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INDUSTRY PULSE

THE YEAR THE WORLD INVESTED IN OUTSIDE

A tumultuous 2020 didn't hurt
the industry; it propelled it

December 2020 VOL 59, ISSUE 12

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HEADQUARTERS

1360 East 9th St., 10th Floor
Cleveland, OH 44114

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones

785/542-2627 | sjones@northcoastmedia.net

Senior Editor Abby Hart

216/706-3756 | ahart@northcoastmedia.net

Editor Christina Herrick

216/675-6009 | cherrick@northcoastmedia.net

Associate Editor Sarah Webb

216/363-7932 | swebb@northcoastmedia.net

Art Director Tracie Martinez

216/280-6127 | tmartinez@northcoastmedia.net

Graphic Designer Courtney Townsend

216/363-7931 | ctownsend@northcoastmedia.net

Jr. Graphic Designer Olivia Newman

216/706-3780 | onewman@northcoastmedia.net

Digital Media Content Producer Danielle Pesta

216/363-7928 | dpesta@northcoastmedia.net

ADVERTISING STAFF

Group Publisher Bill Roddy

216/706-3758 | broddy@northcoastmedia.net

Associate Publisher Craig MacGregor

216/706-3787 | cmacgregor@northcoastmedia.net

Eastern Regional Sales Manager Dan Hannan

216/363-7937 | dhannan@northcoastmedia.net

Western Regional Sales Manager Jake Goodman

216/363-7923 | jgoodman@northcoastmedia.net

Account Manager Chloe Scoular

216/363-7929 | cscoular@northcoastmedia.net

BUSINESS STAFF

Administrative Coordinator Petra Turko

216/706-3768 | pturko@northcoastmedia.net

Director of Marketing & Events Michelle Mitchell

216/363-7922 | mmitchell@northcoastmedia.net

Marketing Manager Margot Kelley

216/706-3772 | mkelley@northcoastmedia.net

Events Manager Allison Blong

216/363-7936 | ablong@northcoastmedia.net

Manager, Production Services Terri Johnstone

216/978-9622 | tjohnstone@northcoastmedia.net

Senior Audience Development Manager

Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins

216/706-3750 | asanchez-perkins@northcoastmedia.net

MARKETING/MAGAZINE SERVICES

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northcoastmedia@wrightsmedia.com

List Rental Brahm Schenkman,

The Information Refinery, Inc

800/529-9020 | bschenkman@infofinery.com

Subscriber, Customer Service

847/513-6030 | landscapemanagement@omeda.com

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CORPORATE OFFICERS

President & CEO Kevin Stoltman

216/706-3740 | kstoltman@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Finance & Operations Steve Galperin

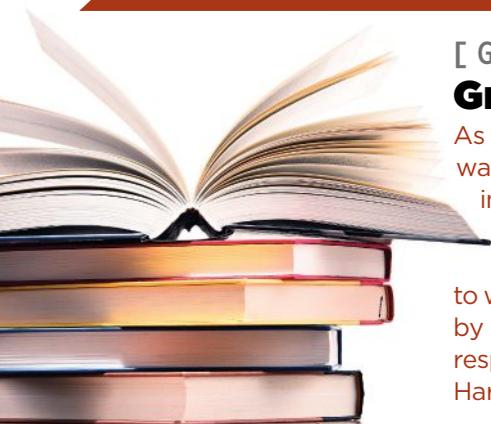
216/706-3705 | sgalperin@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Graphic Design & Production Pete Seltzer

216/706-3737 | pseltzer@northcoastmedia.net

Editorial Director Marty Whitford

216/706-3766 | mwhitford@northcoastmedia.net



[GIVEAWAY]

Growing into 2021

As the year 2020 comes to an end, we want to know how you plan to grow into 2021. Tell us how you're strategizing for growth in the coming year and you could be selected to win one of five copies of "Traction" by Gino Wickman. Email your responses to LM Senior Editor Abby Hart at ahart@northcoastmedia.net.

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Contact Jones at 785-542-2627,
sjones@northcoastmedia.net or
via Twitter @sethajones.



2020 hindsight

There's a photo my mom really loved of me and my dad that she blew up to supersize and hung in our house. Now, it resides in my house. In the photo, my dad and I are in the mountains in Washington. I'm crouched on a boulder, Dad is sitting next to me and mountains and evergreens as far as the eye can see surround us. I'm probably 16 in the photo.

Every time I look at the picture, I ask myself the same thing: Why on earth was I wearing a neon pink jacket in what would have otherwise been a really great photo?

You know the saying. Hindsight is 20/20.

I wonder what our 2020 hindsight will be?

We wrap up the year this month with our annual Industry Pulse Report, sponsored by our friends at Cub Cadet. We surveyed our readers and asked the usual questions: What was your net profit for 2020? What are your expectations for next year? What percentage of your clients did you retain this year?

In a treasured photo with his dad, Jones sports a bold fashion choice.

And, we also asked the unusual questions 2020 wrote for us: Was your company

shut down because of the pandemic? (70 percent said no); Has implementing COVID-19 safety protocols been a significant cost to your company? (Fifty-seven percent said it was insignificant.)

For the Industry Pulse Report, we always rely on our readers to give us insights on the year that was and what they expect of the year to come. You, the reader, are the boots-on-the-ground person seeing the day to day of the industry. In other words, you're the ones saving me from putting on another neon pink jacket like I did in 1993. And for this issue, you're the ones who told us, "You know what ... despite all the bad news, this has still been a really amazing year, and next year has the potential to surpass it."

Here's a smattering of responses we received from our survey, using an online random number generator for fairness. The question was, "What is your economic outlook for 2021 and what is driving this response?"

"I'm cautiously optimistic — hopefully COVID-related challenges will ease by July."

"My optimism is high. Landscapers were deemed essential in Georgia, and all my customers have been staying home for work. They are all fixing up their landscapes."

"Very optimistic. Hope for the best, prepare for the worst. I'm 69 years old and have been through the highs and the lows. Do the best you can and live by the Bible's principles."

"Uncertain. We work mainly for developers and builders, and they are still building many homes here in Florida. We are in a housing shortage down here."

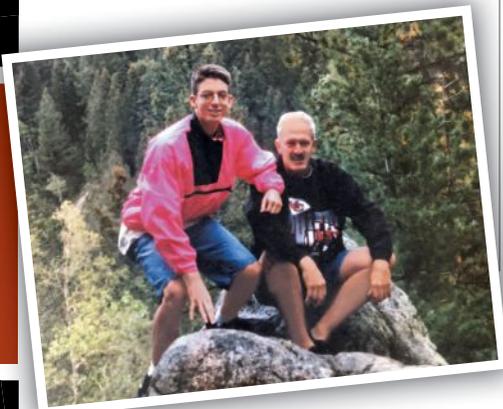
While I have the random number generator at work here, let me take this space to announce the winners of

“For this issue, you're the ones who told us, 'You know what ... despite all the bad news, this has still been a really amazing year, and next year has the potential to surpass it.'”

our drawing for those who participated in our survey. They are Kyle Blessing at Blessing Property Maintenance; Chris Speen at Twin Oaks Landscaping; and Steve Curran at U.S. Lawns of Fort Collins ... you all get a \$100 gift card as a thank you for taking the survey. And to Rob Kurtz of Veteran Landscaping, I'm buying lunch for you and your crew as a thank you for your insights.

If anyone would like to see all of the responses to the above question (some are pretty hilarious, and as you can imagine, more than a few are political), I'm just an email away. We'll use some of the questions and answers that didn't make this issue, like "Has the lower cost of fuel impacted your business?" and "Is there any equipment that has helped your company become more efficient?" in future issues of the magazine.

What has been a tumultuous year has come to a close. There's no telling what 2021 will bring, but my 2020 hindsight today tells me that we'll remember 2020 as the year the world invested in outside. Hopefully 2021 brings even more of those investments. Only time will tell. 🍷



EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD



MORE ONLINE

See more great advice and complete answers from our Editorial Advisory Board in the online version of this feature at LandscapeManagement.net.

How would you describe the current state of the landscape industry?



“Most I talk with are optimistic for next year, but (they are) being careful about debt and planning too far out until we see the effects of the virus and the election on the economy and consumer confidence.”

“I think next year will be a big one for landscapers, especially residential ones. The challenge is going to be getting enough workers to do the work. You better be taking care of the ones you’ve got, for starters. Making your place a great place to work is the best recruiting tool you’ve got!”



“The current state of the industry is a local question, but it’s less relevant than the current state of your business, team and plan of attack.”



Landscape Professionals

Richard Bare
Arbor-Nomics Turf
Norcross, Ga.

Troy Clogg
Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Paul Fraynd
Sun Valley Landscaping
Omaha, Neb.

Luke Henry
ProScape Lawn & Landscaping Services
Marion, Ohio

Chris Joyce
Joyce Landscaping
Cape Cod, Mass.

Aaron Katerberg
Grapids Irrigation
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jerry McKay
McKay Landscape Lighting
Omaha, Neb.

Bryan Stolz
Winterberry Landscape & Garden Center
Southington, Conn.

Greg Winchel
Winchel Irrigation
Grandville, Mich.

Industry Consultants

Dan Gordon
TurfBooks
Newton, N.J.

Marty Grunder
The Grow Group
Dayton, Ohio

Phil Harwood
Grow the Bench
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Kevin Kehoe
3PG Consulting
Laguna, Calif.

Jeffrey Scott
Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.



“The landscape industry is in a tremendous position to capitalize on the cocooning effect of homeowners, the universal joy of being outdoors and a renewed effort to support local businesses.”



“I would say it’s currently as good as it gets. The companies that are highly organized and well-staffed are the ones that can capitalize.”



“Construction backlog is OK, and lawns have to be mowed. The sooner this thing ends, the more we will know about the long-term impact on commercial property management.”



OUR MISSION: *Landscape Management* shares a comprehensive mix of content designed to stimulate growth and take our readers to their next level.

Highlights of The Grow Group's Fall Field Trip

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

“What’s your ideal client?” Marty Grunder asked attendees toward the start of The Grow Group’s Fall Field Trip, held at Grunder Landscaping Co. (GLC) in Dayton, Ohio on Oct. 28-29.

There was a different feel for the Fall Field Trip. Attendees wore masks at all times and networked while remaining socially distant.

Grunder told the 25 landscape professionals that identifying GLC’s ideal client helps shape so much of what the company does. Grunder was proud to show off his employees during the two-day event, and his employees, in turn, relished in promoting Grunder Landscaping Co.

“Let your people talk about what you do,” he said. “It’s fun for them.”

Grunder said he stresses GLC’s mission to employees ad nauseam.

“One of the signs that you’re on track is when you find your employees making fun of you,” he said, noting employees may roll their eyes at this focus on the mission statement, but there is a reason for doing so. “They’re not just words on a paper. They’re how we operate. This is our owner’s manual.”



Grunder Landscaping Co. employees shared some of the ins and outs of GLC’s departments during the tour. Grunder challenged attendees to quiz his staff on GLC’s mission during the presentations.

When someone asked Dalton Yates, director of design/build for GLC, what his company’s mission statement was, he effortlessly answered: “To enhance the beauty and value of every client’s property while exceeding their expectations every step of the way.”

Marty Grunder and The Grow Group hosted a socially distanced field trip in October.

Trump press conference brings Four Seasons Total Landscaping into the news

President Donald Trump’s legal team hosted its Nov. 7, 2020 press conference at Four Seasons Total Landscaping — a Philadelphia-based landscape company, as reported by *The Marketplace*. The press conference occurred while Pennsylvania’s mail-in ballots for the Nov. 3, 2020 election were still being counted.

The company garnered notoriety from this event on Saturday Night Live, where it was name-checked by Kate McKinnon playing Trump’s lawyer Rudy Giuliani.

“Our team at Four Seasons would have proudly hosted any presidential candidate’s campaign at our business,” a statement from Four Seasons said.

“We strongly believe in America and in democracy. We hope that our fellow Americans can join together and support all local small businesses during this time.”

After becoming a viral sensation, the business promoted merchandise on its website, setting up a section with \$50 hoodies, \$25 T-shirts and stickers that say, “Make America Rake Again” and “Lawn and Order!”

The family-owned business has been operating since 1992, and has provided services to clients like the Philadelphia International Airport. It provides landscape maintenance and snow services to a primarily commercial clientele, according to the company’s website.

FNGLA becomes Project EverGreen affiliate partner

The Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association (FNGLA) joined Project EverGreen as an affiliate partner.

The two groups will support landscape pros, local businesses, municipalities and community leaders to grow the maintained green space footprint in Florida.

“FNGLA is a vibrant industry association whose members are dedicated professionals working to enhance green spaces throughout the state of Florida,” said Cindy Code, executive director of Project EverGreen. “FNGLA’s participation not only expands our mission and programs in Florida to help more communities and military families in need of healthy, vibrant yards, landscapes and parks, but it also celebrates the generosity of FNGLA’s landscape contractor and production nursery members.”

Luv-A-Lawn and Pest Control acquires Lawn Supreme Services

Luv-A-Lawn and Pest Control of St. Cloud, Fla., acquired Lawn Supreme Services of Rockledge, Fla. Terms of the agreement were not disclosed.

This is Luv-A-Lawn’s first entry into Brevard County and the Space Coast of Florida.

Lawn Supreme Services will join Luv-A-Lawn’s other four offices in Florida and will operate under the Luv-A-Lawn brand.

GIE+EXPO ToGo adds new education sessions

The GIE+EXPO ToGo online portal now has 12 new on-demand, free education sessions. GIE+EXPO ToGo offers four tracks: landscape contractor, dealer/retailer, grounds management and hardscape. It can be accessed anytime, anywhere at GIE-Expo.com through the end of 2020.

