

Landscape managers digging into new growing medium

by James E. Guyette

■ Landscape managers in Texas are digging into a new highly efficient planting medium that is cheaper than peat moss. "It's never been done before, but it's an excellent product and it's very economical," reports Gary Kinney of Kinney Bonded Warehouse, a horticultural supply firm in Donna, Texas.

"The local landscape trade here is using it and I've sold all of our crop potential so far," says Kinney. The material comes from kenaf, a tall, leafy, fibrous plant closely related to the hibiscus. Until now kenaf (pronounced "kuh-NAFF") has been used mainly for cattle feed, rope and newsprint.

It holds high hopes for the landscape industry, according to Kinney and Dr. Yin Tung Wang, a horticultural scientist at the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station in Westlaco.

Previously the core of the kenaf plant was usually discarded, "but we researched it as a potting medium and it worked," says Kinney.

"The whole idea," Wang explains, "was to reduce production costs by using kenaf in the potting medium instead of peat moss, which is expensive and must be shipped in from Canada.

"But our research showed that to keep the desired properties of the mix, we still had to blend in some peat moss. So the challenge was to determine the maximum proportion of kenaf, while at the same time providing a healthy growing medium for plants."

After almost three years of research, that proper proportion turned out to be an approximate mixture of 70 percent kenaf and 30 percent peat moss.

"There are a few other minor ingredients in there such as wetting agents and time-released fertilizers, but that 70/30 mixture works quite well and keeps cost low," according to Wang. The bulk kenaf product sells for \$14.50 per cubic yard;



The kenaf processing plant is able to reproduce any type mix that anybody in the landscaping business might ever want to order.

peat moss is \$21 to \$25 per cubic yard.

Harvesting of the first-ever landscape-oriented kenaf crop began last fall on a 750-acre spread. It soon sold out and more is being planted.

This year's kenaf harvest will produce some 20,000 to 22,000 cubic yards of material for use as a planting medium, but Kinney anticipates needing more than 100,000 cubic yards at full production to meet the demand.

It is being processed at the new Kenaf International Plant north of Weslaco, and Kinney plans to construct a building adjacent to Kenaf International this spring to house a \$150,000 mixing facility. "With that mixing equipment, we'll be able to reproduce any type mix anybody in the (landscaping) business would want," Kinney says.

Kenaf originated in Africa and was brought to the Rio Grande Valley in the 1920s and '30s. In a few months, kenaf grows from a small seed to a 15-foot-tall plant. If harvested early, the leaves can be used as cattle feed. But in the Rio Grande Valley, the kenaf industry uses kenaf stems—not leaves—so the plant is allowed to grow to maturity. The kenaf bark, known as bast, is high in fiber. It is stripped, compressed, baled and sent to a

paper mill in North Carolina, where is used to make high-quality newsprint. Once the bark is stripped and shipped, the stem core is then ground into fine particles that are mixed with peat moss and other materials to form the growing medium.

Kenaf byproducts are also used for wallboard and the dashboards of automobiles, and research is being conducted on the material for large-scale vegetable production. Currently landscape contractors and nursery applications are the biggest agricultural users.

"The future looks very bright," says Kinney. "If you look at it it takes some imagination, but as a growing medium it's working quite well."

For more information:

● K-Mix, 102 N. 13th St., Donna, Texas 78537; (210) 464-4491

● Kenaf International, 120 E. Jay Ave., McAllen, Texas 78504; (210) 687-2619

● Weslaco Texas A&M Ag. Experiment Station, Dr. Yin Tung Wang, Dept. of Hort., 2415 E. Highway 83, Weslaco, Texas 78596; (210) 968-5585

—The author is a contributing editor to *Landscape Management*. His freelance writing business is based in South Euclid, Ohio.

Paul Harvey's attacks: will they never end?

WASHINGTON—Radio commentator Paul Harvey launched his third verbal salvo in the past 12 months at the golfing industry. On March 14th, he opened his remarks with this allegory:

"If there were snakes in the grass of your golf course, there'd be a loaded shotgun in your golf bag."

He then proceeded to liken the golf industry's use of pesticides to the tobacco industry's claims about their products. He also said that there might be lawsuits in golf's future.

Harvey cited Jerome Blondell of the EPA, and a recent study in the "American Journal of Public Health."

He said that researchers are "particularly critical of chemicals 2,4-D and carbaryl and diazinon." What he did not include in his broadcast was that researchers did not ask, in their most recent study, what chemicals were used—they assumed that 2,4-D, carbaryl and diazinon were "most likely to be used."

