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Illustration by David V. Grigg, David V. Grigg Illustration



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- Not valuable at all** — I've been to shows and get nothing from them.

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## THE LM DAILY

Senior Editor Beth Geraci writes about the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) Renewal & Remembrance program at Arlington National Cemetery and Legislative Day on the Hill (see page 17). For more on those events and to get a personal slant on the news of the day, visit *LM's* blog site ([landscapemanagement.blogspot.com/](http://landscapemanagement.blogspot.com/)).

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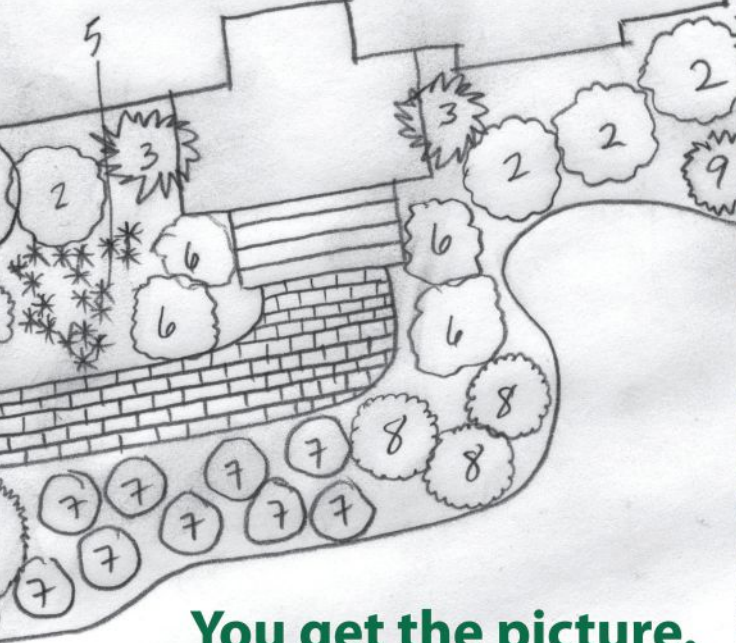


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## Adjusting my mindset

**T**here's nothing quite like your child's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to make you feel older. By the time this article appears in print, Josh will have finished his 18<sup>th</sup> year and begun his sophomore year of college (see last month's column for more on that).

Children are constant reminders of not only how quickly time passes, but also how it seems to accelerate as they grow. Time, it would seem, is relative. As Albert Einstein once said, "When a man sits with a pretty girl for an hour, it seems like a minute. But let him sit on a hot stove for a minute and it's longer than any hour. That's relativity."

That notion describes how quickly time seems to pass as we watch our children grow.

For those of you without children of your own, there is another way to feel the ever-quickenning passage of time. Each year, Wisconsin's Beloit College puts out "The Mindset List" ([www.beloit.edu/mindset](http://www.beloit.edu/mindset)) to help professors better understand the incoming freshmen class. It's a look at how the world has changed since they were born — or more accurately, it's a description of what has always been true since they were born.

Like Josh, the bulk of this year's class was born in 1993. That group, the class of 2015, has never known a world without an Internet ramp onto the information superhighway, nor has there ever been a time in their lives when there weren't two women on the Supreme Court. For you movie buffs, Ferris Bueller and Sloane Peterson could be the ones sending their child to college.

I remember being awed by the birth of the World Wide Web and laughing at Matthew Broderick's school-ditching shenanigans in the 1986 classic film "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" (Yes, I know, shenanigans is a word the old caretaker used in his

rant after getting caught by Shaggy, Scooby-Doo and the gang on Saturday morning cartoons — one item not on the list, but should be).

Want more?

The class of 2015 is more likely to think LeBron James than Lyndon Baines Johnson when you refer to LBJ. Amazon has never been just a river in South America. O.J. Simpson has always been looking for the killers of Nicole Simpson and Ronald Goldman.

Feeling old yet?

The Mindset List was created by Beloit's former Public Affairs Director Ron Nief and Keefer Professor of the Humanities Tom McBride. According to the school's website, "It was originally created as a reminder to faculty to be aware of dated references, and quickly became a catalog of the rapidly changing worldview of each new generation."

Giving educators a sense of how their students perceive culture and the establishment makes sense. It makes sense for business owners as well.

It's not a bad idea for company executives looking to hire new graduates (millennials) to have a little perspective on how these younger workers view the world.

While you might remember the Bay of Pigs fiasco, they have never known a time when the U.S. government has not housed refugees and prisoners at Guantanamo, or at time when there's been an official Communist Party in Russia.

Not interested in, or able to hire, new grads? The Mindset List still might be useful. The first list was produced for the class of 2002 (those born in 1980). Those workers are now in their early 30s.

Warning. If you think the list for the class of 2015 makes you feel old, taking a look at the Mindset List for the class of 2002 is even worse:

Most have never seen a TV set with only 13 channels, nor have they seen a black-and-white TV. Really? Come to think of it, there's really not that much worth watching nowadays. Maybe we should return to just 13 channels.



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# NEWS+VIEWS

GREEN GREENS TRIBES | EVENTS, TRENDS & TIPS

BY BETH GERACI SENIOR EDITOR

## Louisville in the spotlight

When 18,000 industry pros descend upon Louisville's Kentucky Exposition Center for the GIE+EXPO (Oct. 27-29), they'll be greeted by 750 landscape product exhibits on an expanse of ground covering 425,700-sq.-ft. inside and 642,000-net-sq.-ft. outside. They'll be treated to outdoor product demonstrations, see the market's newest products and rub elbows with their counterparts. So it's not like there will be a shortage of things to see and do.

But the GIE+EXPO isn't the only game in town. There's also the city itself. Here are *LM's* suggestions for things to check out should you have time to kill.



### OLD LOUISVILLE

A short cab ride from downtown, this charming historic neighborhood is renowned for having the country's largest number of restored Victorian homes. The neighborhood abounds with magnolia and oak trees, but its architecture alone makes it a standout.



### FOURTH STREET LIVE!

The strip of restaurants, bars and shops in the heart of downtown provides no shortage of entertainment. Hit the strip Thursday, Oct. 27, when country band Stealing Angels ("Paper Heart") gives a free live performance (9 p.m.). Do it again Friday, Oct. 28, when country music legend Charlie Daniels follows suit in honor of his birthday (9 p.m.).



### LOUISVILLE SLUGGER MUSEUM & FACTORY

Get a close look at the Louisville Slugger brand of baseball bats created by Hillerich & Bradsby in 1884. See bats swung by Joe DiMaggio, Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle and other legends and tour the on-site factory, which produces 1.8 million bats per year.



### 21C MUSEUM HOTEL

Hardly your average hotel, the 21c triples as a contemporary art museum and an award-winning restaurant. Centrally located on Louisville's downtown Museum Row, the 21c was lauded by *Travel & Leisure Magazine* as "one of the most ambitious unions of art and hospitality ever undertaken." On display in October: "Cuba Now", featuring work by contemporary Cuban artists.



### KENTUCKY SPEEDWAY

Kentucky hosted its inaugural NASCAR Sprint Cup race July 9. Big names such as Jimmie Johnson, Dale Earnhardt, Jr. and the night's big winner, Kyle Busch, raced before an energetic crowd of 107,000 fans. No race is planned for the weekend of the GIE+EXPO, but see [www.kentuckyspeedway.com](http://www.kentuckyspeedway.com) for a calendar of the 2012 season; it's worth the return trip.

PHOTOS COURTESY: LOUISVILLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (FOURTH STREET, LOUISVILLE SLUGGER MUSEUM), ALL OTHERS BY BETH GERACI



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# BOBCAT BOOT CAMP

Sloshing around in a mud pit was never so much fun.

BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

What is it about mud puddles that attract kids like Karaoke Night draws Journey front man Steve Perry wannabes?

Whatever it is, climbing into a Bobcat loader, skid steer or excavator after a heavy downpour is something of heaven for those kids who never grew up completely. That's just what happened at the Bobcat boot camp earlier this summer. An overnight deluge left the fairgrounds, where Bobcat was providing education and training to members of the company's dealer network, a massive mud pit. Think Woodstock without the music and mind-altering substances.

Bobcat, which has manufactured more than 750,000 skid steers and loaders since the late 1950s, today offers about 20 different models in the skid steer and compact track loader lines. And a few editors were invited to test the latest models.

The company's latest editions — the M-series — were introduced starting in 2008, and offer a variety of improvements over the previous models, including better fuel capacity, better traction and increased lift.

PHOTOS BY DAN JACOBS



(From top left) Tires not neatly, but stably stacked. A brief rain storm delayed, but could not stop the fun. A view of the playground.

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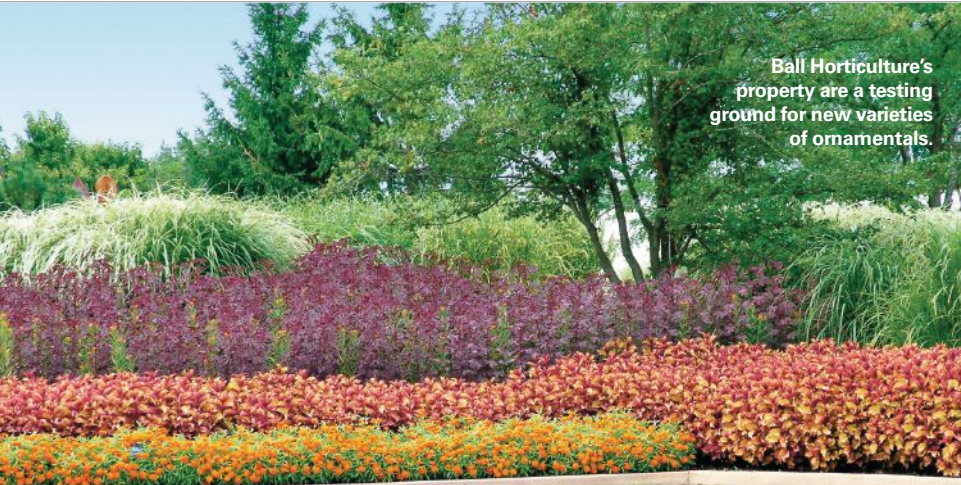
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Ball Horticulture's property are a testing ground for new varieties of ornamentals.

# Having a Ball

The flower company explores the latest trends in ornamentals and the industry.

BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**B**all Horticulture clearly recognizes that landscape contractors are key components of the ornamental supply chain.

"You are the bellwethers of things to come," says Jeff Gibson, landscape business manager for the Chicago-based company. "It's terribly important for you, the contractors, to work one-on-one with our growers."

In August, Ball hosted several contractors and growers as part of its annual Landscape Day. The event included a tour of the company's nearly 9-acre property and new research facility, as well as a panel discussion looking into the latest trends and issues facing growers and contractors.

## Economic concerns

To say market conditions are volatile might be an understatement. At press time, the stock market was in the midst of



400-point swings and there is little clarity about where we're headed. The phrase "double-dip recession" crossed the lips of a few commentators at the event.

"The economy was better — at least it was two weeks ago," quips Terry Carter, Designs by Sundown, Englewood, CO.

That said, homeowners associations, homeowners and commercial property owners seem to be a little more willing to spend money than they have been, says Carly Rizor, enhancements manager for Christy Webber Landscape in Chicago.

While customers might be willing to shake off the cobwebs and wipe the dust

*continued on page 16*

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*continued from page 15*  
from their pocketbooks, few, if any, are expecting the economy to return to full bloom anytime soon.

Visitors admire Ball's latest offerings.

"I think our industry is moving in the right direction," says James Russell, Armstrong Growers, San Juan Capistrano, CA. "We're forgetting what it was like and learning what it will be like."

One thing that hasn't changed is the growers' desire to know what they'll need to grow for clients as soon as possible.

"Eighty percent of what we do is pre-booked," Russell says. "We need to get the clients to understand the timeline."

In other words, contractors who work with their customers and know what they'll need for the year are more likely to get what they want when they want it. Nurseries can't afford to grow products no one will buy.

"Nobody likes to have their neck on the chopping block all the way," says Jim Clesen, Ron Clesen Ornamental Plants, Maple Park, IL.

Christy Webber tries to pre-book as much of its business as possible, but customers can be a bit of a gamble, Rizor says. Customers don't always know what they want, or if a customer gets laid off from his or her job or a business goes under, homeowners or property managers might not have the money they were expecting.

Of course, the economy can only be blamed for part of the problem.

"Budgets are still cut," Russell says, "but there are still customers out there to find." **LM**

## What's hot at the HOTHOUSE

Three trends gathered from the Ball Landscape Day event:

1. Color is still king.
2. Sustainability is moving up the royal ranks.
3. Textures are increasing in customer importance, as are native plants.