“This year has presented new opportunities that have pushed the green industry to the limits but also allowed us to emerge better and stronger versions of ourselves,” said Sara Hey of Bob Clements International. “As we look forward to 2021, now is the time to make a plan for how you are going to maintain the momentum of 2020. What better way to reenergize and start the planning process than to engage with some of the training you would have found at GIE+EXPO, the centerpiece of industry education.”

Visitors will also find exhibitor listings for GIE+EXPO and Hardscape North America, a new product spotlight and resources such as product specs, demo videos, special event links and brochures.



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DESPITE THE NEWS,



2020 saw a major uptick in homeowners wanting to update and beautify their outdoor spaces.

AN AMAZING YEAR

Despite bad news on TV, it was good news outdoors for the lawn care and landscape industry

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The final days of 2020 are here, giving us a chance to take a moment to reflect on what was a difficult — and yet positive — year.

Social unrest, record-setting wildfires and hurricanes and a contentious presidential election weren't enough for 2020. Throw in a global pandemic for good measure.

But, the results of the 2020 *LM* Industry Pulse survey, sponsored by Cub Cadet, show an industry thrilled with the season that was, despite all the bad news and the challenges of doing business. While the nightly news showed a nation in turmoil, the daytime reality for companies in the lawn care and landscape business was they were busier than ever, with the nation more appreciative and in need of their expertise than ever before.

According to respondents of the 2020 *LM* Industry Pulse survey, 31 percent say their local market was up significantly, with another 39 percent reporting it was slightly up. Only 16 percent report their market was down, and 14 percent say they were flat. Optimism for 2021 is also high; 46 percent are somewhat opti-

mistic, and 36 percent are very optimistic, while only 7 percent say they are pessimistic. Eleven percent say they are uncertain.

"Honestly, it was amazing; we had a good year overall," says Jeremy Elliott, owner of myLawn! Turf & Tree in Great Bend, Kan. "There was the stress and the unknown in the early spring, not knowing how the whole COVID situation was going to pan out, but overall, as the season progressed, it was awesome — everything, from our clients to our team. I expected things to be worse, especially with my team missing work or the fear of coming to work, but there was none of that. 2020, believe it or not, was pretty amazing."

Andrew Gabries, owner of Go Green in West Chester, Pa., says the difficulties of 2020 made homeowners care more for their outdoor spaces than ever before.

"We did not lose as much work as we thought we would, when everyone said the world was going to end, and we were all going to die," Gabries says. "The year turned out better than we thought. It was a horrible winter with no snow in the Northeast and a scary spring with the COVID (pandemic), but it all turned out better

than we expected. It was a good year overall."

One respondent sums up his feelings of optimism mixed with pessimism based on the uncertainty of having enough labor to satisfy the workload. The respondent writes, "Business has significantly picked up since September, and now we have a shortage of manpower with more work than ever. We could be doing double the work if we had the employees to do it."

Elliott says he's highly optimistic for 2021 based on what he saw in 2020.

"God willing, it will be another 20 to 30 percent growth (in 2021)," he says. "That's what we're expecting. I really think next year, we'll have a better handle on the way COVID is. I know what it would look like in a perfect world, but that's not what we're dealing with."



"2020, believe it or not, was pretty amazing."

— **JEREMY ELLIOTT**, owner, myLawn! Turf & Tree



Andrew Gabries



[WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR]

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Growing the green industry together

Over the past 10 months, we've all experienced and endured unprecedented change in our lives. Personally and professionally, it's been a difficult year for many. The green industry has been impacted in both positive and negative ways, but we're fortunate that more people are choosing to spend time outside — beautifying their backyards for safe gatherings and enjoying community parks and open spaces. As a result, we have seen significant investments in tools and materials. At the same time, some lawn maintenance professionals have struggled with the uncertainty around canceled contracts and a move toward more homeowners doing their own mowing given stay-at-home orders.

While concerns still loom as the pandemic stretches out, the industry seems to be adjusting and looking forward to growth over the next year. As landscapers start to resume capital investments in mowing equipment, we expect a heightened focus in products that drive efficiency, like stand-on mowers and fuel-efficient components like EFI engines.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I was fortunate enough to visit with landscapers across the country as we developed and tested our new stand-on mower lineup. Understanding and building products that meet the needs of professionals have been essential to the growth and success of our commercial solutions.

We have found new ways to connect and partner with our customers in developing the future generations of mowing equipment that will deliver a new, huge leap in efficiency for the commercial cutter.

For 2021, Cub Cadet is extending our stand-on lineup to include a 36-inch offering. The 36-inch stand-ons are quickly growing in popularity because of their speed and efficiency on smaller properties that traditionally required push mowing. Additionally, we are launching new EFI offerings along with a power-assist bagger for our Pro Z commercial zero-turn mowers. We are dedicated to exceeding the expectations of our customers by partnering with them through every step of the development process.

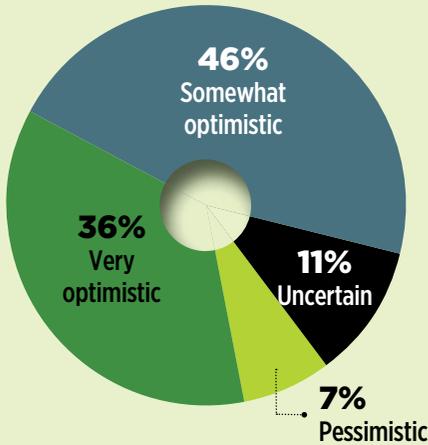
Through rigorous field testing and research like this Industry Pulse, we're proud to deliver innovative products that help build your business.

JOSH SOOY,
*Director, Professional
 Business Segment,
 Cub Cadet*

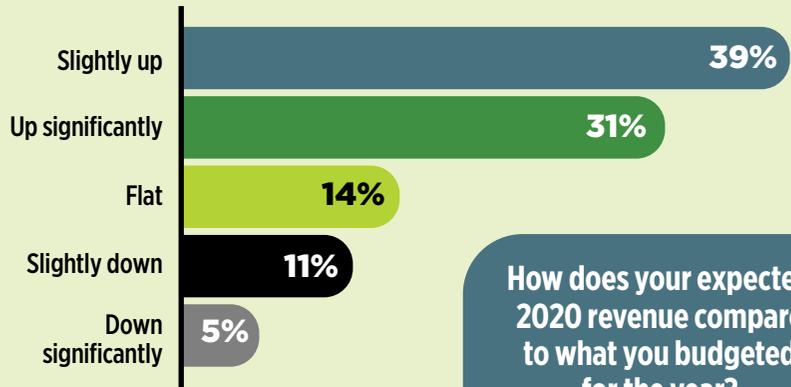




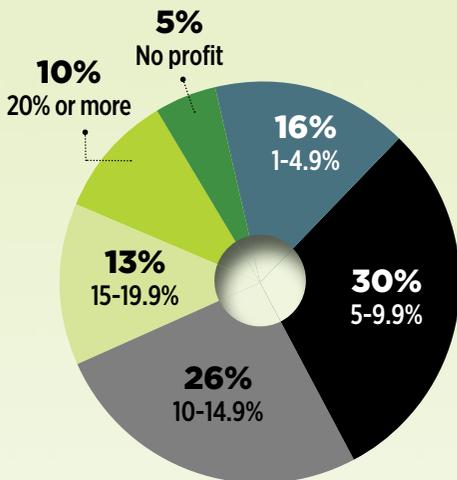
What's your 2021 business outlook?



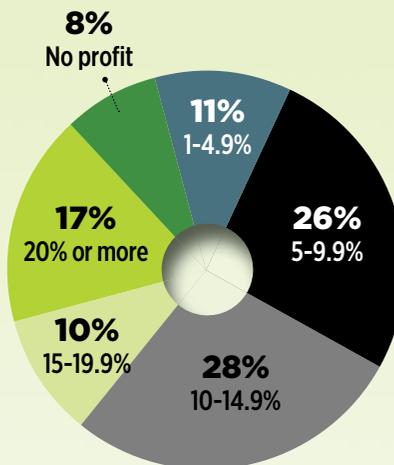
What is the state of the landscape and lawn care service market in your area?



What was your 2019 net profit?



What do you anticipate your 2020 net profit will be?

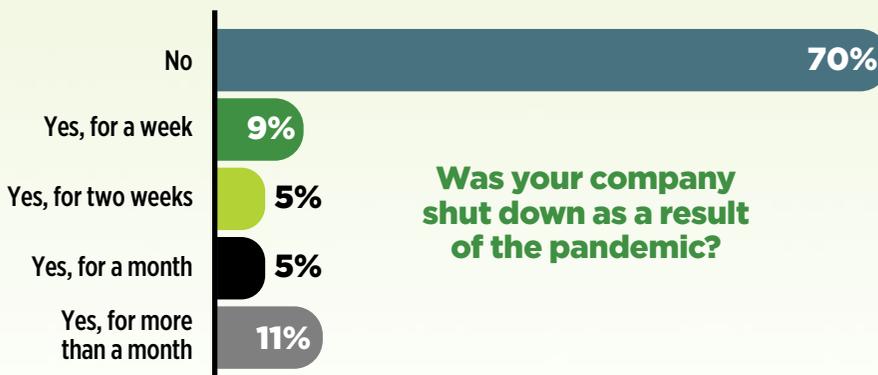
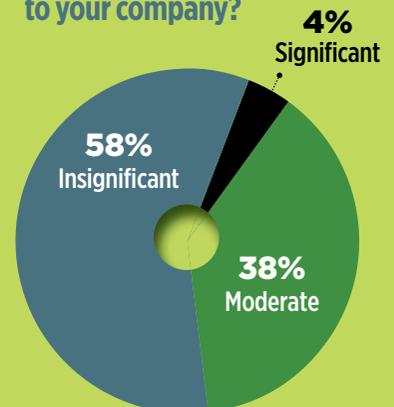


How does your expected 2020 revenue compare to what you budgeted for the year?

- We'll beat our revenue goal. **45%**
- We'll just meet our revenue goal. **25%**
- We won't make our revenue goal. **25%**
- What budget? We don't have one. **4%**

**does not add up to 100 due to rounding*

Has implementing pandemic safety protocols been a significant cost to your company?



Was your company shut down as a result of the pandemic?

Continued from page 9

A YEAR OF STEADY INCREASED DEMAND

Landscape companies are meeting pandemic-related production and operation challenges and finding new opportunities

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

It's been a common thread throughout 2020 for many landscape companies, according to this year's Industry Pulse results — more people working from home has led to more business.

"It's been nonstop — we've had a lot of referrals and a lot of new clients," says Tom Pilon, owner of Perfect Earth Landscape in Louisville, Ky. The company provides design/build and maintenance services to a primarily high-end residential client base.

Pilon says keeping production on pace with demand has been a struggle, in addition to figuring out which potential clients are window shopping and which are serious about investing

in a landscape project.

He adds that turning around estimates for clients has been tough. "The challenge has been efficiency — getting our customer service up to the right level and touching back with everybody," he says.

To help manage the day-to-day operations, Pilon's hoping to phase out QuickBooks software in 2021 and use a more sophisticated customer software. "We have it built out really well, but it doesn't provide us with a whole segment of daily operations use — work orders, routing, client communications — so we do a lot of double and



Tom Pilon

triple work," he says.

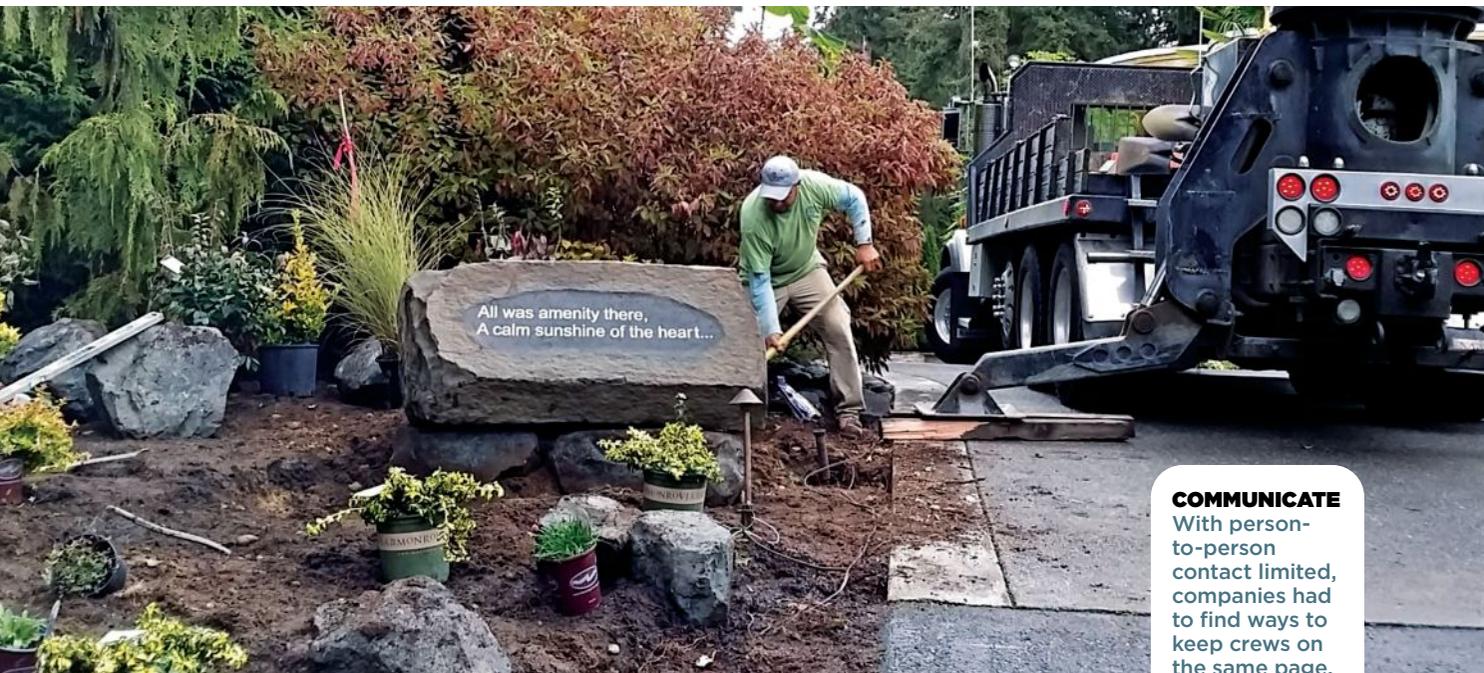
"It's going to be a big learning curve and a slow process, but it's something that needs to get implemented," he adds.

