

let's hear it

YOUR OPINIONS, COMMENTS, & QUOTES

Victim of efficiency

Several years ago, while trying to build my business, I purchased a new lawn tractor with a 38-in. deck and twin bag collection. I used this on my small- to medium-sized residential properties. It was a great mower, and I thought, "This mower will put me in a better position to attract some high-end customers." After a year, I bought a mower of another brand with a 48-in. cut. I felt I had made a good buy because this mower was faster and more maneuverable, plus it cut and vacuumed better.

But I experienced something I wonder if others have experienced. After buying the faster mower, two customers complained about their monthly service fee. They both said when I was using the slower mower they got a great cut and felt the fee I was charging was fair. When I switched mowers they said my mowing time was cut in half and expected me to cut my fee in half. I refused, and they left.

— Rick Hooper
Rick's Lawn Care
Taylors, SC

Break it down

I have my own landscaping company, and I was always taught if you're not making \$60 per hour (\$1 per minute), you won't be successful in this business. I do quality work at a quality cost, not quality work at

a low cost or low quality work at a high cost. I concentrate on older customers who appreciate my presence on more than a weekly basis. I try to break my pricing down into categories (edging, trimming, mowing, blowing), and not show just one price for mowing.

— John A. Morano
Morano Landscape &
Environmental Service
Sellersville, PA

Avoiding liability

Your article on mowing couldn't have come at a better time. My company does some mowing but our primary service is chemical fertilization. I started out as a franchise but became a victim of the ChemLawn buy-out, which turned out for the best anyway. I try to charge whatever the market will bear. In doing so, I can also do freebies without doing a change order.

Recently, a former county worker who took early retirement started up a mowing/landscaping business with his son. From what I've seen, he's getting his foot in the door and, along the way, desecrating the industry. He avoids licenses and carries minimal insurance and no workers' compensation because his son is a subcontractor (operates under the same company name, insurance, etc.)

Our city awarded this company with a three-year...mowing contract for a cemetery (es-

Editor's note: The following letters were written in response to our "Best Practices" article in February on what to charge for mowing. Due to the large number of letters we received, not all are published here. We will publish more as space permits.

timated avg. of 40 hours per week). I didn't bid, nor did the last two custodial contractors. A former county board supervisor thinks this is a good fee for equipment, wages, etc., yet the board member pays higher wages to county park maintenance employees. I need some facts and figures to present to an arrogant few on costing out mowing services without placing the community/customers in a liability situation.

— Name withheld upon
owner's request

Lowballing blues

In my area, I seem to be on the high end quite often, charging \$37.55 per man-hour. I know I'm not going to become a millionaire, but I would like to have something left at year's end. I've already experienced a few instances of lowballing this year — even the big "national leader" is lowballing. I'm amazed at the prices guys are offering. I say \$50 per cut, they say \$30. I say \$82 per cut, they say \$40. Come on fellas, let's make an honest living by

doing quality work for a profitable price.

— Scott Hunt
Grand Rapids, MI

Confidence booster

Your article on mowing rates was encouraging. We've been charging \$45 per hour for all our services. We job cost using CLIP and have a good handle on our expenses.

I recently started using Charles Vanderkooi's MORS system, which broke down our overhead by department and told us what to charge. The \$45 per hour charge held true, but our mowing charge came to \$35 per man-hour.

We've always had problems with our competition due to price. I feel the MORS system will help us. We've been mailing out proposals with new pricing, and even though I trust the MORS program, it helped to see we came in where your survey put us. Now I'm confident we made the right decision on adjusting our pricing!

— Randy Johnson
Reliable Landscaping, Inc.
Lowell, MA

