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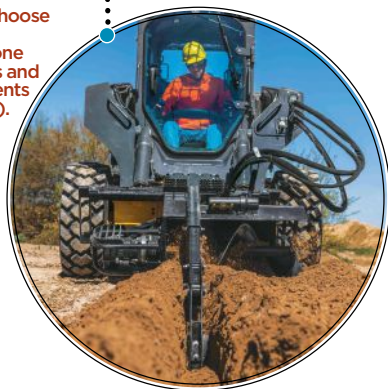
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## [ CALL FOR PROJECTS ] Be featured in LM

We're always looking for great reader projects to feature — including maintenance, hardscape and irrigation jobs. That's why we're asking you to send us some information and photos of the project your company is most proud of, and you may be featured in an upcoming Water World, Big One or Hardscape Solutions story. Email your thoughts and high-resolution photos to LM Editor Christina Herrick at [cherrick@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:cherrick@northcoastmedia.net).



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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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## Head out on the highway

**O**ur cover headline this month refers to Steppenwolf's 1968 classic "Born to be Wild." The cover story, written 53 years later by Managing Editor Sarah Webb, is an overview of today's mowers and how they're best being utilized. It was our Editor Christina Herrick who gave us all a smile when she nailed down the Steppenwolf callback for the cover headline. I didn't need an excuse to go back and listen to the song, but I did, and as I often do, I listened loudly.

I have gone from zero to 60, and all of a sudden, my motor has been running. I went from practically no travel over the last 15 months to four trips in three weeks — Cleveland, San Diego, St. Louis and Kohler, Wis. It's been good to get back on the road and meet with people in person and learn about what they're hearing, seeing and doing. There's just no substitute for that in-person interaction when you have my job.

My most recent trip was to Kohler for the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's (OPEI) Annual Meeting. It is a gathering of the industry's largest equipment manufacturers and their supporting casts. *LM* was the only industry publication at the event. We were proudly represented by Publisher Bill Roddy, North Coast Media CEO Kevin Stoltzman and me.

Kris Kiser, president and CEO of OPEI, nicely summed up the mood of the room in his opening remarks when he simply said, "I missed you guys." He asked, by show of hands, how many people were on their first business trip since March 2020. About two-thirds of

**"It's been good to get back on the road and meet with people in person and learn about what they're hearing, seeing and doing. There's just no substitute for that in-person interaction when you have my job."**

the room raised their hands.

"It was a challenging year, we lost (GIE+EXPO)," Kiser said. "But we had money in the bank for a rainy day. And it rained hard."

Kiser is excited to further get back to normal this year as they prepare to host GIE+EXPO 2021 in Louisville, Ky., Oct. 20-22. He does predict a downturn in attendance from 2019 based on restrictions for international travelers, but he's still optimistic for what will be a comeback year for the event.

Rick Olson, CEO of The Toro Co., agreed with Kiser and said he thinks "welcome back" will be an ongoing theme of 2021. Olson, the chair of the OPEI board of directors, spoke to the group about the unique situation the industry finds itself in coming out of a tumultuous 2020.

"Our industry became the heroes of last year," Olson said. "People were in their backyards. It was a refuge for people, and I don't think that will wear off. It will be a boost to this industry for the future."

All in all, it was a great meeting with a lot to take in. We'll have more coverage of what is happening with the industry's largest trade show this year and beyond in an upcoming issue. In the meantime, my team and I look forward to seeing you in Louisville this fall, especially after missing last year.

- Speaking of in-person meetings, the 2021 *LM* Growth Summit takes place Dec. 6-8 at Reunion Resort in Orlando. If you're a decision-maker in the turf and ornamental care segment and would value one-on-one meetings with a select group of our partners, I'd encourage you to visit [LandscapeManagement.net](https://www.landscapemanagement.net). Click on the tab that reads *LM* Growth Summit to learn more and apply.
- With this issue we welcome Robert Schoenberger to the team, our new senior editor. Robert comes to *LM* with an extensive journalism background, primarily covering the automotive industry, most recently as the editor of *Today's Motor Vehicles*, a magazine he founded in 2013. Robert has worked his way north over the last two-plus decades, starting his career in Houston, then Jackson, Miss., then Louisville (I promise I'm not getting a commission for every Louisville reference in this column, despite the brochure that was included with this issue) and then all the way to Cleveland. Join me in welcoming Robert to what is clearly the *heavy metal thunder* team and publication in the industry. 🎸



# WALKING THE PERIMETER

## Why adding perimeter pest control makes sense for LCOs

**S**mart lawn care operators (LCOs) want to grow their businesses, but they know they can't add on just any service and make it a profitable part of their company. That's why offerings analogous to lawn care, like perimeter pest control, are a popular option.

"Part of it is about the efficiency and convenience factor," says Evan Parenti, market manager at FMC Corp. "It can also be used to set yourself apart from other service offerings."



**Evan Parenti**

Parenti explains that residential customers have spent more time than ever in their homes and yards over the past year and half. At the same time, they have become hesitant about letting technicians inside to do a traditional pest control treatment. LCOs can take advantage of these cultural changes by offering perimeter pest services that take place entirely outside the home.



**Brian Mount**

"Homeowners are keyed in now on top-of-mind pests, especially in areas with heavy tick pressure," Parenti says. "We're seeing these pests showing as increasing issues in the population, so there's more interest in perimeter pest control."

Savvy operators often couple perimeter pest services with mosquito control services to complete the package.

Parenti sees lawn care companies leveraging versatile products like FMC's Talstar Professional Insecticide in their perimeter pest and mosquito control efforts. Scion Insecticide is another option for perimeter pest control.

Talstar, which has the active ingredient bifenthrin, hits a sweet spot for multiple reasons, Parenti says. The product is an easy-to-pour, nonclogging concentrate that doesn't require a lot of measuring. This product also has a broad label, good efficacy and a favorable toxicological profile.

"Talstar is so broad and flexible that there's very few places it doesn't go or do what it needs to do," Parenti says.

Often, LCOs contact FMC looking for an insecticide product that will last between their visits, says FMC Service Manager Brian Mount. He points them to Talstar, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

"Typically, the service interval is 30 to 60 days," he says. "Talstar has been able to show that over time it does last through the service interval and it is performing. Talstar has improved year after year and has met customer expectations."

To add perimeter pest or mosquito offerings, the first thing to do is assess your existing customers and services, looking at ways you can be efficient and set yourself apart, Parenti says.

FMC offers several assurances, which LCOs can pass along as guarantees to their customers. Offering the peace of mind that comes with free retreatments can be a great differentiator for lawn care companies.

With the Mosquito Promise assurance program, FMC guarantees 45 days of no callbacks after a Talstar mosquito treatment within the program period (now through Nov. 30). If callbacks occur, FMC will provide the amount of Talstar needed to make a reapplication to the treated area for free.

Likewise, for perimeter pest control FMC offers the Scion Perimeter Performance Assurance, which guarantees 90 days of no retreatments after an exterior perimeter barrier application is made, now through Sept. 30.

In the end, the success of your add-on offerings comes down to proving your worth as a service provider. "Remind the customer of the continued success of the service," Parenti says. "If you've done your job right, your customers won't notice anything in the perimeter."



**In honor of Talstar's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, lawn care operators are encouraged to enter FMC's Ford F-150 sweepstakes. Visit [Talstar25th.com](http://Talstar25th.com) before September 30!**

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# 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](http://LandscapeManagement.net).

## How can landscape companies contend with rising raw material prices?

"I recommend frequently evaluating P&L ratios and adjusting prices in order to ensure the company's fiscal health."



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**Bryan Stolz**  
Winterberry Landscape & Garden Center  
Southington, Conn.

**Greg Winchel**  
Winchel Irrigation  
Grandville, Mich.

"The landscape industry should easily be able to pass on price increases to customers with the demand we have right now for services. Keep your costs up to date for when your job will start and utilize a cost markup system for pricing instead of unit prices."

"Most reasonable people understand that we are all paying more for the inputs in our businesses. If your clients and prospects don't seem to understand, show them data, be patient and stick to your guns in terms of pricing that covers all your costs and allows you to make a profit. Profit is NOT a dirty word."



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**Kevin Kehoe**  
3PG Consulting  
Laguna, Calif.

**Jeffrey Scott**  
Jeffrey Scott Consulting  
New Orleans, La.

"Rising material costs are something that should lead to opportunities — opportunities to confirm our pricing structures and margins and to educate our team and our clients on what things really cost and therefore what they are worth."

"Communicate well with your suppliers and then relay that information to your customers. Brutal honesty is always well received."

"Prices are rising across the board, so your customers are expecting increases. Strike while the iron is hot!"

"Better, tighter estimating on job materials (less waste — yes, there is a lot) and raising prices by replacing the cost basis of the materials in the estimating system."



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Reduced production before 2020, winter storms and increased demand has caused a plant shortage.

# Plant shortage: A perfect storm

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

**R**educed production, 2020's increased demand and the February Polar Vortex in Texas has left contractors scrambling to source plant material.

If you ask people in the green industry about obtaining plants, you might hear statements such as “unprecedented demand” or “the worst shortage in years.”

Experts say this plant shortage predates beyond homeowners' renewed focus on green spaces and the weather in Texas, back to the Great Recession, where many nurseries were left with an oversupply and slashed production, and many went out of business.

Now, add the compound effect of COVID-19, an already labor-short industry and the Texas freeze.

With a hot housing market in the Southeast and Texas and increased interest in gardening, the freeze just exacerbated an already tight supply for plant material, experts say.

“Texas is one of the largest economies in the world, and it's had one of our largest housing booms in America over the last 10 years,” said David Kirby, executive vice president of Everde Growers in Houston.

Those cold temperatures in February killed or severely damaged plant material grown by Texas nurseries. Difficulty sourcing plants from Texas has led landscaping companies like Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping in San Antonio to purchase material from locations outside the state.

“We're having to get plants from California, Florida and other places out of state that have more availability, which hits us on the freight side,” said Jerry Maldonado, corporate vice president of Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping. The company earned the No. 58 spot on the 2021 *LM150* with \$38,874,196 in 2020 revenue.

Maldonado said this situation has caused his company to delay and post-

pone projects, substitute plant material for what's available and even accept undersized material.

As far as predicting how long the plant shortage will last, experts say they don't expect to see relief any time soon.