Some customers have rushed into sustainability with such fervor that they've raced past reasonable. Armstrong Growers' James Russell cites one California resort as an example that went past that point and ended up with a sterile-looking environment.

"There's a balance," he says. "When the color goes away, the comment cards start coming in — and the customers start going to other hotels."

PHOTO BY: DAN JACOBS

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# Remembering the fallen

Perhaps it was the row upon row of white gravestones, situated in symmetrical straight lines. Or the striking contrast of green and white everywhere you looked.

For whatever reasons, even as nearly 400 landscapers and their families (including 58 children) from around the country descended upon Arlington National Cemetery on July 25, the place seemed quiet and still, resounding with an uncanny, peaceful hush that implied the cemetery itself is as resilient as those it holds once were.

The landscape professionals from 101 companies nationwide had gathered for the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET's) 15<sup>th</sup> annual Day of Renewal & Remembrance. The day of volunteerism is the industry's way of honoring

## More than 400 Green Industry representatives beautify Arlington National Cemetery at PLANET

event. BY BETH GERACI SENIOR EDITOR

military men and women of past and present, and thanking them for their service through donating expertise and equipment.

"Our work here is a small token compared to their great sacrifices," said PLANET President Jerry Grossi in his opening address.

And that sentiment seemed to be the consensus of the day.

"We're here to donate our time and services to all the thousands of people that've died for our country," said Todd Tarring, 41, president of Chantilly, VA-based Pleasant Valley Landscapes, who was volunteering with his family. "We feel it's a small sacrifice, a token of appreciation, and it was something we needed to do."

The event was especially moving for veterans like Tim Price, an Iraq veteran and territory manager for Herbi-Systems, Memphis, TN.

*continued on page 18*

PHOTO BY: BETH GERACI

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# Getting their voices heard



BY BETH GERACI SENIOR EDITOR

**O**hio Landscape Association Executive Director Sandy Munley, Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Government Affairs Chairman Paul McDonough, and other PLANET members representing Ohio walked the halls of Congress.

They were there on July 26 as part of Legislative Day on the Hill, PLANET's annual event where reps from around the country share their views with their congressional leaders on landscaping-related legislation before Congress.

Meeting with spokespeople for Ohio Senator Rob Portman, Speaker of the House John Boehner and Ohio Rep. Sherrod Brown, these PLANET members spoke out about two key issues that would greatly impact the landscape industry: the WaterSense bill (H.R. 1967) and the federal regulation on H-2B visas.

The WaterSense bill would limit to 40% the amount of turf that homeowners are allowed on their properties, as a means to conserve water.

Problem is, "most turf is not irrigated," McDonough told Speaker Boehner's liaison. "To tell homeowners, 'You can't have more than 40% of your

landscape as turf' is absolutely absurd.

"If you don't have turf, you have more sediment runoff. It's counterintuitive."

Potential changes to the federal regulation on H-2B visas would make it more expensive for landscape businesses to hire temporary workers from outside the country, requiring employers to pay them about \$3 more per hour. Without action the new regulation goes into effect September 30.

PLANET reps asserted the change would hurt small businesses financially, causing many to forego hiring immigrant employees, who often constitute the core of their workforce.

Whether lawmakers were swayed remains to be seen. But McDonough was pleased with their efforts.

"One of the most encouraging things is the turnout that we had," he said, explaining that 80 more PLANET members participated this year. "It's certainly encouraging that people are willing to be more involved. It's crucial!"



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**REMEMBERING** *continued from page 17*

Tears welled in his eyes as he spoke. "It was kind of a different world, I guess you could say," he said, describing his experience in Iraq. "... It's an honor and a privilege to come do it. Just spend a few days here, visit the cemetery, just pay my respects."

According to PLANET statistics, landscapers at this year's event applied 120 tons of lime to 271 acres; aerated 30 acres of turf; installed 24 yards of soil; planted 1,381 perennials; updated two irrigation systems; and installed lightning protection on seven trees. And that's just the start.

Landscape companies donated \$200,000 in staff, time and equipment. To date, PLANET has contributed more than \$2 million to the care of the historic landmark.

Few tears were shed at this year's event. There was no laughter, either. Just reverence. For the 15<sup>th</sup> year, landscapers paid their respects in the best way they know how: through their work. **LM**



A volunteer installs cables to help protect trees from lightning strikes.

PHOTOS BY: BETH GERACI

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# PROGRESS

## Turf takes a stand



### Advances in breeding, equipment and pesticides get the credit for today's better turf.

**T**urfgrass technology has progressed dramatically over the years, say turfgrass scientists from around the country, and the result is stronger grass that is denser, more uniform, more colorful and more attractive. And that's just the beginning.

In the 1960s, Kentucky bluegrass and fine fescues were the only turfgrass games in town, says Peter Landschoot, Ph.D., professor of turfgrass science at Penn State University.

Back then, Kentucky bluegrass was prone to leaf spot and was not very resistant to disease. Today, bluegrass is drastically more disease resistant.

Advances in turfgrass breeding happened largely due to the efforts of retired Rutgers University turfgrass professor and breeder Reed Funk, Ph.D., say Landschoot and Funk's Rutgers colleague William Meyer, Ph.D.

"I really think that the most important thing discovered was the work that Funk started here in 1960, where he proved you could go through cycles of improvement on cool season grasses and make an improvement in them every year," says Meyer, professor of Plant Biology and Pathology and director of turfgrass breeding at Rutgers.

When Funk and his students discovered in the 1970s that flowers of all Kentucky bluegrass open after midnight, a new era dawned on turfgrass breeding.

"Dr. Funk and his students found out if they sprinkled pollen from one bluegrass onto another they could make hybrids," Meyer says. "That was a phenomenal discovery. And today all the new varieties that are performing

well evolved from making hybrids in that greenhouse."

Major strides also have been made in ryegrass and tall fescue. "The first improved perennial ryegrasses were Manhattan and Pennfine perennial ryegrasses, and now we have over two hundred perennial ryegrasses," Landschoot marvels.

Ryegrass is a prime example of higher turf quality today, in disease resistance, uniformity, color, mowing quality, texture, density and brightness, says Meyer.

When Meyer started at Rutgers, he recalls, bluegrass constituted two-thirds of the turfgrass market. Then ryegrass came along in the early 1970s and trumped Kentucky bluegrass's popularity, thanks to its quick establishment and wear tolerance.

Even with ryegrass's popularity, in many areas today tall fescue reigns, especially in the South. The first improved tall fescue emerged in 1980, Meyer says. It was called Rebel.

"Before that," he says, "there were a couple hundred million pounds of Kentucky 31 in the 1940s, a forage type grass that has one redeeming quality: It's cheap."

Tall fescue is popular, Meyer says, because "it comes up fast. It has a rooting system that's three to four feet deep, so it uses more of the water resources in the ground."

Whereas tall fescue traditionally was a coarse yellow pasture grass used for ground cover along highways, once

it was accepted for use on lawns and sports fields, Landschoot says, breeders began to seek ways to produce finer textured tall fescue that were darker green and appealed to homeowners.

In the past, says turf expert Clark Throssell, Ph.D., there was an emphasis on turf aesthetics. Now that they've been mastered, the challenge is to make turf even more drought tolerant and disease resistant, he says.

Giant leaps also have been made in pesticide formulation, experts say. "The pesticides we use are much safer than the ones of 30 or 50 years ago and are applied at much lower rates," says Karl Danneberger, Ph.D., professor of horticulture and crop science at The Ohio State University.

In the '50s and '60s, chlordane was used, and it contained arsenic, he says. "There've been huge improvements since the days of mercuries and arsenics, which were used until the '70s. Now we have much cleaner products and much lower rates."

Just as advances in breeding and pesticides have shaped today's turfgrass formulation, so has technology such as aerators, seeders and mowers.

Together with improved breeding science, better equipment engineering accounts for about 50 percent of the advances made, says Landschoot.

"It's impossible to transport yourself back to those early days," Landschoot says. "Once in a while I think, 'Oh my God, that's what we had to deal with back then.'"



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## HEARMEOUT

BETH GERACI SENIOR EDITOR

Contact Beth at 216/706-3756 or via e-mail at bgeraci@questex.com.

# Well equipped

**R**ob Foster of Strata-G Communications sent me the Husqvarna photos today. There were so many, it took more than an hour to download them.

When I came to the shots of myself, it felt surreal. I scrolled through them slowly, savoring each one as one might savor a rich dessert.

Why? Because the photos, taken in July at a Husqvarna demo, were taken from a photographer's perspective. And the photographer's perspective of me proved to be vastly different from my own.

That the contrast should be so stark amuses me. Throughout the two-day demo, I felt insecure about putting my limited landscape experience on display for all to see.

The photos, however, portrayed an adept, confident newcomer who rose undaunted to each challenge presented.

The demo was held concurrently with the unveiling of Husqvarna's new state-of-the-art research and development center in Charlotte, NC. I went to Charlotte oblivious to what level of participation was expected of me. And that was the key to everything that followed.

It was daunting enough being the newcomer in my group, and even more so being the only female. I would have been quite content to sit idly by and watch as the guys in my group worked the tractors



---

The **clanking of the axe** against the tree rang out ... When the tree careened to the ground, **I felt triumphant.**

and the chainsaws and the pole saws without me.

So when Husqvarna chainsaw safety pro Cary Shepherd pointed to a tree and told me I was going to chop it down with an axe, I was surprised.

But Shepherd presented it so matter-of-factly, I didn't know saying "no" was an option. It didn't even occur to me.

So off I went to chop down a tree. As the guys looked on in silence, and the clanking of the axe against the tree rang out, it felt like an eternity. But when the tree careened to the ground, I felt triumphant. That was my reward.

And so it went throughout the day. Through the chainsaw demo. And the edgers. And the zero turns. I felt pained and elated all at once.

The Husqvarna safety crew stood closely by through it all. They provided us with full safety gear and were quick to intervene when necessary. Thanks to their care and expertise, I always felt safe and protected. Through their example, I not only learned how to better operate landscape equipment, I also learned the importance of working responsibly and safely.

I am grateful to them for that. And I am just as grateful to them for throwing me into the fire—for giving me the tools to not only cut down a tree, but to grow.

For more on safety in the industry, see our cover story (beginning on page 26).



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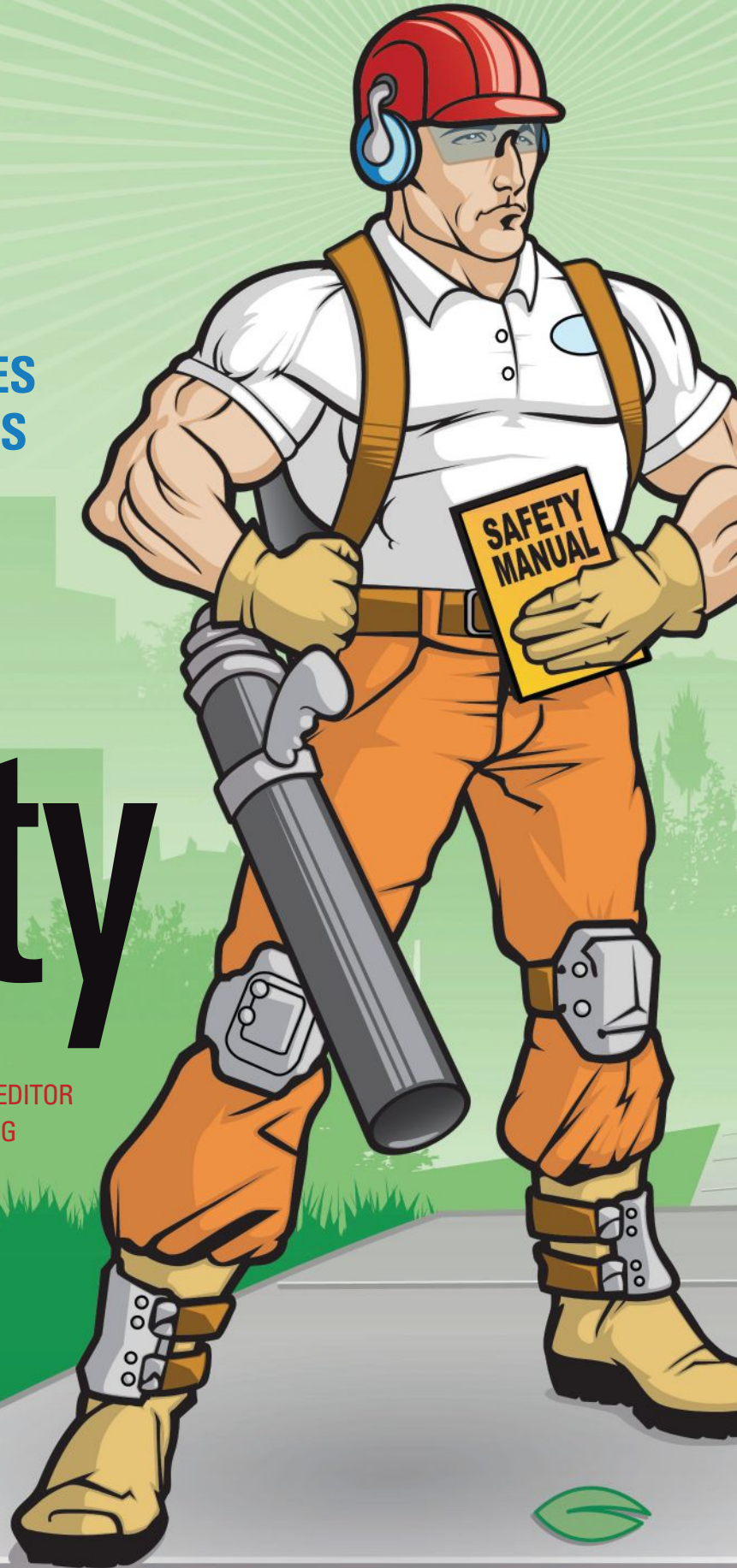
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# Safety

STORY BY BETH GERACI, SENIOR EDITOR  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID V. GRIGG





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*According to the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, a 38-year-old landscaper was weeding a lawn near a chain link fence at a middle school in Davie, FL, when he was struck by lightning. Dazed, the man was taken to an area hospital. He was one of the lucky ones; he survived. Some aren't so fortunate.*

# superhero

According to the most recent Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) statistics, 13 landscaping-related fatalities were caused by electrocution in 2009. And it's just one example of how dangerous landscaping can be.