Communication hurdles

Alan Burke, president and landscape architect for Classic Nursery & Landscape Co. in Woodinville, Wash., says communication has been an obstacle since the beginning of the pandemic.

Because of the person-to-person nature of the company and employees coming to work on staggered

Continued on page 14



COMMUNICATE

With person-to-person contact limited, companies had to find ways to keep crews on the same page.



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Continued from page 12

shifts for social distancing reasons, the internal communication has felt a bit disjointed.

"It makes it difficult to convey information to everyone all at once as we used to," he says. "That makes it tougher to engender a company culture."

Classic Nursery & Landscape Co., a \$2.4 million company providing primarily residential design/build services, also includes a 10-acre nursery. Burke expects the firm to beat its net profit goal for 2020. The company was shut down for six weeks in March and April, but since returning to work and adjusting to the virtual format of presenting to clients, it's seen some upsides.

"We've been gratified to see how easy it's been to have Zoom meetings, and I wish I'd done that earlier now," Burke says.

Silver linings

Burke also points out another result of the pandemic: no noticeable busy or slow seasons.

"There's really been no seasonality here — such as when kids go back to school or people go on vacation — so this has become a seamless time, and we didn't see the ups and downs we normally see during the summer and fall," Burke says, explaining that it's made planning easier.

Keeping up with the increased demand over the entire year has meant creating some new processes,

including Kanban, a workflow method used in the tech industry.

"For us, this means having a lean inventory, with everything clearly labeled and a process whereby we set up our projects as a series of tasks that move from a 'to-do' to a 'doing' to a 'done' type of Kanban category strategy," Burke explains.

Six months ago, the company began using Asana, a free cloud-based software, so managers

can track tasks as they move through the process. "Being able to know that the designer can track things online has led to an easing of production," he says.

"It's been pretty revolutionary for us, and it's easy to set up."

In looking at the challenges over the past nine months, Burke says he's reminded of the last economic crisis — the Great Recession of 2008-2009. During that time, the company went from

50 people to 17. "There was a time when I was laying off two or three people every Friday," he recalls. "It was professionally and mentally debilitating."

Luckily, he hasn't had to lay people off this year, and he's found an unexpected positive in the current situation. "The thing with this pandemic is I'm not worried like I was before — not just because we have so much business, but because the recession steeled me to understand that we can get through anything."



"The thing with this pandemic is I'm not worried like I was before — not just because we have so much business, but because the recession steeled me to understand that we can get through anything."

— ALAN BURKE, president and landscape architect, Classic Nursery & Landscape Co.

THE HIGH AND LOW OF LABOR

Landscape companies explain how they've retained their best workers, despite the difficulties encompassing 2020

BY SARAH WEBB
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Labor continues to be a challenge for landscape companies, according to the results of the 2020 LM Industry Pulse survey.

In fact, one respondent says, "Today's workforce is changing big time. Even employees that have been with me for three to four years have a hard time showing up to work. Money and bonuses do not motivate them anymore. The 18- to 30-year-old workforce has no motivation and high expectations."

Still, several companies are trying new recruitment and retention practices, resulting in low employee turnover and high employee satisfaction.

Bringing on more hands

To help recruit new employees, New Castle Lawn & Landscape in Birdsboro, Pa., implemented an employee referral program this year.

The referring employee receives a \$100 bonus if the new employee has stayed on after 60 days, \$300 when the new employee has stayed for six months and \$800 when the new employee has stayed on for 18 months, according to co-owner Brad Stephenson.



GreenScape, a maintenance, hardscape and irrigation firm in Bartlett, Tenn., advertises in local English and Spanish daily newspapers and with radio spots to attract new crew members, according to President Kathryn Hetzler.

For upper and middle management, GreenScape says its summer internship program has worked wonders, with several current employees who worked with the company during the summers as interns returning full time once they obtained their degree.

Diversity and inclusion

A minority- and women-owned business, GreenScape says it has been cognizant of promoting diversity since its founding.

"A company can have all the proper information in their employee manual and educational training sessions for employees, but unless you live it as part of your corporate structure, it's not really going to be inclusive," says Hetzler, noting that when she started in the irrigation industry in the '90s, she was one

of the only women she knew of in the field.

To promote diversity in its ranks, New Castle converted all its documentation into Spanish, including its website and company newsletters. Additionally, a translator attends company meetings to relay important information.

"We are finding that people are feeling like part of the team, especially now that everything is bilingual," Stephenson says. "It definitely eliminates communication issues."

A steady ship

GreenScape and New Castle Lawn & Landscape both have tried to act as a steady force for employees in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Lack of communication can lead to uncertainty, which can affect motivation," Hetzler says. "Our goal is to make sure our employees are well informed about not only safety adjustments, but to reinforce during these uncertain times GreenScape is here to help."

Taking this a step further, when the pandemic started to take hold in March, New Castle's Stephenson recorded and emailed out daily video recorded messages about protecting employees' mindsets and getting their life organized.

"He would give a shoutout to all of the team members, just saying 'we're going to get through this,' and offering encouragement because there was a lot of uncertainty," says Stacey Carmello, sales manager for New Castle. "People's fear subsided and they were like, 'hey, we're just going to keep doing a good job.' The communication from leadership during the whole period has been incredible."

ALL WELCOME
New Castle co-owners Brian Cuccaro (left) and Brad Stephenson aim to create an inclusive workplace.

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Continued from page 15

BRIDGING THE GAP WITH TECHNOLOGY

How companies are using technology to keep pace with growth and address labor issues

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

This has been a good year for many in the green industry. The majority of respondents to our Industry Pulse say that improving their company's efficiencies through new equipment and software has helped boost their 2020 bottom line.

A big change Prolific Landscape in Wind Gap, Pa., implemented this year was the switch to Buildertrend for project management. Jason

Kaniper, owner and president of Prolific Land-

scape, says this move has simplified some of the company's duplicate data entry.

"We now have one system that will be used for lead activities, notes, pictures,

proposals and to convert the lead to a job for scheduling, invoicing, tracking, notes, job site pics, files and more," he says. "From the management side, it will significantly save time and allows the jobs to be more transparent throughout the company. The project manager and foreman have access to design files, presale notes and pictures available prior to or during a project."

Levi Duckett, president and owner of Sunshine Landscape in Meridian, Idaho, says his company has increased revenue by \$2 million from 2019 to 2020. Sunshine Landscape provides

landscape design/build and installation, maintenance and snow and ice management services for primarily commercial and government clients.

Duckett and Sunshine Landscape implemented some big changes this year by switching to LMN software, adding Geotab GPS tracking on the company's trucks and shifting to the Enterprise Fleet Management program for the company's trucks. In fact, he says he plans to move to leasing all large equipment because of how satisfied he's been with the fleet management program.

Duckett says he likes the data Geotab provides on his trucks and his drivers. Sunshine Landscape gets diagnostic alerts on any of the fleet's service needs, and he says his team can understand how efficient the routes are and how safe his drivers are being.

"If they're going too fast, it will send an alert," he says. "If they're not wearing their seat belt, it will tell us."

Duckett says with the data his company has gleaned from Geotab, he's looking to add software to better manage the service needs of Sunshine Landscape's equipment, too.

Making use of machines

David Rindfleisch, director of business development for Sun State Landscape Management in Parrish, Fla., says his company has opted to add equipment to help address the issues of labor availability.



"We cannot keep people. We've tried everything," he says. "A lot of our industry is at that point because we can't keep staffed enough. With that, my answer is to automate everything and use as much machinery as we can."

Sun State provides design/build and installation, maintenance and irrigation services for commercial clientele.

His company has added Toro TRX walk-behind trenchers and Toro Z Master 7500 D 96-inch deck mowers to the fleet. He says the large mowers have improved efficiency enough to add another \$500,000 in commercial contracts. The company, in turn, bought two more of the 96-inch deck mowers.

"I can run a machine 14 hours a day. It doesn't matter if it's 95 degrees, and it doesn't matter if it's going to run seven days a week or six days a week; that's what we've done," Rindfleisch says. "If we need to bring on another machine, we'll bring on another machine."

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Jason Kaniper



Levi Duckett

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BUSTING MYTHS AND (QUIETLY) TAKING NAMES

Experts debunk misconceptions about battery-powered handheld equipment

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Battery power has quietly been making its way into handheld equipment for years, and many landscape professionals have reaped the benefits of using the tools.

“Landscape professionals enjoy battery (power) for the ease of use and not having to mix gas and oil; virtually no maintenance, such as fuel-related issues; reduced noise and vibration; and no exhaust emissions,” says Mike Poluka, product manager for Stihl. “Plus, (landscape pros) are often up against certain HOA or government regulations that prohibit the use of gas equipment. They need an alternative that satisfies that regulation and gives them the performance they need.”

While there’s still progress to be made, several experts agree that the technology will continue to improve in the years to come.

“I believe that the turning point for this new trend to really take off is right around the corner,” says Mike Gunn, president of Gunn Landscaping in Noblesville, Ind. “With the trend of electric vehicles in the automotive industry, they have really driven the improvements in our current battery technology

that can be implemented within the green industry.”

Poluka, Gunn and Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management in Hillsboro, Ore., share their experiences using battery-powered handheld equipment to bust a few myths about battery power that still pervade the green industry.

Battery equipment can offer safety benefits for crew members, including fewer emissions and vibrations.

Myth #1: BATTERIES DON'T GENERATE ENOUGH POWER TO COMPETE WITH GAS-POWERED EQUIPMENT.

This year, Gunn Landscaping ran two gas-powered standard professional grade trimmers as well as Echo’s 58-volt trimmer all on the same trailer setup. Gunn says the 58-volt trimmer has as much as, if not more power, than the standard two-cycle alternatives.

“This was just to see if the battery power could take over as far as employee favoritism and convenience,” Gunn says. “It was also as easy as the pull of a trigger, and boom, you’re trimming. We need to remember that battery technology really is just as

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BATTERY-POWERED EQUIPMENT GUIDE



Several landscape pros tout the benefits of slowly introducing battery equipment, instead of transitioning everything at once.

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boundless if not more so as any combustion alternative and will only improve.”

Currently in the “experimental” phase of implementing battery-powered equipment into its daily operations, Gunn Landscaping uses battery-powered equipment from Stihl, Echo, DeWalt and Makita. The company provides lawn care, maintenance and design/build services to a 70 percent residential, 30 percent commercial clientele.

Grover, on the other hand, started implementing battery power at Pacific Landscape Management about three years ago, and he says the technology has come a long way as far as power.

“The first equipment we tried three years ago, the battery didn’t last as long, and it didn’t generate as much power,” he says. “I believe that the technology will continue to improve.”

Pacific Landscape uses battery-powered blowers, string trimmers, hedge trimmers, edgers, chainsaws

and hand tools like drills and saws. The equipment the company uses comes from a variety of manufacturers, including Stihl, Oregon and DeWalt.

“We’re wanting to stay on the forefront of technology, and we’re always curious when we see new developing technology come along,” Grover says. “The battery blowers in particular stem back to our environmental concern because small gas engines are very polluting, and if we can come up with a solution that is efficient and cost effective, we would love to lower our use of that polluting equipment in our operation.”

Overall, Grover says the biggest thing is to not give up on the idea of battery equipment.

“If we go back to electric cars of 10 years ago, now we have Tesla,” he says. “People were skeptical of cars, and you could go 150 miles. Now you can go 400. Let’s have faith in our manufacturers developing the technology to where it’s working and affordable.”

Myth #2: BATTERIES CAN’T PROVIDE THE RUN TIME TO GET THROUGH A FULL WORKDAY.

Overcoming the perception from previous battery technology that batteries can’t provide a full day of run time is a major challenge, according to Poluka.

Poluka says with old battery technology, certain tools would lose performance as the battery was depleting.

“(However), when you look to the new lithium-ion technology, those batteries provide constant power throughout the whole state of charge,” he says.

While the batteries will offer the amount of run time landscapers can expect on a tank of fuel, they need to be able to recharge them. Therefore, Poluka says they should consider that they may need additional batteries in the fleet to be able to work throughout the day.

Gunn adds that while some users view battery power with great skepticism, he believes the introduction of the solid-state battery, which is currently undergoing development in the auto industry, will bring the equipment one step further in addressing any run time issues.

“It is only a matter of time before that battery trickles down to other things like our handheld tools, mowers, etc.,” Gunn says. “This solid-state

battery, which replaces liquid electrolytes with a solid, is really said to be the Holy Grail of battery technology. I feel that it will resolve a lot of the current issues with using lithium-ion."

He says the solid-state technology can last up to 30 years holding on to more than 90 percent of its original performance and can take far less time charging.

"So, if you can imagine, for example, your trimmers, when they are on the racks in the enclosed trailer and you are in between lawns, they can be essentially charging on a charging rack of some sort," he says.

Myth #3: IMPLEMENTING BATTERY POWER IS AN ALL-OR-NONE SCENARIO.

While there are many benefits to battery equipment, Grover says that at this point, companies should be wary of adopting an "all or none" attitude when it comes to the technology.

"It works on some routes, and it doesn't work on other routes," he says, noting that the company may not use all battery-powered equipment when it takes care of properties that have wide expanses.

On the other hand, when crews service small properties in downtown Portland, Ore., where they may go up elevators to access a site, they use battery-powered equipment.