“I think it's going to be more than a blip. It's not just a spring 2021 phenomenon,” said Timothee Sallin, co-CEO of Cherrylake of Groveland, Fla., No. 115 on the 2021 *LM150*, with \$20 million in 2020 revenue. “This tight market is going to last, I believe, at least three more years. We make decisions when the market's good, and then we end up in a situation where the market's bad with a lot of inventory. If the economic cycle is three to five years, you should always be planting when things are bad and pulling back when things are good, but nobody does it that way.”

#### MORE ONLINE

To learn more about the plant shortage, visit the Web Extras section at [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net).



## Project EverGreen wins donation to revitalize Detroit park

The charitable arm of Rocket Mortgage is donating \$280,000 to Project EverGreen. The money will go to revitalizing Detroit's Antonio McDuffy Park, a small green space near the city's Motown Museum and General Motors' Factory Zero electric vehicle plant.

Antonio McDuffy Park, formerly Philadelphia Park, is in Detroit's New Center Historic District. The park serves as an important community gathering space for residents of the Piety Hill neighborhood. It was renamed for Tony McDuffy, a resident and advocate for the community. The renovation will double the size of the park to about 1.5 acres, as the city

recently acquired adjacent lots. Demolition of a vacated alley and grading work will extend the park further.

Although the bulk of the work was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, preliminary survey work was completed this year and other work began in June. The project will include a new 1/8-mile concrete walkway, an inclusive playground, picnic tables, grills, bike racks, benches and a horse-shoe pit. Additionally, new trees will be planted, and an open grass play area will be created.

## NALP appoints new board of directors

The National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) has named its board of directors for 2021-2022. The term begins Oct. 1.

"The nominations team executed a very thorough nomination and selection process that brought some to the best minds in the industry before the committee," said Andrew Ziehler, chair of the nominations committee for NALP. "It was a difficult decision for the committee to make, but in the end, we feel we got the best possible slate of candidates to serve NALP in 2021-2022 and continue the progress towards taking NALP to the next level."

Officers include:

- President Bob Grover, Pacific Landscape Management
- President-Elect Mike Bogan, LandCare
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- Immediate Past President Shayne Newman, YardScapes Landscape Professionals

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**MOWER  
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# Get your mowers **RUNNIN'**

While they might not head on down the highway, in this mower faceoff, experts reveal the best “adventures” for each type of mower

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

Zero-turn mowers serve as the workhorses of mower fleets due to their high productivity.





**Stand-on, ride-on, robotic, walk-behind** — the question is which type of mower rises above the rest, which mower is best for heading out on the open — erm — turf.

The answer may not be as clean and straightforward as the lines they create.

“Many times, the contractors will focus their fleet on the applications that allow them higher equipment utilization,” says Tom Vachal, senior turf product manager for Kubota.

Vachal; Chase Tew, product line manager of B2B mowing at John Deere; Brad Unruh, director of new product development at Hustler; Oscar Holmberg, product manager for robotics at Husqvarna; and Sean Dwyer, global product manager of commercial wheeled product at Husqvarna, explain where and how the different types of mowers should be used.

*Continued on page 12 ➤*



## Stand-on

### SQUEEZE IN

Stand-on mowers take up a smaller footprint and can mow in tight spaces.

The benefits of stand-on mowers, Unruh says, are threefold: They leave the operator less fatigued, they're compact for easily navigating tight spaces and their small footprint takes up less room on a trailer than a zero-turn.

"Contractors love them because they are user-friendly," Unruh adds.

Dwyer adds that stand-on mowers are popular when trailer space is limited and where operator maneuverability, like shifting body position or ducking below tree limbs, is required.

"Stand-ons are also great when getting off and on the machine is a more regular occurrence," Dwyer says.

Proving to be versatile across several applications, stand-ons typically come in 36- and 48-inch deck sizes, but options up to 72-inch deck sizes are now available, Tew says.

"The stand-on has a lot of flexibility to flex down into trim applications and flex up into what would be known as the more productivity-focused machines," he says. "The ability for those machines to be nimble and versatile is a lot of the reasoning why they've become so popular over the last three to five years."



### OPERATOR IN MIND

Many landscape companies turn to stand-on mowers because they leave crew members less fatigued at the end of a long day of mowing.

PHOTOS: KUBOTA (TOP), JOHN DEERE (BOTTOM)





**GET IT DONE**  
Zero-turn mowers can cover a lot of ground and are often used on large complexes.

## Ride-on

**D**rivers of productivity, ride-on mowers are ideal for tackling big, wide-open areas.

“Given the larger fuel capacity, higher-horsepower possibilities and deck capabilities, zero-turn mowers remain better suited for larger areas and situations where the operators remain on the unit for extended periods,” Dwyer says.

Tew adds that ride-on front mowers work well for large complexes, such as schools and city parks, where the machines stay on-site or when the machines are transportable from one job site to the other without having to load them on trucks and trailers.

“One of the big advantages of the front mowers is it’s got four-season versatility. You can get these machines with or without



a cab,” Tew says.

“You can mow in relative comfort and air-conditioned in the summertime, but then come fall, you can take that mower and put on a broom or blower for cleaning up after a storm. Then, come wintertime, you can use a broom or a snow-blower on the front and a drop spreader on the back to perform snow and ice management with one machine and one pass.”

**WIDE LOAD**  
Ride-on mowers often tout larger deck sizes to get more done in a single cut.

**MOW AWAY**  
The ergonomic features on many zero-turns allow the operator to be comfortable all day long.

*Continued on  
page 14 ►*





## Robotic

**A**s labor continues to be a challenge for landscapers, autonomous products may offer a solution, experts say.

"Whether it be small autonomous (residential focused) or larger autonomous (mowers) that can cut areas while the primary operator is doing other tasks, basically becoming a one-man crew, I believe we will see that become the norm in several years," Vachal says.

In addition to helping with labor shortages, Holmberg says using robotic products often comes down to contractors needing a low-emission and low-

noise product in places such as universities and hospitals.

He adds that robotic mowers are often a solution for customers who expect a perfect-cut lawn.

"The difference between a robotic mower and conventional mower is that a robotic mower cuts every day," Holmberg says. "You will have a constant look of the grass; it will always look

mowed, and it will never grow tall. You're keeping short grass short."

These products are lightweight, small and they have safety sensors, he adds.

"If it runs into a person, it will bump very gently, stop, turn and go in another direction," Holmberg says.

Continued on page 16 ►

### PERFECT CUT

Robotic mowers work well in areas that require a uniform cut every time.



### MOWIN' ON ITS OWN

Robotic mowers can save companies on labor. Additionally, low noise output ensures no one is disturbed.



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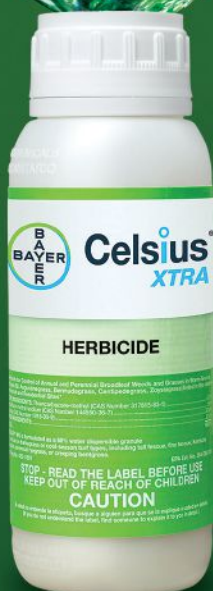


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## Walk-behind mowers

**O**ften a less expensive option, smaller push mowers perform well in smaller residential yards. Unruh says landscape professionals also rely on larger walk-behind mowers on commercial properties.

Vachal adds they can access areas that other products cannot fit into, such as parking lot islands and narrow areas.

“Push mowers, they’re still out there, of course, but they’re not nearly as prolific as they used to be,” Dwyer says. “It seems like everybody has them for cleaning up around the flower beds and medians and places where you’re doing more trimming work than actual mowing work.”



### EASY ACCESS

Commercial walk-behind mowers can access items other mowers can't, such as parking lot islands.



### CLEAN IT UP


Smaller push mowers are ideal for items such as cleaning up around flower beds and curbs.

## ROUNDING IT OUT

All in all, contractors most likely will have a combination of several types of mowers in their fleet, Tew says.

“The combination of those machines fits the properties that they maintain. Normally, there’s not a one-size-fits-all option,” he says. “It’s based on application and property types that they manage and have under contract that will ultimately determine their fleet composition.”

Vachal adds that it’s important to keep the employee in mind when deciding on what type of mowers to incorporate into a fleet.

“Taking care of your employees is important and will grow in importance in the future, so equipment that offers a better experience for your employees will benefit you in the long run,” Vachal says. 



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## TURF + ORNAMENTAL

### WEED AVENGERS

## Under control

Experts share the top things to consider to keep crabgrass in check

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR



It's crabgrass season, and while experts say preemergent products are typically the best bet, they've also shared a list of things to think about regarding crabgrass for summer and fall.

**ERIC CZERNICH**, owner of Connecticut Valley Landscaping, Chicopee, Mass.

- **Understand your product labels and use the right product for the right stage.** "Certain herbicides only work during certain tiller stages," he says of the number of stems the weed produces during its growth. His company offers lawn care, maintenance, pest control, design/build and irrigation services to a 75 percent residential and 25 percent commercial clientele.
- **Note problem spots.** This way, Czernich says, you can modify treatments next season to mitigate crabgrass issues.
- **Raise the mowing height.** At 3 to 3.5 inches, your clients' turf will help naturally shade out weeds and save on postemergent applications, he says.

**ERIC REASOR, PH.D.**, PBI-Gordon Southeast research scientist

- **Grow healthy turf.** "Implementing cultural practices (i.e., mowing, fertilization, irrigation and cultivation) will facilitate turfgrass competitiveness against crabgrass," he says.
- **Know your postemergent herbicides.** "Postemergent herbicides are a great tool to control what crabgrass breaks through the preemergent herbicide," he says. "Examples of these herbicides include fenoxaprop, fluazifop, pinoxaden and quinclorac. Postemergent herbicides are most effective at early crabgrass growth stages with the addition of a spray adjuvant."
- **Think about resistance management.** "Using the same herbicide over and over will eventually lead to crabgrass resistance to that mode of action," he says. "There isn't a large selection of herbicide modes of action for crabgrass control." This is where cultural practices and spot treating breakthroughs with postemergents come in handy.

**BOB MANN**, director of state and local government relations, National Association of Landscape Professionals and former agronomist

- **Best defense is a dense stand** "Do our crabgrass controls work as advertised? You bet they do, but they are not

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Raising the mowing height to 3-3.5 inches will naturally shade out weeds, including crabgrass.



#### KEEP IT DENSE

A healthy stand of turfgrass is the best defense against crabgrass. Otherwise, voids in the turf can lead to breakthroughs.

magic bullets," he says. "Herbicides must be used in conjunction with best management practices. A dense stand of vigor-

"Depending upon where you are in the U.S., (1,700 growing degree days) could be well into July. One preemergent application in early spring might be the cause of midsummer breakthrough," he says.

