

Un-stumped

A DECADE AGO CHRIS Lee went out on a limb when he decided to bring all tree services in-house for EarthWorks, located in Lillian, Texas. Now, garnering \$75,000 in annual revenue from the add-on, the president of the \$13 million company has no further reservations. Plus, the stump grinding facet of the service is one of EarthWorks' most-desired services. Clients value it aesthetically and for liability concerns, Lee says.

EarthWorks subbed out its tree services for years but concerns arose due to "lack of control," Lee says. "When we used subs, we constantly had to stay on top of them. At times they would not show up or be late and we were the ones that looked bad. With it in-house we have complete control over scheduling."

Its current tree service options include installation, trimming/removal and stump grinding. The latter is much needed and profitable, Lee says. "Every tree we remove—unless in a native area—includes stump grinding," he says.

But Lee says the company also found a way to secure some stump grinding gigs beyond its typical tree work. "We have been successful identifying old stumps from previous removals done by previous contractors and relating the liability involved to the client," Lee says. "That typically leads to a quick approval of the job."

Having grinders on hand has been a boon to landscape installation crews, too. Before purchasing the equipment, crews had to remove surface roots from planting areas with axes or mauls, which was time consuming and labor intensive. A grinder makes quick work of this task.

Lee says new stump grinders can be purchased for less than \$6,000. The company purchased a single walk-behind grinder initially and now has three on-hand for full-time use.

EarthWorks primarily uses Rayco Mini Work-Force grinders because of the com-



EarthWorks removes tree stumps in-house.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: EarthWorks

LOCATION: Lillian, Texas

WHY STUMP GRINDING?

Initially to supplement tree removals and eliminate the trip hazard associated with stumps, Lee says.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE? "You can cause damage if you aren't careful," Lee says. "There's also quite a bit of maintenance and repair work involved in grinding."

BEST TIP? "(Stump grinding) goes hand-in-hand with tree removal," Lee says. "If you aren't doing much work in the way of tree removals, first investigate how many opportunities there would be to bid/perform this kind of service."

pact size. "We can get them into just about anywhere," Lee says.

Stump grinding pricing differs depending on tree type, size and location, Lee says. Jobs typically range from \$75 to \$250 per stump. A separate two-man stump grinding crew typically conducts the work.

With stump grinding marketed as a component of its overall tree service offerings, Lee says the company most often promotes it to customers during existing tree service jobs, typically from employees identifying a stump and proposing the grinding service to clients while they're on site.

Reflecting on EarthWorks' implementation of the service, Lee says it was a smart business move. If it's something a company has been thinking about and is in the market to do a lot of tree work, he encourages them to go for it. "If other owners are wavering on the decision as I was, I would say, like Nike says, 'Just do it.'"

Payton is a freelance writer with eight years of experience writing about the landscape industry.