



## Forklifts Speed Landscaping, Help Control Costs

Machines that became an operational necessity with the advent of palletized sod have since proved a key element in the growth of a Chicago-area landscape contractor. By deploying a spread of rough-terrain forklifts to handle sod and a variety of nursery stock on its projects, the contractor has speeded work and controlled costs on its landscape contracts.

Forklifts became a required tool for Lawrence & Ahlman, Inc., Dundee, Ill., when Chicago-area sod growers began handling sod rolls on pallets to help overcome labor shortages and spiralling costs. Prior method was all by hand, proving both time consuming and costly for sod farmer and landscaper.

Since pallets, the contractor dispatches its four forklifts to sodding projects to unload and strategically place sod pallets for its crews to go to work.

But while the machines performed their primary function of pallet handling, the contractor saw

*Above: As the forklift backs slowly down the roadside, two installers drop and evenly space rolls of fresh sod.*

additional material handling assignments that would increase versatility on the job and free other equipment for additional tasks. In addition to unloading and spotting sod pallets, the forklifts are also used at Lawrence & Ahlman's yard and nursery for handling balled and burlapped nursery stock.

Lawrence & Ahlman tackles a job from design to finished product. Most of their work requires grade preparation for sodding or seeding and final landscaping. Once grading is finished and soil has been prepared, the contractor carefully plans remaining work to control costs and assure timely completion.

"The essence of a landscaping project, no matter what kind of job it is," says Ron Ahlman, co-founder and vice president, "is speed. Sod, more than any other product, is a highly perishable commodity, and if left rolled or unwatered, will soon smother and could die in just a couple of hot days. The idea is to get sod laid and new trees planted as quickly as possible."

To do that, sod transported to projects from the sod farm on a

tractor-trailer is quickly off-loaded by one of the forklifts on the job. On each 40-foot-long flatbed trailer, 14 pallets containing as much as 1,000 yards of fresh sod must be removed quickly to free the transport for other hauls. Each pallet can weight up to 2,800 pounds.

The forklift will remove and carry the first pallets to workmen for laying, then return to finish off-loading the trailer. The unit takes less than 20 minutes to completely remove pallets and station them nearby. Once the trailer is off-loaded, the forklifts are used to lift and carry pallets to the landscaping crews.

The contractor assigns an average crew of six men for each 1,000 yards of sod that has to be placed and estimates each crew can place up to 2,000 yards in a normal eight hour shift. Trees and shrubs are planted by at least two men, depending on the size and weight of the plant.

All sodding projects require at least one forklift to handle pallets and assist crews. Lawrence &

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Ahlman recently completed an environmental project along a 2 1/2 mile stretch of Route 68 near Arlington Heights, Ill. The job called for installation of 40,000 square yards of sod in the median strip and along the right-of-way of the recently improved highway.

To handle the project, Lawrence & Ahlman sent a 10-man crew equipped with utility truck, an International tractor loader and one of its forklifts. On a typical day the crew moved into action with the forklift maneuvering in and out of traffic, carrying pallets of sod to the installers.

Two or more workmen removed sod rolls from the pallet, dropped and spaced them evenly as the forklift backed slowly down the roadside. The rest of the crew followed along unrolling and fitting the strips of sod. Once the pallet was empty, the forklift then tracked 200 yards back to a nearby parking lot to pick up another pallet of fresh sod.

The tractor loader on the job site preceeded sodding operations by clearing and grading sections that had to be landscaped. Later in the day, once large enough sections were sodded, Lawrence & Ahlman's tanker made several sweeps past spraying the freshly greened areas with water.

A few miles south of the highway project a second Lawrence & Ahlman crew was completing sod installation of an open space in the center of a new apartment development. The second project called for 7,000 square yards of sod and required an eight-man crew along with another of the contractor's forklifts.

The rough terrain forklifts in Lawrence & Ahlman's equipment spread have proved to be an integral factor to the contractor's successful operations. The machines are an effective time and money-saver and their use on many projects frees wheel loaders for other assignments.

"Forklifts are ideally suited to landscaping operations," attests Ahlman. "Each of these units easily handles sod pallets weighing up to 1 1/2 tons, and can negotiate a site to

place loads where we need them, saving considerable time and expense.

"Many times, we're at a site that has obstructions like curbs or timber. Using pallets and the forks to lift-and-carry eliminates the need for a crew to help fill a wheel loader's bucket. And these rough-terrain forklifts climb a curb with no trouble at all. Because of their versatility, we can schedule equipment for other uses and eliminate idle machine time."

The units are equipped with manual shuttle transmissions and can safely lift up to 4,000 lb. Each machine is equipped with a 42 hp Perkins gas engine and two-stage 10 foot mast. The units Lawrence & Ahlman use are manufactured by Massey-Ferguson, Inc., Des Moines, Iowa.

Lawrence & Ahlman began operations 17 years ago, specializing in residential landscaping. Since then, the contractor has grown to an annual contract volume exceeding \$1 million. During peak months the company employs more than 100 people and operates primarily within a 75-mile radius of metropolitan Chicago.

The contractor's projects vary from municipal contracts, highway sodding and planting, to golf courses, industrial parks, shopping malls, and university campuses. Sod, tree and shrub planting comprise the bulk of Lawrence & Ahlman's material handling requirements and call for mobile equipment to handle and place the stock on the job. □

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Forklift picks up a fresh pallet of sod to carry 200 yards up the road to installers.

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