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CONTENTS»

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What does "sustainability" mean for us? Perhaps you're wondering that in light of the growing popularity, use and misuse of the word within our industry.

Athletic Turf News

The experienced grounds manager at The Ohio Stadium still likes grass best, but says the three-year-old synthetic turf playing field is less stressful to maintain.

LD/B Solutions

After successfully marketing his design-build services with displays at supply yards along busy roadsides, Erik Klein decided to bring the outside in.

Get Growing

Green Giant is a fast growing, pyramid-shaped evergreen that has no serious pest or disease problems.

DEPARTMENTS

- 6 News & Views**
Ariens, Yellowstone acquisitions; PLANET Awards.
- 20 LM Reports** Trenchers
- 30 Lawn Care Pro**
Mark Grunkemeyer, Buckeye Ecocare, Centerville, OH
BY RON HALL
- 50 A Cut Above**
Yellowstone Landscape Group, Plano, TX
BY DANIEL G. JACOBS



20

COLUMNS

- 4 The Hall Mark**
BY RON HALL
- 18 The Benchmark**
BY KEVIN KEHOE
- 32 Best Practices**
BY BRUCE WILSON
- 48 InfoTech**
BY TYLER WHITAKER
- 64 Whit's World**
BY MARTY WHITFORD

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 61** Products **62** Classifieds
- 63** Resources

ON THE COVER

Illustration by: Roger Motzkus;
www.motzkusart.com



FEATURES

8 Corraling customers ^(B)

Landscapers share how they regain clients' trust and business. BY MARTY WHITFORD

SPECIAL REPORT

21 Turfgrass Fertility Report, Part 2 ^(LC)

Selecting the right fertilizer to meet today's environmental and competitive challenges is vital for success. BY RON HALL AND CINDY GRAHL

SPECIAL REPORT

35 Water Wise, Part 3 ^(I)

The Green Industry looks to technology to save irrigation. BY RON HALL

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SPECIAL SECTION

53

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H₂O issues invite government control

This fall the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) released an updated Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance. It states all cities in California will have rules to limit the amount of water used for landscape irrigation by January 2010. Local governments can adopt the DWR ordinance or develop their own as long as they provide an equal level of water savings.

California is preparing for what will be a future of rising water costs and increasing scarcity. These regulations will be permanent regardless of when the three-year drought in the state ends.

Preparing for change

Landscapers and irrigation experts in the Golden State — and associations representing them — have been participating in public hearings about the ordinance these past few months. They've voiced their concerns to some of the provisions in the ordinance. Among the provisions are:

- › water budgets for landscapes,
- › the prevention of excessive erosion and irrigation runoff,
- › landscape and irrigation design requirements,
- › the use of recycled water where available,
- › irrigation audits and
- › scheduled irrigation based on local climate.

In a real sense this is government dictating what types of landscapes property owners in California

will have and how landscape professionals will be providing services to their customers.

Not confined to California

Don't look at this as a California-only phenomenon. It's national. Consider the U.S. EPA WaterSense program and its controversial proposed limits on the amount of turfgrass in landscapes. That's one of several provisions in the program that seems ill-advised. Water is the common denominator.

Whether there's an overt anti-industry bias in these decisions is debatable. The people making these rules almost certainly feel they're for the public's good. Disconcerting, however, is the too-often lack of inclusion of industry participants as part of the rule-making processes. Input from researchers and industry leaders is often ignored. Too bad.

Once policies and enforcement are in place, there's no turning back. Government involvement and oversight grow and rarely, if ever, shrink.

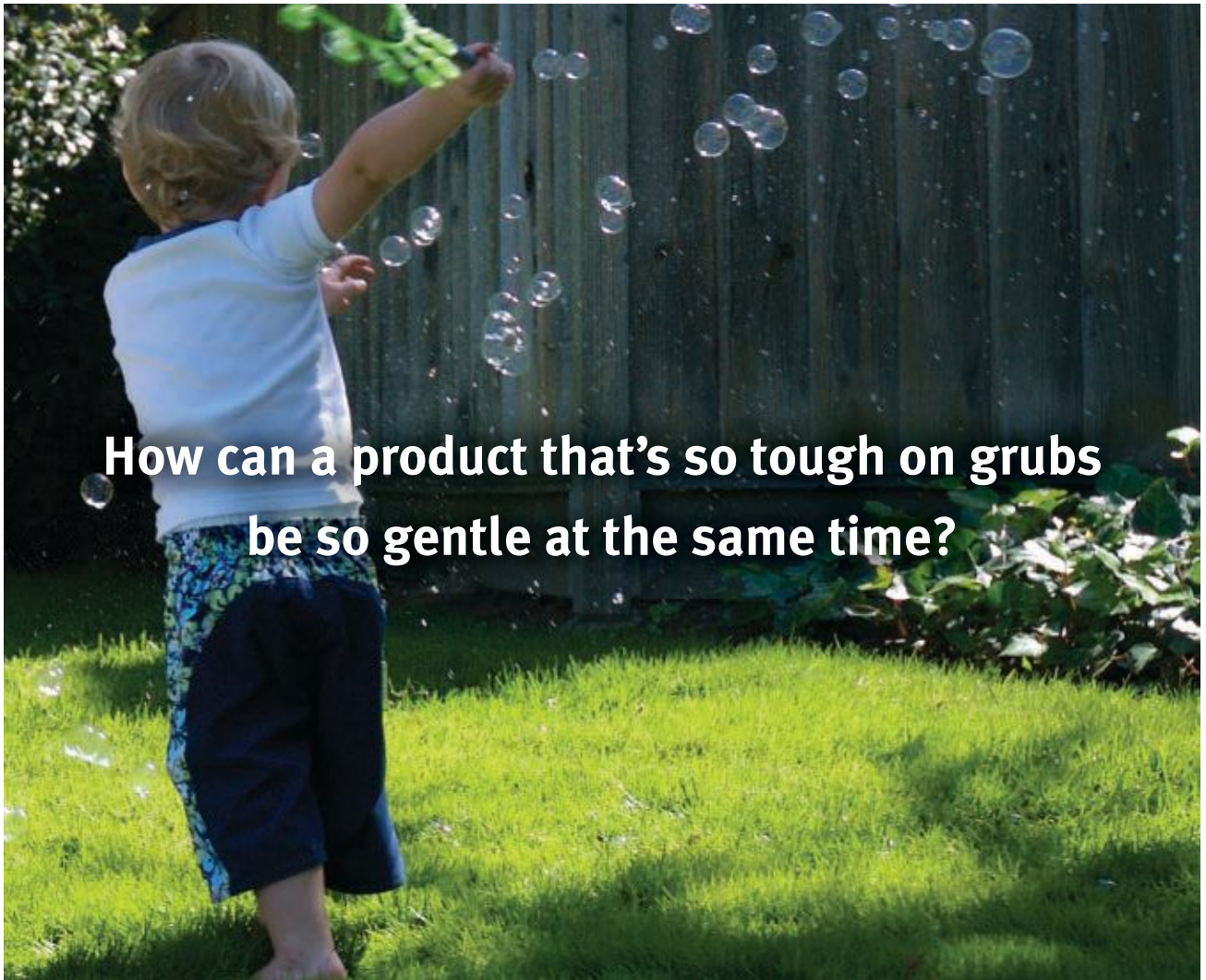
Unsettling also is the pace at which the process has been accelerating. Water-use restrictions seem to be popping up faster than landscape professionals can assimilate them into their service programs. While particulars vary from region to region, these rules typically include:

- › watering restrictions,
- › limits on turfgrass in landscapes,
- › landscape water budgets,
- › water audit requirements,
- › incentives for installing artificial turf in landscapes and
- › rebates for the purchase and use of irrigation-system technology, such as sensors and smart controllers.

Some mandates and guidelines are proven water savers and fit the landscape industry's broader environmental efforts. Others are questionable.

In a perfect world, our industry would function based solely on its own time-tested, environmentally sound best practices. But as we all realize, this isn't a perfect world.

In a perfect world, our industry would function based solely on its own time-tested, **environmentally sound best practices**. But this isn't a perfect world.

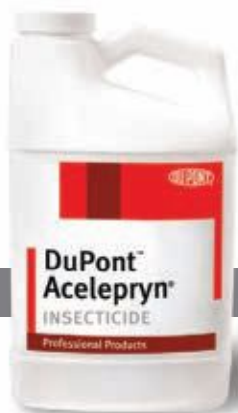


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NEWS+VIEWS

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS, TRENDS AND TIPS

Ariens, Yellowstone make acquisitions

Ariens Co. has acquired the assets of debris maintenance equipment manufacturer, Parker Co. Inc. of Phoenix. Ariens will continue to sell Parker products through two-step distribution channels in the outdoor power equipment market. The products will also be made available as brands sold directly to the independent dealer channel for the fall 2010 clean-up season.

“The addition of the Parker lawn sweepers and debris handling equipment will help extend the lawn and garden season for our equipment dealers with fall clean-up products,” says Dan Ariens, president of Ariens, Brillion, WI. “It

will also serve our growing sports turf maintenance segment.”

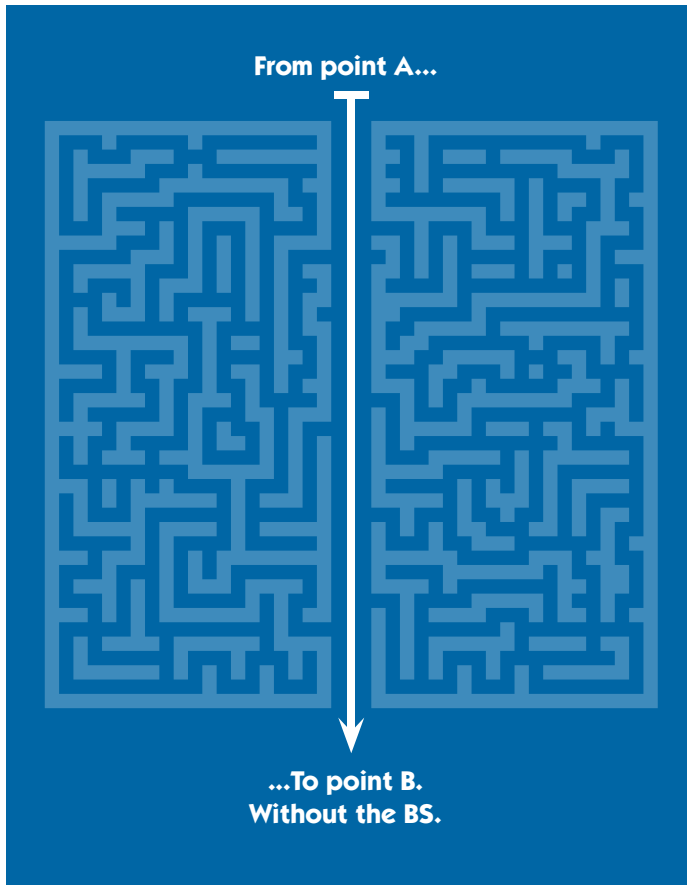
Ariens will produce the Parker products at its manufacturing facility in Auburn, NE. The company expects to make parts available to distributors in 30 to 60 days. Whole goods availability is expected by December.

BIO Landscape & Maintenance, a Yellowstone Landscape Group company, expanded its Texas presence through the acquisition of Outdoor Environments, a commercial landscape maintenance company headquartered in Houston. All members of the Outdoor Environments team have joined the BIO team.

“Outdoor Environments and its prin-

cipal, Chris Lallier, will quickly become an integral part of the BIO team,” said Robert Taylor, president of BIO. “Chris worked for BIO some years back, went out on his own, and we welcome him back to share in the vision we have for BIO and Yellowstone. Chris is a very capable manager and will soon be running our North Houston Branch.”

With the addition of Outdoor Environments, BIO now serves 10 counties with a combined 380 employees throughout Southeast Texas. In April 2008, BIO merged with the Yellowstone Landscape Group, one of the largest full service and environmentally focused landscape providers in the United States.



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PLANET honors Rick Doesburg with its Lifetime Leadership Award. Pictured left to right: Andy Doesburg, Peggy Doesburg, Rick Doesburg and PLANET President, Bill Hildebolt.

PLANET honors Environmental Award winners at GIE+EXPO

The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) is proud to announce the recipients of its annual 2009 Environmental Improvement Awards. This year marks the program's 40th anniversary. Of the 134 projects entered in this year's awards program, 126 were recognized with an award. The awards breakdown includes three Decade Awards, 38 Grand Awards, 46 Merit Awards, and 39 Distinction Awards.

"It is encouraging to the entire Green Industry to see such excellence," says Awards Committee Chair Will Spiegelberg, CLP, Spiegelberg Landscape Design Inc., Chicago. "Congratulations from all of us at PLANET."

The awards program, which is open to only PLANET members, reflects the association's commitment to creating

and preserving the beauty of the landscape and is designed to reward independent landscape, lawn care, and interior plantscaping professionals who execute superior projects.

"The quality of the submittals was overwhelming in many realms," says Spiegelberg.

PLANET also presented special awards including the Promise Award to Marshall Scheibe; the Association Partner of the Year award to the Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association; the Lifetime Leadership Award to Rick Doesburg, CCLP; and Sustainable Company Awards to Pacific Landscape Management, Lambert Landscape Co., John Mini Distinctive Landscapes, Cagin & Dorward and The Laurelrock Co.

Special thanks to the judges for their

commitment and expertise. The judging panel consisted of Matt Triplett CLP, CLT, CLIA, Willamette Landscape Services, Tualatin, OR; Louis Kobus, CLP, Fox Run Nurseries, Alexandria, VA; Aaron R. Williams, CLP, Williams Landscape & Design, Williamsburg, VA; and Gerald J. Grossi, CTP-CSL, ArborLawn, Lansing, MI.

Through a special multimedia show, recipients were honored at the PLANET Green Industry Conference Awards Presentation and Reception last month, in Louisville, KY. The Awards Reception was sponsored by Husqvarna.

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“Follow up and follow through’ is the motto we live by. Clients will always migrate back to such a business model should low-ballers not be able to keep the pace.”

— DONALD SMITH, PRESIDENT OF SANTA ANA, CA-BASED PACIFIC CREST LANDSCAPE

BY **MARTY WHITFORD** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

CORRALLING CUSTOMER

Landscapers share how they regain clients’ trust and business.

CORRALLING LANDSCAPE customers can be harder than herding cats.

A September online survey conducted by *Landscape Management (LM)* shows the average landscape company lost 12% of its customers in 2008, and another 9% will gallop away this year.

The *LM* survey found 20% of landscapers let their customers just trot off. Although one-third win back 25% or more of their lost clients, another 44% of landscapers admit they corral, at most, one of every 20 customers who stray. The average landscape business, theoretically, could need to replace all of its customers every decade or sooner.

