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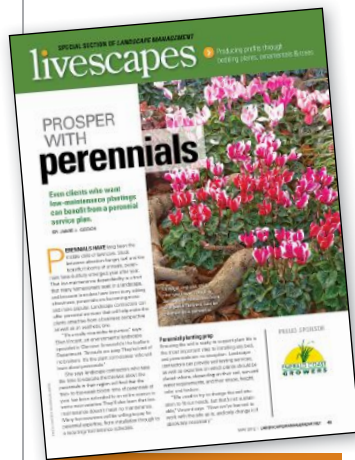
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## THE LM DAILY

### DID YOU CATCH THE LATEST FROM THE BLOG?

» Watch as Cub Cadet offers free joy rides outside of Progressive Field and Quicken Loans Arena, homes to the Cleveland Indians and Cleveland Cavaliers, respectively. The company brought its mowers to the plaza so local residents could partake in the Cub Cadet Test Drive Challenge. With crowds on hand to cheer on both teams, Cub Cadet reached 30,000 fans in one afternoon.

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## Pinterest OF THE MONTH

The Turf and Ornamentals Communicators Association held its annual awards ceremony this month. See what all transpired and how LM fared. Log on to: [pinterest.com/landscapemgmt](http://pinterest.com/landscapemgmt)

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# Talkin'



# Tech

with Jerry Corbett

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## A commercial success

Employees of Lawn Ranger star in a nationally televised ad for AT&T. BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**W**ith the advent of digital video recorders that allow viewers to pause live television broadcasts and later zip past commercials, you might wonder if anybody watches ads anymore.

Well you can bet the employees of Eden Prairie, MN-based Lawn Ranger (and their families) recently spent a lot of time zipping through the shows to get to the commercials — at least one commercial in particular.

The company and some of its employees were featured in a nationally televised 30-second commercial for AT&T.

“It was an amazing thing in Minnesota,” said Joe Unger, president of Lawn Ranger. “They spend a lot of money on these ads. We had people that did our clothes, catering, make-up artists.”

The commercial features Lawn Ranger’s use of the Xora, a smart phone application combined with the AT&T network, explains Todd Dilley, operations director. Xora is a mobile enterprise application designed to help organizations improve productivity and service goals by giving them real-time visibility into the locations and activities of employees and vehicles and by eliminating manual data collection and paperwork.

The commercial was unscripted. The company’s employees were simply asked to talk about their work and how they use the smart phone and computer app.

Horticulturist Bobby Jensen, for example, talks about why Lawn Ranger is actually a misnomer because the company



takes care of far more than just lawns.

The irony? Unger never appears on screen. “I mumble too much, and I’m not very good in front of the camera,” he says. “I couldn’t remember my lines very well.” Maybe so, but he’s been running a successful business since 1985.

Dilley gets a lot of screen time (at least in the long version of the commercial, available at: <http://yourbusiness.att.com/smallbiz/story/lawn-ranger>) showing the company’s old way of tracking workers, machines, materials and jobs — a massive whiteboard. “It was utter chaos,” he says.

AT&T’s Minnesota-based sales representatives nominated Lawn Ranger to appear in the commercial. More than 100 companies were up for the spot. That list was narrowed to four and ultimately down to just Lawn Ranger.

The production team comprised about 50 people, which spent four days



It took four days and a production team of 50 people — including make-up artists, light designers, camera operators and a director — to produce a commercial featuring Lawn Ranger employees.

at Lawn Ranger’s facilities in late January. Although snow is a large part of the company’s business, the commercial was filmed using a lot of artificial snow, dry ice and foam.

The spot aired about 350 times on various networks over a six-week period. And while the employees were required to join the screen actors’ guild, none expects to be appearing in any Hollywood productions anytime soon. Although there is some hope AT&T will use Lawn Ranger in a “sequel” featuring the company’s summer services.

Lawn Ranger’s sales are up heading into the spring. Whether or not you can attribute it to the commercial, Unger is not sure, but many of Lawn Ranger’s customers have sent congratulatory emails.

“It’s built a lot of confidence in us,” Dilley says. “It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and it was super fun.”



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# An entrepreneur turns inventor

BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Tom Del Conte had a problem. Since a ready solution wasn't available he did the only thing he could. He created his own.

"There are approximately 25 million controllers across the United States," explains Del Conte, the creator of Sprinkler Times. "Smart controllers are the wave of the future. Three percent of those controllers are smart controllers. What do we do about the 97%? If we're going to try to go 'green' and sustainable, how do we know how many minutes to program the other 97% of the timers until they get converted?"

The Sprinkler Times app, which sells for \$5.99 on the iTunes store, allows contractors to set irrigation plans for properties without performing time-consuming water audits.

"We're (into) the '100 days of hell,'" says Del Conte, founder and president

of Del Conte's Landscaping. "That's when we can save the most but that's when we're the busiest. Who's really going to be paying that much attention to the controllers?"

The app takes weather data from weather stations around the country (localized to zip code) and factors in a number of variables (soil, shade, etc.) and the ever-changing evapotranspiration rates to give technicians a yard's proper irrigation schedule.

Del Conte recognizes that the industry is headed down the smart controller route, which means his app is not a long-term solution.

"We think we'll be obsolete in 5 to 10 years — all those old timers will be out of there," he says. "Until then, we've still got a water crisis on our hands, and it's not getting any better. We're pumping water out of the ground like crazy."

It took Del Conte more than a year



SprinklerTimes offers contractors a way to set irrigation schedules for controllers.

to put the app together. At one point he scrapped the entire programming team and started from

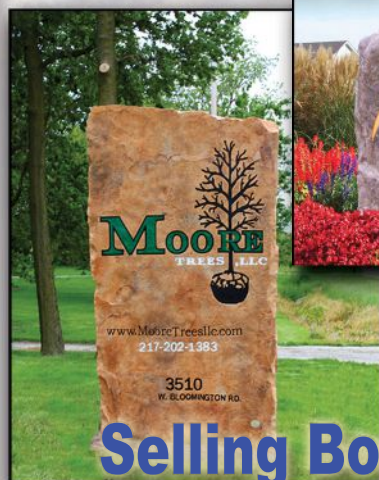
scratch. "It was every bit like building a house," he says. "You don't even know the decisions you have to make until you get there."

But now that he's there, he is happy with the results.

"We're looking for some cool stuff to happen out of this," Del Conte says. "We're excited about the idea we might make an impact."

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# Syngenta's Bell retires

After 35 years, Bell says 'goodbye' to the Green Industry. BY BETH GERACI

It's been a long time, but after 35 years at the company, Syngenta marketing communications manager Margaret Bell retired May 4.

"It's time to move on to something else," Bell said. "It's hard to believe that somebody can be in a job that long. Once you start having deadlines in your life, your life starts to go by very quickly. Before you know it, it's 35 years."

Bell launched her Syngenta career in the Chemicals Group in the 1970s, switching to Ag in 1980. "That's when my career really started moving," she said, noting the rise of generics at the time. "It was pretty exciting being at

the forefront of that." In 2001, Bell moved to marketing communications in Syngenta's Lawn & Garden Group.

Bell "has been a trailblazer in our industry in many ways, and her business savvy, contacts and knowledge of the golf, lawn care and landscape markets will be difficult to replicate at Syngenta," said Syngenta Turf and Landscape Territory Manager Lee Bloomcamp.

"You always enjoyed working on a project with Margaret," added Walt Osborne, Syngenta's key account manager for national golf accounts. "She has a great sense of humor, and you knew you could count on her to get the job done – and done right."

Bell was active in many Green Industry associations throughout her tenure, especially the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA),



Margaret Bell will miss the people of the Green Industry most of all.

of which she served as vice president for nearly 12 years. She'll always remember the sing-alongs at TOCA.

"I will miss my involvement in TOCA a lot," she said. "That is a fun time. Sometimes just watching people sing, it's just so much fun. The passion we have for what we do is expressed in the way we sing the song."

Bell will miss the people of the Green Industry most of all. It's "pretty good to know you're around people who are all good folks," she said. "I will miss that more than anything."

She'll probably work on projects during her retirement, she said, but a 40-hour workweek is out of the question. Instead, she'll spend more time with family and enjoy the down time. "It's just time to go," she said. "I'm not even nervous. I'm excited about my future."

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## The path down memory lane leads right back to the present

**J**osh just finished his sophomore year of college. Sammie is days away from becoming a high school senior. Where did the time go?

As a boy growing up in the Midwest, the time it took to graduate from high school and go to college seemingly dragged on forever. The time since has passed more quickly than ever. I'm not sure how that works. Maybe it has something to do with Einstein's Theory of Relativity. He did once explain the concept this way: "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 — then it's longer than any hour. That's relativity!"

I guess it's my wife's fault, then. Our 21 years of marriage (nearly 24 as a couple) have whizzed by in the blink of an eye because of my beautiful bride.

One way to relive those years is through the gauzy mist of memory. Ironic isn't it? The years seem to have flown by, so the memories should be fresh. I should be able to draw on those images with the same clarity that highlights watching last week's characteristically bad round on the golf course — something I'd rather forget, but no. Those memories persist rather stubbornly.

The other way to recall the past is to page through the increasingly dusty photo albums wedged into boxes in the basement. There's something set-

ting and calming about leafing through those old Kodak Instamatic images. Sifting through the photos recalls comforting times. They're a reminder that despite the frenetic pace at which we all move, there were once more manageable moments.

But there's another reason to pull out those old photographs, one that connects that idyllic history to this modern world.

The Internet provides an endless stream of mindless banality. But every so often, I stumble across a site created by someone particularly clever, someone who truly grasps the power of the Internet and its ability to reach people in ways that would be challenging if not impossible otherwise.

My current obsession (and the reason for that trip down memory lane) comes from a variety of websites where people post those long-stored images of themselves alongside photographs in which they recreate (as much as possible) the same scene. They strike the same poses, wear clothing and do so in the same settings they were in years, often decades, earlier. Just type "now and then photos" into your favorite search engine and you'll come across any number of websites featuring side-by-side comparisons of photos.

Some are funny. Some are heartwarming. Some are daring. Some are flat out strange.

I'm not sure exactly what makes this so engaging. Maybe it's that connection between the old and the new. I can still look on my office wall and see the first issue of this magazine, published half a century ago. There are plenty of Green Industry businesses whose longevity makes us feel like teenagers. Whether you're a young upstart or a veteran enterprise just showing a little gray around the temples, send us your family's now-and-then photos. Maybe we'll share them on our pages, when *Landscape Management* celebrates 50 years in publishing later this year.

LM's own version of "now and then" photos — our very first magazine cover from 1962 and the most recent cover.







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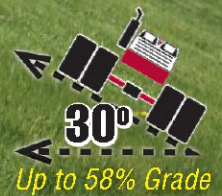


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# PROGRESS



## Keep on truckin'

**F**or the past 50 years, pickup trucks, vans and trailer combos have been the most popular vehicles for mobilizing work crews and equipment in the landscaping industry.

In the mid-'50s, Ford introduced its F-100 truck series with the first automatic transmission and overhead valve V8 engine, commonly called the Y-block. It also introduced two other irresistible features: the chrome grill and the four-wheel drive.

The more compact pickup was popularized during the '60s, when Toyota and Nissan entered the North American truck market. In the '70s, the Ford F-150, Chevy Silverado and Dodge Ram were introduced.

Today, landscaping trucks come in a wide variety of truck bodies, including dump trucks, flat beds and more. They fall into one of three weight classes: lightweight, medium range and heavy-duty.

### Custom commercial

Many of today's landscapers are investing in highly customized, medium-duty trucks designed to eliminate the operation of trailers.

Tony Bass, president of Super Lawn Trucks, Fort Valley, GA, has been capitalizing on this trend since the early '90s.



A custom-painted Nissan NV

### From four-wheel drives to alternative fuels, maintenance trucks continue to move forward.

He sells a highly specialized landscaping truck system designed to store and transport tools and equipment.

Nissan recently revived the commercial van with its new NV model. Joe Castelli, vice president, Commercial Vehicles and Fleet, Nissan NA, says he believes the NV is ideal for landscapers for a number of reasons, including its versatility and mobility.

"A commercial van must serve many more functions today, including acting as a mobile office for time spent on the road or at a job site," says Castelli. "We've made storage and productivity items integral to the design, too."

The NV's driver compartment allows the operator to organize the paperwork, business cards and equipment needed to handle multiple jobs. The vehicle has a full-sized center console capable of accommodating hanging files or a laptop computer. The lid slides forward to provide an efficient work surface. And, the passenger seat folds down to provide another flat work surface.

In the Ram, improving the organization of tools and equipment meant adding the RamBox, a cargo management system with adjustable cleats. "It combines lockable, lighted storage bins in the truck's bed walls with enough space to fit toolboxes, but also equipment such as rakes, blowers and pruners," says Nick

Cappa, spokesperson for Ram Truck Brand, Chrysler Group LLC.