Whether they're mowing, tree trimming or sawing wood, landscapers can never be too careful in the field. Problem is, when workers are on the job, they don't always contemplate that. On-the-job accidents happen for many reasons, business owners and consultants say, not the least of which are carelessness, ignorance and machismo.

For workers to work safely in the field, they need more than just thorough safety training. A quality company safety policy is meaningless without strict enforcement and continual worker oversight. » »

David Grigg

*According to Texas' www.starlocalnews.com, a landscaper was mowing a lawn in McKinney, TX when his hand somehow touched the lawnmower blade. The blade was still active. The accident severed several of the landscaper's fingers and he was rushed to a local hospital.*

## Dangers of yard work

Such accidents are common in the landscape industry, as Eastern Land Management president Bruce Moore knows. The top injuries the company sees are cuts from mowers and back injuries due to heavy lifting, he says.

"We've seen guys putting their hands under a mower deck," Moore says. "You never know why some people do what they do. We had one guy trying to adjust the belts that drive the blades while the machine was running and he lost part of his finger with that."

David Estrada is AAA Landscape's

new safety director. He started on the job in June. A hands-on leader, Estrada spends 80% of his time in the field, making the rounds.

The company has a training room, where safety leaders show presentations on safety before taking new employees out in the field for hands-on training.

"If they can't operate the major equipment like weeders, chainsaws or blowers, they don't get hired," Estrada says. Presentations cover everything from fire extinguishers to scorpion protection, and the company even has a separate defensive driving program.

## Vehicle accidents common

AAA has "zero tolerance of cell phone use while driving," Estrada says, "because we've had several vehicle accidents," including a recent incident in which an employee was talking on his cell phone, opened the door, hit it on a mailbox and smashed the window.

Moore's Eastern Land Management, Stamford, CT, recently was awarded an Overall Safety Achievement Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). The award recognizes ELM's commitment to providing safe work environments for its workers.

ELM and other companies were evaluated on overall number of accidents, number of days that employees were away from work, and reported injuries and illnesses, as well as the quality of its safety programs.

Increased safety "is something we've worked hard on," Moore says. "I'm very proud of the award."

To improve driver safety, in January *continued on page 30*

## MAKING THE SAFETY GRADE IN MANUFACTURING

Randy Reinke is president of Custom Products, a manufacturer of cabs and rollbars based in Litchfield, MN. The company sells cabs and rollbars to vehicle manufacturers such as Toro and Bobcat and to landscape and tractor dealers.

Reinke's been building cabs since 1963 and rollover protection since 1971.

Custom Products operates a 130,000-square-foot facility featuring a test lab where the company tests its designs before certifying them.

"The safety really has to be pushed starting with the manufacturer," Reinke says. "Then it's important that the safety message comes all the way down — to the dealer, then the purchaser. It's important that the safety message comes all

the way down through the distribution channel."

Some employers may forget that it's actually an OSHA legal requirement to provide a safe workplace for employees.

"Why do you do it?" asks Reinke. "You want to avoid injury and you also want to avoid liability. The end goal is protecting that person — that human being at the end of the line. Safety saves lives."

Cary Zielinsky, president of Rider Tailgate Accessories, is a forest engineer who does timber work for the State of Utah.

He recently developed new truck accessories called Tailgate Cable Extension Links. The links make loading and unloading landscape equipment safer and easier, Zielinsky says, because they decrease a loading ramp's steepness.

"I had the idea quite a few years ago," he says. "I had an ATV, and the steep angle of the loading ramps on the tailgate wasn't good." As a result it was difficult to load heavy equipment, which often slid down the ramp, he explains.

The steel links can pull about 4,700 pounds.

"Anyone who has to load on ramps knows going backwards throws the weight a little bit," Zielinsky says. He adds that Rider links reduce ramp steepness by about 16% and allow a tailgate to be lowered past 90 degrees. As a result, low ground clearance equipment such as riding mowers do not get stuck on the tailgate edge.

"For me it was all about the safety," Zielinsky says. "If it's less steep, you're less likely to lose traction going up the ramps."



A mower is loaded into a pickup truck with the help of Tailgate Cable Extension Links. The links lower the tailgate by 5.3 inches.

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*continued from page 28*

ELM installed GPS units on all of its vehicles and receives a weekly report of the speed limit at which employees are traveling.

Because its trucks travel the highway daily, ELM sets the limit at 60 miles per hour. Every Friday, ELM receives a spreadsheet showing which vehicles exceeded 60 mph. Once a driver exceeds 65 mph he or she receives a written warning and repeat violators are fired after their third infraction.

OSHA statistics indicate that 20 landscape workers died in highway accidents in 2009; and Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010 preliminary data states transportation accidents in all industries declined from 2009-2010 yet still accounted for nearly two out of every five work-related deaths.

Like AAA, Green Lawn Fertilizing forbids its employees to use cell phones while driving, says Vice President of Operations Tom Knopsnyder. "You're driving a 9,000-pound vehicle on the road," he says. "We're driving through residential neighborhoods. We're aware of the risks. We take it very seriously."

Also, last July, Green Lawn began providing chains to restrain equipment in its trucks. The chains are installed by a mechanic before any truck goes out in the field.

"It's a 2,000-pound machine," says Knopsnyder. Obviously, you know what can happen if that machine falls off and hurts somebody."

Like ELM, Knopsnyder is proud to say that Green Lawn received a safety award from PLANET last year for having no road-related accidents. "We didn't hit a parked car or hit a mailbox off the side of the road," he says.

### Heat a factor

At AAA, based in Phoenix, temperatures often rise to 118 degrees, so employees can become overheated.

According to OSHA preliminary statistics, more than 30 workers died in 2010 from heat-related illnesses. In June of this year, the administration launched a campaign to educate land-



Staying hydrated on hot days helps prevent injury and lost productivity.

**"WE HAD A COUPLE NEW EMPLOYEES GET INJURED BECAUSE THEY WEREN'T USED TO WORKING IN THE SUN. THEY'RE NOT USED TO WORKING OUTSIDE IN 100 DEGREES FOR 8 HOURS, AND BY THE END OF THE DAY THEY GET CONFUSED AND DIZZY AND THAT'S WHEN WE HAVE ACCIDENTS."**

— DAVID ESTRADA  
AAA LANDSCAPE, SAFETY DIRECTOR

scapers about the risks of working in the heat. The campaign reminds workers that they need "water, rest and shade," according to OSHA's website.

AAA has a heat illness prevention plan showing employees how to recognize and treat heat stroke and heat exhaustion symptoms. When workers suffer a heat-related illness, they are required to do exactly what OSHA suggests — go to shade and loosen clothing. Their fellow workers are told to fan them and put an ice pack under their armpits and on their legs.

On each job site, AAA also provides an ice machine, water, electrolyte powder and salt tablets. If employees do not get better, they are driven home.

### Chemical risks

Speaking of risks, Knopsnyder says working with chemicals and heavy equipment can be extremely dangerous, and that's why safety is among the company's top five priorities.

At Green Lawn, the guys doing the fertilizer applications have the most dangerous job. That's why Green Lawn provides them with rubber gloves, rubber boots, safety glasses and long-sleeved shirts. In the four years Knopsnyder's worked at Green Lawn, a worker's never suffered a chemical burn.

Because working with fertilizers can be dangerous, Green Lawn audits its workers and watches them apply chemicals in the field, showing them what they did right and what they did wrong.

"If it's a major violation they'll be terminated on the spot," says Knopsnyder.

Knopsnyder wishes more companies would take applying fertilizers seriously and train employees properly. More companies need to be well versed on rules and regulations, he says. But unfortunately, "if you have a truck and a spreader, you can start a lawncare company."

*continued on page 32*





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## FATALITIES RESULTING FROM TREE-RELATED WORK ACCIDENTS IN 2009

Source: Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA)

22

The number of workers killed by a falling tree or tree limb

17

The number of workers who died after falling from a tree

14

The number of workers who died from electric shock

9

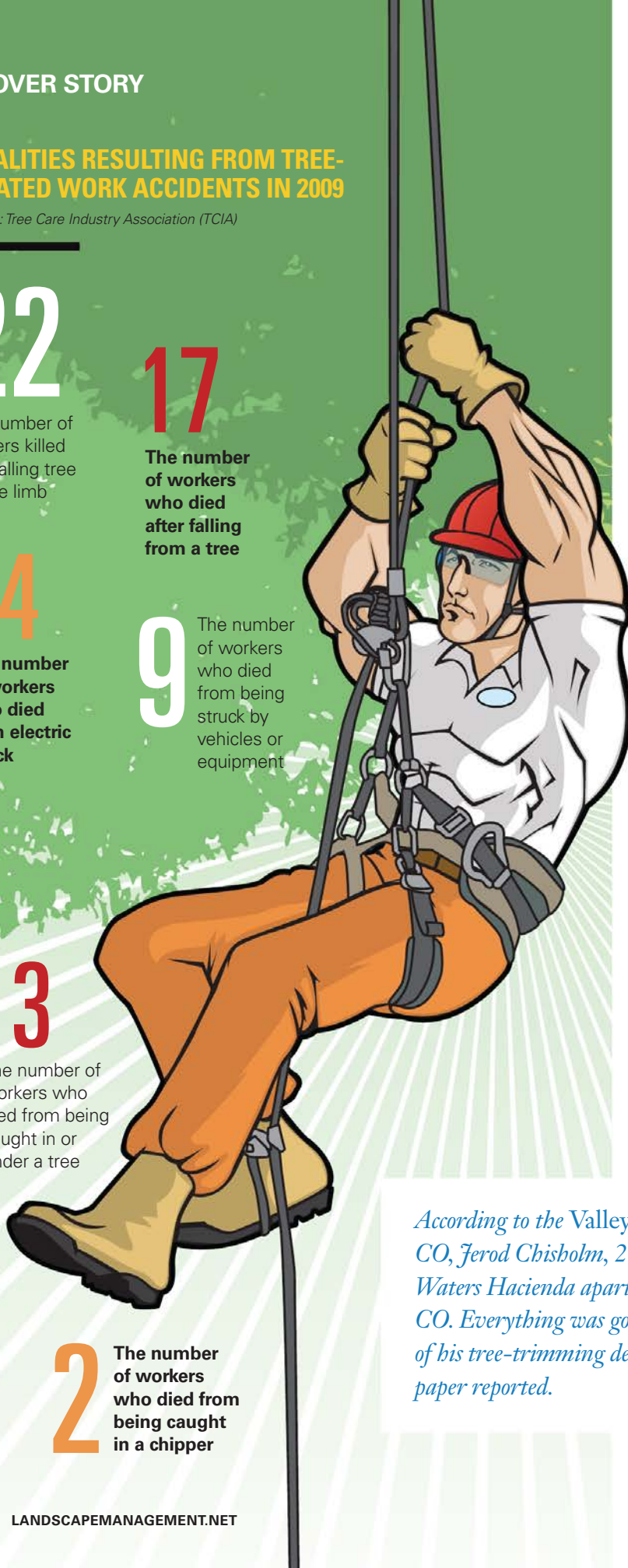
The number of workers who died from being struck by vehicles or equipment

3

The number of workers who died from being caught in or under a tree

2

The number of workers who died from being caught in a chipper



*continued from page 30*

### Tree care a risky profession

The young man was discovered unconscious in his trimming unit's bucket (see anecdote below). Paramedics performed CPR on Chisolm for more than half an hour before he was pronounced dead, the paper reported.