#### DAVE BIEGACKI, Nufarm customer and brand manager for turf and ornamentals

- **Keep 'em covered.** "Crabgrass is very opportunistic, so any void in the turf becomes a prime area for crabgrass," he says. Quinclorac is a good herbicide to control crabgrass during turfgrass establishment.
- **Healthy turf.** Think about cultural practices, such as proper fertilization, watering, good drainage and aeration, to keep crabgrass at bay, Biegacki says.
- **Tank mix.** "Topramezone or fenoxaprop are good postemergent choices," he says. "It is important to include methylated seed oil or crop oil concentrate in the tank with topramezone. Be aware that topramezone causes goosegrass and crabgrass leaves to appear bleached for seven to 14 days after application before plants die." 📱

ously growing turfgrass is the very best herbicide of all." Removing too much leaf material by mowing too low exposes the soil to sunlight, thus increasing soil temperature and increasing crabgrass pressure.

- **Your application pattern matters, a lot.** Apply the right rate across the entire lawn. "Too often, applicators will 'cheat the edges,' which causes insufficient herbicide to be applied along the perimeter of the lawn where crabgrass pressure is the greatest," he says.
- **Early down, early gone.** "Early down, early gone" is wise advice from my favorite weed scientist," he says about early herbicide applications. While crabgrass is believed to hit full germination at 1,700 growing degree days, Mann says the weed isn't done germinating, with at least 10 percent of the weed still germinating into summer and early fall.

PHOTOS: BOB MANN



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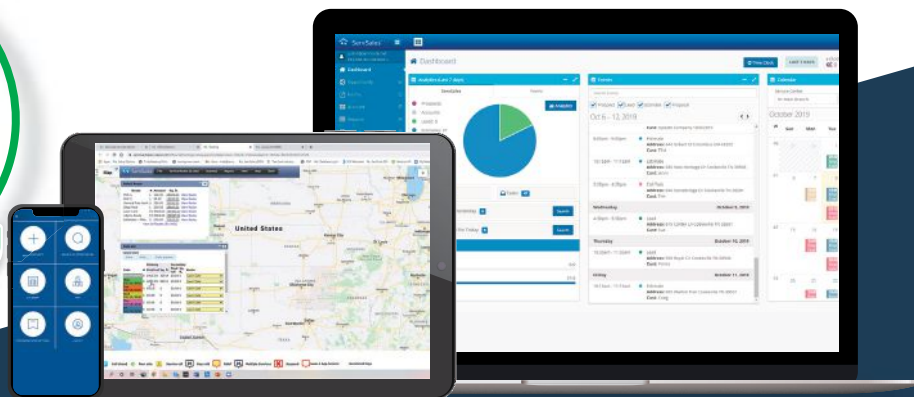
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## TURF DISEASE ID + CONTROL

# How to ID *Pythium* blight

Get the scoop on ideal conditions, mistakes to avoid and treatments to keep this lawn disease in check **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**

**K**nowing how to prevent, properly identify and manage *Pythium* blight will determine how big of an issue this disease can become.

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

While *Pythium* blight can occur on any type of turfgrass, it's especially problematic on new stands of perennial ryegrass and annual bluegrass, says Brian Aynardi, Ph.D., northeast research scientist at PBI-Gordon Corp.

It can affect cool- or warm-season turf, though tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass are typically less affected.

Characteristics include yellowish or brownish spots about the size of a quarter that grow up to 6 inches in diameter, says Brent Radford, golf, turf, landscape and nursery agronomist with Wilbur-Ellis Agribusiness. If *Pythium* blight is allowed to persist, the disease will cause significant areas of turf loss, giving the dead turf a bronze appearance.



"When daytime temperatures are above 85 degrees Fahrenheit, nighttime temperatures are above 65 degrees F and 90 percent relative humidity persists, *Pythium* blight has a potential to develop," Aynardi says. "Proper identification at the time symptoms and signs (mycelia) are present is critical since the disease spreads rapidly."

The disease is often misidentified as brown patch or dollar spot. Symptoms may disappear by midday, making identification more difficult, says Ben Pease, turfgrass agronomist for The Andersons Plant Nutrient Group.

"Look for cottonlike, white mycelia that appear in the early morning

PHOTO: PBI-GORDON CORP.

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## ← LOSS OF TURF

Areas impacted by *Pythium* blight will exhibit major turf loss and a bronze color.

around the edges of and within the disease patch,” Pease says.

### BEST COURSE OF ACTION

Several cultural practices can help prevent the pathogen from causing infection: maintaining canopy height, increasing air movement in prone areas by pruning trees and shrubs, improving drainage, using a turf species that's less affected and increasing sun exposure. Aerating also allows more oxygen to reach into the soil and creates a way for water to get to the roots — which pays dividends in preventing *Pythium* blight, Radford says.

“However, sometimes the use of a fungicide may be warranted, and there are products labeled for use on commercial and residential lawns, such as cyazofamid and azoxystrobin,” Aynardi says.

There's often a reluctance to use a fungicide due to cost or lack of information about the products that may be used, especially in residential settings, Aynardi says, but once *Pythium* blight kills the turf, it won't recover, and the area will need to be reseeded.

“If in doubt, consider contacting a distributor rep or chemical manufacturer about using fungicides and communicate to the client that reseeding will be a more expensive proposition,” Aynardi says.

### COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Applying the incorrect amount of fertilizer can cause thatch, which can hold moisture and lead to *Pythium*. Operators can ensure they don't overfertilize by using a slow-release fertilizer, Radford says.

“The technology releases nitrogen over three to four months, versus releasing all of the nitrogen within a few weeks,”

Radford says. “We see fewer disease problems because it meters out the nitrogen.”

Seeding during the summer also can cause *Pythium* blight because the heat and frequent watering during the establishment period are the perfect mixture for development.

“Since seedlings are much more susceptible to *Pythium* than mature turfgrass stands, we recommend seeding in September once temperatures have decreased,” Pease says.

The lower the mowing height, the higher the possibility is of having *Pythium* blight and other diseases, as well. Lawn care operators also should avoid watering during the hottest parts of the day.

“*Pythium* is there all of the time,” Radford says. “It's just a matter of creating a vector or wound that gets it started.”

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Nashville.

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## INSECT ID + CONTROL

# Putting out the fire (ants)

Experts from Quali-Pro and FMC Professional Solutions explain how to control fire ants

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

**F**ire ants can be easily identified by the mounds they build.

“They typically like building their mounds in areas that are disturbed, such as where two different types of turf come together or along curbs,” says Janis Reed, Ph.D., board-certified entomologist and technical services manager for the pest control division at Quali-Pro. “Most people know they have encountered fire ants because they got stung by one.”

Unlike those built by other ant species, fire ant mounds do not have a center; instead, they appear as flat or dome-shaped sand that has been “worked,” according to Rakim Turnipseed, Ph.D., product development manager, insecticides, for FMC Professional Solutions.

Mounds can be 1 to 2 feet across and as high as 1.5 feet.

“If the mound is disturbed with a stick or another long object, fire ants will emerge rapidly in large numbers



and travel vertically onto the object, a behavior not typically exhibited by other ant species,” Turnipseed says.

### HOW TO ID

For those who dare to take a closer

PHOTO: QUALI-PRO



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## ← GO AROUND THE MOUND

Fire ants can be identified by the mounds they build, sometimes up to 1.5 feet high.

look, fire ants typically sport a reddish/brown color. They have two nodes between the thorax and gaster, 10-segmented antennae and a two-segment club at the end of each antenna. It's important to avoid getting too close to the female fire ants, which can sting.

The pests mostly dwell in southern states and are most active after rain. During the winter, they reside deeper in the soil, but because they mostly thrive in warm-weather states, fire ants are active all year long.

"Fire ants can build mounds in most types of soil, even after rainfall as they prefer to work with and maneuver through damp soil," Turnipseed says. "They are quite resilient after flooding caused by rain as they have the ability to float until they reach dry land and build a new mound almost overnight."

### DAMAGE CONTROL

The damage fire ants cause is two-pronged, Reed says.

"There's an aesthetic damage up through the turf due to their mounding activities," Reed says. "There's also the damage to a worker who may reach down to pick up an object and instead get five or six fire ants on them and be stung."

To help keep fire ants under control, Reed recommends putting out fire ant baits both at the beginning and end of their active season.

"You can cover a large area without a lot of product," Reed says. "It pays to manage fire ants over time rather than just when they become a problem."

Generally, fire ant baits should be used when temperatures are between 70 degrees F and 90 degrees F, Turnipseed says.

"They are easy to apply and don't take any specialized equipment," Reed says. "The most effective time for bait applications is in the fall because you're attacking those fire ants when they're going into the lean winter months. If you

can knock down numbers at that time of year, you can get the best control."

Additionally, regularly mowing lawns can knock down some mounds and cause them to be relocated, but

this will not likely reduce the number of mounds, according to Turnipseed.

Reed says the main cultural practice to help control fire ants is to keep the turf healthy. 🍷

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## » INSTALLATION SOLUTIONS

# 5 keys to trouble-free reels

**Truck-mounted or fixed, reel systems can withstand harsh outdoor environments with occasional, basic care**

BY ROBERT SCHOENBERGER | LM SENIOR EDITOR

It's an easily forgotten piece of equipment — a simple metal drum with rails and a motor or spring that retracts hoses for proper storing. And with proper, basic maintenance, reel users can safely forget about their equipment for years, manufacturers say.

"We don't really have any problems with the reels until they get some age on them," says Brian Nance, president and owner of H&H Farm Machine Co., a Monroe, N.C.-based maker of spray equipment for farms, golf courses, greenhouses and landscape systems. "That's what we like about them."

Jennifer Wing, marketing manager for Hannay Reels, says manufacturers design reels to survive harsh winters and hot summers, deal with caustic chemicals and withstand heavy use and vibration faced from being mounted on pickups. While no piece of equipment lasts forever, there are basic things users can do to extend the lives of their reels.

Teddy Mathis, sales manager at Graham Spray Equipment, agrees. Users taking the following advice can expect long-term, low-cost performance from their reels.

## 1 GET THE RIGHT REEL

"Know what you'll be using the reel for, the fluid you're running through it and the pressures and temperatures you'll be using for the application," Wing says.

If the reel isn't rated for caustic chemicals, it could leak or crack. If your spraying application requires high pressure, standard reels could leak or fail. Also, with high pressure, unspool the entire hose before pressurizing the system. If the hose is still on the reel, pressurizing it could crush the reel's wheel.

