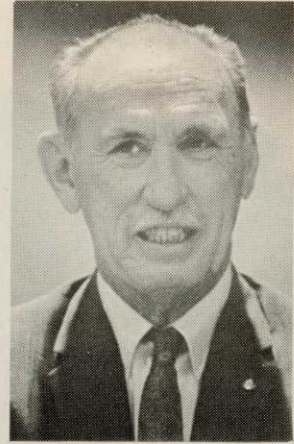


By RAY GUSTIN, JR.
Gustin Gardens, Inc.
Gaithersburg, Md.



MAINTENANCE:

Stepchild of Landscaping

THERE ARE THREE children in our landscape family. We've named them "*Design, Construction, and Maintenance.*"

Design is a well-organized character. He possesses much talent, great artistic ability, many original ideas—some not too practical, perhaps—yet necessary. By and large, he is respected by the public and by the rest of the family as being capable of great accomplishments.

Construction is the one we probably understand best. He has a very practical sense of direction, possesses great engineering ability, likes to see things done efficiently. He does not always get along too well with *Design*, but because it's all in the family their differences usually can be resolved.

Then there is *Maintenance*. Sometimes the other members of the family deny his existence, as though he were illegitimate. Sometimes he is tolerated, but seldom embraced. This is why I've entitled this discussion: "Maintenance—Stepchild of Landscaping."

It seems that people who write specifications and people who have contract authority don't realize that plants are living things that need good care after planting. Present methods parallel the man who's in the hospital for a delicate surgical operation. Proper diagnosis is performed, skillful surgeon engaged, sophisticated equipment used. Great care is taken to prevent infection and the operation is successful. Then almost before the patient is out of the anesthetic, the doctor says: "You are fine. Get dressed

and go back to work!"

I'm afraid that's the way we sometimes treat plants.

In Maryland's beautification program involving millions of dollars, most federal money was appropriated for highway planting. Not one cent of that money could be spent for landscape maintenance. Efforts to change the allocation to include post-installation care failed.

Plants take quite a beating in transplanting operations. Feeder root damage in digging. Transportation hardship. Unfavorable planting conditions. Planting delays because of construction halts.

Add to this the possibility of poor soil conditions and you can begin to understand the amount of shock a plant must overcome to fulfill its intended purpose.

Plants want to live. After working closely with them for nearly 50 years, I freely confess an affinity for them. Probably this is why I crusade for better plant care.

Bid Maintenance + Cost

Let's separate landscape maintenance from landscape construction. These activities should be performed separately by different people with special skills.

We have got to convince architects and others that write job specifications that landscape maintenance is a cost item and should be so bid.

You and I may be bidding the same job, for example. Let's assume you bid to make an allowance of 15% for maintenance and guarantee.

I figure a smaller amount, or none at all. Perhaps I figure the Good Lord will take care of maintenance. I get the job on a lower lump sum bid. You can see what might happen. The job may not look too well in a few months.

Plants can look really sick before they either die or start moving ahead. If planting was one bid and maintenance an alternate bid, I believe the contracting authority would be in a much better position to compare bids and the jobs, with properly scheduled maintenance.

At a recent meeting of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, architects expressed a desire to somehow obtain better landscape maintenance. They are artists, and they want the finished job to look the way they had pictured it.

Separate Maintenance Crews

How do you implement the concept of separating landscape construction and landscape maintenance? Here's how we're doing it:

We had realized a lot of our jobs weren't looking too well. Ones we could point to with pride often were those where the client had good maintenance people taking care of his property.

Too many of our jobs looked well immediately after completion, then looked pretty horrible a few months later. In these cases, maintenance was entrusted to unskilled labor, such as janitors, porters, or others who knew little or nothing about plant care.

Prior to establishing a landscape

ments, renewing of mulches, checking root conditions for drainage or aeration, etc.

When a planting job is completed, a copy of the job sheet is given to the maintenance superintendent. The job is scheduled. We try to give the first inspection and service about one month after the planting is completed. We plan to give at least two additional services during the year. We make a point to see the client each time a service is performed. We've found it beneficial to give him a report, plus tips on such things as watering. Quite often the client is interested in additional planting, in which case the landscape salesman is notified.

One big plus we failed to fully recognize when we started the service was the big improvement in customer relations. Clients sometimes are actually shocked to see us appear on the property to check back on our jobs without them having to call us.

What about the economics of the concept?

Maintenance and guarantee are cost items and should be built into

every job. In these days of close competitive bidding, it is important to keep this cost to a minimum.

We know our clients, or most of them, realize they have made a substantial investment. They feel inadequate to give the plant material the care it needs to keep it alive and looking well. When we used to pull off from our jobs, I believe we left some customers with a big question mark and a little worry.

I believe many of our customers are willing to pay well for good maintenance. If we are unable to provide it, we have not met our responsibilities. This is particularly true on industrial and commercial properties where general maintenance is a budgeted item.

Unless maintenance is contracted for at the time of installation or contracted for at the completion, our gratis service is limited to inspection and replacements where needed. Since organizing our maintenance section, our replacements have dropped greatly.

In most cases, our maintenance is seasonal, and does not include such services as grass cutting, frequent watering, snow removal, etc. There

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are exceptions. Maintenance contracts are fairly easy to sell, and at a good price. We charge just as much per manhour for maintenance as for our other operators.

We keep accurate records on work performed by our maintenance section. We know what it costs in labor, equipment and materials. We know that the profits on the work we get paid for exceeds the cost of the gratis work of inspections and replacements. We believe the end result is a better service, improved customer relations and perhaps most of all puts each branch of service in its proper perspective.

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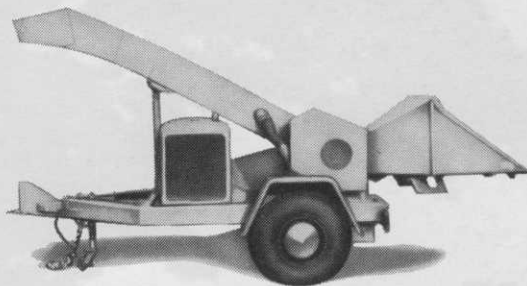
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