Losing customers’ trust and business is a part of doing business. But those losses should be exceptions to the rule — and they need not be permanent. Our survey shows most customer loss is spurred by low-ballers and landscapers overpromising and under-delivering. The flip side of the coin — WOWing customers while competing on value, not price — presents the key to lassoing lost business back beside you.

ILLUSTRATION BY: ROGER MOTZKUS; WWW.MOTZKUSART.COM



RS

"We have a 'Return Customer Discount' note on our invoices that has helped bring back clients from 10 years earlier."

— TREVOR GRIFFIN, OWNER OF SULLIVAN, NH-BASED T. GRIFFIN TREE

COVER STORY

Rescue opportunities

Losing one of your largest customers to a lower-priced competitor hurts. But if that competitor fails to follow through, it creates quite a rescue opportunity — if you are willing to shelve your ego and shovel an ex-client out of trouble.

Last winter, Elkhart, IN-based NatureScape Services lost a key full-service account when the real-estate developer was wooed away by supposed savings.

Before NatureScape lost the account, it received all of the client's installation and maintenance business at strip malls and residential rental properties, basically without having to bid on the projects, says Mike Knepper, NatureScape's operations manager. The customer made a price-based switch in landscape service providers, but he soon discovered cheaper isn't always better.

This February, the former customer called Knepper and asked whether

"We lost a client to a low-baller, who lost the account to another low-baller, who lost it to a third low-baller. After the site was a disaster, we got the account back at a higher contract price."

— ROLLIN HAAS, PRESIDENT OF MONTEREY, CA-BASED MASTER LANDSCAPES

NatureScape could bail him out by providing snow removal at one of his strip malls that the other contractor had not been able to get to on time. The parking lot was a mess. NatureScape's crews were there *that day* to scrape it, and applied salt for the next four days to melt the parking lot's 4-in. base of ice.

"I gave him a break on that bill in the hopes that it would help us win back his business," Knepper says. "This spring he told me he 'had learned his lesson' — that he now realizes our service, support and response times are well worth our slightly higher rates. He asked us to again service all of the jobs he pulled from us last season.

"Unfortunately, in this industry a lot

of contractors spend a majority of their time cutting their competitors' throats instead of putting their efforts and resources into providing stellar service and quality," Knepper adds. "It was nice to affirm that sometimes 'the good guys' actually do win in the end."

Low-ballers lose

Most of Ryan Lawn & Tree's lost-and-found customers strayed after competitors dangled lower prices in front of them, notes Mike McGillicuddy, turf manager for the Overland Park, KS-based business. Many returned because they now trust Ryan even more and place more value on its service quality.

Ryan is far from alone. Quite a few landscapers say they also recover business once former clients realize the grass all too often isn't greener — literally — on the cheaper side of the street.

continued on page 12

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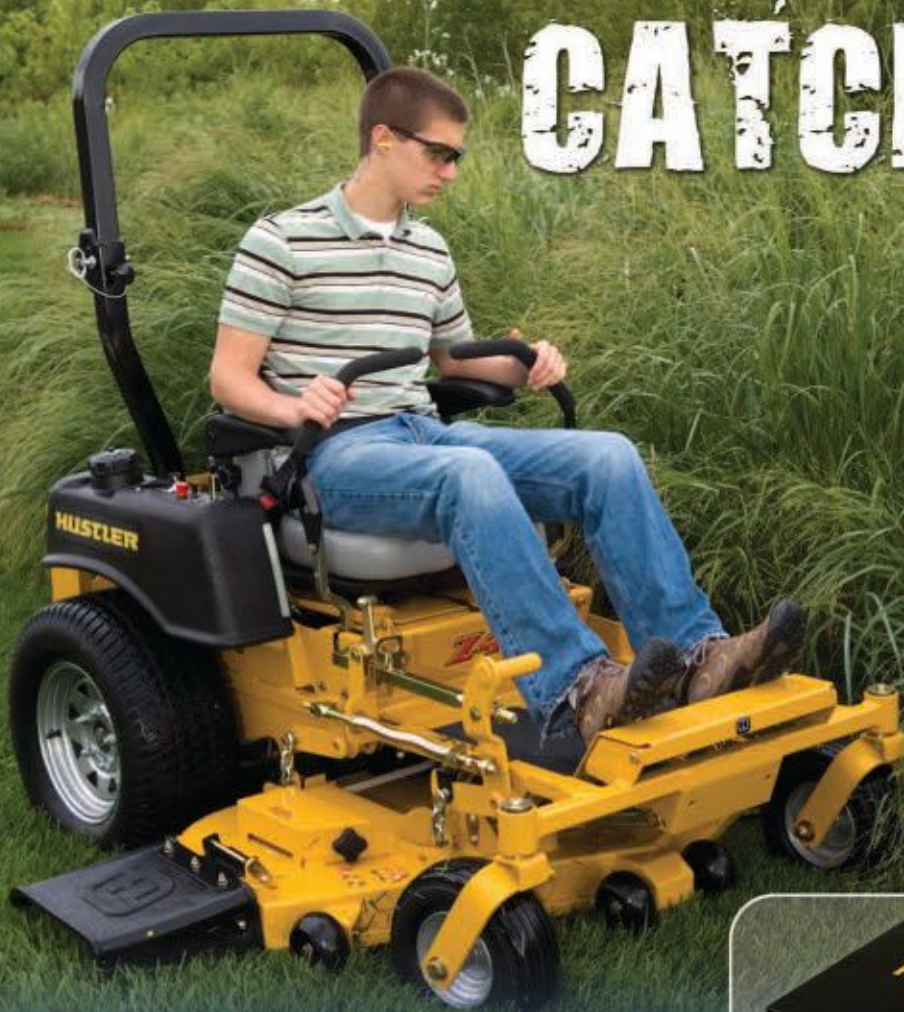


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COVER STORY

continued from page 10

Many landscapers just have to “cowboy up” — be patient and stand behind their superior service and fair pricing.

After six years together, a large industrial customer dropped Black Landscape Contracting in Mechanicsburg, PA, opting to go with a national company for a 32% savings. President Greg Black said

the national company failed to perform to expectations, and the client returned to Black Landscape within two years.

“We lost a mowing customer we had for five years to a low-baller,” says Peter Schepis, vice president of The Greenwood Group LLC, based in New Melle, MO. “The first month, the client’s lawn was mowed one and

one-half times — and they tried to charge him more! We got the customer back with a 10% increase.”

Kevin Peck, a regional manager for Gaithersburg, MD-based Brickman Group, says the company recently lost a longtime customer because of a competitor’s extremely low bid. “Within six months, the former client was all but begging us to come back at the higher price, and apologized for ever questioning what they were getting from us.”

Brad’s Lawn Service in Owensboro, KY, also lost a client to a low-baller but the business returned in short order. “That was more than 20 years ago. The customer’s been with us ever since and won’t accept bids from other landscapers,” says Owner Brad Bell.

“We had a customer leave us who was happy with our services but was offered a lower price and wanted to save money,” says Blake Moore, president of Ferta-Lawn

continued on page 14

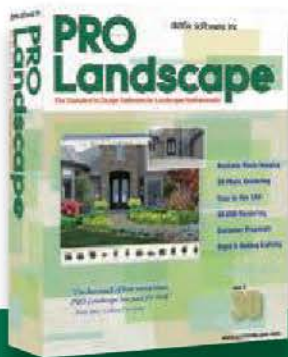


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LOST & FOUND

Following are 10 tips for regaining lost customers’ trust and business. These best practices were shared by members of The Leader’s Edge peer group for landscape professionals:

DOs

1. Do tell former clients you appreciate their business, show remorse for failing/losing them, and let them know you are ready to help if questions or problems arise — regardless of who currently manages their landscaping.
2. Do keep former customers on your mailing list — stay top of mind with them.
3. Do remain proactive on warranty issues: This is your chance to stay face-to-face and showcase your professionalism.
4. Do stay warm, open, friendly and accessible — so if they want to return, they won’t feel embarrassed.
5. Do get creative. For example, send flowers to Mrs. Smith with a note that reads, “Mr. Smith won your heart. We want to win back your trust and yard!”

MOW & BLOW

How does your **2009 maintenance customer retention** compare to 2008?

51%

The same or better

Down **1-5%**

27%

12%

Down **6-10%**

10%

Down **11% or more**

THE BOTTOM 10%

10% of landscape companies reported losing a combined average 44% of their customers in 2008.

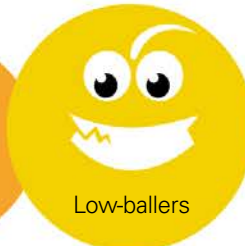
DON'Ts

1. Don't assume you know the real reasons why your clients left. Ask the decision makers what triggered the moves, and let them know their feedback is helpful.
2. Don't blame former clients or argue with their feelings or perceptions of your service. Instead, acknowledge their feelings and share their concerns.
3. Don't try to talk customers out of leaving. Instead, offer to fix any problems and refund their money. They might talk themselves out of leaving. And don't pester them if they're not ready to talk: Timing is crucial.
4. Don't trash former clients' new landscapers or their do-it-yourself work.
5. Don't overpromise to win back accounts — that might have been the problem to begin with.

— Jeffrey Scott, Green Industry consultant & The Leader's Edge peer group facilitator, 203-220-8931, www.GetTheLeadersEdge.com.

TROUBLESOME FOURSOME

What are the biggest threats to your customer retention?



Source for all infographics: September 2009 Landscape Management online survey with 249 respondents



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SWEET SERVICE SAVES

What follow are a few **examples of landscape service miscues** and how the companies righted the situations and regained their clients' trust:

› **Tree-demption** — A technician with Fullerton Grounds Maintenance in Ledgewood, NJ, applied Sevin instead of Trimec to about 100 trees dotting the landscape of a large condominium community. The company quickly informed the client of the mistake and spent the next week washing, watering, pruning and deep-root feeding the trees. Only two trees were lost; Fullerton replaced them in the fall. The condo community remains a customer.

› **Mulch A Do about Something** — Impact Landscaping in Morgantown, WV, installed 25 cu. yds. of a very acidic mulch at a high profile fitness club and it burned the delicate foliage and perennials in the beds. The landscaper identified the problem with the mulch supplier, and watered the beds daily to dilute the salinity. The company also replaced a few annuals and installed temporary irrigation hoses to keep the plants healthy. Once the situation was diffused and corrected, Impact Landscaping won the full maintenance contract for the property.

› **No Sorry Sod** — Terry Landscaping and Lawn Care in St. Louis installed sod on a yard this spring and even though the homeowner properly watered it, summer weeds quickly overtook the sod. The company replaced the sod free of charge. President Russell Terry told the pleasantly surprised client that if his name was going to be associated with the work, he wanted to be sure it looked professionally done. — *MW*

continued from page 12

in Bountiful, UT. "Before the end of the year, she returned. She wanted to know if we had a 'Prodigal Son' program for those who are sorry for leaving."

Corrective action

No-shows and poor performance also trigger the loss of customer trust and business, but these, too, are reversible.

"I accidentally stood up a prospect who was a referral and, as a result, I didn't get the job," says Calvin Craig, owner of Calvin Craig Landscaping in Sacramento, CA. "But after I brought her flowers and told her how embarrassed I was, she hired us."

When it rains it pours, especially for Daily Rain in Dexter, MI.

"We had a technician miss not one but two scheduled service appointments with the same client two days in a row," says President Jerry Boquette. "Our

continued on page 16

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Most landscapers say their **design/build/installation** customers are the most likely to cancel services.

NOT EASY COME ... BUT EASY GO

With annual customer loss averaging more than 10%, a typical landscape company theoretically could need to replace all of this year's customers within a decade.

LAWN RANGERS

How does your **2009 lawn care customer retention** compare to last year?



56% The same or better



22% Down 1-5%



13% Down 6-10%

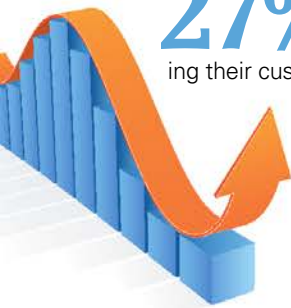


9% Down 11% or more

ON THE REBOUND

27% of landscape companies are predicting their customer retention to *increase* in 2009.

> 9 percentage points is the average projected climb of these forecasted fortunate few.



Source for all infographics: September 2009 Landscape Management online survey with 249 respondents

TIME IS MONEY

How long does it take you to follow up with lost customers?

We call the same day they stop service. **43%**

Within one week **25%**

Within one month **8%**

Several months or longer **4%**

We just let them go. **20%**



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Smooth. Real smooth. One click, and minutes later your entire customer list, employee list and item list is automatically synched with QuickBooks. Any change you make in QuickBooks or QXpress syncs in real-time.

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"The moment I started using QXpress, all of my apprehensions disappeared. It looked just like QuickBooks and imported my QuickBooks data, so I had a full database from the very start. My staff and I were literally scheduling in QXpress right away. Within no time, our crews' mowing schedules were full and we were even scheduling landscape projects. It was the best transition I could have asked for!"



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COVER STORY

continued from page 14

tech was held up on previous jobs and forgot to warn the client of his delay.

"Eventually, we did make it out on that second day, later that evening, and we did not charge for our \$95 service. The customer appreciated the non-charge and is a paying customer, today."

Mayday's Lawn and Pest in Winter Park, FL, was calling "mayday, mayday," after one of its clients canceled services across four properties because of poor performance. CEO Jason May's make-good included hiring a new landscape crew and personally being on-site for service delivery six weeks straight.

"An employee's poor work and attitude lost us an account," says James Van Eenwyk, president of Grandpa's Nursery & Gardens in Sodus, NY. "We fired him and through communication — an apology and a personal promise to exceed their expectations — we won back the account on a trial basis. We still have them

as a client today."

Craig might have been able to smooth over his *faux pas* with flowers, but not everyone is as fortunate. Flowers were the problem — not the solution — for James E. Coffey & Son Landscape Contractors in Laconia, NH.

"One customer caught a few of our employees throwing fallen rhododendron flowers at each other for more than a half-hour," says Owner James Coffey. "The client called me and told the employees to leave the property."

Coffey says he spoke with his crew and quickly visited the client to apologize face-to-face for his associates' actions.

"I then put myself on that crew, which was a group of good people who just 'had a moment,'" Coffey notes. "I stayed on the crew until the customer, whom I had

"One customer complained we weren't removing enough leaves from her yard, but a camera later revealed a neighbor was dumping leaves in her yard just minutes after we left."

— PAUL E. ANDERSON, OWNER OF JACKSONVILLE, FL-BASED PEA GREEN LAWN & HOME MAINTENANCE

done business with for nine years, again felt comfortable with our crew."

Frequently, corralling straying customers "brings you both full circle," concludes Coffey, noting the once-distressed customer relationship healed so well that the client and landscape crew eventually shared "a special moment."