He also notes that there is growing potential legislation, especially in certain municipalities in Oregon, to outlaw the use of small engine gas blowers, specifically.

"We're wanting to understand the battery equipment because it may become legislated that we would need to use it," he says. "Banning gas-powered equipment before the technology gets there is challenging. I think with people that want to be sustainable, sustainability is a process we're moving to. We need to be patient." 

PRO TIP:

When considering battery-powered equipment, Gunn notes that landscape contractors should be aware that many of the batteries are brand specific.

"This forces you to choose a specific brand and stick with it as you grow and add various pieces of equipment within the same brand that those batteries can interchange within," he says. "Do your homework and do the research necessary. Like anything, make sure you're buying the right tool for the job. It's no different from gas-powered equipment; there are different products for different applications."



To keep equipment up and running, experts recommend keeping extra batteries on hand.

Davison's 4 Seasons Landscaping can put up to 30 hours of run time on its Mulch Mate machines before they get sluggish.



NEW EQUIPMENT IN TOWN

A look at the battery-powered equipment that's recently rolled into the green industry

Handheld equipment has often taken center stage when it comes to battery-powered equipment in landscaping, but the time has come for those handhelds to share the spotlight with some new equipment that's recently made its way into the green industry.

"I can see this battery equipment catching on in the near future, especially with emission regulations and fuel becoming scarce or more expensive to produce," says Bruce Davison, owner of Davison's 4 Seasons Landscaping in Berlin, Ohio. "Once people try the equipment and appreciate the same work getting done, but without the loud engines, I feel they'll be switching by the droves."

Landscape Management spoke to landscape contractors and manufacturers for their take on the latest battery-powered sprayers, material movers and mowers.

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

MIGHTY MATERIAL MOVERS

Davison's 4 Seasons Landscaping has been using Mulch Mate for two seasons now, Davison says.

"Honestly, I was looking for something to help speed up loading wheelbarrows, and this machine did that," Davison says. "Only, once we started using it every day, we realized how nice it was being so quiet with no running engines and with no fuel fumes."

Craig Carlson, founder of Mulch Mate, says the lack of noise the Mulch Mate produces is what sets it apart from gas-powered machines.

For example, he says, in order to run hydraulic power, landscape pros need a gas or diesel engine running constantly to provide that hydraulic pressure,

but with the Mulch Mate, it doesn't run except when users touch the joystick.

"You're using that battery power to energize the motors to pull in the material and transport the material only when you're pressing the joystick," Carlson says. "You can go into a community at 7 a.m. and start running mulch, while with some of the other gas-powered products, you can't."

Carlson recalls performing a job in a mostly enclosed church courtyard, in which people were having lunch nearby. "We were running our machine, dispensing mulch, and not one person complained about the noise," he says. "When you walk up and drop your wheelbarrow on the ground to fill it, it makes more noise than our machine does."

As far as challenges go, Carlson says it's important to pay attention to the condition of the batteries and the amount of charge left in the battery.

"Battery power is so easy and convenient and almost effortless that sometimes guys forget that they have to be charged," he says. "The biggest thing that still deters people is they think it's not going to last long enough. That used to be the case, but as battery technology keeps getting better, the run time keeps getting longer as well."

Davison says if the company didn't charge the Mulch Mate batteries, the machine can run for up to a week; in the week the company tested out that theory, the machine moved 150 yards of mulch and ran for 30 hours.

To remedy any battery issues, though, Davison suggests carrying extra batteries in the trailer, ready to go in the charging station.

In addition to keeping the batteries charged, Davison suggests landscape professionals be patient to allow small equipment dealers and repair shops to work through a learning curve in order to service the equipment.

SPRAY AWAY

Robert Palmer, owner of Turf Therapy, a lawn care consulting firm in Aberdeen, Md., says he's seen several lawn care operators (LCOs) incorporate the

"I believe there's a culture in our industry that people stick with what they know. New technology isn't always given a fair chance."

—NATE HYDE, MAINSCAPE

Jacto PJB-16 battery-powered backpack sprayer.

"It has a built-in pace-keeping feature along with the on-board regurgitator that will keep the solubles mixed well," he says. "The output pressure remains the same to the last drop, and it sprays out 99.99 percent of

whatever solution is in there."

Greg Imus, president of Jacto, says the newer backpack spray models get 50 percent more autonomy from the batteries, there are no emissions and they weigh less than manual sprayers, despite misconceptions that they're heavier.

"In the past, we'd get about 30 tanks of spraying, or eight hours of battery time; now, it's about 12 hours

Continued on page BP10



A major perk of battery-operated equipment is the lack of noise it generates.

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of battery time between charges,” he says. “Originally, on some battery products, they were more or less homeowner products, but now they’re very much professional products, and you’re seeing more people interested in battery power than ever before.”

Imus adds that with a battery-operated sprayer, LCOs get 100 percent consistency with the amount of spray because there’s no variation in the pressure as they spray.

He advises that when storing the batteries in the winter, users should keep them indoors versus in an unheated tool shed, garage or shop to help protect the overall battery life.

MEAN MOWERS

Mainscape, headquartered in Fishers, Ind., started off the year with an all-in approach when it came to electric equipment.

The company, which provides maintenance and installation services to 70 percent homeowner associations and 30 percent commercial clientele, set up a trailer that has battery-powered handheld equipment and three Mean Green mowers.



Experts say spray inconsistency is less of a concern when using battery-powered spray equipment.

“We committed one full electric rig that would never have gas on it and outfitted the trailer so that we could directly charge the trailer back at the office every night and just committed to that,” says Nate Hyde, vice president of Mainscape.

In addition to reducing noise, emissions and vibrations and saving on downtime, fuel and maintenance, Hyde says many customers appreciate the use of the mowers because they help support their sustainability initiatives.

“Those things are pretty friendly to our teams and to our customers,” he says.

While the mowers do have some run time limitations, Hyde says his company has yet to bump into them.

“We’re mowing a full day’s route, and our teams are working the same as they would with a gas-powered fleet,” Hyde says. “I think there’s a perception that if we’re working for eight hours, our mow time should be eight hours. The mow time is really about four hours in an eight-hour day.”

For other companies looking to incorporate electric mowers, Hyde says the rollout process is critical.

The company took the opportunity to reward one of its best crews and asked for their help in piloting the innovation.

“We said, ‘You are not allowed to use any gas-powered equipment on this rig ever,’ making sure they were as committed to the electric power as we were,” he says. “That eliminated the opportunity for it to fail. I believe there’s a culture in our industry that people stick with what they know. New technology is not always given a fair chance.”

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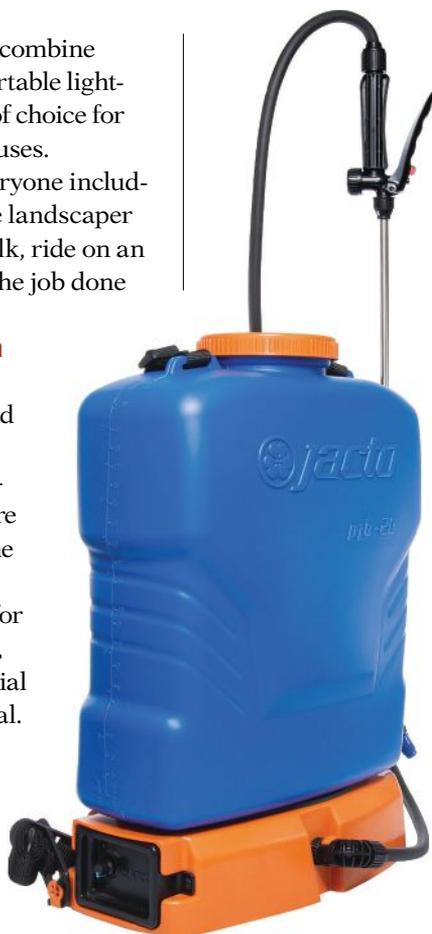
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Persistent problems

In part 2 of this series on pesky weeds, experts explain how to identify and control broadleaf plantain, spurge and doveweed

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR



BROADLEAF PLANTAIN

A perennial that grows in a rosette pattern and features a wide, shiny elliptical leaf with veins running parallel with the margins, broadleaf plantain can be found throughout much of the U.S. It often has short stems that form a U, like a celery stalk. The plantains can be seen during the entire growing season and can survive drought conditions when grasses start to go dormant. It germinates in the spring.

It's best controlled by common herbicides that contain 2,4-D or MCPA. Spring-applied herbicides often can desiccate above-ground foliage but do little to the below-ground structures, while fall-applied herbicides do a better job moving to the roots for a more effective kill.



DOVEWEED

Doveweed is a summer annual that may resemble St. Augustinegrass and is most problematic in warmer climates. It produces stolons, which enable it to spread laterally, and clusters of small blue or purple flowers. The leaves are long and narrow, and on the stem, leaves appear in an alternate arrangement. Doveweed germinates in late spring in southern states and becomes more conspicuous as it gets established by midsummer.

It thrives in poor-draining soil, so a healthy and dense turf canopy is the best cultural control. The key for post-emergent control of doveweed is to make applications early before the plants have produced any stolons. It's often necessary to make sequential applications about 14 days apart for complete control. Herbicides containing 2,4-D and dicamba can work well when applied sequentially and early. Spot sprays with ALS herbicides, those containing thiencarbazone and iodosulfuron, can be used to clean up misses later in the summer.



SPURGE

Spurge is a summer annual that germinates after crabgrass. It's a mat-forming weed that can root at the nodes. It's often confused with common purslane but is much less succulent and exudes a milky white sap when the stems are broken. It has red stems and green leaves often with purple or maroon spots in the middle of each leaf. Flowers on mature plants form on the axils of upper leaves. Spurge can be found around sidewalks and driveways initially. It'll tolerate low mowing, compacted sites and low fertility, so it's pretty well adapted to lawns.

Because it's a late summer annual, preemergent applications have likely dissipated by that point. A combination product that includes dicamba or triclopyr are effective against spurge. The leaves are small, so lawn care operators must make sure they have adequate coverage. 📌

SOURCES: Dean Mosdell, Ph.D., technical services manager at Syngenta; Ken Hutto, Ph.D., product development manager for herbicides and fungicides for FMC; Bret Corbett, director of technical services for Prime Source; Aaron Hathaway, technical services manager for Nufarm.

DID YOU KNOW

SCOUT IT OUT
Lawn care professionals can teach clients what to look for when it comes to sod webworm damage.



Sod webworm scouting

LCOs share how to locate and manage sod webworms in turf **BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR**

Sod webworms can be an unpredictable pest. Just because a lawn previously had sod webworm damage does not make it more susceptible in the future, says Cal Leggett, director of agronomy with Juniper Landscaping in Fort Meyers, Fla. Juniper Landscaping is a full-service commercial landscape design, irrigation, construction and maintenance company.

“They’re a unique pest because they’re only somewhat predictable,” he says. “It can vary year to year and location to location — some years are light, and some years you’ll see it everywhere. You never know how bad an outbreak could potentially be.”

Leggett and Richard Kasczak, owner of Impeccable Lawns in Ocean Isle Beach, N.C., share tips to help manage this fickle insect.

Leggett says the No. 1 misconception about sod webworms is that when moths are present in a lawn, that means it’s time to spray. Moths may or may not be laying eggs.

“If you’re seeing a lot of adult moths, that doesn’t mean you need to go out and spray,” he says. “You just need to increase the scouting that you’re doing for actual damage to turf. Once you actually see the

caterpillar itself, that’s where you want to make control applications.”

EDUCATE, EDUCATE, EDUCATE

Kasczak also recommends avoiding excess sprays and treating for pests when needed. Impeccable Lawns offers lawn care, lawn maintenance and landscape design/installation for a primarily residential clientele.

“They want us to give them the information and treat it as necessary,” he says. “Really, the only way you can do both are through seeing the activity, spotting the insect and going from there. That’s the way it is with so many things in lawn care.”

Leggett says the unpredictability of sod webworms is an opportunity to educate the homeowner about the pest.

“When you enter that summer season, let (the client) know that it is a potential pest they could be seeing,” he says. “Maybe see if they can help scout for it, and if they see issues, they can reach out to you. You can educate them so at least they’re prepared for that as a possibility.”

Leggett says another critical component of educating the client is to share how scouting and treating is a part of your



integrated pest management practices and that you’re only making an application once you hit that damage threshold.

“Even if they see the damage, assure your client that the turf will recover,” he says.

SCOUTING TIPS

Leggett says it’s also important to show your technicians what the signs of damage are and what the pest looks like.

When it comes to scouting for sod webworms, Kasczak says technicians should look for worms that are light green with some gray and dark green spots on the body. Turf damage shows up as areas browning out.

“If you reach out with your hand, the grass will come up, like you’re picking up thatch,” he says. “As you’re scraping it up, you’ll notice there’s not really a thatch layer left. Normally, if you do that, you’ll actually then pick up one of these guys when you’re raking through it. That’s really when you’re going to find out that you have the activity.”

TREAT QUICKLY

Leggett says that once technicians or clients find sod webworm damage, it’s important to treat the area with a contact insecticide. Leggett says he uses bifenthrin, and he knows other lawn care professionals apply pyrethrin or acephate.

“Once you start to see the damage, the populations are high, and it can result in extensive damage very quickly,” he says. “Over a weekend, you can go from very little damage to severe damage.”

Kasczak says while turf damage from sod webworms will look bad, it’s important to remember the feeding habits of the pest.

“They’re only interested in the foliage,” he says. “The plant will generally recover.” 



HOLD THE SPRAY

Some lawn care operators suggest waiting to spray for sod webworms until actual damage or caterpillars are present.

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(Plant) food for thought

Two lawn care operators explain how implementing different fertilizers into their programs have helped reduce turf problems

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

In helping create a healthy stand of turf, fertilizers can also help lawn care operators take back clients' yards that had previously been plagued with problems.