In the age of the Internet and smart technologies, more truck manufacturers are developing Wi-Fi systems in their vehicles for mobile functionality. GM has developed a Wi-Fi system available on select models that turns its work trucks into a wireless hot spot within a 150-ft. range. Ford Work Solutions is a bundled package of technologies for running businesses remotely in its work trucks.

Today's landscapers are saving money by downsizing their trucks and learning how to do more with less. "There was a time when a large fleet made me happy," admits Dean Snodgrass, vice president and one of three brothers operating Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping in Portland, OR. But now, he says, "we realize that we don't necessarily need large, heavy trucks on-site all the time and for every job. We are always rethinking the size of vehicles necessary."

San Francisco-based Cagwin & Dorward used to rotate its trucks out of day-to-day operations about every 10 years. "In this current economy, we are stretching our budget by extending the life of our trucks up to 15 years if necessary," says Steve Glennon, vice president, treasurer and chief operations officer.

The big gas-guzzling vehicles that landscapers thought they needed in the heady days of the '90s helped put many in the fast lane toward bankruptcy once the recession hit. To become more economical, landscapers are now moving away from fuels they've traditionally used, such as diesel and gasoline. Instead, they are turning to propane, biodiesel and natural gas for their long-term economical and ecological value.



## Just say 'no' to naysaying

**T**he other day, I went to my usual café for a latte. It was late afternoon, and I really needed a boost.

But once I stepped inside, much to my surprise, I saw that in just one day's time the café had released its entire staff and replaced it with a new one. Not one familiar face greeted me.

Uh-oh, I thought, this does not bode well.

The old staff was professional. They'd worked there for years. They knew my order without asking; cut me a deal every now and then; piled on extra sandwich meat whenever I asked; and called me by name. They gave me freebies on my birthday, shared stories about their kids and were quick to serve me.

But this time, when I strolled to the espresso bar to place my order, I waited. And waited. And waited...for someone to help me. No one did. Two guys stood in the back, chit-chatting. The cashier was shooting the breeze with a coworker as well. And the new manager sat at a table talking on his cell phone — looking right at me.

The grossly untrained cashier finally came over to take my order. I happily told her what skim milk is and where the refrigerator was. I would have explained how to make a latte as well, but we didn't get that far.

Because I had ordered a large.

"Coffee drinks only come in medium," she said, standing next to a stack of large cups.

"Really?" I asked. This was new to me. "But I'd really like a large, and the cups are right there," I said. "I'm willing to pay for it."

She called the manager over. When he finally did come over and heard the situation, he had just one thing to say: "Lattes only come in medium."

And that was that. I left, sans latte.

Now, I could easily have accepted the medium. It would have tasted the same. But it was the principle of the thing.

I used to go to that cafe nearly every day. Now I

go only in times of desperation (read: never).

I've worked in the service industry many a time. I've worked at cafes. I've worked at clothing stores, record stores, even a frozen yogurt stand. In every one of those jobs, my managers drove home one thing — if a customer asks for something, just say "yes."

Whatever we had to do to make it happen for the customer, we did it. If a customer wanted to return clothes after they'd clearly been worn, we shut our mouths and gave 'em a refund. If the food was taking too long to come out of the kitchen, dinner was on the house.

And guess what? Our customers appreciated it, or at the very least were placated. And they returned time and again, to spend money.

When it comes down to it, there is no word more irksome to a customer than "no". Have you ever said it? How did that work out for you? As a customer yourself, have you ever heard it? How did that work out for them?

In today's competitive marketplace say "no" even once and there's a good chance the customer won't be calling on you again. It sounds dramatic. It's not. There are just too many other businesses out there willing to do whatever it takes to ensure customer satisfaction. Let yours be one of them.

---

**Customers appreciated it, or at the very least were placated. And they returned time and again, to spend money.**



*For the second  
straight year,  
unusual weather  
gave us an  
extremely  
challenging start  
to the season.*

BY **DAN JACOBS** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

# The winter (and spring) of our discontent

**S**nowplows sat idle, gathering dust instead of snow. Temperatures blinked to late spring levels in February before alternating between record heat and below freezing for much of the country. It sent contractors everywhere scrambling and launched their 100 Days of Hell as much as 45 days earlier than in years past.

“Everyone is scrambling to find out what it means for bugs and weeds because it’s uncharted territory,” says Phil Fogarty, owner of several Weed Man franchises in northeast Ohio. “We’ve never had this combination of things happen, let alone any one of them.”

While so much of what Green Industry professionals do is dictated by the weather, preparing and planning for the season takes place around the calendar. And while Mother Nature rarely abides by exact dates on the calendar, she doesn’t usually vary her schedule by so wide a margin as she did this year. It’s forced maintenance teams out well ahead of schedule and wreaked havoc on lawncare programs.

“As you look at how people make their applications, those who were in a routine of looking at a calendar and thinking, ‘This is the time that it goes,’ better adapt this year,” says Kevin Frank, associate professor and extension turf specialist at Michigan State University. “It’s obviously not

the case so far.”

“It’s craziness,” says Frank, who in late March had just returned from an overseas teaching assignment. “I don’t know how to describe it. Usually I go to China this time of year because I figure by the time I get back the season will just be starting.”

Instead, he was about a month late. Not dealing with a typical year is, well, typical. Rarely does the average season materialize. Average is just the balance between the highs and lows of extremes. An average season, if such a beast exists, certainly hasn’t appeared in any widespread form in the past few years.

“Two years ago, we had snow cover the entire month of March,” Fogarty says. “We didn’t make our first applications until March 31st or April 1st or 2nd. You couldn’t see lawns from Thanksgiving until April Fool’s day. Here we have the opposite of that. After two really, really bad winters, we’ve got a year where we’ve had almost no winter.”

“Last year we had the wettest year ever; then we had the mildest winter on record. Then we have a spring that starts off with four or five record temperatures in a row.”

Such unusual weather has implications for a variety of services.

“You get used to when a pest or when a

## COVER STORY

disease is going to show up,” says Jim Zwack, director of technical services for the Davey Institute. “If everything is running three, four or five weeks ahead, it becomes a little more of a wild card. You’ve got to juggle your lineup because you’re not used to dealing with this problem or that problem at that time of year. You can’t rely on the way you’ve always done it. In a year like this, that might not be good enough.”

### Maintenance

Besides losing revenue from the highest margin service he offers (snow plowing), the unusual weather forced Roscoe Klausing, owner of Lexington, KY-based Klausing Group, to adjust his maintenance plans.

“It’s been a killer,” says Klausing. “You’ve got a block of hours that has to be performed in the month of March — that’s mulching. In April you’ve got a big block of hours and that’s mow-



A lack of winter and early warm weather has left a lot of turf in rough shape. Many tree leaves and flowers arrived far earlier than expected.

PHOTOS COURTESY: THE KLAUSING GROUP

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ing. As soon as people start calling and saying, the grass has to be cut right now, you're stealing from that (first) block. It's been really, really challenging."

Challenges are part of life in the Green Industry. And like many other difficult situations, the key is good communication with clients.

"As much as is possible, we're trying to educate people," Klausing says. "That's the best tool that we've got. You can't talk to customers in terms of weed and feed. They have to understand what we do, even if you have a good lawn care in place, there are variances within every season. There has to be some level of tolerance on their part."

Tolerance and accommodation. Klausing is working with his customers to provide the level of service his customers demand without losing the profit he needs.

"By far, 98% of our customers have fixed-priced contracts," Klausing says.



**"With the extended season we're going to have, we're going to see more weed pressure this year, and I think we're going to see some increased spraying. And callbacks are going to be a problem this year with homeowners."**

**DEREK MILLER**, SOUTHERN REGIONAL SALES MANAGER, BASF

"You can't start mowing three weeks early and still be expected to adhere to a weekly visit that was sold to start April 1 and end the last week of October.

"We make clear that we are not going to exceed the number of occurrences in the contract. That may mean we go 10-14 days between visits in the heat of the summer. We can adhere to your budgets, but quality and service could be impacted by a change in the weather."

Most people understand the situation, and about 15% have already purchased a few additional mowings, Klausing says. The rest have opted to see how the summer goes, and if there's a need, purchase those extra mowings later in the season.

### 100 Days of Hell

Memorial Day might mark the traditional start of summer, but it's April Fool's Day that traditionally begins contractors' busy season. February and March



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**“We were on a site and found a place where petunias had wintered over. This is a summer annual that should die back in November when it starts to get cold. These were exploding in March with blooms.”**

**ROSCOE KLAUSING,**  
THE KLAUSING GROUP

are normally spent planning. For many, those months were spent in the field.

“Those guys have been cranked for the last few weeks,” says Derek Miller, southern regional sales manager for BASF.

Areas that traditionally are covered in snow through the winter months not only spent much of the season bare, they were far warmer than normal.

“There was no winter,” Frank says. “We never had frost under turf this year. There was never frozen soil up here all winter, which is pretty remarkable. Then you get off to the fast start that we got off to with spring; it’s going to be interesting.”

Interesting, challenging and unexpected. And that’s not just for contractors. Chemical manufacturers are having their own issues.

“When you forecast something for April, and now it’s March and your manufacturing plant is trying to do just-in-time manufacturing, it compresses that schedule,” says Adam Manwarren,

Product Manager — Turf & Ornamental for FMC Professional Solutions.

“We’ve had a few stock-outs, which is a good problem to have, but you never want to keep the customer waiting.”

When FMC does its forecast, management also provides a plan for a good year, which includes a 10% to 25% bump in product. FMC, anticipating the need for its post-emergent products, is acting on that higher production plan.

“I’ve seen increased demand a lot earlier than I would have ever anticipated,” Manwarren says.

## Lawn care

The early warm weather forced lawn care professionals to apply their pre-emergents much sooner than they typically have in the past. Doing so this early in the year might require a split application. Products have an expected duration. If those products are applied 30-45 days sooner than normal, they’ll break down that much sooner. In other words, some areas might need a second round of pre-emergent application, and will very likely need additional post-emergent attention.

This serves as both a challenge and an opportunity for lawn care professionals. Companies that offer pre-sold programs will need to convince existing customers to pay for an extra application. It’s either that, risk the wrath of a customer unhappy with a stressed lawn, or eat the cost of product, fuel, labor, etc.

“Instead of starting a month later, we started a month earlier,” Frank says. Thus, “your program isn’t going to come out exactly the same.”

Fogarty isn’t sure if the weather is creating opportunities “but we’re on a really good pace this year, and so is most every operation I talk to in our group,” he says. “They’re way ahead of last year’s sales. We’ve done a lot of marketing things to push that along. And the economy seems to be getting better. I don’t know what combination of factors is making it happen, but we’re way ahead of pace.

“It’s been easier to get people to get into a conversation about their lawns when it’s not covered in snow and they can start to see weeds and growth.”

But the weather is creating some challenges.

“From an economic perspective, the lawn care operators should be in a position to capitalize on it — as long as they have the manpower ready to go,” Manwarren says.

And Fogarty’s addressing that.

“You plan to start around a calendar date,” Fogarty says. “You can’t plan to start whenever the weather breaks. We’ve got to bring people on, hire them, get them trained and have trucks ready. Even though the weather was



ready for us to make treatments from late February on, we don't have our plans in place to start until we get close to the second week of March."

Small (one or two-man) operations might be able to respond to the weather more than the bigger players. "When you're running a business that's got multiple people involved, you have to plan around a 'normal' year," Fogarty says.

### Disease and pests

"If the pattern of running things ahead of schedule continues, we can expect to see pests showing up, disease show up ahead of schedule," Zwack says. "Dutch Elm Disease (could appear) in late May or early June. We may have more visibility of those problems."

Klausing looks at a degree-days calendar to plan for pest outbreaks.

"We're adding up the sum of all the temperatures every day," he says. "This

is how you get an indication of when pests are going to become active.... We can take a look at our delivery schedule and we can get an indication of what services are also going to come early."

"We accumulated as many growing-degree days in late March as we had in late April or early May last year. It gives you a sense of how far ahead we are. It throws the timing off when it comes to management of those problems."

### Return to winter

Despite the early warm weather across most of the country, a late April East Coast storm proved that weather is evermore unpredictable.

"When we have unusually persistently warmer than normal weather early in the year, you start to get trees and shrubs breaking buds and put out leaves much earlier in the calendar than they normally would," Zwack says.

*continued on page 23*

## THE UNLUCKY 7

Unusual weather means unusual things happening, or at least happening at unusual times. Kathie Kalmowitz, Ph.D., technical specialist – South, BASF Professional Turf & Ornamentals, provides a list of weeds that many lawn care professionals are seeing this spring and summer.

