

# let's hear it

YOUR OPINIONS, COMMENTS, & QUOTES

## Crazy prices

\$36.78 per hour for mowing in the small town of just over 1,000 people where I live? I don't think so. I wouldn't have any customers if I charged that price. Most people in my town must educate themselves on good lawn care because they seem to know what it's all about.

I charge \$15 to \$20 per hour, which you apparently think is crazy. Yet there are people in my town who think I'm charging too much. Other people have started to mow and charge \$3 to \$5 less, and they seem to be getting more customers than myself. But I have the experience, background and training. Every year, I have a booth at our local farm and home show. I also have a booth at two other shows in the area.

I don't understand how these people are making it. I'm just barely surviving. I'm looking to expand my own business, but as you know, it's not easy.

— Jerry Wittmus  
J.W.'s Lawn Care & Landscaping  
George, IA

## Too low?

How many sleepless nights have I had since this article was printed? Maybe it's just my lack of knowledge, or terminology (per hour per employee?) My typical day last eight hours, but traffic, maintenance and stops at the local nursery result in 5 to 6.5 hours of actual billable time. Am I on

base? In my market, my cost for one person is \$10 per hour, and the lead person makes \$14 per hour. That's \$24 per hour plus \$2.88 per hour for the vehicle plus \$1.50 per hour for mowers times .46% overhead times .255 profit equals \$52 per hour for those two workers.

Why am I so low compared to these numbers? It must be billable hours. I have a friend across the river who brags that his three-man maintenance crews average \$480 per day. We do \$300 to \$400 a day with two workers. I wonder if I'm too low.

— David M. Teas  
Clean Cut Lawn Maintenance  
Charleston, SC

## Plot the numbers

I own and operate a small lawn care and maintenance business in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, and every time we did an estimate, we used to have to deal with questions like, "How do you charge?" and "How do you know that's how much it will be?" Three years ago, we came up with a simple, but sometimes alterable, solution.

The answer to my customers' questions was right outside my front door in the form of a 10-acre pasture field used to graze my horses. We measured off five square acres and divided them into five equal plots. Then, we mowed

the plots, keeping accurate times. The first plot we mowed as fast as possible, not worrying about how it looked, the second we mowed in ordinary round-and-round style but took a little more time, the third in quick back and forth strips, the fourth in a nice strip pattern at 3.5 in. on the deck, and the fifth in a nice strip pattern at a height of two inches. We also charted the amount of fuel we used, and placed an equal amount of obstacles in each plot to mow and trim around.

Our numbers allowed us to set a job time and dollar amount to charge for each 500 sq. ft. of lawn area. We no longer had to say, "Well, I've done this long enough that I know what it takes to do a yard," when a customer asked how we determined our fee.

This solution can be altered to accommodate many different situations to better suit our customers' needs. I'm not going to give out the dollar amount determined, but I can say this will work for anyone with the equipment and manpower they currently have if

they want to take the time to do it. I can also say we're below the national average by more than \$2.

— Michael Smith  
Greenview Turf and  
Ornamental Management  
Belton, KY

## Quality is key

There are a lot of "mom & pop" operations that will mow a lawn for \$20 when it costs us \$45. They're not making any money. We only work for clients interested in professional, quality work.

Our prices can be as high as \$60 per hour or as low as \$35 per hour depending on the equipment and property size. These prices are set so we generate a 20% profit after all overhead is paid.

Know your equipment, choose the correct machine for the job, educate your staff to be productive, offer the correct incentives, know your cost of doing business, and reward yourself with a profitable operation.

— John Van Staaldunin  
Davey Tree & Lawn Care Experts  
Rochester, NY



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.