

# TECH CENTER

## Responding to the drought

### Here's how to make the drought of 1991, now a mere memory, pay handsomely.

by Jeff Lefton, Ph.D., Purdue University

■ The drought of 1991 is history, but in many parts of the country its aftermath still brings opportunities. Listed below are tips to help maximize customer satisfaction during the months ahead.

● Make customer contact during the winter via letter or phone call. The highest cancel group will be the customers in the two-year-or-less group. Make phone contact with these customers, asking them about their upcoming needs for the spring. This should be a proactive experience.

● Lawns with less than 50 percent turf are prime candidates for dormant seeding. This can be started when the soil temperatures drop to 40 degrees or below. Use a customer leave-behind to explain that the seed will not germinate until late spring. Weed control should not be used until the new seedlings are well established.

● An early winter fertilization coupled with a middle- to late-fall fertilization will help thicken lawns. For maximum effect, it should be applied before the turf browns in the early winter.

● Consider starting the early spring production with a granular fertilizer. This will give seedlings a boost. In addition, a three-year study at Purdue University has demonstrated that a standard amine salt formulation of a broadleaf herbicide will not show acceptable weed control until late spring. In this same study, the ester formulation was effective about two weeks earlier.

● Use a standard three-way broadleaf herbicide on established turf that has not



been seeded. A research study at Michigan State University showed acceptable weed control in East Lansing through mid-November. This might be important in some areas to help reduce the winter annual (common chickweed and henbit) populations.

● Consider a soil testing service in the early spring. This could include the garden area, ornamental beds or the lawn itself. Identify a good soil test lab and use its expertise in setting up this program.

● Deep root fertilization and pruning are services that should be made available to landscape customers.

● Attend as many technical meetings as possible during the winter. Take all of your employees. After the training session, have a branch meeting and ask, "What did we learn that can make us better?"

Remember that the customer buys your service for two reasons: (1) to feel better about his or her property, and (2) to get solutions to problems. During the months ahead, ask your employees to target their thinking on these factors. Make 1992 a proactive, successful year.

### Xeriscaping: Is it the answer?

The seasonal droughts of recent years have focused the public's eye on water-saving landscapes employing xeriscaping techniques.

by Dr. Eliot C. Roberts

■ Town ordinances are being considered in most all parts of the country that would force developers to use xeriscaping techniques when they construct new homes and other structures.

Xeriscaping is a landscaping approach  
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