



John Deere's 1500 aerator pulls 30 cores per sq. ft.

Aerate to the core

BY CURT HARLER /
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Cores? Let 'em lay, is what the folks at DeSantis Landscapes, Salem, OR, tell their customers.

"We used to rake up plugs," says John O'Neil, maintenance supervisor.

"Now we tell the customer that it's better to let them lay for a week and dry up. Then we run over them with a mulching mower."

Either spring or fall is a good time to aerate lawns, O'Neil says. He leans toward spring despite the fact that it's a busier time of year.

DeSantis's customers have a wide mix of soils from heavy clays to really loose ground. "We'll do the heavier clay more often," O'Neil says.

Coring is generally done two-and-a-half

to three inches deep on two- to three-inch spacing. Because DeSantis's aeration jobs often come at the busiest season, the company will sometimes subcontract a job. Even when handling the jobs in-house, they typically rent their aerators. "We only use them seasonally, so it pays to rent," O'Neil explains.

When specifying equipment, they prefer to use a cam-operated machine as opposed to the roller type. "They seem to do a cleaner job since they pull the cores straight out," O'Neil says. He finds that the roller units often come back at an angle and tear the turf.

As long as landscape professionals explain the benefits of leaving the cores on the ground, homeowners seem to have no ob-

jection. The next mowing, done with a mulcher, recycles the cores and any organic matter to the lawn. That makes all parties — the customer, worker and lawn — happy.

Cutting corners

Tom Taylor, owner of Integrity Landscape and Design, Nashville, TN, hates to see his workers coming back at the end of the day exhausted from wrestling with aerators. There's no good way to cut corners with an aerator — but Taylor thinks there should be.

"I'm looking for something that doesn't jerk the operator around the corners so much, something with good controls up front," says Taylor. His crews frequently deal with heavier soils. "More than anything else, I look for ease of operator use."

Before you buy...

▶ Check a machine's productivity in square feet per hour. Remember, productivity varies depending on the gear used

▶ Know the machine's coring pattern

Ask:

▶ How many different tine sizes and styles can be used

▶ How deep will the machine dig?

▶ How clean does the core come out of the ground?

▶ What does the machine weigh?

▶ Do you want a machine that slits or cores?

▶ How convenient are the hand controls?

▶ Can you get it on/off a truck easily?

▶ Is the engine one you're used to working with and stock parts and supplies for?

Cornering is the first area where Taylor would make some design changes. He'd like a machine that makes tight turns at the end of a row like a zero-turn mower or a walk-behind, not the big sweeping turns required to keep things going on many machines.

"There should be a way to clutch the machine when coming around a turn, rather than having to make a direct stop or letting the machine pull you around the corner," he says.

That would allow his workers to cover the maximum amount of ground per day without getting beat up. "I know you have to make trade-offs," Taylor says, noting that acres per day is still important. But he thinks a unit with a third wheel — a pivot wheel — would allow tight turns without lifting the bar...which, in effect, means

lifting the whole machine.

Speaking of lifting, Taylor would also like to find a machine that's easier to lift off a pickup truck. "When all the dove-tails are being used for other jobs, we'll run the corners out on a pickup," he notes. "I'd want to tweak the machine for ease of getting it off and on trucks."

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