.C., Huntersville, N.C.

2001 REVENUE: \$15,520,000

2002 PROJECTED GROWTH: 10 percent

SERVICE MIX: 80 percent commercial/industrial and 20 percent residential

EMPLOYEES: 230 year-round, 20 seasonal

EQUIPMENT: 33 trimmers, 128 blowers, 57 edgers, 8 pruners, 45 walk-behind mowers, 22 riding mowers, 16 chain saws, 4 brush cutters, 56 hedge trimmers, 62 maintenance vehicles, 5 spray vehicles, 25 installation vehicles

THE COMPANY

THE ACQUISITION: Formerly Post Landscape Group, the three partners acquired the service from the real estate giant last November and formed an independent landscape design/build and maintenance firm – HighGrove Partners.

CHALLENGES: The economy, finding good people and a highly competitive market

PRESIDENT: Bill Lincicome has a degree in landscape architecture and worked for Post Landscape Group since its inception in 1989.

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER: Jim McCutcheon also has a degree in landscape architecture and worked with Lincicome and Rogers at Post Landscape Group as one of its key managers.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER: Ken Rogers joined Post Landscape Group in 1995 and helped the company fine-tune its accounting, tracking and job costing systems.

The HighGrove partners left home for the first time without a wink of doubt.

Normally, breaking away from the nest sets off uncertainty, triggers some nerves. No more security blanket – no more financial pillow, market reputation or big-business clout. No more endless budget or surplus labor. Quite frankly, independence takes guts and gumption and struggle before glory.

But all this doesn't make the former Post Landscape Group trio a bit homesick.

"It was time for us to leave home and venture out on our own," recognized Bill Lincicome, president of the Smyrna, Ga.-based partnership, once part of the real estate giant Post Properties. For him, Jim McCutcheon (chief operating officer) and Ken Rogers (chief financial officer), the time was right last November when their

parent decided to concentrate on its core property management business. In an amicable deal, Post Properties sold its landscape group to its three top managers, who formed HighGrove Partners.

"It was a back-to-the-basics campaign for Post, and it is a win-win situation, because it affords us the opportunity to do what we want to do," Rogers noted.

"We had dreams about this years ago," McCutcheon added. "We were proud of what we had done over these many years, and

Post provided us an opportunity that we saw made sense."

Besides, parting from their Post home didn't mean leaving their comfort zone. Now the long-time co-workers are testing their industry education in an adventure all their own, with some fresh ideas on boosting maintenance business, piling up profit, preserving a solid reputation and, most of all, putting people first.

THE RIGHT TOOLS. HighGrove is a bit of a double entendre in some respects. The \$15.5-million company started its operation with high standards, high-quality employees, a high reputation to uphold – not to mention high aspirations. But, like any growing business, the company climbed some steep hills first.

These milestones come with mud puddles. For example, before smooth systems are "accounting nightmares," like Lincicome described. "I was spending 50 percent of my time in the accounting department trying to get things sorted out. We couldn't grow because the accounting situation was a nightmare, and I knew if we were going to go anywhere we had to find someone in tune with business."

This was in 1995, when the three were working at Post Properties and systems were not so smooth. In fact, operating on the real estate company's accounting system was skewing landscape pricing because the software was not designed for such detail.

HighGrove Partners, LLC

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At a
Glance

(continued on page 52)

Right Partners

Equipped with a clever game plan and established reputation, three former Post Landscape veterans test their independence as HighGrove Partners.



Ken Rogers, Jim McCutcheon and Bill Lincicome (left to right) head the HighGrove team. Photo: Jill Alikonis

(continued from page 50)

Enter Rogers. "When I got there, we had about six different systems in our landscape division to track everything," he explained. "We had an accounting system to track our man hours, and another to track our job costing. And Post Properties had a lot of hybrid accounting systems in place for their construction and property management de-

partments - we were all using completely different systems. It was a real nightmare to marry all of that."

Rogers sorted through the mess, undertaking a project to integrate all of the departments and "put everyone on the same platform" - a scenario many small companies experience when first testing accounting sys-

tems. After all, an \$15-million landscape division couldn't operate from the same systems that worked for a \$2-billion real estate firm.

"We had to start from ground zero," Lincicome remarked. "We needed a process. When I say accounting, there are two aspects to that. It's really understanding how the job is performing financially and, internally, our managers needed to understand where they are as far as hours and expenses - they needed a job management tool. We couldn't expect them to succeed if they didn't have the necessary tools."

The goal: Improve job costing and put pricing in perspective. Price slashing was the trend and the landscape group found its prices were a bit out of touch from the market. "Now, we take data from industry associations and we see how our pricing and overhead compare," Rogers said.

A lack of job costing created inaccurate billing in the enhancement department, for example, which lost money because costs were not tracked carefully. "Now, we isolate each service, evaluate it on its own merit with a pricing structure, and we've been able to increase our profits because of that," Rogers said.

Some of the prices were too high, others were too low. Gib Durden, vice president/sales manager, said the company did cut prices a bit to contend with competitors, but some of the prices were too high to begin with. "We found we were really competitive on some of the smaller jobs, but when we got into the high-production jobs, we weren't really as competitive because of our bidding systems."

Lining up costs with other companies was not only a matter of comparison, but finding out just how long it takes to perform each task. "We basically took a stop watch and said, 'Go,' and saw how long things take," he noted. "We updated our bidding system and got more competitive."

Now, HighGrove draws on these money mistakes and sees its Post parent's tight reigns on financials as a business boot camp - a sort of training and preparation for their new venture. They stick to quality and don't worry so much about price shoppers - less cost-conscious customers also help this, Durden added. "They take more of a middle ground, and if you can back up a little higher price with exemplary service, they see some value in that."

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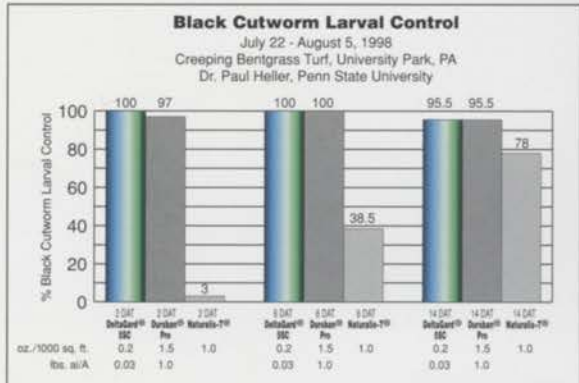
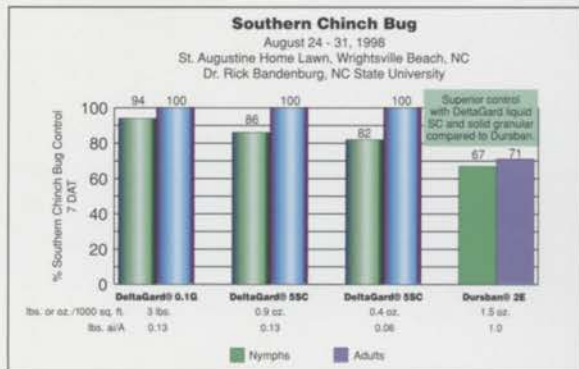
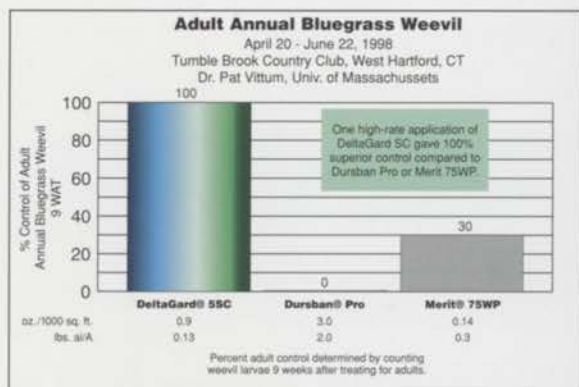
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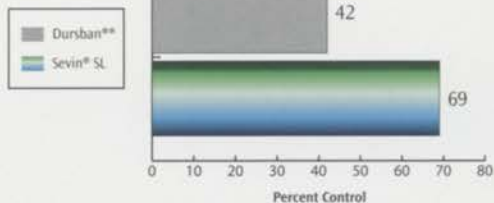
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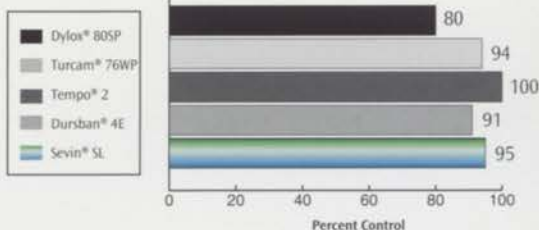
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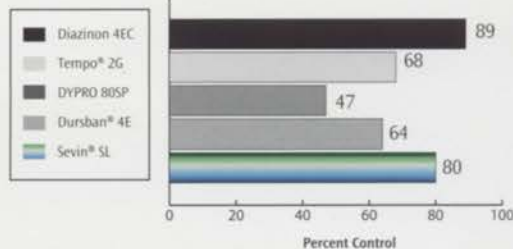
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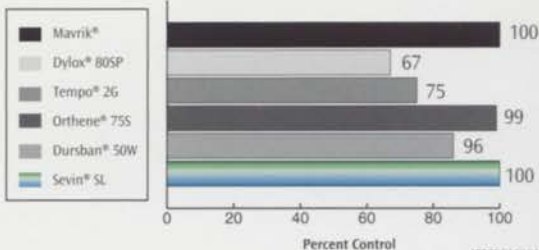
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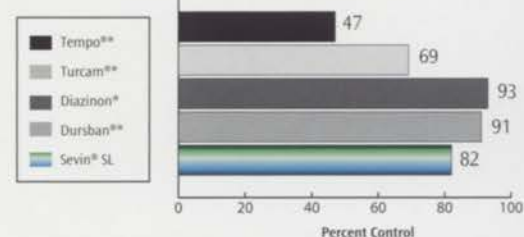
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Training is more than video tapes and on-site tag-alongs at HighGrove Partners. People are its greatest investment, so the company implemented a promotion and educational program to build skills, confidence and careers.

"It's one thing for us to put the gold in the pot, but if we don't give the employees the resources and training, they won't succeed," noted Ken Rogers, chief financial officer of the Atlanta, Ga.-based firm, formerly Post Landscape Group.

Considering this, training programs are niche-oriented and specific for each job level. Employees learn the ins and outs of each rung on the ladder before progressing to the next position, explained Keith Worsham, branch manager, Atlanta operations, Smyrna, Ga. For instance, a grounds person learns mowing, edging and blowing skills in the field with a trainer, who demonstrates proper procedures for each task. Later, back at the shop, the employee takes a written exam that reviews the information. Since employees progress at different speeds, there are three categories for each job description – three steps of learning and three steps before moving to the next level.

"There are three levels in each position – grounds person 1, 2 and 3, and so on," Worsham explained. "To be an assistant supervisor, you first have to be certified at all three levels. Then, level three of assistant supervisor prepares you for the next level – supervisor. We focus on more experience to get them ready for the next promotion. That's the key to it."

Experience includes making mistakes, but HighGrove won't micromanage. "You don't have the owners looking over your shoulder and you have the opportunity to follow your nose and succeed," Worsham described. After 13 years, he moved from mowing to managing, and he sees inspiring opportunity. "When I saw the amount of personal interest that gets taken in each person and how sincere the company is about everyone's progression and long-term goals, I started to see the career aspect of the job." – *Kristen Hampshire*

A Personal Investment

In essence, being held accountable for their numbers and performance in the past created a solid beginning for the new partnership, Lincicome recognized.

"It's a good exercise and we were forced early and we think it will be a big benefit," he figured. "Now, we can analyze what divisions are doing well, talk about the ones that are not doing well and why – do we need more resources? We can get focused on the immediate problem. Financial reports are a discipline that is critical to growth. You can't grow smart without it."

PROFIT ADD-ONS. Growing smart keeps the partners' critical eyes constantly looking at the company's clockwork. Their to-do list is a healthy size, and finding more profit is never scratched off the roll.

So, after smoothing out systems, the landscape group took a second look at subcontracting work. In 1998, Post Landscape Group subcontracted irrigation repair, turf care – everything except construction, which was in-house, Roger said. Since then, it added these high-profit services to its business, sav-

ing the company money on fees.

"We focused more on our enhancement work as a percent of our contract maintenance and that's been a big help," Rogers recognized. From here, the company decided that maintenance would play a profitable part of its future, especially in a lagging economy.

In 1995, Post Landscape Group had \$8 million in revenue with a 75-percent construction-based business. Gradually, this top line expanded, and the ratio of construction to maintenance evened out. 2001 brought HighGrove Partners \$15.5 million in revenue with 60 percent maintenance, Lincicome reported.

"That was one of the first projects we undertook shortly after the three of us got together," he noted. "We realized that if we were going to be more profitable, we had to turn [the company] into a maintenance business."

This transition might seem a little unnatural for two landscape architects and a numbers man. But weekly cash flow keeps companies alive, and they knew if

they were going to hit Post's targets each year, which were set at between 10 to 15 percent in growth, they needed a more constant revenue source. Maintenance was the answer, and it plays an important role in the business plan for their new organization.

"Construction is good when the economy is good, but in 2001 it slowed down," Rogers said. "You need to be able to insulate yourself from those downturns in the economy. In our case, we cut our teeth on installation and design and we'll never get away from it, but we want to be 75 to 80 percent maintenance and have the ability to choose the construction work that we want to do."

Adding more maintenance requires more capital, however – more people, more equipment, more management to oversee the work. First, the company focused its operational performance. "Initially, it was, well, not quite that good," McCutcheon admitted. A part-time sales person wasn't enough to feed more business into the department. Also, the company needed more and better equipment, which required a multi-million dollar investment spread over a couple years – not such a stress when it was financed through Post Properties. Now, HighGrove pays for these needs with a line of credit, and help from industry consultants "turned the ship," McCutcheon said.

"When we had a transition from design/build to maintenance, that was a pivotal decision," he noted, adding that a people-oriented service requires a compatible manager. McCutcheon was that maintenance point man in 1998, before he shifted into a broader management position. "Maintenance is where 70 percent of our people are – it's people intensive," he noted. "Managing people in a creative way is critical."

In fact, any add-on service will survive only with the right people, Lincicome pointed out. His advice for landscape companies striving for one-stop-shopping status is to know limitations and recruit valuable employees.

(continued on page 60)



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JOHN DEERE

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NOTHING RUNS LIKE A DEERE®

(continued from page 57)

Same goes for managers to grow a company, he noted. "Every manager knows people who are reliable," he identified. "You need to circle those wagons around you and get trust and respect pulling between that group." Coincidentally, this is how McCutcheon and Rogers became such valuable managers, and eventually, partners, in the HighGrove

dream. "I didn't have a plan, but I always knew in the back of my mind, if I got in a position of success where I started to grow, there would be people I would need," Lincicome reflected.

"Ken was one," he continued. "I didn't just discover him, he was targeted. Jim was the same way."

CREATING CAREERS. Marking high-potential employees doesn't end with upper management. Actually, HighGrove's emphasis on training, developing and promoting middle management creates a close-knit company fabric.

"We try to find the best people, train them the best we can, lay out the expectations and allow them to do their jobs," McCutcheon explained. "That has enabled us to take on more services and provide more for our customers."

"It also develops opportunities for our people—career growth," Rogers pointed out. "And that's very important also."

The HighGrove partners step back from their managers and employees—they let them make mistakes and find new ways to handle problems. Sure, it's not easy all the time, McCutcheon admitted. "We're challenging our people to think instead of pointing a finger and saying, 'Do this,'" he said.

Avoiding micromanagement tactics also allows employees the independence to make decisions. Some are better than others, but all of them are learning opportunities, McCutcheon added.

"You have to have faith," he remarked. "We have made mistakes. There is no way we could've grown from zero to \$18 million without that. Our employees have learned a lot from us and they are applying the same logic."

Promoting from within will grow the company and provide a solid, knowledgeable management team. "A lot of companies are started by one or two guys and stay in the family," Lincicome said. "For us, it will stay with the people that operate it."

Essentially, HighGrove, in its first year, is grooming its next generation of owners. Perhaps the partners want to pass on the opportunity that was afforded to them by Post, or maybe they simply appreciate the value in company loyalty and want to reward those who do the same. Either way, Lincicome communicates this potential to employees.

"It will be the people that run the business, and they know that," he said clearly. "All of our operations are set up that way. We're offering them the incentive that if they work hard and smart, this will grow into something that is theirs."

HighGrove talks this up, but its training programs and intricate infrastructure back these words. Take Keith Worsham. As a branch manager of Atlanta operations, he is

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Check out this story online for HighGrove's take on the benefits of being full service.

responsible for the irrigation department, turf care and floriculture, and he has four account managers and mechanics who report to him on a daily basis. After 13 years with the company, Worsham sees possibilities – he sees a career. "I've come through the ranks," he pointed out.

Each position has three levels, he explained: Ground person one, two and three, then assistant supervisor one, two three, and so on. "The top level of each position prepares you for the next level," Worsham described. "People progress differently at each level. You need to break [training] down into smaller increments."

Now, Worsham is looking forward as well – he's thinking about his next step and where he might fit into the larger picture. This is exactly what the partners want. "People really feel like they're successful, and there's a future and an opportunity if they work hard – there is an avenue for them," Lincicome related.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS. Four months on their own, and the HighGrove threesome is holding their own. They are filling out the footprints of rather large shoes, but finding an identity that both preserves and builds on the Post reputation.

"I think we'll develop our own culture," Lincicome concluded. "It's important for us to grow from our experience at Post, and develop our own culture with a commitment to customer service, professionalism and quality. All of those things have always been important and the management knows that."

Resources for people, growth for profit and quality for reputation – these staples will drive success, McCutcheon added. That, and a simple mantra – "Have fun and make money," Rogers added, laughing.

Multi-family clients present sales opportunities, and the "formerly Post Landscape Group" tag will follow the new name until the company establishes market recognition, Lincicome noted. A favorable market that surges 60,000 in population every six months

will also encourage the company's growth – a 10-percent revenue increase for 2002, they hope. Furthermore, a synchronized relationship among the three partners will cement the operation.

"We don't have any desire to be the biggest company in the country, we just want to be the best," McCutcheon related. Best, de-

finied in terms not marked by dollar signs.

"We want this to be a great place to work and where people feel success and have a bright future," Lincicome recognized. "And that's what we work toward every day." ■

The author is Managing Editor – Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Live & LEARN

David Teas has learned that bigger isn't always better.

Throughout the past 10 years, David Teas, owner, Clean Cut Lawn Maintenance, Charleston, S.C., has learned to be happy with conservative growth. "I like where I am," he asserted. "I tried getting bigger a few years ago and I wasn't happy with the results."

Teas explained that he noticed quality starting to slip when he tried to expand his business, which offers lawn maintenance, irrigation, annual color and holiday lighting services to both residential and commercial properties, so he decided to pull back. "I didn't have the systems in place to get bigger," he related. In addition, he said that money was an issue associated with his attempt at expansion.

"I've been burnt on the money end of it as far as getting over extended," he stated. "I definitely wasn't happy with the profitability."

So, instead of rushing growth, Teas decided to take it nice and easy - improving the qualities that initially made his businesses successful, so that when he's ready to expand again, the systems will be in place.

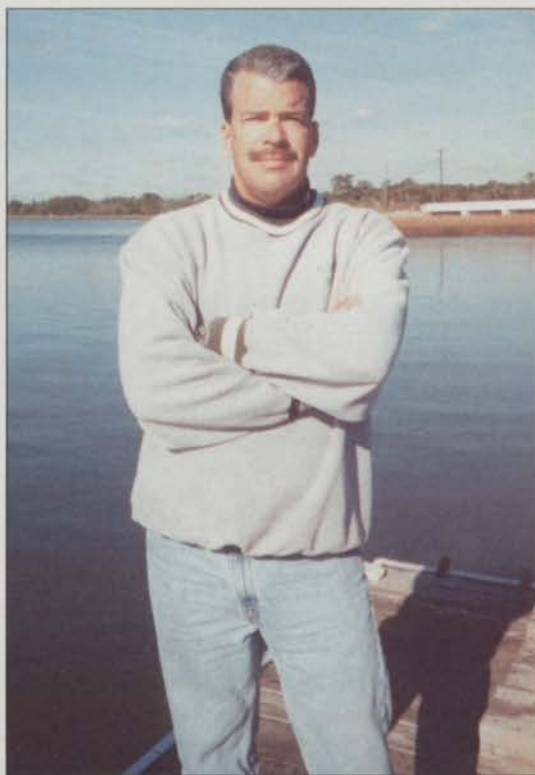
As far as Teas is concerned, learning from past mistakes will position Clean Cut as a leader in the marketplace.

"When I look at my first two years, I was totally undercapitalized and I borrowed up the yin-yang, and I'm still paying for that," he lamented. "Four years ago, I starting running the business on a strictly cash basis and now, I've got the numbers in place to recoup my capital investments so there's no reason not to pay cash. That's been the biggest turning point."

Other tough decisions Teas had to make involved his client list. He had to drop a project that comprised about 30 percent of his business, simply because he saw no growth potential with the customer. "I chose not to rebid this property because I saw that there would be some adversarial situations," he maintained. "They wanted to go low dollar and I didn't want to go there."

(continued on page 64)

Paying attention to the small details has helped Clean Cut Lawn Maintenance achieve success. Photo: David Teas



Running a successful business and being able to enjoy life is the perfect balance that David Teas is hoping to achieve. Photo: David Teas

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USE READER SERVICE #80

First Look

(continued from page 62)

Despite a reduction in staff, the Clean Cut team is still able to provide quality services to its existing customers without working overtime.

Photo: David Teas

After dropping that major client and deciding to get rid of about eight smaller accounts that Teas did not consider to be quality customers, Teas decided to reduce his workforce from two, two-man crews down to one. Although he continues to add to his client base, he has decided not to expand his work force again. "We don't work more hours in the day," he pronounced. "If we can't get it done in eight to 10 hours, then we don't do it."

Teas explained that taking on more reliable and profitable clients and revising the routing schedules helped him and his employees handle the amount of work since the loss of the extra labor. "Over the past two years, I got rid of eight low-income properties and added six quality customers, so if anything, running the business has gotten easier," he noted.

HOLDING THE KEYS. Every business can hold the keys to success. It's simply up to the owner to decide what keys to put into the ignition to get the company headed in the right direction. For Teas, the main key to his success is customer service. While most companies would say the same thing, Teas realizes that providing good customer service requires commitment.

"Our No. 1 goal is keeping customers," Teas trumpeted. "I will lose money to keep a customer because I know down the road I'll make that money back by giving them great customer service. I consider that paramount."

Teas explained that he believes this philosophy sometimes gets lost on bigger companies, with a strong financial focus. "It's just a numbers game to them."

One component of customer service that Teas remarked as being invaluable is consistency. "People can set their clocks by our service," he said. "Other companies, my competitors, aren't consistent."

Although it may sound simple, Teas explained that "billing what you say you're going to bill, doing what you say you're going to do and keeping your customers informed," is the essence of consistency.



For instance, if it rains and Teas' crew can't get to the accounts scheduled for that day, those customers know that they will be first on the list to receive service the next day. Then, after those accounts are caught up, Teas will begin with the accounts scheduled for that day.

Another primary component of this consistency, Teas said, is continuous communication with the client to resolve concerns right away. "I'm on all our properties every week or every other week," Teas asserted. "If the communication with the customer can't be conducted face-to-face, we use e-mail. All concerns are handled within 24 hours – period."

To ensure he services only the top-notch clientele, Teas carefully screens all potential customers – only taking on new clients who are referred by current patrons.

"Over time, you slowly become a judge of character," Teas commented. "Generally speaking, if the referral is from someone I know, the [potential customer] is going to be someone good – someone who is willing to pay for the services rendered."

He feels screening potential customers is necessary because he doesn't want to waste his limited time with a client who is only price shopping. "I always ask the person why they called me and how they got my number," he declared. "Right away I ask them what they're looking to spend, and if they hem-haw around, I know they're just price shopping."

With this method and through careful budgeting, Teas is in a position where he can pick and choose the clients he wants to take on.

"I know what my revenue is going to be at the beginning of the month," Teas advised. "I typically turn down more clients than I take."

ON THE HORIZON. In the future, Teas expects to continue growing at a slow pace, making small, sensible changes. In 2002, Teas expects growth of about 8 percent

over last year, with projected revenue between \$150,000 to \$200,000. However, this revenue doesn't include any installation projects Teas may take on. "I don't push the installation side of the business and I've had four calls for installation in the past few weeks," he asserted. "I don't push it because it would take away from the maintenance side, and the maintenance is what gives us these opportunities."

In an effort to save money and streamline his operations, Teas is also reevaluating his equipment and accounting systems this year. Because of the narrow streets through the downtown Charleston area, Teas plans to eliminate the use of trailers in favor of trucks with drop tails for liability reasons. In addition, he's currently evaluating his accounting system to see if there are any software systems on the market that will help him run a tighter ship.

"I've been shopping around for a new system but for a company my size, I'm not sold," he advised. "I've got the systems in place, so I'm just going to improve upon those."

While shopping for new software and trucks hasn't been a burden, Teas expects that his goal of reducing training costs will be more time intensive and require more resources. Because he only has two permanent employees on his payroll, Teas utilizes an H2B staffing service when bigger projects require more labor. Therefore, one of his major goals for 2002 is to produce bilingual training manuals and office communications. "I want to put everything down on paper so that when the workers switch out, it will reduce the amount of training required," he declared.

As he achieves these goals, Teas expects that his company will raise the bar for the industry in his area. And while he continues to strive to be the best - he's okay with not being the biggest.

"The big companies have the same problems we have, just on a different scale," he emphasized. "They are successful and some people want to get to that level."

"But, a lot of guys are happy making a decent living," he continued. "I live on the intercoastal waterway - it's beautiful here and I'm able to take advantage of that." **LI**

The author is the Internet Editor for Lawn & Landscape Online.

