

Grinding logic

Mowing professionals share why they sharpen mower blades in-house or outsource the task. *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*



In-house grinding tends to be a money saver, whereas outsourced grinding saves on time, maintenance professionals say.

Rood Landscape has sharpened its mower blades in-house for so long the brand marker on its grinder is no longer visible. Accordingly, Maintenance Department Manager Jaron Sickler can't conjure from memory what manufacturer's name once bedecked the machine.

None of that is important, though, he says. The grinder still operates to standard for the Hobe Sound, Fla.-based company. The shop mechanic uses it to sharpen 20 sets of blades two to three times per week, providing quick replacements of dull blades with freshly and correctly sharpened ones.



Jaron Sickler

That handiness is why Rood has done in-house grinding for so long instead of outsourced grinding, Sickler says.

"I like it in-house for the fact I have

more control over it," he says. "The biggest advantage is the turnaround time and we can make sure it's done right."

Contradictorily, Ben Bowen uses the same logic—ensuring blades are sharpened correctly—to reason why he outsources his grinding to Oregon Carbide Saw, a local sharpening service in Portland, Ore.



Ben Bowen

"To me, it's one less thing to worry about and I know it's being done properly," says the landscape manager of Ross NW Watergardens in Portland. "These people are professionals so I know they're getting the angle just right and they're balanced perfectly."

As part of outsourcing, Bowen has triple the amount of blades on-hand than necessary for his quantity of equipment so there's never a shortage of fresh blades for his team to rotate with. Employees

swap out blades as they see appropriate, putting dull blades in a box for Bowen to drop off at Oregon Carbide Saw every two to three weeks to be sharpened at \$7 a piece.

Although this process does eat into his financials, Bowen says the payoff is his team, which does not include a full-time mechanic, can work on more important tasks, rather than spend its time sharpening blades.

"Philosophy is part of it," he says. "We prefer to outsource stuff we don't enjoy or takes us away from the stuff we know we make money on."

While Bowen says he can't see a scenario where he'd purchase his own grinder, he understands why in-house grinding is suitable for some companies, due to volumes of mowing differing per location.

"If I was having to put new, sharp blades on a couple times per week that would probably change the math," he says. "(But) it's just about priorities for us."



Ben Talbert

Ben Talbert's philosophy aligns with Bowen's. The owner of Bay-Scapes Property Maintenance & Landscaping, based in Lusby, Md., has outsourced its grinding to a local dealer for the past three years.

And of the \$600 per month he spends on the grinding, Talbert says:

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"I eat it. It tears my wallet up to outsource, but it's a timesaver. I try to avoid spending time on business outside of work as much as I can."

He says he's humored the idea of purchasing his own grinder, but says it all boils down to personal preference.

"I base it on how much time it's going to take me versus how much time I want to spend on other stuff," Talbert says. "I can allocate a person or myself to work sales versus having to take an entire day to sharpen all of those correctly."

Mark Schifsky, owner of Association Maintenance in Shoreview, Minn., delegates the task of grinding to his company mechanic, who sharpens around 200 blades per week with a grinder Schifsky purchased nearly 20 years ago.

Schifsky has done in-house grinding since opening his company in 1988. It was in 1995, however, that he upgraded from a freestanding grinder to a more professional machine that better matched

his sharpening demand.

"That was a big step for me because that machine was \$5,000 to \$6,000," he says. "When I bought it, I didn't expect for it to last as long as it did with as little of care. Everything should last forever, it's just how much you put into to it."

The grinder, Schifsky says, has paid for itself due to the amount he's saved financially on in-house grinding versus paying someone else to do it.

Moreover, he says his blades have had longer life spans because he oversees whether they're sharpened at the correct angles, speeds and by qualified employees (per chance his mechanic is unavailable). For safety and performance reasons only about 10 of his 35 employees are allowed to use the grinder.

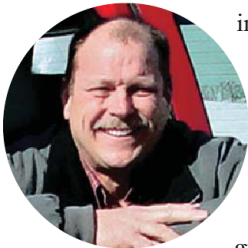
Another perk of in-house grinding, Schifsky adds, is the convenience of hav-

ing freshly sharpened blades at his facility versus having to travel to pick them up.

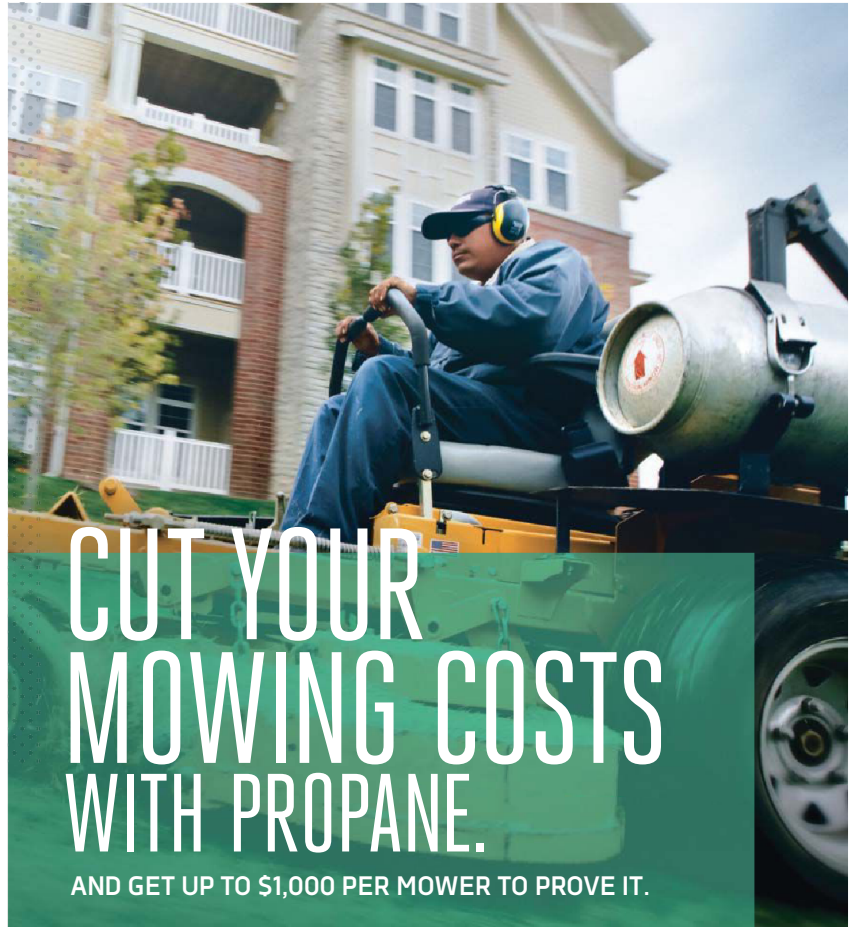
For those reasons, he says the notion of outsourced grinding is unfathomable to him—he jokes it's more likely he'd incorporate that as an add-on service for

his own company than resort to outsourcing himself.

"I've never heard of anybody outsourcing," he says. "Maybe that's something I need to be doing is sharpening everybody else's blades. ... I trim a nice blade."



Mark Schifsky



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