## 2 KEEP IT CLEAN

Mathis explains that "reeling the hose back up in a somewhat neat manner" will distribute force across the wheel.

Nance suggests users "take a rag, and run the hose through that rag while they're rolling it back up. That way, dirt and those kinds of things don't make their way back home to the reel."



**EASY DOES IT**  
Gently handling the hose and walking it back to the reel can prevent damage and leaks.

## 3 TAKE IT EASY

Mathis says some crew members will pull on hoses that are already fully extended, hoping to get another inch or two of play rather than moving a truck. That puts pressure on the connector between the hose and the reel.

"Pulling the hose as far as possible can damage the reel or (cause) a massive leak," Mathis adds.

Wing explains that even though reels have spring-powered or mechanical systems to retract hoses, users can't just let go of the hose and hit retract.

"You need to walk the hose back to the reel," Wing says. "Just letting go could cause damage to the reel and injury to anyone standing nearby."

## 4 INSPECT OFTEN

Leaks can be indicators of bigger problems, so look out for liquid pooling under reels, Mathis and Wing say. Mathis suggests visually inspecting reels daily, paying extra attention if you spot a leak.

Wing adds, "There are different kinds of rewind options, brake systems and locks, so know how they operate to make sure they're working correctly."


Motors or bearings that are starting to fail will often make lots of noise, so pay attention to grinding sounds or any new sounds coming from moving parts on reels.

For truck-mounted reels, check bolts frequently to make sure they're tight, Nance says. Trucks are constantly vibrating, and even the best-installed equipment can get loose following heavy use.

## 5 GREASE AND OIL

Powered reel systems have bearing, chains and other moving parts that require proper lubrication. Inspecting those parts and adding oil or grease when necessary can keep them working well, Mathis says.

Wing says basic care can protect investments in equipment for a long time.

"Maintenance is the key for any kind of mechanical equipment," Wing says. "The chains, if they start looking loose, you can tighten those up. The reels are designed to withstand day-in and day-out use. They do require minimal maintenance checks, but if you keep up with those, they'll last for a very long time." 





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## THE BIG ONE

### A better visual

**LOCATION** Pinecrest, Fla.

**COMPANY** VisualScape

**DETAILS** VisualScape provides landscape maintenance services to the six village parks of the Village of Pinecrest, which encompass more than 60 acres of green space.

Annual services for the five-year contract include mowing the St. Augustinegrass turf and Bermudagrass fields, maintaining the shrubs and groundcovers, mulching, topdressing, aerating and rotating the flower beds three times.

Heavy foot traffic during soccer and baseball season had damaged the turf and irrigation system's rotors, according to Ivan Vila, president of VisualScape. Additionally, the fields were initially infested with weeds, and the existing soil condition was poor, lacked nutrients, was compacted and hadn't been topdressed.

VisualScape works with Pinecrest on a bimonthly basis to keep the irrigation system maintained and set up a biweekly turf care program based on the soil tests it performed on four sports fields. About six employees work full time on the site, using Toro and Scag mowers and Stihl handheld equipment. Specialty crews help with items such as rotating the flower beds.

It took about six months to a year to get the fields back to acceptable standards, but VisualScape's relationship with the client helped it re-up the contract for another five years, beginning in a few months.

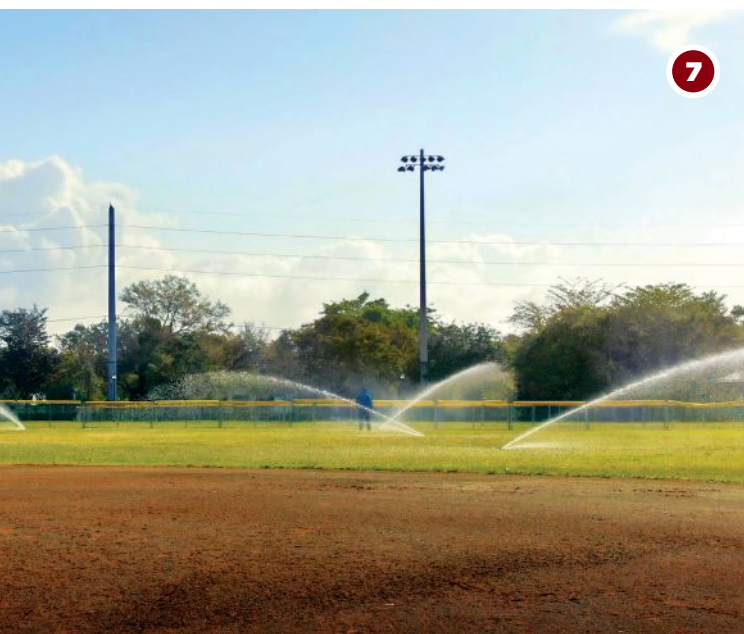
"We create partnerships with the client and take pride in creating long-term relationship with all our customers," Vila says.

*See more photos from this project at [LandscapeManagement.net/thebigone](https://LandscapeManagement.net/thebigone).*



PHOTOS: THINK TWICE





**Captions |** **1.** Entrance circle with annual flowers, part of VisualScape's floriculture program. **2.** A crew member mowing St. Augustinegrass turf. **3.** Trees are structurally pruned on an annual basis. **4.** Sunrise at Evelyn Greer Park playground area. Trees are inspected and pruned to ensure they are safe for pedestrian traffic. **5.** Irrigation inspection of stainless steel rotors. **6.** Biannual palm pruning. **7.** Evelyn Greer Park irrigation inspections are completed twice per month to ensure the Bermudagrass fields are receiving adequate water.



## EXPERTS' TIPS

### String Trimmers



Before purchasing a trimmer, think about operator comfort and how and where the trimmer will be used.

## Know your use

Experts say the decision of which string trimmer to buy comes down to use, comfort, features and servicing

**W**hen it comes to purchasing a string trimmer, contractors say use should be the top factor to consider. Understanding specifically what tasks you intend to use the trimmer for will help inform your purchasing decision.

“Are you cutting small lots? Or are you cutting big condo associations?” says Michael Bedell, owner of Bedell Property Management in Milford, Mich. “Is that piece of equipment getting used minutes a day or hours a day?”

Bedell Property Management provides 40 percent maintenance, 35 percent design/build and 25 percent snow and ice management services to an 85 percent residential 15 percent commercial clientele.

Talking with your crew about features is another important step. Operator comfort should be a priority. Keep in mind features that will help make the job easier and more comfortable.

“For me, being a smaller woman doing trimming the majority of the day, I need something that isn’t going to be heavy and quickly wear me out,” says Savannah Spencer, co-owner of Spencer’s Lawn Care in East Canton, Ohio.

Spencer’s Lawn Care provides lawn care, maintenance and snow and ice services for a 70 percent residential and 30 percent commercial clientele.


A great way to narrow down your choices is to talk with your local dealer or product representative. Bedell says the hunt for a new piece of equipment is

a great way to start a conversation with your local dealer. You can discuss use and where you see your business going in the future.

“It also gives you the opportunity to try some other things as opportunities come along in the future with new equipment,” he says.

Contractors say testing equipment is the best way to decide if a piece of equipment is going to work for you, your team or your jobs.

Spencer points out, “If your dealer will allow you to demo some before you purchase, that is always a great way to get a feel for one.”

And, when purchasing a string trimmer, be sure to add gloves, eyewear, ear protection, long pants and boots. 



## **HUSQVARNA** **Jack Easterly**

*Professional brand manager  
for handheld equipment*

The No. 1 thing to think about would be application. What is the client's contract for? That's going to tell them what tool they need. The power-to-weight number is really important to make sure you have appropriate power, but again, not too much. Another thing to keep in mind is operator comfort. You want to be able to be comfortable throughout the day. You'll be more productive. You'll be more focused and less prone to make errors. Reliability and durability are much more important because it could cost that company money. Do your research. Look at the technical specs. Start with your job site. Find a good demo program and try before you buy.



## **ECHO** **Mark Taylor**

*Product manager*

Focusing on professional-level equipment will ensure that the end users purchase equipment that meets daily needs and delivers longevity of a unit. Key features that should be planned for include the comfort of holding the unit. Most professional models offer overmolded handles and triggers for extended comfort. Vibration reduction mounts also create a more comfortable experience. Overall cutting size, or swath, of a unit is very important. Standard swath ranges for professional models typically range from 17 inches to 20 inches. A larger cutting swath enables the user to cut material in less time. Some commercial-grade models also offer a high-torque version that provides greater torque at the cutting head, enabling faster cutting in heavy weeds. Finding models with tool-less access to air filters, spark plugs and fuel filters will save the user time and money.



## **STIHL** **Andrew Johnson**

*Product manager*

The main factors that drive product purchasing decisions are overall power, durability, performance and dependability. Some other factors users should consider are the planned use for the trimmer, ease of use, power source, mobility and weight. Contractors should also look at the total cost of ownership, which includes initial costs and ongoing costs, such as maintenance and fuel. Battery-powered products have come a long way and have benefits like low maintenance, low noise, no fuel and zero exhaust emissions. Visit your local dealer. They're valuable resources for information, and users can also physically pick up the unit and see what the comfort features and usage are like. Dealers can provide great advice on product selection, proper equipment use and recommended protective equipment.



## **EGO POWER PLUS** **Gerry Barnaby**

*Director of excitement*

Pros usually reach for two-cycle gas trimmers, but they are loud, emit exhaust and impart vibration to the user. Battery-powered string trimmers now have the power of gas but with a fraction of the noise, no exhaust and very little vibration. So, which one is right for you? It depends on how much time you spend "on the stick." If all you do all day is run a string trimmer, then gas may be your first choice, but the cost of converting to a battery-powered unit can pay for itself in a couple of years with much lower fuel costs, no maintenance and much happier employees.





## HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

### Seamless design

**LOCATION** Landmark Landscapes

**COMPANY** Sheboygan, Wis.

**DETAILS** The clients approached Landmark Landscapes after seeing the company's projects in their neighborhood. Goals included mitigating erosion problems on the property, which overlooks Lake Michigan's bluffs, and creating a seamless feel from the inside of the home to the outside.

Joe Majerus, president of Landmark Landscapes, says the clients put off the project for years because they could not source the same type of limestone as the exterior of the home. Landmark Landscapes sourced material from a quarry and a farm. Landmark also sourced the limestone for the built-in bar on-site.

"In the middle of the gardens, we unearthed this bar top that was some landscape element from the 1950s," he says. "We laid the two pieces out and I was like, 'This would be the perfect shape, size and scale for a bar top on the back patio.'"