Tree care is routinely listed among the top five most dangerous professions in the world. Preliminary 2010 Bureau of Labor statistics show that fatal work injuries involving forestry, farming and fishing rose by 9% in 2010, while fatalities among logging workers specifically also increased, from 36 in 2009 to 59.

Ninety percent of all accidents can be attributed to unsafe behaviors, asserts Peter Gerstenberger, senior adviser for safety compliance and standards at the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA).

Gerstenberger runs a certified tree care safety program at TCIA, an association for commercial tree care companies that strives to reduce accidents and improve worker safety.

Dangers usually emerge when tree care veterans — not new workers — become overconfident, Gerstenberger says.

Dave Marren, vice president of safety and regulatory affairs for Bartlett Tree Experts, agrees.

“Workers must remember that you can do something right 99.9% of the time and that .1%, that one day at 11 o'clock in the morning on that oak tree, you can make a mistake and get hurt.”

*According to the Valley Courier newspaper in Alamosa, CO, Jerod Chisolm, 25, was trimming trees at the Blue Waters Hacienda apartment complex in Saguache County, CO. Everything was going great, that is until the arm of his tree-trimming device touched an electrical line, the paper reported.*



Workers operate a wood chipper.

Of those deaths, 22 workers were struck by a tree or tree limb when removing trees; 17 fell from trees; 14 died from electric shock; 9 were struck by vehicles or equipment; and the remainder were incited by various other causes, such as chipper accidents and asphyxiation.

One big problem is that smaller

At Bartlett, if an employee commits the same infraction twice he or she is fired. Some infractions, such as not being tied in when working above ground, are one strike and you're out.

"We're not playing baseball," Marren says.

### Training key to preventing accidents

Marren oversees all of Bartlett's safety and compliance programs, and Bartlett's is among the most intensive safety training programs in the industry. It operates a state-of-the-art, 400-acre facility dedicated solely to safety. Workers attend 50- to 60-hour safety courses covering everything from rigging to cabling.

"We go out and actually apply techniques with seasoned instructors and look at the pros and cons of each type of system," Marren says. "It's more than, 'OK, we've told you the right way to do it. You're on your own.' You have to make it part of their behavior."

"It's like learning how to drive," adds Dane Buell, director of general tree care at SavATree. "You're more careful when you're first starting out."

Inspired to modify SavATree's safety policy after attending a tree conference last winter, Buell says SavATree is now revising its safety policy, focusing more on injury prevention.

It already holds a monthly safety-related conference call, where its safety committee discusses accidents, near misses and how they can be prevented going forward.

The TCIA compiles information on all arbor-related accidents reported in the media. The association's most recent data show that in 2009, 89 fatalities were reported.

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## COVER STORY

companies aren't always aware of hazards or don't have the resources to address them, Gerstenberger says, and workers often have accidents because they have no training.

He should know; he worked in tree care for 10 years. "In a sense I am a poster child for what I'm talking about," he says. During those 10 years,

he suffered minor injuries, which happened because his company didn't provide safety training.

### Hefty price to pay for injuries

When Moore recalls the mowing accident in which his employee lost part of his finger, he bristles when he thinks of the cost, not only to the man

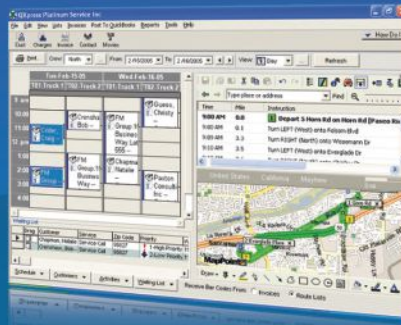
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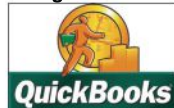
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but also to the company.

"It's unfortunate, but at the same time workers don't understand that it costs the company a lot of money, because as your insurance claims rise, your premiums go up." And when rates rise, they stay that way for three years, he says.

The last major claim ELM had was 15 years ago, Moore says. An employee who was pruning fell off a ladder, twisted his knee and needed two surgeries.

"It was well over \$150,000 that the insurance company paid," Moore says. "Our rates went up 15% just from that one accident. In today's market you could lose your insurance altogether."

Simple accidents, even an emergency room visit, can cost a company several thousand dollars, Moore adds.

It's crucial to have a hefty insurance plan, as Green Lawn does, says Knopsnyder. "If you're not insured, it's just a bad accident waiting to happen and it's bad for everybody in the business.

"When a company doesn't follow the rules we all get lumped into that. It's not good."

Insurance "is a big deal," says SavATree's Buell, "but the trick to having competitive insurance rates is to reduce your losses. It's like the stock market. You buy low and sell high."

Hearing stories like those of a 32-year-old weed-whacker who got too close to the street and was killed by a car in a hit-and-run accident always hits home, Gerstenberger says.

Such stories are stark reminders that no worker is immune to tragedy.

"The majority of the accidents happen to people who have been on the job for years," Estrada says. "They feel like they can do it with their eyes closed, and they can't." **LM**



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## THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kkehoe@questex.com.

# Build a sales machine

In the old days, the phone rang and there was more business than we could handle. Yeah, I really miss the old days, too. But we aren't likely to see them again for at least five years — or until the real estate market heals.

All that being said, it is essential to build a sales machine within your business. There are five parts of a well-functioning sales machine:

1. Your **plan** must address the volumes required to achieve a return on investment.
2. Your **pricing** must be competitive enough to win a fair share of what you bid.
3. Your sales **people** must be able to execute the plan — weekly.
4. Your **methods** must make it easy for your team to focus on the primary objective: maximum face time with prospects.
5. Your **message** must resonate in the prospect's gut. (*Hint: Their primary need is not for higher quality landscape*).

### More on the message

Your message must demonstrate an understanding of the prospect's core needs. Only after this has occurred can you offer solutions. The prospect's needs are both logical and emotional, but are always driven by business considerations.

Let's use an example of primary needs in the commercial maintenance services arena. The following message:

- › demonstrates an understanding of the prospect's world;
- › suggests (not provides) potential solutions; and
- › provides a common platform for print media, advertising, marketing, emails, proposals and sales calls.

When you consider the following challenges you face, selecting the right company to achieve your business goals becomes more than a matter of a green lawn.

**Supply and Demand:** Vacancies for commercial space over the next five years are expected to increase by 10% in our market. This put pressure on rents and retention. When you consider that retention is driven by rental rates, and rental rates are driven by good management and curb appeal, it makes sense to fashion a maintenance services strategy that gets you the best return on investment.

**Energy Cost:** The cost of energy and water are expected to rise by 20% by 2012. Combining this with pressure on rents, property managers can ill afford to waste water or continue to invest in high energy-consuming landscapes. It makes sense to assess these costs and invest in necessary upgrades to save money.

**Litigation:** The primary sources of litigation stem from issues regarding accidents related to poor maintenance practices — 70% of which are outside the building where people come to and from the office. Mitigation can involve line of sight, lighting, water/snow slip-and-fall, and damages from maintenance equipment and contractors. When you consider the probability of these events, a prevention plan can save you plenty.

**Weather:** Storms cost property owners more than \$400 million in our market last year. The greatest threats stem from windblown trees, hail damage to walls and structures, and poor drainage because of outdated landscape design. These are high-cost insurance items that can be addressed by low-cost landscape practices. Managing this annual reality has a direct impact on your annual revenue.

This is a sales message. It is directed at the real needs of the commercial property manager in this particular market. It is the way you get in the door to become a contender instead of just a bidder. Everyone has problems these days, and the problems are all money problems. Sell your services as a solution to these problems, and the prospect will listen.

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**P R O V E N   S O L U T I O N S**



## AT A GLANCE

**COMPANY:** Lawn Dawg, Nashua, NH

**FOUNDED:** 1997

**TITLE:** President

**YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:** 28

**INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT:** Former president of PLCAA and the Massachusetts Association of Lawn Care Professionals (MALCP); PLANET member and Trailblazer.

**SERVICE AREA:** Northeast United States

**NUMBER OF LOCATIONS:** 8

**EMPLOYEES:** 72

**SERVICES:** Lawn and tree/shrub care

**HOBBIES:** Spending time with family, playing golf and being an avid Red Sox fan

**FAMILY:** Wife, Oana, and children Joe, Sam and Bianca

**WEBSITE:** LawnDawg.com

**Jim Campanella** started as a technician for Old Fox Lawn Care nearly 30 years. He moved into management with a variety of companies in the Northeast before deciding to set out on his own. “At that time, I decided that I had learned all the tools I needed to start my own company,” he says. Today, he’s the president and owner of Lawn Dawg.

**How did you come up with Lawn Dawg as a name?** I knew I wanted something different in the name, logo, colors and the features and benefits of the services I offered. While working for Barefoot Grass, we had a softball team we called The Lawn Dogs, so I changed the spelling of Dog to Dawg, developed a logo that was friendly and distinguishable, and built my offerings based on all of the things customers told me that they did and didn’t like about lawn services.

**You’ve been involved in the industry, as a former president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA, now part of PLANET). Why is that important to you?** Prior to starting Lawn Dawg, I had the great fortune of working for legends of this industry — including Jim Wilkinson, Marty Erbaugh, Pat Norton and Bill Hoopes. The mentoring I received from them helped me get to where I am today.

I joined PLCAA in 1998 with the desire to give my support to the next generation of leaders, just as those guys did for me. Over the years, I have developed so many friends

from all over the country, thanks to my involvement with PLCAA and PLANET.

**You’ve expressed frustration with the way legislators approach lawn care issues. What can — and should — be done about it?**

I’ve seen bad legislation passed or considered that has no scientific foundation. Emotion plays a huge factor in how bills get introduced, gain momentum and get passed. Our activist opponents are very engaged with legislators, and are constantly providing misleading and outright false information. They have been better organized than us, and have really kept us on the defensive. Of course, they have the advantage of performing their activism full time. Lawn care operators are busy running businesses, creating jobs, stimulating the economy and providing a beneficial contribution to the environment and the quality of life of our customers.

**Have you been able to influence any legislation?**

In 2010, I lost a lot of sleep: A representative in New Hampshire introduced a bill that would eliminate the use of pesticides on lawns. The first public hearing was like a circus, as the activists systematically introduced people to testify that pesticides have in some way devastated their lives. They brought people from New York, Massachusetts, Washington, Maine and Canada, including a few self-proclaimed “experts.” Watching the reaction of the committee members made it clear to me we were in for a battle. Over the next nine months I attended about half a dozen committee meetings — and with the support of the National Pest Management Association (NPMA), Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), PLANET and several industry suppliers, we were able to defeat the bill.

**What challenges and opportunities do you see for the industry in the coming year?**

We will continue to face the challenges that we’ve been facing in recent years, such as legislative activity, rising product costs, rising fuel costs, rising labor costs, and an economy that doesn’t allow for price increases.

**THE MENTORING I RECEIVED FROM (INDUSTRY LEADERS) HELPED ME GET TO WHERE I AM TODAY.**



# THE PICTURE *of* HEALTH



**AN 11-STORY HOSPITAL** is rising in Escondido, CA, located in hot, arid and drought-prone San Diego County. Instead of traditional lush green lawns and plantings, the landscape will feature California native plants, decomposed granite pathways, stone and boulders found onsite and swales that allow storm water to infiltrate the ground instead of run off into storm drains.

“The industry and society are steering toward environmentally friendly landscaping,” says John Mohns, president and owner of Benchmark Landscape, which is installing the project. “Even though in the past, people loved their tropical oases and green lawns, things are changing — and landscape architects and property owners are responding to that.”

The landscaping includes installing bioswales for water runoff.

*Behind the scenes at the environmentally friendly landscaping work for a new California hospital.* BY JANET AIRD

Mohns founded the company in 1984, in Poway, near San Diego. Benchmark’s landscape installation clients are mostly general contractors, he says, but much of its client base is in the commercial maintenance department. He’s opened branch offices in San Marcos and Spring Valley, which are also in San Diego County — mainly for the maintenance division to be closer to the properties they work on.

Benchmark has approximately 260 employees, with

roughly 220 in the field.