### TROUBLESOME 2012 WEEDS (SOUTH):

1. Bluegrass
2. Crabgrass
3. *Poa annua*
4. Chickweed (prolific seeder)
5. Hairy bittercress (prolific seeder)
6. Lawn burweed
7. Speedwell, also called veronica



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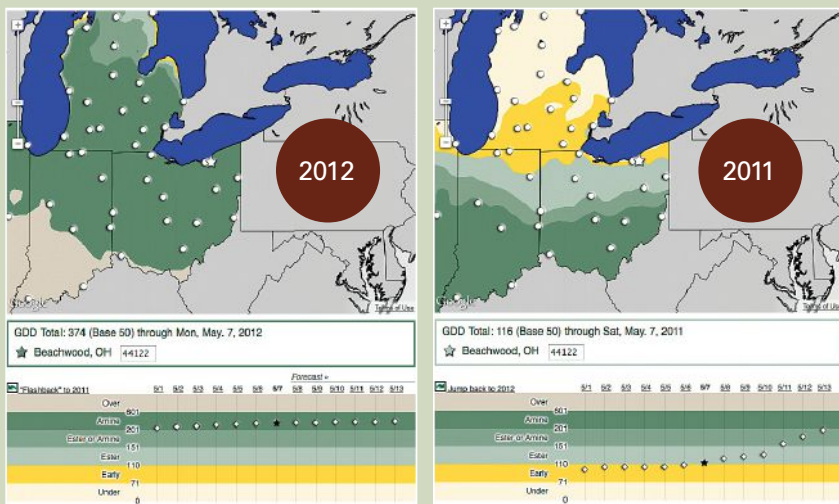
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## GROWING DEGREE DAYS TRACKER

Nothing beats being in the field. But contractors looking for advice on when to apply preemergents or expect certain weed outbreaks can turn to Michigan State University's Growing Degree Days Tracker ([www.gddtracker.net/](http://www.gddtracker.net/)).

The site uses weather data to provide estimates for when activities will occur. For example, on May 6, 2012, conditions across most of Ohio and the southern half of Michigan were ideal for weed flowering (darker green). On the same date last year only the southern half of Ohio saw those same conditions.



*continued from page 21*

“When you combine the weight of those new leaves plus the weight of the heavy wet snow, we see more damage from those scenarios.

“Trees are just not used to that extra load. In summertime (with a big wind event), those trees act like a sail with all those leaves on there. If you start to add dead weight, sitting on those branches, on top of the weight of the leaves, it becomes an issue of biomechanics. It’s a recipe for failure.”

Failure for trees, but it could give a lot of businesses that lost revenue during the winter a boost because there was no snow to remove.

“When there’s damage like that, the services that are provided by tree care companies are in high demand,” Zwack says. “Storm damage is hard work and it’s dangerous. On the upside for business, (companies) are going to have people busy for weeks or months.”

Klausing’s Kentucky-based team has been evaluating how current conditions will affect future business.

“If turf comes three weeks early, you can bet shrubs will,” Klausing says. “While we might typically start shrub pruning, sometime in May, we anticipate that is going to happen toward the end of April or early May. We’re going to start getting calls.”

And there might be some surprises yet to come.

“I don’t know if it means we’re going to have a huge crab grass year,” says Fogarty. “We’ve gotten to the point where the soil temperatures are well ahead of where they need to be, for crabgrass to germinate, but we haven’t seen crabgrass. There must be some other factor at play.”

Whatever factors are at work, the early start to the season is keeping contractors on their toes.

“The business end of this becomes challenging,” Zwack says. “Buying products and getting your materials in, all that stuff sort of hits you. It’s not like at any given moment you knew this pattern was going to continue. You stay alert; you stay attentive.” **LWM**

## Spring Maintenance Tips from Mobil Delvac™

As the summer months approach, don’t overlook the impact winter has had on your vehicle. Consider the long term health of your truck by following these key maintenance tips:

- **Fluids** – Freezing winter temperatures can diminish the effectiveness of vital engine fluids. Check your engine oil and other fluids.
- **Tires** – If you’re still on your winter tires, switch to all-season tires. Have the air pressure and tread levels checked and your tires rotated.
- **Brakes** – Months of stop-and-go driving over icy roads can wear down brake pads. If you hear any squeaking or grinding noises, get your brakes checked immediately.
- **Wash** – A winter’s worth of road salt can damage your vehicle’s exterior, so give it a thorough cleaning.
- **Wiper Blades** – Check to see if your truck’s wiper blades held up against the winter cold and road salt. If they seem dry or cracked, swap them out for a fresh set.

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# The Grounds Guys

**W**hen Derek and Maureen Paulk finished their military duty, they began looking for a franchise opportunity. A military job fair led them to The Dwyer Group. And The Dwyer Group's values and veteran program inspired them to become a franchisee of The Grounds Guys, a subsidiary of The Dwyer Group.

"It was definitely the people of The Grounds Guys that we liked the most," says Derek Paulk. "It was their code of values and their customer service that helped us make the decision. They put an emphasis on taking care of people."

Paulk and his wife knew they'd have to "start from scratch" with whatever they did, so working with people who shared their deepest values was even more important to them than the business itself. "We didn't get into comparing how much equipment one franchise required versus another or comparing other details like that," says Paulk. "For us, it really came down to the people and the values. Those were the deciding factors."

But having grown up on a ranch in Colorado, Paulk says he definitely liked the idea of doing landscaping work. Following high school, Paulk went directly into the Air Force Academy and has been part of the military ever since. "I did engineering for my first assignment

and then flew fighters and was also an instructor," he says.

Paulk's wife, Maureen, who grew up in the San Francisco Bay area, also has a military background. She flew helicopters for the Army and now is on Air Force reserve duty. The couple met while they were contractors in Iraq, and the rest is history.

As veterans, the Paulks qualified for the VetFran Program. The program is supported by the International Franchise Association (IFA), which gives U.S. military veterans discounts toward the purchase of a franchise. As an active participant in the VetFran Program, The Grounds Guys offers a 25% discount on the initial base territory purchase for honorably discharged military veterans.

"That was a substantial amount and the discount made our decision even easier," admits Paulk. "We already really liked the company and they were also making the upfront cost affordable for us."

Paulk says being a new business owner is a challenge but the support they've received from corporate has helped. "They have all the systems already in place," he says. "We feel like we've gotten a lot of the support we needed to get started."

Maureen feels that same support. "The foundation of a 'Culture of Care' (The Grounds Guys' motto) has been a launching pad for every element of

## PUBLIC PROTECTORS

In addition to being part of the VetFran program, which makes franchise opportunities more affordable to veterans, The Dwyer Group recently launched a new program for law enforcement and firemen. The Public Protectors Franchise Advantage (PPFA) program was developed to recognize the contributions to society that have been made by those serving in law enforcement and firefighting. PPFA awards a 20% discount on the initial franchise fee for the base territory for qualified future franchisees looking to open a franchise with any of The Dwyer Group brands. That includes The Grounds Guys, as well as Aire Serv, Glass Doctor, Mr. Appliance, Mr. Electric, Mr. Rooter, and Rainbow International.

this business," she says. "We've really taken that to heart."

And though the couple didn't come from a business background, they say their military background has helped them. "Having been in the military and contracting for most of our lives there was obviously a learning curve of running the business, hiring the personnel, and even the finance side, all of which take a lot of time on their own," says Derek. "But our military background has helped us with things like scheduling and operations. And The Grounds Guys has helped us with the other parts. As part of the system, The Grounds Guys also supplies us with a daily checklist, which is good for us with our military background. We're used to operating that way and we follow that checklist to a tee."

He says that anyone considering a franchise should follow their instincts and feel comfortable with the people they're going to be working with. "For me, it really does come down to the people," Paulk says. "In the military, you're working with good people — they're hard working, trustworthy and reliable. So those are the things I look for. We think the culture of The Grounds Guys is really great and the people we're working with exemplify those values. In the end, you get to build a culture — not just run a business — and that's something that was really important to us."

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



Derek and Maureen Paulk became a franchisee of The Grounds Guys because they were inspired by the company's people and values.

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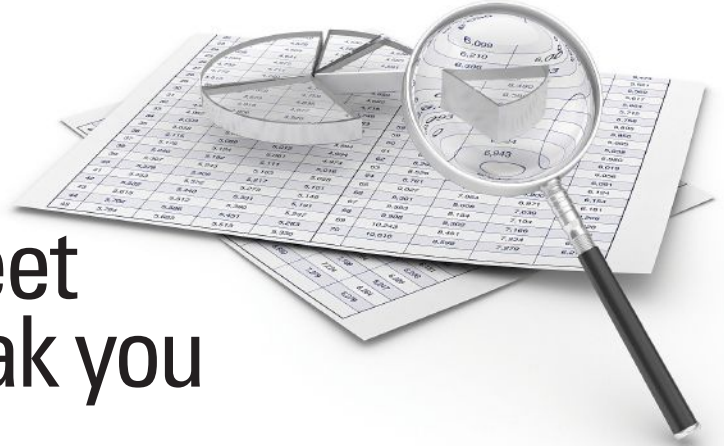




# THE BENCHMARK

JEFF HARKNESS

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 15-year industry veteran. Reach him at [jharkness@questex.com](mailto:jharkness@questex.com).



## Your balance sheet can make or break you

**N**ews flash: Spring arrived about 45 days early this year. While this means opportunity and potential business for some companies, others will experience a substantial shortfall in profit and a tightening of cash flow. What happened to all the snow? Cutting warm-season grass in March? Yikes!

Steady the ship and get your arms around your balance sheet. Start with these:

**How much profit and cash is being eaten up by balance sheet transactions?** Look at your current amortization schedules on existing debt and identify the next 12 monthly required principal payments.

Take the amount and timing of any new loans you are trying to get approved and put the details into an amortization schedule. Add this expense on top of the existing principle debt payments.

Add monthly dollars for any owner draw or distribution. This would include taxes for S-Corporation owners.

**Example:** Monthly payments from schedules and requirements  
A. \$ 5,000 + B. \$ 2,000 + C. \$ 3,000 = \$10,000 per month total

In simple terms, according to the example above, I need to generate \$10,000 per month in profit to cover these balance sheet expenses. If I generate less than \$10,000 per month in profit, then I have to borrow money to meet my obligations (line of credit) or eat into available working capital: (Cash + AR) – (Payables). Eating into available working capital assumes you have some.

**Know your balance sheet benchmarks.** A healthy balance sheet can help you ride out a rough patch (see table below). It is, by far, the most underutilized and misunderstood report with business owners. While we are just hitting a few a concepts at a high level, understand that if your balance sheet has errors on it, your profit and loss statement is flat-out wrong. Understanding the relationship of both reports is where the cash flow light will go off.

**TABLE: BALANCE SHEET BENCHMARKS**

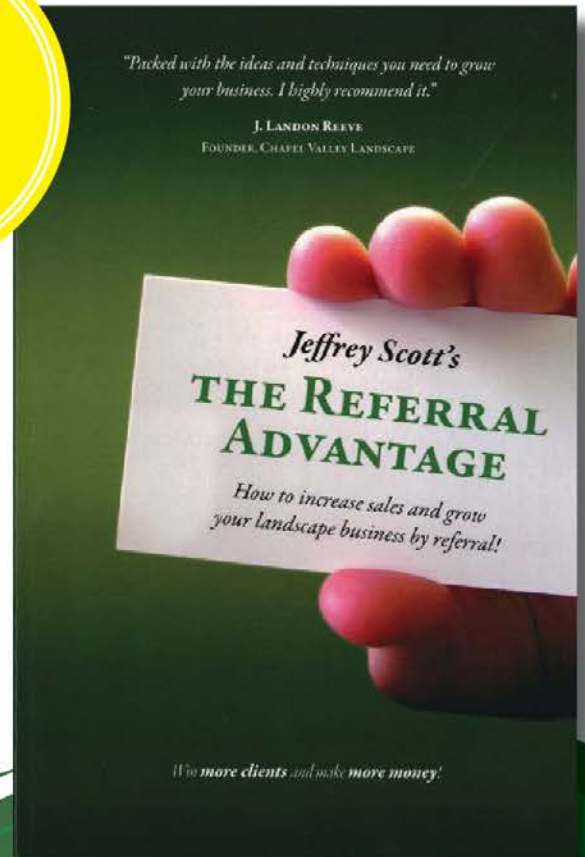
Ratio	Formula	Result x 100
Debt to assets	LT debt dollars / Straight line net fixed asset dollars	40% or less
Asset turnover	Revenue dollars / Total assets dollars	375% or greater
Current ratio	Current assets (Cash + AR) / Current DB (Trade + LOC)	200% or greater
Debt coverage	Profit dollars / Debt payments	200% or greater



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Author: Jeffrey Scott

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**Landscape**  
Management

## Defense against theft

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THIEVES WITH SOME PRECAUTIONARY STEPS AND THE RIGHT COVERAGE.