"A year after 'the incident,' while popping in on our same landscape crew at the same residence, I saw the customer throw the first rhododendron flower," Coffey adds. "We all laughed, and that was that." **LM**

WHO'S IN YOUR CORNER?



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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S



THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author is the owner-manager of Kehoe & Co. Contact him at kkehoe@earthlink.net.

Where to invest in 2010

The common thread in conversations with business owners is the perception that it gets harder every year just to get back to the same place. Next year will be another challenging year.

This is not pessimism; rather it is an acceptance of reality. The facts are housing and unemployment will be a drag on spending at least into 2011. And facts, as they say, are stubborn things. No amount of false hope and rah-rah changes that. The supply/demand equation remains tilted in the customer's favor, and the current political and lending climates are clearly unhelpful to small business owners.

Ninety-five percent of the companies I know will make less money this year. They are being realistic about next year and adjusting their investment strategies accordingly. They are investing in two primary areas: sales to generate revenues, and computer systems to reduce labor expense.

Investment in sales

A significant opportunity exists to pick up new business in 2010. Call it the "boomerang" effect. Many customers who contracted with the "low price guy" are not happy now, and they are willing to

pay a little more — although not a lot more — for improved quality and reliability.

Make an investment in a pricing model that enables you to win this business while still making gross profit. At the same time, investing in additional sales staff is a good idea. In many cases, the actual hire may be in operations or administration, freeing up the owner to focus on sales.

The days of selling by simply answering the phone are over. You must prospect more, bid more and employ what might be long-dormant selling skills to succeed. Investments in pricing and "feet on the street" are producing solid returns for many business owners already.

Although investments in Web sites, advertising and collateral material are always good ideas, they do not seem to be producing equal results.

Investment in systems

Another significant opportunity exists to reduce field and non-field labor expenses. Several companies I work with have invested in software that helps them manage in real time, thus minimizing the entry and manipulation of estimates, work orders and purchases. The goal is to enable the same number of people to handle greater workloads more efficiently.

This produces a "reduction in overhead" relative to revenue that has at least two virtuous effects:

1. It allows you to reallocate money away from "dead overhead" and redirect it to your sales effort.
2. It reduces your per-hour overhead recovery rate, allowing you to reduce prices in your pricing model — thus allowing you to safely work at a lower gross margin.

These investments go hand in hand, and are integral to recreating the way you will need to do business next year. Given the economic realities, it is best to get started now with these investments or risk falling behind. If you under-invest, the perception that it is getting harder to get back to the same place will unfortunately become your reality.

If you under-invest (in sales and systems), the perception that it is **getting harder to get back to the same place** will unfortunately become your reality.

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LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

TRENCHERS

Compact Power Inc. →

The Boxer 118 trencher features an 18-hp, air-cooled Kohler Command Pro gasoline engine, with a chain speed of 280 feet per minute. The dirt cup tooth chain is made of high carbon steel with frosted carbide tips. Available in 24- and 36-in. lengths, the unit is complemented by a standard discharge auger, which simultaneously pushes the dirt away — allowing for a clean cut trench and consistent trenching speeds across a variety of soils. The 1,652-lb., rubber tracked trencher produces just 2.9 psi, and produces a trench width range of 4 to 8 in. BoxerEquipment.com or 800/476-9673

Toro

The Toro TRX-15 and TRX-19 tracked, walk-behind trenchers boast traction, maneuverability and zero-turn ease of operation, even on rough terrain. They feature user-friendly controls and four-cycle, V-twin engines. A large oil reservoir helps maintain low engine temperature and prolong engine life, and a large, dual-element KAI air cleaner improves airflow, performance and engine wear. Toro.com/TRX or 800/DIG-TORO



Ventrac ↑

The KY400 Trencher is capable of trenching up to 40 in. deep with a 5.5-in.-wide cut. It is designed with dual Push-N-Pull cylinders to assure positive boom control for digging, boom lift and transport. The terminator/cup combo chain offers car-



bide cutting tips for cutting performance in a variety of soil conditions. Digging teeth bolt onto the chain for easy replacement. Ventrac.com or 866/VENTRAC

Barreto Manufacturing

Because of its large footprint, the tracks of the new 2324TK Track Trencher are less invasive on the landscape. Cross-trenching is made simple — and by combining tracks with additional weight, the ability to keep the trench straight is greatly improved. The 2324TK features an ergonomic, single-handed control and up to 48 in. trenching depth. BarretoMfg.com or 800/525-7348

Brown Products Inc.

In addition to its Trench-Master line, Brown's Model F991H BedEdger provides trenching capability, too. Featuring a 9-hp Honda engine and steerable wheels, the unit trenches up to 9 in. deep and 2 in. wide. Interchangeable rotors provide versatility for landscaping or trenching operations. BrownProducts.com or 800/897-3726



For the Edge Inc.

The TRENCH'N edge Trencher has developed a new method of installing Sub-surface Drip Irrigation (SDI) and Waste Water Dispersion (WWD) systems that decrease installation cost and clean-up labor. SDI also eliminates the overspray onto sidewalks, streets and driveways that have now been restricted by California and Texas. The "blade-in-a-blade" technology is an option on all of the company's irrigation trenchers, which will install both conventional irrigation and

SDI/WWD systems

all in one unit. This blade will also allow for the installation of low-voltage lighting, cable TV, dog fencing and silt fence. TrenchNEdge.com or 651/777-7923

Ditch Witch

The new RT80 is a utility-based, fully hydrostatic trencher with a compact footprint and an 83 gross hp turbocharged diesel engine. The unit offers a top speed of 9.8 mph. It offers four combinations of torque and speed for greater adaptability. Cruise control and other operator comforts are standard, as is a 30-gal. fuel tank and an advanced cooling system to help maintain optimal engine performance. Several attachments are available, including traversing trencher, saw and backhoe. DitchWitch.com or 800/654-6481

E-Z Trench

The new Groundsaw model EZ9100 was built for fast digging, durability and performance. It has a centrifugal clutch drive that is bathed in oil, which provides protection against extreme conditions and abuse. Carbide bits cut right through tree roots and hard soils with progressive biting blades. The 250-lb. unit makes a clean, neat 2.5-in.-wide trench from 0 to 13 in. deep. EZTrench.com or 843/756-6444

Turf Teq

In addition to Bed Edging and Trenching, the Multi-Use Power Edger offers a Bed Grooming function. This feature enables the operator to quickly, easily and cleanly maintain beds with minimal disturbance throughout the entire season. Capabilities include grooming, edging and trenching, among others. All Multi-Use Power Edger functions can be performed by simply changing the blade and guard. TurfTeq.com or 866/503-8873

2009

TURFGRASS FERTILITY REPORT

PART TWO OF A TWO-PART SERIES

AS YOU BALANCE ECONOMICS AND AGRONOMICS RELATED TO YOUR CHOICE OF FERTILIZERS, KEEP IN MIND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS, TOO

INSIDE:

23 Fertilizer BMPs matter — follow them

26 Lessons from the price spike

Right Fertilizer Choices Reduce Environmental Footprint and Increase Bottom Line

In recent years, increased concerns about protecting water from fertilizer runoff and leaching have prompted government officials to pay closer attention to the landscape industry. In fact, some local and federal regulatory agencies, notably the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) are considering imposing new restrictions on fertilizer applications.

By using the right fertilizer at the right rate, time and place, landscape professionals can realize cost and time savings with fewer applications, remain competitive in the market and stay ahead of possible environmental restrictions.

Fertilizers and the Environment

Most traditional fertilizers are water soluble and release nutrients quickly. When nitrogen is delivered too quickly for the plant to take up, unused nutrients are often lost to the environment. A nutrient that leaves its intended application site risks becoming a pollutant. Movement of nitrate-nitrogen generally receives the most attention because it can contaminate ground water and cause health hazards. Excess nitrate-nitrogen and phos-

phorus in water bodies or wetlands can cause algae bloom and other plant growth that deplete oxygen in the water and reduce its ability to support life. In addition to the environmental impact, the loss of fertilizer nutrients to the surrounding environment represents lost value from professional landscapers' fertilizer budgets.

Slow- and Controlled-Release Fertilizers Reduce Environmental Losses

Slow- and controlled-release fertilizers deliver nutrients to the soil gradually and consistently feed the plant over a longer period of time. These fertilizers are manufactured in a way that prevents water from rapidly dissolving the fertilizer nutrients. The purpose is to prevent release of the nutrients immediately following application. Instead, nitrogen is gradually released in unison with turfgrass demands.

Slow- and controlled-release

fertilizers effectively deliver more nutrients to intended plants while protecting against environmental loss. Nutrients stay in the root zone for longer and feed the plant at the root, which results in green, healthy turf and a significantly lower impact on the environment.

Agrium Advanced Technologies' Earth-Friendly Fertilizers

Agrium Advanced Technologies' slow- and controlled-release fertilizers are engineered with advanced-generation coatings and other proprietary technologies that increase nutrient uptake by plants and reduce losses to the environment.

Landscape professionals rely on our environmentally friendly fertilizer technologies to control nutrient release for improved plant growth and environmental performance. Agrium Advanced Technologies' product line includes the following slow- and controlled-release products—POLYON®, NITROFORM®, NUTRALENE®, XCU™ and DURATION CR®.

Our company is working hard to provide innovative, cost-saving solutions with slow- and controlled-release technologies and we're committed to helping our customers discover smarter ways to grow. For more information, please visit our website www.AgriumAT.com.



FERTILIZER BMPs MATTER — FOLLOW THEM

A fertility program is part agronomy and part economics. But according to Jon Cundiff, an increasingly important third leg of any landscape fertility program is environmental stewardship.

Cundiff should know. He has worked his entire adult life in the Green Industry. He started his career in turfgrass as a teenager working on the grounds crew for the Kansas City Royals baseball team. Presently, he and his wife, Vicky, co-own Turf's Up-Weed Man, a Kansas City-area lawn care company.

Depending on the weather, Kansas City can be a difficult place to grow quality turfgrass. With its hot, humid summers and freezing winters, it's in a part of the country known as the transition zone, where typically neither warm-season nor cool-season species thrive.

This year the weather gods smiled on the region with wet, relatively cool weather. Lawns, most of them cool-season tall fescue, entered the fall looking green and full, Cundiff says.

Cundiff is keenly aware of turfgrass fertility best management practices (BMPs), partly because he tracks and incorporates into

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS JOIN AGRONOMIC AND ECONOMIC CHOICES IN DEFINING THE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR LAWN CARE COMPANIES AND THE LAWN SERVICE INDUSTRY. BY RON HALL, EDITOR-AT-LARGE

his program recommendations from turfgrass experts at the University of Missouri and Kansas State.

"We're looking at our programs and determining what worked and what didn't," he says. "We're in the process of determining if there's anything we want to tweak for next season in our fertility program."

Train your technicians

Gary LaScalea, whose career in lawn care started as a manager for ChemLawn during its glory days in the 1980s, will only send

trained and knowledgeable technicians to fertilize customers' lawns. Because of that philosophy, the company he founded 15 years ago, Plano, TX-based GroGreen, Inc., maintains an employment strategy focused on keeping great technicians. When it hires a new employee, he says it takes at least a week — and sometimes two — for the new prospect, working under the guidance of an experienced technician, to be allowed solo on clients' properties.

The on-the-job portion of GroGreen training consists of:

- ▶ learning how to calibrate a spreader;
- ▶ using a deflector to direct fertilizer prills where they belong;
- ▶ preventing fertilizer from entering waterways; and
- ▶ sweeping fertilizers from sidewalks, driveways and other non-turf surfaces.



Jon Cundiff follows recommendations from local universities to keep his firm's fertility program on target.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF TURFGRASS

While homeowners appreciate the beauty of their lawns, few recognize their environmental benefits:

- › erosion control
- › dust stabilization
- › precipitation capture for groundwater recharge
- › surface water quality improvement
- › improved entrapment and decomposition of synthetic chemical pollutants
- › soil restoration
- › heat dissipation and temperature moderation
- › noise abatement
- › glare reduction
- › sequestration of carbon dioxide



ANNUAL NITROGEN REQUIREMENTS BY DIFFERENT SPECIES

COOL-SEASON GRASSES	LBS. N/1,000 SQ. FT./YEAR
Sheep and hard fescue	0-3
Red fescue	1-3
Tall fescue	2-4
Perennial ryegrass	2-4
Improved Kentucky bluegrass	2-4
Common Kentucky bluegrass	1-2
Creeping bentgrass	3-8
WARM-SEASON GRASSES	LBS. N/1,000 SQ. FT./YEAR
Improved Bermudagrass	4-8
Buffalograss	0-2
St. Augustinegrass	2-4
Zoysiagrass	2-4

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS TURFGRASS EXTENSION & OUTREACH

Organic vs. synthetic

He says proper fertilization is based on the four R's — Right source, Right rate, Right time, Right place.

Seemingly, there's always discussion (and oftentimes disagreement) about the use of inorganic or organic fertilizers. There shouldn't be because plants, including turfgrasses, take up nutrients in inorganic forms, usually ionic forms. Consequently, organic molecules of organic fertilizers must decompose into smaller inorganic components before they can be taken up by turfgrass. Plants don't favor one source of nutrients over another as long as the required amounts and forms of nutrients are available.

Even so, some lawn care business owners see advantages to using organic materials alone or in combination with synthetic fertilizers. For example, Brent Flory, founder and president of Freedom Lawns, Inc., Delphi, IN, mixes and uses aerobically generated compost

with urea on customers' lawns. The carbon sources in the compost help keep the urea (which he needs to increase the nitrogen to an acceptable level for the desired turfgrass response) from releasing so quickly. The humic acids in the mixture promote plant health, he says.

"The material I use on our properties is teaming with microorganisms that build the soil. I rarely worry about diseases or other problems on our lawns," says Flory, who was an agriculture consultant and fertilizer formulator before starting his landscape/lawn service company more than two decades ago.

Like all responsible lawn care business owners, Flory is aware of the environmental consequences of sloppy or inappropriate fertilizer applications. His techni-

cians use products at the right times of the season and in the right amounts to provide optimum plant benefits — and keep nutrients from entering the waterways in the scenic Wabash River watershed, his principle market.

Fertilizer runoff into streams, lakes, bays and other surface waters is the main environmental concern about fertilization. Excessive levels of phosphorus in these surface waters have resulted in regulations that limit phosphorus in fertilizers in some areas.

More recently, turfgrass fertilizer itself — not just phosphorus — is a product category that's ending up in the crosshairs of policymakers in several regions of the country.



Brent Flory adds aerobically generated compost to fertilizer applications as an additional carbon source.

The blame game

For example, county officials in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties on Florida's Gulf Coast have been considering a ban on the use of lawn fertilizer (by professionals and do-it-yourselfers alike) during the summer to curb the development of toxins and algae in Tampa Bay and other surface waters. Officials claim residential runoff accounts for 20% of the nutrient runoff in the Bay. This past summer, an algae bloom stretched 14 miles across the Bay.