“As a company, I think our managers have a passion for the environment, landscaping, plants and irrigation and drainage systems that function like they should,” Mohns says. “We’ve gotten very good at value engineering. We have some tremendous talent, and we have some good ideas.”

The hospital, Palomar Pomerado Health, is on a 4- to 5-acre site, says Benchmark’s general manager, Bill Hoffman. At a cost of approximately \$3 million, the landscaping project is

## SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPE

one of the largest Benchmark has been involved with, and is one of the largest in the country. It began in the spring of 2011, and has a completion date of mid-2012. San Diego-based Spurlock Poirier Landscape Architects designed the landscaping.

“They’re very involved onsite,” Hoffman says of the design team. “We’re working closely with the architect relating to plant procurement, plant layout, and site and design issues.”

One of the challenges is the sheer size of the site. Another is that the hospital is still under construction. With so many people on the job, there’s almost a little village of offices to administer and manage the various trades onsite, Mohns says. Benchmark has a project manager onsite full time, and has 12 to 20 employees in small sub-crews working in multiple areas. Scheduling and coordination among all the trades is probably the biggest challenge, he says.

“It’s amazing what it takes for everyone to do their jobs, and do their jobs efficiently,” he adds. “We have to work on a very tight schedule to make sure we can get into areas that are open for us. Other areas, we coordinate with other trades. There are some areas on the project — for example, the bioswales — where we have to work on Saturdays because that’s a day when no cars are parked there.”

The bioswales, at the edges of the parking lots, the perimeter of the site and other impervious surfaces, are the main storm water features in the project: Storm water will flow into them from the impervious surfaces.

As storm water infiltrates the ground, plant material, mulch and soil will filter out pollutants such as sediment and hydrocarbons. During large rain events, runoff may pond or flow in the swales, but it won’t work its way offsite. Instead, it will empty into surface drains at the lower part of the swales, Hoffman says, noting, “It’s amazing the effort that’s gone into treating the storm water.”

**Bioswales collect and filter water before it enters storm drains.**



### Reduce, reuse, recycle

Another sustainable feature of the project is the reuse of materials already on the site. Benchmark will excavate the swales 3.5 ft. deep, and then replace some of the excavated soil with a mixture of soil from elsewhere on the site. They’ll use 3- to 8-in. aggregate from onsite for the mulch and bring in the remainder from elsewhere. They’ll landscape the swales with trees, drought-tolerant plants, and 2- to 4-ft. landscape boulders that were already on the site, as well.

“They’re absolutely gorgeous boulders,” Mohns says. “There’s a lot of beauty in things that in the past might have been thrown away.”

They’ll also use boulders from the site to build rock walls that designate main entrances and exits, driveways and other focal points. The boulders retain the soil on slopes, they’re natural — and they don’t need water, Mohns points out.

“In landscaping, a lot of thought can go into how you cover the ground, especially on a slope,” he says. “The landscape architect was very involved in laying these out. We’re working with them to ensure that their design is implemented.”

The landscaping includes other sustainable features as well, says Hoffman. The entire site is being capped with approximately 3 ft. of clean dirt that was excavated when the site was leveled. The decomposed granite pathways also

allow storm water to infiltrate into the ground. The benches are being made of Ipê wood from sustainable forests, and the landscape mulches in most of the planter areas are organic.

The main garden is the healing garden, which is designed to be an area of meditation and peace of mind. It will be surrounded by other gardens that also will be designed to be calming and restful — and drought-tolerant. San Diego is just emerging from a Level 2 drought that began in 2009, and designers are choosing plant palettes with water efficiency in mind.

“The challenge right now is finding enough of the right plants,” Hoffman says. “Typically, a good nursery is actively managing its stock, planting, moving its stock up as it matures, fertilizing and pruning. The recession depleted the available quality plant material stock. It definitely takes more time and effort to locate good plant material in the quantities we will need.”

Benchmark is buying blocks of plants and contracting with nurseries to grow them. If there aren’t enough, Spurlock Poirier will make substitutions or specify smaller plants.

“We have a very strong team out there,” Mohns says. “In the end, it will be a very successful job and a beautiful job.” **LMI**

*The author is based in Altadena, CA.*

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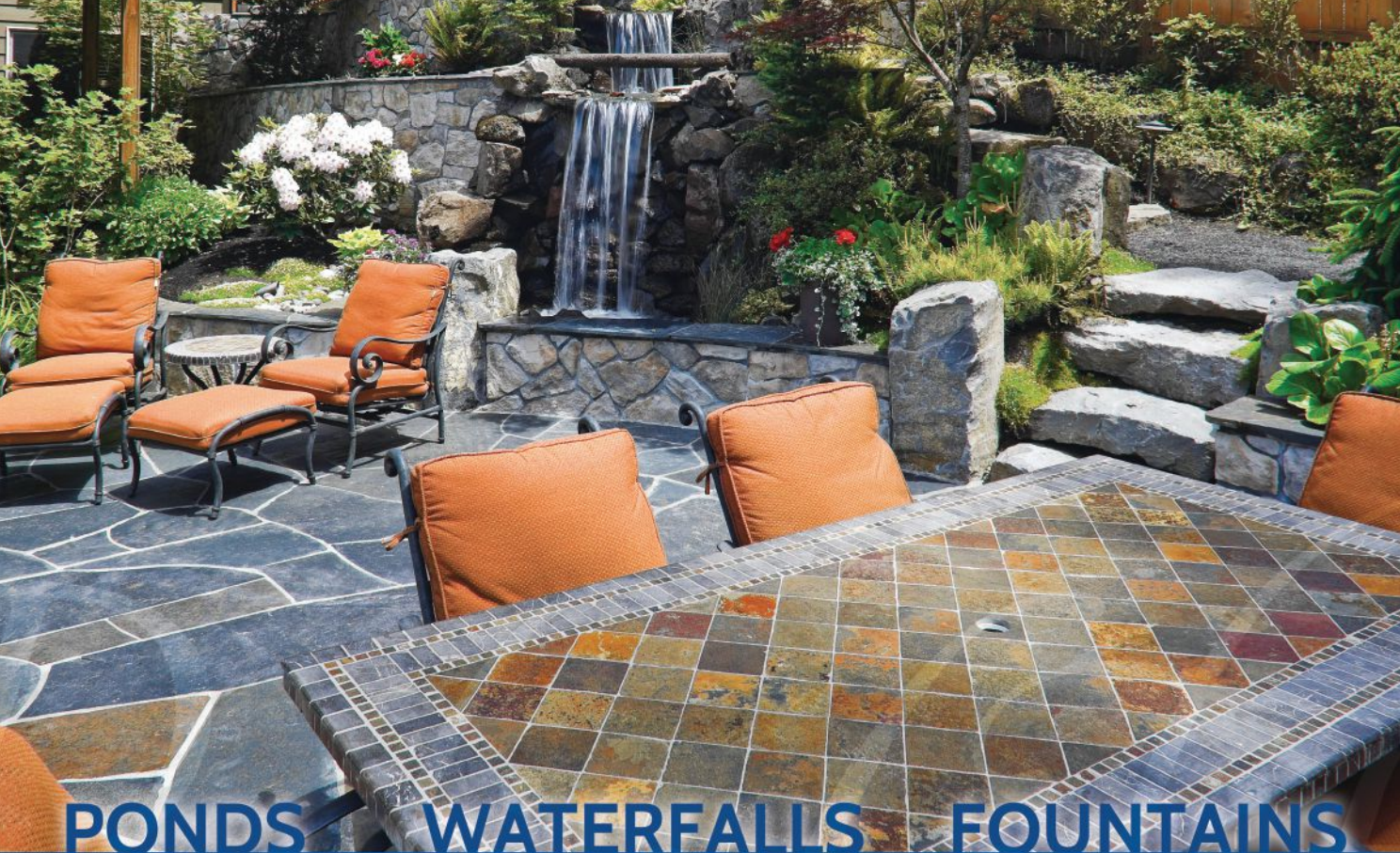
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# HAPPY FIVE-OH, TURFCO

The first mechanical topdresser celebrates 50 years of consistent spreading. BY SETH JONES

**IT MIGHT SEEM** hard to imagine, but 50 years ago, topdressing was done by a laborer armed with a shovel. He'd start on one end of a property and pitch sand until the entire area received a layer.

By the end of the day, the consistency of the amount of sand being spread was, well, lacking.

Enter the mechanical topdresser. The first Mete-R-Matic — with wooden slats and a wooden hopper — was shipped by Turfco in September of 1961.

A lot has changed in 50 years for Turfco. Now the company offers riding

applicators, heavy-duty spreaders and advanced edgers.

But that doesn't mean the 1961 Mete-R-Matic is totally out of style.

"We still get calls for the old wooden machines wanting to know if we have replacement parts," laughs Scott Kinkead, executive vice president.

## The warranty pool

Turfco Manufacturing, founded by John Kinkead, is a family-owned and operated company. (John Kinkead's father, Robert Stanard Kinkead, founded National Mower in 1919.) John's two sons, George, president and Scott, executive vice president, have been working with the company 26 and 20 years, respectively.

The family atmosphere transforms into a team atmosphere from the front office to the factory. That's because



The first powered topdresser in the industry was sold by Turfco. This Mete-R-Matic was bought by Christina Lakes Golf Course near Grand Forks, British Columbia, in 1962.

employees at the facility are driven to make machines that won't break down. The better the machines, the better their bank accounts.

Every year the company establishes what they call "the warranty pool." The pool is money dedicated to repairing equipment still under the company's two-year warranty.

At the end of each year, the money that isn't spent from the pool gets distributed to the staff in the factory. So the fewer machines returned for service, the bigger the warranty pool check.

"It gives them more incentive to do good work," John Kinkead says. Scott adds, "Quality is important — operators expect this equipment to last."

What it all comes down to for the company is the desire to help people do their jobs better.

"These guys are running their own businesses," Scott Kinkead says. "We're making products that are fundamental to them making money. We're involved with helping guys grow their business. That's pretty fun." **LM**

In honor of their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Turfco is giving away 10 Apple iPads and a grand prize of a WideSpin 1540 EC. To enter the drawings, visit [www.turfco.com/50years](http://www.turfco.com/50years).



John Kinkead, CEO of Turfco, and Scott Kinkead, executive vice president of Turfco.

*Seth Jones is editor-in-chief of Landscape Management's sister publication, Golfdom.*

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## PROFITING FROM DESIGN

JODY SHILAN

Shilan is editor of FromDesign2Build.com. Contact him at 201/783-2844 or jshilan@gmail.com.

# Competing with value, not price

**Q** Many companies offer “free drawings” to get installation work. We’ve always charged for our landscape plans, but often lose work because of this. What can we do?

— **Bill Smith**, Greenscapes Unlimited, Greensboro, NC.

**A** This is a common problem no matter where your landscape design/build business is located.

There will always be companies that provide “free plans” as a strategy to get installation work. One could argue this is no different than offering a 10% discount on a new installation.

Don’t get me wrong. Creating landscape plans for free, is bad business. It might get you a signed contract, but the chances of the work being profitable, the customer being satisfied, and the project coming out well are extremely slim.

There is no such thing as a “free” plan. The time it takes to create a design, present it to the client, and make revisions in hopes of getting the work, costs you, the contractor, a considerable amount of time and money.

Most contractors roll the cost of the plan into the installation estimate, thereby charging clients “full price” for their “free plan.” This is fine if you get the installation, but what about the other four or five “free plans” that didn’t turn into any work? Who pays for those drawings? You do.

There are many variables at work here, including the size of the property, the scope of the work, the amount of detail in the drawing and the proximity of the project in relationship from your office.

During the typical design/sales process, contractors can expect to spend about 20 hours creating a

free plan. That’s half of an average workweek (or one-third of a landscape contractor’s workweek).

I’ve listed the basic steps of the design/process below, including average times for each step. Keep in mind that each step includes drive time to and from the office.

**Initial meeting:** 2-3 hours

**Site analysis:** 1-2 hours

**Concept plan:** 3-4 hours

**Estimate:** 3-4 hours

**Client presentation:** 1-2 hours

**Plan revisions:** 2-3 hours

**Estimate revisions:** 2-3 hours

**Client presentation:** 1-2 hours

**Total:** 15-23 hours

To dissuade clients from working with a free plan, the best thing that you can do is educate them on the value of working with your design team and installation crews. Explain how you will work closely with them to make sure the design and installation are exactly what they envisioned, and how a landscape plan is the least expensive, but most important part of any landscape installation. Compare the benefits of hiring a professional company such as yours versus the potential pitfalls of working with a company that provides free plans.

Clients willing to pay for a professional plan and go through the proper design process are typically a better clients. They are also the clients who usually increase the scope of work and their budgets during the design/build process — providing you with a more profitable project and a very satisfied customer.