**T**ODAY'S THIEVES SEEM to be getting bolder. They have been known to cut right through the trailer to steal what they want. Some might even take the whole truck.

While no precautions are 100% foolproof, there are ways to protect your business against theft. And because you can't prevent everything, it's important to be covered by insurance.

Zachery Bruce, loss control manager with Hortica Insurance & Employee Benefits, says being prepared will decrease your risk of becoming a victim.

"A lot of the equipment that we see reported stolen are smaller pieces of equipment like weed eaters or backpack blowers or attachments," Bruce says. "It's the type of stuff that someone can just pick up off the back of the truck and walk away with. Just taking the extra few seconds to lock it down makes you less of a target, because a thief might decide to move on to the landscape company down the road whose (employees) didn't lock down their equipment."

Much of it is common sense. Don't leave keys in the truck, close everything up, and lock everything down. But with crews on tight schedules, basic steps often are forgotten.

Bruce says that even just a few extra seconds spent on securing locks may help prevent theft.

Larger equipment may be more difficult to steal, but it's hardly exempt. In fact, skid steers and zero-turn mowers are commonly stolen, thanks to their high resale value. To protect your equipment, older equipment that still operates by key needs to be re-keyed if it hasn't already, Bruce says. "The keys are universal, so that makes those items easier to steal," he explains.

You can also take advantage of the latest technology. GPS tracking units could help you locate a piece of stolen equipment. And according to Bruce, they cost about \$400 and don't have a monthly service fee unless you activate them. "On a brand new skid steer, this is a small amount of money to spend to further increase your chances of finding it in the event it is stolen," he says.

Also put some thought into where you store equipment overnight. Don't store it in highly visible areas, says Bruce, who has done many property walk-throughs of his landscape clients' headquarters. "In some cases motion lighting, fences and even security systems are warranted," Bruce adds. "There are also a number of specialty locks on the market."

Bruce says it's also critical to have good records of your equipment and know all of your serial numbers. Painting the company logo or other distinguishable markings on the equipment make it easily identifiable and therefore less of a target. Taking pictures of your equipment can also help. The more information you can supply law enforcement, the better. Bruce also suggests registering equipment with the National Equipment Register ([NER.net](http://NER.net)). The NER manages a database of equipment theft and ownership, helping make recovery more likely.

If equipment is stolen, file a police report first and foremost, Bruce says. And secondly, call your insurance company. Hortica will require several key items in order for you to file your claim, Bruce says.

"Be prepared to provide purchase invoices for the stolen items or a quote from your supplier to replace the equipment," he says. "A copy of the police report will be required for the claim file. If your insurance company orders a copy by mail, it may take several weeks before the report is received and a payment may be issued. If you are contacted by the police regarding recovery of any stolen items, you should notify your insurance company immediately."

Casey Payton is a freelance writer who has covered the landscape industry for seven years.



### QUICK STEPS FOR PREVENTION

Zachery Bruce, loss control manager with Hortica Insurance & Employee Benefits, offers the following 5 Simple Steps you can take to make your business less of a target for theft.

- 1 Visibility.** Keep hedges and shrubs well-trimmed so they're not creating opportunities for someone to sneak onto your property.
- 2 Fence it in.** A security fence is a huge deterrent. Most thieves are looking for the easiest entry possible.
- 3 Think big.** Big-ticket items such as mowers get thieves the most cash, fast. Install anti-theft devices such as fuel cut-offs, alarms and locks.
- 4 Think small.** Plants, pots, and even mulch may be small items, but they're also easy to steal. Lock up as much as you can at night or make items hard to pick up and load quickly by putting bricks on top of them.

- 5 Use technology.** There are so many options today — use security cameras, lighting controlled by smart phones, and even RFID technology to track stolen items.

Does your insurance company think a “grub problem” means mystery meat monday?



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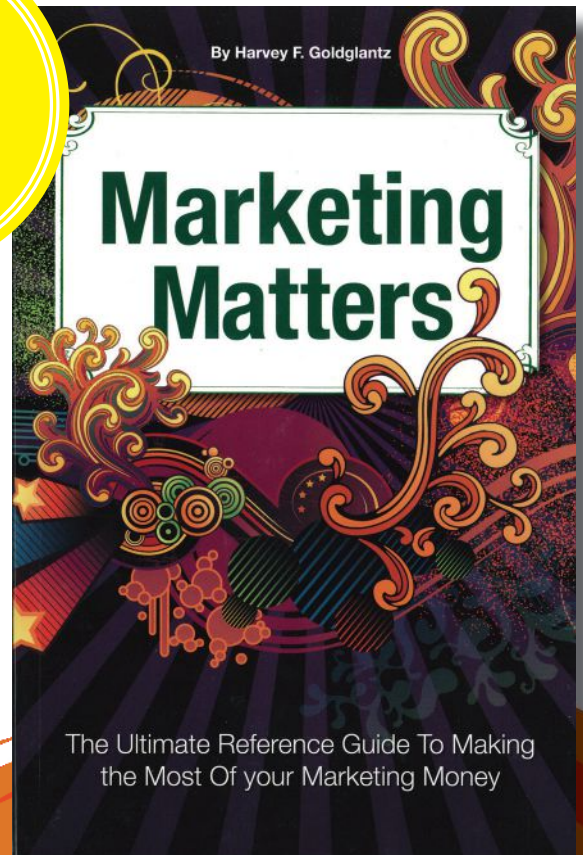
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**Landscape**  
Management

# SNOW+ICE

GUIDE

## SHOVELING *dirt*



The lack of snow in 2011-2012 hit landscapers where it hurts — in their wallets. **BY BETH GERACI**

**2** 011 WILL GO DOWN AS one of the wildest weather years in history. Spring mercilessly flooded landscapes with rain. Summer and fall brought an onslaught of tornadoes. And for much of the country, winter brought, well, nothing — except mild temperatures, that is. So if landscaping companies were seeking redemption in their snow business, they didn't find it there.

### Hard times

This winter was definitely challenging, says Roscoe Klausung, president of Lexington, KY-based Klausung Group, whose snow business constitutes "the highest margin work that we do."

In 2011, Klausung Group's snow

revenue was down 60 to 75%. "That's pretty significant," Klausung laments. "It means you're going to start the landscaping season cash poor."

At Environmental Management Services in Dublin, OH, business was a struggle, too. Vice President of Operations Gary Clark says the company usually has enough snow for 8 to 10 plowings and 18 to 30 saltings. But last winter, "some of my customers I didn't even service," Clark says.

In fact, only about half of Environmental Management Services' customers needed plow service, and the company's snow revenue was down by 80%. "I do about 4 to 5 million (dollars) a year, and this year I did just over a million," Clark marvels.

"It's very disheartening when you don't see any snow falling," he says. "The double punch for us is we just came off the rainiest year in local Central Ohio history. We've seen more rainfall this past year than ever before. My

profits were cut in half already because of the amount of rain that fell."

Since Environmental Management Services relies on its snow revenue to carry it through the spring, the company's had to turn to banks to get additional lines of credit.

### Layoffs

"We do quite a bit of commercial construction," Clark says, "so it was mild enough here that we did commercial construction and some pruning on trees and shrubs. But I also had to lay off more people than I ever had to before."

When you lay off employees, there's always the risk they won't come back. In fact, 15% of Clark's employees moved on to other jobs. Since his summer staff usually comprises 350 workers, "15% to me is a lot," he says. Now, he's resorted to using temporary services to fill his summer labor positions.

And "that doesn't work out well,"

*continued on page 32*

*continued from page 31*

he says, "because temporary services, it's really people who are only mildly interested in finding work. The guys will work for a couple days usually, not more than a week, and then my supervisors are pulling their hair out."

## Hot and cold

Mariani Landscape in Lake Bluff, IL services a 25-mile radius in the Chicago suburbs. Snowfall in 2011-2012 was "very light" says Mariani Service Program Manager Chris Paisley. "We actually had only four plowable events where we sent everybody out."

Between drivers and shovelers, Mariani Landscape employs 130 snow workers in the winter, servicing about 300 residential properties and 30 commercial properties. The residential clients pay per push, while commercial clients are contracted for the season. Thanks to those commercial contracts, Mariani's snow revenue was only slightly down in 2011-2012.

"We're balanced out pretty well," Paisley says. Having a balance of residential and commercial work is important, he adds, because "in a down year, you still have the contracted work. And in heavier snow years, we may not do as well on the contracted work, because your expenditures on labor, equipment and fuel are greater. In a year like this, it kind of washes itself out."

Some of Clark's customers sign contracts for the season as well. Others pay per push. Some of those under contract "were looking at me saying, 'Do I really have to pay you? There's no snow,'" he recalls. "Yes, you do."

As for Mariani, the company was further helped by the fact it didn't invest in new equipment this winter.

Klausing wasn't so fortunate.

"We actually ramped up for a pretty significant snow year — invested in several new pieces of equipment," he says. "We spent about \$75,000 building up a salt house that will hold 900 tons



of bulk salt. It's certainly not full, but I'm sitting on a lot of inventory right now."

In response to the overstock, Klausing Group has made efforts to store salt properly to ensure the company's inventory does not shrink before the winter of 2012-2013.

Klausing knows full well timing is everything. In the heart of the winter, his service area in Kentucky had just two half-inch snows. "Then of all things, the first week of March we got 5 inches on a Monday morning, which was the first time plows had been run in 13, 14 months," he says. "It was really challenging."

Kujawa Enterprises, Inc. (KEI) in Oak Creek, WI, had a slow winter, too. The average snowfall there is 52 inches, says KEI vice president Joe Kujawa. This year, he says, less than 30 inches of snow fell in the area, "and 29 of that came this spring." His region had a "really weak" November and December, he says. However, KEI's huge spring business compensated for its winter losses.

Klausing's company offers service discounts to customers who purchase retainer fees upfront. He's sold them successfully for at least 10 years running. After this winter, however, Klausing worries that his clients won't be so quick to

**The winter of 2010-2011 brought ample snow for Roscoe Klausing's business (above and left). But sights like these were incredibly rare this winter.**

purchase them going forward.

"This is the first time in over a decade that some customers did not utilize their entire retainer fee," Klausing says. "That could make selling that feature to them more difficult in the future. It's easy to say, 'Put some percentage down.' And when that statement is followed by 'We've never had anyone not utilize their entire retainer fee,'" it's a pretty easy sell. Our company wins by getting some cash in the door up front."

## The upside

On the bright side, Clark says, looking at the 2012 season, his sales never have been better. The mild temperatures enabled him to start his landscape maintenance work early this year, and because of a jump in commercial construction, he expects his landscape division to double in size from 2011-2012. His maintenance division, meanwhile, is on track to grow by 15%.

December always has been a busy month for Mariani, producing an average of 23 inches of snow.

"Not this year," Paisley says.

But that's not all bad. Like Klausing, Mariani's snow products, such as salt bags, are still stacked in storage. That means the company will have to buy fewer snow and ice supplies in 2012.

Ultimately, landscapers hope the winter of 2011-2012 doesn't become the norm. After all, "I haven't had a winter like this since 1997," Clark says. **LMI**

# At season's end

Proper post-season maintenance is key to optimum performance next season. BY RANDY STRAIT

**C**ONTAINMENT SNOW **PUSHERS** are among the most common attachments found on small equipment such as skid steers and tractors. When winter winds down and the snow diminishes, most look forward to giving their pushers a break. But before parking the winter workhorse, take time for post-season maintenance. It's the easiest way to avoid a pile-up when the snow starts flying next season.

The maintenance checklist is much less time-consuming and labor-intensive than one might expect.

## Clean it up

The first, and perhaps simplest, step in a post-season maintenance plan is to give the pusher a good cleaning. A good power wash removes salt and debris and helps prevent corrosion and rusting.

After cleaning, allow the pusher to dry for a few hours, then apply a standard penetrant oil to pivot points, fasteners and nuts and bolts. Depending on the pusher, the cutting edges and the springs will need extra attention; they're more prone to wear and rusting. Be sure penetrant oil is applied liberally to these areas.

## Inspect, repair and replace

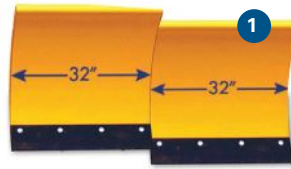
When the pusher is clean and dry, a thorough visual inspection should be conducted. All pushers have the same, standard areas to check, but there are differences, depending on the model.

Every pusher has either a rubber or steel cutting edge that should be

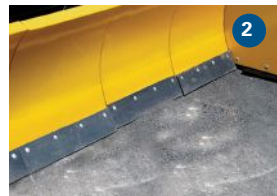
inspected and replaced if necessary. Rubber edges tend to wear faster than steel, so there's a higher likelihood of more frequent replacement needed on rubber-edge pushers. Regardless of what type, replacement does come at a cost. Sectional moldboard models alleviate both the time and expense of replacement. Rather than replacing a large, single cutting edge on a one-piece moldboard several feet wide, just the damaged section needs to be replaced.