The turfgrass industry says that banning lawn fertilization in the summer won't solve the region's water quality problems — and may, in fact, contribute to them. It says that as turfgrass on home lawns and other properties becomes thinner it is less able to retain precipitation and prevent runoff.

Regulators are targeting both do-it-yourself (DIY) homeowners and professional lawn application companies.

Of the two, professionals (if they are professionals) build their programs incorporating BMPs, including soil testing, and the proper product selection, amount and timing for the type of turfgrass they're fertilizing. They monitor soil conditions and seasonal needs, and keep fertilizer off impervious surfaces and away from streams, lakes, ponds and other sources of surface water.

"We don't run soil samples on every customer every year, but we run about 50 a year," says Mark Grunkemeyer, president of Buckeye EcoCare in Centerville, OH.

Soil testing is particularly important to Grunkemeyer because of the differences in soil types from the southern to the northern ends of his service area.

"We base our programs on the fertilizer standards provided by The Ohio State University, but our technicians have the ability to give lawns what they need, usually at the neighborhood level," he says. "They're well trained — and well compensated." **LM**

SOME NITROGEN CARRIERS AND RELATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

CARRIER	% NITROGEN	ANALYSIS	RESIDUAL RESPONSE	LOW TEMP. EFFECTS	BURN POTENTIAL	LEACHING POTENTIAL
QUICK RELEASE						
Urea	45-46	45 or 46-0-0	short	rapid	high	moderate
Ammonium nitrate	33-34	33 or 34-0-0	short	rapid	high	high
Ammonium sulfate	21	21-0-0	short	rapid	high	high
Potassium nitrate	13	13-0-44	short	rapid	high	high
Diammonium phosphate	20	20-50-0	short	rapid	moderate	moderate
SLOW RELEASE						
IBDU	31	31-0-0	moderate	moderate	moderate to low	low
SCU	22-38	22 to 38-0-0	moderate	moderate to low	low	low
Resin-coated urea	24-35	24 to 35-0-0	moderate to long	moderate	low	low
Methylene ureas & ureaformaldehyde	38	38-0-0	moderate to long	very low	low	low
Activated sewage sludge	4-6	4 to 6-4-0	long	very low	very low	very low
Manures	1.5-3	variable	long	very low	very low	very low
Dried blood	3-14	variable	short	moderate	very low	very low

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS TURFGRASS EXTENSION & OUTREACH


GROWTH RESPONSES OF MAJOR MINERALS USED BY TURF

MINERAL	RESPONSE
Nitrogen (N)	green color; shoot growth and density; root growth; carbohydrate reserves' recuperative potential; heat, cold and drought hardiness; wear tolerance; and disease susceptibility
Phosphorus (P)	establishment rate, maturation, root growth, seed production
Potassium (K)	root growth; heat, cold and drought hardiness; wear tolerance; disease susceptibility
Sulfur (S)	green color, shoot growth and density, root growth, carbohydrate reserves, disease susceptibility
Iron (Fe)	green color; shoot growth and density; root growth; carbohydrate reserves; heat, cold and drought hardiness; wear tolerance

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS TURFGRASS EXTENSION & OUTREACH

CONTRACTORS CHANGE THEIR FERTILIZER SELECTION AND PURCHASING DECISIONS FOLLOWING HISTORICALLY HIGH PRICES IN 2007 AND 2008.

BY CINDY GRAHL



Slow- and controlled-
release fertilizer
save labor and product
cost long term

LESSONS FROM THE PRICE SPIKE

Commodity prices have settled since the world economy plunged in late 2008.

The price of fertilizer has stabilized as a result. This is in stark contrast to the volatility denting contractors' budgets for the 2007 and 2008 seasons. During the 12 months ending April 2008 nitrogen prices jumped 32%, phosphate prices increased 93% and potash prices exploded 100%, says the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The eruption in the cost of fertilizer was tied directly to the exploding demand for natural gas and other raw materials, such as phosphorous, potassium and sulfur, which is used to coat some urea products. Robust worldwide economic expansion fueled this demand

and increased prices of all commodities, including farm products such as corn, which also rose 100%. Since then the world's economic picture has changed dramatically — and prices for all commodities have fallen.

How long prices will remain steady depends on demand resulting from an anticipated worldwide economic recovery. The minerals that comprise fertilizers are traded globally.

The price of natural gas figures largest in the fertilizer price picture. It takes 33,500 cu. ft. of natural gas to manufacture a single ton of anhydrous ammonia, which is found in most of the popular forms of nitrogen fertilizer the Green Industry uses.

Prices also were affected by the rapid expansion of the ethanol industry,

which led to increased demand for corn crops, further boosting fertilizer prices.

To hedge against this volatility, including future price surprises as the world economy rebounds and drives demand for resources again, lawn care professionals are looking to buy smarter and increase the efficiency of their fertilizer applications.

Michael Turner, president of Custom Lawns in North Ridgeville, OH, didn't worry much about prices previously. But he says a big reason why the company maintained last year was because he bought fertilizer in May.

"We anticipated an increase, but not on the order of 20% per month," he says.

Jack Robertson, president of Jack Robertson Lawn Care in Springfield,

IL, was moved to action by the price volatility of the last 18 months. He says now checks prices as well as different suppliers more frequently than in the past to get the best value for his dollar.

Harnessing technology

End users, fertilizer manufacturers and suppliers are seeking to increase the efficiency of fertilizer. More attention is being given to slow- and controlled-release products, including those that use polyurethane coatings or chemical bindings to make nutrient release more consistent. These are activated over a longer period of time by hydrolysis or temperature-controlled diffusion, and release the nutrients at a more controlled, plant-available pace.

Fertilizing the “old way” with frequent applications wastes product and money because too much is used and it runs off or leaches into the water table, says Chris Derrick, technical specialist at Agrium Advanced Technologies, Sylacauga, AL.

“Lawns want to be spoon-fed, given the proper nutrition, with fertilizers applied appropriately,” he says.

Thus, using a more efficient fertilizer that delivers a more effective application of nutrients reduces product costs and enhances performance.

Quick-release fertilizers are typically applied about every six weeks with an initial whoosh of nutrient (and nutrient waste).

“The old mindset is for LCOs to keep fertilizing every month; it makes the customer feel good,” Derrick says.

But that idea is changing. Contractors should take a lesson from golf course superintendents because they have access to the latest turf management technologies, Derrick says. Slow- and controlled-release fertilizers allow lower rates of application and fewer applications a year. Although the product may cost a little more up front, these means that applications are reduced, saving labor and product

costs. Delivery fuel and inventory costs are reduced, too.

Timing and storage options matter

When buying fertilizer, more LCOs are employing various purchasing and storage strategies to take advantage of pricing and delivery options.

“Our bidding begins in January, and we give our list for the entire year to four or five suppliers,” says Rick Kier, president of Pro Scapes in Jamesville, NY.

Kier says he buys in two different ways: 50-lb. bags on a skid or 10 to 12

tons of liquid fertilizer in one big truckload. Pro Scapes has a 6,500-gal. tank of liquid fertilizer on-site, and keeps granular fertilizer in storage one month before it’s needed, buying as needed to avoid tying up capital.

“Using common sense and planning ahead are the best ways to save money, as well as knowing your square footage, because you can find out that an \$18 bag is \$14 two months later,” he says.

The Kapp’s Lawn Specialists branch in Macedonia, OH, buys in the winter, usually in January. It purchases as much as 11 truckloads at a time, with as many as seven of those self-stored.

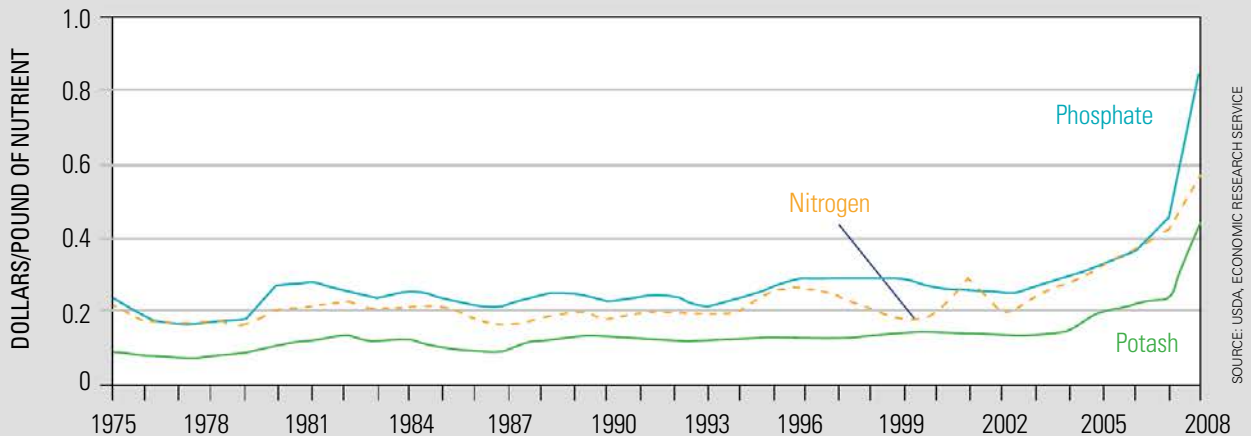
“We buy on demand to avoid the expense of storage and insurance”

– JACK ROBERTSON, PRESIDENT, JACK ROBERTSON LAWN CARE



Price is the average for April of each year. Nitrogen prices are average prices of nitrogen nutrient in anhydrous ammonia, nitrogen solution, and urea. Phosphate prices are the P₂O₅ prices of superphosphate. Potash prices are the K₂O prices of muriate of potash.

PRICES OF FERTILIZER NUTRIENTS INCREASED SHARPLY TO HISTORICAL HIGHS IN 2008



“We look at our usage for the entire season,” says Branch Manager Robert Walls, Jr. “Sometimes we buy less, sometimes more.”

Walls shops around for the best price, not assuming local suppliers will have it. He says he is always willing to negotiate.

Dennis’ 7 Dees Landscaping in Portland, OR, has a program with a local distributor familiar with its needs. The distributor makes the recommendations, and it works very well, says Department Manager Jeff Rieger. The company buys the one-ton pallet with a preset price because the supplier knows the volume the company buys. The distributor stores the supply for Dennis’ 7 Dees and delivers it as needed.

“We buy by the truckload, as needed, based on what it used in the past and on price, volume and quality,” says Jack Roberson. “We buy on demand to avoid the expense of storage and insurance costs. Sometimes the dealer stores it, and sometimes it’s delivered to the company’s warehouse.”

What it’s all about

In the long run, fertilizer should be used to enhance lawn health and appearance, Derrick says. Agrium has an online

prediction tool to allow managers to look at cost savings relative to their own microclimate and specific location, based on the actualities of water release and weather in a 12-year period.

Rieger is a proponent of slow-release fertilizer.

“We know mowing is what will kill you because increased growth slows down productivity for our crews, so we’re careful not to overfertilize,” he says. “We know what the square footage is and don’t work it too hard. We do four to five applications of slow release a year. That way, we don’t have to fertilize until the last half of April. Our goal is to have the last application stretch through the winter and spring months.”

Paying attention to the local climate conditions is important.

“In our climate, we need a certain amount of slow release between February and early October,” Turner says. “We outline a four- or five-step program to get a certain amount of nutrients. We’ll use slow release in spring and summer and late summer, depending on the climatic calendar.”

Walls prefers slow-release fertilizer but, depending on the client, may use a product that’s applied as much as six times annually.

“We’re getting good feedback from LCOs about the slow- and controlled-release fertilizer products,” Derrick says. “They may need to make fewer trips to fertilize, but they can use that time to do things such as weeding, edging and other tasks that bring value to the service.”

Environmental benefits

Fertilizer also plays into today’s sensitivities about sustainability. A more precise nutrient delivery system reduces runoff and surface or groundwater contamination. Ultimately, contractors must sell themselves not on how often they apply fertilizer, but on the result they achieve: the look and the health of the lawn. It’s important for contractors to focus on that outcome.

“We save not so much on product as by being a knowledgeable shopper, knowing the different types and makeup of various products,” Kier concludes. “We use slow release four times a year. It depends on how many applications you make. And it depends on your ultimate goal.” **LM**

GRAHL is a Cleveland-based researcher and writer. Contact her at info@landscape-management.net.



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Mark Grunkemeyer, past president of the Ohio Lawn Care Association and a former board member of the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation, says the benefits he has received by participating to industry events far outweigh the effort. "I can pick up the phone anytime and network with any number of great people in this industry as a result," he says.

How did you get into the lawn care business? I wanted to work outside. It's the reason why I studied to be a golf course superintendent at The Ohio State University. Then I developed a passion to help homeowners improve the green spaces where they live, work and play.

What do you like the most — and the least — about owning/operating a lawn care business? It's been exciting to be a part of the evolution of what is still a young industry, and the constant change that is taking place in the lawn care business. One of the most frustrating aspects of the business, at least for me, is dealing with people, including clients, who have little or no patience.

What is your company's competitive advantage? Our technicians have been trained to give lawns only what they need, and can use either liquids or dry treatments. We can do this because our trucks are equipped with 600-gallon split tanks and dry boxes. Our technicians are well trained

and well compensated. Even the newest guys have been on the same lawns for five years.

What do you see as the largest challenge for the lawn care industry? The largest challenge for the lawn care industry is the environmental groups that mistake perception and emotion for science and reality. That's why we must continue to educate our clients and the public about what we do to keep their properties healthy and attractive, and the reasons about why we do it.

We visited your Web site and downloaded several of your most recent quarterly newsletters. In terms of design and content, they're excellent — among the best we've seen. Who produces them? We contract with Focal Point in Cincinnati. The professionals there produce the first page our newsletter, and I

produce the second page. It takes me about two hours five times a year. We produce one for every round or application, and every customer gets one. We did a survey to see how many are being read, and we discovered that about 15 percent to 20 percent of our customers read them. We think this is a pretty good rate.

What would you describe as your company's best marketing tool? Our people are our best marketing tool, but we're very proud of our printed material and our Web site, too.

Will you be attending the Ohio Turfgrass Conference again Dec. 7-10? I never miss the conference. It's always a great opportunity to learn and network.

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Buckeye Ecocare, Centerville, OH

FOUNDED: 1984

PRESIDENT/OWNER: Mark Grunkemeyer

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: 1

EMPLOYEES: 30

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: past president of the Ohio Lawn Care Association, seven years on the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation Board, member of the Bayer National Lawn Care Advisory Board

BUSINESS OUTLOOK FOR '09: "Same as '08: residential sales up, commercial sales down."

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS/HOBBIES: "Good friends, great times, competitive golf and being outside and near the water."

FAMILY: wife of 33 years, Peggy, two grown children, three grandchildren

WEBSITE: BuckeyeEcocare.com

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BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author is a partner with the Wilson-Oyler Group consultancy. Visit www.wilson-oyler.com.