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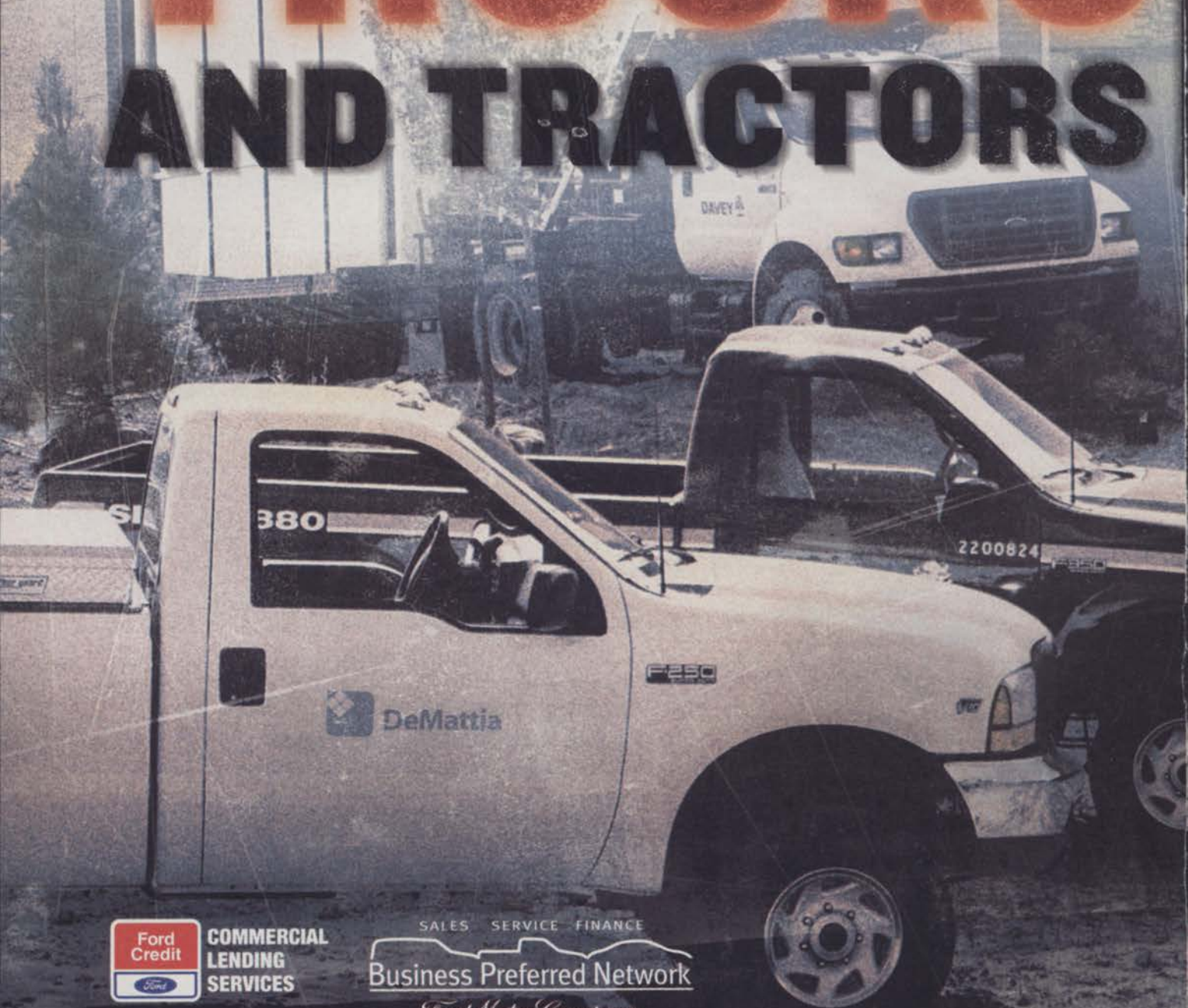
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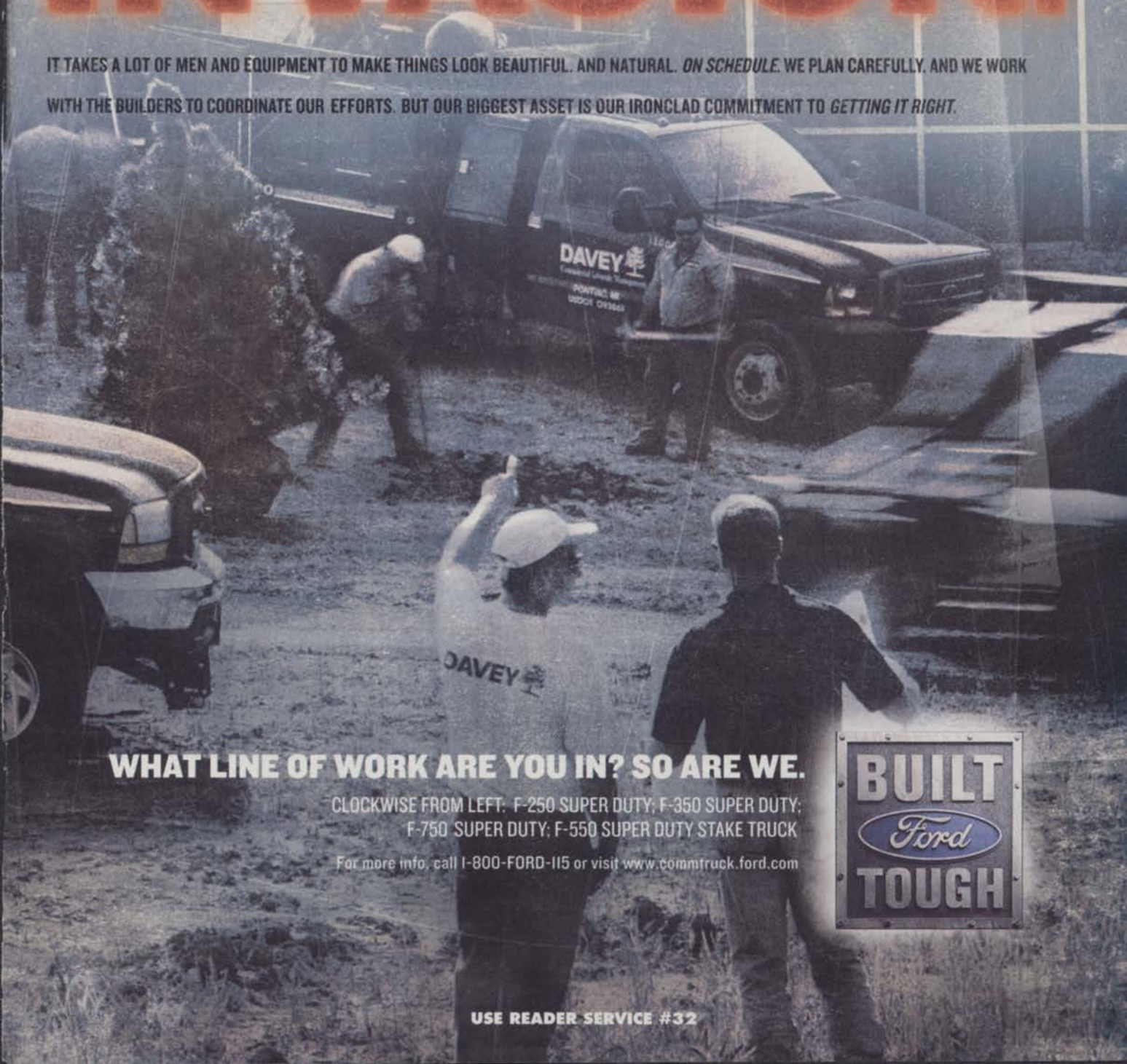
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USE READER SERVICE #32

Handling Difficult Clients

by Kristin Mohn

Being prepared for difficult clients in advance – brushing up on service ABCs – transforms most worrisome clients into satisfied customers.

Start with the persnickety older woman who glares out the window while employees are on her property, add a wealthy residential client who sees a single leaf on his driveway as a world disaster, toss in the loyal customer who worries that your business growth will compromise her services – and you've got a recipe for landscape clients at their worst.

However, choosing to initially write off difficult clients may very well amount to throwing away dollars. First impressions can be misleading – irritated customers may, over time, turn out to be your most valuable clients, explained Jerry Lesak, president, J.L. Land Development, Kirtland, Ohio. "It's hard to read people in the beginning and it is always opposite of what you thought," he related. "The bad ones turn out great and the ones you thought were great turn out bad."

In other words, taking a deep breath and going with the flow when clients make you see red can eventually increase, rather than limit, your customer base. Preparation and patience for antagonistic customers can result in positive solutions for both contractors and clients.

GROWING PAINS. Company expansion and growth opportunities spell success for every element in the business equation – except for, sometimes, the customers. Clients may feel anxious about the quality of their lawn care as a company gains newer and more prominent service opportunities, suggested David Ruckman, project manager, Scape-Abilities, Mountainside, N.J.

Ruckman's company has consistently grown in the past few years – 45 percent last year alone – and some of his original customers expressed concern with the increased business. "They think, 'You guys are the big hotshots now,'" he described. "Their image is that a little company might take care of them better."

(continued on page 70)

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USE READER SERVICE #33

Handling Difficult Clients

(continued from page 68)

Consequently, even though business expansion led to redesigned logos, advanced equipment and greater visibility for Scape-Abilities, the company's image among long-time customers suffered. As a solution, Ruckman insisted on the principal key to any relationship: communication. "We put out a personalized letter explaining what

was happening," he related. "We said, 'Yeah, you're seeing more of us, we're growing, but we're not forgetting about you guys.'"

The letter served as an outreach reminder that erased many complaints, Ruckman remembered. Even when a few clients continued to place disappointed phone calls, mentioning the letter caused customers to realize

Ruckman's effort to continue the relationship. "If they still called after receiving the letter, we asked them why they didn't do anything about it sooner," he said. "They tend to get embarrassed and wonder why they waited so long, why they didn't call us sooner, etc." The growing company that maintains customer contact can thus substantiate expansion without leaving loyal clients in the dust.

Still, clients with smaller service requests may feel that a budding company with thousand-dollar install projects does not have the time or interest for \$25-a-week mowing requests. Again, a quick call to the customer or continued presence during the maintenance service calls can do wonders for reassuring nervous clients, Ruckman insisted. He added that even when a brief mowing job only requires five to 10 minutes on a property, contractors should take the extra two minutes to stop the mower and have a conversation with the client. "It's so important for them to think, 'He had enough time to say hi,'" he said.

Sometimes, company growth pays off with added customer protection, pointed out Michael Cassimatis, president, Incrediscape, Garland, Texas. As his company expanded, he began carrying insurance, such as workmens' compensation, which eliminated client liability. Even though the insurance costs raised prices, convincing the customer of the insurance benefits usually was enough reassurance, he said. "Most of our customers were receptive - 95 percent of them were understanding," he observed.

Companies that don't adjust well to growth may lose a few clients along the way. And when those displaced customers seek lawn care services again, the new company needs to make an extra effort to assure these potential clients of its commitment, Lesak explained. "When I have come across difficult customers right from the beginning, they have been hurt by other companies," he stated. "The other company didn't listen to them and maybe pushed something on them. They need more attention because of the past."

In this situation, listening to the customer's concerns with an open mind and taking more time to ease the effects of the past relationship convince the customer that this experience with lawn care services will be different from the last. "Take the time to really hear what clients are saying to you," Lesak said. "Ask the right questions and listen for a response.

(continued on page 72)

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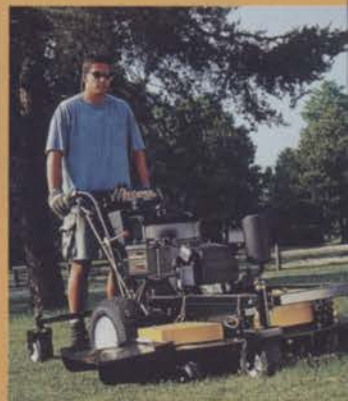


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USE READER SERVICE #34

Handling Difficult Clients

(continued from page 70)

Once you identify what they are saying, make sure you deliver. Never drop the ball."

Lesak suggested letting customers vent their concerns initially, following up with subtle questioning about how services could have been performed differently and discussing how similar problems have been solved by the company in the past. Easing

into these conversations and building trust thus significantly improves the contractor's chances of keeping clients, he added.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS. Keeping customers in the loop with service expectations will eliminate misunderstanding and frustrations down the line. In particular, commu-



nicate clearly to new lawn care customers, said Bob Borden, president, B&W Landscaping, New Hamburg, New York. "They may have never used a lawn maintenance service or landscape company and they don't know what to expect," he said. "They want their lawn to look like their neighbor's lawn, which has had years of proper care, while their lawn has had years of neglect."

Most importantly, be specific, but realistic, when informing customers of arrival and start times for projects and services, Ruckman advised. "We never give an exact start date," he declared. "We give them a window, and then our sales people and project managers stay close to that window." Then, if the company realizes in advance that it might miss the window of time originally set, a simple phone call usually is enough to keep the customers updated and satisfied.

In fact, when Scape-Abilities started growing, its employees lagged a bit on follow-up phone calls. However, the company quickly realized the importance of this small step in retaining clients. "Our firm put more training and more manpower into that, and now we just pick up the phone," he said. Then, when projects actually do occur during the original time window, customers view this as an over-achievement, Ruckman enthused.

Cassimatis utilizes a customer contract that he labels a "schedule 37," which is an agreement that states Incrediscape will be on the property 37 times throughout the year for the client's maintenance needs. Setting forth this schedule early on erases timing misconceptions, he said.

Further, remind clients that the sooner they report complaints to the company, the sooner problems can be resolved, Borden stated. "I had a customer that had damage to a lighting fixture from a mower two seasons ago, which he never reported but repaired on his own so I never noticed it," he related. "I had to explain to him the importance of letting me know the problems as quickly as possible so we can take steps to make sure the situation doesn't happen again."

(continued on page 77)

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USE READER SERVICE #83

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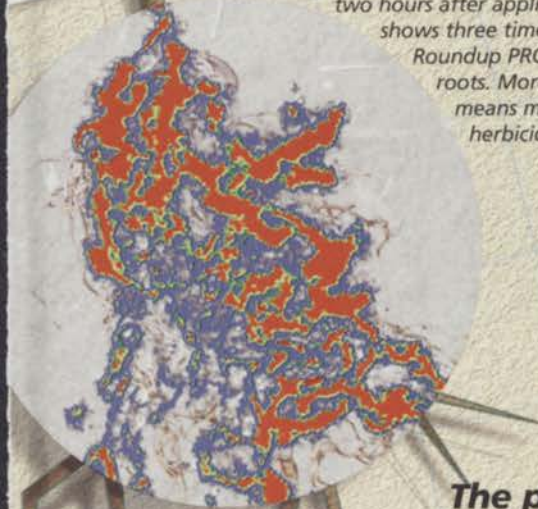
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Handling Difficult Clients

(continued from page 72)

A recent *Lawn & Landscape* online poll identified price as the most common customer complaint. But being upfront with costs and service charges will spark discussions immediately, rather than after the service has been completed. Scape-Abilities utilizes a concise proposal form that foremen can easily fill out for each job. The form lists certifications and licensing qualifications, in addition to service details, so customers know exactly what they are paying for. "Then, in advance, we can thwart any complaints about pricing," Ruckman noted. "When people are asking us to drop our prices, we can say, 'We don't want to deal with you because we have non-negotiable prices.'"

Similarly, Cassimatis' service contract binds customers to a payment plan, which also includes a 30-day option to redo services or bow out of the contract if customers aren't satisfied. "Customers have a 30-day out if they are not satisfied, and we come out and make it right," he said. "It's then not an excuse that we weren't doing a good job."

Yet, customers who shop around for the lowest bid or try to take advantage of contractors' desire to please are a fact of life, Lesak insisted. "The trick is to find them out before you start working for them," he said. Since "bad seed" customers can take on many

forms, a simple prequalifying process can separate the bid shopper from actual prospects, Ruckman said (see sidebar below).

This becomes even more of an issue as a company experiences growth, he continued. "We try to prequalify on the phone, but we're still grabbing as much business as we can," he said. "I'm sure we'll get more to that point, and there are certain people we don't meet with." When contractors have an intuitive feeling about a difficult client, a brief, to-the-point explanation is usually best. "We just say, 'It doesn't seem that our firm is the right fit for you at this point,'" Ruckman remarked.

Rex Mann, president, RM Stonescaping, Medina, Ohio, admitted he will take on ornery clients, but will he incorporate a higher price for the additional attention. "I build that factor into the price of the job," he said. "When I do meet with someone and realize they are not someone we would enjoy working for and with, I tell them the truth: 'Our company is not a fit for your project.'"

Maintaining this direct and honest approach, rather than failing to return phone calls or avoiding confrontation, usually impresses the clients, even if they decide not to go with the company's services, he added. "It allows us to maintain a professional image in a very tricky situation," he noted.

Rex Mann, president, RM Stonescaping, Medina, Ohio, set a few ground rules for his customer prequalifying process, a procedure that helps eliminate some of his inherently difficult clients:

"I prequalify over the phone and tell them exactly what the initial meeting will entail, including the following:

- How long the meeting will last
- That all decision makers need to be present
- That I will bring a portfolio and ideas
- Any items they need to bring
- What decisions will be made during the meeting
- A rough idea of the finished product
- At the end, we will set up another meeting, proposal or go our separate ways

"If they do not agree to any of the above points, I trust my judgment to help me decide if I should meet with them. I'll let referrals from past clients slide a little on the qualifications because they are already somewhat prequalified due to the referral. This process weeds out a lot of shoppers.

"For example, last season I had 235 leads. I had initial meetings with 100 of those. I had a second meeting and proposal with 59 of the 100. I weeded out over 135 shoppers. If you figure, conservatively, one hour per prospect, that's about three weeks. It allows me to devote my time to my target market."

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USE READER SERVICE #84

Handling Difficult Clients

DROPPING THE BALL. Of course, landscape contractors can make mistakes, and sometimes the irritable client is a result of a missed phone call, forgotten service or basic misunderstanding. In these cases, accepting faults with grace usually dissipates clients' anger or frustration. "When there is a problem, I will admit right off the bat, 'Hey, we dropped the ball, but don't worry, I will fix it right away,'" Lesak stated.

Face-to-face communication does wonders for customers who feel their service has been slighted, Ruckman pointed out. "When you're in front of the clients and they see you, they realize you're just a guy doing his job," he said. "You're trying to make them happy and they realize mistakes are made."

In addition, when satisfactory clients have problems, going the extra mile to resolve the issue will maintain that relationship, Cassimatis related. "We will send the crew back out to the house to get it right, especially with customers that have been with us

a long time," he said. Incrediscap also records complaints in its computer system, so when the company returns to the property, it can be sensitive to prior problems.

In cases of particularly angry or upset clients, slowing down, maintaining eye contact and, above all, listening carefully allow the client to express his feelings without feeling challenged or corrected. "The last thing they want to hear is you fighting with them," Ruckman admitted. "Let them talk, and in two to three minutes they start to calm down."

On the other hand, contractors must walk the fine line between owing up to mistakes and defending quality service, Ruckman reminded. While most conflicts can be resolved with thorough communication, sacrificing pride in one's product should never be a solution. "Perception is reality, and if they think you did a bad job, you need to find out why," Ruckman said. "But we're the professionals, we know what's right and wrong, and even though we won't apologize for

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Proposal forms list prices and eliminate future disputes. See this story online for a sample.

something we haven't done wrong, we can apologize for the fact that they are upset."

In the end, clients mainly want to know that their landscape contractors are paying as much attention to their small suburban lawn as they are to high-profile properties. Maintaining communication from the initial meeting to the final service will create loyal clients and spark additional referrals. "Basically, when you're working with customers you are building relationships," Lesak said. "It's up to you to see where these relationships are going." — Kristin Mohn

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Regional Forecast

by Nicole Wisniewski

With help from lawn care operators and researchers, Lawn & Landscape gives an eye-in-the-sky look at spring's turf troubles.

Have you ever been tardy to work or missed the initial 10 minutes of a movie or first inning in a baseball game because traffic congestion made you late? Everyone has experienced the frustration of vehicles moving at the pace of snails and horns honking as drivers' nerves tighten with each passing second.

But instead of accepting construction delays and closed lanes, there is a solution. By taking a moment to listen to the traffic report before leaving the home or office, you can avoid the clogged route, saving time and preventing frazzled nerves.

Similarly, by tracking insect, weed and disease problems and how the weather influences them, lawn care operators (LCOs) can avoid a bottleneck of turf dilemmas, beating spring congestion.

To aid technicians in their quest to keep pace with lawn care quandaries, *Lawn & Landscape* consulted researchers and LCOs across the country to learn their spring turf predictions. Continue reading only if you desire to dodge scheduling delays, unprepared technicians and inadequate pest education.

INSECT INSIGHTS. Grubs – the very word makes clients shudder and LCOs grumble. But Bob Andrews, president, Greenskeeper, Carmel, Ind., is glad to see that grubs are still infesting his area. “We went through several years without widespread grub damage until [2001],” Andrews explained. “Grubs are the kind of insect infestation that by the time the real damage shows up, it’s too late. Not having grubs around means clients will think they’re not a problem – you don’t want that or clients won’t let you treat preventively.”

While Indiana’s grub population picked up last year, Michigan’s masked chafer infestations have grown worse over the past few years, according to Joe Vargas, professor of plant pathology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich. “We got clobbered with them the past couple of years,” he said. “They wrecked the Michigan State campus, bringing the skunks and crows to tear up the turf.”

Unless Mother Nature blesses the Midwest with some extremely cold temperatures this winter, more grubs will result, Andrews said, complaining of warm temperatures during November and December and the resulting lack of dormancy in plant material. Adequate freezes can prevent egg hatch and knock back some insect populations, he said.

(continued on page 82)

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Regional Forecast

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If Mother Nature isn't as friendly, grubs, which Andrews said are usually found in heavily irrigated lawns with a lot of thatch build-up, can be controlled with accurate watering this spring. Vargas suggested more frequent, light waterings vs. less regular, heavy irrigation.

While white grubs have been prevalent

in the Midwest for only a couple of years, they have increased in abundance and intensity throughout the past 10 years in the Southeast, pointed out Rick Brandenburg, professor of entomology, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C. Though Brandenburg couldn't point to a specific cause for the increased infestations, he said

turf quality improved in the area, giving grubs a greater feast.

"The past three years, there have been plenty of grubs despite below normal rainfall in the summer for many areas," he said. "Such a prolonged dry spell can usually be expected to reduce the abundance, but they have still been plentiful. My concern is that if we have a year with above normal rainfall during beetle emergence and egg laying in early to mid-summer, then we could be in for a banner year for grubs."

Brandenburg also reported a measurable increase in the distribution and abundance of Oriental beetle grubs in parts of the Southeast. "They are very common in the foothills and mountains of North Carolina and are plaguing the nursery and turf industries," he maintained. "The beetles emerge and egg laying occurs several weeks ahead of other grub species, so timely insecticide applications are critical."

The mole cricket is another major Southeast pest LCOs need to watch out for. The drier weather, though, has limited its impact, Brandenburg said. "Even if the crickets are there, it appears they are working deeper in the soil," he reported. "This means they may not produce as much surface tunneling damage."

But this also means that since mole crickets are deeper in the soil, they may be more difficult to control, Brandenburg warned. The bad news is that "with good rains in the coming years, expect a big rebound of mole crickets," he said.

On a brighter note, these same abundant rains can help suppress southern chinch bugs, which plague St. Augustine grass during dry, hot spells in Florida, Brandenburg added.

In fact, 2001 was in many ways a worst-case-scenario year for chinch bugs in Florida, according to Barry Troutman, director of technical services, Environmental Industries, Sanford, Fla. "We experienced hot, dry weather going into the season and made a lot of applications that could not be watered-in as soon as we would have liked," he said. "But our insecticide performed very well, so we are a lot more confident in our chinch bug control for 2002."

Due to continued insecticide bans, Brandenburg also said he expects to see more reports on the presence of earthworms exceeding tolerable population levels. "Some

(continued on page 84)

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Regional Forecast

(continued from page 82)

of the older chemistry suppresses earthworm populations and many of the newer products do not," he said.

Activity from other worms, such as armyworms, fall armyworms and cutworms, is difficult to predict. Often, drier weather encourages these pests to attack turfgrass as other vegetation dries out. Drier weather also limits the natural diseases that control these pests, Brandenburg pointed out.

Another growing Southeast turf problem is uncontrollable scale on cycads that is spread-

ing north from south Florida into areas like Tampa and Orlando, Troutman warned, describing the Asiatic cycad scale as extremely prolific and financially uncontrollable.

"Best treatments of these pests require weekly applications of horticultural oils for four to five weeks or very high rates of a grub control product as a root drench," Troutman said. "At best, control might last for one to two months before the treatment sequence must be repeated. It is usually more cost effective to remove infested plants and re-

Unfortunately, insects, weeds and diseases aren't the only turf problems that plague lawn care operators (LCOs) in the spring. Strange weather patterns, such as multiple freeze-thaws, also can cause turf and plants to weaken.

In the Midwest, mild winters or several freeze-thaws can dehardened ornamentals, explained John Fech, extension educator, University of Nebraska Extension, Omaha, Neb. This is especially the case if clients or lawn care professionals are installing plants that are one zone beyond what is recommended for the area.

In the Southeast, drought may have caused root damage in woody plant material, particularly large old oak trees, which may not become apparent until this year or next year, pointed out Barry Troutman, director of technical services, Environmental Industries, Sanford, Fla. "Root dieback caused by the drought may lead to the death of some of these giants as their food reserves are slowly exhausted," he said. "Drought damage of the root systems of these trees may also favor the development of root disease when normal rainfall patterns return. So, at least some of our older laurel oaks are living on death row as a result of the drought."

Since it is likely that customers will question the cause of death of some of these very valuable trees, Troutman suggested that LCOs start talking to customers about this issue before the trees begin to decline. "Unfortunately, there is not much we can do to prevent or even predict which trees will die," he said. "All we know is that laurel oaks have an 80 to 100 year life expectancy and are the most susceptible to this injury."

St. Augustinegrass that was forced into drought dormancy last summer may also be more susceptible to winter kill this spring in the Southeast if repeated frosts and thaws occur during the seasonal transition, Troutman added. "We expect some winterkill of St. Augustinegrass in northern Florida every year but we could see more than normal amounts this year," he commented.

On super-dry, stressed Georgia lawns, green-up will be less smooth this spring, reported Clint Waltz, turf specialist, University of Georgia, Griffin, Ga. "What happens to turf this spring is a result of accumulated drought stress," he said. "If we continue this drought pattern, it's just a matter of wading our way through it and adhering to the guidelines of sound science. Bermudagrass is the most drought tolerant turf we've got here, in terms of its recuperative potential. So, it may be diminishing now, but as long as it receives adequate rain and good care, it will grow."

While established turf has its own challenges, new turf is even weaker when faced with intense stress, such as a drought. "If you dropped seed in February and March of 2001 and then had a hot, dry summer, it wouldn't surprise me to see that turf suffering this spring," Waltz remarked.

To nurse turf back to health, Tim Murphy, professor, department of crop & soil sciences, University of Georgia, Griffin, Ga., recommended contractors raise their mowing heights. "Doing this increases the shoot to root ratio and will help drive roots down to help the turf survive," he said. — *Nicole Wisniewski*

Silent Killers

plant a different species. While the problem is difficult for us, it appears to be threatening the livelihood of cycad growers."

Fire ants also continue to spread in the Southeast, and a mild winter suggests that this will not change, Brandenburg said. "In addition to seeing fire ants spread to new areas, we are also seeing more areas with confirmed cases of multiple queen colonies. Multiple queens may lead to smaller colonies, but it usually means the number of colonies or mounds per acre will increase dramatically over single queen colonies."

These small, red ants also are a problem in the Southwest, reported Gary LaScalea, president, GroGreen, Plano, Texas, and the mild winters the past few years don't help the situation. "A couple of good freezes could help knock back the insect population here for 2002, driving them into the ground or preventing the eggs from hatching," he said.

In the Northwest, craneflies, which feed on grass blades and leave bare or thin patches, are the biggest pest problem. Because craneflies thrive in shady, poorly drained areas, a very dry 2001 meant adults hatched in August and September and couldn't survive because they were laying on dry ground, explained Rod Reining, franchise owner, Spring-Green, Lacey, Wash. "So we're looking at a minor insect year in 2002," he said.

WEED WORRIES. Weeds always present a challenge, according to Reining. Although the Northwest's native turf is creeping bentgrass and fine fescue, the weed problems appear mostly in the perennial ryegrass and fine fescue mix that makes up a majority of the area's seed and sod lawns. "The biggest problems appear in perennial ryegrass lawns that are thinned by drought," Reining explained, adding that he expects more 2002 weed problems in the form of chickweed and clover due to last year's water limitations.

Greater weed pressure as a result of drought also is expected in the Southeast.

Tim Murphy, professor, department of crop & soil sciences, University of Georgia, Griffin, Ga., reported that the state is one whole year short of rainfall, a result of three years of drought conditions. This unhealthy, thinner turf will have greater weed pressure due to the accumulative effects of inadequate irrigation, Murphy said.

(continued on page 88)

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Regional Forecast

(continued from page 85)

Weeds are always a problem in Florida's St. Augustine turf, lamented Troutman, who had a difficult time controlling perennial crabgrass weeds due to a postemergence control product that was voluntarily withdrawn from the market. "We will be forced to use a nonselective herbicide when this product runs out, and these treated areas will

need to be plugged or sodded in St. Augustinegrass," he said. "Tropical signalgrass, which is a small flowered alexandergrass, will require the same treat-and-sod scenario when it infests St. Augustinegrass this year."

In the Southwest, weed problems erupt in Bermudagrass lawns. "If we have a wet spring,

the weeds will germinate early and we'll have to fight them," LaScalesa said, adding that Texas springs have been fairly normal – not too wet or dry – the past couple of years. "But if we have a mild winter, the weeds – broadleaf and grassy – will never subside."

DISEASE DIAGNOSIS. Disease control is the one positive factor that resulted from the two-year Florida drought, Troutman remarked. "It's truly an ill wind that blows no man good fortune and, if anything, drought has helped us with disease," he said. "The truth is that watering every other day is bad for most plant material. We have seen less root disease in the last two years and I expect that trend to continue. Liriope, a common landscape groundcover grass, and junipers did better with less water in the last year if they were on separate irrigation zones from annual color plants and turf."

Many diseases that invade Southeast turf are best curtailed in October or November when the pathogens are active and can be killed, Murphy said. "If you notice dead spot in the spring, you have to push fertilizer and proper management practices and that's all you can do," Murphy said. "Then you plan to make a fungicide application in the fall."

Like spring dead spot, brown patch, which plagues the Southeast's centipedegrass and tall fescue, can appear during spring but cannot be prevented unless fungicide is applied in July or August on tall fescue and closer to fall on centipedegrass, Murphy advised. "The problem with diseases is that they aren't like weeds – you have to think preventive," he said.

The Northwest, which typically experiences above average precipitation and, therefore, has to handle leaf spot as a result of a wet winter, actually had a very dry 2001, Reining reported. So, while there is some leaf spot, there is not an excess of it, he said.

Even ornamentals had an overall good year, despite the drought, Reining commented. "We look forward to hoping the weather doesn't cause a fungus to grow in trees and shrubs this spring," he said. "We watch for anthracnose more than anything – if we see anthracnose early in the year, that means all the diseases are going to be bad."