He also did not note the statement of

the man who led the most recent study, as quoted in the "USA Today" newspaper:

"It's only a suggestion (of an association between home pesticides and cancer in children). You cannot infer cause and effect at all...further research needs to be done."

Harvey concluded his bombastic diatribe with: "Golf clubs and their USGA cannot hide behind the EPA any more."

Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment, a trade association composed of pesticide manufacturers, issued a memo to members saying:

"He (Harvey) is on a campaign against our industry, and is willing to misuse any information he can to paint a negative picture. He has been totally unreceptive to industry input.

"If any member has ideas on how we can influence Mr. Harvey, please contact RISE. He has a large audience, and his attacks are having an effect. He has already refused to discuss the issue with industry."

—Jerry Roche

INFO CENTER

Useful literature and videos for the green industry

BEING A PROFESSIONAL..."Professional Landscape Management" by David L. Hensley defines the true landscape manager and also extends to specifications and contracts required by architects. It is available for \$24.80 from Stipes Publishing, 10-12 Chester St., Champaign, IL 61820. Phone (217) 356-8391.

SPRAY DRIFT?...A new, easy-to-use pocket guide helps pesticide spray applicators configure their equipment to maximize its effectiveness and minimize chances for wind-borne spray drift. Using the guide, applicators match spray speed with application rate to determine tips and pressures that produce droplet sizes that are less likely to drift. To get your free copy, write to Drift Manager Offer, Spraying Systems Ag Division, P.O. Box 7900, Wheaton, IL 60189.

ABOUT TREES...The American Society of

Nurserymen has "Selecting Trees, A Guide to Purchasing Quality Trees as a Wise Investment" available. The 16-page publication is \$7, with bulk pricing available. Write AAN, 1250 I St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005 or phone (202) 789-2000. Also, from the International Society of Arboriculture comes "Tree Climbers' Guide" for \$30, "Tree Pruning Guidelines" for \$12 and "Treesource Volume 2" (of a video resource library) for \$25. For info, write or call the ISA: P.O. Box GG, Savoy, IL 61874; (217) 355-9411.

SKID-STEER TRAINING...The Melroe Company offers a skid-steer loader training kit for \$125 that includes a three-part video tape, five course handbooks, an administrator's guide EMI safety manual and more. Send orders to Melroe Co., P.O. Box 6019, Fargo, ND 58108 or phone (701) 241-8700.

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS

APRIL

24: Envirotron Golf Classic, World Woods Resort, Homosassa Springs, Fla. Phone: Glenn Oberlander, (904) 795-7017.

30-May 2: Menninger Tree Conference, Harry P. Leu Gardens, Orlando, Fla. Phone: Linda Van Der Zee, (407) 345-8137.

MAY

1-3: Southeastern Turfgrass Conference, Tifton, Ga. Phone: Jeanne Werner, (912) 386-3416.

2-3: Microscopic Identification of Turfgrass Diseases workshops, Cook College, Rutgers University. Phone: (908) 932-9271.

4-5: Tree Care Seminar by Dr. Alex Shigo, Greater Columbus (Ohio) Convention Center. Phone: Tree Care Educators, (503) 254-0482.

5-8: American Institute of Architects National Convention and Expo, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta. Phone: Katherine McQuay, (202) 626-7467.

15-25: California Assoc. of Nurserymen's Horticultural Study Tour to Canada. Phone: Harvest Travel International, (800) 227-0464.

21-23: "Trees, People and the Law" Conference, Nebraska City, Neb. Phone: Kathy Austin, (402) 474-5655.

24-26: Color Magic, Walt Disney World. Phone: Florida Nurserymen & Grower's Assn., (407) 345-8137.

Restricted Use record-keeping is changed

WASHINGTON—According to the American Association of Nurserymen, the USDA changed its Restricted Use pesticide record-keeping laws, which—unless delayed by the passage of H.R. 450—take effect May 11th.

Key changes: Restricted Use pesticide applications must be recorded within 14 days instead of 30; records must be maintained for two years; federal regulators, state regulators and licensed health care professionals caring for a patient must have access to records; records of spot applications of Restricted Use pesticides must include a description of the location and treatment.

(H.R. 450 is the "Regulatory Transition Act of 1995" that would institute a moratorium on all new federal regulations taking effect from Nov. 20, 1994 through Dec. 31, 1995. The bill, introduced by Texas Republican Tom DeLay and Indiana Republican David McIntosh, is strongly supported by the AAN.)