Additionally, owners of sectional moldboard pushers should quickly inspect the mounting blocks. Mounting blocks are designed to handle a lot of pressure and abuse, protecting the operator, the tractor and other carrier equipment. As a result, they will occasionally need a quick replacement. With proper operation and care on the part of the operator, mounting blocks can last five years or more.

All pushers have wear shoes that should be inspected at the season's end, and replaced if severely worn. Those who own pushers with a standard hitch design may find their shoes wear faster and unevenly, requiring more frequent replacement. However, newer "drop-and-go" hitch designs ensure even wear on both shoes for longer life and fewer replacements. These designs also permit the shoes to "float" rather than drag



**1** Sectional moldboard models alleviate the time and expense of replacement of a large, single cutting edge on one-piece moldboards several feet wide.



**2** Every pusher has a cutting edge that should be inspected and replaced if necessary. Rubber edges tend to wear about five times faster than steel.



**3** Mounting blocks handle a lot of pressure and abuse, protecting both the operator and carrier equipment.

during operation, further extending life. Though it's less likely that a replacement will be needed,

owners of "drop-and-go" pushers do still need to check the shoes at season's end.

Finally, be sure to inspect all areas for loose or missing parts. Tighten or replace any pins, nuts or bolts.

## Simple storage

It's perfectly fine to keep pushers outside during the off-season. Again, be sure to spray penetrating oil onto rust-prone areas as an added safeguard.

Though pushers are virtually low-maintenance in the off-season, it's a good idea to inspect periodically — especially after a rainfall — to be sure rust isn't rearing its ugly head.

Post-season maintenance is the best way to extend the life of a snow pusher and guarantee years of reliable performance. Taking care of maintenance now ensures pushers are ready for next snow season. The flurries can come anytime. Be ready to push through Old Man Winter's first arrival. **LM**

*The author is president, Arctic Snow & Ice Control Products. Contact him at [rstrait@arctic-snowandice.com](mailto:rstrait@arctic-snowandice.com) or [ArcticSnowAndIce.com](http://ArcticSnowAndIce.com).*

# PRODUCTS

## Grasshopper

Quickly and efficiently plow a 5-ft.-wide path through deep snow and drifts along sidewalks, driveways and parking lots in one pass with Grasshopper's 60-in. V-Plow. The V-Plow maintains the zero-turn maneuverability of the Grasshopper, so the operator is constantly plowing with no wasted motion to make turns. For plowing wider paths, either side of the V-Plow can be used to continue to push out the snow. The V-Plow attaches in place of the out-front mower deck and features reversible/replaceable blades and a hand-controlled lift, locking the blade into one of four positions for quick and easy transport and loading. *Grasshopper-Mower.com/v-plow*



## Henderson Products

The Charge Clean-Power Series offers electric control for medium-duty snow and ice truck equipment (classes 3-7). It employs a CAN bus system to manage the entire snow and ice control package. This bumper-to-bumper management covers the snowplow, dump body, lighting, sand/salt spreader, spinner and pre-wet system. Numerous operator-friendly functions have been condensed into a single joystick controller that fits conveniently inside a cup holder. The Charge system also is intelligent, aiding in the reduction of applied material by incorporating proportional ground speed control into the spreader's material output functions, a feature commonly absent on spreaders using electric controls. The manufacturer estimates the system can save operators up to \$14 per day in fuel costs, when compared to complex central hydraulic systems. *HendersonProducts.com*

## Campbell Scientific

The GMON3 Snow Water Equivalency (SWE) sensor obtains a measurement by monitoring gamma rays that are naturally emitted from the ground. As snow accumulates on top of the ground, it measures an attenuation of the normal background radiation levels. The higher the water content, the higher the attenuation of the gamma radiation. The sensor measures with an accuracy of  $\pm 15$  mm from 0 to 300 mm, and  $\pm 15\%$  from 300 to 600 mm, operating within temperatures from  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The GMON3 can output an RS-232 signal interface to Campbell Scientific dataloggers or other recording devices. It is effective with any type of snow or ice. Data can be transmitted in near real-time with the addition of a wireless communication option.

*CampbellSci.com/gmon3*



*continued on page 36*



## The Boss

To meet growing demand from off-road vehicle owners, The Boss Snowplow UTV Plows are available for a wider selection of popular UTV brands, including Bobcat, Case IH, Club Car, Honda, Husqvarna and New Holland. They join John Deere, Kawasaki, Kubota, and Polaris for The Boss' growing UTV plow lineup. Two models are available: The 6.5-ft. Power-V XT and the 6-ft. Poly Straight-Blade Snowplow (pictured). Both offer Smart Technology features and high-performance

hydraulic systems, making snow removal easier, faster and more efficient. The hydraulic pumps are fully enclosed to protect against corrosion and hydraulic freeze-up for enhanced durability. Operation of the hydraulic and electrical system is done with the touch of a button from inside the cab, making lifting, lowering and angling the snowplow fast and easy. *BossPlow.com*

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continued from page 34

## ClearSpan Fabric Structures

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## Ditch Witch

The ultra-compact, ultra-powerful SK350 compact tool carrier features a 20-hp Kohler engine and an 11 gpm dual hydrostatic ground drive that gives it the same capabilities of larger compact loaders. With the SK350's comfortable stand-on platform, freeing you from trudging through mud and debris and over uneven terrain, you'll

be better able to witness how productive this rubber track loader can be. The SK350 also has a powerful auxiliary circuit flow to enable the unit to run more than 70 compact utility attachments at full power. [DitchWitch.com/compact-utility/compact-tool-carriers/SK350](http://DitchWitch.com/compact-utility/compact-tool-carriers/SK350)

## Cargill

Cargill Diamond Crystal GreenMelt Blended Ice Melter now works down to -5° F. It's green-tinted for easy-to-see coverage on ice and packed snow. The commercial-strength blend includes fast-acting calcium chloride and extended action sodium chloride for an economical one-two punch. It's commercially balanced to give sidewalk and parking lot crews a critical 20-minute jumpstart from its calcium chloride, coupled with more than 60 minutes of extended melting action from its sodium chloride. [Cargill.com](http://Cargill.com)

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## Bobcat

With five blade configurations, the snow V-blade attachment from Bobcat can be positioned in multiple ways for maximum attachment versatility. Position the blade in a V-configuration to clear a path and plow through deep snow or use it as a scoop blade to scoop, push or pile snow. You can also use it as a straight blade to pile large amounts of snow and as an angle blade to push snow right or left. Applications for the snow V-blade attachment include clearing deep snow from pavement. Other applications include pushing snow and ice, scooping and piling snow, and plowing through deep drifts.

[Bobcat.com/attachments/snow\\_v-blade](http://Bobcat.com/attachments/snow_v-blade)





## Ariens

The professional 36 Sno-Thro, which comes equipped with a 342cc Ariens Polar Force engine by Briggs & Stratton, easily removes snow from sidewalks and large areas with a 36-in. clearing width. The all-steel, 16-in. serrated auger and three-blade, 14-in. steel impeller enhance clearing ability. A 50-ft. discharge range ensures snow lands outside the clearing path. Automatic traction control optimizes maneuverability, and with no levers or triggers, steering is effortless. The Sno-Thro also features a 120v electric start with recoil backup, a 3.2-qt. fuel capacity, a forward speed of 6 mph and a reverse speed of 2 mph. Additional features include a 200°, Quick-Turn remote chute control; high-wear, reversible skid shoes and drift cutters to enhance power and performance; hand warmers; a halogen headlight; and a clean-out tool with a brush. *Ariens.com*



Sno Broom



Sno Blade



Sno Blower

## Pro-Tech Manufacturing and Distribution

Pro-Tech now allows customers to purchase its latest line of products — the Sno Blade, Sno Blower and Sno Broom attachments — directly from its website. Online purchases are offered with free freight within the United States, and products are shipped directly to the customer. The new system lets snow and ice management professionals check availability before ordering, and as long as a product is in stock, it will ship within 10 business days. Pro-Tech representatives will call customers to let them know when their orders have shipped, and their freight partners will call to confirm delivery. Pro-Tech plans to have the rest of its product line available for online purchasing this summer. Sales tax applies only to those taking delivery in the state of New York. *ProTechCorp.com*

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### Honda

The HS928 series snowblower is intended for aggressive snow clearing in demanding environments and is available in wheel-driven and dual-track, self-propelled models. Its enhanced design enables a 28-in. clearing width and a discharge distance as long as 49 ft. The series (HS928WA, HS928WAS, HS928TA and HS928TAS), which is powered by a high-torque Honda GX270 OHV engine, also offers a choice of manual or electric starting. [Honda.com](http://Honda.com)



### SnowEx

Electrically powered, the new SL-80 and SL-80SS push sprayers are designed for ice management on sidewalks and other small areas. Available with a powder-coated steel frame (SL-80) or stainless steel frame (SL-80SS), both sprayers have a 13-gal., corrosion-resistant polyethylene tank. Each model includes an adjustable-height boomless nozzle, which sprays most salt brine and liquid ice melters up to 48 in. wide. The units also come with an adjustable spray wand for spot-spraying applications. A 12-volt electric pump and rechargeable battery powers the SL-80 and SL-80SS. The pump is rated at 2 gpm at 60 psi. Other standard features include inline filtration in the tank and large pneumatic tires for easy pushing over snow and ice. The sprayers are covered by a two-year limited warranty. [Trynxfactory.com](http://Trynxfactory.com)



## 10 best practices for a new reality

I have spent the better part of the first quarter in an airplane, traveling the country meeting with contractors. I'm happy to report there's good news out there: Prospects for recovery look better than they have in a long time.

Contractors I have talked to are increasingly upbeat. They have been able to maintain a positive, proactive attitude even during tough times.

So, how did they do it? They balanced cautious optimism with careful planning and embraced change. When they pushed their "reset buttons" two things happened: They ended up healthier and leaner in their revitalized state and their collective team spirit became stronger than ever.

In transitioning from downsizing to recovery, the following best practices will help *you* push the reset button and align your company with shifting expectations for the new economy:

**1 Refine estimating.** Invest time and energy in analyzing how you estimate. Revise production rates; develop comparative square footage rates and a more detailed process that will help you estimate with greater precision. Upgrade or invest in software programs that will make estimating more precise and efficient.

**2 Eliminate costs.** Take a hard look at overhead, and eliminate some costs both for salaries and other expenditures.

**3 Rethink traditional marketing.** Consider newer ways to market your business. Discover how to use social media as part of an integrated program to attract and engage quality customers. Is your message still fresh? Does it resonate?

**4 Reconsider what keeps you interested.** Join a peer group. Benchmark costs and margins and connect with other contractors from non-competing markets to share best practices. I facilitate four peer groups, and a fifth is being formed as I write this. This has been a powerful tool for owners to energize their companies and stay interested, relevant and connected.

**5 Invest in bench strength.** Hire interns and new graduates from horticulture and landscape architecture programs. Invest in recruiting strategic new hires. Develop next-generation leaders from within.

**6 Go green.** Incorporate sustainability into your service offerings. Water savings, resource conservation and irrigation management are good places to start. Some companies incorporate rainwater harvesting, bioswales, green walls, roof gardens, LEED certification, organic compost teas and other sustainable practices to become leaders in their markets. Consider investing in cleaner-burning fuels to power your fleet and field equipment, and learn the benefits that sustainability brings to your customers' bottom lines.

**7 Upgrade equipment.** Stand-on mowers, for example, are becoming an industry staple for mowing, replacing the walk-behind mower. They are faster, more maneuverable and have a smaller footprint in the trailer or on the truck bed.

**8 Manage cash flow.** Be more aware of your balance sheet. Manage cash better and use debt carefully.

**9 Outsource fleet maintenance.** Using a third party like Enterprise Fleet is an efficient way to do preventative maintenance; it lowers maintenance costs and makes shops easier to manage.

**10 Eliminate waste.** Become technologically proficient. Incorporate paperless technology for time tracking and eliminate paper timecards. This is more accurate and efficient. Invest in mobile technologies and practical, real-time applications that will enhance your productivity.

The Green Industry is resilient, and the people and companies in it have taken bold, courageous steps to forge ahead. The positive spirit, value system and work ethic that united us in difficult times will sustain us into the future.

I see many good companies in our industry poised for great growth in the not-too-distant future.

# WEEDWATCH

STANDING SENTINEL TO PROTECT PLANT HEALTH



Recommended  
Dow AgroSciences  
solution  
**Turflon® Ester Ultra**  
specialty  
herbicide

## CHICORY

*Cichorium intybus*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

▶ This summer perennial develops from a basal rosette. While it looks similar to dandelion in the rosette form, its leaf lobes are not opposite.

