

**J**OB ESTIMATING is essentially the science of figuring the costs of a job and arriving at a dollar amount low enough to get the work, yet high enough to insure a profit. The difficulty is not to get the job. Anyone can do that by simply submitting a figure too low. It is then just a question of time how long you can afford to stay in business. On the other hand, you can insure never losing—just submit a high bid. Naturally, you will not get any bid work either.

The secret then is to hit that area where you can get the job and still make money. This area is a rather narrow band and getting narrower all the time. Often a contractor, wanting the work quite badly, will shave his final bid before submitting it. A study of highway contractors' bids showed that 90% of the successful bids would have been the low bid at 10% more money. This is lost revenue—lost profits, and in some cases the 10% is the profit. I have found this to be true in my own case, yet I constantly am tempted to cut those last few dollars. Don't do it!

### Two Types of Tree Care

In tree care today, the field is generally divided into two groups: the private homeowner, and the commercial or industrial customer. Some years back, by far the greatest amount of tree work came from large estates. Some retained a crew of men on a year-round basis. A few do today but the balance is changing. Larger estates are giving way to the millions of private homes and "small estates." Much of this work is seasonal; most of it of short duration. This then poses a problem of how to estimate a job that requires a crew of two or three men to prune deadwood out of one or two trees.

My approach to this problem is to insure, by fair treatment of the customer and reliable professional workmanship, that the customer will ultimately come to the conclusion that the fairest and cheapest way to get a small job done is to call and describe what he wants and just authorize you to do the work. I

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# Job Estimating in the Tree Business

By

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maintain that this is the most economical way to handle small jobs. You have an established hourly rate with a minimum time. The customer gets the benefit of the time saved by the omission of your trip over to submit a price. Time today is money. We do not use a contract in these cases.

### Are Contracts Necessary?

This approach to the small homeowner with his occasional job, and working without a contract has provoked quite a bit of discussion. Treemen seem to be fairly evenly divided on contract vs no contract. While they admit time could be saved by not bothering with a contract, they feel it is poor business. I maintain it is a calculated risk that enables a larger volume of business by fewer sales people. I also pointed out that the secret of the success of the whole procedure is that you must absolutely establish your reputation for fairness and professional workmanship. We must continue to give our customers the very finest of tree care and constantly strive to upgrade tree care methods.

In many customers' minds, there is a deeply embedded memory of being taken by someone years ago when they said, "Go ahead and fix it." Again I emphasize there is a difference in contractors. I believe that the majority of homeowners would dearly love to have a good reli-

able, trustworthy tree care company available, so that when the need came up, they could just pick up the phone and call — without the sparring and haggling over prices. We do not bargain with our doctors or dentists. Why shouldn't we receive the same professional respect?

### "Patsy" Bids

Another phase of job estimating covered was the field of the "patsy" or the "second bid" required by a superintendent of an estate or cemetery. Many of these people have the trust of their employers but the moral integrity of the lowest type. They have their favorite contractors who "take care of them" with kickbacks. The unfortunate part, of course, is that most of the time they must get two bids so they can "award" the bid to the lowest bidder. So you are called in and asked to submit a bid. The first inclination that all is not on the up and up is the vagueness of details. There are no written specs to work from. The superintendent waves his hands and points to this tree and that tree. The type of pruning or, in the case of spraying, the ingredients and number of applications are not discussed. These are all danger signals. My advice here is to politely decline to bid. You are just wasting your time. The crooked superintendent cannot be stopped. He is despicable, but here to stay as a living testimonial to the existence of blocks in the path of ethical progress.

### Dealing With Union Contractors

Job estimating when dealing with the large union contractor puts an entirely new face on the problem. Eighty to 85% of the tree care people, perhaps even higher, do not work with union employees. A few do sometimes, but none all the time. Again, the criteria is to know fully all the costs and to read the fine print very carefully. Do not sign a contract without full legal counsel. I did this in 1962, and am still trying to collect \$12,000.00 for work our firm did and for which the contractor received payment from the State of New

York, so I know. I have been there before.