In a rainy climate, disease also tends to breed in wet spots that don't have a chance to

(continued on page 90)



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JOHN DEERE

Regional Forecast

(continued from page 88)

dry out – for instance, underneath fallen tree leaves. “Leaf cleanup is a big deal out here,” Reining said. “As winter storms bring down more leaves and twigs, we have to remind clients to diligently rake the debris from the lawn or acid will leach from the leaves and cause bare spots. We also push clients to have mulching mowers so they don’t have to worry about picking up the leaves.”

Keeping clients abreast of turf maintenance needs is a big part of Andrews’ job in the Midwest. If clients don’t take care of their properties in between his lawn care visits, disease could strike unexpectedly. “We have a tough time predicting [disease] since we don’t see a lawn for six or seven weeks at a time and can’t spot the initial signs of a problem,” he said.

If a history of snow mold is apparent, treating turf for this Midwest problem when a warm spell hits during winter is smart, advised John Fech, extension educator, University of Nebraska Extension, Omaha, Neb.

Other Midwest disease problems, particularly summer patch in Kentucky bluegrass, tend to strike in relatively young turf, Vargas pointed out. “Usually lawns get it the first five to seven years and then it disappears,” he said. “This is true especially during dry summers.”

In cool and wet summers, perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass mixed lawns are susceptible to dollar spot, brown patch, red thread and pythium. This is particularly true for lawns that are one-third perennial ryegrass, Vargas said. “Ryegrass germinates quickly – in four to six days – but isn’t as hardy,” he said. “Kentucky bluegrass is the preferred turf for the area but it takes 14 days to germinate. LCOs would have less problems if they were more patient with the turf they chose to install on a client’s property.”

These weed, disease and insect tips may help LCOs get a head start on spring, but like any traffic report, there are always constant updates. Maybe an accident clears up and

the road is smooth, even though the reporter still encourages drivers to avoid that route, for instance. So, though it may be the off-season, LCOs need to be mindful of weather changes and pay attention to their local history of turf problems to stay informed of spring’s expected challenges.

“You need to be thinking about what happened last year – particularly mid-summer through fall,” Murphy advised. “As you experience spring green up, those factors limiting growth last fall will most likely be limiting growth in spring.”

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

EDITOR’S NOTE: These predictions are not 100 percent accurate. They were based on interviews conducted in mid-January. Many sources commented that since two months of winter were still ahead, their reports could change based on weather changes.

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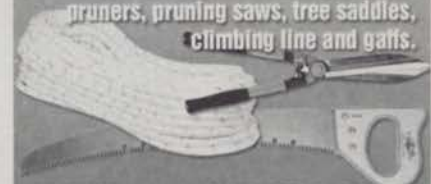


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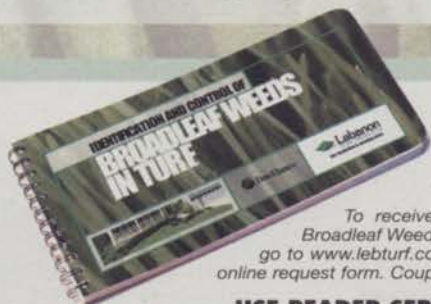
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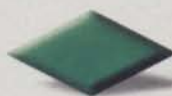
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Drip Systems

by Kristin Mohn

The future in irrigation may lie in drip systems that balance resource conservation and watering efficiency.

"Drip" brings to mind the exasperating sound echoing from a leaky kitchen sink. It also describes the pitter-patter of intermittent raindrops on a skylight. But in irrigation terms, drip means an alternative to sprays and rotors – a system of watering with its own specific applications, advantages and environmental agenda.

Used generally for areas of specialized watering, drip irrigation is gaining ground as the urgency peaks for proper water conservation. Expanding services to include drip irrigation now can mean better preparation for what may become mandatory later, advised Dean Dal Ponte, marketing manager, Rain Bird Landscape Drip Division, Azusa, Calif. "We're seeing a lot of people who are not mandated by law yet to deal with water issues figuring that they will at some point," he admitted. "I think people in general are increasingly conservation-savvy, realizing they can save financially through the drip system, and I have no doubt drip will continue to increase in usage and popularity."

THE DEAL ON DRIP. Rick Heenan, commercial sales manager, DIG Corp., Vista, Calif., identified a key situation for drip systems: "Drip irrigation can be used when you want to be more precise with watering and conserve water," he said. Drip systems serve to lower wasted water through low-to-the-ground output and decreased moisture drift or evaporation – common downfalls of spray systems.

Dal Ponte suggested that a perfectly installed spray system might max out at about 70 percent efficiency – the remaining 30 percent is a victim of excess watering, under-

(continued on page 94)



Although drip irrigation systems are less conspicuous than traditional sprinkler systems, they are by no means less effective.
Photo: Olson Irrigation

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Drip Systems

(continued from page 92)

watering, evaporation or drift. However, a drip system, by eliminating water loss, can increase efficiency to 90 percent, he noted.

Of course, drip irrigation systems work best in areas where spray systems fall short, Dal Ponte added. "Our take on drip irrigation is to use it where rotors or spray sprinklers don't make sense," he said. "There are plenty of places where that happens - in small areas, irregularly-shaped areas, slopes, and next to sidewalks or buildings where you don't want any overspray, etc."

"We use drip in what we consider to be sparse applications," Dal Ponte continued. "These are areas where you have plant material spaced far enough apart where watering between them doesn't make sense - if you have a plant every 5 feet, it doesn't make sense to water all the dirt in between."

Broad turf areas are better served by other irrigation systems besides drip for two reasons, Dal Ponte pointed out. Installing drip systems in large areas such as sports fields

Drip irrigation directs the water output to the root source of the plant, conserving water by avoiding overspray and excess watering of sparse regions between plants.

Photo: Olson Irrigation



poses financial obstacles that establish spray systems as the better option. "A soccer field might use 16 rotors or less with the entire field," he suggested. "But to effectively do the same thing with drip, you need to run in-line emitter tubing on a 12- or 18-inch spacing. So, immediately, the cost of material you're using and the installation itself goes way up, to the point where it gets a lot harder to justify putting in a drip system."

In addition, because turfgrass roots tend to aggressively search for water sources, root intrusion can occur in the emitters, causing

pesky clogs and system failure. "When the system is turned off, the water in the soil starts to dissipate so that it's not available," Dal Ponte explained. "The turfgrass roots will go where the water is, and there's a tendency for them to actually find the emitters themselves. The roots can grow into the emitter and cause a blockage." Thus, contractors not only face an inefficient system, but often, expanses of ruined turf, he said.

Nevertheless, aside from broad turf applications, drip irrigation offers a host of

(continued on page 96)



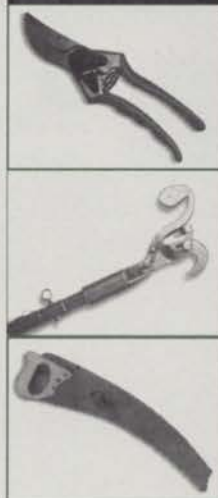
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Drip Systems

(continued from page 94)

benefits from an environmental, financial and maintenance standpoint, Heenan stated. "Drip is an ideal alternative when conserving water because you're watering more efficiently at the root source, not the surrounding area, which also creates less weeding," he said.

WELDING WATER. Once contractors decide to incorporate drip irrigation into their watering repertoire, they must consider the four types of systems available. The first type consists of single-phase emitters with ½-inch tubing or ¼-inch spaghetti tubing, Heenan described. This tubing is laid in mulch, with the emitter exposed next to the target plant.

Another type, the multiple emitter system, consists of ½-inch PVC tubing installed underground. The drip distribution head, with four to six outlets, is installed flush to the surface in an emitter box. Distribution tubing then runs underground until it sur-

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Komara is marketing manager for Salco Products, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.

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faces next to the plant. "This type is popular in areas like shopping centers, or in planters within parking areas," Heenan noted.

The third form uses primarily PVC piping, brought up to the surface on two 2½-inch risers. The risers are installed on either side of the plant and use a single-phase emitter. "This type of system is more popular in desert applications where the plant material is more sparse," Heenan identified.

The use of PVC pipe in many drip irrigation applications reduces contractor costs, noted Travis Komara, marketing manager, Salco Products, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. "For example, it is certainly easier and quicker to lay out a 500-foot roll of flexible PVC drip hose than an equivalent length of rigid pipe of the same diameter," he said. Further, emitters fit more easily into a flexible hose than sprinklers into rigid pipes.

Finally, the in-line emitter, or drip tubing, system consists of ½-inch tubing with the emitters already built into tubing. Emitters are spaced out in a grid a certain number of inches apart, and then the tubing is buried under mulch or simply laid on the surface. This eliminates the installation step of plugging in the emitters separately and lowers the possibility of having emitters knocked out of place in high-traffic areas. "A grid of in-line emitter tubing is an extremely effective way to cover a larger area," Dal Ponte said.

In addition, this final type lowers the threat of system vandalism, said Bill Schumacher, president, Springtime Irrigation, Bend, Ore., because the emitters cannot be pulled out as easily.

Cost savings posed by drip irrigation systems further position this type as a viable solution for watering localized areas. Since drip systems characteristically offer low flow rates, costs fall for supply piping, valves, regulators, backflow preventers and fittings, Komara insisted. "Operating costs are also considerably less, when compared to equivalent alternate systems, primarily because of reduced water consumption," he said. Additionally, since drip irrigation cuts down on the watering of outside areas, weeding becomes less of an issue, and thus may further cut maintenance costs.

IRRIGATION INFO. Drip irrigation systems may not require increased attention to installation and maintenance, just an

alternate focus on system components. Dal Ponte advised contractors to pay particular attention to pressure regulation and filtration. "You're dealing with much smaller orifice sizes than those in a sprinkler system, and they might have more of a tendency to clog up," he stressed.

Pressure compensation thus helps alle-

viate differences in pressure along the line, and maximizes the system's efficiency (see sidebar on page 97). "The rule of thumb that the industry is starting to accept is in sandy soils, use 12-inch emitter spacing, 12-inch lateral spacing and a one-gallon-per-hour emitter," Dal Ponte remarked.

(continued on page 100)

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Drip Systems

(continued from page 97)

"As you get into medium soils, use an 18-by 18-inch grid, and in clay soils, where the water takes a long time to soak into the ground, use a 24-by 24-inch grid, with a ½-gallon or .6-gallon-an-hour emitter." Even though smaller volume emitters put out water more slowly in clay-type soils,

they still produce an even distribution across the entire area, he stated.

"[Drip] requires different maintenance because every now and again you need to go and clean out a filter, which you don't have to do with a sprinkler system," Dal Ponte added. On the other hand, this additional

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Check out this article online for handy tips and tricks on drip irrigation system maintenance.

maintenance balances out with the time saved otherwise, he said. "With a sprinkler system, you might spend a half-hour a week cleaning up weeds because you're irrigating the extra area," he said. "If you take that time and put it against the time spent looking over the drip system, it's either a wash or in some cases, saves you time."

THE DRIP SWITCH. Thus far, most of the success with drip irrigation has occurred in the western and southern areas of the country, where water conservation issues have been more prevalent than on the eastern seaboard. However, a broadened concern for environmental issues over time will expand this application's influence, Heenan insisted. "I've started to see more inquiries from states outside of the Southwest," he said. "The issues now are not just conserving water – runoff is also much more easily handled with drip irrigation."

Skepticism about drip stems mainly from a lack of education, said Dal Ponte. "People's perception has been the biggest stumbling block to get over," he said. "Fifty percent of the people I talk to love drip; fifty percent have had a bad experience, but that's because they tried to use it in a situation where it wasn't well-fitted, they installed it incorrectly or didn't have adequate filtration or pressure regulation. I think as the education level gets better, people will manage these systems better and become more comfortable using them in these situations."

Ultimately, drip irrigation poses an alternative, not a replacement, for traditional forms of irrigation. However, contractors can learn from broadening their skills and exploring the drip benefits, Komara stated. "Drip irrigation is obviously not the answer for all landscape irrigation installations," he related. "But it should be treated as another tool for irrigation system designers to include in their consideration of alternatives when analyzing an irrigation system." – Kristin Mohn

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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by Cheryl Green



Hardscaping features help form a transition between architecture and landscape (above). The use and repetition of both 90-degree edges and soft radiuses make terraced planting beds interesting (below). Photos: ICD Corp.

Manufacturers

answer the

call for more

unique,

natural-looking

hardscape

materials.

As consumers become aware of the different styles of landscaping they become more creative with their properties. This has certainly proven to be true with the use of hardscape elements. Rocks, decks, bricks and walls have been staples of the more upscale landscape design for years, but only recently have customers become aware of all they can do with these elements. And as clients demand more unique designs from their landscape contractors, manufacturers answer the call with new and improved products to meet these expectations.

BLENDING IN. One of the more popular trends with hardscapes today is the tendency to make materials look more natural or old-world while offering more color options.

"Customers are moving away from the completely manicured look and moving more toward a natural look," explained Jon Palasek, owner, JonKar Designs, Yaphank, N.Y. "I get specific requests for loose and natural designs."

To achieve this natural look, the material is actually placed into a tumbler with sand, which chips the edges and distresses the surface to give it a worn appearance. "Through this method, brand new brick will look like it's been out in the elements for 100 years," Palasek related.

A few years ago, products like this were hard to come by and cost just as much as hiring a mason to install the real thing. But, as manufacturers realize the demand for this type of material, products are becoming more readily available at a more affordable price.

"In the last year-and-a-half to two years, the manufacturers have seen the need for this, and now, almost all offer products like that," noted Stuart Coile, president, Bolingbrook Land Design, Pegram, Tenn. "I think we'll see more providing manufactured materials that look more natural at a cheaper cost."

In addition to producing these natural-looking materials, manufacturers are starting to offer products in a host of different colors.

"For the longest time, materials were grey, then tan," declared Lynn Barnhart, landscape market manager, Anchor Wall Systems, Minnetonka, Minn. "Now, customers want blended colors that look like granite. Develop-

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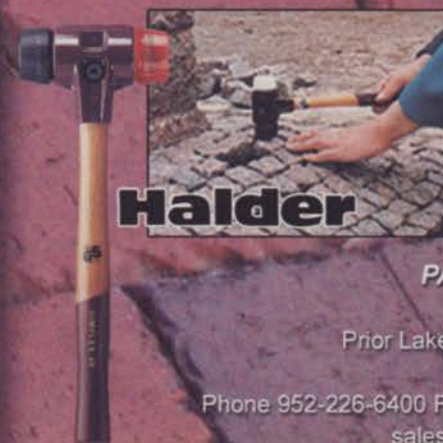
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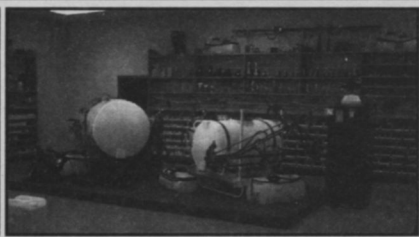
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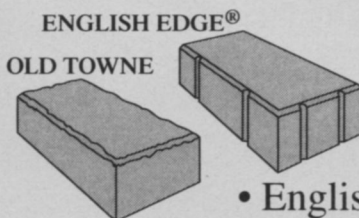
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Hardscapes

(continued from page 104)

ing existing products in different colors and textures is just as important as developing new products."

Another emerging color trend involves using containers or pots in the exterior landscape. Scott Neave, president, Neave Landscaping, Wappingers Falls, N.Y., remarked that he uses colored pots to add contrast in the landscape.

"Having a different material against the plants and the mulch adds an aesthetically pleasing element to the landscape," he said. "I use pots differently in that I will use them for annuals that don't belong in a bed or for Alberta Spruce. Pots are great for color and they bring the landscape onto the patio or walkway."

A BALANCING ACT. While homeowners want their hardscape materials to be aesthetically pleasing, contractors expect manufacturers to make products that are both easy to install and functional. Through constant research and development, manufacturers continue to work at satisfying both groups.

"Every new product that needs to be out there is not out there," Barnhart declared. "We do research and development 365 days a year, but we also focus on making adjustments or alterations to existing products to meet customer demands."

Mark Fuss, vice president, EP Henry, Woodsboro, N.J., concurred, adding that his company closely monitors design trends in Europe.

"European countries have a lot of products that haven't even hit the market here," Fuss acknowledged. "They do things with textures and sizes that's too advanced for the U.S. market. We monitor those countries and their products all the time to keep a marketing edge."

To stay ahead of the curve, manufacturers must create products that satisfy aesthetic, functional and environmental standards. One such product gaining popularity is a tumbled retaining wall system that doesn't require the use of pins. Tom Griggs, president, Southside Supply, Richmond, Va., explained that this type of system is popular because it looks more natural and enables contractors to build the wall higher with the help of geo-grid reinforcement.

"This system is not as expensive as a pin system but more expensive than a non-

Hardscapes

tumbled unit because it's got more manufacturing involved," Griggs noted.

Because of their versatility, concrete pavers have also become a hot hardscape item, Griggs continued. Concrete pavers are quickly replacing brick pavers because they are more versatile. Because they're stamped, or made from the same mold, each paver is the same size, whereas the process of making brick pavers practically ensures that each piece will be different.

"Brick is extruded, dried and fired," Griggs noted. "It's like baking cookies over and over again — each one comes out differently."

Because no two pieces will come out of this process the same, it is hard to intermingle the pieces to create a design be-

"Customers are moving away from the completely manicured look and moving more towards a natural look. I get specific requests for loose and natural designs."

- Jon Palasek

cause the measurements rarely work out, Griggs noted. But because each concrete paver is the same size, "You can design a red patio with a black border around it, and the pattern will work because the mathematics is there," he said.

Concrete pavers also withstand weight that bricks can't handle, he noted. For instance, if a customer wants a brick driveway, a concrete-paver base must be laid first because brick can't take the weight of a car on a simple gravel or sand bed like concrete pavers can.

"The brick can't rock and move, but the concrete is designed to allow that," he said.

Though Coile agreed that concrete pavers are gaining popularity and are functional, he warned contractors not to overuse them.

"There's so much available that mixing

too many materials looks too busy," he stressed. "You want something to complement the property instead of sticking out like a sore thumb."

HOME SWEET HOME. Aside from products being introduced to the marketplace, contractors notice new trends in hardscape design that allow the landscape to become usable living space for homeowners.

"With the use of hardscapes, you can create more accents or usable space," related Jon Baumann, sales manager and landscape architect, Grant & Power Landscaping, West Chicago, Ill. "We can create different environments within the same landscape or accentuate the existing landscape."

Following Sept. 11, many contractors have noticed a nesting trend emerging in which customers put off vacations and, instead, invest disposable income in their homes, including making improvements to their landscapes.

"You can live in a landscape now more than you ever could before," Palasek expressed. "I think people are trying to bring the indoors and outdoors together."

One example of this is a job that Palasek finished recently that called for adding a cedar deck with a three-season room, featuring a plexi-glass roof. "The clients wanted to be able to sit out on a rainy day and still have light coming in or have a barbeque and not have to worry about the weather."

In the Midwest, Baumann is finding that outdoor kitchens are becoming a popular way to bring the indoors outside. "We build the entire patio around the grill and put a shade structure on top," he remarked. "Sometimes we'll add a sink and countertop as well. We started doing outdoor kitchens this year and they've been a pretty hot item."

Other trends in hardscape design call for the incorporation of water features.

"There's a huge range of water feature products out there," Coile explained. "But, it only fits if the setting is there to make it look natural. You can dig a hole in the ground and have a pump recirculate water over a boulder, but if it doesn't fit with the rest of the landscape, I wouldn't do it."

Some projects Coile has worked on include designing a tiered patio with water falling from each tier to the next, ending in a

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pond or swimming pool and installing different sized ponds that have a trickling water in the center.

Although installing these types of features might be out of the normal realm for most landscape contractors, manufacturers and distributors agree that landscape contractors are naturals for this type of work.

"If you've got some basic skills – if you know how to read a ruler and can work a

power tool – you can do this," Griggs advised "Contractors already have the knowledge and equipment needed to do the job, plus they can make themselves more attractive to the homeowner because they don't have to mark up their prices by hiring a subcontractor."

However, when offering this service, contractors should be sure to ask clients detailed questions to determine what customers want and expect. Their answers will help

pinpoint what type of design is practical and what type of materials to use. For example, if a contractor were building a deck for a client with children, Palasek suggested using less expensive, more durable wood. But, if the area is used mainly by adults, cedar is a more upscale option – but it's also more expensive.

"We have to figure out what they want to accomplish," he advised. "We ask them basic lifestyle questions and then I give them a design of what I think would look good."

To ensure the integrity of the hardscape design and installation, there are a few tips to keep in mind to avoid making mistakes. Neave reminds contractors to always put down a good base, remember to follow manufacturers' installation specifications and to use colors that match.

"Get as much training as possible with whatever materials you are using," he advised. "Hardscapes can be fun and can create new dimensions to a landscape, but if not done correctly, can lead to disaster."

While adding hardscape design and installation to your service offerings can help garner business, it doesn't always produce more profit, Neave warned.

"Even if the work is completed in a timely manner, the profit margin is not that big when compared to other forms of landscaping," he said. "The process of installing a hardscape is very time consuming and there's no real way to speed it up."

FOLLOWING THE CROWD. With more homeowners investing in their homes, landscape contractors should not ignore designing and installing hardscapes as a revenue possibility. While it might not provide huge profits, offering hardscaping services can be a way to round out a business' portfolio of offerings to become customers' one-stop shop for landscaping services. Because hardscaping offers aesthetic appeal, durability and flexibility for creativity, it's typically an easy sell to clients. "The majority of work we get is by word of mouth," Colie said. "We go out and pursue contractors and developers, so we also actively seek the work. It's been a good source of business for us." **LL**

The author is Internet Editor for Lawn & Landscape Online.

Adding hardscape installation to your service offerings can be an effective and, most of the time, easy way to increase profitability. However, there are some things that contractors should keep in mind before tackling any hardscape project, advised Tom Griggs, president, Southside Supply, Richmond, Va.

"The contractor needs to know what he's up against," Griggs emphasized.

The best way to accomplish that is to ask questions. For instance, if a contractor is installing a retaining wall, some of the questions he or she should ask at the beginning are:

- How big or how tall is the project?
- What kind of soil does the property have?
- What kind of area will the wall be built in?
- What will be behind the wall?

Griggs explained that knowing the answers to these types of questions is important because it helps ensure that suppliers suggest the right materials, which improves the chances that the project will be a success.

One of the major mistakes contractors make is getting bogged down in price, Griggs continued. "When pricing walls, contractors should do so by the square footage, not by the piece," he asserted. "A cheaper unit is not necessarily a cheaper unit when you look at the square foot coverage."

When comparing products for the best price, contractors should make sure each is equivalent in size. For example, Griggs related that if one unit comes in pieces that are one-square-foot but another unit comes in pieces that cover less than a square foot, they are not equivalent, and therefore, their prices cannot be compared until the measurements are converted.

In addition, Griggs said that cost should never be the first priority when installing hardscapes.

"Everyone wants to know how much the unit will cost and that should never be the first question," Griggs stated. "When you're building a wall, safety and performance should be the first priority – dollars should always be the last concern." –

Cheryl Green

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Overseeding

by Nicole Wisniewski

Learning the correct overseeding methods helps landscape contractors cure the thin lawn syndrome.

You've seen me—I'm out there. As you drive down a long residential street or a row of office parks filled with green, lush lawns, you spot me instantly because I stick out like a sore thumb. I'm brown, bare and spotty, and people do not envy me. What am I?

In the South, I'm a dormant warm-season grass that needs some winter color refreshment, and, in the North and transition zones, I'm a cool-season grass that has thinned after barely surviving a hot, dry summer.

Overseeding is the cure for irksome and unattractive spotted turf. But unlike an ointment that can be rubbed on for instant results, simply scattering a little seed and waiting until germination is not the answer.

To the professional turfgrass manager whose success depends on the quality of his or her service, overseeding is a complex operation that requires preparation, timing and, unfortunately, a little luck since unfavorable weather conditions can ruin sound procedures.

Hence, the lawn care operator's objective is to minimize the chance for overseeding failure with proper seed selection, bed preparation, timing and careful seedling maintenance.

OVERSEEDING DEFINED. Overseeding is the process of planting grass seed directly into an existing lawn area without removing the turf or soil, defined Jeff Youngbauer, partner/owner, Youngbauer Landscaping & Linestriping, Verndale, Minn. "It's an easy way to fill in bare spots, improve turf density, establish improved grass varieties and enhance a lawn's color," he said.

Overseeding candidates include thinning, dying, disease- or insect-prone turf, or grass that needs additional water and fertilizer to thrive.

In the South, warm-season turfgrasses are often overseeded with their cool-season counterparts, such as perennial or annual ryegrass, to provide instant green color during the winter when warm-season turfgrasses become dormant and brown, pointed out James

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Overseeding

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McAfee, associate professor and extension turfgrass specialist, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas.

In fact, Mike Regan, president, Pacific Green Landscape, said the trend in San Diego, Calif., is to use perennial ryegrass instead of annual ryegrass. "Overseeding has evolved over the past 10 years in this area and almost everyone has switched to perennial ryegrass," Regan explained. "Though annual ryegrass is less expensive and provides quick green, it dies out in spring. Perennial ryegrass doesn't die out as quickly - it sticks around until the more aggressive Bermudagrass comes out of dormancy and tramples over it."

In transition zone areas like North Carolina, 90 percent of lawns are cool-season fescue, which is a bunch-type grass that does not spread by stolons or rhizomes over bare areas, but needs to be introduced to those areas via seed or sod, pointed out Sam Lang, president, Fairway Green, Raleigh, N.C. In

In Northern U.S. regions, thinning or dying turf areas are overseeding candidates. But researching the possible causes for these lean green spaces is essential in fixing future problems, stressed Jeff Youngbauer, partner/owner, Youngbauer Landscaping & Linestripping, Verndale, Minn.

Possible causes for thin turf include intolerance to shade, drought, insects, diseases or simply too much traffic in one lawn area. And the culprit also should be tackled when the lawn is overseeded, Youngbauer said. "Shade-related problems should be addressed by removing some of the shade, if possible," he explained. "If the problem is drought-related, a sprinkler system may be the answer. Insects and disease generally attack weakened turf so the source of the stress should be identified first."

- Nicole Wisniewski

Quick Tip

the summer months, as North Carolina temperatures skyrocket, fescue lawns suffer.

The same can be said for north Georgia, where 35 percent of Chuck McIntire's treated turf area is fescue. The Kennesaw, Ga.-based president of TurfPride said thick, healthy, green, spring fescue can develop bare, thin

areas by fall because of its sensitivity to brown patch, leaf spot and other diseases, as well as summer's drought and heat influence.

Whereas southern and transition zone grasses require an overseeding filler during cooler winter months, northern grasses are

(continued on page 114)



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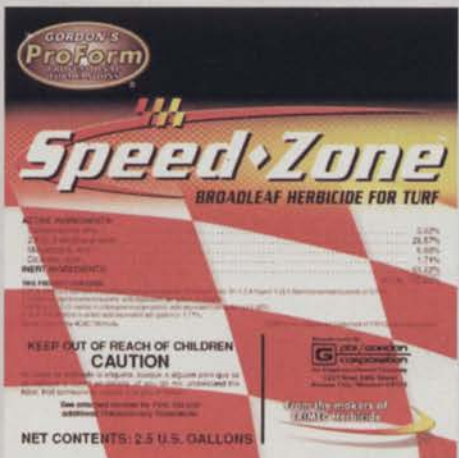
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Overseeding

(continued from page 112)

overseeded to thicken turf areas and crowd out weeds, explained Michael Kaufman, president, Enviro-Guard, Belmont, Mich. "Overseeding is one particular non-toxic weed control method," Kaufman said. "Consider the basic physics. Two things cannot occupy the same place – put grass there and you can't have a weed there."

Overseeding northern cool-season grasses also helps the ground retain moisture longer, Kaufman added. "If bare spots are filled in with grass, less air passes over the soil to evaporate the moisture that is present," he said. "In addition, when the lawn is thick, sunlight does not easily reach the soil, which also aids in moisture retention."

While overseeding's advantages include enhanced aesthetics and density, the procedure's disadvantages, particularly on warm-season turf, include scalping and spring growth delays. "Scalping of the lawn in the fall severely inhibits the turfgrass plant from storing carbohydrates for winter

months," McAfee explained. "Overseeded turfgrass also delays the normal green-up and growth of the warm-season turfgrass in the spring, which can create several problems, such as increased weeds and thin areas." Overseeding also may just mask a more serious turf-related problem, Youngbauer said.

The best time to overseed warm-season turfgrasses is in the fall, after growth has slowed and before the danger of freeze nears. "For the northern areas of the South, this is going to be around mid-September and for the southern portions of the South, this is going to be around mid- to late October," McAfee said.

As long as night temperatures are still above 50 degrees Fahrenheit, overseeding warm-season turf is still possible in the Southwest, Regan said, pointing out that his company is usually busy with this service into early November.

Cool-season turfgrasses also benefit from fall overseeding, particularly once soil tem-

peratures drop to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. This will occur any time between early September to early October, McAfee suggested.