▶ Bright blue to purple, square-toothed flowers form on stems that can grow up to 3 ft. tall. When cut, stems produce a milky liquid.

▶ Each plant can produce up to 3,000 seeds from June through September.

▶ It is most troublesome in disturbed areas and thrives in thinner turf, but it can be found in newly established turf.

### CONTROL TIPS

▶ Properly mow, water and fertilize lawn to encourage healthy turfgrass growth, and inhibit the spread of chicory.

▶ When chicory is in the rosette stage, apply a systemic post-emergent herbicide, labeled for chicory control and your use site.



Recommended  
Dow AgroSciences  
solution  
**Confront®** specialty  
herbicide\*

## DANDELION

*Taraxacum officinale*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

▶ This perennial grows all summer in moist conditions and soils, but thrives in weak, thin turf.

▶ Bright yellow blossoms have many petals, followed by puffball seed carriers.

▶ Long, hairless leaves have jagged teeth growing from a low rosette.

▶ Leafless, hollow stems emit a white milky sap when broken.

### CONTROL TIPS

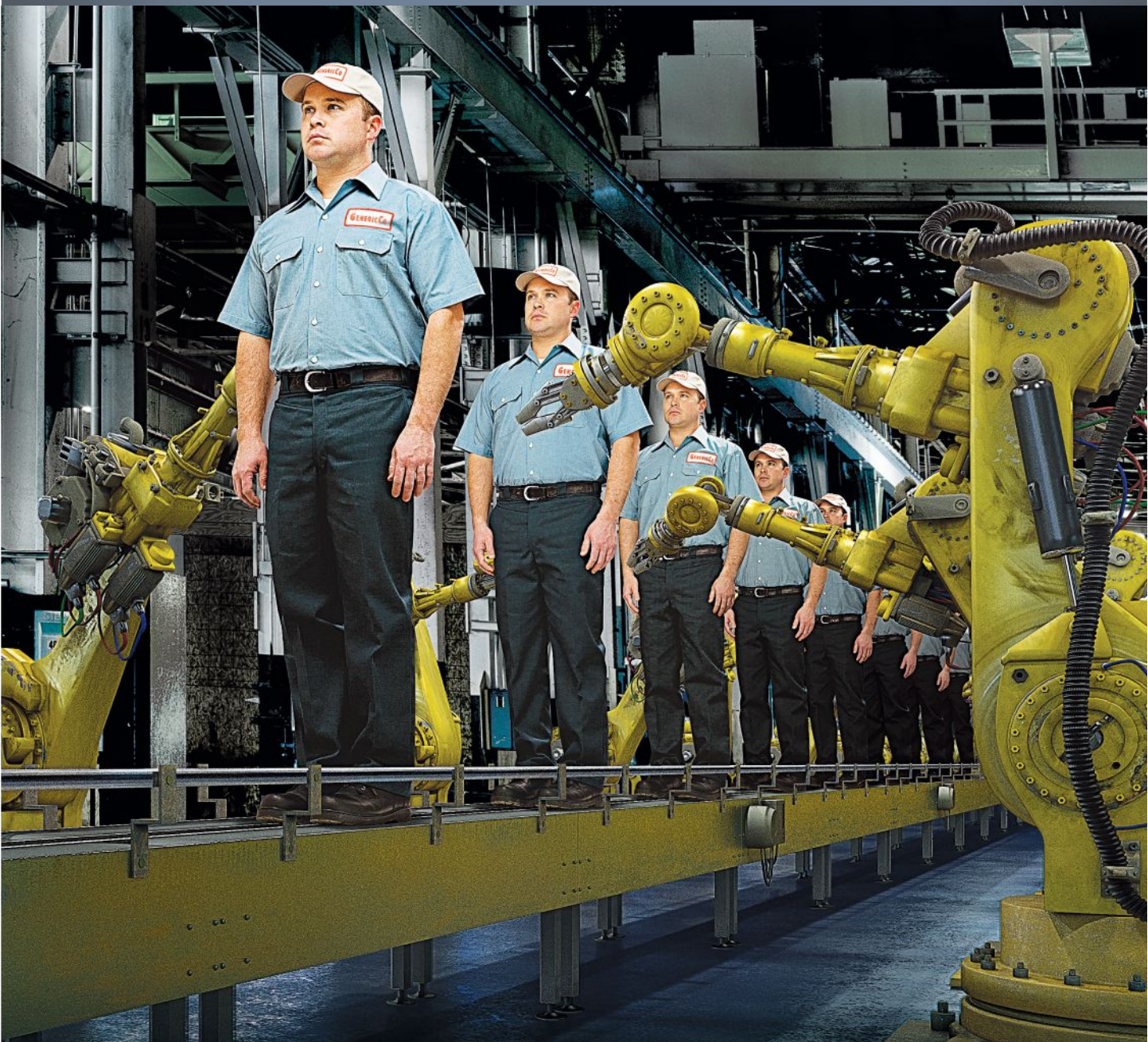
▶ A post-emergent application of two-, three- or four-way broadleaf herbicides is most effective in spring or fall.

▶ Properly mow, water and fertilize lawn to encourage healthy turf growth and minimize thin turf.

\* 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.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit [www.DowProvesIt.com](http://www.DowProvesIt.com) or call 800/255-3726.

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ORNAMENTAL

# LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

## MAINTENANCE: TREE PROTECTION



### Growth Products, Ltd.

BioNutrients Total-Pak Injectable provides a complete micronutrient package, along with a mix of beneficial microbes, symbiotic mycorrhizal fungi and

other plant boosters. This easy-to-use solution promotes better establishment of transplants and improves the health and growth of both deciduous and evergreen trees. It includes 11 strains of endo- and ecto-mycorrhizal fungi, which colonize soil and improve a plant's nutrient uptake, mineral uptake and water absorption. The wide range of both endo- and ecto-mycorrhizae ensures that the correct type of fungi is present for all types of trees and climates. Total-Pak also contains yeast and multiple beneficial bacteria to promote soil health and plant vigor. In addition, this dry soluble includes biologically active soil conditioners, a natural wetting agent, humic acid, kelp extracts and seven micronutrients (boron, copper, iron, manganese, magnesium, molybdenum and zinc). [GrowthProducts.com](http://GrowthProducts.com)



### Nu-Arbor

The new, versatile 1-Two Root Injector accurately delivers liquid Nu-Arbor Root Fertilizers and can be used to inject soil-applied insecticides such as imidicloprid. Demand for this tool is strong, since production of the Kioritz Soil Injector ceased. The Nu-Arbor 1-Two Root Injector includes a large 4-gal. backpack tank and offers improved strength, length and durability.

[Nu-Arbor.com](http://Nu-Arbor.com)



### Netafim USA

Techline CV is widely used to irrigate turf, trees, shrubs and bedding areas in residential and commercial installations. It can be installed either subsurface or above ground and delivers water directly to root zones in precise, measured droplets (0.26 to 0.9 GPH). Physical root barriers in its micro-emitters protect the tubing from plant and tree root intrusion. The integral barriers deflect root growth without reliance on chemical applications and help ensure longer dripline performance life and low maintenance. [NetafimUSA.com](http://NetafimUSA.com)



### FMC Professional Solutions

Bark beetles and borers, such as emerald ash borers (EAB), are some of the most devastating and difficult-to-manage pests. Protect the health of your trees and your business relationships with Onyx insecticide. Onyx is a preventive treatment for reliable, long-term protection against

beetles and borers. While several organophosphates traditionally used to control these pests have been removed from the market, Onyx insecticide continues to be a viable, effective solution for the prevention of beetle and borer damage. To ensure your trees are protected, apply Onyx insecticide one to two months prior to expected adult beetle flight. Using a hydraulic sprayer, spray the tree as directed on the label for consistent, dependable control of these target pests. [FMCProSolutions.com/LawnCare/Products/Insecticides/OnyxInsecticide.aspx](http://FMCProSolutions.com/LawnCare/Products/Insecticides/OnyxInsecticide.aspx)

### BugBarrier

The BugBarrier Tree Band is a pesticide-free, adhesive banding system. Its dense, flexible, fiber barrier is first wrapped around the trunk to fill bark crevices. The adhesive film barrier is then installed over the fiber, with the adhesive side facing the tree. This exclusive design eliminates unsightly debris and keeps insect carcasses out of sight. Best of all, it can be installed in less than five minutes. It is so effective, the company says, that it was registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a "mechanical pesticide." [TreeBands.com](http://TreeBands.com)







## ArborSystems

There's a new, rugged, high-impact plastic carrying case now available for the Wedgle Direct-Inject Tree Treatment System. It's included at no extra charge with every Wedgle Direct-Inject System new purchase. The all-in-one case holds the injection unit, all tools and up to four 120-ml chemical packs. The deluxe version includes 12 Portle injection tips and a tip setter for treating conifers. [ArborSystems.com](http://ArborSystems.com)



## Arborjet

ACE-jet is a micro-injectable, broad-spectrum "fast-acting" insecticide used for the management of insects that ravage forests, trees, landscape ornamentals and interior plantscapes. It eliminates leaf-chewing insects such as caterpillars, winter moth, gypsy moth and webworm; piercing-sucking insects such as whiteflies, adelgids, aphids, spider mites, scale, thrips and mealybugs; and mining insects such as leafminers

and sawflies. Beneficial insects, including wasps, soldier beetles and assassin bugs, are not affected by ACE-jet since it is injected directly into a tree's trunk and only impacts insects that are feeding directly on the tree. [Arborjet.com](http://Arborjet.com)

## DESIGN BUILD: TREE CARE & DEBRIS MAINTENANCE

### Paladin Construction Group

The FFC Tree Spade provides a quick and efficient way to accomplish your tree and debris digging, carrying and placing needs while maintaining visibility. It has no moving parts, requires virtually no maintenance, has a low original purchase cost and is easy to operate. The FFC Tree Spade is available in 36-, 40-, 44- and 48-in. ball sizes and easily attaches to skid steer loaders, utility tractor loaders and backhoe loaders. The round configuration digs a hole for planting the tree, easily digs up the tree ball, carries the tree to the new location and places the tree in position. The 3/8-in. plate construction with sharp tapered edge digs effortlessly. The spade is also good for lifting and moving balled trees, carrying and placing large boulders and digging up old tree stumps and bushes. [PaladinConstruction-Group.com](http://PaladinConstruction-Group.com)



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## Loftness

As part of its VMLogix line of products, Loftness introduces the Carbide Cutter G3 high-performance mulching head attachment for skid steers. This new-generation product incorporates the latest cutting-tooth technologies and power drive systems while maintaining the rugged reliability expected of Loftness equipment. The Carbide Cutter G3 is available with 51-, 61- and 71-in. cutting widths. All models are offered with a variety of carbide-tipped and heat-treated steel teeth to match any job application. The precisely engineered spiral tooth pattern on the rotor ensures continuous tooth contact with the material being cut. An optional primary-stage shear bar is also available for ultra-fine mulching. [VM-Logix.com](http://VM-Logix.com)

## Gravely

Gravely introduces a line of Hurricane Plus walk-behind blowers for easy debris cleanup without the hassle of back or arm strain. The durable, productive blowers are available with 169cc, 265cc and 404cc Subaru engines. Each Subaru overhead cam engine provides power with less noise and convenient one-pull starting. Featuring all-steel construction, all three blowers feature remote throttle control with an optional remote locking caster. The remote throttle control is located conveniently on the handle near the operator for easy access. Pneumatic tires maneuver smoothly even on rough terrain. Direction and dispersion of the debris can be controlled by the front and side discharge on the blower as well. The blowers are covered by Gravely's one-year limited warranty. [Ariens.com](http://Ariens.com)



## Schiller Grounds Care

The Little Wonder hydro brush cutter (Hydro BRC-24) is constructed of 7- and 10-gauge welded steel, with a 28-in. cutter deck that houses a reversible 24-in. cutter blade. It offers height adjustments from 4 to 5.5 in., with the power to cut sapling growth up to 2 in. thick. Other features include a HondaGXV390 (390cc) engine, a Hydro-Gear T2 hydrostatic transaxle, a Noram mechanical blade clutch, solid linkage controls, a speed control dialer, dual 16-in. flat-resistant foam-filled urethane tires and a two-year warranty. [LittleWonder.com](http://LittleWonder.com)



## Stihl

Built tough for storm cleanup, tree felling, and firewood cutting, the MS 271 Stihl Wood Boss chainsaw is designed with improved ergonomics and equipped with a low-emission, fuel-efficient engine. It features an advanced anti-vibration system to help reduce operator fatigue while providing optimum control. A side-access chain tensioner makes for easy chain adjustment, and the pre-separation air filtration system offers greater cleaning efficiency and longer filter life. [StihlUSA.com/chainsaws/MS271.html](http://StihlUSA.com/chainsaws/MS271.html)

## Bearcat Products

The SC3265 chipper/shredder reduces yard debris while helping operators be kind to the environment. The 3-in. chipper/shredder comes with a 265cc Subaru engine; two reversible, heat-treated steel chipper blades to reduce maintenance costs and blade replacement; 12 serrated shredding knives; 1.5-in. screen standard (three other screen options are available); and a double-banded belt drive for an equal transfer of power. [BearcatProducts.com](http://BearcatProducts.com)



## TurfEx

The TLP060 leaf pusher maximizes the capabilities of a zero-turn mower while minimizing the amount of equipment needed to do multiple jobs. At 60 in. wide and 27 in. high, the leaf pusher easily mounts to the top of the Thatch, Groom 'N' Sweep Package. Depending on the application, the leaf



pusher can be used with the brush or tine sections from the attachment package. It also

benefits from Flex Hitch, a system for accommodating the ground contour. To minimize turf damage and eliminate gouging, the hitch allows the attachment to automatically pivot as the ground elevation changes from one end of the unit to the other. A lift kit also is available for raising the attachment off the ground when not in use.

