

The landscape industry hasn't been around long and therefore is still **wide open** for innovation because everybody is always looking for ways to save time and labor.



You may be an inventor

You may not see yourself as an inventor, but you might be. If you've run a landscape company for any length of time, chances are you've "invented" a labor-saving tool or piece of equipment.

You came up with the product not because you thought you were another Edison, but you saw a way to save either time or labor. You felt that you (or your employees) were working too long or too hard on a specific task. What you may not realize is that other landscapers could benefit from your invention, too and that your product could become a commercial success.

I've been in the landscape business for almost 30

years, and I don't like hard work any more than you do. That's one reason why I keep my mind open to developing new products either to save labor or solve a particular problem.

But I don't usually stop there. When I come up with a new product that I feel a lot of other people could benefit from, I take the extra step. I patent and bring the product to market. It doesn't even have to be a landscaping product.

For example, one of my most successful inventions is a product called the Drainbox. I came up with the idea for it when I noticed that homeowners had just two ways to dispose of rooftop drainage, and neither was satisfactory in neighborhoods where the houses were close together. They could let the water flow from downspouts around the foundation of their houses, or direct it away with unsightly pipes or tubing. The houses and landscapes might look nice, but your eyes are always drawn to those pipes. They don't look good.

So I experimented with a system that would direct the water from the downspouts into an underground "drainbox" (www.drainbox.com) away from the house. When I had a system that worked, I obtained a patent and began production.

Most of the other products I've developed have been for the landscape industry, like my first patented product in 1981 called the "Total Landscape Machine." The combination box blade/soil pulverizer/earth remover saved my crew almost 30% time on every soil renovation task — every fourth job we were working on free time. My most recent invention, the "Tongue Twister," is a lawn care equipment trailer that's been generating a lot of interest at equip-

Will demand warrant the expense?

Turning a good idea into a marketable landscape product can be expensive, but it can also be profitable.

If you have an idea for a new product, the first step is to determine if it is, in fact, new. You will need to do a patent search. An experienced patent attorney can help you fulfill the requirements of the U.S. patent office, including the drawings.

Unless you're convinced the market will respond to your "new" product, you may be scared away by the \$20,000 to \$25,000 you will need to invest to get a patent.

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Author Chumley's "Tongue Twister," a trailer with both front and rear ramps.

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trade shows. The trailer is equipped with both front and rear ramps. A side-mounted hydraulic motor can swivel the trailer 40 degrees in either direction, so you can remove the equipment you need from either the front or rear of the trailer.

I am far from a genius when it comes to inventing — everything I've come up with has been a result of my practical experiences as a landscaper since borrowing a mower and starting my own maintenance business in 1972. I was married, had a new baby, a new house, a new car and not much money, but looking back on it, it was exactly the right thing for me to do.

I've been in the landscape business ever since, growing and adding services to fit the changing marketplace in and around Greenville/Spartanburg, SC.

To all potential inventors, I say this: The landscape industry hasn't been around very long and therefore is still wide open for innovation because everybody is always looking for ways to save time and labor.

This translates into opportunities to de-

velop and bring new products to market, an opportunity that's open to any experienced landscape company owner.

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Chumley believed in his "Drainbox" enough to patent it and create its own Web site.