METHODS MAINTAINED. Overseeding is typically done three different ways: via broadcast spreader or by hand, with aeration or with a dethatching or slit-seeding machine, which actually slices the turf area so that seed can be dropped directly into the soil.

Some lawn care operators rely on only one of these methods. For instance, Regan said in Southern California he only uses broadcast spreaders to overseed his clients' lawns.

Other contractors choose their method based on the lawn's condition. Lang will either slit seed or aerate his clients' turf areas. If the turf is thinner, he prefers slit seeding because "we find we get a good stand of grass that covers quickly," he said. "If it's an area we just want to fill in and thicken, we'll aerate the lawn and then broadcast seed over it."

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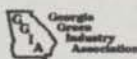
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James McAfee, associate professor and extension turfgrass specialist, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, recommended the following methods for overseeding success.

FOR WARM-SEASON TURFGRASSES:

- Aerate the site 30 days prior to overseeding.
- Scalp existing turfgrass prior to overseeding.
- Apply seed after warm-season turfgrass growth has slowed, but at least six weeks prior to the first hard frost.
- Apply seed in two directions with a cyclone spreader.
- Apply complete fertilizer at the same time overseeding is done.
- As soon as the grass reaches desired height, start mowing. Make sure mower blades are sharp as dull blades can pull young seedlings out of the ground.

- Irrigate the site on a daily basis, sometimes twice per day, until the seed is germinated and the plants are growing.

FOR COOL-SEASON TURFGRASSES:

- Aerate the site 30 days prior to overseeding.
- Rake the site with a power rake to remove any light thatch prior to overseeding.
- Apply seed in the fall when soil temperatures are between 70 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Use a cyclone-type spreader or a seed drill to apply seed.
- Make sure equipment is properly calibrated before overseeding.
- Once seed and fertilizer are applied, start watering site on a daily basis until seed starts to germinate and grow.
- Start mowing as soon as possible. Make sure blades are sharpened prior to the first mowing after overseeding.

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Overseeding

(continued from page 116)

The key with seed application is to achieve a high level of seed-to-soil contact, McIntire remarked, which is why he prefers combining core aeration with overseeding. "Overseeding is possible without aeration or additional preparation but some of the seed will germinate on top of grass and thatch and dry out rather than find a soil home to establish a multi-branching root system," he said.

Once contractors choose the right equipment, educating the client on preparing the lawn is important. If aeration seeding is planned, the lawn needs to be watered. But if slit seeding is intended, the lawn needs to be moist, but not too wet, Lang advised. "If the grass is too wet, a slit seeder will destroy more grass and do more damage than good," he said.

SERVICE STRATEGIES. Commercial clients and high-end residential clients respond well to overseeding since a green, lush lawn provides a more attractive display than brown or splotchy winter turf, McAfee said.

Lang, who overseeds 38 percent of his customers' properties annually, charges 6 cents per square foot to perk up residential clients' lawns. "We did it for 4 cents per square foot to be price competitive a few years ago, but we were only breaking even and not making a profit," he said. "We have high overhead and we buy high quality seed—so we don't cut corners and clients get what they pay for."

McIntire also charges by the square foot—his standard aeration and overseeding service costs between \$40 and \$45 per 1,000 square feet. This does not include topdressing with wheat straw, which is only done when slopes or other factors affect seed establishment, he said.

While Youngbauer said pricing based on property size ensures all clients receive equal treatment, Regan said some clients' lawns need more work than others based on the degree of damage, so he prices overseeding work on a job-by-job basis.

The Chalet Nursery, Wilmette, Ill., prices

overseeding work on a time-and-material basis. Like McIntire, the company prices slit seeding by the square foot in 1,000-square-foot increments, but the service is not offered separately. "We do it as a part of a spring/fall clean-up or core aeration," explained Bill Leuenberger, lawn care department manager.

Despite the various ways to offer and price an overseeding service, most contractors do not guarantee germination and advise the client accordingly, Leuenberger said.

"We put a notation in a letter we send to the client before the service is done, explaining that 100 percent germination does not always result and we may have to come back and spot seed accordingly and bill them additionally for that," Regan said. "Most of the time, we don't bill them for that, but it's good to warn clients ahead of time that 100 percent germination is never guaranteed." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

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Native Plants

by Nicole Wisniewski

Contractors who learn their regions' native plant options can satisfy clients seeking more natural landscape looks.

The swaying of golden ornamental grasses, the bright color beams bursting from a wildflower patch and the simplicity of both visions used together in a landscape that appears as if Mother Nature herself designed it – these are just a few native garden traits that attract clients.

"It's definitely a different look," remarked Louise Gonzalez, sales yard manager, The Theodore Payne Foundation & Nursery, Sun Valley, Calif. "Native isn't a green lawn with annual color. It can have a lot of color throughout the year but it tends to bring it in the form of foliage and fruit instead of annuals and perennials. It mirrors woodland gardens that you see hiking or in the mountains."

In addition to their aesthetic appeal, native plants and prairie wildflowers have grown popular in recent years due to the rising public attention to environmental issues and ecology, explained Michael Dana, professor, department of horticulture and landscape architecture, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind.

Many clients who are tired of the formal, structured, copycat lawns and gardens of today are going back to their roots and seeking a more rustic landscape look. To meet their needs, contractors must learn about local native plant options and their installation and maintenance needs, or review non-native alternatives that achieve the same all-natural air.



Some species of Loosestrife (above) are native to North America. Others that look similar and are also commonly known as loosestrife have naturalized in the U.S. and are considered invasive weeds.

(continued on page 122)

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Native Plants

(continued from page 120)

THE NATURAL LAW. By definition, a native plant is "indigenous, occurring in plant communities prior to European settlement," remarked Kevin Tunesvick, manager, Spence Restoration Nursery, Muncie, Ind., explaining that European settlement was during the mid- to late 1800s in the Midwest, and many of the trees still in that region, such as sugar maple, red maple and oak, are native. "Most of the disturbed areas in urban environments are not native, but the woodland areas still have a good majority of native plants."

Before 1870, native plants occupied more than one-third of U.S. land area, but now they only cover one-half of 1 percent of those spaces, which is why natives can be difficult to properly identify, Dana pointed out. For instance, in the Northwest region, Douglas-fir is a native plant in much of western Washington, while English holly – though popular in that area – was brought to the United States from England, pointed out Michael Leigh, Washington State University Cooperative Extension, Thurston County, Wash.

In Ohio, common native plants include purple coneflower, *Liatris*, black-eyed Susan, Joe-Pye weed, rattlesnake master, and little bluestem and big bluestem grasses, listed Ann Lighthiser, plant pathology academic program coordinator, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. While many of these plants are wildflowers, researchers warn that not all wildflowers should be considered U.S. natives. "The term 'wildflower' does not necessarily imply that such plants are native to our area," explained James Klett, extension landscape horticulture specialist and professor, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colo. "Rather, it refers to an overall look or feel of an informal planting. Many plants in wildflower seed mixes [sold here] are not native to Colorado."

Most non-native plants, such as forget-me-nots with circular clusters of sky-blue flowers and yellow centers, generally do little harm, while others take over natural areas and overrun native plants because the natural pests, diseases and weather conditions that kept them in-check in their homeland don't exist in their new environment.

Even though all native plants once grew in the wild, many of them currently found there may not be wild at all. The following general definitions might help clarify the difference between native plants and others.

NATIVE PLANT – A plant that grows in the wild without human intervention.

EXOTIC PLANT – A plant that was introduced by human intervention from another area or country (accidentally or purposefully).

NATURALIZED – An exotic plant that has escaped from cultivation and now grows in the wild.

WILDFLOWER – Any flowering plant, usually herbaceous, that grows in the wild (native or naturalized).

INVASIVE – A plant that competes vigorously and takes over habitat.

NOXIOUS – A plant that is so invasive it is regulated by state or federal laws.

– The Ohio State University Extension

Wild Things

"Because native plants have evolved with the ability to attract native animals that benefit them, such as pollinating and seed-dispersing insects and birds, and repel or survive native organisms that harm them, such as plant viruses and munching insects, they often attract a wider variety of native animals than do exotic plants," Leigh said.

lective forms of butterflies, for instance, have to field on specific plants," he said. "If natives are replaced by non-natives, these butterflies can't survive."

In fact, a naturalized plant like purple looses-trife has become such a dominant species that it actually has been banned for sale in certain states, Tunesvick said. State officials who inspect local nurseries annually control the sale or distribution of such plants, he explained.

"There are many plants that are considered escaped exotics that have gotten out of control and into the wild and naturalized themselves," Gonzalez added, pointing out that non-native plants also can bring alien diseases and pests, which can negatively affect native plants, into the U.S. "They are living and reproducing as if they were native plants, but they're not." (For a list of definitions describing the differences between native, wildflower, naturalized and other plant types, see *Wild Things*, above.)

In addition to their *aesthetic appeal*, native plants and prairie wildflowers have grown popular in recent years due to the rising public attention to environmental issues and ecology. – Michael Dana

For example, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported that wetlands infested with purple looses-trife – a tall plant with pointed leaves and spikes of purple flowers – lose as much as 50 percent of their original native plant populations. When native plants are eliminated, the insects, plants and butterflies that depend on them also can be lost, Tunesvick pointed out. "Some se-

SPONTANEOUS PLANNING. Contractors should throw away the design rulebook when it comes to planning a native landscape. "Native landscapes can't be formalized," Tunesvick explained. "Don't overdesign and worry about placing every plant where you want it. Keep the design meadow-like and accept an informal look."

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Native Plants

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The trick to using native plants correctly is to carefully choose plants that match site conditions, pointed out Mary Ann Rose, assistant professor, department of horticulture, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. "While some native plants are tremendously adaptable to a wide range of environmental conditions, many are quite habitat-specific," she said. "Before you start selecting plant materials, know your site, including the exposure, soil texture, pH, fertility, moisture conditions, weed problems and the history of use."

Ideally, Leigh said landscape contractors should choose plant varieties that are similar to those that occur naturally nearby. Such plants adapt to the climate and soils specific to the area, he said.

However, choosing native plants can be particularly challenging in urban areas. Although many plants that are native to river bottomlands are adaptable to urban conditions, most residential and urban landscapes do not resemble natural habitats, Rose explained. "In these situations, the soil has been disturbed, natural vegetation has been cleared and the microclimate has been changed," she said. "Furthermore, urban stresses such as compaction, pollution, salt runoff and reflected heat can have a negative impact on remnant native trees and shrubs."

One way to establish native plants is through seeding, which should be done in fall or spring, fall being the preferred time for some prairie wildflowers because subsequent winter cold and snow moisture promotes germination the following spring, Klett said, adding that proper watering is the key to adequate results. "You may need to water in the spring to germinate seeds if winter moisture is insufficient," he explained.

Depending on the mix selected, Klett recommended contractors sow 4 to 8 ounces of seed per 1,000 square feet, adding that for even distribution of seeds, they should mix six parts dry sand with one part seed. "Exceeding recommended seeding rates may result in poor stands," he warned.

The type of wildflower seed mix contractors use depends on the site conditions and the effect clients want to create. Commercial seed mixes are formulated using a variety of flowers with different heights, colors and bloom times, Klett said. "Wildflower mixes also may contain some grass species, which

can fill in spaces around flowers, add texture and color contrast and provide support and protection to wildflowers," he added. "Grasses also can reduce soil erosion and enhance wildlife habitat. On steep slopes, existing or seeded grasses can reduce soil erosion until wildflowers become established. Use plastic netting or straw mulches on the soil surface to help establish wildflowers on steep slopes."

While the one disadvantage to seeding native plants is their establishment time — three years for a mature look — Rose advised against transplanting native plants due to their sensitive and deep roots. "Transplanting is not recommended and will probably lead to poor performance in the landscape," she maintained.

NATIVE NEEDS. The appeal of native plants is their ability to withstand their local landscape's worst vices. For instance, researchers have found that native plants often can adapt to compacted, overly dry or excessively wet soils that are common to urban areas, Rose said.

Native plants' maintenance needs differ from conventional landscape flora. For instance, fertilization may not be necessary with some meadow and prairie species, Rose said. "Overfertilizing these plants may promote weak, spindly growth and invasion by weeds," she explained, adding that woodland plants require slightly different needs. "In contrast, woodland plants need fertile, organic soils. Although most urban sites will not provide an ideal environment for woodland plants, improving soils with organic amendments will help."

While achieving natural oases on clients' properties is certainly possible by mixing native and non-native plants, contractors should remind clients that these landscapes are not no-maintenance. "While a carefully planned landscape using native plants can be low maintenance once it has attained maturity, native landscapes may require considerable effort to establish, and are rarely maintenance-free," Rose advised. "For example, a meadow or prairie community will decline if it is not managed by annual mowing, weed control and reseeding." ■

The author is Managing Editor of *Lawn & Landscape magazine*.

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SUPPLEMENT TO

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MARCH 2002

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
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Pesticides require a level of accident alert. Practice these safety basics and avoid reputation-killing risks.

Splashing, drifting, spilling, dripping – risks pile up when handling pesticides.

But most lawn care operators don't think these mishaps will happen to them. They don't expect to get a splatter of herbicide in their eyes when liquid glugs out from a container, and they don't always consider the environmental harm when pesticides drift during an application.

That is, most technicians don't realize these hazards until it is too late.

"Before an accident occurs, there is a strong belief that it will not happen to them – that they are operating in a safe manner and it only happens to people who are careless," pointed out Bob Avenius, branch manager, TruGreen-ChemLawn, Indianapolis, Ind. "When they do occur, they are surprised and realize the importance of a safety program."

Companies need to focus on pesticide handling practices just as they focus on servicing, pleasing and billing their clients.

For the sake of employees, owners need to consider safety first, noted Fred Whitford, coordinator of Purdue pesticide programs, Purdue Cooperative Extension, West Lafayette, Ind.

"We want to do as much for our workers as our clients," he stressed. "Our employees should be trained and protected from the possibilities that these things could happen. It's just doing right by your employees."

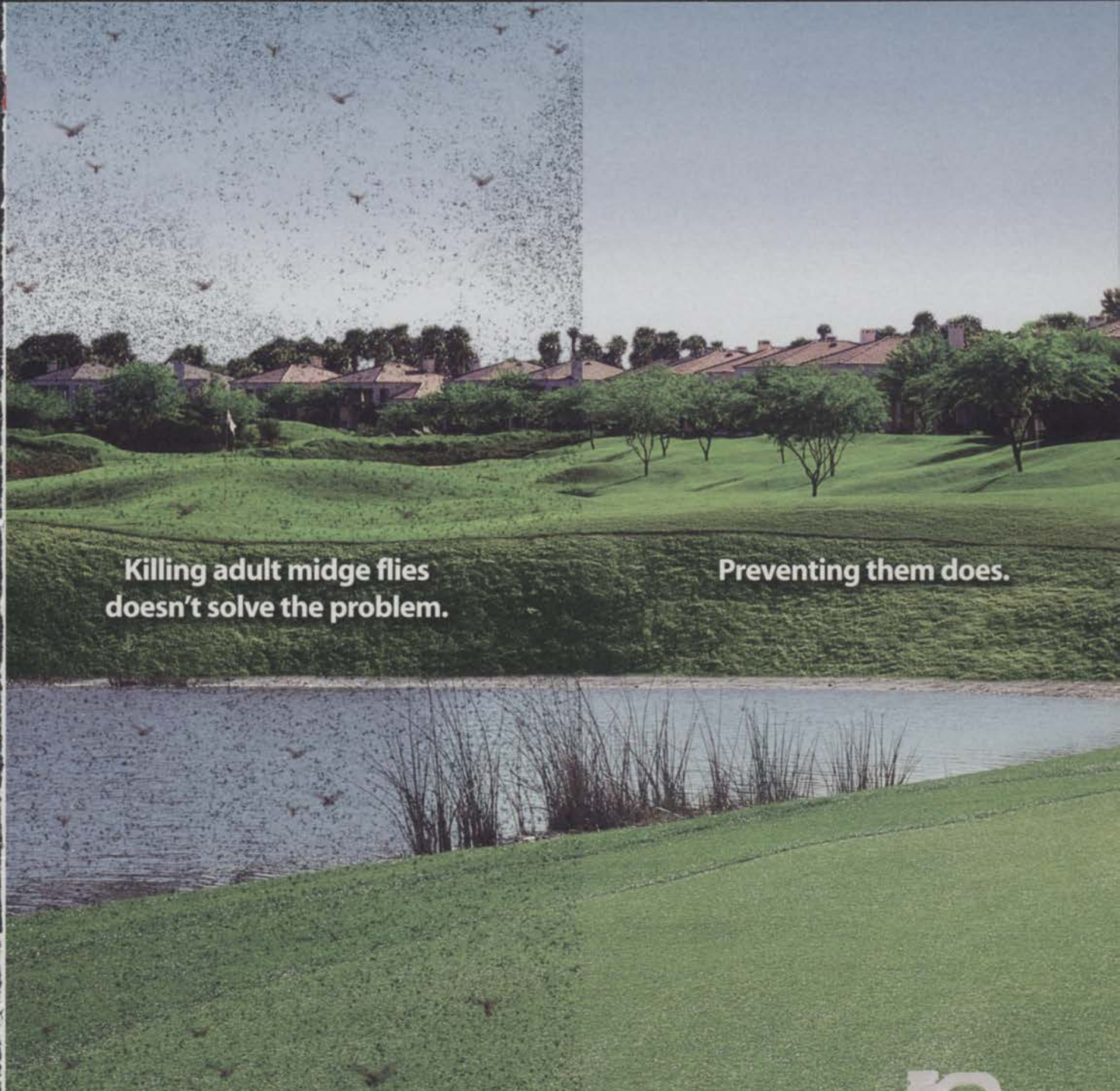
LABEL LOGISTICS. "The label is the law." Whitford considers jargon-filled product packaging the starting point when implementing a safety program. Product labels include valuable information, including ingredients, mixing instructions, required safety gear and warnings. Also scrambled in with the science-speak are key words that tip off users – signals such as "caution," "warning," "danger," and "poison" that indicate the pesticide's potency level. Depending on the ingredients, a label might require only safety goggles and long sleeve shirts, or a full-gear slicker.

"Lawn care operators will look at products and say, 'I need something that will kill 1, 2, and 3,' and then they have a choice," Whitford explained, adding that most pesticide manufacturers try to keep their products in the 'caution' category. "Why not pick a 'caution' over a 'warning,' 'danger,' or 'poison?' Then you know the product will be a lot less toxic."

Less potent products reduce the company's liability as well, he added. Companies that use more potent products in their application regimens can expect more serious repercussions if the label's advice is ignored. "I try not to use restricted use products," Whitford said. "These products have specific language on how I am to behave when it comes to the environment or safety



Reading labels carefully gives contractors clues about how to dress, mix and apply products. Photos: BASF and Chipco Professional Products



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equipment. I want a regular product that I can buy off the shelves."

Nixing certain formulas from an application program might not appeal to some contractors, but carefully following their warning labels should if they want to protect workers from accidents. The owner isn't the only one obligated to read the fine print—employees are equally responsible, said Johnny Berry, manager of emergency management and environmental stewardship, Syngenta, Greensboro, N.C.

"The label is a little bit of a roadmap for them," he related. "It's really common sense stuff, but people work with the product for so long, and they just don't always fully read the label."

This speaks to the importance of training and education about the products companies use. While labels spell out precautions, reading them isn't the only safety measure technicians should practice. Tim Doppel, owner, Atwood Lawn Care, Ster-

ling Heights, Mich., builds safety into his company culture with rigorous training that includes a slide presentation that discusses risk management, hands-on equipment demonstrations, weekly refresher meetings and reviews of sensitive application areas, like around toys and pets, and near schools and playgrounds.

"We always start with the fact that if handled properly, there is no serious risk," Doppel noted. "It's a matter of reading the labels, wearing the right kind of protective equipment and not being stupid."

Like Doppel, Avenius integrates safety in his everyday operation—repetition reinforces a commitment to safety, he said. Besides reading labels, large banners near designated fill areas indicate required safety gear while technicians are filling and mixing pesticides.

"Only one person mixes, so only one person is exposed, but the banners help and having the safety equipment right

where they are filling is also pretty important," he added.

After all, this is where accidents are most likely to occur, pointed out Berry, who is in charge of Syngenta's emergency response team. Spilling tops the list of pesticide handling upsets, and dropping containers is the main cause, he said. This is why following the label's instructions for safety gear is crucial—so eyes, hands, arms and legs are protected from exposure.

Besides labels, Whitford said investigating Materials Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) prior to purchasing pesticides further educates lawn care operators about the products they purchase. While companies are required by law to carry these sheets in their trucks, simply having them on hand is not enough, he said.

"Good companies actually use the MSDS," he remarked. "They look at them before they buy the products, and see what products can cause birth defects, tumors

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or impact offspring. Since we are hiring more women in our industry, why would I want to use these products and why would I want to use them around my customers' yards?

"If you were asked to give this MSDS to a customer for a lawsuit, for example, it would become obvious that you were blatantly telling people that this product has the potential to cause cancer in the longterm," he described, hypothetically. "That's just not a good message."

While this scenario illustrates an extreme situation, it accents that the MSDS is more than a list of ingredients. This information combined with the label's language helps contractors make wise purchase decisions and protect their employees.

Besides, following the label's lead promotes professionalism, Doppel added. "Reading labels, complying with laws, and making sure you have clean uniforms and your trucks don't leak - the little things

make you look like a professional," he pointed out.

PACKAGING UNWRAPPED. Choices extend beyond which labels lawn care operators stock on their shelves. Packaging options - water-soluble packets, tip-and-pour containers and glug-proof jugs - create a safer environment for workers who pour and mix pesticides.

"Packaging actually promotes safety in the workplace," Whitford said, noting that water-soluble packets are premeasured and dissolve completely in the tank without mixing, pouring or handling. "If there is no exposure, there can't be any harm - you can't get drunk if you don't drink."

Glug-proof jugs eliminate spurts of liquid from gushing out of the spout when pouring. The formula comes out of the container in a smooth, steady stream without splashing, which can cause eye injuries, Whitford explained. "You can pour

them as fast as you want and they flow out really well," he described.

Tip-and-pour jugs come with built-in measuring cups so technicians can pour formulas directly into tanks. This option also minimizes exposure to pesticides, Whitford added.

Some companies opt for granular products, so liquid splatter is not an issue. Granulars allow for quick clean-ups if spilled, and they roll off when spilled on a technician. "Granulars have a lot of advantages - especially today when they are a lot cleaner," Whitford pointed out. "In the past, there was a lot of dust and bits and pieces, but manufacturers have done a good job of removing this from the bags."

On the other hand, granular products often require storage space for piles of bags, and they sometimes require customers to water and care for their property after applications, which isn't always a realistic expectation, he noted.

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Granular or liquid, the mixing process is the most dangerous, and packaging that reduces exposure lessens liability. Avenius has greatly reduced environmental risk by using returnable drums for his liquid applications – he doesn't have to worry about contaminated containers disturbing landfills. When the drums are emptied, he returns them to the manufacturer. Furthermore, technology presents new measuring methods that reduces mixing risks, he added. Equipment that premeasures mix allows him to pour the correct quantity.

But like any new technique, lawn care operators must learn the trick to gain optimum results. Closed systems – water soluble packets, for example – aren't so "closed" if technicians don't use them properly. "With water soluble packets, the biggest issue is you really don't want to open the packets – the powder gets all over the place," Avenius said. "You need to coordinate your fills so you use an entire packet vs. trying to do half packets. Or, you can find another way where you don't have to open the packet, like adding a liquid or dispersible granule in addition to the packet."

In addition, lawn care operators should mix and fill in areas that will contain chemicals if there is an overflow or spill, Berry said. "If you do have a spill and it is small, you can rinse that area off and contain it where you can scoop up the dirt later and dispose of it. With the containers that we are now using, they are closed systems, so it's a matter of being very careful when you pour."

Andy Neher, owner, Lawn Pride, Indianapolis, Ind., uses both water-soluble packets and tip-and-pour containers. But besides carefully choosing packaging, he spreads the safety message to employees by the structure of his facility. The pesticide storage room is self-contained with a ramp system for loading and unloading. Also, the vented area lets in fresh air.

"When we handle pesticides we wear aprons, boots, gloves and a lot of times, a full face shield is used," he noted. "We tend to overkill a little from the standpoint that if you look on most herbicide labels right now, they require long sleeve shirts and pants and rubber boots. We err on the side of caution."

This cautious attitude is contagious – Neher's employees realize the decisions he makes regarding pesticide packaging and mixing practices promote a safe workplace. And if employees are not careful? "Typically, it's as easy as stopping and talking to someone and saying, 'I notice you

**"If there is no exposure,
there can't be any harm –
you can't get drunk if
you don't drink."
– Fred Whitford**

don't have your boots on, and we need to take care of this," he explained, adding that cooperative employees reduce risks of potential fines from ignoring labels and laws. "The state chemist is our friend, and we want to comply 100 percent."

DISPOSAL DOs. Respecting regulations goes beyond appeasing local extension agents or following state laws. It starts with reading the label and ends with proper container disposal. "There is a lot of pressure on the industry for environmental stewardship," Berry said.

The Agricultural Container Recycling Council has a program where lawn care operators can recycle empty, cleaned-out pesticide containers. Collected at state, county and private locations, containers are ground up, repackaged and taken away free of charge, Berry said. "They go to a facility and are made into other products that are made of plastic, like plastic pipes or irrigation pipes – they stay in the chemical industry."

In its twelfth year, the organization recycled more than 7 million pounds of plastic last year.

But before considering a container's

afterlife, lawn care operators need to incorporate "clean" into their disposal habits. It's a matter of the law.

Containers need to be triple rinsed, meaning the jug is emptied and filled half-full with water, shaken from side to side, and refilled two more times repeating this process. The excess water can be used in the tank mix, Whitford said.

Puncture guns can also help contractors rinse containers. "This is like when you wash your car, if you take it to one of those places with the power hose," he compared. "Imagine running that water through a gasoline nozzle, and at the end of the nozzle there are four holes. You punch that into the bottom of the jug, turn the water on and it rinses the container from the inside by shooting the water in it. You do this over your spray tank."

When disposing of paper bags, split bags down their seems to remove granules caught in the corners, Whitford suggested. After being rinsed, bags are considered normal trash.

Neglecting these disposal practices comes at a high price, he added. Unrinsed containers are a violation of the Department of Agriculture and the EPA, which can amount to large fines. And if landfills discover that contaminated containers from the company contributed to a violation they are charged with by a government agency, the company might be held responsible for cleaning up the landfill, Whitford said.

But safe practices don't stop at disposal. And they don't stop at passing inspections or reading MSDS sheets. A company that commits to safety – from spraying lawns carefully to protecting their employees with protective gear – will turn common risks into unlikely odds.

"If done right, you can treat properties and the environment is not affected," Berry said. "We need to control the pests we have without harming the environment, and by handling them safely, using them safely and disposing of the containers safely, we will get there." **□**

The author is Managing Editor – Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Check out this article online for information on the Agricultural Container Recycling program.



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USE READER SERVICE #162

by Kristen Hampshire

A little pest control, a little green-up – fertilizer blends provide well-rounded treatment and endless formulation options.

Is there a formula for green – a perfect potion that sprouts lush grass the color of an emerald carpet? Is there a mixture that eliminates grubs and repels pests? Even better, is there a blend that does all this in one?

Perhaps this is a hefty order for one product to handle, but blended fertilizers – granules infused with preemergence herbicides and insecticides – allow lawn care operators to multitask their application programs to some extent.

“The obvious benefit of impregnating fertilizers with herbicides is the lawn care company can kill two birds with one stone,” pointed out Keith Woodruff, national account manager, ProSource One, Memphis, Tenn. “They apply the pesticide while they apply the fertilizer, so there is a time savings.”

These hybrid formulas offer a two-for-one option that equals time savings – it’s just a matter of choosing the right concentration of ingredients, considering the turf type and regional conditions, and matching the right mix for the property’s needs.

BETTER TO BLEND? Checking off two tasks at once isn’t the only reason blended fertilizer products are appealing. Some believe these formulas offer better results, especially with preemergence herbicide treatments, which are insoluble and susceptible to photodegradation.

“When you have an active ingredient on a fertilizer particle, when you spread it out on the turf it gets nestled into the thatch and it is protected,” explained Greg Richards, senior product manager, LESCO, Strongsville, Ohio. “One of the problems with spraying is with some applications you leave a lot of the material on the blades. Sometimes you might mow right after you spray, collect the clippings, and you’ve lost some of the ingredient. Other times, if it is hot, it might volatilize.”

Fertilizers ingrained with herbicides and insecticides are produced by manufacturers, who spray active pesticide treatments on the fertilizer particles and apply a dry-back agent to help particles flow. Or, if the active ingredient is a powder, they will wet fertilizer pellets and mix the two products, Richards described.