Landscape Management got the scoop on how fertilizers have helped eradicate such issues from Jimmy Tompkins, owner of JT's Landscaping & Lawn Care, a full-service maintenance and design/build company that services residential and commercial clients in Wake Forest, N.C., and Luke Hawthorne, owner and CEO of Emerald Lawns in Round Rock, Texas, a lawn care, irrigation and tree care company that serves a 95 percent residential and 5 percent commercial clientele.

The problem: Fungal damage, such as brown patch, gray leaf spot, summer patch

When JT's Landscaping & Lawn Care switched over to Greene County Fertilizer Co.'s products about two years ago, the company was excited about using a solution that had less nitrogen than what he was previously using, according to Tompkins.

"Our approach on it was trying to be as sustainable as we possibly could and not just slinging an abundance of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous all over the yards," Tompkins says. "I feel like a lot of companies overfertilize, which can create fungal issues."

Supporting that theory, in an article titled, "The plant doctor — plant disease and fertilization," Alan Henn, Ph.D., Extension professor at Mississippi State University and Extension plant pathologist, disease management of ornamentals, peanut, turf, fruits, nematode program, writes, "Plants with balanced fertility are less susceptible to diseases, but plants with imbalanced nutrition may be predisposed to attacks by pathogenic organisms such as fungi or bacteria. We know more about the influence of nitrogen on the development of diseases than we know about the influence of other elements. Too much nitrogen often causes more severe disease."

Further complicating the issue, JT's Landscaping & Lawn Care is located in an area with clay-based soils that make the fertilizer take a while to break down.

"(Since using the new program), we've been able to increase the organic matter of the soil and get a good organic layer," Tompkins says. "So, there's less stress on the plant because there's less we're taking off on every mow, and the roots are driving deep into soil, which creates drought resistance."

Since the company started using Greene County's products, Tompkins says he's seen the amount of fungal damage in clients' yards decrease.

"Our lawn care program before was really good, but this has just enabled us to be able to use less fertilizer in general," he says.

The problem: Take-all patch, brown patch

Emerald Lawns was first drawn to Anuvia Plant Nutrients' products about three years ago because of the sustainability factor.

When Emerald Lawns started implementing Anuvia's fertilizers into its program, crews noticed less damage in lawns from take-all patch, because the fertilized stands of turf were healthier overall.

"It keeps new cases from popping up," Hawthorne says. "Take-all patch is something you can't just treat once and it goes away. Typically, you have to hit it once a year, once every two years, but if we're able to use Anuvia two, three or four times a year, we don't really have to deal with it anymore."

Hawthorne says the fertilizer products have also helped with brown patch, but it's the effect they've had on take-all patch that has saved the company time and money.

"You'll be driving in older neighborhoods, and you'll just see huge circles with nothing, just dirt where the take-all patch claimed the grass," he says. "The only way to get the grass to come back is to treat the soil and then resod that area, so it's pretty expensive, and if you can prevent that from happening as much as possible, all the better." 





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10 tips for selling your business in 2021

Whether you're ready to sell your business or just thinking about it, we're counting down the tips to help prepare for the sale

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

If your New Year's resolution is to think about selling your landscape or lawn care business, you're in luck. Here to help you prepare and count down to the sale of your business is Chad Butler, president and principal broker of Landscape Depot Investments in Wellington, Fla.; Joe Flake, former owner of Target Lawn Care, in Paola, Kan.; and Debbie Small, senior adviser in mergers and acquisitions for Apex Business Advisors in Overland Park, Kan.

10. THINK AHEAD. Butler says business owners should start preparing about two years in advance of a sale.

"This gives enough of a window to ensure the financials reflect the most profit and stability," he says.

9. GET HELP. Flake, who sold his business earlier this year, says it was important

that he worked with a broker. He thought his business was going to sell three times before it did, he says, and having someone to help him through the process was critical.

"Having somebody hold you by the hand as you're walking through the process is pretty important," he says.

Small says the sale of a business has many layers to it, and working with a broker can be a long-term relationship but one worth its weight in gold.

"We tend to generate an accepted purchase price of at least 120 percent to 150 percent more than owners of companies selling the business themselves," Small says. "We more than make up for our fee in net proceeds to the seller."

8. KEEP IT CLEAN. Small says owners should not run personal expenses through the business to reduce their tax burden.

"The more money that they can report on their tax return as profit, the higher value they'll get for the company," she says. "I've seen everything: Harley Davidsons on tax returns, trips to Walt Disney World. I've seen boats. The cleaner the financials, the more likely we'll be able to maximize the value of the company for the seller."

7. KNOW WHAT YOU NEED. To prepare your business for sale, Butler says you'll need to supply some documentation.

"Initially for valuation purposes, the seller will need to supply three years of financials, including P&L statements; tax returns; an employee list with positions and wages; an asset list with year, make and model of vehicles; and a customer list with income and longevity of each account," he says.

6. WORK ON THE BUSINESS, NOT IN THE BUSINESS. If you're thinking about selling your business, and you're still heavily involved with projects, you need to transition to a management role and hire staff for the day-to-day tasks, Small says.

"Most buyers are wanting to run a business from an operations standpoint instead of actually doing the service work," she says.

5. KEEP IT QUIET. For Flake, it was important that he kept the details about working with a broker to sell his business to himself. If your employees or customers find out before the sale is complete, they may get nervous and

PLAN IT OUT
A successful business sale often takes up to two years of preparation.



jump ship. Butler says if your employees or clients find out, it's likely your competitors will find out, too.

"We have had instances where an owner insists on letting his long-term and loyal key employees know and somehow it gets leaked out to all of the employees, customers and competitors," Butler says. "Confidentiality is critical."

4. KEEP ON KEEPING ON. If you're keeping a potential sale a secret, you need to continue focusing on the business. It could take up to a year to complete the sale. Butler says it's a good idea to focus on growing the business during the process.

"It is an important consideration for any buyer to feel comfortable that the business is currently performing the same or better than last year," he says. "Losing accounts or key employees during the sale process or anytime recently places a risk alert to buyers."

Flake says he invested in his business with new equipment partially to keep up appearances but also to ensure his future buyer was getting good equipment.

"I didn't want to (buy new equipment), but I felt like I had to do it to keep up appearances," he says. "I needed to pass on good equipment to my buyer. I did some things I didn't want to do just to appear that we were continuing."

3. KEEP STAFF. It's a good idea to have critical employees, such as an operations or account manager, sign a non-compete agreement saying they will stay with the business post-sale, Butler says.

"This is an issue with any key employee who may be a high risk to any buyer post-closing," he says.

2. FAIR AND SQUARE. Small says you need to know what the fair market value of your business is.

"Most business owners think their baby is the prettiest one on the block," she says. "They have a tendency to want to think that the value of the company is much greater than it actually is."

Like many brokers, she offers a free valuation to potential sellers to help them get a handle on whether or not it's a good time to sell. Brokers will work with you to help make your business as attractive as possible.

"If we aren't at a value that makes sense for them, I encourage them to hold on to the company, increase gross revenue and increase profitability, so we can get that exit number value that makes sense for them," she says.

1. THINK POST-SALE. Don't forget to consider what you're going to do once the deal is done, Flake says.

"I was ready to sell," he says. "I wasn't going to take just any deal, but I was ready to personally do something different." 

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LOCATION Edwards, Colo.

COMPANY Rocky Mountain Custom Landscapes

DETAILS Rocky Mountain Custom Landscapes installed this residential project in 2004 and has been maintaining it ever since.

The main challenge for the maintenance team is the abundance of deer and a short growing season. Rocky Mountain Custom Landscapes applies Liquid Fence animal repellent at every maintenance visit during the growing season.

Perennials on the property's half-acre of ornamental garden beds must be hardy enough to resist or sustain damage from deer feeding, says Lauren Crary, gardening account manager for Rocky Mountain Custom Landscapes.

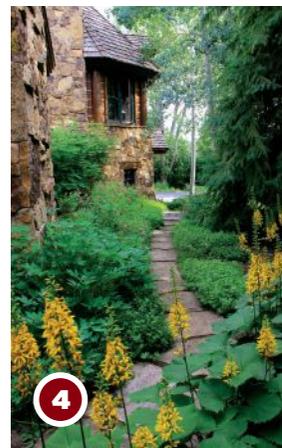
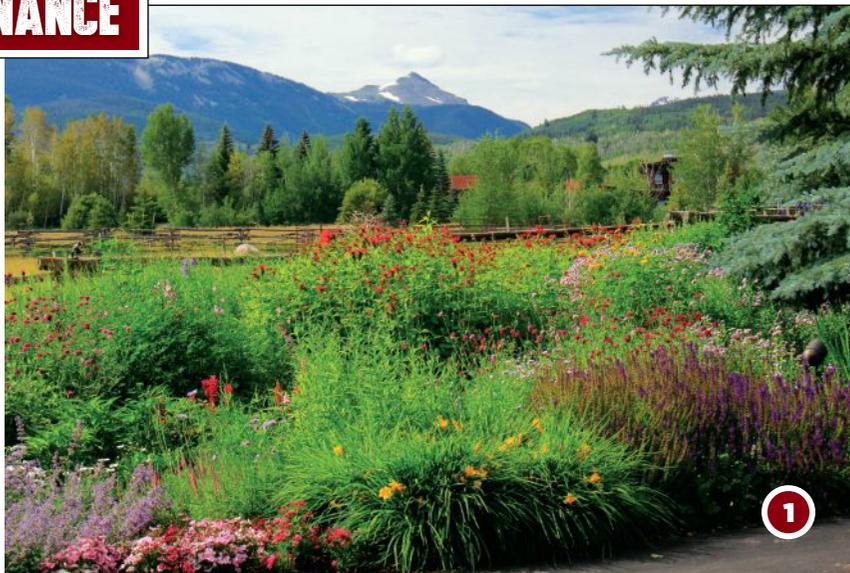
"Over the years, the deer tend to prefer different plantings, even plants they're known to not typically eat," she says. "Our perennial palette is constantly changing."

The perennials must also pack a year-round punch with color, too, with a growing season that typically runs from late May to late September. Rocky Mountain Custom Landscapes selected plantings such as crocosmia, ligularia penstemons and asters.

"We find plants that are hardy and colorful and stagger them to bloom at different times throughout the property, making sure that every part of the garden has something interesting at all times," Crary says.

This project earned Rocky Mountain Custom Landscapes a 2019 Gold Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

See more photos from this project at LandscapeManagement.net/thebigone.



Captions | 1. Red bee balm plantings encourage hummingbird feeding. **2.** Rocky Mountain Custom Landscapes maintains the property's half-acre of ornamental gardens with deer-resistant plantings, such as the daisies in the foreground. **3.** The water feature is an irrigation ditch that channels into a nearby stream. **4.** Yellow ligularia line the path to the shaded nook on the property.

PHOTOS: ROCKY MOUNTAIN CUSTOM LANDSCAPES

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PRODUCTS THAT WORK

Stand-on Mowers



VANQUISH MOWER

COMPANY: Mean Green

URL: MeanGreenProducts.com

Mean Green's new Vanquish model brings stand-on mowing to the company's Evolution Series of commercial, electric mowers. Available with a 52- or 60-inch deck (side/rear discharge), the Vanquish runs for up to seven hours continuously at speeds of up to 11.5 mph. It features Mean Green's ZTR technologies, which the manufacturer says make it competitive with any gas mower in its class. The Vanquish is a quiet, low-maintenance, zero-emissions mower that is built for all-day professional use.



PRO X 636

COMPANY: Cub Cadet

URL: CubCadet.com

The PRO X 636 is the latest addition to the Pro X Series line of stand-on mowers and offers the same strength, comfort and performance as the rest of the Pro X Series models. The versatile deck size allows landscapers to be nimble in small spaces like gated properties and maneuver around obstacles. The Pro X 636 has a two-year, no-hour-limit warranty and will be available at Cub Cadet independent retailers in early 2021.



STARIS STAND-ON MOWERS

COMPANY: Exmark

URL: Exmark.com

Exmark Staris stand-on riding mowers deliver the commercial performance, durability and ease of service landscape professionals need to maximize productivity and profitability. Intuitive controls make Staris models easy to operate. Optimized frame design and caster wheel positioning for each deck width delivers superior cut quality. The Staris E-Series is available with 32-, 36- or 44-inch UltraCut Series 3 cutting decks. Large-frame Staris S-Series models are available with 48-, 52-, or 60-inch UltraCut Series 4 cutting decks.



652R AND 652R EFI QUIKTRAK MOWERS

COMPANY: John Deere

URL: Deere.com

The 652R and 652R EFI QuikTrak mowers provide professional landscapers with the durability and productivity they need. The compact design allows for excellent maneuverability in tight spaces. These units are equipped with a 52-inch floating mower deck made with seven-gauge fabricated steel, a commercial-grade engine and a hydrostatic drive system with speeds up to 9.6 mph. The optional Mulch on Demand deck and Michelin X Tweel Turf airless radial tires further enhance versatility and uptime, according to the manufacturer.

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EXPERTS' TIPS

Chainsaws

MUST HAVES
Personal protective equipment is a must when using chainsaws.



Setting the bar

When it comes to purchasing a new chainsaw, its intended use will help landscape pros decide on bar size and the other features they need to get the job done

Buying a new chainsaw requires users to first consider how they'll use it, says Dylan Stephenson, owner of So-Low Cuts Landscaping, in Springfield, Ohio. So-Low Cuts provides property maintenance, lawn care and landscape design and installation for a mix of 75 percent residential, 25 commercial clients.

Stephenson and Mark Chisholm, Stihl spokesperson and director of operations at Aspen Tree Expert Co., a commercial and residential tree removal, pest control and plant health care company in Jackson, N.J., share chainsaw purchasing tips.

In addition to how you'll use a chainsaw, you should also consider how often

you plan on using it. If you don't plan to run a chainsaw every day, Stephenson says a battery-powered option may be a good fit because the carburetor in a gas-powered chainsaw can experience buildup if it's idle for too long.