Careful analysis of the surrounding business climate is key to success

We're living in a changing world. Most of the past 12 months have been extremely challenging, and most people don't see that changing in the next 12 months. As a result, I see many companies in a reactionary mode.

During times like these, it's difficult to slow down. Our business practices require an extreme sense of urgency. However, our business health is dependent on sound strategy, which will evolve only if we take time to reflect on what's happening around us in many different arenas.

Our business health is dependent on sound strategy, which will evolve only if we take time to **reflect on what's happening around us** in many different arenas.

How will political events, such as the healthcare debate, affect our businesses? How will the spending habits of the American consumer affect the business environment? Sooner or later, government spending will affect interest rates, taxes and inflation. Do the high unemployment numbers suggest an opportunity for us to upgrade our work forces? Will there be immigration reform? Will there be business opportunities arising out of the green or sustainability movements?

I don't remember a time when there was so much uncertainty in the business environment in so many areas simultaneously. Yet some companies are going to come out of this unstable environment smelling like roses. It always happens.

Some people will worry themselves sick about this. Others will get mad, and still others will reflect and find a strategy that positions them favorably in the future.

As I reflect, I like to think about best-case and worst-case scenarios. As I see events unfolding, I think about the best outcome I could hope for that would be helpful to my business — or, if that outcome develops, what I need to do to use it to my advantage. If a worst-case scenario develops, I need to think about how can I prevent becoming a victim and minimize any negative outcome to my business.

It's imperative to reflect internally and externally on how customers and potential customers will be affected. Only then can you understand how to position your company for success.

Investigate possible outcomes for your business environment.





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As landscapes come under increasing scrutiny from water authorities, the Green Industry ramps up its efforts to develop sprinkler technology and new turfgrasses that make every drop of water count.

PART



Counting on **TECHNOLOGY** to save irrigation

PHOTOS AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL, INC.

37 Turfgrass in critics' bull's eye

What we're doing to maintain a vibrant turf industry despite calls to restrict "water-hogging" lawns.

43 Catching the rain for irrigation

Rainwater harvesting is growing at an incredible rate. But is it a business opportunity for us?



WORD FROM OUR PARTNER

Rain Bird: Smart Technology for a Better Future

AS THE WORLD'S WATER supply continues to be challenged by population growth, drought and contamination, there's little doubt that the future of the irrigation industry rests upon a very important goal. We must consistently develop and implement new, more efficient systems that maintain healthy landscapes while using as little fresh water as possible. At Rain Bird, we're dedicated to achieving this goal each and every day.

Every new product or service developed at Rain Bird is assessed for its contribution to The Intelligent Use of Water™. At one of the largest indoor irrigation testing facilities in the world, we continually test new and current products for quality and accuracy. As a result, we're developing new products that incorporate the latest "smart" or weather-based technology, helping us provide the most efficient irrigation solutions available on the market today.

In June, Rain Bird introduced its ESP-SMT Smart Control System, a simple-to-use tool that provides weather-based control while saving time, money and water. This control system combines a sophisticated controller with an on-site weather sensor that calculates evapotranspiration rates and deducts actual effective precipitation to determine how much water it should apply to maintain an optimum moisture level in the soil. Until the launch of this product, weather-based controllers were often too expensive and complicated for residential use. The ESP-SMT has changed all that by providing an affordable and accurate level of irrigation control that was formerly out of reach.

October 2009 marked the launch of the newest member of Rain Bird's smart irrigation family—the SMRT-Y Soil Moisture Sensor Kit. After the SMRT-Y (pronounced "smart why") is installed, its digital sensor measures absolute soil moisture levels every ten minutes and relays that information back to the SMRT-Y controller interface. When soil moisture levels are above a pre-determined level, the controller interface interrupts the irrigation schedule that's been programmed into the system's timer. If the sensor recognizes dry soil conditions, the system's next watering cycle will proceed as originally scheduled. This closed-loop feedback process means that actual plant and turf conditions at the roots are being communicated back to the controller for a truly accurate snapshot of a landscape's moisture needs.

In addition to these groundbreaking new products, Rain Bird continues to produce many other water-efficient system components that can make a tremendous impact on the amount of water used for irrigation. From rotary nozzles with matched precipitation rates to rotors with pressure-regulating stems and our patented Rain Curtain Technology, Rain Bird continues to make it easier than ever before to incorporate smart, water-saving practices into any irrigation system.



Turfgrass in critics' bull's eye

Responding to growing criticism that lawns “waste” water, the Green Industry ramps up technology and focuses on turfgrass breeding to maintain the popularity and benefits of lawns in American landscapes.

BY **RON HALL** EDITOR-AT-LARGE

THE AMERICAN lawn is under attack. It's being criticized on several fronts, but most vehemently for “wasting” potable water. This criticism is misdirected, say many people in the Green Industry. Water isn't wasted *by* turfgrass, which almost every scientific study has shown uses water efficiently; rather, it's wasted *on* turfgrass. There's a difference. A big difference, they claim.

“We've established the basic principles of the drought tolerance in turfgrass,” says turfgrass expert Dr. James Beard, professor emeritus Texas A&M University. “Now it's a matter of documenting the specific details. There's a lot of pressure to do more research on this



Developing turfgrass with better drought and heat tolerance has become a top priority in the industry.

HYBRID GRASS COULD HELP CONSERVE WATER

When Dr. James H. Baird joined the Department of Botany and Plant Sciences at the University of California-Riverside as turfgrass extension specialist on Jan. 1, 2008, he found a full plate of projects waiting for him. One of them was reviving a program to develop a drought-tolerant, cool-season grass for California lawns. That project, stalled because of the retirement of turf expert Dr. Vick Gibeault several years earlier, had been kept alive through the efforts of geneticist Adam Lukaszewski.

Lukaszewski had been working on crosses of ryegrass with a variety of meadow fescue. He is attempting to find the right combination of stress-resistant genes to produce a turfgrass that remains attractive with extremely little water. The investigations of selections have moved to test plots at Riverside's 15-acre turfgrass center.

"We're going to push this grass to being a ryegrass because that's essentially what it is," Baird says. "Even though its parent is a forage-type fescue, it walks, talks and quacks like a ryegrass."

But even if the program is successful, Baird sees the "super" ryegrass as a short-term solution.

"Ultimately, especially in Southern California, we should be using warm-season grasses," he says. "We want to apply the same type of technology we're using on this ryegrass to develop a warm-season grass that stays green year-round. That would be a home run."

because of issues with water use."

This sheds a different light on "water-hogging turfgrass," which has become a journalistic catch phrase when describing lawns in relation to water issues. Industry's response to this description is direct: *Grass doesn't waste water; people waste water.* The people are property owners and usually homeowners.

Yes, a lot of our water is used outdoors. As much as 30% to 70% of homeowners' water use occurs outdoors, mostly for landscapes and lawns, says the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). And as much as 50% of that water is wasted by inefficient irrigation.

Where the grasslands occur

There's a lot of drought resistance in grasses, says Dr. Leah Brillman, veteran turfgrass breeder at Seed Research of Oregon in Corvallis, OR.

"Consider where grasses are native

in the world," she says. "These are in the world's arid or semi-arid regions."

Consider that before settlement in the 19th century, deep-rooted native grasses covered the U.S. Great Plains. Tall grasslands in the eastern regions received an average of 20 to 25 in. of rain annually, and the short grasslands beyond the 100th Meridian received less than 16 in. of rain. These were native grasses, of course.

While practically none of America's popular turfgrasses are native, nevertheless, many are efficient users of water, too, says Brillman. Most cool-season turfgrasses originated in northern or central Europe. Almost all warm-season species came from Africa and other warmer climates. Even so, many of these "introduced" species (especially the improved cultivars) survive droughts and recover. To do this they typically go off color and and (to many people's eyes) become unattractive.

And that's at the heart of the issue, she says. Homeowners expect their lawns to be green and lush year-round regardless of conditions. As a result, they use too much water on their lawns, she says.

"Unless they have even coverage with their sprinklers, they'll develop dry spots and be tempted to up the amount of water they're using. They end up using way too much water," Brillman says.

Education is crucial

Educating the public to water intelligently is key for all segments of the Green Industry. It's critical for turfgrass sod growers since grass production is their sole livelihood. "Turf has its place in the landscape like other valuable plants, and all plants use water," says Dave Dymond, general manager of H&H Sod Company in Kenansville, FL. "We know that people who have irrigation usually water too much. If we could just train and educate them better, we

IRRIGATORS SEEK MORE SAY WITH EPA WATERSENSE

The big-lawns-waste-water sentiment is hardly confined to the arid Southwest or to Florida, which faces severe groundwater issues in light of its continued population growth and development. The sentiment has become national, and has found a partner in the U.S. EPA WaterSense program, a voluntary government/industry partnership to encourage water conservation.

One of the options in the most recent draft of its Water-Efficient Single-Family New Home Specification suggests turfgrass shouldn't exceed 40% of the landscapable area. This and several other guidelines in the draft, which was released in May 2009, aren't being viewed kindly by the Green and Irrigation Industries.

Early in 2009, the Irrigation Association (IA) formed a WaterSense Task Force consisting of contractors, irrigation product manufacturers and distributors to respond to the draft of the WaterSense specification. The group made a formal request to the EPA to delay the release of the outdoor portion of its program.

"We requested an alternative outdoor portion of the future New Home specification be based on performance results, which are also outcome-based, rather than the prescriptive measures," says John Farner, IA Federal Affairs Director.

"Next, we requested the EPA work with industry experts to develop a science-based alternative," says Farner. "Finally, we stated to the EPA the outdoor criteria, as currently written, are flawed and aren't something that the IA can support."

As of this writing it wasn't clear whether the EPA would modify its stance on turfgrass and other contested issues in its WaterSense outdoor program. Indeed, agencies throughout the United States are seeking to replace turfgrass-dominated properties with plant material they've identified as requiring less water.

To view the IA's complete response to the WaterSense Specifications for New Homes, visit Irrigation.org and click on "Gov't Affairs" at the top of the home page.

John Farner, works with the IA's WaterSense Task Force.



could provide the water savings our water districts are seeking."

That's a tall order and, to this point, one that's being driven mostly by local governments and water agencies. As these bodies attempt to educate the public (often at great effort and expense), they also put measures in place to force water conservation. These measures include irrigation restrictions and landscape ordinances to discourage the use of certain plant material. Reducing the amount of

turfgrass almost always tops these lists.

In September, commissioners in Orange County, FL, approved a plan to limit the amount of grass homes in new neighborhoods can have. They want yards in new homes to be less than 60% grass. The new law can save half of the water used outdoors, the commissioners claim.

The new law is similar to efforts in communities throughout the arid Southwest where property owners are being asked to reduce the amount



A&M ROAD WARRIORS PUSH TURF TO ITS LIMITS

Never let it be said that turfgrass experts don't go the extra mile to discover something new about the grasses used on lawns, sports fields or golf courses. Drs. David Chalmers and Kurt Steinke went the extra 350-plus miles as they drove from Texas A&M University in College Station, TX, to San Antonio each week for two years as part of an ambitious project studying the drought tolerance of turfgrasses. The project was headed by Chalmers and used facilities at the modern Irrigation Technology Center (ITC) in San Antonio.

Chalmers and Steinke discovered that turfgrass can be a remarkable survivor.

"The consumer has to recognize how turfgrass has evolved," says Steinke, who left A&M this past year and is now with the Michigan State University turf team. "When conditions are tough for grasses, they shut down to survive — and they will survive."

Steinke makes those comments as a result of the ITC study that used a portable rainout shelter to stress grasses to their limits. The two-year project investigated the 60-day drought tolerance of 25 cultivars of four different species. The study compared and recorded how replicated plots of the different species and cultivars performed when planted on native soil with unrestricted root depth relative to plots with a 4-in. topsoil depth.

The Turfgrass Producers of Texas and the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) funded the study. SAWS had been considering banning the planting of St. Augustine grass, which it described as a high-water-use grass. It was also looking at requiring 4 in. of topsoil for newly established lawns.

Using digital photography, the researchers recorded the condition of the grasses each week as they were forced to go longer and longer without irrigation. It took St. Augustine between 26 and 50 days before losing 50% of its color, and Bermudagrass between 43 and 60 days, Steinke says.

"Consumers view color as indicating plant health," he says.

The grasses growing in the native soils with unrestricted root depth survived even 60 days of drought, says Steinke, while the grasses growing in just the 4 in. of topsoil perished within a month.

"Turfgrasses are a lot more drought-tolerant than most people think," Steinke says. "If you don't water it, it'll recover eventually."

To review the complete report of the 60-day drought study, visit http://itc.tamu.edu/documents/2008FinalReportSAWS&TPT_s.pdf



The ITC Center's state-of-the-art rainout shelter, above, was used in the ambitious drought study.



of turf on their properties, in some cases being offered cash incentives to remove lawns.

"If the lawn isn't being used for anything, why have so much of it?" notes Doug Bennett, conservation manager for the Southern Nevada Water Authority. A horticulturist by training and charged with conserving his region's scarce fresh water, he makes no apologies for taking a dim view of big lawns in his water district. Las Vegas, after all, is located in the Mojave desert and receives an average of just 5 in. of rain annually.

Turf is viewed in a similar light by some authorities in Florida in spite of the state's vastly wetter climate.

"It's been an uphill battle for us because turf is such an easy target," says Dymond, who has been in the sod business more than 30 years and is past president of the Florida Sod Growers Cooperative. "When people

drive down the street and see sprinklers running when they shouldn't be or water sprayed onto the pavement, they tend to blame the turf."

Dymond admits educating the public is a tall order and a job the industry needs to do better.

"People have to realize there's a big difference between keeping their lawns alive and keeping them lush, especially when water is scarce," Dymond says.

"We try to teach our customers to teach their customers to irrigate the grass only when it needs water, to wait until the grass begins to wilt. It will tell you when it needs water. Don't water it because it's Tuesday or because the clock is set at a certain time."

It's equally important property owners follow other proven cultural practices, too, Dymond says. These include not fertilizing lawns too much and mowing them at the height most advantageous to each type of turfgrass.

The Green Industry's customer education efforts can't match what the

EPA and regional policymakers, with their greater financial resources, can accomplish. For example, regional policymakers are attempting to curb landscape water waste with PSAs, a constant stream of literature and, in many water-scare regions, demonstration gardens to showcase water efficient landscapes.

One of the newest gardens will be installed at the University of California San Bernadino this coming spring.

The Water Resources Institute of Cal State San Bernadino (WRI), San Bernadino Valley Water and several other partners joined this past summer in a successful effort to collect funds for a Water Conservation

Demonstration Garden on its campus. The site, which consisted of 1.5 acres of turfgrass surrounded by walkways and parking lots, will become a garden of low-water-use "California-friendly" plants. The site will be open to the public and will also be used educate students, from the grade school to the university level.