While it took time to build a relationship with the client, it also created an opportunity to collaborate on features such as the hanging chandelier.

"It was really through the collaborative efforts of our staff and the clients that we came up with a lot of the really awesome features in the landscape itself," he says.

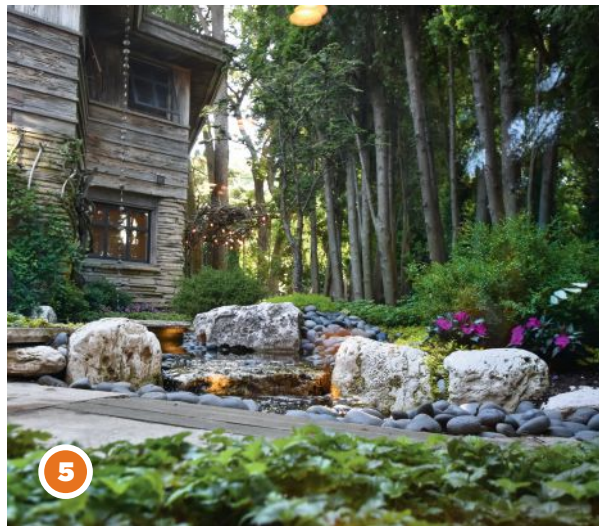
Landmark Landscapes won a Gold Award in the 2020 National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

*See more photos from this project at [LandscapeManagement.net/hardscapesolutions](https://LandscapeManagement.net/hardscapesolutions).*



PHOTOS: KIMBER JOHNSON





**Captions |** 1. The garden showcases the client's terra-cotta art. Other features include eroded limestone boulders sourced from a farmer's fence row and plantings reflective of the Japanese garden influence. 2. While the terrace garden serves as a space for entertaining, the real function of the patio is to capture and manage stormwater to prevent the erosion of the bluff that the property overlooks. 3. Crews excavated the basin of the pond by hand and hauled materials in and out with a wheelbarrow. 4. Access to the property was a challenge for crews. To move stone, crews rolled boulders "Egyptian-style." A Toro Dingo also helped move gravel and stone. Crews also reclaimed much of the stone for the 1,400-square-foot patio from the existing patio. 5. The clients wanted to view the garden from inside the home and appear to flow from the inside out. 6. To create the effect of a floating chandelier, crews fastened the lighting fixture to a 35-foot stainless steel cable anchored to a tree and the home. Crews also installed 46 light fixtures to accent the outdoor space. 7. A before photo of the meditation garden area. Before the renovation, the space was overgrown. The original goal was to cull back overgrown cedars and evergreens and connect the space to the rest of the property.



## BUSINESS BOOSTERS

# How to outfit your crew

Things to think about when trying to create a uniform look for your team

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

**W**orkwear is a critical part of a landscaping company's branding, but it doesn't come without its challenges. Crew members come in all shapes and sizes, and workwear needs to not only fit but keep up with the demands of the job. A challenge for companies is to find a uniform

look that suits the fit and function of everyone on the team.

Hilary Kleese, content brand manager for Gempler's, says working with a company that knows workwear can help those in charge of ordering understand what brands run true to size, what brands run small and what brands have larger sizes.



"You want to choose options where you don't have to choose between putting my logo on it and making sure that it's professional grade," she says. "For us, when it comes to branded workwear, it's Carhartt, it's Dickies, it's Columbia or Under Armour when you need sun protection."

Having a wide variety of sizes is important, Kleese says. "That's definitely something that we've run across time and time again because those landscape professionals come in all shapes and sizes," she says, noting Carhartt runs up to a size 4XL and Gempler's stocks work boots up to a size 15 with regular and wide widths.

Kleese; Rob Paradise, vice president of Arborwear; and Carl Atwell, president and owner of Gempler's, share tips to help companies get the right fit for employees.

### Tip 1. Think colors, not just brands

"Not every brand of apparel fits exactly the same, and a certain brand that fits well to some may not to others or (may not) be offered in a full range of sizes," says Paradise, whose company based in Chagrin Falls, Ohio, outfits crews from head to toe with workwear and boots. "A solution? Choose a color scheme or design that can be duplicated across a few different apparel brands to meet the sizing needs."

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**ASK THE TEAM**  
Request input from employees to make them comfortable and productive.



## Tip 2. Get input

Want to ensure your crew is happy in their workwear? Ask team members to prioritize which workwear features are important to them, whether that's lightweight or moisture-wicking material, sun protection or comfort.

"Implementing a uniform without addressing the needs of the team in the field could be a costly mistake," Paradise says. "If there is buy-in from the team and their input is heard, you will have a much happier and productive workforce. Choose the right tool for the job at the beginning, and the team will be excited, proud and happy."

## Tip 3. Get samples

Atwell says samples from an apparel distributor are a great way to understand how a certain brand of workwear will fit and meet the solutions your team is looking for.

"Get some samples of the product so you can get the size right," he says.

## Tip 4. Don't wait

Paradise says apparel is an investment in your team, and it's an investment that pays off as a source of pride for your employees.

"Just about all our customers that had been hesitant to embark on a full uniform program eventually admitted that they wish they had pulled the trigger much earlier," he says. "The happiness of the employees and professional appearance benefits the businesses in added revenue and employee retention."

## Tip 5. Layers

Your crew may need different workwear, such as pullovers, long-sleeved and short-sleeved apparel, all on the same day.

"Last week, we were talking to a guy who said, 'At the beginning of the day when I get dressed, I never know what jobs I'm going to be doing that day, so I really have to walk out the door being ready for any conceivable task,'" Kleese says.

Include the company name and logo on employee workwear and make sure they're visible.



Will your crew cover up your logo with a high-vis vest? If so, think about having your logo appear on each layer to reinforce your branding.

## Tip 6. Start small

While it is important to ensure your logo is consistent and appears on all offerings for your crew, Paradise suggests approaching outfitting your crew in steps.

"Keep it simple to start as it will be much easier to manage and fine-tune the program as the company grows," he says.

Kleese says apparel is also a great tool for retention. Crews can get a set amount of logo apparel to start, and then it can expand after a certain period of employment.

"Owners can say, 'at three months here, you get this awesome rainwear jacket that's logoed. We'll give you this starting set of logoed gear for free, and then you can earn these other pieces as you go,'" she says.

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## » BRAND U

# Big jobs, tight spaces

**Bellas Landscaping carves out its outdoor living niche in the market with Vermeer mini skid-steers**

BY ROBERT SCHOENBERGER | LM SENIOR EDITOR

**A**dam Bellas works on big projects — pergolas, outdoor living spaces, decks, retaining walls. When it comes to doing that work, however, he says he constantly has to think small.

“The areas we work in are primarily residential,” Bellas says of Bellas Landscaping, the company he founded with his identical twin brother, Justin, in 2003. “The lots aren’t very large. We’re getting into tight areas. There would be no way we could get a full-sized machine back there. It would just be impractical. You’d get no work done, and you’d do more property damage than it would be worth.”

Vermeer mini skid-steers allowed Bellas Landscaping to transform itself from a mowing and maintenance company in Bloomington, Ill., to a design/build operation. Bellas estimates that

80 percent of his revenue comes from hardscaping and design work with the rest split evenly between snow removal, mulching and maintenance.

He bought his first Vermeer machine in 2006 and now has five units, S925TXs and CTX100s, one per crew.

The machines’ responsive hydraulics provide power and safety, Bellas says. When testing some mini skid-steers, he adds, they coasted to a stop when the driver let go of the controls. His Vermeers don’t coast.

“When you’re getting 2 inches away from a foundation or an outdoor living area with the machine and you let off, it stops,” Bellas says.

Crews like using the small machines because they can easily move materials to staging areas, pull out trees and bushes and till and cultivate soil. Most

of his crew members are longtime employees with lots of landscaping experience, so making them more productive and reducing manual labor is critical, Bellas says.

“What we’re really doing here is selling skilled labor,” Bellas says. “We’re bringing the value of a guy that’s been in the industry for 20 years to put a \$50,000 hardscape patio in your backyard. Customers don’t want to see somebody breaking their back on their property. They want to see us using the latest equipment.”

The Vermeer machines’ biggest fan, however, is Bellas Landscaping’s mechanic.

“Within a minute, you have the hood up and sides off, and you’re able to clean it, look it over and service it,” Bellas says. “If there’s a problem, he knows within 30 seconds. He can have panels off and really look into the machines.”


The company has tested other companies’ machines, he says, but easy serviceability has kept it loyal to Vermeer.

## ATTACHMENTS BOOST MINI SKID-STEER PRODUCTIVITY

“We’ve used pretty much every attachment known and a few that are new to the market — different types of buckets, forks, augers for footings for outdoor living areas,” Bellas says.

The Mini Beak hydraulic clamp from Daniel Mfg. allows Bellas to remove trees, bushes and concrete footers from old construction. He adds, “You’d have to see it to believe it. It makes the mini skid-steers do what a full-size skid can do.”

Crews also use Harley rakes for tilling soil and soil cultivation and a dozer blade with a rubber edge for snow removal.

“We don’t like to be out in the winter too much, but if we do, we’d rather not have to go out with a shovel.” 



**THINK SMALL**  
Vermeer’s mini skid-steers allowed Bellas Landscaping to perform more design/build work.

PHOTO: BELLAS LANDSCAPING



## PRODUCTS THAT WORK

### Landscape lighting and sound fixtures



#### INTEGRATED ACCENT LIGHTS

**COMPANY:** Dauer Manufacturing

**URL:** [DauerManufacturing.com](http://DauerManufacturing.com)

Dauer Manufacturing's cast aluminum Mirage and Moonbeam lighting fixtures have removable shrouds and come in a dark bronze, powder-coated finish. The Mirage comes in three, six and 10 watts, 2,700 K and 3,000 K, and 25-, 40- and 60-degree beam spreads. The 10-watt Moonbeam offers a 60-degree beam spread. Its 5,700 K color temperature is an exact match to the mercury vapor effect. Dauer Manufacturing offers a 10-year warranty and custom powder-coated color options.