By blending together fertilizers and pesticides, contractors can do two jobs at one time.
Photo: NuGro Technologies



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This process allows for mixtures that are measured for efficacy, and various blend options allow lawn care operators to choose formulas that best match their application needs.

And, for Rick Kier, president, Pro Scapes, Jamesville, N.Y., knowing that these mixtures are already proportioned saves him the worry of calculating the ingredients. "You have guaranteed compatibility with the fertilizer and active ingredient when you are buying an already blended product," he noted.

Kier takes advantage of blended preemergence crabgrass/fertilizer products in his granular lawn care program and he occasionally utilizes insecticide blends, which are also effective mixtures, he explained.

"With insecticides, the blended products work well because they need to get into the ground where they can be watered into the soil profile so they will do their jobs for the roots," he said. "The insecticides and preemergence crabgrass controls spread out and do their thing."

Also, blended products tend to require less maintenance for clients, who cannot always be trusted to care for their properties in between applications, Woodruff pointed out. "By putting pesticides on a fertilizer carrier, it doesn't always need as immediate irrigation, so if there isn't rainfall for a couple of days, you won't get less efficacy," he noted. Again, it's a matter of gravity. Pesticides infused into fertilizer granules seep into soil and stay there longer due to the weight of the product.

Besides, fertilizer blends bring flexibility to a lawn care program, which might be why the industry's preference for these formulas has tripled in the last three to four years, Richards noted.

Convenience and a general public preference for granular products over liquids also drives this popularity, along with the fact that these formulas give contractors a range of options to work with.

"Basically, they pick out the pesticides they want to use, whether it be for disease control, fungus control or insect control," explained Brian Rowan, product manager – fertilizers, LESCO, Strongsville, Ohio. "They can tailor that program around the fertilizer needs of the plants. It gives them

more options so they can also tailor the formula to their pesticide program. Blends offer them more flexibility."

CHOICES, CHOICES. While blended fertilizers offer options, not all products fit all lawn care programs. "There is no tried and true formula that is good for all people," Woodruff remarked.

So, contractors should work backwards and first identify the end-results they hope to accomplish with their applications, he suggested. Manufacturers offer batches of blends with varying loads of preemergence herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers to suit certain needs – knowing the objective before choosing the product is a must. More or less potent fertilizer blends might be appropriate depending on other

regional manager for the professional products group, Howard Johnson's, Milwaukee, Wis.

A mental picture of the treated property never hurts. If contractors want golf-course green lawns for their clients, they need to review ideals before they can fill the perfect application prescription, Skibba added. "What is your goal for the fertilizer? Is it the green from the nitrogen, the phosphorus for the root level, or the potassium for winter hardiness and disease resistance?" he questioned.

"End users also need to understand what weeds they are trying to control," he continued. "That way, they can go to the manufacturer and say, 'This is my prob-

"If you put down a pesticide with a fertilizer, you are going across the lawn one time and you are providing food to the plant and putting down your pesticide at the same time." – Chris Skibba

lem – this is what I am trying to control."

Contractors also need knowledge of how much active ingredient they want to put down per acre of land – how much nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium – and how much land they want to cover, Woodruff added. For example, a product applied at 100 pounds per acre with a certain load of pesticide will not work as well as one applied at 200 pounds per acre. "Rates of application and, in some cases, SGN (size guide number), become an issue because you have more coverage," he said. Smaller particles fall into turf easier and often blanket areas more effectively.

And depending on geographic location, different turfgrasses require different SGN sizes for the formulations to produce desirable results, Skibba said. "If you have zoysiagrass or tight turf where it is difficult to get into the turf canopy, small particle products are an absolute must," he stressed, noting that a 150 SGN size is more typical for these turf varieties.

"Two-hundred SGN size would be too

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"Two-hundred SGN size would be too



large of a particle to get into the soil," he continued. "If you have a lawn care company that is caring for tall fescue, perennial ryegrass or Kentucky bluegrass where [the turf] isn't really tight, if it puts down a 200 SGN size and 200 pounds of product per square foot, [the fertilizer] will do a great job. In this case, [the company] wouldn't have to pay the extra expense for a smaller product."

Besides measurements and sizes – the numbers in the lawn care formula – there are simple questions contractors can ask manufacturers to ensure they are choosing the right fertilizer blends. For example, is the fertilizer designed for turf or agriculture? Or, is the manufacturer an authorized formulator approved by the chemical manufacturer to blend the active ingredient with a fertilizer? These are basic, but essential queries, Skibba said.

Woodruff added that finding out the history of a client's property also helps in the product diagnosis process. In addition, technicians should ask customers how much product they want to apply in a year's time. For those clients who prefer fewer applications, contractors might choose various degrees of slow-release nitrogen fertilizers to blend with the active ingredients.

And, budget concerns figure into the decision as well. "As you choose these products, what you're going to do for the customer and what kind of program you are going to propose to them, know if there are budgetary constraints so you can give the client the most bang for their buck," he advised.

"If money is not an issue you can apply fertilizer once a week – you can do some ridiculous things," he continued. "Knowing budgetary constraints helps you position the product that will best do what they want to accomplish."

MORE WAYS THAN ONE. Kier weighs these crucial considerations before choosing products for his company's lawn care program each year. But first, he thinks of his customers.

"Everything is subjective, and the decision depends on what is available," he remarked. "We want to do the best we can for our customers at the most reasonable cost. We need to stay competitive and still do a good job."

Each winter, Kier solicits proposals from local suppliers, constructing a bid list and sending it to the five companies in his area. In the proposal, he requests basic product specifications, and also requires that the company lock in the price for the whole season.

"We give them the payment terms on the products and delivery – we want shipping included in the quoted price," Kier explained. "We look at different products we use and we have a list, so when we send out requests for quotes, we include these needs."

Kier's needs are fairly diverse. His blended products are not solely granular – he offers a liquid "premium" program for clients, where he blends the fertilizer and pesticides in a tank mix to get desired results. He uses pre-blended granular products in his standard program, which also offers a preemergence crabgrass/fertilizer application with the service.

In the standard service, he uses a sprayer/spreader so he can "get the best of both worlds" and apply effective, granular fertilizers along with liquid weed control, which he believes is superior to the granular alternative.

Kier's mix-it-up program is not unusual. Most contractors will use a mix of liquid and granular products, Woodruff noticed. Slow-release fertilizer options cause many contractors to sway toward granular formulations, while many still stick to liquid spot treatments for weeds. "It is whatever is most efficient for their operation," he said. And, naturally, properties differ in their lawn care diagnoses.

Woodruff outlined the typical blended program. "What they do in a lot of cases is start in March or Febru-

ary with a fertilizer with a preemergence herbicide on it, and then as the spring progresses and temperatures warm up, they might need a broadleaf weed control, so they will switch to a tank mix of preemergence fertilizer and weed control."

One thing is for sure – customers don't like to see brown in their lawns, Kier stressed. This is why it is crucial for contractors to make sure they aren't skimping on pesticide portions when treating clients' properties, he said.

"If you are a little light on your fertilizer, you might not get a complaint phone call from the customer, but if you are light on the weed control, [he or she] will call you and let you know about it right away," he pointed out.

Customers might not be so concerned about the exact formulation contractors apply to their lawns, how much active ingredient is infused in the fertilizer or whether the blend is applied at exactly the right time, Kier noted. Their main concern is the end result, and nothing is less appealing to them than a brown lawn. "Most customers don't care about the particulars," he remarked. "They just want [the application] to be done and done at a reasonable price."

No matter the blend, customizing is the key to finding the "magic potion" – or, at least the right product for the job. Stirring up the right fertilizer brew takes more than adding a little of this and a little of that, but contractors who assess their needs first will find the advantages of specially-made mixes.

"If you put down a pesticide with a fertilizer, you are going across the lawn one time, and you are providing food to the plant and putting down your pesticide at the same time," Skibba concluded. ■

The author is Managing Editor – Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Sevin stacks up well against organophosphates, too, performing better than Dursban against pests that include billbugs, cutworms, June beetles, and sod webworms. Sevin works through both contact and ingestion, and the combined effect is quick knockdown with thorough control. Good residual activity keeps Sevin working for up to 14 days, and insects rarely show resistance to this trusted and proven compound.

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MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENTS	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON:	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED	CONTACT INFO.
PESTICIDES						
BIOLOGICALS						
Plant Health Care	Teknar Bti	Bacillus thuringiensis	Granular, WSP	Ornamentals, ponds	Mosquito, black fly larvae	800/421-9051
	Bioinsecticide PHC Mosquito Dunks Bti Bioinsecticide SoilGuard T2G Biofungicide	var. israelensis (Bti) Bacillus thuringiensis var. israelensis (Bti) Beneficial fungus	Water soluble dunk 12% granule	Ponds, lakes, reservoirs Landscapes, flower beds, soil/ potting mixtures	Mosquitoes Pythium, rhizoctonia, fusarium and sclerotinia	
FUNGICIDES						
Agrisel	Agrisan 2D T/O Fungicide	Consan	Pellets, blocks	Turf, ornamentals, industrial	Leaf spot, blights, brown patch, pithium, fading out	877/480-0880
Arbor Systems	Shepherd	Propaconazole	14 percent	Ornamentals	Oak wilt, Dutch Elm, Sy- camore anthracnose, Apple scab	800/698-4641
Aventis/Chipco	26GT®	Iprodione	23.3% - 2 pounds/gallon	Institutional turf	Dollar spot, brown patch, large patch, Fusarium blight and Necrotic Ring Spot, leaf spots, Fusarium patch, gray snow mold Pythium, phytophthora, downy mildew, fire blight	800/438-5837
	Aliette	Aluminum tris	WDG	Turf, ornamentals	Brown patch, fairy ring, other common turf diseases	
	ProStar	Flutolanil	WP	Turf		
Bayer	Bayleton®	Triadimefon	50% T&O	Turf, ornamental	Dollar spot, brown patch, anthracnose, leaf spot, blight	800/842-8020
	Compass	Trifloxystrobin	50% wettable granular	Turf, ornamental	Brown patch, leaf spot, anthracnose, rust, Pythium	
Cleary Chemical	3336	Thiophanate-methyl	F, WP/Water soluble bag, G	Turf, ornamental	Anthracnose, leaf spots, turf patches, snow mold brown rot	800/524-1662
	Spectro 90 WDG	Chlorothalonil, Thiophanate-methyl	Water-dispersable granule	Turf, ornamental	Anthracnose, leaf spots, turf patches, snow mold, brown rot	
	Spotrete	Thiram	F, water-dispersable granule	Turf, ornamental, animal repellent	Dollar spot, brown patch, rust, leaf spots, red thread	
	Protect T/O	Mancozeb	Water-soluble bag	Turf, ornamental	Anthracnose, leaf spots, botrytis, rhizoctonia, mildews	
	Endorse	Polyoxin-D	Water-soluble bag	Turf	Brown patch	

Pesticide & Fertilizer BUYERS' GUIDE

Putting together an effective lawn care program means selecting the right products, so *Lawn & Landscape* presents its Pesticide & Fertilizer Buyers' Guide, a comprehensive listing of key pesticide and fertilizer suppliers and the herbicides, fungicides, insecticides, biologicals and fertilizers they produce.

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USE READER SERVICE #165

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENTS	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON:	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED	CONTACT INFO.
Dow AgroSciences	Eagle WSP	Mylobutanil	WP in water-soluble packets	Landscape, lawn care	Dollar spot, brown patch, summer patch, red thread Brown patch, gray leaf spot, rusts, Pythium blight, snow mold	317/337-3000
	Fore Rainshield	Mancozeb	WP in water-soluble packets	Lawn care		
Griffin	Junction	Copper hydroxide and mancozeb	Dry flowable	Greenhouse, nursery and turf	Algae, brown patch, dollar-spot, leaf spots, anthracnose and foliar diseases Brown patch, dollar spot, leaf spot, algae, melting out rust and red thread Brown patch, dollar spot, leaf spot, algae, melting out rust and red thread Botrytis, anthracnose, cercospera, rust, leaf spot, etc. Botrytis, anthracnose, cercospera, rust, leaf spot Alternaria blight, anthracnose, phemopsis, leaf spot, etc.	800/737-3995
	Concorde SST	Chlorothalonil	Liquid	Turf, nursery and ornamental		
	Concorde DS	Chlorothalonil	Dry flowable	Turf, nursery and ornamental		
	Pentathlon LF	Mancozeb	Liquid	Turf, landscape		
	Pentathlon DF	Mancozeb	Dry flowable	Turf, landscape		
	Kocide 2000 T/O	Copper hydroxide	Dry flowable	Turf, nursery and ornamental		
J.J. Mauget	Fungisol	Debacarb	Liquid	Ornamentals	Dutch Elm disease, verticillium wilt, anthracnose, fusarium wilts cytospora canker Oak wilt, Dutch Elm, crab-apples scab, Hawthorne leaf spot	800/873-3779
	Tebuject	Tebuconazole	Liquid	Ornamentals		
Knox	Shaw's Bayleton 100 Granules	Bayleton	1% Granular	Turf	Dollar spot, red thread, rusts, fusarium blight, brown patch	219/772-6275
LESCO	MANhandle	Mancozeb, myclobutanil	WP	Turf, ornamentals	Anthracnose, brown patch, dollar spot, Pythium, red thread	800/321-5325
PBI Gordon	Bordeaux Mixture	Copper	Soluble powder	Flower beds, ornamentals	Fungal and bacterial diseases	800/821-7925
Plant Health Care	Trilogy Neem	Neem oil Oil biopesticide	Sprayable horticultural oil	Landscape plants and shrubs	Powdery mildew, rust, black spot, aphid, whitefly, scale, mite	800/421-9051
Rainbow Tree	Alamo	Propinconitol	Liquid	Trees	Oak wilt, Dutch Elm disease, Sycamore anthracnose	877/272-6747
	Arbotect	Thiabendazole	Liquid	Trees		
Riverdale	Magellan	Mono- and dibasic sodium, potassium, ammonium phosphates	Liquid	Turf, ornamentals	Pythium, yellow tuft	800/345-3330
Simplot Partners	Polar Kote	PCNB	10% granular, 4% flowable	Turf, ornamentals	Pink snow mold, gray snow mold, root/stem rot, black rot	800/552-8873
Syngenta	Banner MAXX®	Propinconazole	LinkPak/MAXX, 2x1 gal./MAXX	Turf, ornamentals	Dollar spot, rust, powdery mildew, red thread, anthracnose Algae, dollar spot, leaf spot, melting out, brown patch, anthracnose, red thread Brown patch, Pythium, take-all patch, summer patch, anthracnose, snow mold Phythium, yellow tuft, downy mildew in St. Augustinegrass	800/395-8873
	Daconil®	Chlorothalonil	Liquid	Turf, ornamentals		
	Heritage®	Azoxystrobin	Liquid	Turf, ornamentals		
	Subdue MAXX®	Metonoxam	Liquid, granule, LinkPak	Turf, ornamentals		

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENTS	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON:	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED	CONTACT INFO.
Syngenta	Primo MAXX®	Trinexapac-ethyl	Liquid, LinkPak	Turf	Turf growth regulator	800/395-8873
Tree Tech	Alamo	Propiconazole	Liquid injection	Trees	Dutch Elm disease, oak wilt, anthracnose, cedar apple rust, apple scab	354/520-5335
	Systrex/Nutrient	Triademifon	Liquid injection	Ornamental trees	Rust, powdery mildew, leaf blight, leaf spot, tip blight	
TopPro Specialties	Curalan	Vinclozolin	Granular	Industrial turf	Brown patch, leaf spot, fusarium, fusarium patch	800/888-5948
United Horticultural Supply	Banol C	Banol, daconil	Flowable	Disease control on turf		303/487-9000
	Engage Accost 1G	PCNB, Triademifon	Granular and flowable Granular	Various turf diseases Turf	Dollar spot, patch diseases	

HERBICIDES

Agrisel	Agrisel Clear-Out	Glyphosate		Turf, ornamentals, industrial	Weeds, grasses	877/480-0880
	Glystar Pro	Glyphosate		Turf	Weeds, grasses	
	Glystar Turf	Glyphosate		Turf	Weeds, grasses	
	Agrisel Clear-out 41 Pro Plus	Glyphosate		Registered glyphosate uses	Weeds, grasses	
Agrisel	Aqua Star	Glyphosate		Aquatic uses		
	Agrisel MSMA Herbicide	MSMA	Liquid	Turf, ornamentals, agricultural	Chickweed, crabgrass, bahia grass, barnyardgrass	
Aventis/Chipco	Acclaim®	Fenoxaprop-ethyl	Liquid	Sod farms, turf, ornamentals	Crabgrass, goosegrass, annual and perennial grasses	800/438-5837
	Ronstar® G	Oxadiazinon	2%	Turf, ornamentals	Annual grasses, broadleaf weeds	
	Finale®	Glufosinate ammonium	Liquid	Emerged weeds in noncrop areas	Dandelion, dollarweed, thistle, white clover, annual and perennial grasses	
BASF	Pendulum	Pendimethalin	2G, 3.3 EC, WDG	Turf, ornamentals, landscapes	Crabgrass, goosegrass, bluegrass, spurge, chickweed	800/545-9525
	Drive 75 DF	Quinclorac	75 DF	Turf, ornamentals, landscapes	Crabgrass, dollarweed, clover, speedwell, torpedograss	
	Image 70 DG	Imazaquin	70 DG	Turf, ornamentals, landscapes	Green kyllinga, purple nutsedge, yellow nutsedge, wild garlic, wild onion	
	Basamid Fumigant	Dazomet	Granular	Weeds, soil, pre-planting	Grasses, weeds, diseases, nematodes	
Bayer	Sencor 75	Metribuzin	Wettable powder	Turf	Annual bluegrass, goosegrass, Bedstraw, carolina geranium, carpetweed, common chickweed, corn speedwell	800/842-8020
Cheminova	Glyfos® PRO	Glyphosate	Soluble container	Turf, ornamentals, industrial sites	Annual weeds, perennial weeds, unwanted vegetation	800/548-6113
Cleary Chemical	Methar 30	DSMA	Solution	Turf	Crabgrass, dallisgrass	800/524-1662
Dow AgroSciences	Confront	Triclopyr and clopyralid	Liquid, on fertilizer	Lawn care	Dandelion, clover, broadleaf weeds	317/337-3000
	Gallery	Isoxaben	Liquid	Landscape, lawn care	Chickweed, spurge, oxalis	
	Lontrel T&O	Clopyralid	Liquid	Lawn care	Clover, dandelion, thistle, dollarweed	
	Snapshot 2.5 TG	Trifluralin, isoxabin	Granular	Landscape	Grassy and broadleaf weeds	

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENTS	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON:	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED	CONTACT INFO.
Dow AgroSciences	Surflan A.S. Team Pro Dimension	Oryzalin Benfen and trifluralin Dithiopyr	Liquid Granular, on fertilizer Liquid, WSP, on fertilizer	Lawn care, landscape Lawn care Lawn care	Crabgrass, chickweed Crabgrass, spurge, oxalis Crabgrass, grassy weeds, broadleaf weeds	317/337-3000
Griffin	TranXit GTA	Rimsulfuron	Dry flowable	Turf	Poa trivialis, perennial ryegrass	800/737-3995
Howard Johnson's	Weed Control Crabgrass Control Crabgrass Control	Millennium Barricade Dimension	0.87% .20%, .29%, .37%, .58% .086%, .107%, .13%, .172%	Ornamentals, turf Turf, landscape ornamentals Lawns, ornamental turf	Clover, ground ivy, henbit, oxalis, thistle Crabgrass, foxtails, henbit, spurge, pigweed Crabgrass, chickweed, henbit, pineapple weed	800/298-4656
Knox	Shaw's Turf Food Barricade® Shaw's Turf Food Dimension® Shaw's Turf Food Ronstar® Shaw's Turf Food Team® Pro Shaw's Turf Food Pendimethalin 86 Shaw's Turf Food Millennium Ultra Shaw's Turf Food Trimec Shaw's Turf Food Triamine®	Barricade Dimension Ronstar Team Pro Pendimethalin Millennium Ultra Trimec Triamine	.20%, .28%, .38%, 50% .08%, .10%, .13%, .17%, .25% 1%, 1.5% .86%, 1% 0.86% 0.97% .703%, 2.11% 0.94%	Turf Turf Turf Turf Turf Turf Turf Turf	Barnyardgrass, crabgrass, poa annua, selected annual weeds Barnyardgrass, crabgrass, poa annua, foxtail, selected annual weeds Goosegrass, crabgrass, poa annua, other annual weeds Crabgrass, foxtail, poa annua, goosegrass, selected annual weeds Crabgrass, foxtail, poa annua, barnyardgrass, other annual weeds Common weeds Common weeds Common weeds	219/772-6275
Lebanon	ProScape Confront® ProScape Dimension® Professional Preen® ProScape	Triclopyr + clopyralid Dithiopyr Isoxaben, Trifluralin Triclopyr + clopyralid, Confront® + Team®	Various Various Granular 19-3-9 Homogeneous trifluralin + benfen	Turf Turf Ornamental Turf	Clover, dandelion, chickweed, ground ivy, hawkweed Crabgrass, foxtail, goosegrass, annual grassy weeds Grassy, broadleaf weeds Crabgrass, clover, dandelion, chickweed, ground ivy	800/233-0628
LESCO	LESCO Pre-M LESCO Dimension LESCO Prosecutor LESCO Momentum	Pendimethalin Dithiopyr Glyphosate 2,4-D, triclopyr, clopyralid	DG, WP, EC, Granular WSP, EC, Granular Liquid Liquid, granular	Turf, ornamentals Turf, ornamentals Turf, ornamentals Turf	Crabgrass, goosegrass, poa annua, knotweed, chickweed, spurge Crabgrass, goosegrass, poa annua, knotweed, chickweed, spurge Herbaceous weeds Dandelion, chickweed, clover, thistle, black medic	800/321-5325
Monsanto	Roundup Pro Roundup Pro Dry Manage AquaMaster	Glyphosate Glyphosate Halosulfuron Glyphosate	Liquid Dry Dry Liquid	Turf, ornamentals Turf, ornamentals Turf Aquatic weed control	Non-selective herbicide Non-selective herbicide Non-selective herbicide	800/332-3111
PBI Gordon	Trimec® Classic Trimec® Turf Ester Super Trimec®	2,4D, MCPP, dicamba 2,4D, 2,4DP, dicamba 2,4-D, 2,4-DP, dicamba	Low-odor liquid and low-odor dry Low-odor liquid emulsifiable concentrate Low-odor liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Warm- and cool-season turf grasses Cool-season turfgrasses Cool-season turfgrasses	Postemergence broad-leaf weeds Postemergence broadleaf weeds Postemergence broad-leaf weeds	800/821-7925

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENTS	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON:	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED	CONTACT INFO.
PBI Gordon	Trimec® Plus	2,4-D, MCP, dicamba, MSMA	Liquid	Warm- and cool-season turfgrasses	Postemergence broad-leaf and grass weeds	800/821-7925
	Trimec® 992	2,4-D, MCP, dicamba, MSMA	Liquid	Cool-season turfgrasses	Postemergence broad-leaf weeds	
	Trimec® Southern	2,4-D, MCP, dicamba	Liquid	Warm-season turfgrasses	Postemergence broad-leaf weeds	
	BrushMaster®	2,4-D, 2,4-DP, dicamba	Low-odor liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Non-crop areas	Postemergence brush, stumps, broadleaf weeds	
	Pre-San®	Bensulide	12.5%, 7% granule	Established turfgrasses	Preemergence broad-leaf and grass weeds	
	Barrier®	Dichlobenil	Granular	Ornamentals, plant beds, tree wells, fence lines	Pre- and postemergence weed and grass control	
	Vegemec®	Prometon, 2,4-D	Liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Sidewalk cracks, patios, driveways, fenceline, bare earth areas	Post- and preemergence total vegetation	
	Tupersan®	Siduron	Wettable powder	Turfgrasses	Crabgrass, foxtail, downy brome	
	Bensumec® 4LF	Bensulide	Liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Established turf grasses	Preemergence broadleaf and grassy weeds	
	Mecomec®	MCP	Liquid	Cool-season turf grasses	Chickweed, clover	
	Ornamec® 170	Fluaziflo-P, butyl	Liquid emulsifiable concentrate	Flower beds, plantings, wildflowers	Postemergence grassy weeds	
	PowerZone	Carfentrazone-ethyl, MCPA, MCP, dicamba	Low-odor liquid ester	Warm- and cool-season turf	Postemergence broad-leaf weeds	
	SpeedZone	SpeedZone	Carfentrazone-ethyl,	Low-odor liquid ester	Warm- and cool-season turf	
SpeedZone St. Augustine Formula		Carfentrazone-ethyl, 2,4-D, MCP, dicamba	Low-odor liquid ester	St. Augustinegrass turf	Postemergence broadleaf weeds	
ProSource One	Strike 3 Ultra	2,4-D clopyralid, dichlorprop-r	Various	Turf, sod farms	Clover, dandelions, spurge, plantains, oxalis	901/758-1341
Riverdale Chemical	Manor	Metsulfuron methyl	WDG	Turf	Bahiagrass, grassy and broadleaf weeds such as clover, dollarweed, creeping beggarweed	800/345-3330
	Corsair	Chlorsulfuron	WDG	Turf	Clump grasses, grassy and broadleaf weeds such as Virginia buttonweed, annual ryegrass, smutgrass	
	Cool Power	MCPA, triclopyr and dicamba	All ester forms	Turf	Wild violet, wild geranium, spurge, oxalis	
	Razor	Glyphosphate	41% WSL	Turf	Grassy, broadleaf weeds	
	Razor SPI Horsepower	Glyphosphate MCPA, triclopyr, dicamba, 2,4-D free amine	41% WSL	Turf	Turfgrass/black medic, buckhorn, chickweed, clover, daisy, dandelion, goldenrod, goose foot, round ivy, henbit, knotweed, oxalis, plantain, poison ivy, purslane, red sorrel, red clover, speedwell, thistle, wild violet	
Millenium Ultra Plus	MSMA clopyralid, 2,4-D dicamba	Liquid	Turf	Crabgrass, nutsedge, goosegrass, other broadleaf weeds		
Simplot	BEST with Dimension	Dithiopyr	Various	Turf, ornamentals	Crabgrass, goosegrass, poa annua, oxalis, spurge	800/227-9633
	BEST with Barricade	Prodiamine	Various	Turf	Crabgrass, goosegrass, poa annua, chickweed, woodsorel	
	BEST with Trimec	2,4-D Prodiamic acid, dicamba	Various	Turf	Dandelion, oxalis, spurge, chickweed, purslane	
	BEST with Team Pro	Benfenin, triflaurin	Various	Turf	Crabgrass, goosegrass, poa annua, oxalis	
Syngenta	Barricade®	Prodiamine	Liquid	Turf, ornamentals	Crabgrass, goosegrass, poa annua, etc.	800/395-8873

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENTS	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON:	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED	CONTACT INFO.
TopPro Specialties	Basagran T/O	Bentazon	Soluble Liquid	Turf, ornamentals	Yellow nutsedge, law burweed, ragweed Grasses	800/888-5948
	Vantage	Setharydin	Liquid	Turf, ornamentals		
United Horticultural Supply	Surflan Coated	Surflan	Granular	Nursery, ornamentals	Annual grasses and certain broadleaf weeds on warm-season turf New-generation broadleaf weeds	303/487-9000
	Chaser Ultra	2,4-DP	Liquid	In areas where three-way products are commonly used		
	Chaser	Triclopyr + 2,4-D ester		Turf	Broadleaf weeds	
	Chaser 2 amine	Triclopyr + 2,4-D amine		Turf	Broadleaf weeds	
	Mec Amine D	2,4-D + dicamba + MCPP		Turf	Broadleaf weeds	
Four Power Plus	2,4-D + dicamba + MCPP		Turf	Broadleaf weeds		
KleenUp Pro	Glyphosate		Turf	Emerging weeds		

INSECTICIDES

Agrisel	Agrisel Permethrin Tech	Permethrin		Turf, ornamentals, indoor/outdoor	Termites, beetles, flies	977/480-0880
	Agrisel Permethrin 360	Permethrin		Indoor	Termites, insects, beetles, flies	
	Agrisel Multi-purpose Insect Killer	Permethrin		Indoor/outdoor	Flies, mosquitoes, ants, beetles	
Arbor Systems	Pointer	Imidacloprid	5%	Ornamentals	Aphids, borers, adelgids, leaf miner, beetles	800/698-4641
	Greyhound	Abamectin	2%	Ornamentals	Elm beetle, mites, lepidoptera	
Aventis/Chipco	Chipco® TopChoice	Fipronil	0.01%	Turfgrass, landscape beds	Fire ants, mole crickets, fleas, ticks, nuisance ants	800/438-5837
	DeltaGard T&O	Deltamethrin	5SC concentrate, granular 80 WSP, SL	Turf, ornamentals	Insects	
	Sevin®	Carbaryl		Turf, ornamentals	Armyworms, cutworms, sod webworms, chinch bugs, other turf pests	
	Chipco® FireStar	Fipronil	None	Mound treatments, turf, landscape beds	Fire ants, mole crickets, fleas, ticks, nuisance ants	
	Maxforce Granular V	Hydramethylnon	Granular	Bait around buildings and on lawns	Ants, crickets, cockroaches	
	Maxforce Fire Ant Bait	Hydramethylnon	Granular	Bait around buildings and on lawns	Fire ants	
Bayer	Merit®	Imidacloprid	75 WSP, 75 WP, .5, 2 F	Turf, ornamental	White grubs, mole crickets, aphids, whiteflies, scale	
	Dylox®	Trichlorfon	6.2 granular, 80	Turf, ornamental	White grubs, cutworms, sod web worms, armyworms	
	Tempo®	Beta-cyfluthrin	20 WP, GC	Turf, ornamental	White grubs, mole crickets, sod worms, cut worms, army worms	
	Nemacur®	Fenamiphos	3, 10%	Turf	Nematodes	
Cleary Chemical	KnoxOut NL	Diazinon	Micro-encapsulation	Commercial landscapes	Aphids, boxelder bugs, beetles, scale insects	
Dow AgroSciences	Conserve SC	Spinosad	Liquid	Lawn care, nursery, arborist	Cutworms, armyworms, sod webworms, leaf-miners, leps, thrips, spider mites	317/337-3000
	Dursban Pro	Chlorpyrifos	Liquid, granular, on fertilizer	Industrial turf	Insects such as lepidoptera, chinch bugs, fire ants, aphids	
	Confirm Mach II Specialty Insecticide	Tebufoenozide Halofenozide	Liquid Granular, liquid	Landscape, nursery, arborist Turf	Worms, caterpillars, moths White grubs, lepidopteran larvae, etc.	