"Working together with our partners, this garden will promote a better understanding of water conservation, sustainable practices and energy efficiency," says Randy Van Gelder, general manager of Valley District.

Betting on technology

The Green Industry, by contrast, is relying heavily on technology to provide water to American landscapes. It's attacking water waste on two broad fronts — smarter irrigation products and also by identifying and, in some cases, developing plants, including turfgrasses, that require less water to remain attractive and healthy.

These efforts are leading to "smarter" products, such as sprinklers that dispense water more evenly and precisely across landscapes, and controllers that use climate- and sensing technologies to supply plants with the water they need — and only what they need.

The industry wants to take the guesswork out of irrigation by taking it out of the hands of homeowners.

On the turfgrass front, experts across the United States are attempting to develop grasses that are even more efficient water users. The efforts are scattered in different regions of the country, looking at different species and cultivars..

But, developing new, improved turfgrasses takes years even with today's growing knowledge of genetics.

Brilman, one of the relatively small group of turfgrass experts committed to improving the environmental and aesthetic features of turfgrass, says significant progress has been made in



RESEARCH HAS SHOWN OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT TURFGRASS IS AN EFFICIENT WATER USER.

— Dr. James Beard,
Professor Emeritus Texas A&M
University

NTEP STARTS SPECIAL TURF DROUGHT TRIALS

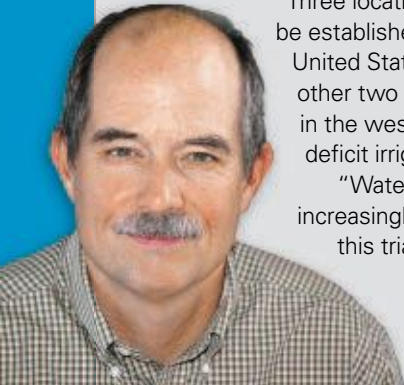
The National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) is a great information source for landscape and lawn service professionals. The program, headquartered in Beltsville, MD, shares data for 17 turfgrass species gathered from turf trials in 40 U.S. states and six provinces in Canada. It provides information aimed at helping end-users select the turfgrass best suited for their particular regions of the country, specific sites and uses.

In addition to evaluating and sharing data related to turfgrass quality, color, density, resistance to diseases and insects, and tolerance to heat, cold, drought and traffic, NTEP initiated a new trial this year focused on testing the drought tolerance of cool-season grasses at five locations. This will be the first trial in NTEP's new Trait Specific Testing program.

Three locations for the drought trial will be established in the eastern half of the United States using rainout shelters. The other two locations will be established in the western half of the country using deficit irrigation testing.

"Water used on turf is becoming increasingly criticized. Therefore, we feel this trial will show improvements in

Kevin Morris, executive director of NTEP



drought tolerance that can help consumers save water in their landscapes," says Kevin Morris, NTEP Executive Director. "Also, since there are municipalities, communities, and even the federal government, that wants to restrict turf use in landscapes, this program is an important step in encouraging development of drought tolerant grasses."

Data about percent green and ground cover throughout time will be collected regularly using digital imaging technology. Highlights of the procedures include:

- ▶ Three locations will use rainout shelters, which allow testing of short-term drought situations of 60 to 75 days during two growing seasons. Locations are Fayetteville, AR; St. Paul, MN; and Ithaca, NY.
 - ▶ Two other locations will measure chronic drought stress by imposing deficit irrigation during two complete growing seasons. Deficit irrigation levels will be determined by the needs at each location, but will range about 50% of evapotranspiration (ET) during spring and fall, and as much as 65% of ET during summer. Locations are Ft. Collins, CO, and Logan, UT.
 - ▶ Cool-season species will be organized into high-fertility and low-fertility groups. Therefore, low fertility species such as fineleaf fescue will receive only one-half the fertility of species such as perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass.
- "In the future, we hope to expand this program to traffic tolerance, salt tolerance and many other important traits," says Morris.

While results from the newly developed drought trials are not yet available, other valuable data related to turfgrass performance can be found online at NTEP.org.

developing grasses that remain alive and healthy with low water use.

Unfortunately, property owners (and some contractors, too) seem to be largely unaware of this and lack basic knowledge about turf care. For this reason, they continue to make grass selections on price, she says. Too often the turfgrasses they use to establish lawns represent the cheapest, poorest performing choices.

Brilman says that different species of turfgrass and even cultivars within each species can exhibit widely different degrees of drought tolerance.

Take Kentucky bluegrass, for example. Research has shown some of the improved cultivars of this popular cool-season species, such as the America types, require almost two-thirds less water during the course of a

summer to remain green and healthy compared to common types, which are used in a lot of the older bluegrass lawns in the northern parts of the United States, she says.

"If we could convince these people to change and establish lawns with the more expensive bluegrass, they'd need only about a third of the water they're presently using," Brilman says. "The problem is that people still have to know how much water that grass really requires, and only put that amount of water on it."

Basic misconceptions about turfgrass and its water needs color policymakers' perception of its role in landscapes, adds turf expert Beard, who has spent the past half-century researching turfgrass at Michigan State University and Texas A&M.

Turfgrass is an efficient user of water compared to trees and even many desert plants, he adds.

Generally, the water needs of plants are in proportion to their total leaf areas, he says, a fact born out by the location of forests in wetter climates around the world.

In the end, says Beard, the public will decide the fate of turfgrass on their properties. That decision may rest upon whether they will be willing to pay more for water for irrigation and for improved cultivars that use water more efficiently. Or if they will accept grasses that go dormant or seasonally off color, including when irrigation is not available.

"People may not be willing to accept it, not right away. They'll fight it, at least for a while," says Beard. **LM**

Catching the rain for irrigation

Interest in rainwater harvesting systems to supplement landscape irrigation is growing, but there's much to learn before jumping into the business.

BY **RON HALL** EDITOR-AT-LARGE

E DUCATING YOUR clients about rainwater harvesting systems can provide customers an alternative, free source for irrigation water in the face of increasing water restrictions. And who doesn't like free?

OK, so you've been around long enough to realize that even free usually isn't really free. Yes, there is a cost to using rainwater: the expense of installing a rainwater system, which can be considerable. Add the cost of the system's maintenance, usually minimal. But even these expenses, which vary based on a system's design, size and sophistication, may be a sound investment for many property owners when they consider and tally the expense of replacing dead or dying trees and ornamentals because of watering restrictions.

Landscapes, including expensive specimen trees, get severely stressed and often die because of lack of water

whenever a region suffers a severe drought and restrictive watering rules take effect.

As most of us know, local governments and water authorities don't view landscape irrigation as a critical use of potable water, especially on large residential or commercial landscapes where turfgrass is not actively used for sports or recreation.

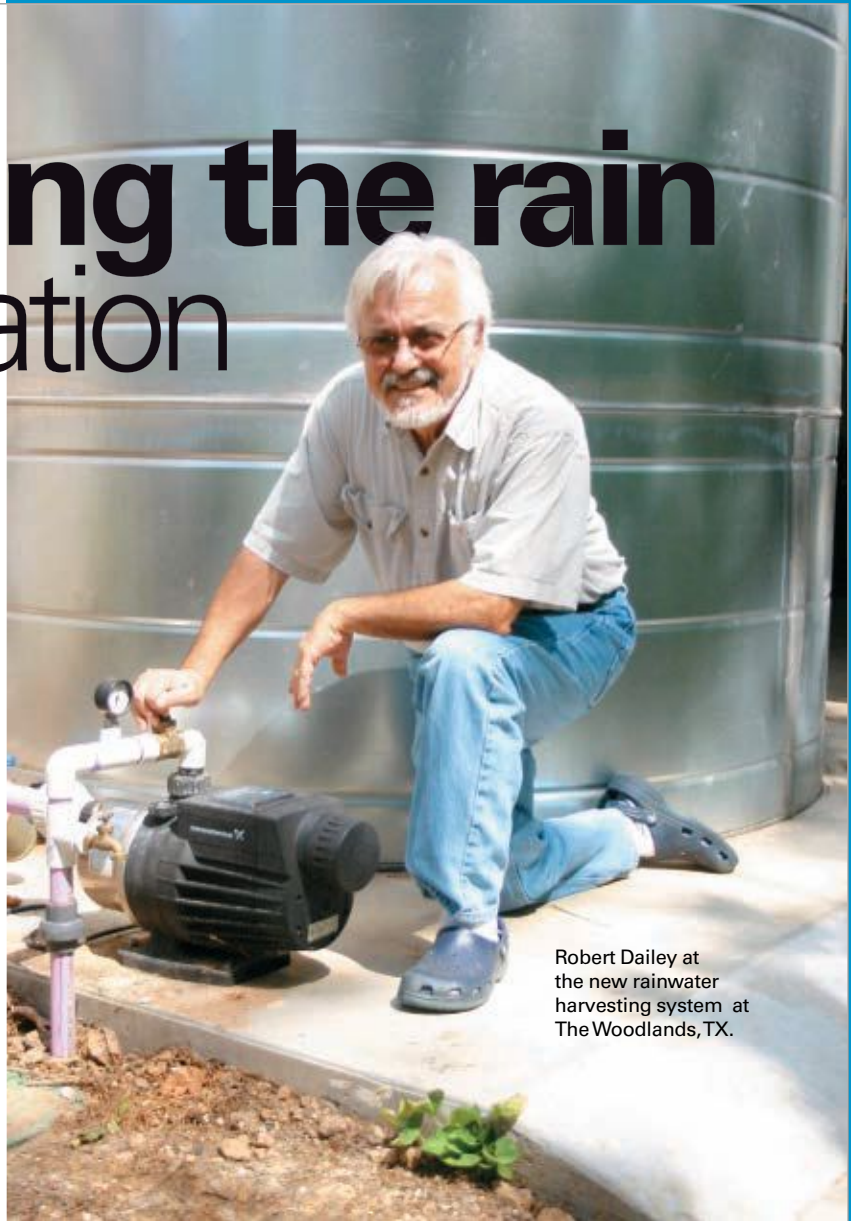
Look before leaping

Is harvesting rainwater a good business opportunity for a landscape company? Every owner will have to decide

that realizing that interest in these systems soars when a region is suffering drought, but demand can dry almost overnight when rains return.

Property owners in regions of the country with persistent water shortages or where potable water is costly are more likely to want them.

The concept of these systems is simple, starting with a design that captures rainwater or snowmelt running off from impervious surfaces such as roofs. The water flows by gravity from a roof, via gutters and downspouts, into a storage tank or underground cistern.



Robert Dailey at the new rainwater harvesting system at The Woodlands, TX.

Captured rain supplements traditional sources of water



DETERMINE THE STORAGE CAPACITY OF A SYSTEM BY THE LENGTH OF DRY SPELLS IN A REGION

— **Tim Pope**, President,
American Rainwater Catchment
Systems Association

The stored water is delivered to irrigation lines by a small pump and is directed to landscape plants. Filters keep debris from flowing into the tank and through the irrigation lines. Keep in mind that because this water has flowed over roofs and other imperious surfaces, it's probably passed over bird waste and other harmful substances. It probably shouldn't be used for anything other than irrigation.

Systems are available in a range of sizes and levels of sophistication — from a simple \$50 rain barrel available at most big box stores, to large, above-ground, gravity-fed storage-tank systems or underground cisterns, which deliver stored rainwater to a landscape via 1/2-hp to 1-hp electric pumps.

A supplemental source

The amount of irrigation water a rainwater catchment system can provide depends on the size of the area used to collect the rainwater and the design of the system. A rule of thumb is 1 in.

of rain falling on a 1,000-sq.-ft. roof yields 600 gal. of water.

While that may sound like a lot of water, it's not — at least when it comes to watering turfgrass, says Tim Pope, president of the American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association (ARCSA). Installing a system big enough to irrigate turfgrass is rarely, if ever, worth the cost of a system, he says.

Even a professionally designed and installed system is regarded as a supplemental or emergency source of irrigation water, mostly to preserve the health of valuable trees, shrubs and other ornamentals, he says.

Determine the storage capacity of the system largely by the length of dry spells in a region, Pope says. The longer the period between rains, the larger the capacity for storage.

In other words, a system installed in Atlanta, which typically receives frequent rains, would require less storage than a system installed for a similarly sized landscaped property in Tucson, where rain is much less frequent.

Pope lives and works out of his home in Friday Harbor, WA, where he has installed about 200 rainwater harvesting systems on the islands in the Puget Sound north of Seattle. Even though capturing rainwater for home use is technically illegal in Washington, Pope says he hasn't been prosecuted.

In spite of the Seattle area's reputation for being wet, it actually receives less total precipitation annually than any U.S. region east of the Mississippi River. In fact, the availability of fresh water in many of the communities on the Puget Sound and around Seattle is scarce, the reason why Seattle has a master water permit that allows residents of most neighborhoods to collect some rainwater.

A similar easing of rain collection by homeowners was approved in

Colorado as well this past spring. But it remains forbidden in Utah, which continues to honor 19th Century water rights laws that dictate that all flowing water in western states is already dedicated to someone's use.

Even so, interest in rainwater harvesting is exploding, Pope says, citing the growth of ARCSA, which was founded in 1994 in Austin, TX. For example, the association counted 120 members in 2007. This year, there are more than 700 members, including landscape architects, public officials, utilities, regulators and property developers.

Popular in newer communities

Installations are happening at all levels — residential, commercial, community — and since 2008 across entire real-estate developments in New Mexico.

In fact, nowhere in the United States is rainwater catchment systems promoted as vigorously as in Santa Fe County, Bernalillo County and Albuquerque where residents with 2500 sq. ft. or more of property must install an active rainwater catchment system comprised of cisterns. All commercial developments are required to collect all roof drainage into cisterns to be reused for landscape irrigation.

Another striking example of support for capturing and using rainwater for irrigation took place in 2008 in Tucson, AZ, with the passage of a municipal rainwater-harvesting ordinance for commercial projects. Under the law, developers building new corporate or commercial structures must supply half their landscape water needs from harvested rainwater. The law takes effect June 1, 2010.

Tucson, of course, is in the Sonoran Desert and receives just 12 in. of rainfall a year on average. With a metropolitan population of just more than 1 million people and growing, the region depends on the Colorado River and groundwater, which it care-

NOW THIS IS A RAINWATER CATCHMENT SYSTEM!

AUSTIN, TX — The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's 14-year-old rainwater harvesting system is an integral part of its architecture, and demonstrates the importance of connecting human culture with the natural world. The collection system conserves water and serves as a public education tool.

The Center collects water from 17,000 sq. ft. of roof, and can store more than 40,000 gal. in five on-site cisterns. The collected rainwater provides about 10% of the center's yearly water needs for irrigation of gardens and landscaping. About 10,600 gal. of water is collected per inch of rain. With an average rainfall of 30 in. per year, this rooftop system can collect about 300,000 gal. of rainwater annually.

