

Digital Dominance

Electrical and mechanical controllers, move over. Solid state is making its presence felt in the irrigation industry.

by Jack Schember

"If it sells in California, it'll sell anywhere."

This often-quoted axiom may be accurate in describing the phenomenal success of the waterbed, hot tub and Apple computer, but will it ring true for the solid-state irrigation controller?

Manufacturers of irrigation equipment think so. They believe the digital controller will be a big hit with the nation's landscape architects and contractors.

The solid-state controller is already a hit in California. According to a survey by Irri-Trol Mfg. Inc., 70 percent of the irrigation market in California is using solid-state controllers while 30 percent are employing the electrical or mechanical versions.

"But the reverse is true once you get outside California," says Irri-Trol's Chuck Hoover. "Here we found that 30 percent were using solid-state and 70 percent were still using electrical or mechanical.

These odds help pinpoint a potentially huge market for sophisticated irrigation equipment, according to Hoover. "I think solid-state will be big everywhere pretty soon," he says.

Components dominate

Hoover was one of the more than 300 manufacturers and distributors exhibiting landscape supplies and equipment at the 1985 Landscape Industry Show which took place in March at the Long Beach (California) Convention Center.

Produced by the California Landscape Contractors Association, the sixth annual trade show attracted more than 5,000 professional contractors, architects and turf managers, according to Greg Meyer, show chairman.

"There is no other show in the West as diverse as this one," says Meyers, who is vice president of Valley Crest Tree Co.

"We have everything here from A to Z for the landscaper."



Greg Meyer, vice president of Valley Crest Tree Co.

Irrigation components dominated the show floor.

More than 35 companies were exhibiting irrigation products like backflow preventors, fittings, PVC pipe, drains, drip emitters, filters, pumps, sprinklers, controllers, valves and meters.

Water is lifeblood

Such displays of irrigation parts are not unusual at the yearly Landscape Industry Show, for in the arid West, water is the lifeblood of landscaping.

"Everything is irrigated here," says Mark Pedicone, a sales representative for the turf division of Rain Bird. "For a built landscape, water is essential."

With a construction boom and a strong economy in key Western cities, there is plenty of business for the irrigation industry," Pedicone says.

"There is a demand for more "localized" irrigation products. Landscape architects are designing smaller parcels of property and are specifying that zone watering and low volume irrigation be implemented. Products marketed for this style of irrigation include bubblers, drip emitters and micro spray heads.

The "water manager" is beginning to appear as a viable member of the landscaping work force. Such a specialist will typically approach a homeowner's association or a city planner

and propose a water savings plan. The water manager is compensated according to how much he can reduce the water bill. "This is a big trend," Pedicone says.

New to the market is a line of valves and nozzles that makes irrigation "more efficient," says Chuck Turmell of Champion Sprinkler Co.

Champion's new In-line Y Valve, for example, reduces pressure loss and improves the flow of water, Turmell says.

"We have a line of pop-up sprinklers with matched precipitation-rate nozzles," he points out. "Even though the nozzle sizes are different, the lawn still gets the same amount of water."

Joe Silva of Hunter Industries says the landscape manager wants to simplify his sprinkler inventory and find one sprinkler "that can do it all."

Hunter's new Professional Series sprinklers can apply water from a 15-foot radius to a 52-foot radius, and from one-half gallon per minute to 1 1/2 gallons per minute, thanks to interchangeable nozzles.

"The contractor can get 12 sprinklers in one, Silva says.

Hunter is planning to market a fully adjustable head with one nozzle for a multiplicity of uses, he indicates.

Solid-state controllers, zone watering, irrigation management and versatile nozzles are not the only trends to catch the fancy of the Western landscaping industry.

Larger trees

Greg Meyer of Valley Crest Tree Co. says architects are now regularly specifying larger trees for commercial sites.

"Budgets are now calling for 15-gallon and 24-gallon trees, rather than the popular five gallon trees of yesterday," he says.

At Belcourt, a swanky residential development in Newport Beach, CA, "contractors were putting in 48-inch box specimen trees like they were as inexpensive as groundcover," Meyer

TURF VAC®

Only sweeper for both turf and pavement. Grass, glass and trash... wet or dry. Sweeping widths from 4 to 10 ft. Self-propelled and tow-type, both with ground dump and power lift dump.



Riding Model 80



Model FM-5 with hand intake hose

SANDANCER®

Versatile multi-purpose work vehicle. Hill-climbing 18 h.p. gas engine with a unique power train that eliminates stripped gears and burned-out clutches. Three models and a wide selection of options allow you to build a SANDANCER to match your work needs.



3 or 4 wheel models

Write for brochures and distributor in your area.



TURF VAC CORPORATION

P.O. Box 90129
Long Beach, CA 90809
(213) 426-9376

Circle No. 148 on Reader Inquiry Card

remembers. The trees cost about \$800 each, he says.

Sophistication

Pointing to other trends, Meyer believes there is a direct relationship between landscaping and real estate marketing.

"Landscaping is worth the initial investment because it will pay off handsomely once the building or house is sold," he says.

Many landscape architects and contractors are working closely with developers in building corporate office parks where landscaping is used to lure clients, Meyer confirms.

In short, Meyer says, the industry is becoming more sophisticated, "even down to the homeowner level." He says homeowners are demanding quality workmanship and this in turn breeds higher standards for the industry."

He says the West will continue to be "a haven for architects and landscape contractors" as long as the climate, economy and the outdoor-oriented lifestyles of the people remain unchanged. **WT&T**

Jack Schember is the former editor of *Western Landscape News*.



**ATRINAL®
CAN CUT
LABOR
COSTS
IN HALF.**



Atrinal® controls plant growth, so you can get fuller, better-looking trees, shrubs, bushes and ornamentals. With up to half the pruning and trimming costs. Start cutting your costs now, send in this ad for complete information or call The Marketing Department collect at 1-305-567-7506.

NAME _____

FIRM _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

PHONE _____

Nursery Grounds Maintenance

Tree Care Other _____

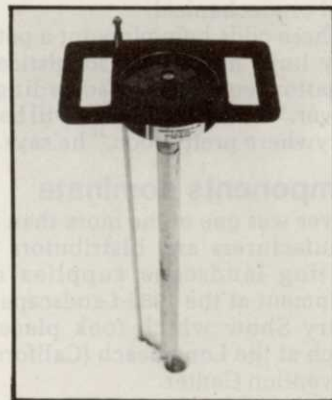
Maag Agrochemicals, Inc. • 5699 Kings Highway
P.O. Box 6430 • Vero Beach, Florida 32961-6430
© 1985 Maag, Inc. WTT-85

Circle No. 123 on Reader Inquiry Card

The Holekey Pokey

(Soil Hardness Gauge)

\$139.00



- Designed to help determine best time to aerate.
- Colored dial easily read for good, fair, and poor aerating conditions.
- Depth gauge for more accurate reading.

An invaluable tool for the lawn care personnel aerating home lawns, it can be used for many other applications. For more information, please write:

Terracare Products Co., Inc.
P.O. Box 506-Pardeeville, WI 53954
Phone 608-429-3402

Circle No. 159 on Reader Inquiry Card