By charging for plans and weeding out the “tire kickers,” you free up countless hours of wasted time. You can now use those 20 extra hours a week to keeping your paying customers satisfied. These satisfied clients will happily refer you to their friends and families, who in turn will expect to pay for their drawings.

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**Profiting from Design** is a quarterly column from award winning landscape designer, consultant and former design/build contractor Jody Shilan. Shilan is also the President of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association. If you have a question you would like answered in Profiting From Design, please contact Shilan at jshilan@gmail.com.



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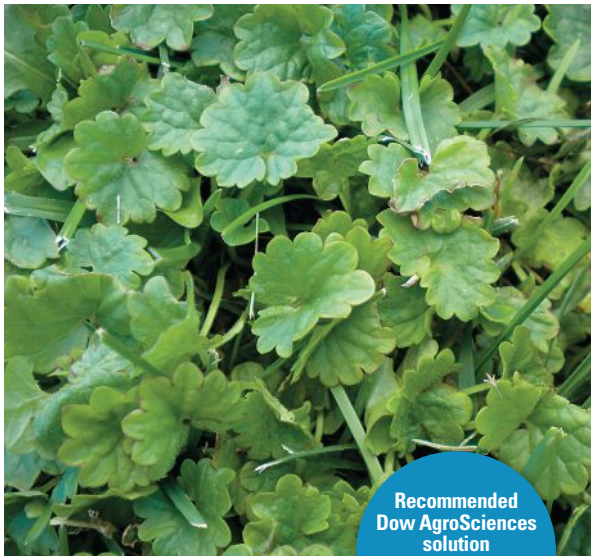
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# WEEDWATCH

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## GROUND IVY

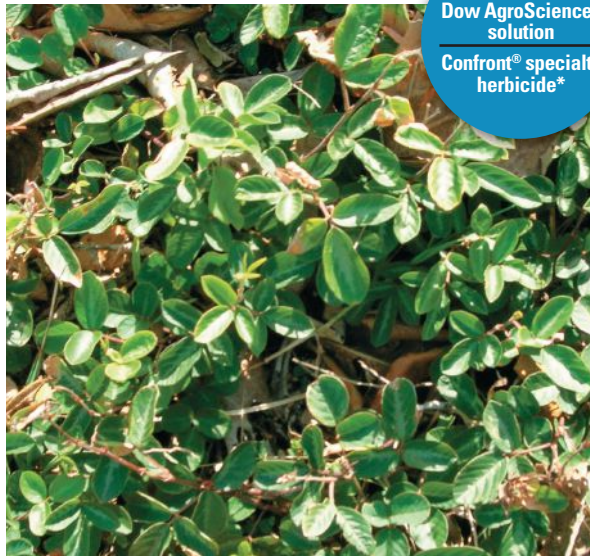
*Glechoma hederacea*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This prostrate creeping perennial, featuring a strong mint odor, has square stems several feet long that root at the nodes.
- ▶ Rounded, scalloped leaves and small, funnel-shaped purple flowers grow in clusters.
- ▶ It prefers moist, shady sites — and can tolerate low mowing heights.

### CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Fall is an excellent time to treat ground ivy. Applications in spring, when the ground ivy is in flower, are also effective for control.
- ▶ Products containing triclopyr have proven to be highly effective in spring and fall, and more effective than 2,4-D-based products during the difficult summer period.
- ▶ Alleviate shade, wet soil and poor fertility to help maintain control.



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## CREEPING BEGGARWEED

*Desmodium incanum*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This perennial broadleaf weed, featuring pink flowers, is found across the Southeast United States.
- ▶ It develops from a large taproot and has many branched runners capable of rooting at nodes along the stems.
- ▶ Leaves are composed of three leaflets — elliptic in shape, pointed at the tip and rounded at the base. Both stems and leaves are hairy.
- ▶ Creeping beggarweed spreads by seeds, stolons or segments of the taproot.

### CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Creeping beggarweed can reproduce and spread in multiple ways. Two or more applications of a post-emergence herbicide may be needed.
- ▶ When beggarweed is young and actively growing, apply a two- or three-way product that will translocate through the foliage and root system.
- ▶ Keep proper mowing height, fertility and moisture to facilitate healthy, dense turf that can compete with beggarweed's aggressive nature.

\* Confront is not for sale or use in Nassau and Suffolk counties, New York. State restrictions on the sale and use of Confront and Turflon Ester Ultra apply.

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# LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

## LAWN CARE: FERTILIZER & FERTILIZER BLENDS

### LebanonTurf

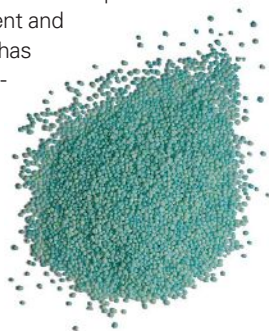


ProScape LockUp enables post-emergence control of annual and perennial broadleaf weeds in residential lawns, golf courses, parks, sports fields, sod farms and other established turf-grass. The granular product provides activity at

low use rates — generally 0.02 to 0.06 lbs. of active ingredient (penoxsulam) per acre — and can be used on wet or dry foliage and on warm- and cool-season turf. The specialty fertilizer/herbicide also includes Lebanon-Turf's MESA, the first nitrogen source to combine ammonium sulfate with methylene urea in a single particle. [LebanonTurf.com](http://LebanonTurf.com)

### Agrium Advanced Technologies

The XCU 10-Week Mini feeds turf for 10 weeks or more, and is — according to the manufacturer — the longest-lasting, mini polymer-coated, sulfur-coated urea (PCSCU) on the market. Along with the XCU 8-Week Mini and regular-sized XCU products, the fertilizer offers a consistent and predictable release profile. It also has a low risk of leaching and volatilization, which means nutrient losses to the environment are minimized. [AgriumAT.com](http://AgriumAT.com)



### Agrotain International

Providing consistent nitrogen feeding for as long as eight weeks, UFLEX is specifically intended for turf uses where repeat application is desirable. It features an exclusive inhibitor that blocks urease, which helps to minimize nitrogen loss to the atmosphere — allowing time

for rainfall and irrigation to effectively transport nitrogen to the root zone for plant utilization. Once in the soil, another inhibitor keeps it in a plant available form, ensuring no other losses occur from denitrification or leaching. [AgrotainTurf.com/uflexx.php](http://AgrotainTurf.com/uflexx.php)



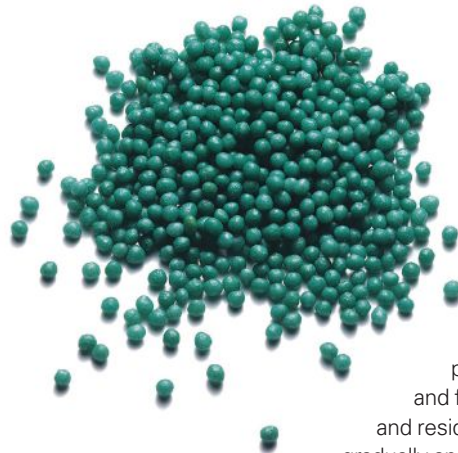
### Harris Seeds

Harris is the primary distributor of Worm Power organic fertilizer in the United States. Certified by the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) for organic

production, the product is odorless and considered safe for use around children and pets, the company says. Its fine, crumbly texture — like that of ground coffee — makes it easy to spread and handle. It delivers a guaranteed NPK analysis of 1.5-0.7-1.5, plus abundant micronutrients and a robust community of beneficial microorganisms essential for plant production. [HarrisSeeds.com](http://HarrisSeeds.com)

## Masterblend/Tyler Enterprises

Greensward was developed for athletic field maintenance, grounds maintenance and landscaping professionals to develop and maintain strong and lush turf. Constant use and play can cause your turf to lose strength and make it more susceptible to insects, weeds and even total loss. Greensward is specially formulated and custom blended to provide turf the strength it needs and the beauty you want. [Masterblend.com/turf.html](http://Masterblend.com/turf.html)



## Harrell's

Harrell's is the exclusive eastern formulator and a leading distributor of Polyon Controlled-Release Fertilizer, which has been used by turf professionals for nearly 20 years. Its patented Reactive Layers Coating technology is backed by many years of basic and applied research, both in laboratories and field applications on commercial turf and residential lawns. Nitrogen is released gradually and consistently via temperature-controlled diffusion and it is not affected by moisture. The controlled release of nutrients helps professional turf managers achieve green, healthy turf and lawns for up to seven months. And, because nutrients are released gradually throughout the growth cycle, there is less nutrient loss to the environment. [Harrells.com/focus/polyon](http://Harrells.com/focus/polyon)

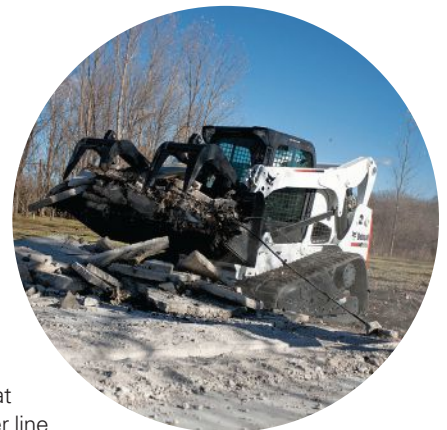
## MAINTENANCE: COMPACT EQUIPMENT



### Toro

Toro has upgraded its compact equipment line with the new TRX-16 (pictured) and TRX-20 walk-behind trenchers, replacing the TRX-15 and TRX-19 models. Along with the Toro TRX-26 model, these gas-powered machines make trenching easier with a tracked design and operator-friendly controls.

The new models are equipped with powerful 4-cycle Kawasaki twin-cylinder engines with a large oil reservoir to help maintain low engine temperature and prolong engine life. Delivering 10 gpm of hydraulic flow at 2,900 psi to the boom helps maximize digging efficiency. Each unit is also equipped with a standard hydraulic oil cooler that provides a cooler running machine in the most demanding conditions. Engineered with a low-profile tracked design, the Toro TRX models provide a low center of gravity for performance on a wide range of ground conditions. Tracks help the operator maneuver over perpendicular trenches effortlessly, where wheeled units may get stuck in the existing trench. The Toro TRX trenchers can be outfitted with a 24-, 36- or 48-in. boom. All three models offer chain widths of 4 or 6 in., and the TRX-26 has an additional 8-in. chain configuration. Available accessories include a backfill blade, a boring attachment and a custom TRX trailer. [Toro.com/trx](http://Toro.com/trx)



### Bobcat Co.

The new T750 joins the Bobcat M-Series loader line, which includes the T630, T650, T770 and T870 compact track loaders and the S630, S650 and S850 skid-steer loaders. It delivers a lift height-to-hinge pin measurement of 132 in. — more than 3 in. higher than a T300. It also features a 23 gpm standard hydraulic flow, an operating weight of 10,327 lb., a rated operating capacity of 3,325 lb., and it's powered by an 85-hp turbo-diesel engine. New job-enhancing features were added to the optional deluxe instrumentation panel. Available only on M-Series machines, the panel intelligently monitors key loader functions, and the keyless start helps prevent theft. The new 5-in., full-color LCD screen offers better readability and interaction. Easy-to-read virtual sweep gauges allow the operator to quickly read and understand the machine's performance. [Bobcat.com](http://Bobcat.com)





## Case Construction Equipment

With a large boom and arm for greater reach, the new Case CX55B compact excavator delivers 11,240 lbf of bucket digging force. Its 39.3-hp engine, operating weight of 12,295 lb. and dig depth of 12 ft. 10 in. give the CX55B enough size and power for tackling a variety of applications. Plus, its compact size and cab height of 8 ft. 4 in. make the Case CX55B excavator as easy to trailer between jobsites as a skid steer. Large front and rear windows improve operator visibility, while a new slide-up front window improves air flow and helps the operator communicate more effectively with co-workers near the machine. [CaseCE.com](http://CaseCE.com)

## Ditch Witch

Fast, powerful, simple to operate and easy to steer, the Ditch Witch RT24 compact trencher offers a choice of high-flotation tires or heavy duty tracks, plus an optional Roto Witch boring attachment that helps you install utilities beneath driveways, sidewalks and other surface improvements with minimal turf disturbance. The fully hydrostatic, 22.3-hp unit was designed with more weight on the digging chain, so it can put more product in the ground faster. A special trail wheel supports the oscillating tracks to help reduce breakover and increase stability over uneven and rough terrain; tracks "walk" or oscillate 12° for extra stability. Its trenching capacity is 48 in. deep and 8 in. wide, and easy hand controls are grouped conveniently at the operator's station. The optional backfill blade, available only from

the Ditch Witch organization, eliminates the need for shovels and manual labor. [DitchWitch.com](http://DitchWitch.com)

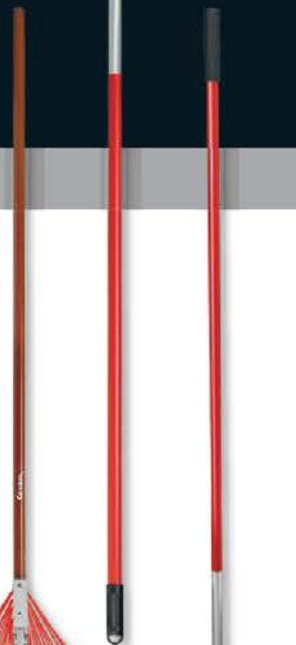


## Steam Jenny

Steam Jenny introduces four models of direct-drive cold pressure washers. All models are designed for maximum durability and portability. The pressure washers are powered by 9- or 13-hp Honda GX Series engines and feature a triplex ceramic plunger pump, which requires little maintenance. The units are available with pressure ratings between 3,000 and 4,000 psi, and flow rates vary between 3 and 4 gpm. The chassis is backed by a 7-year limited warranty, and other components are covered by a 1-year limited warranty. [SteamJenny.com](http://SteamJenny.com)



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## BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at [bwilson@questex.com](mailto:bwilson@questex.com).