### Today's Records, Tomorrow's Reference

Of vital importance in the estimating field is the keeping of job records. After successfully getting the bid, complete daily records are a must. At the end of the work, an analysis should be made and a cost accounting studied. When complete, you will know if you made any money, where you might have been weak, and where, if the same job comes up again, you can use the data wisely.

This constant and changing cost picture must be continuously reviewed and applied if you are to be accurate in your estimate.

In conclusion, my position is very clear. Sound knowledge of the science of bidding plus a well-trained work force and good equipment are all necessary. Combine this with the very highest code of ethics and you must succeed. We have operated too long in the shadow of suspicion because some conniver could not resist a fast buck. Our customers are our livelihood. They deserve to be treated with the utmost respect. Our future is what we make it. and without ethics we have no future.

### Colorado Rains May Increase Plant Disease Problems

Persistent moisture, high humidity, relatively cool nights and heavy dews are favoring the growth of powdery mildew, warns Dr. L. E. Dickens, extension plant pathologist at Colorado State University.

The disease is a grayish powdery mold which covers leaves of many garden flowers, lawn grass, shrubs and trees.

The best control measure, Dr. Dickens explains, is application of protective chemicals before any signs of mildew appear. If this is not possible, plants should be sprayed or dusted immediately after mildew is detected.

Recommended fungicides include dusting sulfur (300 mesh), Acti-dione PM (2 tbsp. per gal-

lon of water), Karathane WD (2 tbsp. per 3 gallons of water), or micronized wettable sulfur (1 tbsp. per gallon of water).

Dusting sulfur should be applied when the air is still and the foliage is dry. Avoid heavy deposits of dust on the leaves and do not apply sulfur (either dust or wettable powder) when temperatures reach 85 degrees. This will prevent leaf burn, the CSU specialist points out.

Fungicides should be applied at weekly intervals. Add a wetting agent such as Triton B-1956 to spray mixes for better coverage. For small scale applications, one teaspoonful of liquid detergent or one tablespoonful of powdered detergent per gallon of spray mix will act as a wetting agent.

Read fungicide labels carefully before using the materials, Dr. Dickens suggests.

### Vigorous Growth Key to Rust Control in Merion

Rust in Merion bluegrass lawns can be kept at a minimum if vigorous healthy growth is maintained, reports Dr. R. E. Partyka, Ohio State University



A grass paint said to make browned-out areas in turf look like natural growth has been formulated for large-quantity users by Luminall Paints, Inc. Sold under the name Lawn Tint, the product is reported to be harmless to children, pets, and surrounding vegetation; can be applied with other turf treatment programs, and can be watered following application. Technical data, including application specifications, may be obtained by writing Luminall Paints, Inc., 3850 West Side Ave., North Bergen, N. J. 07047.

### Dacagin Makes Bow

Special Dacagin demonstration kits were sent to 400 grounds maintenance men so that they could see for themselves how easily and quickly Dacagin turns thin weedkilling spray solutions into sticky gels.

Diamond Alkali Co., Cleveland, Ohio, says this new weedkiller additive was developed by them specifically for use with Dacamine, Fence Rider, Crop Rider, and Line Rider weedkillers. Use of Dacagin with weedkillers greatly reduces the danger of overspray and wind-carried herbicide to crops, grass, and other wanted growth.

Made in powder form, Dacagin is mixed with diesel oil or kerosene and then with the solution of weedkiller and water. The resulting mixture stays fluid under agitation, but turns into a gel as it is sprayed, Diamond reports.

Complete details will be sent to those who write Diamond Alkali at 300 Union Commerce Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio 44115.

extension plant pathologist. He also reveals that the Merion variety of Kentucky bluegrass is more susceptible to rust than the common varieties.

The disease often becomes a problem in late summer, Partyka says. Early symptoms appear as a light yellow flecking of the leaves. As the areas enlarge, they elongate and appear in rows parallel with the veins of the leaves. The spots then burst and a reddish brown pustule develops. When an infected leaf is rubbed between the fingers, a red brown or yellow powder will be noticed. This powder is composed of millions of tiny spores which are the "seeds" of the fungus.

If rust appears, begin fungicide applications at 7-day intervals or more often if the disease is severe. Materials to use include Acti-dione-Thiram, or Zineb. Follow the directions of the manufacturer as shown on the label.