“U” SAID IT

“Some people want to pay for their landscape with a credit card because they can get frequent flier miles that way. That’s fine with me because I take both Visa and Mastercard.”

Joel Lerner
President, Environmental Design
Chevy Chase, Md.

“I’m not afraid of TruGreen. The guy who scares me is a guy just like myself, but about 10 years younger.”

Anonymous
(During a discussion among a
group of independent LCOs at a
seminar in Orlando, Fla.)

“The public, especially the younger [segment], will patronize businesses that are concerned with the environment. We all manage environmental businesses whether we like it or not. If arborists cannot handle their wood waste in the next five years, 65 percent may well be out of business. This is not a problem but an opportunity.”

Bob Thibodeaux
Past president,
Louisiana Arborists Assn.

“‘Live for today’ is a good motto, but when your future is at stake, living for today is no help at all. The gist of this is saving for your and your family’s future—whether it’s a house, a college education (for your children) or retirement.”

Kevin Dushane
Bloomfield Hills C.C.
White Lake, Mich.

“The solution to providing lucrative careers, stabilizing our profession and informing the masses of our existence lies largely with our current band of professionals. Upgrading and policing our industry appears to be the only way to ensure change and affect compliance with regulations.”

Peter Berghuis
California Landscaping
Cupertino, Calif.

currently on line includes a spreader setting guide and technical sheets and MSDSs for K-Power products. To access, call (800) 234-0173 anytime, 24 hours a day.

■ **Miles Inc.** became **Bayer Corp.** on April 1, but that is the only change customers will see. “Our turf and ornamental customers will still get the same quality products (Merit, Bayleton, Dylox, Tempo, Namacur, Morestan), customer service and added value they’ve come to expect from Miles,” says **Allen Haws**, director of the Specialty Products Group.

■ **Theodore J. Host** became CEO of **The Scotts Company** on April 6. **Tadd C. Seitz** became Chairman of the Board of Directors after 12 years as CEO at the annual shareholder’s meeting.

■ **Robert V. Mitchell** won the Scotts Tradition of Excellence Award for his outstanding achievements as a golf course superintendent. Mitchell is executive director of golf and grounds at The Greenbrier, White Sulphur Springs, W.Va. and a former president of the GCSAA.

■ **Pat Searight** was named area manager for Seed Research of Oregon’s Dallas operation, responsible for grass seed sales in central Texas.

■ **Lawn Equipment Parts Co.** of Landisville, Pa. was named **Scag Service Distributor of the Year**. **Todd Stanisky** of Power Turf was named Scag Service Manager of the Year.

■ **Echo Inc.** recently broke ground for a 90,000 sq. ft. expansion of its 160,000 sq. ft. Lake Zurich facility. Completion is expected by June.

■ **Snapper** promoted **Robin Knight** from controller to vice president/treasurer and **Jimmie W. Jones** to executive vice president/CFO from vice president, finance and CFO.

■ **Weathermatic’s** new regional sales manager in the Pacific Northwest is **James J. Foreman**.

■ **Case Corp.** extended its North American contract manufacturing agreement for excavators with Sumitomo Construction Machinery Co. of Tokyo.

■ **Parker Sweeper** recently relocated from Springfield, Ohio to Hampshire, Ill., a suburb of Chicago. Groundbreaking for a second 50,000 sq. ft. phase of the new building is already set for this spring.

■ The Anthony Groundskeeper line of vacuum equipment has been sold by Liechty-Hertzler Corp. and Anthony Liftgates to **Highway Equipment Co.** of Cedar Rapids, Ia.

SUPPLIERS CORNER

■ **Hardie Irrigation** is offering an exclusive new frequent-buyer program. It offers a selection of Harley-Davidson motorcycles and Hardie-Rider leather jackets as awards. Telephone (714) 831-6000 for more info.

■ For the answers to questions about **Hunter Irrigation** products, or technical questions about installing irrigation systems, you can now call the free Hunter Dataline at (800) 733-2823. The number is

in operation from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Pacific time), Monday through Friday.

■ You can earn cash rebates on the purchase of **American Cyanamid** products (Pendulum, Image, Amdro) this spring under the company’s Payback Offer. The offer expires July 31. For more information, phone (800) 545-9525.

■ You can now get fertilizer application information via fax on demand from **Vicksburg Chemical OnLine Services**. Info