

# LAWN & LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY

## Focusing on 'lawn health' works for The Weed Man

**Here's a program to reduce pesticide use by stressing fertility, turf cultivation, and customer cooperation.**

by Darcy Olds

■ Our pest management strategy focuses on turfgrass health which helps our customers' lawns avoid pest problems.

A healthy, well-cultivated lawn, developed through proper fertility and cultural practices, eliminates much of the need for pesticides. They no longer become necessary as a cure for every lawn problem. They can be used sparingly and only when necessary.

Our main program consists of three applications per year of our own high-quality, S.C.U. slow-release granular fertilizer blend. We strongly feel that three

applications of our well-balanced fertilizer, which lasts 8 to 10 weeks, provide sufficient balanced nutrition throughout the growing season in Ontario.

Our customized fertilizer releases gradually through microbial activity in the soil. Microbes break down the material that coats the natural elements needed for plant growth. This helps ensure that grass plants aren't burned or stressed in any way.

**Can't forget aeration**—Along with providing balanced fertility, we believe that aeration is vital either in spring or fall or, perhaps, both. This eliminates



**Technicians for the Weed Man talk with homeowners to remind them about proper mowing and watering.**



**Quick couplings on spray guns help eliminate pesticide drips at the press of a button.**

thatch and alleviates compaction which provides resistance to many pests. It also improves soil porosity, increases deeper rooting and allows water, air and nutrients to penetrate turfgrass root systems.

Regular lawn cultivation and appropriate fertility throughout the growing season allow our technicians to monitor for pests or specific problems each time they are at a site. They map and record problems so that each lawn can be continually monitored.

When pest problems become significant enough to warrant control, we use pesticides, but the least amount necessary for adequate control. We commonly spot-spray to prevent unnecessary use of pesticides.

The products we have chosen for use in our pest management programs have very low toxicity and residual potential. Our pest management strategy does not include fungicides. We believe cultural

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**Weed Man technician monitors for any further pest problems on this lawn, such as chinch bug feeding.**

methods best control lawn diseases.

**Customers help**—Perhaps the most important aspect of our program is our partnership with the homeowner. We do our best to educate each homeowner about watering appropriately and at the

right time of the day, as well as mowing correctly and at an appropriate height. We've found that if customers mow high (2½ to 3 inches), most disease and weed problems are less likely to occur.

Since it's not possible for us to be on a customer's lawn daily, we ask that each customer keep a sharp eye out for any developing problems, and notify us immediately so that we can adequately control the problem. The cooperation of homeowners promotes a healthy lawn and contributes greatly to our integrated approach to lawn care.

When it becomes absolutely necessary to control insects in a lawn, we use such things as day/degrees and indicator plants

to determine the best time for control.

Day/degree computations reveal the stage of a lifecycle of a particular insect. They allow us to determine the best time to apply control measures. Indicator plants, such as the horse chestnut and the vanhoutte (spirea), help us identify lifecycle stages of insects such as the European chafer.

Along with routine inspections, which take place each time one of our technicians is on a lawn, a thorough inspection is performed each year in July. It includes a complete examination of the lawn for signs of insects, weeds or disease as well as a detailed observation of the homeowner's effort to maintain the lawn through adequate cultural practices.

All information from the inspection, including maps and pest level predictions, help us build a valuable and on-going history of each lawn.

—The author is a technical representative of *The Weed Man*, a company founded in 1970 by entrepreneur Des Rice.

## Retaining a lawn when the customer moves

### Why it's better to develop a strategy to keep a client, or property, from season to season

■ Successful lawn care business owners strive to retain multi-season customers. These are usually their most profitable customers.

But what happens when these customers move away? This is a problem that Robert Andrews regularly faces in the growing communities surrounding Indianapolis.

Andrews is co-owner along with his wife, Jennifer, of *The Greenskeeper*, Carmel, Ind., and a past president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA). Andrews also heads Andrews and Associates, a small business consulting firm. It was in this capacity that he addressed a group of LCOs in Orlando recently.

Andrews told the LCOs that relocations because of job transfers are common enough in his market area to have caused him to develop a strategy to retain these lawns. And that's the key in these special instances—keeping the property when the customer leaves.

The Greenskeeper delivers a complete history of the lawn to the real estate per-

son to give to the next owners. The professionally designed lawn history becomes another selling tool for the seller "because it demonstrates the care that's been given to this property," says Andrews.

Lawn care business owners, said Andrews, know that it's less expensive, and more profitable, to retain customers (or their lawns) than to find new ones.

Here are some reasons why:

- ✓ Retained properties are, comparatively, weed-free, and less expensive to treat than start-ups.
- ✓ They usually result in fewer service calls.
- ✓ They're already part of a route.
- ✓ Credit and collections improve.
- ✓ Long-term clients are more apt to buy add-on services.
- ✓ Often, through referrals, they result



**LCO/consultant Bob Andrews: Why not reward a customer for getting you another customer?**

in new business.

Andrews also said he's not hesitant to reward any customer for referring another customer to *The Greenskeeper*. This reward, for instance, may be \$20 off the next application.

"Who wouldn't pay \$20 for a new customer?" he asked.

—Ron Hall