# Take the leapfrog advantage

**A**s I write this, the country's debt rating has been lowered and the stock market has plunged more than 600 points. Hopefully by the time you read this, things will look a bit better.

Although this has been a long and drawn-out decline, and competition has been severe, someday soon the situation will improve. Through my own experience as a business leader and mentor, and in my observation of successful companies, I know that some companies will outperform during the rebound. As measured against the competition, the companies that survive will do so by having a "leapfrog advantage" over their competitors.

A desire to make that leap is one thing, but doing so is tough. We get defensive. We huddle. We retreat. It's hard to mobilize when the challenges seem insurmountable.

But it is possible. Here's how.

The following eight steps are guaranteed to move your company from defense to offense, and position you for the leapfrog advantage:

**1 Evaluate your bench strength.** Do you have the capacity to take on growth, given the opportunity? If you were able to grow sales by 25%, what would your organization chart look like? Can you fill the holes?

**2 Evaluate your equipment.** Have you held off replacing older equipment to conserve cash? Has this left you vulnerable? If so, start investing now and make sure you have the ability to upgrade your equipment to accommodate growth.

**3 Evaluate your finances.** Do you have funds in reserve? If you get a growth opportunity, can you finance it internally, or do you need to increase your credit lines? The best time to borrow is when you do not need it.

**4 Evaluate your market position.** Have you compromised your visibility with marketing budget cuts? Do you have sufficient exposure to get the opportunities you want? What is your customer thinking? When was the last time you asked?

**5 Evaluate your communications strategy.** Has your audience changed? Have you updated your messaging? Have you incorporated a plan for social media?

**6 Evaluate your people.** Do you have a team that can get you through austerity? Are they ready with the right skills to help you move forward? Do you need to re-tool to enhance performance? Are they willing to do whatever it takes? It might mean change.

**7 Evaluate your plan.** How thorough is your plan? Is it up to date? Does it cover contingencies and opportunities? Hire a business coach to help you freshen your goals and map out next steps.

**8 Evaluate your outreach.** Are you networking? Are you talking to other business leaders in your communities? Are you building knowledge, creating relationships and sharing best practices? Listen to what your peers and colleagues are saying. Learn from one another.

Use this period as an opportunity to evaluate and recalibrate. Some segments are doing well; maintenance and residential design-build, for example, show a lot of activity. Where is your strength? Are you playing to it? Are you concentrating on what you do best?

My crystal ball doesn't tell me whether the rollercoaster ride will continue — or whether the turnaround will start today, next quarter or next year. But it doesn't take a crystal ball to know it is better to be the beneficiary of the rebound, rather than the victim of the turmoil.

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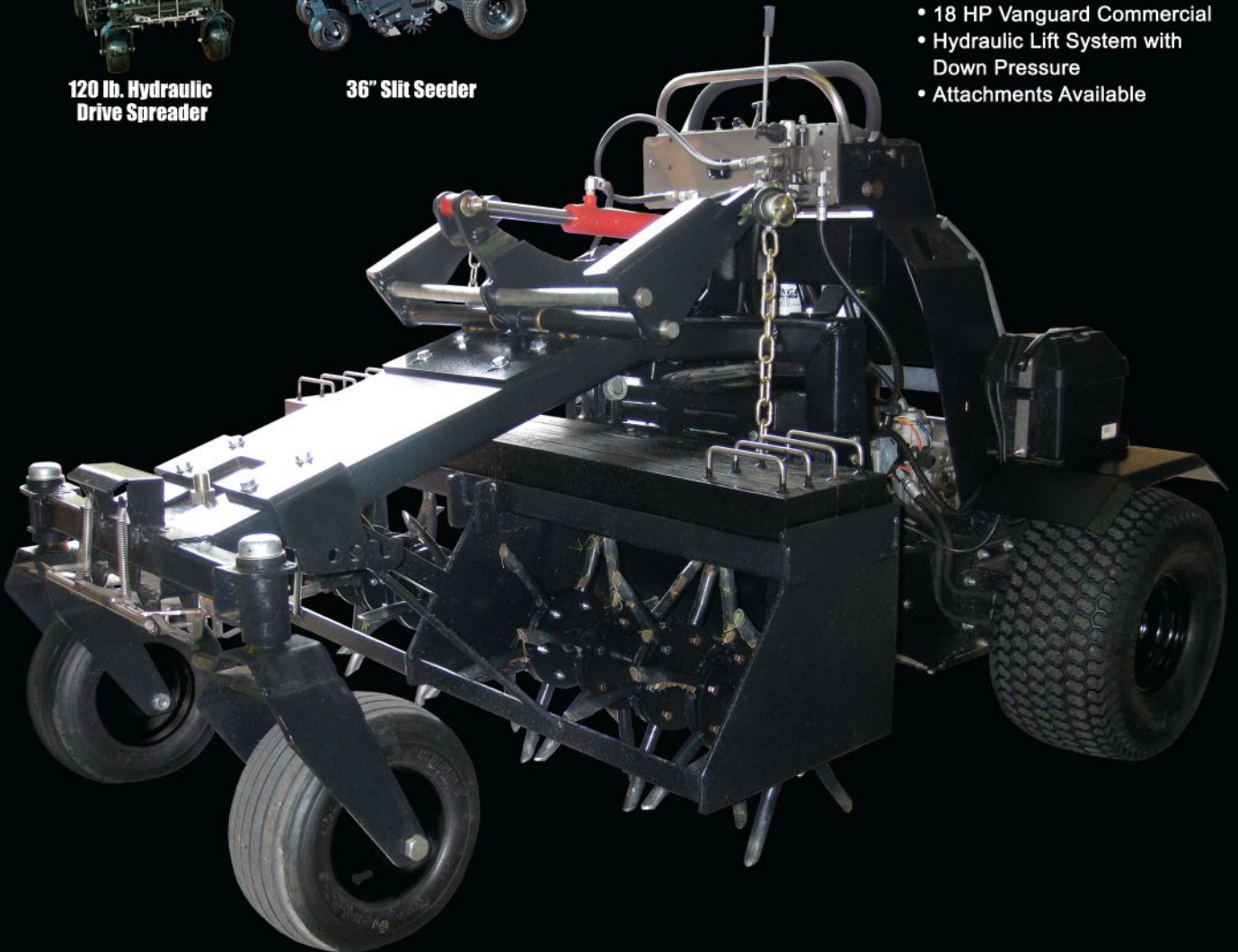
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# Fall LANDSCAPE COLOR

**Spring isn't the only time for colorful plantings.**

BY JAMIE J. GOOCH

**F**ALL COLOR doesn't just grow on trees. Perennials and ornamentals can be combined to provide clients with late-season showiness in containers and beds.

Plant breeders continue to improve the color options available to landscapers, as well as the length of bloom time, so there are many options. Even tried-and-true fall performers such as Asters and Chrysanthemums are available in new colors, sizes and shapes. That may be the most difficult aspect of adding late-season color: deciding on the right plants.

## Plants of the year

There are thousands of perennials and ornamentals to choose from, but you can narrow them down by beginning with plants tested by associations and botanical gardens. One such association, the Perennial Plant Association (PPA), has chosen *Amsonia hubrichtii* as its



'Glamour Red' kale can provide color all winter in some climates.

2011 perennial of the year.

*Amsonia hubrichtii*, also known as 'Arkansas Bluestar', provides three seasons of interest in zones 4 through 9. Even after its clusters of light-blue, star-shaped blooms fade in spring, the plant's feathery foliage takes over. The green, fern-like foliage turns bright

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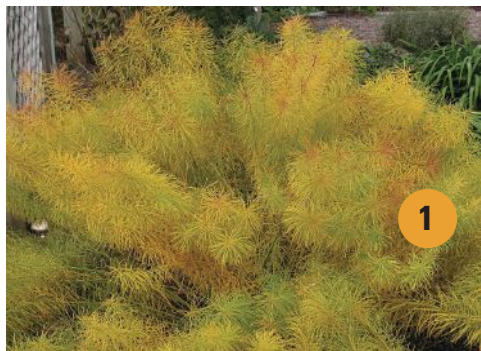


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**1** *Amsonia hubrichtii* has wispy green foliage that turns bright yellow in the fall.



**2** *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' stands out for its cascading yellow blades.



**3** *Gaillardia x grandiflora* will bloom into early autumn.



yellow in the fall. It mounds to 3 ft. high by 3 ft. wide, so it works well in the landscape when massed together and combined with ornamental grasses.

Speaking of ornamental grasses, the variety of foliage colors and heights make them a great addition to a late-season landscape. In 2009, PPA awarded its plant of the year award to *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola,' an ornamental grass also known as Golden Japanese Forest Grass. It has variegated yellow blades with green stripes. Unlike many grasses, it has a cascading growth habit that causes the leaves to arch in the same direction. During the fall the yellow blades of grass take on shades of pink.

### AAS award winners

Another organization that tests and recommends perennials is All-America Selections (AAS). Its 2011 winners include two cultivars with late-season appeal: *Gaillardia* 'Arizona Apricot' and 'Glamour Red' ornamental kale.

*Gaillardia* 'Arizona Apricot' has blooms with yellow edges that deepen to an apricot in the center. AAS judges noted the distinctive color of the 3 to 3.5 in. daisy-like flowers.

"Just 105 days after sowing seed, this *Gaillardia x grandiflora* will bloom from early summer into autumn," according to AAS. "The compact 12-in.-tall plants offer bright green foliage and a tidy uniform habit best viewed when planted to the front of the flower bed."

This long-flowering perennial is hardy

in USDA zones 2 through 10. It is bred by Ernst Benary of America Inc.

AAS' first winning kale is 'Glamour Red,' which has shiny, waxless leaves with vivid color. The fringed leaf type *Brassica oleracea* has a flower head size of 10 to 12 in.

This full sun annual ornamental will bloom 90 days from sowing seed to first color. Leaf coloring begins when night temperatures fall below 55°F for approximately two weeks, according to AAS. You can expect frost-tolerant blooms from November to March in warmer climates. It is bred by Takii & Co., Ltd.

### Look local

To make sure plants are viable in your area, check with local growers to collect their recommendations. Look through

plant breeders' catalogs and use them as a means to discuss new cultivars with your local nurseries.

If you have a land-grant university nearby, it might work with the Cooperative Extension Service in your region on plant trials. A number of state horticultural societies also test and rate plants. A good list of these can be found on the U.S. National Arboretum site at [usna.usda.gov/Gardens/faqs/pickingplants.html](http://usna.usda.gov/Gardens/faqs/pickingplants.html).