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENTS	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON:	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED	CONTACT INFO.
Gowan	Hexygon DF Mesuro 75-W	Hexythiazox Methiocarb	Dry flowable Wettable powder	Ornamentals Ornamentals	Two-spotted spider mite, Western flower thrips, snails, slugs Slugs, snails, sowbugs, millipedes	800/883-1844
	Mesuro Pro	Methiocarb	Extruded granules	Ornamentals		
Griffin	Vendex	Fenbutatin-oxide	Wettable powder	Ornamental plants	European red mite, pacific spider mite, southern red mite, spruce spider mite, strawberry spider mite, two-spotted spider mite and willamette mite	800/737-3995
FMC	Talstar® F	Bifenthrin	Flowable liquid	Ornamentals, lawns	Fire ants, chinch bugs, spider mite, silverfish Ants, mole crickets, other insect pests Ants, mole crickets other insect pests Mole crickets	800/321-1FMC
	Talstar® EZ	Bifenthrin	Granular	Turf, landscapes		
	Talstar® PL	Bifenthrin	Granular	Turf, landscapes		
	Talstar® Mole Cricket Bait Astro®	Bifenthrin	Pellet	Turf, landscapes		
		Permethrin	Flowable liquid	Turf, ornamentals		
J.J. Mauget	Imicide	Imidacloprid	Liquid	Ornamentals	Long-haired borers, flat-headed borers, psyllids, thrips, adelgids Mites, Elmleaf beetle, fall webworms, leaf- miners, Sycamore lacebug Gypsy moth, scales, borers, leaf hoppers, bronze birch borer Pine bark beetles, mites aphids, adelgids Combination insecticide fungicide product Combination insecticide fungicide product	800/873-3779
	Abacide	Abamectin	Liquid	Ornamentals		
	Inject-A-Cide B	Dicrotophos	Liquid	Ornamentals		
	Inject-A-Cide	Oxydemeton-methyl	Liquid	Ornamentals		
	Imisol	Imicide + Fungisol	Liquid	Ornamentals		
	Abasol	Abacide + Fungisol	Liquid	Ornamentals		
Howard Johnson's	Insect Control	Mach II	0.86%	Turf	Cutworms, webworms, beetles, chafer, armyworms Grubs, chafers, billbugs, weevils, crickets Grubs, fire ants, ticks, mites, fleas	800/298-4656
	Insect Control	Merit	0.20%	Turf, ornamentals		
	Insect Granular	Permethrin	0.25%	Grass, spot treatment		
Knox	Shaw's Turf Food DeltaGard®	DeltaGard	0.10%	Turf	Sod webworms, chinch bugs, armyworms, mole crickets, ticks Sod webworms, chinch bugs, armyworms, white grubs, ticks Sod webworms, chinch bugs, armyworms, white grubs, ticks Sod webworms, chinch bugs, armyworms, white grubs, ticks Japanese beetles, Northern & Southern masked chafer, billbug, May-June grubs Japanese beetles, billbug, May-June grubs, cutworms, sod webworms, armyworms Japanese beetles, European & Southern chafer grubs, sod webworms, etc.	219/772-6275
	Shaw's Turf Food Diazinon 333	Diazinon	3.33%	Turf		
	Shaw's Diazinon 500 Granules	Diazinon	5% granular	Turf		
	Shaw's Turf Food Sevin® 430	Sevin	4.30%	Turf		
	Shaw's Turf Food Merit®	Merit	.15%, .20%, .25%	Turf		
	Shaw's Turf Food Mach II®	Mach 2	.57%, .86%	Turf		
	Shaw's Dylox 620 Granules	Dylox	6.2% granules	Turf		



~~FLYING~~ FLIGHT SCHOOL, 1989

~~HEIGHTS~~ CLIMBED EVEREST, 1995

~~GRUBS~~ TREATED WITH MERIT, 2001

CLOWNS



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USE READER SERVICE #167

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ACTIVE INGREDIENTS	AVAILABLE FORMULATIONS	FOR USE IN/ON:	KEY PESTS CONTROLLED	CONTACT INFO.
Lebanon	ProScope Merit®	Imidacloprid	Various	Turf	Clover, dandelion, chickweed, ground ivy, hawkweed	800/233-0628
IESCO	Talstar	Bifenthrin	Liquid, granular	Turf, ornamentals	Chinch bug, mole cricket, gypsy moth, annual bluegrass weevil, sod webworm	800/321-5325
Poulenger USA	PKX Dragonfire	Organic Organic	Liquid Powder	Turf Turf, ornamentals, gardens	Nematodes Nematodes	866/709-8102
Simplot	BEST with Mach 2	Halofenozide	Various	Turf	Grubs, lepidopterous larvae	800/227-9633
TopPro Specialties	Acephate Pro 75 Permethrin Pro Iprodione Pro	Acephate Permethrin Iprodione	Water soluble packet Liquid Granular	Turf, ornamentals Turf, ornamentals, perimeter control Turf	Ants, aphids, beetles Ants, beetles, roaches Brown patch, leaf spot, fusarium, fusarium patch	800/888-5948
Tree Tech	Vivid II	Abamectin	Liquid injection	Ornamental trees	Adelgids, elm leaf beetle, scale, mites, oakworm	354/528-5335
	Dendrex	Acephate	Liquid injection	Ornamental trees, shrubs	Aphids, thrips, caterpillars, bronze birch borer, leaf rollers	
	Harpoon	Metasystox R	Liquid injection	Trees	Bark beetles, borers, mites, adelbids, aphids	
United Horticultural Supply	Dursban 2 Coated Granular		Granular		Surface feeders and mole crickets on turf	303/487-9000
	Carbaryl 4L	Carbaryl		Turf	Insects	
	Sevin 5G	Carbaryl	Granular	Turf	Insects	
	Sevin 10G UHS Fire Ant Bait	Carbaryl Spinosad	Granular	Turf	Insects Fire ants	
Wellmark International	Extinguish	Methoprene	Granular	Turf	Fire ants	800/248-7763
	Enstar II	S-Kinoprene	Liquid	Turf, ornamentals	Whiteflies, aphids, mites, thrips	
	Mavrik	Tav-fluvalinate	Flowable	Turf, ornamentals	Whiteflies, aphids, mites, thrips	
	Altosid	Methoprene	Liquid, granular	Landscapes	Mosquitoes	
ANTIBIOTICS						
J.J. Mauget	Microject	Oxytetracycline	Liquid	Ornamentals	Ash yellows, bacterial leaf scorch, palm lethal yellows, fire blight, leaf scald	800/973-3779
Tree Tech	OTC	Oxytetracycline	Liquid injection	Ornamentals, fruit trees	Fire blight, lethal yellows, wetwood, bacterial leaf scorch	354/528-5335

Disclaimer

EDITOR'S NOTE: This information is provided for general awareness purposes only. A supplier's inclusion or exclusion from this listing should not be perceived as an endorsement or criticism of its products. This information should not be considered a substitute for the information on a product's label, and all pesticide applicators are encouraged to read the label before using any product. Product listing submissions were edited due to the influx of information.

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ANALYSIS (N-P-K)	SGN PARTICLE SIZE	% SLOW-RELEASE NITROGEN	FOR USE IN/ON	CONTACT INFO.
FERTILIZERS						
The Andersons	Straight Fertilizer	0.99 - 0.09 - 0.15	215	1.18% ammoniacal N, 30.82% urea nitrogen, 16% CSRUN	Turf	800/225-2639
	Fertilizer with Weed Control	0.64 - 0.16 - 0.32	150	1.56 ammoniacal N, 14.44 urea nitrogen, 4% CSRUN	Turf	
	Fertilizer with Insect Control	0.77 - 0.10 - 0.28	215	1.17 ammoniacal N, 13.82% urea nitrogen, 3.75% CSRUN	Turf	
Cleary Chemical	Nutrigrow	0 - 28 - 26	Liquid	N/A	Plant nutrient	800/524-1662
The Doggett Corp.	Injecto	32 - 7 - 7	Powder	60%	Trees	800/448-1862
	Injecto	12 - 24 - 24	Powder	50%	Trees	
	Evergreen	30 - 7 - 10	Powder	50%	Trees	
	Palm Promoter	25 - 5 - 10	Powder	25%	Palm trees	
	Tree Rooter	10 - 22 - 22	Powder	25%	New transplants	
	Organic	15 - 2 - 5	Granular	80%	Vertical mulch	
	Natural Resource XL-320	1 - 0 - 10	Powder	N/A	Trees	
Harmony Products	Complete	14 - 3 - 6, 9% Fe	175-185	50%	Turf	800/343-6343
	Complete	12 - 3 - 3, 3% Fe	175-185	20%	Turf	
	Complete	5 - 10 - 5, 1% Fe	175-185	50%	Turf	
	Complete	6 - 2 - 12, 3% Fe	175-185	50%	Turf	
	Complete	7 - 2 - 7, 4% Fe	175-185	50%	Turf	
	Complete	8 - 8 - 8, 1% Fe	175-185	50%	Turf	
	Biodiversity	8 - 2 - 4, .5% Fe	175-185	70%	Turf	
	Pro Natural	4 - 2 - 2, 2.4% Ca	175-185	60%	Turf, landscape	
	Ag Organic	5 - 5 - 3, 11% Ca	200	60%	Turf, landscape	
	Pro Azalea	4 - 6 - 4, 1% Fe	200	60%	Turf, landscape	
	Topcoat	4 - 2 - 0, 2% Fe	200	90%	Fine turf, ornamentals	
	Topcoat Gold	5 - 3 - 2, 5% Ca	175-185	75%	Fine turf, ornamentals	
	Dimension	19 - 5 - 9	200	64%	Fine turf, ornamentals	
Howard Johnson's	Water Soluble	15 - 35 - 14	190-230	N/A	Turf	800/298-4656
	Water Soluble	20 - 20 - 20	190-230	N/A	Turf	
	Water Soluble	25 - 00 - 25	190-230	N/A	Turf	
	Professional	15 - 5 - 10	190-230	25% SCU	Turf	
	Professional	18 - 24 - 12	190-230	40% SCU	Turf	
	Professional	24 - 4 - 12	190-230	40% UFLEXX	Turf	
	Professional	28 - 3 - 10	190-230	50% SCU	Turf	
	Professional	32 - 3 - 8	190-230	25% SCU	Turf	
Hydro-Agri North America	Calcium Nitrate	15.5 - 0 - 11Ca	280	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	800/234-9376
	Turf Royale	21 - 7 - 14	280	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	
	Classic Royale	15 - 15 - 15	280	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	
	NPK SGN 300	15 - 15 - 15	310	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	
	NPK SGN 300	21 - 7 - 14	123	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	
	MiniPrills	22 - 7 - 12	123	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	
	MiniPrills	15 - 15 - 15	156	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	
J.J. Mauget	Stemix	0.7 - 1 - 0.9	Liquid	N/A	Ornamentals	800/873-3779
	Stemix Hi Volume	0.47 - 0.68 - 0.61	Liquid	N/A	Ornamentals	
	Stemix Iron/Zinc	0.5 - 0.9 - 0.6	Liquid	N/A	Ornamentals	
	Stemix HV/MC	1.21 - 0.92 - 0.97	Liquid	N/A	Ornamentals	
	Inject-A-Mid	0.7 - 0.0 - 0.85	Liquid	N/A	Ornamentals	
	Manganese					
	Inject-A-Mid Iron/Zinc	0.6 - 0 - 0.8	Liquid	N/A	Ornamentals	
J.R. Simplot	Bent Grass	28 - 8 - 18	Soluble	N/A	Turf	208/332-0938
	All Purpose	20 - 20 - 20	Soluble	N/A	Turf	
	Super-Cal	15 - 0 - 15	Soluble	N/A	Turf	
	Super-Cal	20 - 5 - 30	Soluble	N/A	Turf	
	Super-Cal	25 - 0 - 25	Soluble	N/A	Turf	

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MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ANALYSIS (N-P-K)	SGN PARTICLE SIZE	% SLOW-RELEASE NITROGEN	FOR USE IN/ON	CONTACT INFO.
J.R. Simplot	Super-Cal	12-31-14	Soluble	N/A	Turf	208/332-0938
	Super-Cal	10-20-30	Soluble	N/A	Turf	
Knox	Shaw's Turf Food	12-25-10	230	25% PSCU	Turf	219/772-6275
	Shaw's Turf Food	16-8-8	230	25% PSCU	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	19-5-9	230	50% PSCU	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	25-3-5	230	50% PSCU	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	25-3-5	230	95.20%	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	25-5-15	230	40% PSCU	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	28-3-10	230	50% nitrilene	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	28-5-8	230	25% PSCU	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	30-4-10	230	50% PSCU	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	32-3-10	230	20% PSCU	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	33-3-6	230	50% PSCU	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	34-3-11	230	18% PSCU	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	6-24-24	230	All mineral	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	12-12-12	230	All mineral	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	19-19-19	230	All mineral	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	20-20-10	230	All mineral	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	30-0-15	230	All mineral	Turf	
	Shaw's Turf Food	30-3-6	230	All mineral	Turf	
	Shaw's Roughs Fertilizer	16-28-10	230	25% PSCU/SOP	Turf	
	Shaw's Roughs Fertilizer	21-3-18	230	90% PSCU	Turf	
	Shaw's Roughs Fertilizer	22-0-22	230	100% nutralene/SOP Fe	Turf	
	Shaw's Roughs Fertilizer	25-3-10	230	95% PSCU/Fe	Turf	
	Shaw's Roughs Fertilizer	28-3-10	230	50% PSCU/Fe	Turf	
	Shaw's Roughs Fertilizer	32-3-9	230	59% PSCU	Turf	
Lebanon	Proscape with Confront MESA			Various available analyses Nitrogen source, available in various analyses		800/233-0628
	Woodace	12-3-6, 14-14-14, 18-5-10, 14-4-6	Tablet, 200	From 25 to 80%	Includes IBDU slow-release nitrogen, MethEX 40 high Al methylene urea complex, PERK controlled-release iron in humic and folvic acid complex	
Milorganite	Milorganite Classic	6-2-0	155	85%	Turf, flowers, trees, shrubs	800/304-6204
Mayer & Son	Arborflo	16-3-3	Liquid	55%	Trees and shrubs	800/345-0419
	Micro Plus	5-0-0	5% iron, 3% sulfur	N/A	Tree, shrub	
	Turflo	20-3-3	Liquid	35%	Turf	
	Coron Plus	25-0-0	Liquid	50%	Tree, shrubs	
	Green Gro	26-6-12	280	30%, 50%, 70%	Turf	
	Green Gro	20-9-9	280	50%	Turf	
	Green Gro	18-24-5	280	20%	Turf	
	Organic Base	N/A	N/A	N/A	Turf	
	MOST	10-9-8	280	25%	Turf, ornamentals	
	MOST	16-4-8	280	12%	Turf, trees, shrubs	
	MOST	19-3-6	280	39%	Turf, trees, shrubs	
	MOST	6-12-12	280	N/A	Turf, trees, shrubs	
	MOST	4-6-4	280	75%	Turf, trees, shrubs	
	Turflo	9-18-9	N/A	100% UN	Turf	
	Turflo	20-3-3	N/A	35% CRN	Turf	
	25% SCU w/ Solu-Cal	10-2-5	280	25%	Turf	
	With Solu-Cal	10-2-5	280	N/A	Turf	

MANUFACTURER	PRODUCT NAME	ANALYSIS (N-P-K)	SGN PARTICLE SIZE	% SLOW-RELEASE NITROGEN	FOR USE IN/ON	CONTACT INFO.
Nu-Gro Technologies	Nitroform®	38% nitrogen	Various	70%	Turf, ornamental, nursery	800/866-0572
	Nutralene®	40% nitrogen	Various	35%	Turf, ornamental, nursery	
	Organiform®	30% nitrogen	Various	55%	Turf, ornamental, nursery	
Plant Health Care	Healthy Start Bio-Tabs	12-8-8	N/A	12%	Ornamentals	412/826-5488
	Healthy Start for Flowers	12-16-12	N/A	12%	Flowering plants	
	Healthy Turf	8-1-9	N/A	6%	Turf	
	Healthy Start	3-4-3	N/A	3%	Gardens, turf	
	PHC for Trees	27-9-9	N/A	26%	Ornamentals	
	PHC for Trees	11-22-22	N/A	4.7%	Ornamentals	
Poulenger USA	Rutopia	Biostimulant	Liquid	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	866/709-8102
	Rutopia + M	Biostimulant	Liquid	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	
	JetWet	Wetting agent	Liquid	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	
ProSource One	Magic Carpet	20-4-10 w/Barricade	210	25%	Turf	901/758-1341
	Magic Carpet	20-4-10 w/.28 Barricade	210	N/A	Turf	
	Magic Carpet	31-2-5 w/.28 Barricade	210	25%	Turf	
Roots	Turf Food	15-3-8	100/180	70%	Turf	203/777-4753
	Turf Food	12-2-12	100/180	75%	Turf	
	Turf Food	8-2-6	100/180	87%	Turf	
	Turf Food	20-2-8	100/180	54%	Turf	
Simplot	BEST Turf Supreme	16-6-8	250	N/A	Turf	800/227-9633
	BEST Nitra King	22-3-9	250	N/A	Cool-season turf	
	BEST Super Iron	9-9-9	250	N/A	Turf, ornamentals	
	BEST Endure	15-15-15	250	10.2% SAUN	Pre-plant	
	BEST Turf Gold	22-5-5	250	10.5% SAUN	Turf, ornamentals	
	BEST Autumn K	22-4-22	250	11% SAUN	Cool-season turf	
	BEST SuperTurf	25-5-5	250	14% SAUN	Turf, ornamentals	
	BEST Pro Start	16-24-10	240	6.8% SAUN	Turf	
	BEST Club Green	21-0-21	240	19.27% PCSCU	Turf	
	BEST Club Green	22-2-22	240	19.53% PCSCU	Turf	
	BEST Club Green	24-3-10	240	19.53% PCSCU	Turf	
	BEST UMAXX	20-5-20	240	16% stabilized	Turf	
	BEST UMAXX	20-10-10	240	8.92% stabilized	Turf	
	BEST UMAXX	24-4-12	240	23.23% stabilized	Turf	
	BEST UMAXX	34-2-12	240	11.91% stabilized	Turf	
	BEST UMAXX	24-5-10	250	16.5% stabilized	Turf, ornamentals	
	BEST UFLEXX	25-4-4	250	14% stabilized	Turf, ornamentals	
	BEST UFLEXX	24-6-12	240	12% stabilized	Turf	
	BEST UFLEXX	32-3-11	240	9.61% stabilized	Turf	
BEST UFLEXX	24-3-8	240	17.02% stabilized	Turf		
Tree Tech	Nutriject Supreme	0.64-0.91-0.78	Liquid injection	N/A	Trees	352/528-5335
	Nutriject FeMaZn	0.83-0.85-0.75	Liquid injection	N/A	Trees	
	Nutriject FeZn	0.81-1-1	Liquid injection	N/A	Trees	
United Horticultural Supply	Signature Green	Varied	100	BCMU methylene urea	Turf	303/487-9000
	Signature Blue	Varied				
Valent	Orthene Turf, Tree and Ornamental	Spray	97	N/A	Turf	925/256-2700
	DiPel PRO DF				Turf	
	Tame 2.4 EC				Ornamentals	
	Spray Insecticide					
	Distance Insect				Ornamentals	
	Growth Regulator				Ornamentals	
Envoy Herbicide				Ornamentals		
Whitmire Micro-Gen	Total Micronutrient Care			N/A	Ornamentals, Turf	800/777-8570

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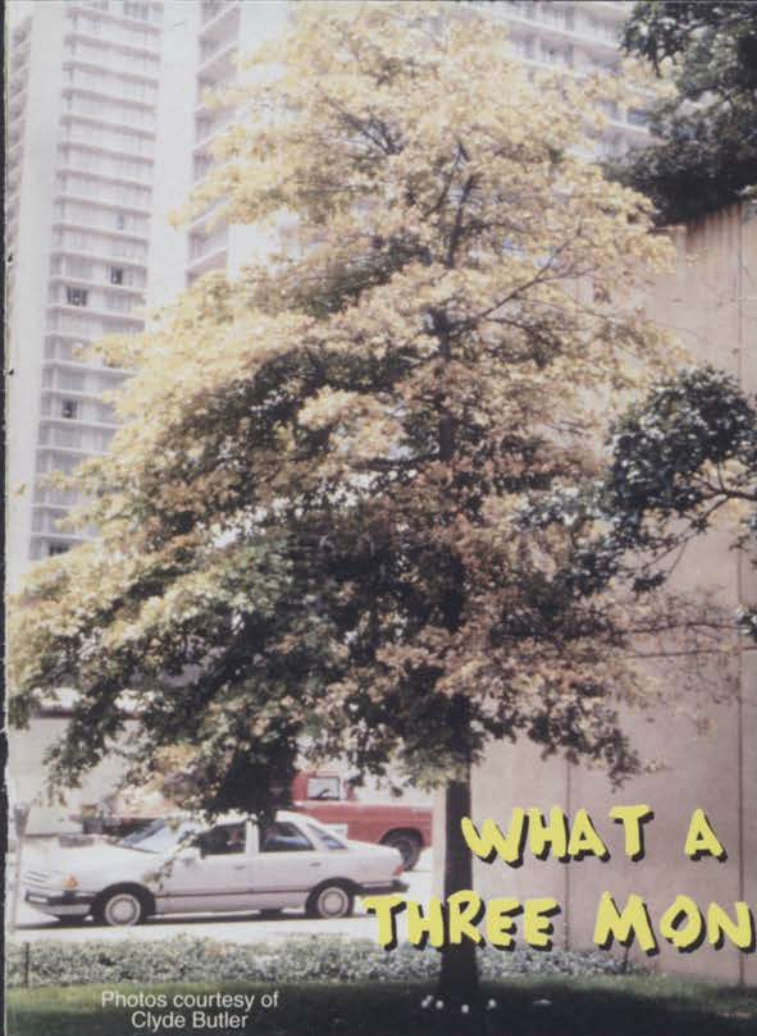
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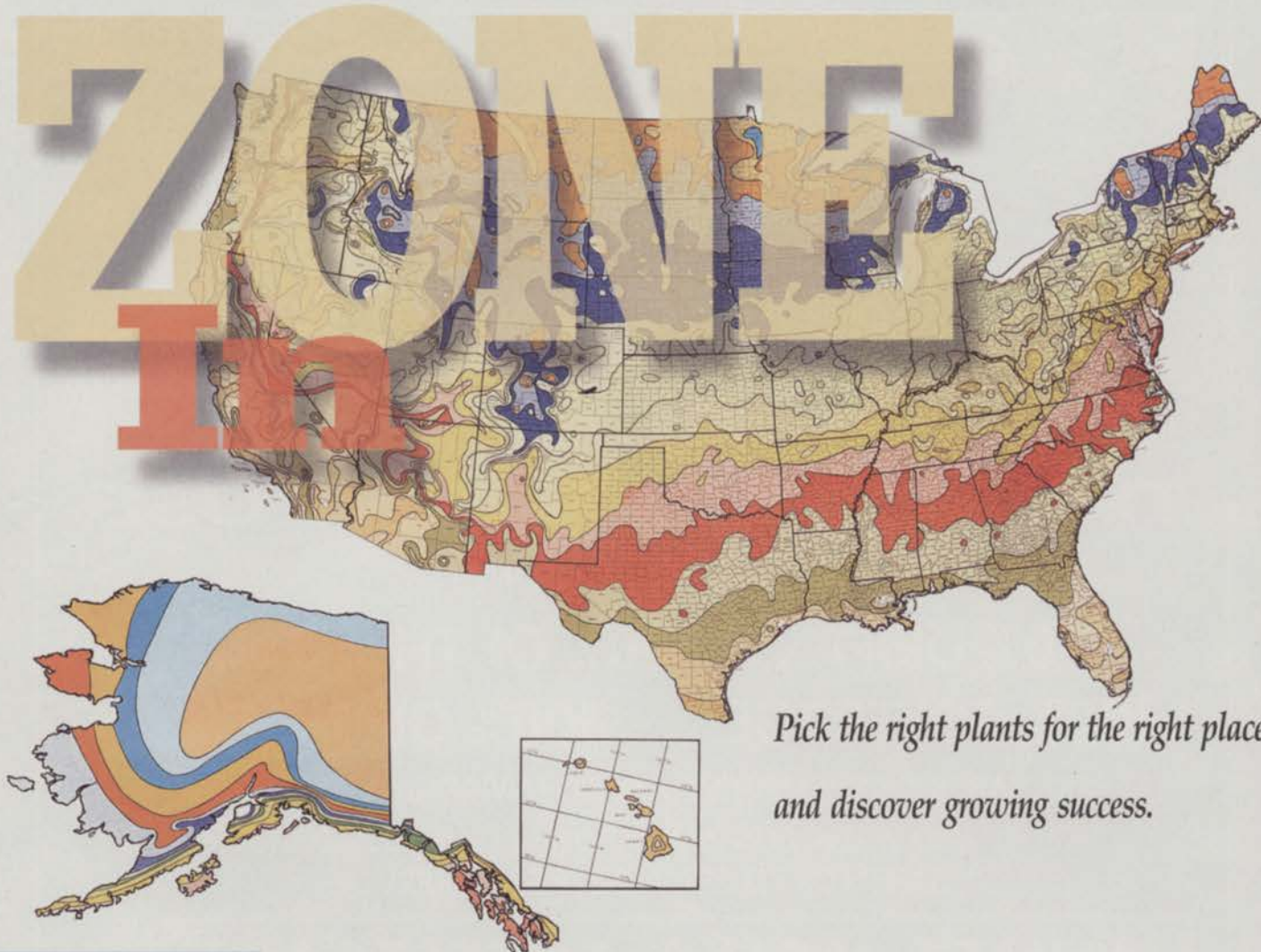
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Plant Zone Basics

by Kristen Hampshire

Consulting the United States Department of Agriculture Zone Hardiness Map helps contractors learn if their plant selections will survive in their regions. Photo: Agricultural Research Service, USDA



*Pick the right plants for the right place
and discover growing success.*

Today's forecast: Hot, humid air hints at afternoon showers. Remember an umbrella for late day. Further west, conditions are brisk with cloud cover shading most of the region. Noon sun will warm temperatures. Head north where blustery winds scathe tender leaves and freezing temperatures create a frosty blanket over the area.

Weather conditions across the map keep mercury rising and falling like a frantic heart monitor. Landscapes fluctuate much the same, as plant variations create distinct regional personalities, pointed out Michael Epp, landscape horticulturalist, Acorn Farms, Raymond, Ohio.

"If you travel around the country and see the flora in different regions, you see that in northern Canada everything is low growing or evergreen, and in the South the trees are taller and more lush," he described, adding that these aesthetic differences often fall in short dis-

tances. "In northern Ohio and Michigan, the forest trees are smaller than in Appalachia, where they have a longer growing season."