The cisterns, one plastic and the others galvanized metal, are linked to the municipal water supply with backflow devices to prevent contamination of potable water. The center has the option to turn to city water, which would bypass the collection system and go right into the irrigation system.

The center was started in 1982 by former First Lady Claudia "Lady Bird" Johnson and actress Helen Hayes, who formed an organization to protect and preserve North America's native plants and landscapes.

First as the National Wildflower Research Center and later as the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, the facility exists to introduce people to the beauty and diversity of wildflowers and other native plants. Every day, the center brings life to Johnson's vision in its public gardens, woodlands and meadows, as well as in research. In 2006, the center became an organized research unit of the University of Texas at Austin. For more information on the center, visit Wildflower.org.



The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center supplies 10% of its irrigation needs with captured rain.

fully monitors to supply its needs.

Sometimes rainwater harvesting systems serve dual functions — irrigation and also education.

This past summer, the Community Associations of The Woodlands, TX, a master-planned region of about 90,000 people located 28 miles north of Houston, installed a 2,500-gal., rainwater-harvesting tank to collect the rainwater from the office roof at its parks, recreation and environmental services building. The water provides irrigation to more than 1,000 sq. ft. of

demonstration gardens on-site. On Sept. 26, the Community Associations invited the public to see the system and learn about rainwater harvesting methods for homes and businesses.

If you're interested to learn more about capturing and using rainwater to irrigate gardens, visit ARCSA.org or download the 88-page "The Texas Manual on Rainwater Harvesting" at www.twdb.state.tx.us/publications/reports/RainwaterHarvestingManual_3rdedition.pdf. There are several books about the subject, too. **LM**

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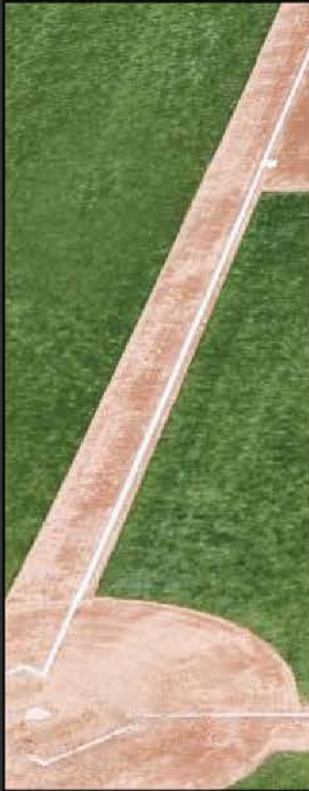


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Google 'waves' at Web collaboration

Are you spending more time in meetings than actually working? Has your fax machine started to memorize certain documents that get passed back and forth with your customers? Does editing a contract feel like a game of hot potato passing changes back and forth?

Well, you may be suffering from collaboration overload. It's a common problem within organizations that rely on committees for everything. But this month, I have good news for you.

Google recently released a new beta product called Google Wave, a revolutionary product that represents the next generation of online collaboration tools. A cross between e-mail, instant messaging and online wiki, it provides a new way to interact with your employees and business partners by creating what are called waves. Creating a wave allows multiple people to simultaneously edit documents, hold online meetings and coordinate projects with ease, all in real time.

Like e-mail, Google Wave has a familiar inbox where you can see new and existing waves from others. But unlike e-mail, all replies and forwards occur within the same wave, which makes it easy to track the entire ongoing discussion in one place. You can edit comments, reply and even have private side discussions all from the same wave window.

That might seem a bit confusing at first, but Google Wave also allows you to see changes to a

wave as they occurred over time by using an innovative playback feature. Using playback, you can watch who made changes in the wave as if you were reversing back in time to watch from the beginning. Playback is a useful feature for understanding how people arrived at certain conclusions.

I've been playing with Google Wave for several months now and have concluded there are effective uses for this new tool. Google Wave comes with an ability to add interactive functionality into your waves through the use of extensions also known as gadgets.

For example, if you're planning the next company barbecue, you can include the weather forecast using the Accuweather.com extension. You also might include an interactive map gadget to give the address and directions, as well as an interactive yes/no/maybe gadget to determine a firm count of the guest list.

The real power of Google Wave comes from its ability to quickly bring all the power of e-mail, instant messaging and interactive Web pages together into one central location.

But there's a downside to this powerful technology. With all the speed that comes with using Google Wave, it can be a productivity drain. There's something about watching others type that's quite hypnotic, and, if left unchecked, you might find yourself collaborating the day away. The best practice is to limit the number of people you're collaborating with by limiting the topic of each wave. Use the tool to plan the barbecue not rewrite the company business plan.

While online collaboration tools have been around for years, Google has a great new solution that may finally bring collaboration to the masses. As with Gutenberg's moveable type printing press, Bell's telephone and the rise of Internet, history has shown decreasing the lag in communication has increased the speed of innovation.

Google Wave has the potential to usher in a new set of communication tools and fundamentally change the speed of business. So buckle up. We're in for quite a ride.



Google Wave has the potential to usher in a new set of communication tools and fundamentally **change the speed of business**. So buckle up. We're in for quite a ride.



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ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

Formed in 2008, **Yellowstone Landscape Group** serves as the parent of three well-established Green Industry companies: **BIO Landscape & Maintenance**, **Piedmont Landscape** and **Austin Outdoor**. President and CEO **John Miller** provides his insight on issues facing maintenance companies.



John Miller,
president
& CEO

TOP TRENDS

» **Reduce costs.** There has been considerable pressure from our client base to reduce the cost and therefore, to some degree, the level of service. More than half of our customers have looked for ways to save money in their landscaping budgets. We work with them very closely to do that. The way we've tried to do that is to go over in considerable detail areas they can pick and choose some reduction in level of service.

» **Adding services.** A number of folks in the Green Industry and even some general contractors have tried to get into a different part of the landscape industry. Where they have been heavily construction oriented, they're trying to get into the maintenance side of the business. You can't blame them because the installation side of the industry has certainly suffered significantly. They just aren't familiar with some of the costs. That creates some difficulties for the incumbent maintenance company, and it creates some real challenges if they bid it too low — they actually have made their situation more complicated.

» **Stimulus money.** The stimulus money that was promised to improve the economy — we have seen very little impact in our market from anything coming out of Washington. We're not sure if we ever will. We're certainly not counting on something coming out of Washington to save the day.

TOP OBSTACLES

» **Tightened lending.** We are fortunate that we are well supported and have an adequate financial position. Our relationship with our lenders is sustaining. But we certainly have encountered companies that have received a great deal of pressure from their lenders. In certain circumstances, credit lines have been reduced or, heaven forbid, not renewed. It's very disturbing to see some of the lenders are not as supportive as one would like them to

INSIDE INFO

Company: Yellowstone Landscape Group

Headquarters: Plano, TX

Year established: 2008

Employees: 1,000 in season; 650 out of season

Annual revenue: Nine figures

Keys to being a maintenance leader: You have to deliver the level of service the customer expects. Maintenance runs a broad gamut, from resort and elite (properties) to tractor mowing of centerlines. Those are radically different kinds of maintenance situations. You need to deliver the level of service for customer expectations. If you give too much, it's going to have an impact on your bottom line. If you don't deliver enough, it's going to have an impact because the customer is going to go to somebody who will deliver the level of service that's appropriate.

be. We hope that it will improve over the next year to 18 months.

» **Acquisitions slowed.** It's very difficult, except for the larger enterprises, to do any acquisitions, because the banks are not that enthusiastic about lending money to support an acquisition.

» **Staff reductions.** If your level of business is reducing, then unfortunately, you have to make some very difficult calls on manpower levels. Nobody wants to let good people go. We have thus far been reasonably successful in retaining our talented people. A lot of the things that you would like to do are just going to have to be deferred.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Gaining market share.** If you have your costs in line and you are competing with people who don't know their costs, you may have some opportunities to selectively assume some business from some other folks in the marketplace. That sounds kind of cannibalistic or predatory. It's not meant to be. Your costs have to be aligned with the market conditions.

» **Financial stability.** This is also — in a left-handed way — to look at the structure of your business and determine if there are some things you need to get more efficient about.

» **Political savvy.** I would recommend people look at some of the things that are changing in Washington. There are big challenges out there. What's going on in Washington can impact their businesses quite significantly. We're talking about everything from health care to carbon footprint.

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THE RIGHT LANDSCAPING CAN ATTRACT WILDLIFE TO YOUR CLIENTS' PROPERTY.

BY KENDALL WEYERS

AS WILD PLACES across our country become increasingly hard to find, more and more people are looking for ways to bring some of that wilderness closer to home. They want to create their own little oasis to enjoy a taste of the wonder and beauty that nature offers. Closely watching a butterfly take tiny sips of nectar or marveling in the energetic industriousness of a squirrel can put the observer in the midst of the wild, even if they're in the middle of a bustling metropolis.

This can be accomplished by landscaping for wildlife. Careful selection and placement of plants and other features that benefit wildlife can bring a variety of creatures within easy view of the nearest patio or window.



Some wildlife can be a mixed blessing in the landscape. Squirrels, for example, are entertaining to watch, but could become pests for some homeowners.

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Any home or business with outdoor spaces can be part of this growing trend.

Why wildlife

Beyond the natural beauty wildlife can bring to a landscape, there are many practical benefits of landscaping for wildlife. A major one is economic. The plants used to attract wildlife are frequently natives, and because natives are adapted to the local ecosystem, they are hardy and thrive with fewer inputs. Fewer inputs equal lower costs. Plus, a better balanced landscape has a web of natural controls that help keep destructive insects and rodents in check, resulting in further economic benefit.



NWF CERTIFICATION OFFERED

Since 1973 the National Wildlife Federation has been offering a program to certify home wildlife habitats. Its website (www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/) has a wealth of detailed information to help successfully design and implement a wildlife habitat plan. It explains all the necessary components, including food, water, cover, and green gardening techniques, and offers links for more specifics.

Landscaping for wildlife also aids in the overall health and balance of local ecosystems. By increasing diversity, the richness and resilience of the landscape also increases. According to the National Wildlife Federation, loss of habitat is the highest current threat to wildlife. Increasing quality habitat around our homes and businesses can help offset losses elsewhere.

It's also significant that landscaping for wildlife fits hand in hand with sustainable landscaping. To successfully attract an abundance and variety of wildlife, the landscape must be treated gently, with careful use of resources. Mulching, composting, wise water use, and controlling runoff are all sustainable landscaping techniques that also make a site more appealing to wildlife.

Pieces of the puzzle

To attract wildlife, landscapers must try to meet as many basic needs as possible. This means food, water, and shelter. Of course, all sites have limitations, but the more wildlife is provided for, the more wildlife the site will have.

A great way to provide food is by using native varieties of plants. The plants and the wildlife of an area are already adapted to provide for each other, with the plants receiving pollination and seed dispersal and the animals getting nourishment in the form of nuts, fruits, berries, foliage, nectar, and pollen. The plants also provide the animals cover to hide from

Lantanas are just one of many plant varieties that can attract butterflies to a landscape.



predators, escape the elements, and raise their young.

Every region has its own blend of natives, but many are widespread across the country. Oak, hackberry, elderberry, dogwood, viburnum, honeysuckle, juniper, milkweed, asters, and goldenrod all are favorites of wildlife, and there are varieties of each native to most of the U.S. For more specific recommendations for your area, check out the "Top 10 Native Plants by Region" at www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife. Even more detailed information can be found at www.wildflower.org/explore, the website for the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Information Network.

All wildlife needs water, and this need can be satisfied in various ways. Having an existing spring, stream, pond, or wetland to enhance is ideal. The next best option is installing a pond, rain gardens, or bird-baths. Many different types of animals are attracted to water, so it is the best single

continued on page 56



BENARY VARIETY FOCUS: PANSY 'INSPIRE' SERIES

Engineered with the landscaper in mind, the new 'Inspire' pansy series offers a strong, dense plant with loads of blooms. They feature narrow flowering windows between colors. Longer flowering under short days and a tight habit ensure that 'Inspire' is the pansy of choice.



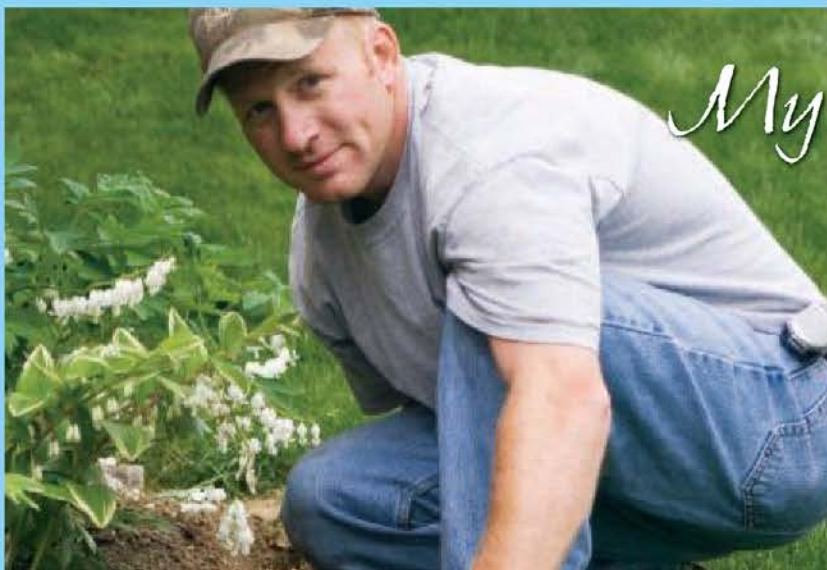
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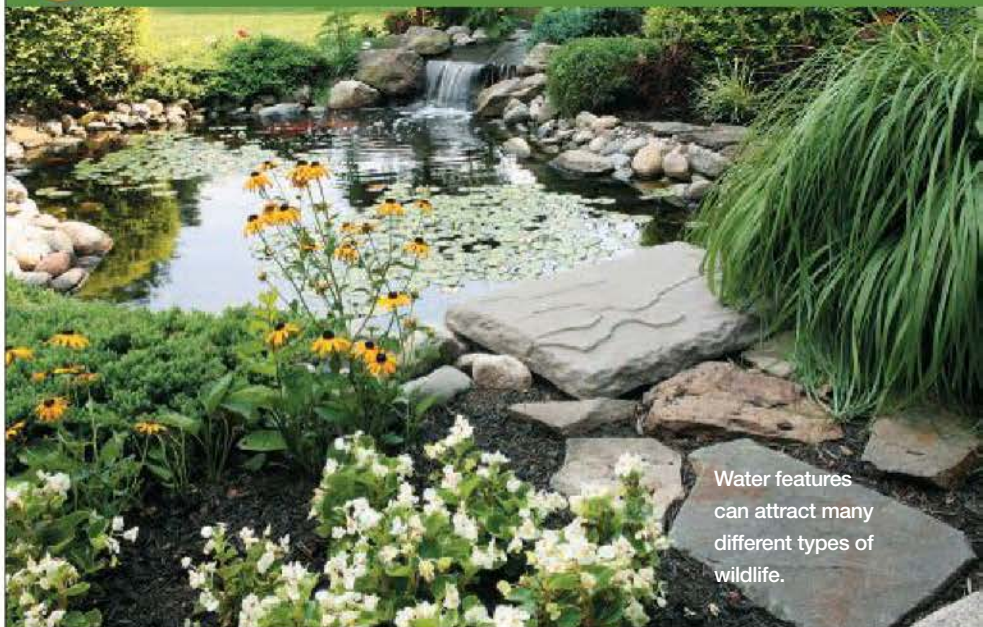
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> WILDLIFE



continued from page 54

step to bring in a diverse list of creatures.

