

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

Emergency relief!

Mid-season rescues of dying lawns are grounds for good customer relations, to say nothing of new customers!

■ It's rounding June, heading for July.

You think you've got control of the summer schedule, when you get a frantic call from some guy who says his lawn is a mess. The reason his name doesn't ring a bell is that you've never worked on his lawn. He was always one of those "it's-too-expensive-and-I-enjoy-doing-it-myself" guys.

But what a summer. Too much rain. Disease. Insects. It was all too much for the average do-it-yourselfer. If only he had hired you in the fall to rejuvenate his tired old turf and put him on a preventive program, it wouldn't look so bad now.

But you agree to help, in the interest of human relations.

Like new—"That's the nature of our business," says Jim Anderson, All-Seasons Service, Itasca, Ill., when asked about mid-season lawn rescues. But the results aren't always the same. The amount of life a crew can breathe back into a damaged lawn, says Anderson, "depends on the time of year they get the call."

"Every year is a little bit different," says Kathy Juntgen of Emerald Green, Fort Wayne, Ind.

"[Homeowners] call when the dandelions get out of hand, and they panic; or else they had another company that mistreated the lawn, or they themselves made a mistake," says Juntgen, who's in business with her husband, Steve. "There have also been times when chinch bugs were a serious problem."

The usual plan of action for a lawn rescue involves slit seeding, fertilizing, and plenty of water, which is the biggest mistake homeowners make. When high utility bills threaten, people just don't water

enough in hot, dry weather. For weed or insect problems, standard practice is to use the appropriate control product.

"Within 60 to 90 days, we can have it back in shape," says Anderson. "Some lawns are totally gone, but that doesn't mean we can't do anything to revive them."

"Lawn care has come a long way, so you don't see lawns in that bad of condition in this day and age," explains Juntgen. "People will call for advice, we tell them

what to do and they they go out and do what they wanted to all along."

Winning them over—Anderson has had great success in keeping these mid-season converts as long term customers. He says every one whose lawn he saves remains a customer "for years afterwards."

Emerald Green also has a good conversion rate. "We're a smaller company," says Kathy, "that goes more on service than volume." So it can easily find room on its roster for new acquisitions.

—Terry McIver

COMPLAINTS AS OPPORTUNITIES

■ If a customer—a landscape client, a member of the golf course, a citizen using one of your athletic fields—has a complaint, you have a tremendous opportunity to build customer loyalty.

A survey by the U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs shows that when complaints are successfully resolved, 73 percent of the complainers would buy that product or service again.

Conversely, when customers had minor problems but did not complain, nearly 67 percent would not buy the same product or service again. The three reasons mentioned most often for not complaining were:

- It wasn't worth their time and effort.
- They believed complaining wouldn't do any good.
- They didn't know how to or where to address complaints.

To handle complaints successfully:

- 1) Listen.
- 2) Sympathize.
- 3) Avoid justifying or making excuses.
- 4) Ask questions.
- 5) Agree on a course of action.
- 6) Inform and involve others who need to know.
- 7) Monitor the progress in resolving the complaint.