Consider the power-to-weight ratio, as well. The longer you use the chainsaw, the more fatigued you'll get. Chisholm suggests thinking about features such as a light bar to help lighten the weight.

Stephenson says a good friend of his offered this piece of advice: Buy the best equipment you can afford at the time.

"If it's a chainsaw, if you're getting started, there's no need to spend \$2,000 unless you're in a place where it is all massive trees," he says.

Don't neglect the owner's manual, Chisholm advises. If this isn't your first chainsaw purchase, it's easy to dismiss the owner's manual, but chainsaw technology has come a long way, and it's important to understand how to care for and use your new purchase.

"In the manual, it will tell you how to maintain it properly," he says. "It's also going to tell you what you need to do to stay safe."

Speaking of safety, Stephenson says other "musts" are insurance and personal protective equipment.

"They make that stuff (PPE) for a reason," he says. "If you're doing this for a living, accidents can happen. Make sure you stay safe." 

HUSQVARNA

Ben McDermott

Global product and sourcing manager

Make sure to find the right chainsaw for the job. Will the chainsaw be in use full or part time? What size trees are you cutting? How will the chainsaw be used? These are all extremely important factors for the end user to consider when narrowing down chainsaw models to purchase. Other important considerations are productivity and cutting capacity, power-to-weight ratio, along with ergonomics and comfort. Each of these factors becomes more or less important based on the personalized job at hand. Once there's an understanding of how the saw will be used, select a chainsaw that best aligns with your needs and preferred feature set, then demo the chainsaw before making your final purchase to ensure it gets the job done, you're comfortable while using the saw and that you get all the power and performance you need. It's also extremely important to purchase and use the right personal protective gear when your chainsaw is in use.



ECHO

Brad Mace

Product manager

The most important thing to do is make sure you fit the saw to your application. You don't want to get something that's too big for your job, or you are going to end up carrying around a lot of extra weight, which contributes to fatigue. Another thing to think about is how many hours a year you will use this saw. Is this something you are going to be using every day or just once a month? That will determine what quality level of saw you want. Think about the saw's weight and how the chainsaw is balanced in your hands. You want something easy to start. Look at the horsepower of the saw. Power might also affect fatigue.



STIHL

John Allen

Product manager

While many factors drive purchasing decisions, overall power, durability, performance and dependability ultimately remain at the top of the list. Other factors users should consider are the planned use for the saw, ease of use, power source, mobility and weight. Contractors should also think about the total cost of ownership, which includes initial and ongoing costs, such as maintenance and fuel. Optimal power-to-weight ratios are essential for professional users. Reduced vibration, comfort and safety features are important factors in choosing products as well. Gas versus battery power should also be considered as an option, depending on the application and usage. While there is a lot of focus on the powerhead, a chainsaw should be looked at as a complete system that includes the powerhead, guide bar and chain. A saw with great power and a poor-quality bar or chain will underperform and impact profitability.



EGO POWER PLUS

Gerry Barnaby

Director of excitement

What you're likely to use the saw for is key, as it will dictate how long of a bar you'll need and also what size engine. You should think about the saw's weight, especially if you will be doing more overhead work. The gas chainsaw is going to require that you stabilize the fuel, drain the carburetor after each use and keep up with prescribed maintenance. But, it will give you endless run time as long as you have a can of gas. A battery-powered chainsaw, on the other hand, has almost no maintenance and can be as powerful as a gas chainsaw but can only run as long as you have the batteries charged. Some important features to consider when buying a chainsaw would be an antikickback brake, a simple chain tensioning system and auto oiling.



PRODUCTS THAT WORK



↑ D-SERIES SNOW BLOWER

COMPANY: John Deere

URL: Deere.com

The two-stage hydraulic SB72D, SB78D and SB84D snow blowers are ideal for clearing snow from roadways and sidewalks, moving snow up to 45 feet from the machine. The snow blowers are available with the standard smooth auger or a serrated auger option, which is designed to cut through the toughest of snow conditions. No case drain connection is required on standard and high-flow models, and the direct-drive motors at the auger and impeller provide reliable performance, according to the company. The D-Series models feature a 36-inch, high-volume intake shroud, maximizing snow-clearing productivity.

ICESTRIKER SPREADER

COMPANY: Hilltip

URL: Hilltip.com

Hilltip's line of AM Series Icestriker spreaders feature integrated liquid tanks in modular hoppers and are capable of prewetting material or pretreating sites from a single controller. The spreaders range in size from 1.5 to 4.2 cubic yards, and when coupled with Hilltip's HTrack two-way GPRS tracking system, users can see the equipment in real time and know the amount of material being applied along with the details of the application itself.



→ SG SNOWPLOW

COMPANY: Steel

Green Manufacturing

URL: SteelGreenMfg.com

Instead of letting your spreader-sprayer sit unused all winter long, turn it into a powerful sidewalk snow-removing machine with up to 350 pounds of salt-spreading capacity. Made with all stainless steel construction, the SG Snowplow resists corrosion from salt and liquid deicer. It features a polyplow blade, which is lighter and stronger than comparable steel plows, according to the company. Live hydraulics control the plow angle, down pressure, lift and float with a single joystick valve. The rubber cutting edge scrapes clean without damaging sensitive areas, and LED lights provide ample light.



↑ HELIXX STAINLESS STEEL HOPPER SPREADER

COMPANY: SnowEx

URL: SnowExProducts.com

The new Helixx stainless steel hopper spreaders offer durability and corrosion-resistant benefits of stainless steel and the Helixx material delivery system, which runs the entire length of the hopper with variable flights, promoting even unloading of material, according to SnowEx. The addition of a prewet and direct liquid application kit provides the ability to spread, prewet or spray with one machine. All functions are easily controlled from the in-cab control.

Compatible with full-size pickups, flatbed trucks or dump-bed trucks, the Helixx stainless steel hopper lineup includes five different models, including capacities of 1.5, 2.0, 3.0, 4.5 and 6.0 cubic yards.

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HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

Rock solid

LOCATION Wayne, Pa.

COMPANY DiSabatino Landscaping & Tree Service

DETAILS An upscale local magazine connected the clients to DiSabatino Landscaping & Tree Service. The clients wanted a tiered patio project completed in time for a high school graduation party.

The house sits on top of a sloping hill. Ivan Mazur, a designer with DiSabatino Landscaping & Tree Service, designed terraces to naturally descend the hill.

“I was hoping to help the customer make it feel as if their home was interfacing with the property better,” he says.

To give the design a native feel, Mazur selected Pennsylvania bluestone and brownstone, Wissahickon schist, granite and local Avondale stone. To execute the design, the company used a Kubota excavator and an articulating claw to help set boulders.

To light the patio, Mazur used FX Luminaire’s DX controller with autotiming. Native plants, including catmint, Zagreb coreopsis, Otto Luyken cherry laurel, Blue Zinger sedge, Jane magnolia and nonnative threadleaf mahonia, give the backyard a natural feel.

This project earned DiSabatino Landscaping & Tree Service a 2019 Silver Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence program.

See more photos from this project at LandscapeManagement.net/hardscapesolutions.



PHOTOS: JEFF ROBINSON PHOTOGRAPHY



Captions | **1.** The main goal of the design was to address the vast elevation change on the back of the property. **2.** The large fireplace challenged the team when it came time to put the cap on. The team engineered scaffolding to reach it. **3.** Crews worked on the project right before winter. DiSabatino deployed tents and heaters so crews could work on the masonry, flatwork and the outdoor kitchen to complete the project in time for a high school graduation party. **4.** The view from the driveway to the backyard patio shows FX Luminaire lights highlighting the path. **5.** A look at the property before the start of the project. **6.** The design of the patio creates independent areas that feel cohesive.

CASE STUDY

Designing in a pandemic

Pellettieri Associates explains how it has kept up its design process during the COVID-19 pandemic

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

For Graham Pellettieri, technology director and project manager at Pellettieri Associates, a landscape design/build firm in Warner, N.H., the coronavirus pandemic has thrown a curveball into the design process.

“Having people working from home and not physically together added a challenge of the physical distance and separation,” he says. “Conversations you may’ve had with an employee stopping by their desk, you have to pick up the phone, email or do a Zoom call. There’s a little more legwork involved in just staying fully engaged and connected and being able to have those progressive conversations with fellow employees and coworkers.”

Pellettieri sheds light on how his company has kept up its operations during the coronavirus pandemic, while ensuring that its clients and employees remain safe.

ANOTHER OPTION

Since the start of the pandemic, Pellettieri Associates has opened up new opportunities to connect with clients virtually. In most cases, it’s a Zoom meeting between a client and a project manager or designer.

“The virtual option is a great option to have on the table,” Pellettieri says. “There’s a lower risk of safety concerns that comes with the virtual environment.”

While the company employed the virtual option before the pandemic, it has since ramped up virtual meetings, with about 30 percent of its meetings with clients being conducted virtually. Before the pandemic, less than 10 percent of meetings were conducted virtually.

He notes that the company still does a fair number of on-site meetings.

“It’s all about taking precautions and measures we’ve put in place, and sometimes it’s taking separate vehicles to job sites for meetings with clients,” he says. “There’s something invaluable about being on that property with the client and able to walk alongside them and make comments or changes. We’re fortunate that we’re outdoors, which allows



us to have more flexibility in meeting clients while keeping everyone safe.”

STAYING SAFE
Pellettieri Associates gives clients an option of Zoom meetings or in-person visits to go over design plans.

When the company conducts virtual meetings, typically through Zoom, a designer or project manager presents items, such as the conceptual designs, drawings, 3D renderings and plant selections, to the clients.

“We’re able to share our screen with clients and walk them through virtually in the design to connect them to the project and the different concepts,” Pellettieri says. “It’s really helpful to us to be able to be on the same page visually. As far as dialogue, there’s also the opportunity for the client to ask questions and chime in with additional details or requests.”

The company has also moved many of its files to the cloud-based data storage app Dropbox.

“That was a benefit because you could access the files from home (for people working remotely), from the office or from a job site,” Pellettieri says. “Right away, there was ink-free accessibility to all of our employees. It also opened up the ability for us to easily share content with people.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Pellettieri says that even once the pandemic subsides, he expects to maintain the virtual option during the design process, especially for job sites that may be far away or hard to access or for clients who may have scheduling issues.

“Being more mobile with technology, using software and communicating design concepts with clients in a virtual environment is going to stick,” he says. “You can work on those projects at any time of day (and) connect with people in different ways. I think that’s opened up some doors that we didn’t have prior to the pandemic.”

He adds that he’s also hopeful for the future of design work because he’s noticed many people have taken a renewed interest in their outdoor spaces.

“People are spending more time at home, and they’re looking into their backyard,” he says. “You couple that with the fact that people aren’t vacationing or traveling like they used to, and some of those funds are used for projects.”

PHOTO: PELLETTIERI ASSOCIATES

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Lighting the way

Landscape design experts highlight residential lighting trends

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Jan-Gerrit Bouwman, senior landscape architect at Grant & Power Landscaping in West Chicago, says when it comes to landscape lighting trends, landscape lighting *is* the trend.

“Lighting is everything because it makes your yards very friendly at night in the summer and the fall,” he says. “It’s also nice to look at it from the inside out and the outside in.”

Grant & Power’s focus is primarily on residential design/build services.

The company also offers residential maintenance, commercial maintenance and snow and ice removal.

Crayton Caudill, vice president of Redwood Landscape in Cedar Lake, Ind., agrees with Bouwman. Landscape lighting used to be an add-on but has become a must-have, Caudill says.

“Landscape lighting used to be an upgrade that people would add on if they had it in the budget,” he says. “They didn’t want to spend the \$3,000 to \$4,000 on it at first, but now I’m seeing it grow a lot.”

Redwood Landscape offers residential landscape design and installation, lighting, irrigation and maintenance, plus commercial landscape design and installation, maintenance and snow and ice management.

Caudill says this increased interest among his residential clientele has been strong for the past two to three years.

“The popularity has grown as people become more educated about it and understand the value of it and understand it adds beauty to the front of a home, landscape or outdoor living space,” he says.

Caudill and Redwood Landscape have launched Lumin8 Outdoor Lighting, a holiday lighting and décor installation company, to capitalize on the increased interest in outdoor lighting and the growing holiday lighting market.

ALL LED

Bouwman says Grant & Power only uses LED lighting for the company’s landscape and hardscape lighting projects. However, clients still want warm, yellow hues, not the blue hues of traditional LED lighting.

“You get so much more light (with LED) for a smaller system,” he says. “While the (LED) fixtures are more expensive, the whole system lasts longer. It’s actually, in the end, way cheaper.”

NONTRADITIONAL LIGHTING

Caudill says homeowners no longer want the traditional uplights on houses and path lights. They look for lighting level with the surface, such as hardscape lighting in seat walls, outdoor kitchens and staircases. Redwood Landscape uses in-ground products from In-lite Outdoor Lighting.

“People don’t always want to see the tall lights,” he says. “Lighting flush with landscaping that softens up a pathway—I’ve seen a growth in that.”

In terms of the shape of the lights, Caudill says homeowners are looking for outdoor lighting that reflects the

trends in interior décor and lighting. Increasingly, homeowners have approached him looking for the farmhouse style of lights with pendants and black or bronze finishes to match the farmhouse style that’s popular in homes.

Homeowners want a modular, modern look to outdoor lighting with square and rectangular features to give their outdoor spaces clean, straight lines, he says.

“A lot of people are liking more modern looks with black fixtures or brass,” Caudill says.

TAKING CONTROL

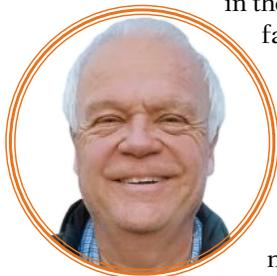
Homeowners are also in the market for Wi-Fi-enabled smartphone controls for everything, including landscape lighting, experts say. Redwood Landscape uses the Luxor system from FX Luminaire. Another popular option is Kichler Lighting’s LED controllers with Wi-Fi capability that users can adjust on their own.

