

cleanup crew

THIS AND THAT

Snow for sale

Why wait for Old Man Winter to start coughing up the white stuff all over your yard when you can have it layered on immediately by a snow-making machine? Some people paid big bucks to make sure they had a white Christmas last year, and **Darien Tree & Lawn Care Co. of Darien, CT**, reaped the profits. Owner Jonathan Sweeney added Snowman Services of Darien to his lawn care business in 1997 after a client of his asked if man-made snow would be possible for a holiday party.



Since then, he's been one of many entrepreneurs to discover that clients are willing to pay up to \$10,000 for instant white happiness. We can only imagine what would happen if school children with snow days on their minds got hold of these machines.

Coming next month in LM:

**The Labor Crunch:
How to Hire the Best**



Put away that big mower — for good



A lawn that grows to a certain height and no higher, and never needs mowing? Researchers seem to be getting closer to that goal.

Scientists at the Salk Institute of Biological Studies in California isolated a gene, known as BAS-1, from a weed that's in the mustard family. The gene appears to control the production of an important growth hormone in plants.

Here's how it works. The gene acts selectively to break down the growth hormone — a steroid called brassinolide — with the effect most noticeable in the stems. By tinkering with the gene, it may be possible to stop growth completely in the stems, while allowing normal growth in leaves and flowers, the *New York Times* recently reported.

Sowing the seeds of love

Landscapers: they cut grass, plant flowers and yes, folks, mend relationships. Just ask Ryan of Senske Lawn and Tree Care, Kennewick, WA, who unknowingly did a better job than any counselor could for the daughters of Ralph and Jerry Kilmer. For nine months, Nicole, 15, and Shannon, 16, stepsisters, hadn't spoken a word to each other as the result of a fight. But when Ryan showed up for work at the Kilmers' house, things changed. The sight of Ryan in tight jeans excited Nicole so much that she called for Shannon to come take a look. For the rest of the afternoon, the two girls were together, going from window to window to check Ryan out. In Ralph Kilmer's own words, Ryan "broke the barrier that all the best parenting skills could not touch." There's no word yet as to whether or not Senske Lawn and Tree Care will add "peer mediation" to its list of services.

Bugs can make your town pretty, too

Compost made from dead insects? You bet. The small town of Port Clinton in northwest Ohio received funding from the Ohio Lake Erie Commission for a demonstration project to collect and compost mayflies, insects that emerge from Lake Erie each June. Mayflies burrow in the lake bottom, invade the city as flying adults, live for a day or two, then die on city streets. City crews have collected as many as 40 truckloads of them in one outbreak. The insects will be mixed with yard waste at the city's compost facility, and the resulting compost will be used to beautify city parks.