Trees and shrubs don't have to be the only bright spots in your clients' landscapes. With the right research and planning, perennials and ornamentals can bring years of seasonal color. **LM**

**Gooch is a freelance writer based in Northeast Ohio. Contact him via [goochandgooch.com](http://goochandgooch.com).**

### KEEP IT CLEAN

To ensure late-season color has its chance to shine in the landscape, sell your clients a fall maintenance package. It's important to remove dead plant matter not only for aesthetics, but to decrease the chance of disease. A fall landscape maintenance program can also include:

- ▶ **Mulching** to protect crowns and roots from winter weather.
- ▶ **Dividing** certain perennials to prevent overcrowding.
- ▶ **Staking** tall perennials so that they aren't damaged by wind or heavy snows.
- ▶ **Weeding and fertilization** as necessary.
- ▶ **Planting** containerized perennials or moving them indoors.
- ▶ **Fall pruning** of certain flowering shrubs. —*JG*



### Sound choice

The new Astilbe hybrids 'Hip Hop' and 'New Wave' (pictured) are part of the **Darwin Perennials** Music Collection. Both false spireas feature strong stems and heat tolerance. 'Hip Hop' has an addition of light pink plumes with high-contrast hot pink stamens. 'New Wave' is an upward grower with dark shiny green foliage — with plumes that have a deep, consistent pink on a dark stem. [DarwinPerennials.com](http://DarwinPerennials.com)

### Pure performance

*Salvia farinacea* 'Evolution White' is **Benary's** new silvery white color, with the same performance and compact habit as AAS award winner *Salvia* 'Evolution,' according to the company. Early to flower, 'Evolution White' features bright white blooms for a clean, fresh look in the landscape all season long. [Benary.com](http://Benary.com)



### Baker's delight

Named for its yellow-gold fruit, *Rubus idaeus* 'Fall Gold' is similar to red raspberries in all respects but color. This upright thorny shrub from **Monrovia** provides an abundance of sweet berries from mid-summer to early fall. It offers green foliage throughout the season and is self-pollinating, so it does not require another plant nearby to set fruit. It reaches 4x3 ft., and prefers full sun in zones 3 to 7. [Monrovia.com](http://Monrovia.com)



### Traditional beauty

**David Austin Roses'** repeat-flowering *Rosa* 'The Wedgwood Rose' (Ausjosiah) — offers approximately 70 soft rose pink petals in medium to large blooms. They feature a fruity fragrance on the outer petals, with a clove-like scent at the center. Their ample foliage is dark green and glossy. They work well as a climber — as tall as 10 ft. — or a flowering shrub (about 5x5 ft.). Hardy in USDA zones 5 to 9, they are named for the English pottery company founded by Josiah Wedgwood in 1759. [DavidAustinRoses.com](http://DavidAustinRoses.com)



### Taste of the tropics

**Tesselaar's** 'Tropicanna,' 'Tropicanna Gold' and 'Tropicanna Black' cannas work well in garden borders, backdrops, containers, ponds or water gardens. Featuring variegated, exotic foliage and brilliantly hued blooms (four to eight per stalk), the plants quickly establish into clumps with an upright growth habit. They mature to a height of between 4 and 6 ft., and particularly thrive in USDA zones 7 to 11 — in full sun or partial shade. [Tesselaar.com](http://Tesselaar.com)

## Earning their stripes

Three business partners recognize huge potential when they stumble into a virtually untapped service segment: marking parking lots.

Tom Darrow demonstrates use of the striping machine.



**C**HRISTOPHER COURI AND Dan Rella had a successful Connecticut-based landscape business, but they were looking for something else in which to get involved. They wanted an add-on service that could increase their growth potential.

Fellow friend Tom Darrow, owner of another nearby landscaping/irrigation firm, suggested parking lot striping. Couri and Rella were intrigued — and today, the trio has parlayed that service add-on into a national brand.

“When we first started researching this service we didn’t even know what to call it,” admits Couri. “Do you call it parking lot marking? Painting? Striping? It’s just so off the radar that there wasn’t even a name for it. When we realized there weren’t a lot of people out there offering it, we saw a great opportunity. We ended up buying a machine and getting trained on how to use it so that we could inject this service into our business.”

The primary investment for the service was the machine, which cost just under \$6,000. The trio already had use of trucks and trailers from their landscaping businesses, so that kept the start-up costs down. And it didn’t take long for the service to really take off. With almost instantaneous success, the trio started focusing on marketing for their new company, We Do Lines.

“We were getting a lot of work in Connecticut, but also as far north as Maine and as far south as Florida,” says Couri. “That told us there was a larger need. We realized there was potential for a national brand.”

That’s when Couri and his business partners decided to become franchisers.

“We wanted to put this opportunity out there on a national basis,” he says. “It’s a nice complementary business to a landscape company. Most of the time,

they’re already on the lot doing the landscaping, so it’s very easy to integrate the line striping into the process. It can definitely work as a stand-alone or full-time business.”

Starting a We Do Lines franchise is relatively simple for the average landscaper because they likely already have most of the equipment — and even the contacts for potential customers.

“You need a truck, a trailer and a machine,” says Couri. “There’s no warehouse needed to store equipment or a whole bunch of required machinery. It’s a fairly simple business model, and that makes us leaner and more attractive.”

We Do Lines has a national supplier agreement with Sherwin Williams for the paint. Couri says this has worked well for franchisees who can go to any Sherwin Williams store and access paint with one master account. In addition, We Do Lines also offers the stencil packages that franchisees would need to create all the additional parking lot markings like handicapped spaces, crosswalks and curb painting.

While Couri didn’t know much about the line striping business when he first started, he and his partners have since become experts on the service. With no major competitors in the market, it’s become a wide-open opportunity.

“The market was really ripe for a national brand,” says Couri. “Up until now, it was mostly part-time and small businesses offering this. I know maybe 20 landscapers in my town alone, but there’s only one line striping company. And there’s no question that’s also helped boost our landscaping business. We become more of a one-stop shop for the customer.”

The author is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY:** We Do Lines, Ridgefield, CT

**PARTNERS AND CO-FOUNDERS:** Christopher Couri, president and CEO; Dan Rella, CFO; Tom Darrow, COO

**WHY PARKING LOT STRIPING:** The business founders recognized a huge opportunity when they couldn’t find a lot of other companies in the market that offered the service.

**INITIAL INVESTMENT:** The equipment is the main piece of the start-up package, along with a truck and trailer.

**WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT:** “There simply aren’t a lot of companies offering this service. For a landscape business, it makes for one-stop shopping. The crew can coordinate the landscaping and the line striping all in one day on the lot.”





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“It is very rewarding to serve as CEO of a \$20 million landscape contractor firm,” says **Bill Russell**, chief executive officer of Russell Landscape Group (RLG). The company, based in Dacula, GA, is as committed to Dacula’s people as it is to its landscapes. The company’s demonstrated that through its longtime involvement in the local community, Russell said.

“RLG’s strong community service and commitment to giving back financially to the area where we’ve prospered has afforded us great exposure, yielded new clients and increased referrals,” Russell says.

He pauses to tell *LM* more about opportunities and challenges facing his business and the Green Industry in today’s economy.

## TOP TREND

### › Irresponsible price cutting and low ball bidding.

I am very concerned with one current industry trend in which far too many firms are drastically reducing their maintenance pricing without regard or consideration for overhead and essential bottom line profit. The prevalence of irresponsible price cutting and low-ball bidding by a large number of companies has created an unfavorable environment, which drives markets downward to the point that we won’t return contract pricing to previous industry standards for several years. Russell Landscape Group will continue to strive to out-service the competition with its quality services at value pricing.

## TOP OBSTACLE

› **High fuel prices and labor costs.** The obstacles Russell Landscape Group is currently facing in this challenging economy are numerous. They include intrusive immigration reform by state government, unavailable capital, astronomical fuel prices, increased tax burden and rising operational and healthcare costs. In an effort to reduce high fuel consumption and labor costs created when crews are stuck in traffic congestion, Russell Landscape Group recently established new branch locations throughout our five-state service market. These new satellite locations have reduced travel time and lost job production incurred as crews moved among client job sites.



Bill Russell

## INSIDE INFO

**Company:**  
Russell Landscape Group

**Headquarters:** Dacula, GA (Northeast Atlanta), with 12 branches in the Southeast.

**Employees:** 475

**2010 revenue:** \$20 million

**Key to being a maintenance leader:** The key to being a strong maintenance leader is to understand that one only wins when surrounded by people who are smarter than you are. People aren’t the greatest asset in any company; however, the right people are a company’s greatest asset (both the right employees and the right clients). A great maintenance leader gets the correct people on the bus and then positions them in the appropriate seats to ensure winning.

Russell Landscape Group’s ownership has found that if we help enough people get what they want, then we can achieve what we want. The largest challenge of being a maintenance leader in the present down economy, where quality is going up and prices down, is maintaining a positive attitude. Business is a competitive sport where true leaders go from challenge to challenge with undiminished enthusiasm. Attitude determines altitude and it is essential that company employees consistently witness a leader who is positive about the company’s future.

## TOP OPPORTUNITIES

› **Effective marketing.** RLG’s leaders network beyond the ordinary, and we have utilized our company website to generate business. The Internet continues to present opportunities for RLG. The presence of a website lends prestige to a firm, is inexpensive, and allows a drastic increase in communication speed. Our company website provides initial contact with numerous potential prospects who are then contacted by phone or in face-to-face sales meetings.

› **Our current client base.** Referrals are RLG’s largest new client generator. Taking care of our existing clients and providing them with more than they expect during tough times has afforded us a strong referral base.

› **Diversified services and landscape enhancement upgrades.** Commercial and residential properties, even in a challenged economy, are still focused on curb appeal by purchasing lifestyle elements such as fountains and outdoor patios. RLG is receiving one-fourth of its new revenue from add-on work orders. Our firm has experienced recent success by expanding services to include Department of Transportation highway contracts, community improvement districts, cell towers and snow removal services.

RLG is also seizing opportunities for growth by partnering with firms who specialize in specific Green Industry services, including hard-scapes, efficient irrigation systems, landscape lighting, mulching, water features and hydro-seeding. Our company often achieves a greater bottom line profit when contracting out specialty work and partnering with firms who specialize in a specific service.



education

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service changed the way it regulates imports of nursery stock.

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The Land and Water Conservation Fund Coalition praised efforts by the House of Representatives to restore \$25 million in funding for the LWCF that was cut from the program in a bill being debated by the House.

# MYBIGGESTMISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



## Business owner Jody O'Donnell learns the power behind managing man-hours.



Jody O'Donnell

**COMPANY:**

LMI Landscapes Inc.

**PRESIDENT:** Jody O'Donnell

**HEADQUARTERS:** Carrollton, TX

**CLIENTELE:** 100% commercial

**SERVICE BREAKDOWN:**

45% maintenance/55% construction

**2010 REVENUE:** \$13 million

**JODY O'DONNELL,** PRESIDENT of Texas-based LMI Landscapes Inc., says getting a handle on man-hours is one of the most challenging, but also most important feats in running a successful business. In the past, he says, he might not have paid as close attention to man-hours as he should have — but today, he's learned it's something he can't let slide.

"Your two biggest expenses in a landscape business are material and labor," says O'Donnell. "Material is much more easily controlled than people and man-hours, so sometimes business owners tend to put more effort into worrying about materials. In reality, it's the man-hours that really need your attention. It's not something that can be ignored."

O'Donnell says that years ago, as his business grew rapidly, he was overloaded with a lot of tasks that took up time and attention. He says back then, he wasn't as attentive to man-hours.

"There are a lot of things business owners and their managers are accountable and responsible for, and sometimes there's a tendency to take care of some of the easier stuff," he admits. "It's not always easy to focus on the challenging tasks like managing man-hours. But once you start paying closer atten-

tion to what your actual costs are versus what your estimates were, you realize how important it is to keep better track of the man-hours on each project."

Today, O'Donnell holds weekly meetings where he forecasts and scrutinizes all the jobs he has going on.

"We go over a man-hour report at every meeting, so that we know exactly where we are," he says. "Now we know exactly where our estimates are falling in terms of what's actually happening."

### IF YOU HAD TO PICK ONE KEY AREA TO REALLY FOCUS ON, I'D DEFINITELY SAY IT SHOULD BE MANAGING MAN-HOURS

#### Gaining control

In terms of getting better control over your company's man-hours, the biggest investment is time. O'Donnell stresses that there's no need for any fancy system. "You can do it with an Excel spreadsheet if you want," he says. "It's just a matter of looking at what you had budgeted for in terms of labor, and then looking at what you're

actually doing. There are a lot of ways to keep track of that information — and honestly, the simpler you make it, the more effective and implementable it will become. If you make it too complicated, you're not going to want to put the time in."

While the management of labor can be delegated to other managers, O'Donnell says this is an area that should start with the business owner's attention — at least in the beginning, until he or she has gained control.

"The function of managing man-hours should emanate from the owner and trickle down to all the appropriate managers responsible for your different crews," he says.

O'Donnell adds that the best advice he can offer to help other business owner better manage their man-hours is to "make it a priority."

"You can talk about how important it is all you want, but you actually have to do something about it to make a difference in your business," he says. "In a perfect world, business owners would be able to stay on top of everything. But if you had to pick one key area to really focus on, I'd definitely say it should be managing man-hours. Once you start staying on top of it, things begin to take care of themselves — and you realize it should have been a priority all along."

Payton is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.

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