“You can play with the brightness on some of them, which is nice,” Caudill says. “A lot of people like that.”

He adds that a full Wi-Fi lighting system may be more expensive to install because the Wi-Fi-enabled lights designed to change colors and brightness are a more expensive product.

“For a Wi-Fi system, it is a little more expensive because the lights are more expensive,” he says. “For an actual Wi-Fi timer, it’s minimal. I don’t charge any more for them. The product might cost me \$5 or \$10 more. I have seen how people are willing to pay a little more for lights that are adjustable. It’s really just an app you download.”

↑ LIGHT IT UP
Warm, yellow hues such as those pictured here are currently all the rage.



Jan-Gerrit Bouwman

INSTALLATION IRON

An arsenal of attachments

Experts discuss how to choose attachments for efficiency and versatility on the job site

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

With homeowners spending more time at home and showing more interest in hardscape projects, many landscape companies have been busier than ever this year.

“(This is) work that requires more physical effort and time,” says George MacIntyre, product manager, Case Construction Equipment. “Landscape contractors that intelligently match their equipment with attachments address both issues: getting more difficult work done and doing it with fewer workers working together in close proximity.”

Landscape Management spoke with MacIntyre and Jason Simmons, attachments & custom engineering supervisor for John Deere, about how landscape contractors can take advantage of attachments to help get more versatility out of their loaders and meet customer demands.

THE RIGHT ATTACHMENTS

“We often talk about a piece of equipment as your base asset with a fixed cost and a fixed set of things you can do with it,” MacIntyre says. By adding the right attachments, contractors can considerably increase the types of work

and jobs they can bid on and increase the amount of time that the piece of equipment is working.

As for the experts’ recommendations to help landscapers build out their selection of attachments, Simmons says that a power rake first comes to mind for its versatility. “It’s a great attachment that can help level a site, clean up debris and break up bigger chunks of dirt,” he says.

MacIntyre adds that a power rake can help save time in establishing the final grade and look of a finished landscape, and it also does a great job of creating a seed bed for grass.

MacIntyre recommends the following pieces of equipment:

- **A set of forks** for loading, unloading and moving around palletized brick and block;
- **Augers** for digging in fence posts and also preparing holes for planting when working in hard surfaces;
- **A four-in-one bucket**, which provides the ability to dig, grapple, scrape and doze in a single attachment;
- **A mulching head** that allows landscapers to be more involved with site clearing/site development work on existing projects. It also provides the capability to handle land clearing projects that may have otherwise been out of scope without that attachment; and
- **A laser grading box** for projects like setting the base of a large patio or driveway, larger hardscape/paver projects and establishing consistent grade on more complicated landscape designs.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Simmons says landscapers should examine their business and attachment

solutions for opportunities to reduce labor- and time-intensive operations.

He advises that a contractor should consider the connection requirements of any attachment they’re looking to purchase and ensure that it’s easy to connect the machine—including hoses and auxiliary electrical connections.

MacIntyre agrees and stresses examining the varying hydraulic requirements of a potential attachment.

“The general rule of thumb is to outfit your machine with a hydraulic system that exceeds what you use today, so you have the flexibility to add performance later,” he says. “For instance, you won’t effectively be able to run a mulching head on standard hydraulics.”

If you think you’ll eventually graduate to attachments with higher hydraulic capacities, he recommends outfitting your skid-steer or track loader with either a high-flow or enhanced high-flow hydraulic system. He says Case’s skid-steers and compact track loaders include a pressure relieving manifold system that makes it easier to attach and detach attachments, including in hot weather conditions where pressure can build up and detaching becomes difficult. This helps make switching between attachments easier.

Contractors should also consider a 14-pin connection, he says. Some attachments, like an angle broom or directional snow blower, require this auxiliary electrical connection and an auxiliary hydraulic connection. Equipping your machine with that connection at the time of purchase makes it easy to add those attachments to your fleet, MacIntyre says. 

GET MORE DONE
Attachments allow companies to get more work done with fewer socially distant workers.



George MacIntyre

INSTALLATION SOLUTIONS

Aeration narration

Manufacturers explain why pond aeration is essential BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The benefits of pond aeration include increasing oxygen levels in the water and adding more circulation, which keeps the water cooler in the summer and prevents ice from forming in the winter, according to Jim Chubb, regional sales manager for Atlantic Water Gardens.

“Every pond should have aeration,” Chubb says. “A lot of people don’t think of air as part of pond construction or pond maintenance. It adds a level to the pond that you’re going to get clearer, cleaner water.”

Landscape Management spoke with Chubb; Roy Watkins, regional sales manager for Airolator; and Sandra Burton, president and CEO of Linne Industries, manufacturer of PondHawk, about the ins and outs of pond aeration.

CHOOSING AN AERATOR

When deciding on an aerator, contractors can choose from surface aerators like fountains, which throw water into the atmosphere, and subsurface aerators, which push air into the water,

Watkins says.

“Surface aerators are going to ideally fit the smaller ponds that are less than 2 acres and 8 feet deep or less,” he says.

Surface aerators have electrical power going out to the unit. On the other hand, with subsurface aeration, the electricity, pump and air compressor are on the bank, so there’s an air hose running into the pond instead of an electrical power cable.

Chubb adds that it’s important to know the number of gallons in a pond, which can be computed by calculating the length times the width times the average depth times 7.48.

“Aeration units are rated for how much water they can move by the size of the bubbles and how big the diffuser is,” he says. “The tinier the bubble in aeration, the more movement of water you get because you’re creating more surface area with the tiny bubbles.”

Burton says contractors can also consider the purpose of the pond, the age of the pond and the surrounding landscape when deciding on an aerator.

“What sort of historic problems and treatment strategies have been used? That’ll tell us how much muck is at the bottom,” she says.

THE GREEN STUFF

Aeration isn’t something you run for a couple hours a day; rather, you run it 24/7/365, Chubb says.

He notes that aerators can cost \$70 to \$500, depending on how many gallons of water you’re treating.

They use between 4.5 watts to 35 watts of energy.

“It’s no more than running a lightbulb if you left it on in your house,” Chubb says. “A low-wattage lightbulb at that. It’s pennies to run aeration, and the benefits you get from running it outweigh the very small cost of using aeration in your ponds.”

If a pond doesn’t have access to electricity, Burton says solar aeration is another option.

“A lot of these ponds don’t have a meter or access to (an electrical) meter,” she says. “Sometimes, if there is electricity, an HOA, for example, will introduce a timer to curtail the use so they’re saving money in the off season. Using solar aeration, you don’t have either of those problems. It comes with its own power supply. That allows for the aeration system year-round.”

Overall, the benefits of pond aeration outweigh the costs.

“If your pond is being treated for algae or any of that gross stuff, those treatments absorb the oxygen, and if you don’t supplement that with aeration, you’re going to have a lot of dead fish or your pond’s going to fill up with sludge, and that creates gases or byproduct that promotes the growth of algae,” Watkins says. “Then, you’re going to have a green, stinky pond.” ☹️



IT'S ESSENTIAL
Aeration increases circulation and oxygen levels in ponds to help keep them clean and clear.

PHOTO: LINNE INDUSTRIES

PRODUCTS THAT WORK

Trenchers



GEORIPPER

COMPANY: MiniTrencher

URL: MiniTrencher.com

The GeoRipper creates a trench three times faster than hand digging. With more than 120 dealers, contractors can see it firsthand and notice the difference. With a starting weight of 32 pounds, this trencher can be used by hand or with an EZ Kart for longer runs. Available in three engine options — Series 6, Series 7 and Series 8 — GeoRipper has you covered. Whether you need a light-weight alternative, low-maintenance solution or a more accessible choice, this mini trencher debunks claims that bigger is better, the company said.



RTX250 TRENCHER

COMPANY: Vermeer

URL: Vermeer.com/na

The Vermeer RTX250 pedestrian trencher is a compact, powerful machine that provides 25 hp (18.6 kW) in a slender profile, allowing the unit to move through narrow gates and navigate an array of residential job sites. The gas-powered, air-cooled engine powers a hydrostatic ground drive system with rubber tracks that help provide strong traction, even in wet, soft or rocky conditions, while a VZ steering system makes operator training more efficient. “No tool” access to serviceable components streamlines regular maintenance on the machine.



C16X WALK-BEHIND TRENCHER



COMPANY: Ditch Witch

URL: DitchWitch.com

Built to maximize performance, the Ditch Witch C16X walk-behind trencher provides ease of use, maneuverability and serviceability. The C16X boasts a 16-hp Vanguard engine and a digging depth of up to 36 inches — making the machine ideal for installing irrigation lines, drainage lines or sprinkler systems. It comes with the Ditch Witch exclusive CX track system.

Designed to improve traction while maintaining a compact footprint, the right track is longer to keep more track on the ground, while the shorter left track keeps the C16X easily maneuverable.



CASE STUDY

In the nick of time

Quality Irrigation capitalizes on a successful year due to some well-timed decisions BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

Sometimes, it takes the benefit of hindsight to realize how fortunate you are. Late last year, Ryan Jardine and his crews at Quality Irrigation made a well-timed switch from a server-based software system to Service Titan, a cloud-based service platform.

A couple months later, COVID-19 struck the U.S., and implementing the cloud-based system when it did allowed Quality to work remotely and track crew members more easily right away.



Ryan Jardine

The Omaha, Neb., company has 30 employees and provides primarily irrigation services and some snow services to 80 percent residential and 20 percent commercial clients.

Jardine and Bryce Groteluschen, general manager, reveal key changes that helped their irrigation business succeed in this hectic year.

THE PROCESSES

Jardine says the company's new cloud-based software offers more advanced features than its prior software.

"The techs like having iPads and having a good way to email or text clients good, better and best options and before and after photos," Jardine says. "And, it's better for the homeowners. They like that we send a pic of the technician before they arrive — it's an Uber-like experience."

Quality Irrigation also began looking at other processes like inventory management. In a simple hack, the

crews starting using large clear plastic totes labeled with the crew names. Rather than drop off orders in one large delivery for the shop manager to sort, Quality's distributors, SiteOne and Reams, provide just-in-time inventory, where they now deliver supplies to the shop on demand and divvy them up directly into each crew's bin. Quality doesn't see any extra costs for this, and it saves man-hours.

The organization didn't stop at the shop inventory. Late last fall, Quality also opted to switch 10 of its 20 trucks to Dodge ProMaster vans, and is in the process of adding on three more.

"We're way more efficient with them," Groteluschen says. "They've got LED lights, and multiple shelves help us stay organized — everything has a place."

THE PEOPLE

Quality also added new people — 15 in 2020, compared to three to five new additions in a typical year. The company also got lucky in the beginning of the year, welcoming the four workers it requested from the H-2B visa program before the program was halted.

To manage the training, the company added a level of middle managers to oversee various departments and training, allowing Groteluschen to manage sales, installation, service and office managers.

"We didn't implement that (system) at the beginning of the year knowing we were going to have this great of a year, but we would have failed horribly if we didn't," he says. "It was a hard transition because I basically had to create four of me, but after those three months, our



stress levels went completely down, and profitability went up because it was a well-oiled machine."

SMOOTH SAILING
iPads enable techs to streamline their working process.

The company also hired a leadership coach to help train the managers on their new roles.

THE REPUTATION

One thing that's helped Quality Irrigation achieve success has been around far longer than the last couple of years: a team mentality that's based on everyone working together and providing good service.

"I think our reputation penetrated through the market — do the right thing, make the right repairs," Groteluschen says, adding that Quality has nearly 700 Google reviews. "And, we preach customer service, and that's come through in people's reviews, sharing their experiences."

The team mentality of the equation extends just beyond reputation — it also shows up in job titles.

"I like to say that I'm a coworker — I'm not anyone's boss," Jardine says, though technically, he is the president of the company.

"I don't need the ego piece of that. It's more important that people feel valued as part of a team," he adds. "Everyone wants to feel like they're working toward the same goal. Plus, it's easier to be a better teammate and easier to have a better culture when everyone is just coworkers."

FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Larry Ryan

PRESIDENT
RYAN LAWN & TREE
LENEXA, KAN.

1 What would you like to tell me about Ryan Lawn & Tree?

Turf is the basis of our company. I started there with turf applications. Then we added pruning and tree and shrub spraying, followed by irrigation. We will do about \$46 million this year. I'm 71 years old. I refer to myself as "the old guy." I don't know how long I'm going to stay on, but we still have some big goals to hit. We are now 100 percent employee owned. Our people are 100 percent bought in. It doesn't get better than that. I'll step down when I no longer bring value to the company.

2 What's your 2020 been like?

We had a lot of positives. People were home; they watched us. We are very careful about our appearance. Hair needs to be well taken care of, and we ask men to shave daily, kind of an all-American look. A lot of men and

women don't care for that, but we hire the ones who can sacrifice. I realize beards are in now — it's the macho thing — but we've kept our no-beards policy. I think it's paid off. Our industry is called a commodity business, which means I get work over your company by beating your price. We don't commoditize what we do. We try very hard to value add everything and charge above market, which allows us to pay above market, which allows us to do a higher-quality, value-added application or service call. With us, presentation is everything.

3 What's your favorite thing about living in Lenexa, Kan.?

I live in Lenexa, and it is a nice town, but I've loved all the places I've lived and that includes Idaho, Montana and Kansas. Now, I'm a forester, and the place I live now has two acres of trees. Taking down a dead or poor quality tree is my hobby. I turn it into firewood and burn it during the winter. Plus, I get to manage my own little forest. I get to pick out the trees I think look nicest. I love managing the forest. Also, I have about 12,000, 13,000 square feet of turf, and I want the neighbors to see it pristine when they drive by. It's goofy, but I love doing it! When you are 71, you realize your days are numbered. I'm having fun with the years I have left. I'm an old man, and my hobbies are landscaping, faith, family and work.