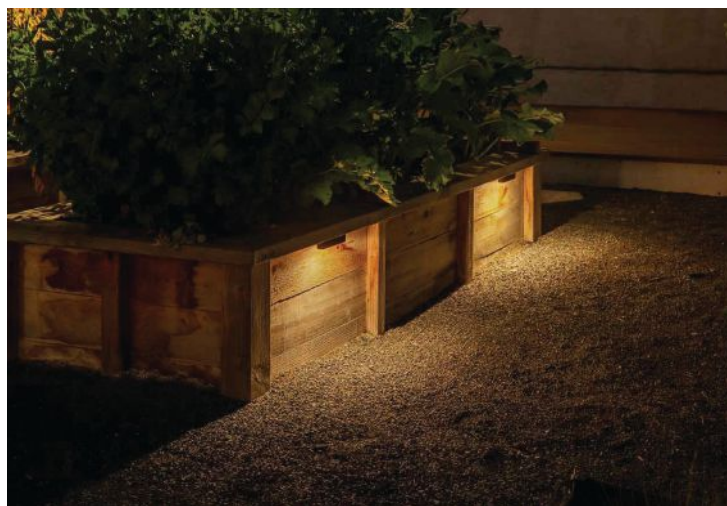
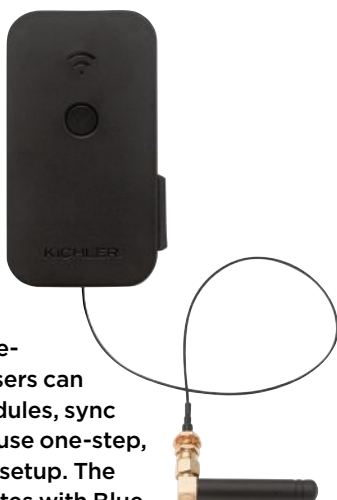


#### SMART CONTROL TIMER

**COMPANY:** Kichler

**URL:** [Kichler.com](http://Kichler.com)

The Smart Control Timer, when paired with the Kichler Connects app, allows users to control landscape lighting with a smartphone, tablet or voice-controlled home device. Users can create custom on/off schedules, sync multiple transformers and use one-step, preset scheduling for easy setup. The Smart Control Timer operates with Bluetooth and Wi-Fi for cloud- and location-based control to align with daylight savings hours and changing seasons. An on-board memory controls lights, even if Wi-Fi is interrupted. The timer's external antenna facilitates long-range connectivity.



#### LD LEDGE LIGHT

**COMPANY:** FX Luminaire

**URL:** [FXL.com](http://FXL.com)

The new LD ledge light from FX Luminaire helps contractors save time on the job site. Ideal for walkways, walls, decks, stairs, counters and more, it features a snap-on lens for easy installation. No tools are needed to change out the lamp, the wire can be installed in either direction and routine servicing can be done without disturbing the fixture, wire or hardscape. The LD is the smallest ledge light from FX Luminaire.



#### SOUND BY VISTA OUTDOOR AUDIO SYSTEM

**COMPANY:** Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting

**URL:** [VistaPro.com](http://VistaPro.com)

The Sound by Vista outdoor audio system maintains the aesthetics of any outdoor space with components that are either hidden or blended in during installation. The standard system includes four speakers and one dual subwoofer with the option to purchase two additional speakers separately. Sound by Vista provides landscape, irrigation and lighting contractors with a simple opportunity to enhance their residential revenue streams.



## WATER WORLD

### All in one

**LOCATION** Anthem, Ariz.

**COMPANY** DLC Resources

**DETAILS** DLC Resources already handled the maintenance in the city of Anthem, Ariz., when it was tapped to revamp the irrigation system as well.

“The city already made the huge investment to use smart controllers five to 10 years ago, and the next thing is to go through the irrigation system and bring it back up to snuff,” says Mark Dalley, director of water management at DLC Resources. “There are even some cases where, over time, the incorrect heads were installed. There were different types of brands in the same zone, and we wanted to make sure all those were uniform.”

Anthem is a master-planned community partially located within Phoenix. It's built on 5,856 acres at the base of Daisy Mountain and Gavilan Peak. DLC is responsible for the upkeep of 73 acres of turf.

“When we were awarded the Anthem contract, the client wanted to increase the quality in the turf, in part, because they have a lot of sports fields,” Dalley says.

From September 2020 to April 2021, between three and six DLC irrigation technicians replaced every sprayhead; straightened, leveled and adjusted all the community's grades; and reprogrammed the existing Weathertrak controllers to fit the updated system.

All in all, Dalley says the irrigation renovation will help save between 15 and 20 million gallons on the site per year.

“It was getting back to basics and fixing the infrastructure so we could use the existing controllers that were there,” Dalley says.

*See more photos from this project at [LandscapeManagement.net/waterworld](https://LandscapeManagement.net/waterworld).*



**Captions** | 1. DLC Resources is responsible for 73 acres of turf in Anthem, Ariz., including several sports fields. 2. DLC Resources was tapped to handle the irrigation in Anthem, Ariz., in part, to help keep the turf in better condition. 3. An after shot of the properly irrigated turf. 4. A mismatched and mismanaged irrigation system led to serious turf damage before DLC Resources stepped in.



## BUSINESS BOOSTERS

### TRENCHING OPTIONS

A John Deere track loader uses a trencher attachment.



# Trenchers: stand-alone or attachments?

When choosing equipment to dig a ditch, the type and variety of jobs determine the best purchase

BY ROBERT SCHOENBERGER | LM SENIOR EDITOR



**S**hould you buy a dedicated piece of equipment that only digs trenches, an attachment to a mini skid-steer or some other piece of powered equipment?

The answer depends a lot on whether you ask a dedicated equipment producer or a seller of multitasking machines. However, some basic questions can point contractors toward the right path.

### WHICH ONE'S BETTER?

Let's ask companies that produce different options.

Ryan Ruhl, team lead for compact construction equipment and training, at John Deere Construction and Forestry, says trencher attachments for track loaders or skid-steers can cost less. If you already have a machine, an attachment can cost as little as \$3,300 compared to about \$3,700 for the smallest stand-alone units — however, the price and size ranges are massive. Also, you get the versatility of being able to use buckets, forks and other attachments.

"This solution can typically be transported using a single truck and

trailer," Ruhl says. Plus, he adds, attachments need less maintenance than dedicated machines.

Sure, they're versatile, says Little Beaver Sales Manager Mike Hale, but how do they perform, and can you get them into clients' backyards?

"A dedicated piece of equipment ensures enhanced trenching performance in a purpose-built unit — power, weight, speed and visibility are optimized," Hale says. "Attachment systems require a larger carrier piece of equipment, which reduces maneuverability, makes it more difficult to access tight locations and increases the likelihood of turf damage."

Hmm, we need a tie-breaker. How about Brant Kukuk, compact equipment product marketing manager for Ditch Witch, a company that makes attachments and stand-alone units?

"There is a place on the job site for both," Kukuk says. "The choice really depends on the project and how frequently contractors will need equipment other than a lone trencher."

### TYPE OF WORK

If installing irrigation systems is your primary business, dedicated trenchers make more sense than if 80 percent of your work comes from hardscaping, such as retaining walls, producers say.

Kukuk says contractors should ask, "What size is the typical job site? Are there a lot of obstacles to contend with? Will the machine primarily be used for

irrigation or for other landscape applications as well?"

He adds that answering those questions will tell contractors if they should go stand-alone or attachment and what size equipment they should consider in either category.


De ere's Ruhl agrees, adding that companies cutting trenches less frequently can benefit from attachment systems, but take note: "If they're looking for a solution that will primarily be used to create a deep trench and/or be cutting very long trenches, these tasks require heavier-duty operation. The self-propelled dedicated machine would be the better selection."

Trencher cutting depths range from six inches on some mini units to more than 36 inches on some stand-on units.

### CONSIDER THE SOIL

Regardless of machine type, pay attention to the ground. Matching cutter teeth to ground conditions will protect equipment and promote worker safety.

"Contractors should look for a trencher with cutter wheels that feature heat-treated, hardened steel teeth with carbide tips, as well as design features that minimize maintenance by protecting key components," Hale says. His company's slip clutch protects the drive train if the trencher hits a rock.

Kukuk suggests consulting with dealers to match the chain, teeth and sprocket system, also known as CTS, to ground conditions. He says, "A cup tooth is the standard utility tooth for most soil conditions, but a shark tooth or alligator tooth is required to cut through medium, hard and rocky soils." 



A landscaper uses Ditch Witch's C12X walk-behind trencher.

PHOTOS: JOHN DEERE CONSTRUCTION AND FORESTRY (TOP); DITCH WITCH (BOTTOM)



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contractors save on time,  
money and labor.



## IRRIGATION TECH

# How sensors save on water usage

**Irrigation pros share how they use various sensors — rain, flow, soil moisture and more — to benefit their customers and bottom lines**

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

**F**rom monitoring rain and water flow to tracking soil moisture, irrigation sensors can benefit both contractors and their customers.

### SELLING POINT

Incorporating irrigation sensors is nothing new for John J. Carbone Jr., president of Morris & Bergen County Irrigation in Wayne, N.J. His company serves about 8,000 accounts and has

been using rain sensors for nearly 25 years.

“A rain sensor will stop your system from watering when the sensor gathers enough water to interrupt the standard watering schedule,” Carbone says. “When the rain collected in the sensor dries out, the program will commence watering.”

More recently, Morris & Bergen also has started installing flow sensors, which send in-app alerts when a leak is

present and give a true representation of his customers’ water usage.

“That is important to gauge and measure how much you are saving,” Carbone says.

Carbone links his flow sensors to Hunter Industries’ Hydrowise system to alert him and his team when it detects an excess flow.

### CATCH PROBLEMS REMOTELY

Santa Rita Landscaping in Tucson, Ariz., began using irrigation sensors because it provides value to clients, says CEO Tanner Spross. “It protects their investments and better monitors the system and water use,” he says.



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PHOTO: RAIN BIRD

Santa Rita provides construction installation, design/build, commercial landscape maintenance and irrigation services to a mix of 85 percent commercial and 15 percent residential customers. The company has an annual revenue of \$25 million.

Spross uses Rain Bird's flow sensors on the main lines to track flow and water usage, which gives baseline information. The sensors also send flow data to the controller system, alerting the irrigation team to any leaks or breaks in the system

and allowing them to identify the problem and shut off the system remotely.

Even with the upfront costs associated with irrigation sensors, Spross says the company can manage the properties better without using as much labor.


Spross says for residential projects, weather sensors typically cost less than \$100, and a flow sensor could cost about \$200 to \$300 each. On the commercial side, Spross says the installation of a full flow sensor and weather sensor with centralized control costs less than \$10,000, and the client will see the benefit in reduced labor spending.