Plant palates change with climates – where certain selections survive, others barely thrive. For contractors, it's a matter of making the right choice. "What you want to do is put the right plant in the right location and make a sale that won't come back to haunt you," noted Dr. Marc Cathey, president emeritus, American Horticultural Society, Alexandria, Va. "You want to be able to guarantee a landscape and have assurance that the plant you put in for the client will be successful."

CHECK THE CHARTS. The desire for innovative plantings – beds washed with a mish-mash of colors, textures and scents – influences some contractors to push boundaries in search of something new.

They call it variety; Cathey calls it "the wants."

"The landscape designer has a want for certain
(continued on page 166)

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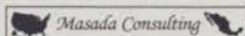
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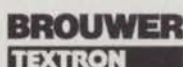
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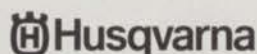
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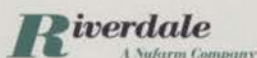
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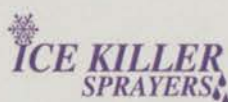
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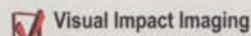
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Plant Zone Basics

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things that just won't make it in the environment," he defined. "The landscape industry must install plants that can be maintained and be successful year after year."

This means more than a couple seasons – more than five years, in fact. A handful of mild winters can fool contractors into installing plants too tender for their average environmental conditions, warned Judd Griggs, vice president of operations, Smallwood Design Group, Naples, Fla. "People started pushing plants that they shouldn't have during El Niño, and that can come back to haunt you because they die back and your clients aren't happy," he said. "You really have to go with long-term weather history, not just what you remember from the last three to four years."

Consulting measurements of regional temperatures helps contractors determine

sustainable plants for specific regions, noted Nina Bassuk, director of the Urban Horticulture Institute, Cornell College of Agriculture, Ithaca, N.Y. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Plant Hardiness Zone Map identifies 11 zones in 10-degree increments ranging from Zone 1 at the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, which can reach a frigid -50 F, to Zone 11 in the Florida Keys, which never drops below 40 F.

Based on a 30-year average, contractors can locate their zone rating on the map, find the temperature range for their area, and pick plants accordingly, Bassuk added. "Each zone is divided into an 'A' and a 'B', so Zone 5 is -20 F to -10 F, where 'A' is -15 F to -20 F and 'B' is -10 F to -15 F," she said.

"Many plants can tolerate a wide range of zones," Bassuk added. "From the cold hardi-

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Check out this story online for tips on how to plant a SmartGarden and conduct a site assessment.

ness standpoint, your coldest temperature would be the limit, and then you can go warmer than that."

Nearly 22,000 weather stations today allow more specific weather tracking than in the past, when horticulturalists gathered information from only 350 stations in North America, Cathey added. "It's like going to the doctor," he compared. "The stock market is unpredictable and can fail, but the doctor's advice is based on information and is much more reliable."

More information increases the validity

(continued on page 168)

Site assessment is more than meets the eye. Contractors need to consider both below- and above-ground conditions when deciding which plants will thrive in a particular area. These guidelines can help contractors carry out a thorough property examination.

BELOW GROUND:

- **Restricted rooting space** – Underground obstacles, compaction near curbs and driveways and actual containerization of trees causes restricted rooting space that limits the amount of water, nutrients and oxygen to which roots have access. Drought-tolerant trees offer some hope; however, adequate rooting space should be planned before planting.
- **Soil texture** – A sandy soil will suffer less from the effects of compaction, but may be less able to supply water to trees. Conversely, compaction may render a heavy clay soil too wet, making oxygen unavailable.
- **Soil pH** – Most urban soils have a high pH due to limestone-containing materials in the street environment. A simple pH test can determine your site's characteristics.
- **Drainage** – Poor drainage due to compaction or underground obstacles can easily be estimated. Place an open-ended coffee can in a hole where you want to plant, pour water in, and observe how long it takes for the water to drain. If water hasn't drained at least 1 inch in an hour, you may want to install supplemental drains or choose species that can tolerate intermittent flooding.
- **Road salt** – In areas where high levels of road salt or sidewalk salts are used, planting tolerant species can minimize damage later.

ABOVE GROUND:

- **Exposure** – Excessively windy sites will often place stress on trees with large leaves that may result in leaf tatter. Also, trees in these sites may need supplemental watering to prevent them from drying out as quickly. Shady sites determined by the sun and shade patterns around buildings may limit the choice of trees. Most trees require full sun, but a few may tolerate slightly lower levels.
- **Building set-back/overhead wires** – The presence of physical barriers to tree growth above ground such as a narrow building set back from the street and/or overhead high tension wires require a tree that will not interfere with these structures. Columnar forms of trees or those with low mature heights (less than 30 feet) can be used in these situations.
- **Surrounding building surfaces** – Concrete, asphalt, car roofs, mirrored building surfaces, etc., increase the reflected and reradiated heat load on a tree. This can cause a tree to heat up and lose water from its leaves at a faster than normal rate. Drought-resistant trees should be chosen in these situations.
- **USDA temperature zones** – All trees chosen for your planting area should be cold hardy. Urban environments often have larger temperature fluctuations due to reflected/reradiated heat from buildings and due to sheltering from winds. A good rule is to plant trees that conform to your zone or lower (colder) temperatures. Container trees are more susceptible to cold temperatures than those in the ground.

Information gathered from "Urban Trees: Site Assessment, Selection for Stress Tolerance, Planting" by Nina Bassuk, director of the Cornell Urban Horticulture Institute, Cornell College of Agriculture, Ithaca, N.Y.

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Plant Zone Basics

(continued from page 166)

of "yard stick" measurements like the cold hardiness map, and recently has prompted heat zone research. Cold isn't the only plant killer – some varieties are more sensitive to excessive heat, Cathey noted. The American Horticultural Society Plant Heat-Zone Map, first published in 1998, identifies 12 Zones based on the number of days that exceed 86 F. Zone 1 is less than one heat day and Zone 12 is more than 210 heat days. Combined with the USDA Zone Map, contractors can more accurately predict which varieties will thrive in their regions, he said.

"Once you know what your zones are, you can look at the coding and you will be able to say, 'Yes, this will grow,' and 'No, this will not grow,'" Cathey said. "You will be able to control your own destiny."

ZERO IN ON ZONES. Labels and temperature statistics might track Mother Nature's thermometer, but plant health requires more than consulting the numbers. "If

you go into a project and trust only the plant hardiness maps, you could get burned pretty badly – especially if you are working on a large project," Griggs remarked.

While contractors who avoid these numbers miss relevant historical data, those who only depend on zones to prescribe plants for their projects neglect the big picture. Large water bodies, elevation changes, soil conditions – these variables create pockets, or microclimates, within plant zones.

"You can change zones in a pretty short distance, especially next to water," Bassuk noted. "Water is a great moderating force in keeping things warmer or cooler, so you get a different zone next to a body of water that may only be a few miles wide, and then you're in a different zone when you get away from the water."

Add man-made landscape variables like shaded areas from tall skyscrapers, protected spots from courtyards or street alleys, and dry beds from sun-heated asphalt parking

lots, and contractors have a lot more than weather reports to consider.

"You know what it feels like when you get in your car after it has been in the sun in the parking lot," Bassuk described. "If you try to plant trees there they won't live for long. With courtyards where you have reflected light from buildings you can get a warmer temperature than you normally would outside. Then you can increase the diversity of plants and do something different."

What survives in a concrete jungle? Drought-tolerant, small selections that won't outgrow the limited soil space will survive in parking lot plant beds, Bassuk suggested.

To address these environmental variables and "put the right plant in the right place," Cathey prescribes a SmartGarden survey (see related web story) which lists practices and tips for landscape contractors to consider when choosing plants for their areas.

Bassuk pointed out that both below- and above-ground considerations, from rooting space and drainage, to surrounding building surfaces and the USDA temperature zones, also comprise a thorough site examination (see sidebar on page 166).

However, simple observation serves as the most essential, basic tool for learning what plants will flourish, Griggs noted. "The best way to get an indication of what survives and what doesn't is to get out of the city and into the native areas and take a look at what is growing there and what isn't," he said. Local extension agents, universities, established garden centers and arboreta also provide information on local plant flavor.

And each zone truly offers an opportunity to capture regional personality, Bassuk remarked. "There are a few plants that will tolerate an enormous range of conditions, but those should be used sparingly," she said. "It's a good thing to use regional variation, and the more diversity in plant material we use that are adapted to the area's conditions is a good thing. It would be very boring if all of our landscapes were the same."

VOICE THE CHOICE. Contractors aren't the only ones with "the wants." With an influx of consumer gardening publications, a heightened knowledge of planting and increased travel, clients are getting big ideas from places other than their own backyards.

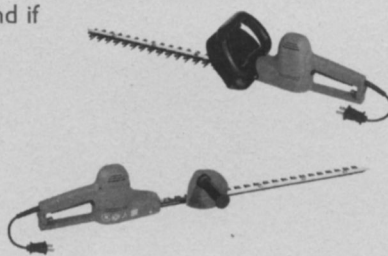
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Plant Zone Basics

(continued from page 168)

"There is more information on gardening available to the public," Griggs explained. "National magazines come out with a plant of the year, and without local knowledge, clients will read it and say, 'In such-and-such magazine they say this is a good plant.'"

This prize-winning plant might not fit the native landscape, however. Installing the wrong match for the area can be risky business for contractors, who guarantee their plants and don't want to lose profits. Griggs tells clients when plants aren't hardy in the area—communication is key, he reminded.

But when customers persist, he won't guarantee the selection. He documents this in a letter that notes the plant is not recommended and will not be covered. "If you have this in writing, then when it does end up dying and the client's memory gets short and they say, 'You didn't say it was going to do that,' you are protected," he said.

Planting pipe dreams in clients' heads that exotic varieties will thrive in inappro-

priate conditions will not earn repeat business. Being frank from the beginning will, Bassuk said. She suggests asking clients: Do you want shade? Do you want a garden? Are you looking for an area for recreation or something to look at and not touch? Is the goal to screen out the neighbors?

"There are different client needs and there are a lot of visions that plants provide, and engaging the client by talking about what they are interested in is important," she stressed. This combined with the site assessment will ensure that the design and the client's goals for the property are in sync.

Contractors need to review the site with clients, but they also should double-check designs from out-of-town architects to make sure their plant choices match the area's environmental characteristics, Epp added. Designers who base blueprints from books do not have local experience that verifies their plants are hardy selections.

Similarly, contractors who purchase plant

material from nursery wholesalers also need to be aware that they might be choosing plants not hardy in their zones, Bassuk pointed out. Nurseries that grow plant material on site may be the best information source for learning regionally hardy varieties.

With more specific methods of surveying sites and even more detailed references that provide planting suggestions, attaining a long-term landscape void of weather-worn plants is getting easier.

Still, honesty helps grow healthy gardens, Bassuk reminded. "Horticulturalists always want to try something new and different and interesting, and sometimes you win and sometimes you lose," she said, adding that California-grown Oleander isn't such a wise decision for outdoor planting in New York, for example. "But, remember, you can always keep it as a houseplant." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor—Special Projects for Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Love 'EM or Leave 'EM

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Finding good employees may be easier since the economy has been in a recession, but that doesn't mean your retention efforts should suffer. Losing employees can ravage your bottom line. Consider the productivity and replacement costs involved when an employee walks out the door: Research indicates that losing an employee costs a company an average of \$50,000.

So how do you retain employees? Here are seven strategies that will help:

- *Create a great environment.* Build a supportive and challenging workplace where communication is encouraged, initiative is rewarded, and development is provided. A good environment offers employees interesting work, growth opportunities, on-going training and development, and a chance to be heard.

This environment needs to be supported by a strong, well-defined culture and maintained by managers who take an interest in their employees. Create the kind of place that employees want to return to, not run from.

- *Support Your Employees.* Talk with your employees. Make sure they know their jobs and your expectations. Provide employees with clear end goals and the information and resources necessary to work toward those goals. Conduct two-way conversations that allow employees to be heard. Value employees' input and include them in the decision-making process. Provide opportunities for making meaningful contributions. Good employee/management relationships are essential. The Gallup Organization's study of 80,000 managers in 400 companies found that an employee's relationship with his or her direct boss is more important for employee retention than pay and perks.

- *Provide Ongoing Training and Development.* This is the key to keeping employees – and keeping them enthusiastic. Involve employees in the discovery of new opportunities and

(continued on page 174)



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Retaining Employees

(continued from page 172)

innovations. Develop employees through mentoring programs. Provide learning opportunities in the form of seminars, educational opportunities or training programs. Armed with new skills and motivated by the learning process, employees will gladly assume new responsibilities and meet challenges with greater initiative.


As long as workers are learning and stretching, they will keep adding value in the form of tangible end results, and they will stick around.

- *Re-recruit.* Take the time to find out how your people are doing. Find out what their needs are, whether or not they are being met and how the company can support them.

Ask them, "What are the kinds of things that will keep you? What kinds of opportunities, growth, etc. do you want?" Make it easy to move and grow within the company and employees will be less likely to look outside. Never assume they can't be lured away.

- *Rev Up Recognition.* Respect and appreciation earns respect and appreciation. Employees often say that they never hear the words "thank you" from their bosses. Genuine appreciation costs nothing, but can yield significant benefits. You need to let employees know how much you appreciate them regularly. Recognize even the little accomplishments. Ways companies are recognizing their people more are by acknowledging achievements at work, birthdays, and milestone recognition at meetings.

- *Make Work Fun.* How can you make work more of an adventure? How can you get your people to want to come to work? When was the last time you celebrated some victory in your company, some milestone that everybody can get excited about? Find ways within your company that will make your employees want to work and succeed. Create an atmosphere that celebrates success. One company has instigated a plan called "corporate cookies" to build employee camaraderie. One afternoon a week they have cookies delivered and everyone sits around the office talking about what is going right. Simple things like cookies can have a big effect.

- *Walk Your Talk.* Employees are looking to the workplace and to you as the leader for authenticity. Herb Kelleher, chief executive officer, Southwest Airlines, a company that has shown profits year after year, had fewer customer complaints, higher satisfaction, greater retention of employees than any other U.S. airline. He has made Southwest one of the most desirable companies to work for in America, according to *Fortune* magazine. The company makes work fun, but it also walks the talk. There is an authenticity about what management communicates in terms of company values and what they live by. Kelleher said: "Figure out what your values are. Because once you figure out what your values are, the rest falls into place." 

The author is president, *The Innovation Resource* in Santa Barbara, Calif. For more information on his employee retention seminars, call 805-682-1012 or email info@innovationresource.com.

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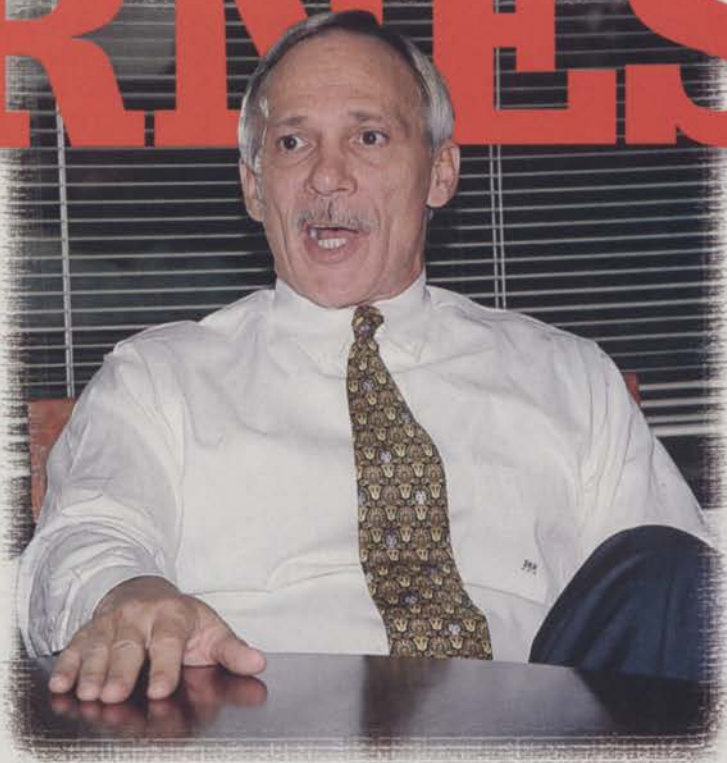
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USE READER SERVICE #112

by Bob West

Conversation with Don KARNES

The head of TruGreen offers Lawn & Landscape an exclusive look at the ups and downs associated with buying LandCare USA.



The following is the second part of Lawn & Landscape magazine's interview with Don Karnes. Check out the February issue of Lawn & Landscape for part one of this interview.

Lawn & Landscape – How has the addition of the LandCare business helped the TruGreen business?

Don Karnes – Commercially, we like to have both sides. When we're out selling commercial in the lawn care business, the one thing that we have to really have is the maintenance side with it. So having your own company is great when you're going in and doing proposals, and trying to get one salesperson to represent both companies, which we're working on today – to get more proposals and a larger sales force out there. So I think that's a huge area.

And controlling the contract helps. In lawn care, most of the time we would be the subcontractor to the maintenance company, so having control of the contract is important to us.

Of course, we could always be left out of some jobs if we were purely a lawn care play, and we didn't want that, so we entered landscape maintenance.

L&L – February 1998 is when you did your first landscape deals with the acquisitions of Minor's Landscape Services in Texas and Northwest Landscape Industries in Oregon. How has that whole process gone?

DK – I think that initially we did pretty well in the acquisitions. We bought some great companies to get started. Unfortunately, we lost a number of those key people. But you know that's going to happen when you buy a company – you pay a large sum of money for it and you're asking the former owner to stay and run the company when he has options. Some of them stay, and some don't.

But we were excited about the companies we bought. With the construction part of the business, we really didn't want that percent to get as high as it did. We really weren't comfortable with it

Don Karnes has spent the last 24 years rising through the ranks at TruGreen after being hired by its founder in 1979.

representing 30 percent of the LandCare operation. We tried to keep it around 20 percent.

Subsequent to that, we did the LandCare acquisition, which bumped up our construction revenue to a large number – over \$150 million – and then we found ourselves in a business that we didn't understand. We didn't have the expertise here at the corporate office to run or monitor that business and, to be perfectly frank with you, we shouldn't have been in the landscape construction business.

So we really did a strong review of the business to see where we're headed and where we really want to be. And we really thought that having to sell the whole base of revenue every year was not something we wanted to do. We like reoccurring contracts – that's a business we're comfortable with. And then with the unstable portion of the economy and us being a publicly traded company, we weren't prepared to handle the downturns in the commercial construction business.

Ultimately, we made the decision to exit that business and, of course, we sold that to Environmental Industries. At that point in time, we reviewed the maintenance business, but we felt very strongly that maintenance is part of our business. It's a business we want to be in, and we're excited about the people we have in this business. We have some branches making in excess of 25 percent operating profits, so there are some great margins in the business even though we have some branches on the other end of the spectrum that we have to work on. Overall, we've got about 75 percent of those branches working pretty well today, and we're very excited about the overall size of the industry and the quality of the people in the industry. Lawn care and landscape maintenance is really what we do. But we bought too much too quick.

L&L – Did it bother you to lose the synergies



between construction and maintenance?

DK – There are some synergies there, handing off the work from construction to maintenance, but I can go through our branches

and see a number of them that have no construction that are performing unbelievably well. So, it really comes down to the same key variables we've always dealt with and always will deal with – who is our branch manager and who are the people we have?

Again, we feel pretty confident that 75 percent of our branches are in great shape in these areas, and we need to focus on the other 25 percent. Trying to get the bottom up a little bit while maintaining the performance in our upper tier branches is what we're always doing in all of our businesses.

L&L – How much did the development of LandCare shift or accelerate TruGreen's strategy to pursue the landscape maintenance side of the industry?

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DK – I don't know that it escalated our plan, but it did get our attention. Once again, we were doing about 20 percent of our lawn care revenue in the commercial arena, and we were trying to protect that, of course, because it's a very profitable business for us. And yet, we were interested in being in the landscape business. Being in the lawn care business for years, we had our eye on that business and where it was headed. Due to the size of the landscape industry, we really wanted to be a part of it.

We always wanted to minimize the construction side, but when you start getting into the acquisition and they have a construction division, it's very difficult to do the acquisition without buying the construction. I think, in hindsight, we would probably play that a little differently today. Having said that, I have no regrets about entering the landscape maintenance business despite the short-term struggle.

L&L – How significant was the learning curve for the landscape industry?

DK – Really, we have individuals out there who are very strong in this area. So, there is a learning curve to it but it's still a commercial business much like the lawn care business.

When you get below the corporate level, it becomes more apparent. And when you get to the branch level the area manager really is a very, very important person because they have direct contact with the customer and sure the customers' needs are filled. They are one level below the branch manager, and they are the ones walking the properties with the customers and making sure that the crews are on top of the service they're supposed to provide. We could have as many as six or seven of them in each branch, depending on the size of the branch. I would say that early on we underestimated the importance of that position somewhat. That's a huge portion of our business and really where we take care of our customers.

L&L – How much more integration remains to be done?

DK – The information system is installed, and that was a huge undertaking that a lot of us underestimated in terms of building it, getting everyone on it, getting everyone the training they needed and getting the system rolled out. Some of that was unfortunately because of Y2K – we didn't have operating systems capable of operating, but we got it out there. We've got our continuous improvement structure. Construction is gone today, and we're focusing on our core business.

Now it comes down to operating the business. We need to make our sales, take care of the customers, provide high-quality customer service and we'll be in great shape. We've got a very viable business here that we're very excited about.

Having said that, if I told you that everything is going to run like a Swiss watch from here on out, I'd be kidding. We're going to have some ups and downs, and we're going to have some bumps in the road, but for the most part, we see the bumps in the road as

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(continued from page 146)

part of our continued growth. The foundation is there and the opportunity is there. If we continue to ask the tough questions, 'What am I going to do today to service the customer? What am I going to do today to take care of our employees? And what am I going to do today to take care of our shareholders?' If we know the answers to those questions, then we're going to be in great shape.

We're very pleased with the shape of the business in some of the key markets, such as Florida, where there are different pricing pressures and tremendous competition, as well as Texas, where we're also in great shape. So, we've got our key people and the key managers in place, and we're very excited about where we're headed in 2002.

L&L - How much are you looking to get into

other areas like tree care or irrigation through the LandCare branches?

DK - We'll do some of that here and there, but the main focus is on the core business of commercial maintenance and the enhancements that go with those properties. Of course, this fits into our national account strategy. We have some very large customers that we're trying to acquire now, and we're excited about that opportunity. And that's why trying to get this footprint across the U.S. - going from 100 branches to a couple hundred branches is very important for us.

L&L - So are you going to making acquisitions again in 2002?

DK - I would not expect any landscape acquisitions until the fourth quarter of 2002, if at all. And the reason is that we have to make sure we focus on what we have and that we perform to the highest possible level this year. That's very important for us. We have these high achieving branches out there, and we really have to get the bottom quartile up. Once we do that, we'll be positioned to do acquisitions again, although we'll probably be a little more strict in our approach to them and do a little more due diligence than we did in the past. But we'll absolutely be in the acquisition business again.

However, I don't think we'll be paying the prices we once paid. I think with the number of companies doing acquisitions back then, a lot of the owners can look back and say, 'I think I got out at the top.'

L&L - Will growth of new branches happen organically as well or do you see acquisition being the primary way you grow?

DK - We can do some of that organically, we'll do some through acquisitions, and we'll do some through national accounts when we get a large customer that really wants us to service them in a new marketplace. But we're going to be in this business and grow this business. The year 2002 will be more of a jump-start for us as far as propelling us into the next few years and what our growth is going to be. We feel confident that we can grow at a double-digit rate in 2002 and then we'd like to accelerate that in 2003 through 2005. Now we want to position ourselves for that growth.

L&L - Obviously, part of your growth plan is residential mowing. Tell me where that's at right now.

(continued on page 180)

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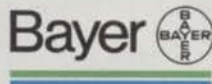
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Conversation

(continued from page 180)

DK – It's really interesting because it's one of the benefits we got from LandCare. There are some individuals there who understand residential maintenance. TruGreen tried residential maintenance in 1989 or so, and we went out and bought some small, \$150,000 businesses when we weren't doing any acquisitions. And we got what we paid for – a few customers, very little management, and the learning curve for us trying to learn that business was steep, so it got very little attention and we phased out of it.

Now, we've got the expertise and experience and we asked ourselves, 'Do we really want to be in this market?' We thought that if we could be in the high end of the residential marketplace – not just all of our customer base, but to really look at the top 10 percent and see if they're willing to pay for us to be a full service. We believe we've found the answer to be yes.

Today, we have about \$10 million in residential mowing revenue, so we feel pretty

confident. We have 38 markets going. We are stopping there and now we have to look at the margins, see if we can provide the level of service we have to provide, identify the protocols and get them in place. We hope to do that in 2002, and if we do that, you'll see a rapid expansion of this service in 2003. It's a pretty unique business, too. It's a very, very quality oriented customer when you're talking about someone who's going to pay \$4,000 or \$5,000 a year. They demand impeccable service. We have to know and understand our customers and what they demand.

Right now, we're testing it in the maintenance and lawn care branches to test both concepts, and the marketing is focused on current ChemLawn customers, although we wouldn't turn down someone who calls in looking for the service.

We don't want to shotgun this out into a marketplace – we want to control the rollout. We've tested two- and three-man crews, different equipment, different trucks and trailers,

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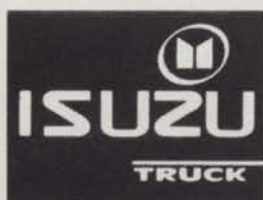
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and we want to get all of that down so we know how we want to run this business for the best practices across the country.

We're really excited about this because it's a huge industry and we're sitting there with this customer list who we're already providing a quality service to, and now we just have to add another service to that.

L&L – Are those 38 locations all over the country?

DK – There are some in California, which has never been a strong lawn care market. Our thought now is that the full-service approach may work well out there, so we're testing in that area. But we have tests in Texas, Michigan, Florida and all over the East Coast. And we could've put this in 100 locations this year



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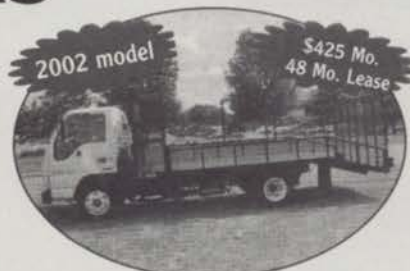
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based on the number of requests we got from branch managers, but we don't want to go too quickly with this.

L&L – When you announced the sale of construction, you also talked as a corporation about being “America’s Home Services Company.” What does that mean for the TruGreen companies?

DK – Actually, it means what it says, but that does not leave out commercial. Again, we’re 50 percent commercial in the TruGreen business, and our retention rate is higher with our commercial customers. We had some LandCare businesses running 92 to 100 percent retention, although we have some on the other end of that spectrum. Looking at our other businesses, there’s a commercial portion to almost every one of the companies that ServiceMaster has.

(New CEO) Jon Ward came in and did what he said he was going to do, which is a complete portfolio review where you essentially take the names off the businesses and

figure out which businesses are going to take the company in the direction you want to go in for the next five to 10 years of growth. There were a few businesses that didn’t make that cut, and construction was one of them.

But I think we did an excellent job of reviewing the businesses and saying which ones do we want to be in, what we will grow and what we will focus our efforts on. LandCare and TruGreen were both in there, as was Terminix, and we came out of that process with this portfolio of businesses on which we’re going to focus our time and energies.

L&L – So residential mowing isn’t just a loss leader to get more lawn care business?

DK – That’s right. This is to be another service line business we want to grow. We think there’s a lot of opportunity, and if we can get the high end down and service them, then we may see if we can come down a little bit and see how well that works as well.

L&L – What are your thoughts about the market for landscape services in 2002?

DK – We have not seen a lot of contract termination to date, but we have had some clients cut back on enhancements. Everybody still has to maintain the properties, obviously, which is good for the industry, but we believe we’ll see some enhancements cut back. One of the nice things about this business is that there are standards for people taking care of their property, not to mention that common sense dictates that certain businesses have curb appeal.

L&L – If you were an independent owner/operator with 10 employees, how would you compete against a \$1.5-billion company?

DK – Provide the best service I could every day. That’s the only way. Then take care of the employees and shareholders. There’s no secret. Again, we do it unbelievably well in a lot of branches and not so well in some. That’s all there is to it – it’s pretty simple. **LL**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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Equipment Notebook

MOWER DECKS

Out of Sight

A cherry-red convertible sports car can become a tacky lawn ornament on cinder blocks if its owner neglects periodic maintenance and service. This machine requires more than a quick wash and a fuel check and demands a thorough look at the elements under the hood – the basic components for the vehicle's everyday operation.

Likewise, landscape contractors need to routinely check under mower decks and be familiar with the systems that produce service desirables like even cuts and suitable mulching. "Routine inspections and preventive maintenance allow your deck to perform the way it is designed to by keeping it in top condition all the time," pointed out Pat Penner, communications director, Grasshopper, Moundridge, Kan.