BEST ADVICE

"In our industry, we always see articles about expanding services. My advice is never expand until you do what you do pretty darn well."

4 What are your favorite holiday traditions?

I have nine brothers and sisters. We are all still married to our first spouse. We love to get together. I also love decorating a 9- or 10-foot Christmas tree every year with my son.

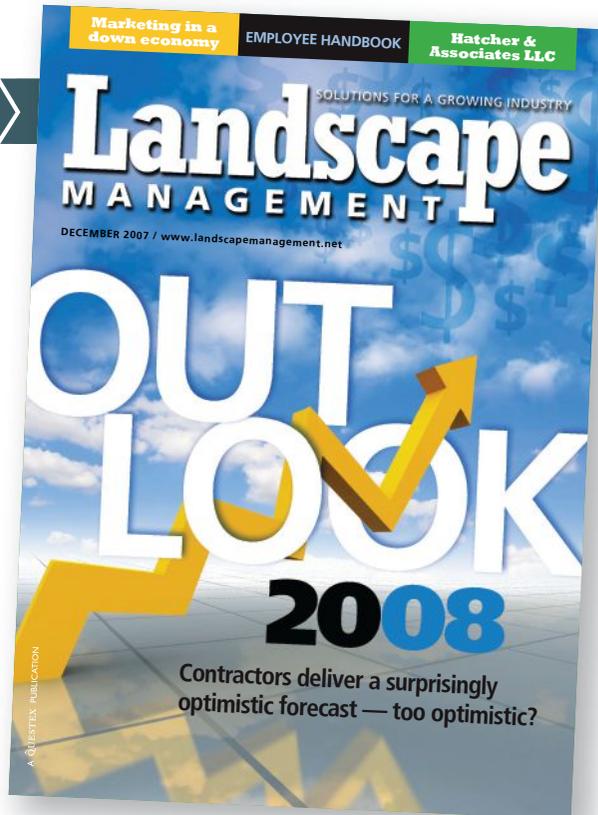
5 Do you recall a day in your career that was really memorable for a positive reason?

Customers have given me great advice. An old neighbor-turned-customer rode around with me one day. At the end of the day, he said, "Larry, this has been fun. But when you send out a \$5 an hour guy who doesn't care, it won't be fun anymore." That saying led the way for our hiring mostly college grads for our workforce. Those higher-caliber people pushed us to value add our service and charge more. It's been a positive Catch-22. Hiring special people has made us stand out in our industry. 



PHOTO: JEREMIAH SAMBORSKI, COURTESY OF RYAN LAWN & TREE

A LOOK BACK



Ups and downs

While 2020 has been a challenging year for many, the green industry has experienced similar ups and downs before and has remained resilient in spite of it all. In fact, in the December 2007 issue of *Landscape Management*, despite teetering on the edge of the Great Recession, readers expressed optimism in the magazine's annual "Outlook" survey. Give it a read at LM's archives (<https://www.landscape.com/lm-archive/>) and see what lessons can be taken away as we wrap up what has been an unprecedented year.

COVER: LM ARCHIVES

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BY PHIL HARWOOD

The author is managing partner of Grow The Bench. Reach him at Phil@GrowTheBench.com.

The accountability challenge

Many managers struggle with the issue of accountability, especially during a time when good people are hard to come by. They reason that it is virtually impossible to hold people accountable, since attempts to do so will naturally result in increased employee turnover. While this reasoning may appear to be sound, I'd like to offer a different perspective on this topic and provide some much-needed guidance for managers facing this challenge.

The truth is accountability does not necessarily lead to an *increase* in employee turnover. In fact, sometimes accountability results in a *decrease* in employee turnover. Let me explain. The best way to think about accountability is with respect to culture. Accountability is something that shows up in cultural norms, either in a strong way where it's pervasive or in a weak way where it's largely absent. The two different cultures are polar opposites with significant differences in terms of outcomes. In other words, accountability is not a management issue, but rather a cultural issue.

When there is a culture of accountability, accountability is not something to be *enforced* by a manager.

Instead, accountability is *reinforced* by peers on their respective teams. In a team structure, each individual feels responsible for the results of the team. Managers rarely need to intervene. People working in this cultural environment tend to adopt an ownership mentality, and they tend to be more engaged, more productive, more careful and more satisfied overall. They are less likely to bail on their teammates, reducing turnover.

I've written about teams in previous articles of this series and would encourage you to read back through those articles if you're interested in learning more about how to develop more cohesive teams in your organization.

On the other hand, when accountability is lacking in an organization's culture, managers are in a no-win situation. Without peer accountability among teammates, individuals become the sole responsibility of their managers. Accountability looks more like discipline than learning. Instead of wildcard behaviors being corrected by peers within a team environment, managers are forced to intervene or ignore the issue for fear of losing a desperately needed employee. What a terrible position to be in as a manager.

Managers attempting to enforce policies and procedures where there is a lack of accountability are often fighting a losing battle. Inevitably, managers simply ignore violations (that's why there is a lack of accountability in the first place). This results in an inconsistent approach that breeds favoritism and encourages even more violations to occur. Good people won't enjoy such a work

environment, resulting in higher employee turnover. However, underperformers may appreciate the lack of accountability and remain with the organization for many years.

At this point, you may be wondering how to develop a culture of accountability. My first recommendation is to begin to develop a team-based management structure for all of the reasons mentioned above. Work to implement team goals and helpful metrics, teach problem-solving skills and invest in team-building activities and incentives for goal achievement among the team. If teams are functioning well, accountability will be alive and present with minimal management intervention.

My second recommendation is to realize that a culture of accountability may be undermined by leaders who set bad examples. I see this all the time. Talk is cheap. If you want to promote a culture of accountability, leaders must be the first ones to hold themselves accountable for following through on whatever they commit to. It's simply wishful thinking to expect your people to think like an owner if the leaders of your organization fail to do so themselves.

In this article series on teamwork, I've been leaning heavily on best-selling author Patrick Lencioni's book, "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team." In this book, he explains an interesting phenomenon: The more leaders hold themselves and their teams accountable, the less likely they are to have to hold individuals accountable and vice-versa. This point reinforces the idea that a culture of accountability starts at the top.

Now go forth. 🙌



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BY JEFF KORHAN

Jeff Korhan is the author of *Built-In Social*, founder of Landscape Digital Institute and a Duct Tape Marketing Certified consultant. Reach him at jeff@landscapedigitalinstitute.com.

Internal marketing: Empowering employees to win with customers

Every employee's work impacts customers in some way.

As legendary sales trainer Zig Ziglar put it, "I have always said that everyone is in sales. Maybe you don't hold the title of salesperson, but if you deal with people, you, my friend, are in sales."

Selling is a skill that can be learned, but it requires training and daily interaction with customers. For the majority of employees, interaction with customers is limited.

An alternative approach is internal marketing training. In most companies, internal marketing is seldom practiced, if it is done at all. We recently launched an internal marketing training and coaching program at Landscape Digital Institute, and the results are encouraging.

Research shows that employees are most committed to an organization when they feel their everyday efforts are aligned with its mission. That's the primary goal of internal marketing: to align the behavior customers see from a company's employees with the message they hear from its external marketing.

As anyone in sales or marketing knows, what's relevant to customers varies throughout their customer journey. Including discovering, acquiring and continuing to use a company's products and services, customer needs will change.

Are employees crystal clear about the stages of the customer journey and how each one fulfills the promise of the company's core message? This understanding informs employee actions,

making mission-driven behavior instinctive.

Customers intuitively sense when internal and external marketing are aligned. They know they're aligned when they ask questions, such as, "What's next?" and get a response without hesitation.

HOW TO BUILD INTERNAL MARKETING TRAINING

Consistent growth requires a defined customer journey with milestones that mark progress and touchpoints that guide that journey. A transparent process gives customers confidence that they are on a safe path to where they want to go, and it empowers team members to guide the process.

It helps to think of the customer journey in terms of stages that achieve key milestones. For example, the first milestone could be a discovery meeting that leads to determining the scope of a project and possibly signing a design agreement or letter of intent.

Knowing these steps gives all employees who support that stage clarity about the outcome. It also empowers them to answer questions and guide customers down the path

you'd like them to go. Understanding what should happen after a milestone is achieved and who will be involved equips them to satisfy customers.

In my monthly Communication Coach blog for *Landscape Management*, I recently discussed how customer case studies can be invaluable training assets. Debriefing and documenting your successes and failures is vitally important for refining your process and internally marketing it.

In addition to clarifying and enhancing the customer journey, these case studies are a rich source of stories, selling techniques and lessons. They're often invaluable for winning new customers who find them relatable.

Employees accept that they are doing a good job when customers are happy. What they need help with is understanding the bigger picture, such as how the company defines an ideal customer and what its core message or promise means to them.

This is marketing. If put to the test, many business owners and marketing managers might be challenged with communicating this to customers. It takes practice.

Why not practice them with your team members to get everyone on board? Not just once or twice but on a regular basis, just as you probably do with safety training.

When employees know not just what they do but why it matters, it's sure to create more wins for customers and help recruit like-minded team members. 



A REVIEW OF THE YEAR IN SAFETY

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Many companies in the green industry have stepped up their safety game — and have been rewarded for it, according to a review of the 2020 Safety Awards presented by the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP).

“The NALP Safety Awards program recognizes landscape and lawn companies that consistently achieve strong safety records,” says Britt Wood, NALP CEO. “Achieving these safety milestones reflects their dedication to creating and maintaining safe work environments, which is essential to running a good business.”

Below are a few figures that stood out from this year’s awards.

127 companies and their branches entered the awards this year, and 119 won a safety award for their 2019 safety data year.

77 companies received a “No Days Away from Work” award.

73 companies received a “No Vehicle Accidents” award.

53 companies received a “No Injuries and Illnesses” award.

53 companies received an “Overall Safety Achievement — Gold” award.

22 companies were new to the Safety Recognition Awards this year.

12 companies received the prestigious “Best of the Best” award, which is given to companies receiving an “Overall Safety Achievement Award — Gold” for the past three consecutive years.

5 of the 12 “Best of the Best” recipients were Aspen Grove Landscape Group companies.

This year, due to COVID-19, each company is receiving their awards separately.

NALP will open the entry process for the 2021 Safety Recognition Awards (2020 safety record year) in January 2021. 



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GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

The author is president and CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group, based in Dayton, Ohio. Reach him at marty@growgroupinc.com.



Fall is for planting, December is for planning

In some ways, it's hard for me to believe that I'm in my 38th year in business at Grunder Landscaping Co. Time has flown by for me, and so much has changed over the years. There are many landscape pros who follow along with what my team and I are doing through this column and on social media. It probably looks like I have it all figured out, although I can assure you that even I have bad days.

It's taken a lot of time, mistakes and hard work to get to where we are now. In 1992, I had just sold my biggest job to date, a \$22,000 landscape installation. I was so excited, I put my briefcase with the plans and signed contract in it next to my truck to get in, then promptly forgot about it and backed over it. The briefcase busted open, and there were tire tracks on all the documents. My mistakes aren't limited to the past. About a month ago, I went to the wrong house for a sales call.

My team and I aren't perfect, and our journey to get to where we

“So, this month, I encourage you to look at where you are today, celebrate how far you've come and think about where you'd like to be a year from now.”

are now was full of missteps. Early in my career, I repeatedly made a big mistake this time of year: I used to more or less take off the month of December. As a reward for a busy year, December was a month to just coast.

I realized that this was valuable time wasted, and now we use December to plan and prepare for the coming year. One of my mentors, Les Banwart, taught me to start planning by asking myself, “How will I know I've been successful a year from now?” when framing my goals so that I can clearly articulate my vision for success and how I want to measure it.

So now, I ask you: How will you know if you've been successful a year from now, and what needs to happen to make this a reality?

If, for example, you want more money in your bank account, you'll need more profits. To get more profits, there are a couple areas to focus on: growing the right sales for your business and managing expenses. To close more profitable sales, analyze your most profitable sales from 2020 and figure out why they were the most profitable. Then, replicate those conditions in 2021 by searching

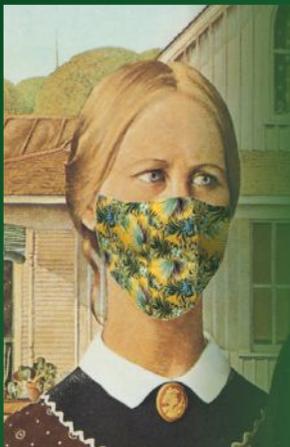
for similar prospects, proposing jobs with similar scopes or creating a bidding process based on these jobs.

To manage expenses, look over your financial reports to see what expenses are up compared to last year or what expenses are up to your surprise. Right now, interest rates are low, and refinancing loans can be a simple way to save money. If you haven't reevaluated your loans or line of credit recently, check in with your banker to see if you can get a lower interest rate.

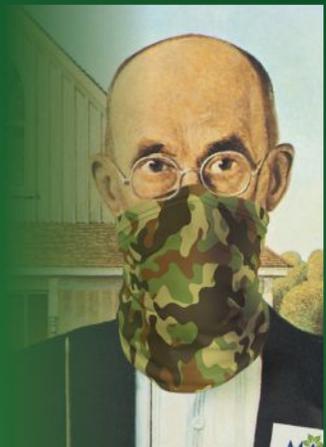
So, this month, I encourage you to look at where you are today, celebrate how far you've come and think about where you'd like to be a year from now. Then, start conversations with your team to identify the steps you'll need to take. Spend any downtime you may have this winter on the first steps to making your vision a reality. 📌

We're looking forward to the GROW! 2021 Annual Conference in New Orleans on Feb. 24-26. While the event will look a little different this year, it will still be the event many in our industry rely on to learn new ways to grow or better control their business. See what we have planned: <https://growgroupinc.com/grow-2021>.





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