[TrynexFactory.com](http://TrynexFactory.com)

## Husqvarna

The T435 chainsaw's lower weight and X-Torq engine translate into 20% less fuel consumption and 60% less emissions than other chainsaws on the market, according to the company. Equipped with two clamping hooks, the double eyelet gives the user the choice to fit the saw in the most suitable way in the harness, while using both hands for other work. Equipped with Smart Start, resistance in the starter cord is reduced by as much as 40%. With the auto-return stop switch, the saw is always ready to be started. The starter handle has a steady four-finger grip. [Husqvarna.com](http://Husqvarna.com)



## LAWN CARE: YARD MAINTENANCE



### GreenWorks Tools, Inc.

Lithium-ion batteries are combined with high-efficiency, 2 Ah or high-capacity 4 Ah motors to create a cordless handheld line of yard tools with gas-comparable performance. The GreenWorks family of 40-volt, handheld products is designed to make lawn care easier and more efficient. The trimmer converts to an edger with the push of a button. The hedge trimmers trim at any angle with a rotating handle. Overmold grips and handles offer added cushion and support to reduce fatigue and lessen vibrations. The tools start with the

simple push of a button. An in-line motor head on the pole saw provides the operator with an unobstructed view of the cutting area. The ComfortReach cushioned forearm rest on the string trimmer and pole saw provides a padded armrest while adding leverage and support to help operators access hard-to-reach places. [GreenWorksTools.com](http://GreenWorksTools.com)



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## Cub Cadet

Cub Cadet's commercial string trimmer line — ST23, ST26 (pictured) and ST35 — makes trimming around fences, trees and flowerbeds easy. The 4-cycle units have engines that are fuel efficient, have low emissions and run quietly. The bump feed head allows for continuous operation. The Advanced Starting Technology (AST) feature dramatically starts with slow, steady pulls and reduces starting effort. An optional power start is available on select models. [CubCadet.com](http://CubCadet.com)



## Stihl

The Stihl BR 430 Backpack Blower delivers the dependable power professionals need to complete tough jobs. Its advanced engine technology provides cleaner emissions and better fuel economy than a standard 2-stroke engine, reducing environmental impact. Its large fuel tank allows for longer run times. In addition, the BR 430 is ergonomically designed to help minimize user fatigue. An advanced anti-vibration system provides more comfortable operation, and a simplified starting procedure makes it easier to begin the task at hand. Back padding, broad shoulder straps and a rubberized grip provide support during use, and the tube-mounted throttle allows for single-handed operation. [StihlUSA.com](http://StihlUSA.com)



## Core Outdoor Power

The GasLess line of emission-free, hand-held power equipment includes grass trimmers, blowers, hedge trimmers, lawnmowers and backpack blowers. These lightweight products run as long as a tank of gas but eliminate the maintenance and hassles associated with gas-powered engines. They generate little noise and zero emissions without sacrificing power, providing as much torque as professional-grade gas engines. The line features a new motor that uses patented technology known as conductor optimized rotary energy (CORE), which eliminates wire windings and iron laminations and instead uses a printed circuit board stator that cooperates with permanent magnet rotors to optimize generated power. The motors produce a high-torque rotary motion at high efficiency levels, leading to longer run times. [CoreOutdoorPower.com](http://CoreOutdoorPower.com)



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# INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

THE GREEN INDUSTRY AT A GLANCE

## PRICE AT THE PUMP

The national average fuel prices compared with one month and one year ago.

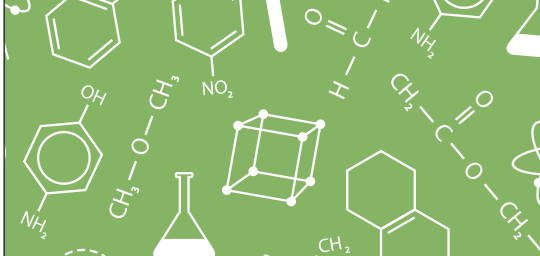
	Regular	Diesel	E85
<b>Current avg.</b>	\$3.816	\$4.089	\$3.287
<b>Month ago avg.</b>	\$3.925	\$4.164	\$3.360
<b>Year ago avg.</b>	\$3.932	\$4.195	\$3.318



**Highest Recorded average price (7/17/2008):**

Regular unleaded **\$4.114** Diesel **\$4.845**

Source: AAA Daily Fuel Gage Report 4/30/12



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## APPLIED KNOWLEDGE

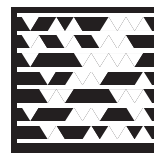
TIPS FOR SMARTER, SAFER CHEMICAL APPLICATIONS

By A.J. Hephner | FMC

Proper product disposal is not only key to finishing a job right, it's critical to protecting our environment. This is especially true when pesticides are involved, and it is important that the professionals who use them are educated on how to correctly dispose of empty containers. **Plastic containers** should be triple rinsed, squeezed and punctured before being taken to the nearest recycling center. Visit the Ag Container Recycling Council website for more information at [www.acrecycle.org](http://www.acrecycle.org). Recycle empty **aerosol containers** and contact your local hazardous waste facility for safe disposal of containers that are not completely empty.



A.J. Hephner is the Market Specialist in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia for FMC Professional Solutions.



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JPM Landscaping's simple before, during and after video on a small paver project:  
<http://tinyurl.com/7nbck3e>

Pacific Outdoor Living shows how good amateur promotional videos can be:  
<http://tinyurl.com/737moha>

5 great tips to help you grow your business:  
<http://tinyurl.com/7fwprwg>

## BY THE NUMBERS

**\$23,740**

2010 median pay per year

**\$11.41**

Median hourly pay

**1,249,700**

No. of jobs

**254,600**

Employment change

**20%**

Job outlook (faster than average)

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition, Grounds Maintenance Workers, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/building-and-grounds-cleaning/grounds-maintenance-workers.htm> (visited April 10, 2012).

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# PROSPER WITH **perennials**

**Even clients who want low-maintenance plantings can benefit from a perennial service plan.**

BY JAMIE J. GOOCH

**P**ERENNIALS HAVE long been the middle child of lawncare. Stuck between attention-hungry turf and the boastful blooms of annuals, perennials have dutifully emerged, year after year. That low-maintenance dependability is a trait that many homeowners seek in a landscape, and because breeders have been busy adding showiness, perennials are becoming more and more popular. Landscape contractors can offer perennial services that will help make the plants attractive from a business perspective as well as an aesthetic one.

"It's a really nice niche to pursue," says Ellen Vincent, an environmental landscape specialist in Clemson University's Horticulture Department. "Annuals are easy. They're kind of no brainers. It's the plant connoisseur who will learn about perennials."

She says landscape contractors who take the time to educate themselves about the perennials in their region will find that the two- to four-week bloom time of perennials of yore has been extended to an entire season in some new varieties. They'll also learn that low-maintenance doesn't mean no maintenance. Many homeowners will be willing to pay for perennial expertise, from installation through to a recurring maintenance schedule.



In warm regions, cyclamen persicum, like this Snowridge Mini Wine from Syngenta Flowers, can be planted as a perennial.

## Perennial planting prep

Ensuring the soil is ready to support plant life is the most important step to installing any bed, and perennials are no exception. Landscape contractors can provide soil testing services, as well as expertise on which plants should be placed where, depending on their soil, sun and water requirements, and their shape, height, color and texture.

"We used to try to change the soil situation to fit our needs, but that's not sustainable," Vincent says. "Now we've learned to work with the site as is, and only change it if absolutely necessary."

PROUD SPONSOR





**Above:** Lantana display a wide variety of growing habits. Bandana Lemon Squeeze, shown here, is one of 28 colors in Syngenta's Kwik Kombos series. **Right:** Angelonia, like this Serenita Mixture from PanAmerican Seed, is known for its upright habit.

One type of soil that may necessitate change is compacted ground. Without oxygen, soil can't hold moisture. If a bed must be planted in compacted ground, the soil should be remediated first and whatever activities caused the compaction need to be avoided.

"Making sure soil does not become compacted in the first place is the No. 1 duty of landscape professionals," says Vincent. Using equipment or even foot traffic on saturated soils can cause compaction.

Beyond soil preparation concerns, landscape contractors should help ensure their clients will receive season-long interest from their perennial plantings — both from blooms and foliage.

"Perennial connoisseurs are all about foliage," says Vincent. "Foliage needs to be talked about as much as bloom. Blooms may not last the whole season, so attractive foliage is a selling point."

### Installation know-how

Once the soil is ready and the right perennials have been chosen for the space, putting them in the ground is just one step of the installation process. Ensuring plants get established is another service landscapers can offer with perennials.

"Making sure that installed plants receive moisture until the roots are established is critical," Vincent says. "Even with plants that are drought tolerant, they still need watered until they're established. That could be three weeks or three months, depending on the part of country you're in."

Mulching helps to retain moisture and may need to be applied more than once per season, depending on the region. That's another opportunity for landscapers to connect with clients. Mulch may also help alleviate the need for fertilization.

Weeding is perhaps the most labor intensive maintenance involved with perennials. Landscapers can offer herbicide treatments, and some clients might be interested in contracting for hand weeding services.

Once perennials are installed and established, landscapers still have an opportunity to provide a service to their clients. By definition, a plant only needs a lifecycle of three years to classify as a perennial. Perennials do need to be replaced. Even

longer-lived varieties should be separated every three years.

"Maintenance firms can use that to their advantage," Vincent says. "You can tell the client, 'In three years, we'll come back and divide the plants for you.' That's long-term, repeat business."

Capitalizing on perennials requires knowing how various plants perform in your region and soil conditions, then communicating their benefits to clients. Becoming a perennial expert takes time, but local botanical gardens, commercial growers and websites such as the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's ([wildflower.org](http://wildflower.org)) can help.

"If you put together all the info about the area, customers, soils and plants, that enables you to really know your environment," Vincent says. "All that info gets synthesized, and if you think of the ecosystem while you're doing business, then you'll make good decisions." **LM**

**Gooch is a freelance writer and editor based in Northeast Ohio.**



### EMERALD COAST GROWERS VARIETY FOCUS: FLOWERING GRASSES

Emerald Coast Growers' flowering grasses program is a great companion program for potted annuals. The program launched with six selections in a range of colors, textures and sizes: *Briza maxima*, *Eragrostis tef* Ruby Silk, *Lagurus ovatus*, *Panicum elegans* Frosted Explosion, *Pennisetum villosum* and *Melinis nerviglumis* Savannah. These annuals offer possibilities for mixed containers, patio pots and window boxes. For more information visit [www.ecgrowers.com](http://www.ecgrowers.com).