Cover for wildlife can take many forms, depending on which animals you want to attract. A dense thicket or spruce tree for birds, a pond for amphibians and fish, or a brush or rock pile for small mammals and reptiles.

The reality checks

First of all, it is important to remember that landscaping that attracts wildlife doesn't meet everyone's ideal. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so where some see a beautiful cluster of wildflowers, others see an overgrown weed patch. Bees, snakes, frogs, and bats are all part of a vibrant habitat, yet may be feared or despised by clients. Local zoning codes may not even allow the types of plants and management best suited to landscaping for wildlife. These various standards and attitudes must be considered whenever creating something a little less than conventional.

Although any space can be enhanced

to benefit wildlife, in the case of habitat size really does matter. More space simply gives a better opportunity to provide the diversity necessary for a quality habitat. Small spaces can be effective, but options are limited.

Another drawback is that patience is a must. Depending on the type of landscape and wildlife expected, it may take years to reach the level desired. Natives give lasting beauty, but usually not immediately.

However, anyone with an unused corner of their yard or an over-sized, under-used area of turf grass is a candidate for wildlife landscaping. Acreage owners and businesses with large outdoor spaces should be high on the list of potential clients. With the green attributes of landscaping for wildlife, expect it to have growing appeal as sustainable landscaping goes more and more mainstream.

Wildlife landscaping is an opportunity for landscapers to create a niche market that is likely to grow. 🌿

Weyers is a landscape contractor based in Nebraska.



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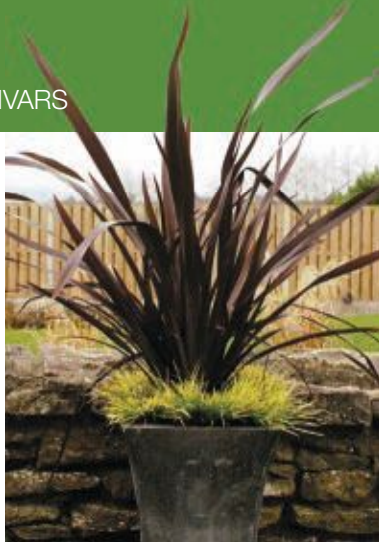
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Autumn all year

Autumn Leaves heuchera from **Terra Nova Nurseries** is a four-season plant that resembles the red leaves of autumn. The leaves change shades through the seasons, getting dark red in the fall. Autumn Leaves needs well-drained soils, but can grow in sun or shade. It can be used for accent and contrast duties in mixed beds or containers. It is suited to Zones 4-9. Terranovanurseries.com



Tall, dark and handsome

Phormium Black Adder from **Anthony Tesselaar** is a burgundy-black spike of glossy leaves shooting upward from the base. It is drought- and wind-tolerant, and hardy to zone 8. It grows 3 ft. high with a slight curve at the tips. It can be used as a focal point or in combination with low-growing foliage plants in the landscape. It can also be used in container plantings. Black Adder can be overwintered indoors. Tesselaar.com

Intense phlox

Proven Winners' Intensa White hybrid phlox is a self-cleaning phlox that enjoys full sun and good drainage, either in the landscape or in containers. It grows 8 to 12 in. and should be spaced 10 to 12 in. apart. It is hardy to 30°F, making it suited to Zones 10-11. It works well when mixed with the other seven colors in the Intensa series, which includes Blueberry, Cabernet, Lavender Glow, Neon Pink, Orchid Blast, Pink and Star Brite. Provenwinners.com



Cheerful colors

Crescendo Primroses from **Benary** are available in eight bright colors, including the new Crescendo Wine, as well as improved white and rose shades. They have winter hardiness and disease resistance. The abundant flowers are displayed 6 to 8 in. above the foliage. Multiple stems have clusters of 2 in. flowers. Crescendo is well suited to flowerbeds, borders and containers in partially shaded locations. Benary.com

Profuse blooms

Profusion Zinnia from **Sakata Seed America** works well as a landscape bedding plant or in containers. The flowers can grow up to 12 in. and spread up to 24 in., filling the landscape with color. They are resistant to common zinnia diseases, such as powdery mildew. Plants in the series have won the All-America Selections' Gold Medal three times for the White, Orange and Cherry varieties. Sakata.com



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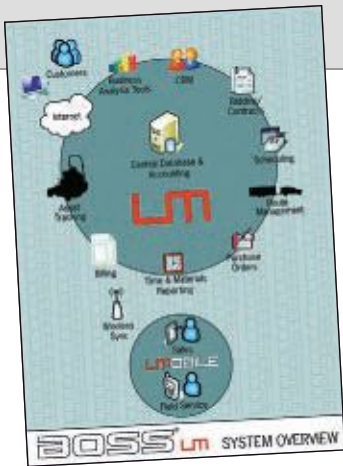
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Business solutions

The Integra Group recently unveiled two new software products at the GIE Show. BOSS LM PRO is designed especially for small to medium landscape firms intent on keeping things simple and overhead low. Based on BOSS LM Enterprise, the software is the foundation for entrepreneurs with a vision for profitable, managed growth. In addition, BOSS LM Mobile is a ruggedized, vehicle-mounted unit for automated field operations management. BossLM.com or 866/596-5971



On schedule

Magnatag's magnetic whiteboard 31-Day Crew Scheduling Board helps plan work schedules and show them 24/7 to employees. The heat-fused printed magnetic whiteboard system is available in four sizes to accommodate four to 16 crews for up to four months. It includes magnetic cardholders to show job locations and specifications. Magnet circles in 10 colors are included for your own special job detail codes. Magnetic month and date sets and write-on tools make it easy to show what's happening. Magnatag.com or 800/624-4154

Get smart

After the SMRT-Y (pronounced "smart why") Soil Moisture Sensor Kit is installed, its digital sensor measures absolute soil moisture levels every 10 minutes and relays that information back to the SMRT-Y controller interface. When soil moisture levels are above a pre-determined threshold, the controller interface interrupts the irrigation schedule that's been programmed into the system's timer. If the sensor recognizes dry soil conditions, the system's next watering cycle will proceed as originally scheduled. This closed-loop feedback process means that actual plant and turf conditions at the roots are being communicated back to the controller for a truly accurate snapshot of a landscape's moisture needs. RainBird.com or 800/RAINBIRD

More power

The Husqvarna 576XP features a redesigned cylinder and crankcase that, at 14.5 lbs and 5.7 hp, is one-half pound lighter than previous models and offers more horsepower. Like other models in Husqvarna's professional line of chain saws, it features the X-TORQ engine that provides high power to weight ratio, 60 percent lower emissions and 20 percent lower fuel consumption. It also features Air Injection for longer air filter life and LowVib anti-vibration technology for improved ergonomics. Husqvarna.com or 800/HUSKY-62



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT
CHAINSAWS



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT
WOOD GRINDERS

Tackles any job

The TM-70 pneumatic blower from Express Blower Inc. spreads a wide array of materials, including mulch, compost, soil blends, wood chips and aggregates. The fully self-contained, steel-framed aluminum box features a 275-hp, turbo-diesel, Tier 3 compliant Caterpillar C-7 engine. For greater flexibility, the unit is designed to work with a variety of tractor configurations. Options include a supplemental injection system to uniformly apply mixes. ExpressBlower.com or 800/285-7227



A winning trifecta

The new L45 tractor-loader-backhoe (TLB) operates like

three machines in one, combining a strong loader and backhoe with three-point implement capabilities. Powered by a 45-hp Kubota diesel engine and new HST Plus Transmission, it boasts a 10-ft. digging depth, a high-performance inching valve and a standard hydraulic thumb bracket. The L45 features standard backhoe crawling mode, providing the ability to move at "creep" speed — ultimately saving time when repositioning while trenching. Kubota.com or 888/4-KUBOTA

continued on page 63

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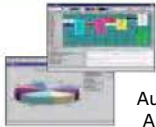
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continued from page 61



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT
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Designed for tractors of 35 hp or more, the new S.H.M. Model WC 5500 premium chipper is available to fit both Category I and Category II 3-point hitches. To ensure smooth, easy feeding, the hopper opening measures 28 sq. in., and the chip opening measures 5.5x8 in. The chip chute can be rotated 360 degrees for accurate placement of chipped material. Other features include double-sided knives, standard chip anvil, top discharge chip chute and powdercoat finish.

SwampyHollow.com or 877/827-2447

Winter green

Turf Revolution's new Time Sav'r topdressing is pelletized, dehydrated compost from leaf and yard trimmings. It's easy to apply with a fertilizer spreader, and contains just 10% water (vs. regular compost, which can be up to 50%). The low-odor topdressing is easy to spread, and does not contain manure or animal byproducts. It increases soil water-holding capacity, resulting in increased drought tolerance and increased irrigation efficiency. It also increases soil nutrient holding capacity, maximizing plant nutrient uptake. TurfRevolution.com or 800/823-6937



AD INDEX

Agrium Advanced Tech.....p21-28	Empire State Green Industry Show.....p14	NuFarm.....p49
Alocet.....p15	Ernst Benary.....p57	Ohio Turfgrass Foundation..p47
Anthony Tesselaar.....p55	F M C Corp.....p29	P B I Gordon.....p2, 19
Ariens.....p51	Goldsmith Seeds.....p59	Pine Hall Brick.....p2
Ball Horticulture.....p56	Horizon.....p6	Pro-Tech.....p7
BASF Corp.....p31	Hustler.....p11	Rainbird.....p35-46
Dow Agro.....p17	John Deere Commercial.....cv4	Sakata Seed.....p52
Drafix.....p12	John Deere Construction.....p3	Target Spec Products.....p13
DuPont.....p5	L T Rich.....p10	Turf Products.....p14
	Mauget.....p33	Turfco Mfg.....cv3
	Mid-Am.....p60	U S Lawns.....cv2
		Walker Mfg.....p34

EDIT INDEX

Agrium..... 22, 27	Pro Scapes..... 27
American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association..... 44	Professional Landcare Network..... 7
Ariens Co..... 6, 50	Rain Bird..... 36
Bio Landscape & Maintenance..... 6	Ryan Lawn & Tree..... 10
Black Landscape Contracting..... 12	T. Griffin Tree..... 9
Brad's Lawn Service..... 12	Terry Landscaping and Lawn Care..... 14
Brickman Group..... 12	The Greenwood Group..... 12
Buckeye EcoCare..... 25, 30	The Leader's Edge..... 13
Calif. Department of Water Resources..... 4	Turf's Up-Weed Man..... 23
Calvin Craig Landscaping..... 14	Wilson-Oyler Group..... 32
Custom Lawns..... 26	Yellowstone Landscape Group..... 6, 50
Daily Rain..... 14	
Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping..... 28	
Ferta-Lawn..... 12	
Freedom Lawns..... 24	
Fullerton Grounds Maintenance..... 14	
Grandpa's Nursery & Gardens..... 16	
GroGreen..... 23	
H&H Sod Co..... 39	
Impact Landscaping..... 14	
Jack Robertson Lawn Care..... 26	
James E. Coffey & Son Landscape Contractors..... 16	
Kapp's Lawn Specialists..... 27	
Kehoe & Co..... 18	
Master Landscapes..... 10	
Mayday's Lawn and Pest..... 16	
NatureScape Services..... 10	
Outdoor Environments..... 6	
Pacific Crest Landscape..... 8	
Parker Co..... 6	
Pea Green Lawn & Home Maintenance..... 16	

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Let's give thanks for gifts disguised as challenges

Sometimes, Thanksgiving comes a little late. That's what my wife, Bridgid, and I learned after our second child was born on Dec. 27, 1995. Bridgid and I know all children are gifts from above, but it took us a while to *fully* appreciate just how special a gift our James Martin Whitford (aka Jamie) is.

For starters, Jamie is named after my father. Dad died at age 61 in 1989. I was 23, in the Navy and dating Bridgid. I used to regret that I never shared with Dad how serious Bridgid and I were — that the day after we first kissed, while lying in the grass with my head on Bridgid's tummy, I told her, "One day, our kids will be in here." I now know that Dad knew more than I thought.

Dad had his share of work and worries. A polio-survivor-turned-doctor, Dad raised 10 children with Mom, and helped put all of us through Catholic grade schools and high schools, as well as college. God called Dad home just days after my kid sister Moe, the last of us 10, left home to attend The Ohio State University.

Knowing Dad's spirit is alive and kicking in Jamie has been a great source of strength over the past 14 years. I don't doubt for a minute Dad's spirit helps Jamie be as bright and gentle as he is. Jamie, in turn, gives Dad's spirit (and all of us blessed to know Jamie) a glorious taste of a worry-free, love-filled life on Earth.

It was absolutely paralyzing and heart wrenching when the nurse, holding Jamie, first told us: "You have a beautiful baby boy, with lovely red hair. ... We have a strong suspicion he has Down syndrome."

We didn't even know this kid, and in a single moment he had turned our lives upside-down.

"We'll treat and love him just like we would any other," Bridgid and I reassured each other

Our son Jamie takes after his recently departed godfather, "Uncle Jim," — laughing, loving and living large.



during the wee hours of those first nights at the hospital, silently questioning what else the future would hold. Little did we know it would be Jamie who would teach us how to laugh, love and live large.

When we come home from work, a beaming Jamie rushes to us with open arms. Every day, it's like we're returning from a week-long business trip. In an instant, his huge hugs can wipe away any sadness or fear, and replace it with pure love.

Jamie is one of the wittiest kids we know. His teachers and our family and friends — and incident after incident (some of which I'll share next month) — confirm this. When combined with his contagious built-in laugh track, it's no wonder we go to bed with bellyaches most nights.

Just as important, Jamie's not afraid to cry. As a result, I'm slightly more open to occasionally suffering from leaky eyes. It took a special kid to teach this veteran that bottling up feelings doesn't make me more of a man.

I can't help but reflect on the many life-changing lessons Jamie has taught our family and so many others. During this time of year especially, let's look around our homes and workplaces and be grateful for other great gifts disguised as challenges.

Happy Thanksgiving, my friends!



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