

## A business with bite

Jim Agabedis offers an organic solution to tick and mosquito control.

**W**HEN JIM AGABEDIS moved to a home in the suburbs, he soon discovered he had a tick and mosquito problem. An organic gardener and landscaper, Agabedis researched his options and decided this sort of bug control would be a useful add-on service for his Massachusetts-based organic lawn care company. That was in 2005. Agabedis says the service has grown since then.

"When I moved to the suburbs, I realized what a problem this was for a lot of homeowners," says Agabedis, president and owner of Minuteman Landscaping Inc. in Brighton, MA.

### >> SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**WHY TICK AND MOSQUITO CONTROL?** Our initial interest in it was for personal reasons. I had moved to the suburbs and had a mosquito and tick problem. But when we found a product that worked, it made sense to offer it as a service through my business.

**WHY ORGANIC?** I've been an organic gardener since 1984. Organic and all-natural lawn care is where we've always hung our hat. So I was definitely looking for an organic product when it came to tick and mosquito control. Customers do appreciate that it's safe for their kids, pets and themselves, as well as for the environment.

**WHAT WAS YOUR INVESTMENT?** We already had some of the equipment we needed through our compost division, but there would certainly be an investment for those that don't have spray tanks or another way to distribute the product. The product we use and have found works the best is cedar oil. There's also a granular version that works as a repellent, so once we eliminate the population by spraying we go in and do the granular treatment to keep up.

**HOW PROFITABLE IS THE SERVICE?** It's definitely a profitable service for us but not something that's bringing in a tremendous amount of revenue. It's definitely a nice add-on service if you have the equipment and the right people to do it, though. It keeps customers happy and that's a good thing for the rest of your business, too.



"The first spring day that we went out to use the lawn we found nine ticks between our three kids and dog," he continues. "And there were a lot of mosquitoes, too. I wanted the kids to be able to play in the yard and as an organic gardener, I wanted to find a product that would be safe. So I started trying out various products and found one that gave pretty immediate results."

After seeing such success on his property, Agabedis pitched the idea to his clients and the service took off from there. In the first season of offering the service Agabedis went from zero to 130 clients. He attributes that growth to regional demand.

"The communities we work in tend to be a little more suburban, with wetlands and some boggy areas that require maintenance," says Agabedis.

As time went on, Agabedis found that his organic mosquito and tick control program not only was effective, but also appealed to customers.

"We've found that this is a service that people really do find value in because it's allowing them to enjoy their property and the results are almost instantaneous," says Agabedis. "We haven't had any calls with customers complaining it didn't work, but we get quite a lot of calls from customers that are really happy because they were able to have that outdoor party they wanted to have after we sprayed. Giving people instant results makes them satisfied customers, and the fact that it's organic and safe is even better."

Agabedis says organic mosquito and tick control has also been an excellent way to differentiate his business from the competition. "It's like snow plowing in that some landscapers do it and some don't," he says. "But those that don't are occasionally let go based on the fact that their services aren't as complete as another company," he says. "This service allows us to be more complete. Homeowners see us as more of a one-stop solution, and that keeps them happy."

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