PHOTOS COURTESY: SYNGENTA FLOWERS (LEFT); PANAMERICAN SEED





### Scent of spring

**Monrovia's** new Golden Crane Hydrangea (*Hydrangea angustipetala* 'MonLongShou Golden Crane') features large lacecaps of white and chartreuse. It not only presents its flowers in late spring, the earliest of all hydrangeas to blossom, but is highly scented, according to the company. Hardy in USDA Zones 6-10, this selection was made from seed collected in Southern Sichuan Province, China. It prefers rich, porous soil. Pink flowers will be maintained in neutral or alkaline soil with pH of 7.0 or higher, while blue flowers will be maintained in acidic soil with pH range of 5.5 or below. [Monrovia.com](http://Monrovia.com)

### Year-rounder

**Ball's** 'Jealousy' *Leycesteria* offers all-season interest, with chartreuse foliage and a big, bushy shape. Some blooms may appear in July, and cooler conditions express maroon highlights to the foliage. Purple fruit appears in the fall. It pairs well with other vigorous plants in large-size containers, and performs well in wetlands. [BallHort.com](http://BallHort.com)



### Gentle giants

The 'Red Fox XXL' series is comprised of large-flowered dahlias, boasting almost 6-in. diameter blooms. These large flowers grow on a plant that doesn't get out of control — nor will they need staking or extra care to maintain the plant structure, according to **Dummen USA**. The full-sun-loving annuals grow to heights between 10 and 24 in. The seven bloom color options include Veracruz (pictured), pink and white; Chiapas, intense pink; Rojo Paramo, red purple; Mayo, white; Durango, yellow; Hidalgo, copper; and Paraiso, pink. [DummenUSA.com](http://DummenUSA.com)



### Here come hummingbirds

The warm tones of the Agastache hybrid 'Summer Sunset' can brighten your summer borders and containers. The newest addition to **Terra Nova Nurseries'** Summer Series, this hummingbird mint is drought-tolerant, has an upright, compact habit, and blooms all summer, according to the company. Hardy to USDA Zone 6, it ranges from 10 to 24 in. in height and features 1.5-in. blooms. [TerraNovaNurseries.com](http://TerraNovaNurseries.com)



### Pastel palette

*Rosa* 'Carding Mill' (Auswest) from **David Austin Roses** is a repeat-flowering shrub that grows to about 4x3.5 ft., thriving in areas of full sun or partial shade (USDA Zones 5-9). Featuring a myrrh fragrance, cupped blooms appear with approximately 80 petals in mixed shades of pink, apricot and yellow. This rose was named after a valley in the Long Mynd, a scenic area of hills and moors close to David Austin's display gardens in Shropshire, England. [DavidAustinRoses.com](http://DavidAustinRoses.com)

## The ticket to weed control

A client's desire for weed control leads Allan Cole to WeedEnder — and a profitable niche.

When Allan Cole's client asked him to control her weed problem, he found the perfect solution.



**W**HEN ALLAN COLE'S longtime client asked him to eliminate the weeds around her fenced-in property, it launched for Cole an add-on business.

Cole, who owns Willow Springs Nursery & Landscaping in Rubicon, WI, had been spraying around his client's fence annually, but the weeds returned year after year. While researching a better solution, Cole came across WeedEnder, a vegetation control-matting product by U-TECK. Made from post-consumer recycled materials, the green product prevents unwanted vegetation growth by depriving root systems of sun, yet it still allows water and nutrients to move through the fiber.

For Cole, it was the perfect solution.

"The client loved that it was made from recycled materials, and it also worked absolutely fantastic," recalls Cole of his first experience with the product. "It was really way above our expectations. I was so impressed that I called the company and asked about getting a distributorship... It has been an excellent fit for our business."

Though WeedEnder was developed for commercial use, the company is now pushing more into the residential landscape industry. U-TECK Vice President of Sales Russ Mason III says "never having to deal with weeds again" is a benefit homeowners can appreciate.

"You can use it in bed gardening," says Mason. "We can cut a series of holes into the sheet so you can plant bulbs through it. It not only kept weeds out of the beds, but it also helped keep the plants moist by reducing some of the evaporation."

### A SPRAYING ALTERNATIVE

Because spraying is often a component of many landscape companies' maintenance divisions, some professionals may be wary about selling a one-time product that promises to get rid of weeds forever.

But Cole has an answer for that.

"That part of the maintenance business may be starting to go away anyhow, as it becomes so heavily regulated," he says. "Pesticide or herbicide spraying, particularly in areas where children are present, is becoming banned or heavily controlled. The handwriting is on the wall. Now is the time to adopt a different solution."

For Cole, WeedEnder has been that solution. But the product's high cost deters potential buyers. Mason admits it's not cheap.

"It was first invented for use with the U.S. Department of Transportation for roadside weeds, so it had to be able to withstand the rigors of having tractors and mowers run over it," he explains. "It's incredibly tough. But making it nearly indestructible drove the cost of the product up. The typical homeowner might not be inclined to choose this product at first."

That's why having a landscape professional involved in the sale makes sense, Cole says, noting that his clients are more receptive to WeedEnder after being convinced of its long-term potential. It's an easier sell with municipal customers such as school districts, where pesticides often are the only weed solution.

"What I tell my homeowner and municipal customers is that there are no recurring costs," says Cole. "You never have to go out and spray or string-trim weeds again. In the long run, the product is a money saver. And it's good PR for places like schools, too. It doesn't look good having someone walk around with a sprayer when it's a place where kids play."

"I definitely think it's a good fit for the landscape industry," he concludes. "It's an easy business to move in to."

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

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**WHY WEEDENDER?** "It's a great solution for people who are not happy with spraying herbicides. It becomes a great add-on service for those customers," Cole says.

**INVESTMENT?** "That's the great thing about the WeedEnder product. You have to pick up very few tools to start installing the product. A landscaper would already have most of the tools, and you can pick up some of the specialized tools from U-TECK. If not considering the advertising and strictly just the investment in tools, I'd say it's under \$2,000."

**LEARNING CURVE?** "The learning curve is the same as any other installation skill a landscaper learns, such as building retaining walls. You just need to pay attention to the specifications that U-TECK puts out, and you'll have an easy installation."

Stockner's Nursery is a third-generation family business based in central Virginia. Launched in 1981, Stockner's designs, installs and maintains landscaping and hardscaping and provides grounds management. It recently branched out to a retail extension, Twigs Garden Center, to complement its residential design/build division. Company president **Gary Stockner** discusses this interdepartmental synergy, as well as effective client communications, rising fuel costs and other challenges.



Gary Stockner, far right, and his management team plan to provide customers with more specialized services.

## INSIDE INFO

**Company:** Stockner's Nursery

**Headquarters:** Rockville, VA

**Employees:** 100

**2011 Revenue:** \$6.9 million

### Key to being a maintenance leader:

Communication is key in differentiating us from the competition. Employing a philosophy of being proactive vs. reactive is how we communicate with our clients. For example, we provide a monthly newsletter to communicate key information about company events and our role in the community. Our monthly field reports are an opportunity to stay connected to our clients by providing feedback to them on how their properties are looking. Our customer service satisfaction surveys allow our clients to communicate to us about how we are doing. All of these communication tools tie our communication and performance initiatives together.

Our clients have come to rely on us to tell them what we should perform, not what they think we should perform. This proactive attitude has presented us with many opportunities in the grounds management market and positioned us to increase our market share substantially — now and for the foreseeable future.

## TOP TRENDS

› **Go-Green initiating.** It's also known as "environmental responsibility" or "environmental stewardship." We are putting many resources into educating our clients on water-saving initiatives, best management horticultural practices and what we as a company are doing to recycle and reuse landscape waste by turning it into new byproducts. We maintain a strong commitment to corporate and environmental sustainability — not only for our clients' properties, but also for our own business practices.

› **Social media guru-ing.** Staying ahead of the curve in both the social media environment and technology is helping us to stay ahead of our competition in so many ways. This year, our attention will be focused on interacting with our existing client base and prospective clients via Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and the other usual suspects in social networking sites. We are offering time-lapse photography on our YouTube installation videos, demonstrating in a fun and unique way what we do and how we do it.

## TOP OBSTACLES

› **Rising fuel costs.** With a fleet of more than 50 vehicles and an array of landscape and construction equipment, fuel is becoming one of our major cost items. We've had to absorb the increase to remain competitive. To better manage our fuel usage, we recently installed GPS units on all our company vehicles. This allows us to more closely monitor our fuel usage by determining how we can improve our drivers' performance and minimize drive times on all our maintenance routes.

› **Competition pressures.** Costs continue to rise as margins continue to slim. There will always be the "low-ballers" and the national and regional players with which to contend. We remain

competitive with comparable companies of our size and revenue by focusing on who we are and what we deliver. Although we all sit at the same table, pitching the same line, it's all about who delivers quality and service consistently at a fair market price while maintaining the strongest relationship.

## TOP OPPORTUNITY

› **Specialization.** We are continuously looking at ways to create a market niche, to increase our opportunities and market presence. Our focus is on turning our global capabilities into specialized, niche brands under one corporate umbrella. We are branding each one of our service segments toward our targeted market.

Internally, we are looking at how each one of our service segments can support, and even grow the revenues and opportunities for each other. An example of this is how our residential design/build division interacts with our garden center/nursery. The design/build division is a "purchaser" of green goods from our nursery, which turns inventory and creates revenue for it; meanwhile, the nursery provides an avenue to market our design/build capabilities to prospective customers. To this end, we believe that this strategy and our core ideology of providing

exceptional customer service will continue to present us with opportunities for growth.

The author is a freelance journalist with more than 20 years' experience writing about the Green Industry. Contact him at [tecrain@goingrenguy.com](mailto:tecrain@goingrenguy.com)

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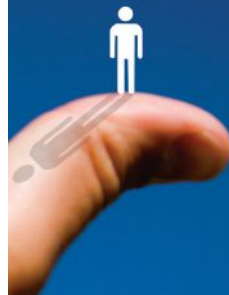
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More and more people are turning to synthetic turf for sustainable landscape and play solutions.

### LD/B Solutions

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### Get Growing

Landscape clients seek beds and borders that perform well and are easy to maintain. Hear 10 things to consider the next time you're installing plants in beds and borders.

### i-News

LM contributor Jeffrey Knight says smart controllers can't compensate for a poorly designed and poorly installed irrigation system.

[ Coming in June ]

## THE LM150

Battling an erratic economy, tornadoes, floods and a mild winter, landscapers certainly took a wild ride in 2011. Read about which companies weathered the storm best, how they did it and what 2012-2013 has in store.



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# MYBIGGESTMISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



## Knowing when to pursue a lead and when to back down has been beneficial for a New Jersey landscape business owner.

**D**REWE SCHOENHOLTZ, OWNER of The Green Scene in Hopewell,

NJ, says there's a delicate balance between sizing people up incorrectly and what he calls "chasing the wind." Finding that balance has come with years of experience in the business. But early in his career, it lost him some jobs — and valuable time.

"One of the biggest mistakes I made in my younger years was not giving clients a fair shake or the opportunity to find out what they want. I wrote them off over the phone," admits Schoenholtz. "That can happen when you've had a few bad experiences. It sours you moving forward, and you become wary of wasting your time on jobs that aren't going to work out. You think you know what people are going to say, and that you can tell who is or isn't going to be willing to spend money. But I've learned it's not quite that simple."

Over the years, Schoenholtz says, some of the clients he expected to be low-budget ended up being some of his best. So he has learned not to judge too quickly.

Still, Schoenholtz says he's wasted time pursuing jobs that never came to fruition.

"Even today, I get a lot of calls from out of town,"

says Schoenholtz. "I used to hop in my car and drive to the lead as soon as I could. I've learned how to get a sense of what the job entails over the phone. While you never want to write off a job too quickly, you can also get a sense of whether it's worth pursuing."

Schoenholtz has learned from experience when to give potential clients a chance and when to walk away. "I've learned to ask some very important screening questions during our initial phone conversation," he explains. "I always ask, 'What are you looking to do?' 'What is your time frame?' and 'What is your budget?' I didn't used to ask this up front, and I still find that most people don't want to talk about their budget on the phone. But I always explain that I'm just trying to get the best sense of what they want to accomplish. When someone is very reluctant to share details, it may be a warning sign the job isn't worth pursuing."

Many landscape business owners believe they have to chase hard after leads, but Schoenholtz has learned that his time is better spent pursuing jobs that are viable. "I've learned not to waste my time chasing the wind," he says. "Time is money. It's best to get a sense

up front whether a job is worth that chase."

But that's not to say Schoenholtz wouldn't accept smaller jobs. Early on, he learned a valuable lesson.

Schoenholtz used to go door-to-door looking for work. A client he secured that way asked him to do a small tree removal project. "We agreed that I would do it on a certain date for \$200," remembers Schoenholtz. "I showed up when I said I would, and charged the amount I originally set. The client was impressed. He said most people don't show up when they say they will, don't do the work they set out to do, and then charge more in the end."

The client then inquired about a small job of planting some bushes. Again, Schoenholtz showed up when he said he would, performed the job, and charged what he'd said he would charge.

"The client then told me that those first two jobs were an interview and he was ready to give me my real job," recalls Schoenholtz. "It was an \$85,000 job. This was more than 30 years ago, so that was a really big job. It was the perfect example of not writing a job off too soon."

Over the years, Schoenholtz says, "I've tried to keep that lesson with me as I look for the right balance in pursuing leads."

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



Drewe Schoenholtz learned early on not to judge potential clients too quickly.

**COMPANY:** The Green Scene

**HEADQUARTERS:** Hopewell, NJ

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1974

**NO. OF EMPLOYEES:** 14

**SERVICE BREAKDOWN:** 50% garden construction (hardscaping, walls, walkways, pergolas, etc.); 35% landscaping; 10% trees; 5% koi ponds

**CLIENT BREAKDOWN:** 80% residential; 10% commercial; 10% industrial



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