

WEEDS and TURF

PEST CONTROL

A SECTION OF PEST CONTROL MAGAZINE

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Home Lawns in Florida need year round care, and contract applicators are cashing in with improved methods and chemicals, author Tomasello says.

913 Florida Spraymen Gross \$25 Million Yearly

SOUTH Florida is unique in its mild, subtropical climate, and lawn insects and diseases flourish the year round. The cooler winter months find insects less active and less abundant but never completely dormant. However, such turf diseases as Brown Patch and Dollar Spot are most active during the winter. These and other factors make lawn and ornamental spraying not a seasonal, but a year round business.

A number of significant changes have taken place in the lawn and ornamental spraying business since 1928. During this early period,

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there was only one established spray company in Palm Beach County. Not until after World War II did the picture begin to change. Today this is a large and fast-growing industry. According to Frank L. Wilson, entomologist for the Florida State Board of Health, there are 913 certified lawn and ornamental spray companies in the state. The largest number of these companies are located in South Florida. Dade County has 248, Broward County

has 200, and Palm Beach County has 74. Wilson estimates that the gross income from lawn and ornamental spraying in Florida is between 20 and 25 million dollars a year.

Chinch Bug Spurs Industry Growth

The chinch bug, which is seriously damaging to St. Augustine grass, has been primarily responsible for the growth of the industry. Florida has grown rapidly in recent years. It is estimated that 5000 people are coming every week to make the state their home. Thousands of new houses are being built every year and most of



Tree spraying contracts are lucrative too, Florida sprayman Tomasello says. Once operators have the equipment and know-how, these big jobs can increase billings. Most major equipment manufacturers offer versatile high-power sprayers to enable contract applicators to diversify.

the lawns are planted to St. Augustine grass.

Chinch bugs have always been very difficult to control and the first effective insecticides were DDT, chlordane, and toxaphene, all of which became available at about the same time. Chinch bugs reproduce continuously in South Florida and homeowners soon learned that it was much more satisfactory, and in some cases cheaper, to have a commercial company spray their lawns than to try to control chinch bugs and other insects themselves.

Spraying for chinch bugs is by no means the only source of revenue for the industry. Such lawn pests as sodworms, armyworms, mole crickets, the hunting bill bug, Rhodes grass scale, and nematodes attack not only St. Augustine grass, but all of the other turf grasses planted in the state. Not only are insect pests damaging to turf grasses, but fungus diseases are widespread and destructive. Liquid fertilizing of lawns and correction of nutritional deficiencies are other important services offered to the homeowner. These services find widespread acceptance.

Long before effective insecticides were available to control

chinch bugs, the spraying of ornamentals and fruit trees was a profitable business. The desire of homeowners for more beautifully landscaped and maintained properties is creating an even greater demand for insect control on all landscaped materials. Fruit trees are widely planted and used in landscaping in South Florida and such trees as citrus, mangoes, and avocados must be properly sprayed and fertilized if they are to produce good crops and to be of ornamental value.

After several years of successful use, DDT began to lose its effectiveness against chinch bugs. Parathion was then discovered to be the most economical and best insecticide for killing chinch bugs and came into wide use by commercial spray operators over the entire state. Parathion is a highly poisonous material to man and warm-blooded animals. It had been reported to have caused the death of several people. When birds died, several dogs were lost, and there were cases of children having been made very sick following the spraying of lawns, a great deal of pressure was brought to bear on public health officials. In 1960 the Florida State Board of Health passed regulations governing commercial spraying of lawns and ornamentals in residential areas with highly toxic pesticides. Twelve insecticides were placed on this restricted list but only parathion was in wide use.

At the present time, less parathion is being used, not only because it is a restricted material, but because chinch bugs have become, in many lawns, highly resistant to it. Trithion has proven to be effective in most all cases of these resistant chinch bugs.

Spray Firms Offer Lawn Contracts

Most all spray companies offer contracts for the spraying of lawns and ornamentals. These contracts vary widely from company to company. Some companies have lawn spraying contracts that include the control of chinch bugs only. Additional charges are made when spraying for all other lawn pests. Some companies offer a contract for three sprayings a year, while others offer nine. Then there are those that offer once-a-month service. Many companies

give a contract to include the spraying of the lawn, vines, shrubs, and trees on a monthly basis to cover the control of insects and diseases, but not the control of nematodes. This is becoming the most popular contract and one that fills homeowner's needs.

Recently landscape and estate maintenance companies and nurseries have purchased power sprayers and have included the spraying of lawns and ornamentals as part of their service, while a smaller percentage of companies, starting out strictly as custom sprayers, have turned to selling nursery stock, sod grasses, garden supplies, and equipment. It appears that operators who restrict themselves to lawn spraying will be placed in an unfavorable position as new grasses, resistant to chinch bugs, become more widely planted and the complete estate maintenance service makes inroads in the custom spray business.

Slowly but surely the unethical operator, the poor business manager, the uninformed and the untrained custom spray operator will be weeded out by this competition. He will be replaced by more able and better qualified men. These men will know grasses; they will be horticulturist, botanist, entomologist, pathologist, nematologist, and merchandiser, and will reap the bounty of this rapidly growing market.

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