Since there's more to the mower than meets the eye, contractors need to pay attention to the dynamics underneath the mower deck, taking the time to understand how proper maintenance boosts efficiency. Photo: Toro



AIR APPARENT. Clogged mower decks, missed patches of grass and an uneven cut produce annoyances and reduce the timeliness of the job. In an effort to control these business slowdowns, contractors initially must understand the airflow system under the mower deck.

Proper airflow can hit a snag as the volume of cut increases, explained Devin McGhee, chief product engineer, Encore, Beatrice, Neb. With three blades spinning in the same direction, the first blade cuts the grass and then tosses the clippings to the next blade, which then tosses that grass buildup to the

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Equipment Notebook

third blade. The trick is to control the converging air masses where these blades join, McGhee said. "Where the blades come together, the lifts are creating undefined downdrafts, and you see where a deck will skip and not cut the grass," he related. "The grass is blown down and misses the blade. Flow control affects those elements by redirecting and fracturing air masses."

This flow control results from a baffling system designed to direct the airflow and create a clean movement of grass through the deck. "A baffle system, with a side discharge, allows air to go out the discharge as smoothly and cleanly as possible," remarked Dick Bednar, chief engineer, Textron, Johnson Creek, Wis.

McGhee clarified that effective baffling systems result from trial and error testing to balance airflow with an industry hunger for additional tip speed and engine power. "When the farthest left and center blades come together, the two air masses converge, which creates strange eddies of air," he said. "The baffle has the tendency to disperse that,

or change its value, so it moves more toward the outlet of the deck." While this occurs, the grass also moves with the airflow over to the last blade and limits clogging under the deck.

Deck design also affects the mower's airflow, McGhee continued. For example, as the area from the tip of the blade to the front of the deck increases, the grass travels better through the mower system. "What you need is increasing volume from left to right, as far as space in front of the blade," he said.

"Also, with a forward discharge design, we try to move discharge to the forward side of the last blade instead of keeping it to the back side," he said. "Then, you get a better direct flow out of the back of the mower."

Penner stated that the increased deck area also comes in handy for heavy clipping volume. "Deeper decks accommodate the large volume of clippings produced by mowing at faster speeds," she said.

However, with enhanced volume, the mower deck must be a larger size, which means contractors should balance their need for adequate airflow with their desire for a

compact mower, McGhee added. And, in dewy or rainy conditions that produce heavy, wet clippings, the additional mower deck area may create more space for these soggy clippings to build up. "It's a double-edged sword," McGhee said.

MULCHING & MAINTENANCE. The mulching capability of a mower is defined in the system of blades, baffles and housings under the deck, Penner described. "Mulching requires a package of components that together suspends clippings, cuts them finely and directs them back into the turf canopy," she described. "A complete mulching package combining down-discharge baffles or shrouds, blades and a discharge restriction plate works to product the airflow needed to produce an excellent quality of cut while mulching."

McGhee identified curved systems for blade chambers as ideal for mulching applications because the curved chambers can more effectively contain the cut grass and limit the clogging potential when moving the grass quickly across the deck. Also, blades

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Equipment Notebook

with serrated teeth or wavy blades, which cut grass pieces in two different positions, reduce clipping size for mulching purposes, he explained.

Baffling systems differ slightly for mulching applications, Penner reminded. "Mulching requires a unique air flow that is accomplished through deck design with baffling or shrouding engineered to work with certain cutting blades to keep clippings suspended as they are cut finely, before dropping back into the grass bed," she noted.

Of course, sturdy deck construction and properly maintained blade spindles rank high in importance for any type of mowing. "The key components of a mowing deck, besides the blades, are the deck housing, blade spindles and the PTO-shaft-drive or belt drive that powers the blades," Penner listed. "Spindles that eliminate failures and down time and welded, fabricated decks that withstand heavy use are of the utmost importance."

Spindles also require fresh grease periodically as a result of the high rpm and steamy operating temperatures that occur during mow-


ing, Penner continued. "Follow the manufacturer's directions for deck lubrication, belt tensioning, blade sharpening and balancing," she suggested. In addition to regular greasing, watch out for rocks and other debris on properties that can potentially bend baffling systems, Bednar cautioned.

Again, when damage does occur, be sure to consult the manufacturer's specifications for replacement parts. "Contractors should remember the original equipment manufacturer belts and supplies are manufactured to exact specifications required for maximum performance," Penner said. "Parts that are not designed to manufacturer's specifications will result in poor performance, shortened service life and may even damage vital components of your equipment."

Simply cleaning out the mower deck from time to time can do wonders for the machine's performance, McGhee added. "The cut quality goes down drastically if you don't keep decks cleaned out," he said. "Baffles may or may not increase the frequency to check and make sure the deck is not plugged up."

When cleaning mower decks, avoid a high-pressure water stream, which may damage the intricacies under the deck, Bednar warned. "Try not to force high pressure water into the bearings because it can shorten the life of the system," he said. Also, make sure the decks have been thoroughly dried before storage, Penner added.

Ignoring the systems under a mower deck because of their hidden nature will only lead to efficiency headaches and dreadful results. Instead, properly maintaining this part of the mower and tending to repairs in a timely fashion will be well worth contractor efforts, Penner maintained.

"If the deck or other equipment is damaged, stop and repair it right away instead of letting what might seem to be a minor problem develop into an expensive and time-consuming repair," she said. "When you take care of your equipment, it will repay you many times over." — Kristin Mohn 

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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E-mail Address _____

Do you wish to receive industry related information by E-mail?

Yes No

1. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one)

- I. CONTRACTOR or SERVICES
- 1. Landscape Contractor (maintenance & installation)
 - 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service)
 - 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor
 - 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
 - 5. Irrigation Contractor
 - 6. Landscape Architect
 - 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

II. IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE

- 8. In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks

III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

- 9. Dealer
- 10. Distributor
- 11. Formulator
- 12. Manufacturer

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

- 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
- 14. School, College, University
- 15. Trade Association, Library
- Others (please describe) _____

2. What best describes your title?

- Owner, Pres., Vice Pres., Corp. Officer
- Manager, Director, Supt., Foreman
- Agronomist, Horticulturist
- Entomologist, Plant Pathologist
- Serviceman, Technician, Crew member
- Scientist, Researcher
- Company, Library copy only
- Other (please specify) _____

3. What services does your business offer? (please check all that apply)

- ____ 1. Landscape Installation
- ____ 2. Landscape Maintenance
- ____ 3. Landscape Renovation
- ____ 4. Mowing and related maintenance
- ____ 5. Irrigation Installation
- ____ 6. Irrigation Maintenance
- ____ 7. Turf pesticide application
- ____ 8. Ornamental/tree pesticide application
- ____ 9. Turf fertilization
- ____ 10. Ornamental/tree fertilization
- ____ 11. Tree Pruning
- ____ 12. Snow Removal
- ____ 13. Interiorscape
- ____ 14. Other _____

4. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?

5. What year was your business founded?

6. What were your company's gross revenues for 2000?

- ____ 1. Less than \$50,000
- ____ 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
- ____ 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
- ____ 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999
- ____ 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
- ____ 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999
- ____ 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
- ____ 8. \$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999
- ____ 9. \$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999
- ____ 10. \$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999
- ____ 11. \$7,000,000 or more

7. Please indicate your approximate business mix:

- 1. Residential _____ %
- 2. Commercial _____ %
- 3. Other _____ % Specify types _____

Total 100%

FOR MORE INFORMATION

on advertised and featured products and services, circle the appropriate number below.

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
- 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30
- 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45
- 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60
- 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75
- 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90
- 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105
- 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120
- 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135
- 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150
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Products

FFC PowerRake

- Quickly and easily pulverizes soil, removes rock and debris, finish-grades, spreads fill or topsoil and dethatches
- Features a bi-directional drum that works the soil forward and backward with long-lasting teeth positioned for maximum coverage
- Offers a dual-motor, direct-drive design that eliminates the need for chains and sprockets, reducing maintenance requirements
- End plates can be removed for windrowing
- Designed to work on skid-steers, backhoe-loaders, small wheel loaders, utility loaders and tractors with three-point hitches
- Available in 48-, 72- and 90-inch widths

Circle 200 on reader service card



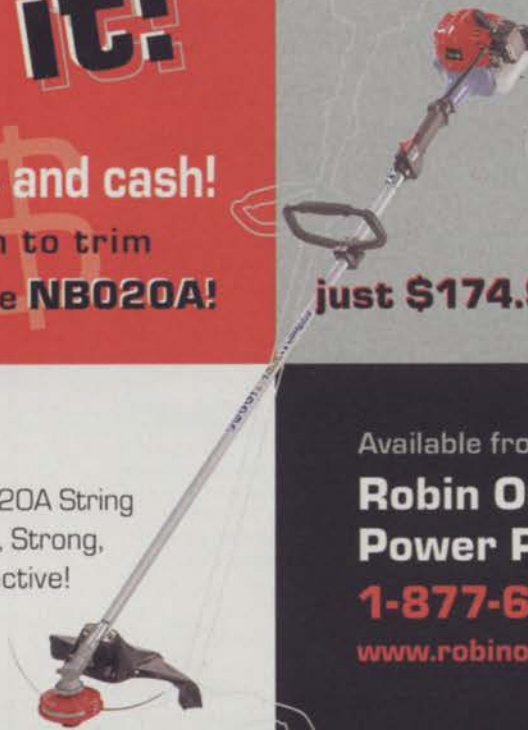
Dixon ZTR 7523 Mid-Mount Mower

- Zero-turning radius cuts mowing time in half
 - Features 23-hp Kohler Command Pro Series engine
 - Features Hydro-Gear hydro pumps and wheel motors
 - Deck options include 52 and 60 inches with 1½- to 5-inch cut heights
 - Foot rest flips up for belt and spindle inspection
 - Mulching kit available
 - Ground speed of up to 10 mph
- Circle 201 on reader service card



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USE READER SERVICE #121

Products

Hannay Reels GHAT1200 Reel

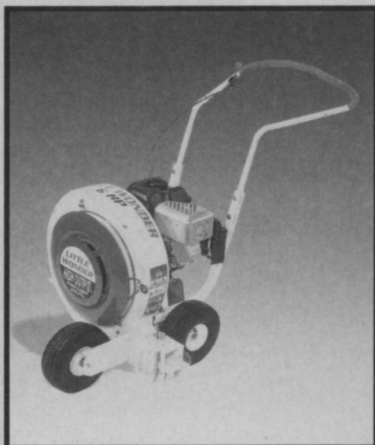
• Specifically engineered for portable use in grounds maintenance

- Provides quick and neat hose pickup and storage
- Features continuous hose flow with a swivel joint inlet, fluid hub and outlet riser
- Operates at pressures up to 1,000 psi and temperatures from -80 to 185 degrees

- Features a permanent, direct-crank rewind
 - Standard inlet is a 90-degree, ball-bearing swivel joint with 1-inch female NPT threads with a male GHT standard outlet
 - Accessories can be ordered separately
- Circle 202 on reader service card**

Little Wonder Blower

- Designed for use on residential properties
- Features 6-hp Intek engine and a Magnatron Electronic Ignition for quick, dependable starts
- Float-feed carburetor provides the right amount of gas for one-pull starts and smooth operation
- Overhead valve design ensures efficient



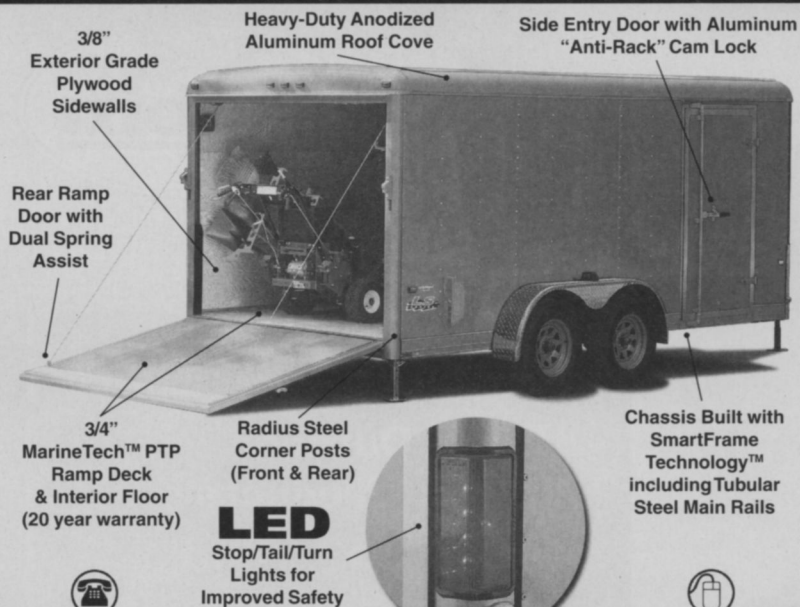
operation and increased horsepower for tough chores

- Height-adjustable, ergonomically designed handles with anti-vibration grips provide greater comfort and control
- Features three, 10-inch diameter, steel-hubbed, wheels for easy handling
- Features 12-gauge steel housing with arc-welded seams for maximum strength and durability
- Air deflector splits air to make use of the fastest moving air, promoting efficient debris movement with less blow-back

Circle 203 on reader service card

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USE READER SERVICE #122

USE READER SERVICE #123

Glenmac Modular M-6 Power Box Rake

- Choose from straight mount or manual-angle mount
 - Features adjustable Rhino-Hide barrier, dual, independently adjustable gauge wheels, reversible endplates for windrowing or reverse box raking, and double #50 oil bath drive chain
 - Choose from 14 models for skid-steers, tractors, mini-steers and front-deck mowers
 - Frame geometry offers excellent visibility of work surface
 - Carbide teeth are specially shaped to ensure the best possible seedbed sub-base for superior moisture retention and germination
- Circle 204 on reader service card**

Millcreek Manufacturing Mulch Tender

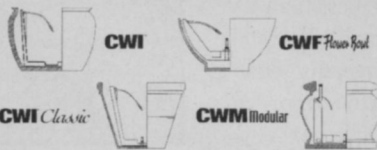
- Carries up to 10.2 cubic yards of mulch and automatically dispenses into wheelbarrows
 - Able to propel mulch directly onto planting beds through side discharge
 - Designed for contractors applying 2,000 cubic yards or more of mulch per year
 - Unit can be towed with a 1-ton pickup or small truck and comes with electric brakes and removable tarp for highway travel
 - Loading height is 8 feet to work with skid steer and compact tractor loaders
 - Clearance height for wheelbarrow filling is 36 inches
 - Power to hydraulic controls is provided by a 13-hp Honda engine
 - Maximum payload is 9,000 pounds with a gross weight of 14,000 pounds
 - Handles a variety of materials including bark mulch, wood chips and compost
- Circle 205 on reader service card**



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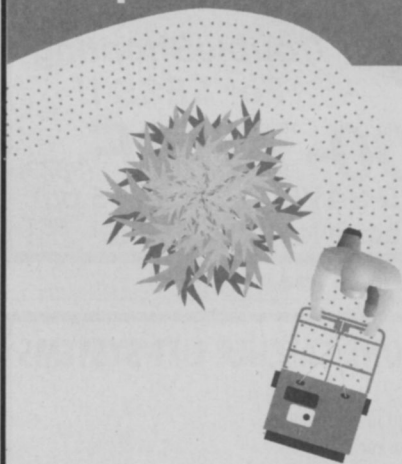
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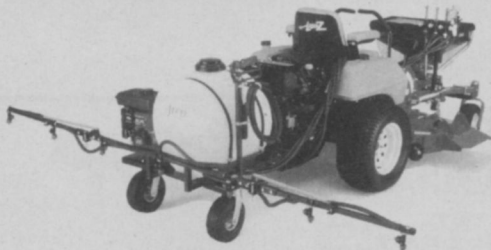
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Products

Cub Cadet Commercial Walk-Behind Mower

- HF1748 model features a 17-hp Kawasaki engine and a 48-inch Command Cut System deck
 - Advanced floating, fabricated cutting deck allows operator to achieve quality cut
 - 7-gauge skirt and 10-gauge top double reinforced at spindle area
 - 1.7-inch Marbane blades overlap, offering a cleaner cut, especially in tight turns
 - Rear roller design provides striping effect for manicured, professional results
 - Dual-lever hydrostatic controls offer true zero turns with pistol grip operation for fast, easy, on-the-go tracking adjustments
- Circle 206 on reader service card**

Olson Irrigation Systems Low Profile Stake

- Streamlined design provides secure installation for micro-spray jets on risers
- Collar support protects the riser from breaking off at the barb
- Less than 1 inch of the stake remains above ground, providing a neat and inconspicuous installation

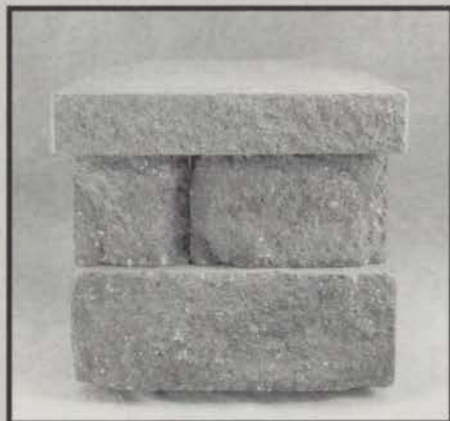


- Stake's side barb allows connection directly to delivery tubing or connection remote from the supply line using a barbed adapter and flexible .160 I.D. tubing

Circle 207 on reader service card

Highland Stone Retaining Wall System

- Three-piece, concrete retaining wall system
 - Face texture replicates natural stone
 - Designed for large, residential applications, commercial developments and public spaces
 - Three unit sizes available: large measures 6 by 18 by 12 inches and weighs 73 pounds; medium measure 6 by 12 by 12 inches and weighs 59 pounds; and small measures 6 by 6 by 12 inches and weighs 30 pounds
 - Can be installed using any combination of units
- Circle 208 on reader service card**



Kenyon Tools Sprinkler Head Trimmer

- Trims grass from around sprinkler heads or utility covers quickly and easily
 - Avoids risk of yellow bowls often produced with string trimmers
 - Available in 2 3/4-, 3-, 4-, 6-, 7-, 8- and 10-inch diameter trim head sizes
 - Features sickle-style blades with scalloped edges to produce a clean, round divot
 - Divots can be picked up with a lawn mower, saving time on the job site
 - Sturdy welded construction and 5/8-inch structural steel handle rods and shafts assure long, dependable service
- Circle 209 on reader service card**

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Syngenta Medallion Fungicide

- Recently received new label from the U.S. EPA for control of pink snow mold and gray snow mold
- Can use as a tank mix with Banner MAXX, offering a

broader spectrum and higher level of control for longer period of time

- Controls diseases in the thatch and near the surface of soil
- Provides protection against snow mold when applied at 0.5 ounce per 1,000 square feet in the fall

Circle 210 on reader service card

Finn T60 Hydroseeder

- 600-gallon HydroSeeder provides fast and economical seeding for smaller jobs
- Coverage is up to 7,200 square feet per load with seed, fertilizer and mulch in an easy, one-step process
- Features hydraulically controlled paddle agitator and liquid recirculation
- Agitator controls are at each end of the tank

Circle 211 on reader service card

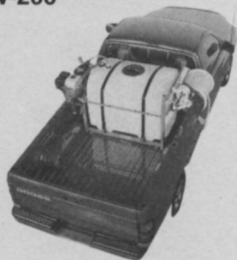
Radians AV Safety Glasses

- Glasses provide both hearing and vision protection
- Offers sleek styling combined with comfortable Jelli earplugs, which attach directly to the temple post of glasses
- Features 48 to 56 lines of resolution and zero prism effect, providing clear images

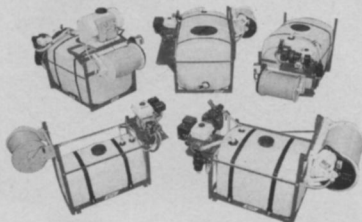
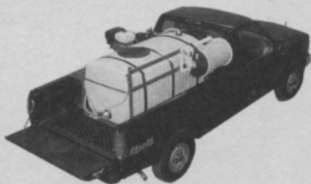
- Lenses block out more than 99 percent of UVB and UVA rays and are scratch and fog resistant
- Earplugs are soft, provide noise reduction of 25 dB, are hypoallergenic and fully washable with mild soap and water
- Available in many colors, including clear, mirror, grey, green and amber
- Coverall safety glasses can be worn over prescription glasses
- Breakaway neck cord will break under 8 to 10 pounds of pressure

Circle 212 on reader service card

V-200



V-300



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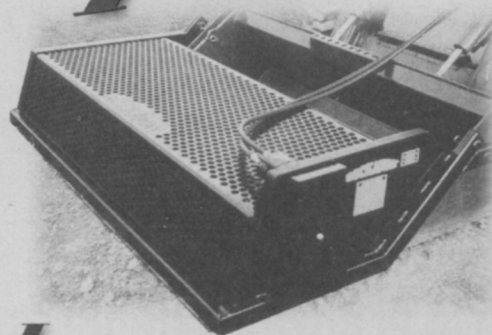
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Buhler Manufacturing B56 Wheel Loader

- Features include 76.8-inch wheel base, 51-inch cab width, 55-degree turn angle and 131-inch maximum turning radius
 - Four-wheel-drive unit articulates and oscillates for operation in tight spaces
 - Offers broad range of attachments for various tasks
 - Equipped with Kubota 56-hp, 4-cylinder turbo engine
 - Maximum torque reaches 2,200 rpm
 - Top driving speed is 15 mph
- Circle 213 on reader service card**

Ferris 4000Z Mower

- Available with 27-hp, liquid-cooled Kawasaki or 31-hp, liquid-cooled Daihatsu engine
- Ten-gauge, 61- or 72-inch mower deck with double top deck, double-reinforced side skirts with lap-welded corners
- Adjustable, 360-degree rotating anti-scalp rollers
- Twin 6.5-gallon fuel tanks
- Twin A-section drive belts
- Low center of gravity
- Foot-operated deck lift



Circle 214 on reader service card

Yazoo Kees ZT Max Mower

- Offers 23- and 25-hp Kohler and 23-hp Kawasaki engine options
- Large-frame, mid-mount mower is built on two-piece, 7- and 9-gauge tubular steel frame
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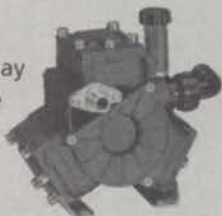
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USE READER SERVICE #142

Products

ASV RC-50 All-Surface Loader

- 50-hp Caterpillar 3024C engine offers operating capacity of 1,500 pounds
- Unit is 77 inches high, 60 inches wide and 128 inches long with a bucket
- Targets mid-sized skid steers that have horsepower between 44 and 56, weigh between 4,500 and 5,500 pounds and have an operating capacity of 1,350 and 1,600 pounds
- Weighs 4,700 pounds with a ground pressure of 2.7 pounds per square inch
- Crawls across lawns, leaving them virtually untouched and traverses mud, sand and other soft soil with ease
- Operates attachments such as backhoes, augers, dozer blades and trenchers
- Rubber-tracked undercarriage gives traction and stability

Circle 216 on reader service card



Spectrum Field Scout Soil Moisture Probe

- Fully portable, enabling user to gather information at several points across the field
- Features LCD display of soil moisture in two different modes: VWC and RWC



- VWC mode indicates the percentage of water in the soil at the sampling depth
- RWC mode, used for irrigation scheduling, does the same, but reports the result relative to user-defined wet and dry soil set points
- In RWC mode, the probe can also indicate the moisture deficit or how much water is needed to bring the level up to the wet set point

Circle 217 on reader service card

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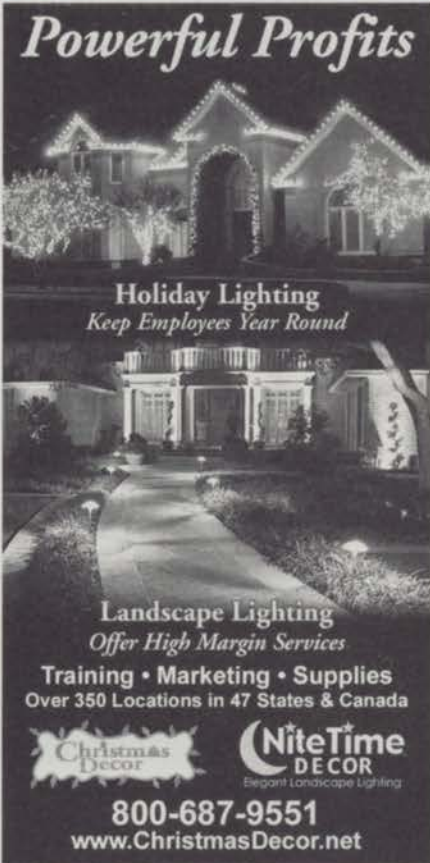
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Creating a Win-Win Bonus at Carver's

Years ago, I believed that if I simply offered bonuses and incentives to employees, I would spark a fire of great operational returns. I dangled the proverbial carrot in front of my employees and thought they would work harder and longer because they could see the reward. It worked – but only to a point. We got a lot more work done; the men loved the bonus system, and they put in lots of overtime, earning extra pay and bonuses. But all that really happened was that our employees became loyal to the dollar and not to the company.

After taking a long, hard look at our numbers, we found that with more than 100 employees and lots of work, we were losing money. Not only were we in financial straits, but also our employee turnover was horrendous and, worse yet, quality took a nosedive, hitting us where it hurt most – our hard-earned reputation.

Our approach seemed to be logical – we offered bonuses on the amount of jobs completed and we paid a lot of payroll and bonuses rewarding quantity.

Our problem? We did not understand the true meaning and critical importance of the efficient and profitable labor hour. True, you can get a lot of work completed and you can set up a bonus system for rewarding quantity, but the bottom line is that if you are not 100 percent sure of your company's numbers – bid estimates, company overhead and, most importantly, the need for a sufficient net recovery within the actual labor hours sold – you can lose your shirt, which we did.

So, I came up with a bonus plan that is the heart of our operations and wrapped an operations system around the bonus plan. Each hour of operations has potential for a bonus. The bonus is derived from saved or unused

budgeted hours that were estimated for each job, so when crews work smarter and harder – not longer – on a job, there is a windfall from the unused labor portion of the estimated hours sold and they are bonused on that saved time. Our payout for bonuses is normally time-and-a-half or even double-time on many jobs, as long as that employee completes his or her regular 40-hour workweek. In this system, our employees found out that they can make more money in 40 hours than they could have made working time and one-half over 40 hours.

Our bonus system is linked to our whole operations system. For example, when we estimate and schedule a job, we do not allow overtime to be calculated in – period.

We also set up a training program that teaches our comprehensive operations system to all of our employees. Since the bonus

is built-in, employees quickly learn how to bonus themselves and become our

partner in hitting maximum efficiency. This translates into real net profits. Also, one of the best bonuses within this system is that all our employees have lives of their own that the company doesn't pre-empt.

Our quality control is constantly trained and monitored but a natural built-in double check is also incorporated into this system. If we have a call back, the same crew that did the work the first time has to go back and correct it, cutting into their scheduled and mandatory 40-hour workweek. This prevents them from attempting to complete other scheduled jobs with the opportunity to come in under budget, thus eliminating additional bonuses from the available 40 hours of productive time. Perhaps one of the best qualities of our system is that our employees understand it, calculate their bonuses and take responsibility for themselves, their work and their bonuses. If they mess up on a job and have to go back to fix it, they pay the price with lost time. It is not adversarial, it is not management taking away a bonus and it is not at all like paying overtime, which rewards inefficiency and poor quality.

With this system, we are partners in profit with our employees and they with us. – Rick Carver

The author is president of Carver's Lawn & Landscape, New Castle, Del.

lawncandlandscape.com

See this article online for a pie chart on Carver's bonus program.

FIVE KEYS TO *Creating a Win-Win Bonus*

1. Devise a bonus plan that is wrapped around an operations system.
2. Give a bonus based on saved or unused budgeted time that is estimated for each job.
3. Do not allow overtime when estimating – keep the workweek to 40 hours.
4. Train employees so they understand the bonus program and operations system.
5. Link quality control to the total system.

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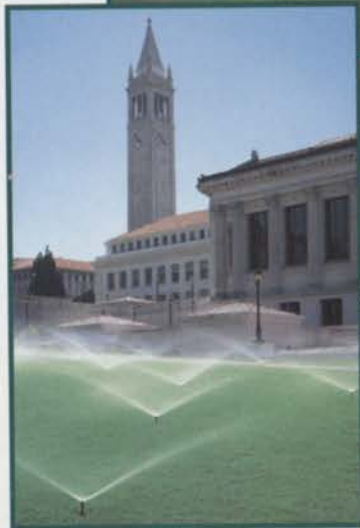
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