"Irrigation sensors allow our company to scale more and provide better service to our clients," Spross says. "All of our clients and other contractors should be embracing technology."

#### COMBINING TOOLS

With a variety of irrigation sensor

types to choose from, contractors should figure out which capabilities will benefit them and their customers the most. For example, Spiio's sensor has four functionalities built into the body of the probe: temperature, soil moisture, light and salinity sensors, says Greg Goudeau, Eastern U.S. sales manager for Spiio.

"It's a data-collection tool that helps you communicate with your customers. It also allows you to only water when the soil actually needs water," Goudeau says. "The successful landscape contractors are very good business people. They are always looking for a tool that will make them more efficient, and soil sensors will absolutely make their daily, long-term and seasonal schedules more efficient." 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Nashville.



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# FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## Jesse Wisley

### OWNER

MID SOUTH IRRIGATION AND LANDSCAPE;  
MID SOUTH NIGHT LIGHTS  
MEMPHIS

### 1 How did you find your way into the landscape and lighting business?

I graduated high school at 19 and went to work for a large irrigation and landscape and lighting company here in Memphis, and I went to school at night for landscape management. I finished that and quit my job and started this 10 years ago in February 2011. It's going well. We're at \$2.5 million in revenue and just moved into our new shop. We have 16 employees, and we'll travel an hour east, south, north and west of our shop.

### 2 What part of your business is really cooking right now?

Lighting, all day long. Gone are the days of putting up 10 uplights and maybe five or six path lights on the front walkway to the front door. It's a totally different animal now. We do a lot of core drilling into concrete. We do a lot of specialty lighting. Things are so different from when I started in 2008.

The opportunities, the specialty fixtures that are manufactured now, it's so much

fun to walk into a backyard and know what you can do versus what you couldn't do 10 years ago. Lighting has taken off for us. My passion is lighting. I want to hone in on that part of the business and grow it as much as I possibly can.

### 3 We're hearing about difficulty getting materials in various markets, what has that been like for you? What has been especially stressful?

Everything is stressful right now. Supply chain is an issue. I just had to bulk order a bunch of lighting wire. We're sitting on four or five pallets of lighting wire right now, which is unusual. We normally only have one or two, but I heard there is a shortage coming. It took me a month to get that order in! We're trying to stock up. We're having trouble getting in certain things. PVC is going up. We've had to buy some other products that we usually wouldn't because we couldn't get our normal stuff. Some plants are in shortage. The logistics of getting plants here because of the shortage of truck drivers... all across the board it is a mess. You have to stay ahead of it, and that's why I bulk ordered that wire, because if we don't have that wire, we're not working.

### 4 What do you and your family do for fun?

I'm married; our seven-year anniversary was just this past Monday. We have two boys, ages 4 and 2, so we're in the thick of it right now. It's pure chaos in my house, but it's a lot of fun. My wife and I love to travel. As the boys get older, we're going to start taking them on trips. We love experiences. We love eating great food. Memphis is a great town. I was born and raised here.

It really is a great town to live in and raise a family.

### BEST ADVICE

"One of the best things that was told to me: Remain flexible. Always keep an open mind. Be willing to change. Don't get set in your ways. The generic term, 'be flexible,' I live by that."

### 5 What's the best thing about having your job?

Meeting people. I like talking to people. I like designing, especially lighting and landscape, and seeing things come to life. The job is cool. It's a very stressful industry — that can't be underplayed — but it's very rewarding. Treat people with respect, and if you do that, they'll respect you back. That makes your job even more fun. I like coming to work every day. If you're doing it the right way, taking care of your customers, it can be fun. 🙌



PHOTO: TAYLOR WISLEY

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BY KEVIN KEHOE

The author is managing partner of The Aspire Software Co. Reach him at [kevin.kehoe@youraspire.com](mailto:kevin.kehoe@youraspire.com).

# The secret to a \$3M account manager

I want to change the way you think about account managers. Are you open to the idea of the \$3 million account manager? This will be the first of several columns on this topic. I will share real data and employ facts and math to make the case. I will offer practical procedural, management and compensation strategies to demonstrate how to achieve this goal.

## MEDIAN ACCOUNT MANAGERS VS. TOP PERFORMERS

### MEDIAN GROUP

Accountabilities	Number	Average Per	Total \$
Contracts	65	\$ 14,000	\$910,000
Upsells	250	\$ 2,400	\$600,000
TDUM			\$1,510,000
Retention	80%		\$(182,000)
YOY TDUM			\$1,328,000
Base/commission compensation			\$70,000
Cost per dollar			5.3%

### TOP 10 PERCENT GROUP

Accountabilities	Number	Average Per	Total \$
Contracts	105	\$ 15,000	\$1,575,000
Upsells	360	\$ 2,500	\$900,000
TDUM			\$2,475,000
Retention	88%		\$(189,000)
YOY TDUM			\$2,286,000
Base/commission Compensation			\$85,000
cost per dollar			3.7%

First, let's define things. The account manager's (AM) primary accountability is the optimization of your customer's service experience. An AM's effectiveness is measured using a key performance indicator (KPI) called total dollars under management (TDUM). This TDUM KPI is driven by contracts, upsells and retention/renewal rate. The goal for any AM is more TDUM.

Second, let's compare the median performers to the top performers in TDUM to establish a baseline for achieving \$3 million TDUM. (This data comes from Aspire Software's client base.)

It's clear that the top group manages way more revenue than the median group both in TDUM and

## THE \$3 MILLION ACCOUNT MANAGER

### \$3M ACCOUNT MANAGER

Accountabilities	Number	Average Per	Total \$
Contracts	121	\$ 16,000	\$1,932,000
Upsells	414	\$ 2,700	\$1,117,800
TDUM			\$3,049,800
Retention	90%		\$(193,200)
YOY TDUM			\$2,856,600
Base/Commission Compensation			\$100,000
Cost per dollar			3.5%

year over year (YOY) TDUM. The average size of contracts managed and upsells made is about equal. For a small compensation difference between the groups, the bottom-line contribution for the cost is significant. These facts will become important when we develop practical procedural, management and compensation strategies.

Third, given the baseline data above, what would these numbers look like for a \$3 million AM? The difference between the \$3 million AM and today's top performers is less than you think. An across-the-board 14 percent improvement in the three sub KPIs (contracts, upsells and retention/renewal rate) is all that's required. This can be achieved by managing three elements of the AM's world:

- Understanding site size distribution and spending more time where the money is.
- Knowing high-value activities and focusing more time on those versus noncore activities.
- Documenting (and storing) information about sites and activities so it is available to execute service delivery.

Finally, why does this matter and for whom? It matters for the owner. It matters for the AM who can potentially make "real money" and be happy and commit to the company for a long time because he or she can have a career and raise a family on a good income. The chart below provides the numbers.

Next time, we'll dive deeper into the details and begin to explore how to make this happen. 📈

## WHY THE \$3M AM MATTERS

Group	Net Profit Added	Value Added	Compensation	Additional Cost
Median Group	\$ 664,000		\$70,000	
Top 10% Group	\$ 1,143,000	72%	\$85,000	\$ 15,000
\$3M Account Manager	\$ 1,428,300	115%	\$105,000	\$ 35,000



**BY JEFFREY SCOTT**

The author is owner of Jeffrey Scott Consulting, which helps landscape companies grow and maximize profits. Reach him at [jeff@jeffreyscott.biz](mailto:jeff@jeffreyscott.biz).

# How to build your platform, regardless of succession plans

**T**here is a resurgence of private equity investing in landscaping firms, which will impact everyone.

Some of my best clients are being propositioned. This fact says a lot about how well they have performed, and it also shows that a rising tide raises all boats (sectors).

It also begs the question: Is it time to sell? Or is now the time to buy? To answer these questions, let's look at how to create value.

Landscape business value is based on cash flow over a consistent period (earnings before depreciation, interest, etc.), and it's affected by the inherent business risks.

The higher the risk, the lower the value. Risk can include the amount of installation work, dependency on the owner, key employees, key clients and, up until recently, the amount of noncommercial work, but it depends on the buyer. The real secret to building value is building the size of your business sustainably. The larger the business platform, the more the business is worth.

## BUILD YOUR PLATFORM

Our industry is fragmented. Investors flush with cash are coming in to build up ("roll up") a platform by buying companies.

Private equity investors know how to assess risk better than anyone. Their success stems from turning down bad deals and only funding truly good ones. Just because they

approach you doesn't mean they will deem you a worthy deal.

Private equity managers also know how to measure results and set growth goals. Remember, their job is to grow the size of their platform. What's the ultimate goal? Some will hold long term, while others will sell the rolled-up company to a larger investor, who, in turn, will want to do the same (grow and sell it). Some will try to go public, despite how poorly BrightView stock has performed.

## WAYS TO BUILD A PLATFORM

Take these examples of different approaches to growth:

- George Tucker, owner of LanDesign in St. Louis, has been growing his firm through organic growth and acquisitions, using acquisitions to diversify and hiring consultants and smart people (including those outside the industry) to grow from \$7 million to \$17 million.
- Kurt Bland, CEO of Bland Landscaping in Apex, N.C., recapitalized his \$20 million firm with outside

investors and now assesses other landscape companies to add to the platform.

- Todd Pugh, CEO of Enviroscares in Louisville, Ohio, has taken a third approach to growth by setting up branches and giving his employees opportunities.

All three leaders have built great platforms and will be speaking at my Summer Growth Summit, Aug. 31-Sept. 1, hosted by LanDesign.


## DEVELOP YOUR SUCCESSION PLAN

Whether you plan to sell your business to your family, employees or outsiders, it's important to get the business ready to maximize its value and ensure a smooth succession.

Get the fundamentals in place: accounting, financial management, hiring strategies, sales system, leadership team and more. Build your platform now.

You must also establish what you want to do after the sale. This is ironically the hardest part of selling — letting go and reinventing yourself.

Lastly, make a financial plan because the money you gain from a sale must be invested. Your return on investment in the stock market will be far less than your return on investment from your landscape business.

Start now. It's never too early to plan for success. 

Learn more about the Summer Growth Summit at [jeffreyscott.biz/2021-summer-growth-summit](http://jeffreyscott.biz/2021-summer-growth-summit).





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## SAFETYWATCH

### HEATING UP

**Sam Steel, Ed.D., NALP safety adviser, offers advice to avoid heat stress**

**BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR**

As summer temperatures peak, landscape professionals and crew leaders should be on the lookout for symptoms of heat stress, especially among older crew members, according to Sam Steel, Ed.D., safety adviser for the National Association Landscape Professionals (NALP).

Symptoms include fatigue and low energy in the initial stages. As heat stress progresses, it can cause confusion, and a person will stop sweating.

"The person with heat stress is going to want to sit down and, in fact, should, but don't put them in a hot truck," Steel says. "Don't sit them down somewhere in the sun. Find a tree or some other shady area to put them."

In the most severe cases, a person can exhibit convulsion symptoms. In those cases, Steel says to call in emergency medical attention right away.

"In the worst-case scenario, heatstroke moves in, which results from the body core temperature reaching 104 and higher," Steel says. "That's a very dangerous situation and actually could result in the body's organs shutting down. And that, of course, becomes a fatality."

To help ward off heat stress before it starts, Steel suggests landscape crew leaders give workers frequent breaks, ensure they stay hydrated, perform the heaviest manual work before the heat of the day and check in with workers throughout the day. It's important to keep in mind that some medications may also exacerbate the symptoms of heat stress. Crew members also can wear light, airy clothing, sun hats and sunscreen to help stay cool and comfortable.

As the heat of summer wears on, workers become acclimated to higher temperatures, so heat stress poses less of a threat, Steel says.


"Workers gradually get used to the hot weather conditions," he says. "It takes an individual up to 10 days or more to become acclimatized." 



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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](mailto:marty@growgroupinc.com).



## Why it's important to know your costs and gross margin

I always like to remind my team at Grunder Landscaping Co. that good managers make good decisions when they have good information. While our industry doesn't have the amount of data that companies in Silicon Valley do, how we handle our data and what we use it for is just as important.

There are a few vital metrics landscaping companies should work hard to track accurately and use effectively, and, this month, I want to talk specifically about costs. Everyone reading this article understands that bidding a job for \$10,000 but spending \$20,000 to finish it is bad, but having your pricing high or your costs too low can be a slow drip. It could indicate you're not paying team members enough, you're cutting corners on quality or you're pricing yourself out of your market.

Knowing exact costs allows companies to bid, sell and perform work effectively and efficiently. One of the most impactful metrics we review and benchmark with our ACE Peer Group members is gross profit margin.

To calculate this margin as a percent, take your total revenue, subtract the cost of goods sold and divide the result by your total revenue. Include

only labor, materials, rentals and sub-contractors in your cost of goods sold. Our goal is for our clients to see about 50 percent in gross profit margin, depending on the type of work they do. Specifically, you should see gross profit margin rates around:

- 50-55 percent for construction work.
- 45-50 percent for maintenance work.

Gross margin essentially measures how your production costs relate to the revenue they generate. If your gross margin falls outside of these norms, there are ways to get it in line.

### IF YOUR GROSS MARGIN IS ABOVE INDUSTRY BENCHMARKS

Great! Just ensure you're delivering quality work and a great client experience first and that your high margin isn't because you're cutting corners.

Next, evaluate compensation. Are your team members paid at or above industry and market standards? The labor market is tight this year. If you can afford to give raises, you may have an easier time recruiting and retaining team members.


### IF YOUR GROSS MARGIN IS BELOW INDUSTRY BENCHMARKS

Start by trying to find efficiencies with labor expenses. Don't lower wages, but do make sure you're minimizing indirect time. Your morning rollout and

“Understanding your costs can help you make decisions on personnel, equipment, pricing, materials and much more.”

truck routes are good areas to focus on. Educate your team so they understand the importance of meeting or beating the hours on every job. If your gross margin doesn't improve with these changes, consider raising prices.

When you dig into the numbers, if one area of your business isn't performing as well as others, it may be time to shift your strategy. We have a client in the Washington, D.C., area who pivoted to focus more on maintenance once he realized that was the work his team was best at and could be profitable on. His company has grown tremendously since then.

Understanding your costs can help you make decisions on personnel, equipment, pricing, materials and much more. It gives you the confidence to know that you're making the right decisions and adjusting the course of your business as needed. Costs are an essential piece of data for any manager and may be key to solving challenges your company faces today or tomorrow. If you don't have a clear idea of your costs, start by calculating your gross profit margin this month. 





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Experience history-in-the-making as you stroll through the factory where world-famous Louisville Slugger bats are made. Admire the tallest bat in the world, count the hand carved homerun notches made by Babe Ruth himself, and take home your very own miniature bat for free!



## Frazier History Museum

Explore the history of the United States from early settlement through Colonization, the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and the multi-faceted origins of America's cultural landscape. As the official starting point of the Kentucky Bourbon Trail® and home to the Trail's Welcome Center, it's no wonder this museum is known for The Spirit of Kentucky® exhibit.

## Muhammad Ali Center

A cultural attraction and international education center inspired by the ideals of the Greatest-Of-All-Time, Muhammad Ali. Carrying on his legacy, the Muhammad Ali Center encourages visitors to explore over two floors of award-winning exhibits and interactive Ali experiences.

## Ovrdrive



A new addition near Museum Row, Ovrdrive offers guests car racing simulators, virtual reality gaming, axe throwing and a rage room – all under one roof.

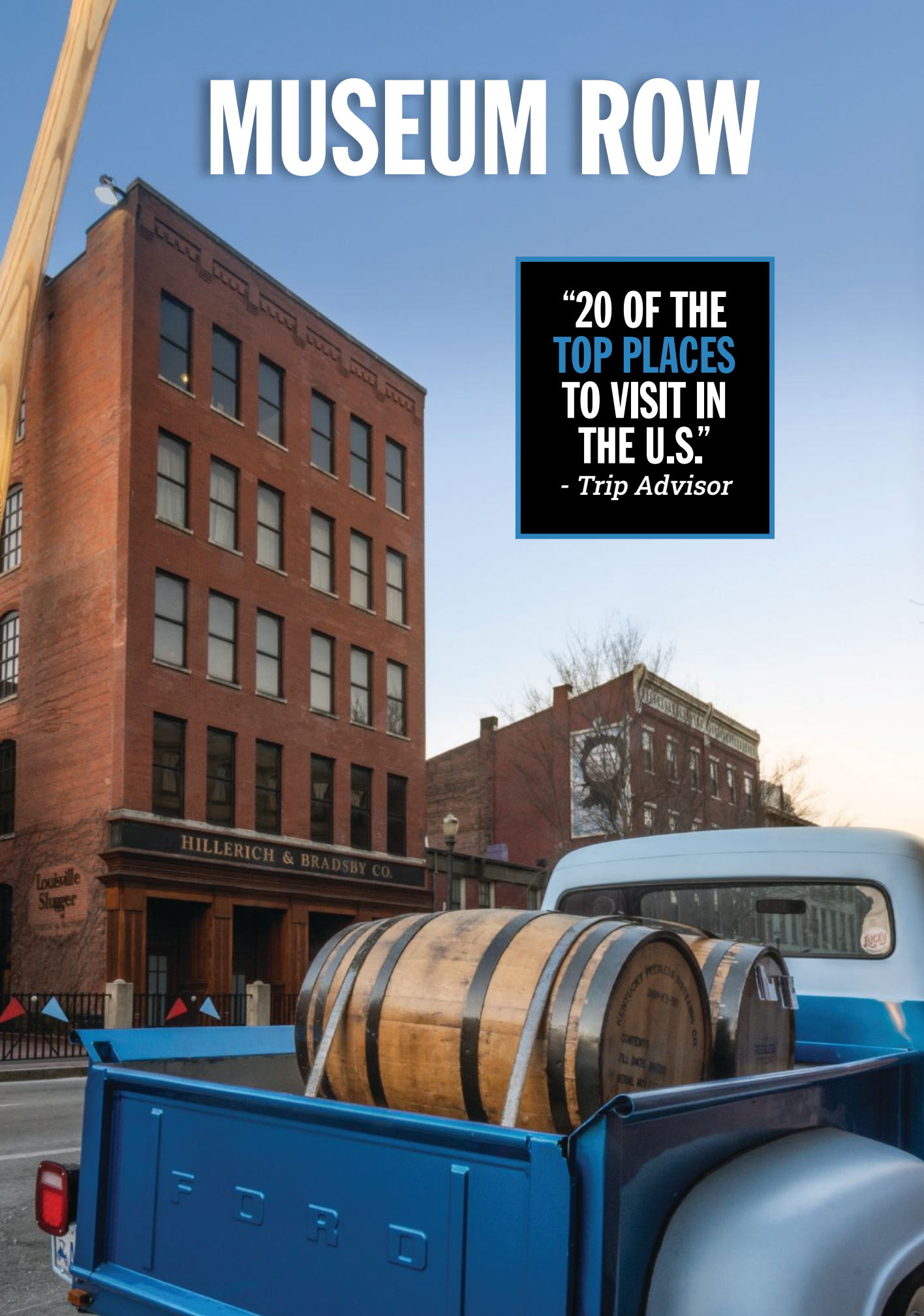




# MUSEUM ROW

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# THE GREAT OUTDOORS

## Big Four Bridge

This pedestrian bridge spans the Ohio River and connects Louisville to Jeffersonville, Indiana offering a two-mile round-trip journey with a spectacular view of the river, downtown and Waterfront Park. Featuring ample green space, fountains, a pavilion, and a play/spray ground. Catch the bridge at night to see it transformed with vibrant color with over 1,400 LED lights providing a fun show.



## Louisville Zoo

This interactive attraction is home to more than 1,200 animals and 134 botanical gardens. Animal highlights include polar bears, gorillas, lions, tigers, penguins and the newest resident – Fitz the baby elephant.

## Louisville Mega Caverns

One of the largest caverns in the U.S. featuring 17 miles of corridors located beneath the city. This cavern offers adventure seekers a ropes course with six zip lines, an aerial ropes challenge, bike park with 45 trails and a relaxing tram ride tour where you will learn about the geology of this man-made cavern. This is one of the most unique attractions in the city. Enjoy the comfort of the 60-degree temperature year-round.







## “8 BEST SPOTS FOR BREATHTAKING SUNSETS IN AMERICA: BIG FOUR BRIDGE” - Ecophile

### The Forest Giants

Don't miss Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest's biggest stars, a family of three larger-than-life Forest Giants! These friendly sculpture trolls love meeting new visitors and taking pictures with you to share with friends!



### Jack-O'-Lantern Spectacular

5,000 carved pumpkins line a 1/3-mile walking trail, illuminated at night as an “art show.” Rated one of the “10 Best Places to Celebrate Halloween” and “Best Halloween Event in the Midwest.”





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**Wednesday, October 20 – Friday, October 22**  
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**THE CRASHERS**

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