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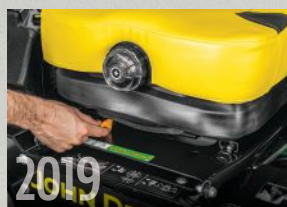
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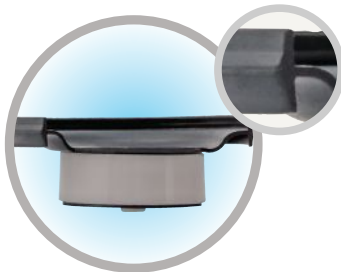
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## My first Equip Expo rodeo

Once again concluded my week in Louisville with a solo walk across the Big Four Bridge into Indiana. With a few hours to kill before my flight home, I grabbed a bar stool at Parlour and ordered a pizza, some of their smoked wings and a cold beer.

It was hard to get settled in and collect my thoughts about the week I just had at the inaugural Equip Expo. So much was packed into one week. It started on Tuesday with a media-only event at Churchill Downs hosted by Greenworks. It ended with a supply chain panel discussion that our magazine hosted, one of the 11 educational panels we put on at the show.

In-between? Three super-memorable dinners (you know who you are). Dozens of meetings and presentations (some were better than others — you probably *don't* know who you are). A firework show at Louisville Slugger

“By the end of the show, my team and I addressed almost 1,200 people hungry to learn from our network of industry experts.”

Park. A selfie with Trace Adkins (see page 8) and reconnecting with David Feherty. And the cherry on top, 11 successful educational sessions hosted by my team at *Landscape Management*. (For a recap of the “Your Company, Your Culture” panel I moderated, see page 42.)

Just ... *wow*. Even the incredible pizza at Parlour couldn't do the moment justice.

### IN THIS BUSINESS ...

We're in the business of providing education and insights to our readers, but this was the first time we were

asked by an entity like Equip Expo to be their exclusive magazine partner presenting educational seminars at their event. By the end of the show, my team and I addressed almost 1,200 people hungry to learn from our network of industry experts.

I said this many times when people asked me how the show was going ...

it was our first Equip Expo in name only. But in terms of what we were doing at the show? It really was our first rodeo, and I'm happy the bull didn't buck us. In fact, my team stepped up so much that we are already making plans for how we can make 2023 bigger and better.

### A 5-STAR WEEK

My first joke of the week may have flopped (“Welcome to the Trace Adkins fan club panel!” — might have been a little too early in the morning for that one), but otherwise, I felt like just about everything went smoothly. OK, my lunch with *LM* columnist Jeffrey Scott almost ended in disaster when a rolling cart of salads toppled over right behind me. But everything else was just about perfect.

Come to think of it, my 2022 Equip Expo experience didn't really end with that panel about the supply chain. It ended with me trying to get an Uber from Parlour in southern Indiana to the Louisville airport. It turned out a Friday night Luke Combs concert had the city in an uproar and a fierce traffic jam.

When my Uber driver finally pulled up, he told me, “Bro, I almost didn't accept your ride. But I saw you were trying to get to the airport, you have a 5-star rating and my guess is you'll pay the toll over the bridge to save us both time ... and you probably tip.”

I laughed and told him that after the 5-star week I just had, no traffic jam was about to slow us down. 🍷



A walk across the Big Four Bridge and a pizza from Parlour in Jeffersonville, Ind., has become a post-show tradition for *LM* EIC Seth Jones. If you have time to kill before your flight home following Equip Expo next year, you know where to find him — drinks are on him.

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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](https://www.LandscapeManagement.net).

## Why should professionals highlight the beneficial work of the lawn and landscape industry to their clients?

“Many people only see the negative side of our business — loud blowers and mowers while they’re trying to eat a peaceful lunch or dinner, trucks parked on their street blocking their lane, chemical smells that linger after a treatment, etc. It’s up to us to talk up our appreciation of the green grass and trees in the beautiful landscapes, not to mention our full bellies from the agricultural sector.”



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#### Richard Bare

Arbor-Nomics Turf  
Norcross, Ga.

#### Troy Clogg

Troy Clogg Landscape Associates  
Wixom, Mich.

#### Pam Dooley

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#### Bryan Stolz

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### Industry Consultants

#### Marty Grunder

The Grow Group  
Dayton, Ohio

#### Phil Harwood

Grow the Bench  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

#### Jeffrey Scott

Jeffrey Scott Consulting  
New Orleans, La.

“Contractors should continuously highlight what they do, why they do it and how their services help serve their clients. Clients should be aware that it’s the people that make the difference. Not the price, equipment or any other aspects of the contractor they select. It’s always people before profit.”



“We are the experts. It’s key that we educate our clients on the benefits of healthy landscapes on our communities, our planet and our collective mental health. Our clients also love to hear about the great careers we are building for our teams!”

“It’s not safe to assume that your clients know how beneficial your work is, and every voice matters.”



“I tell my team and others all the time, ‘Don’t sell the tree; sell the shade.’ Too many of us sell features instead of benefits. The benefits of landscaping are endless; focus on communicating that to your prospects and clients in as many ways as possible.”



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# LM GALLERY

Check out a few of the places where the *LM* team made its rounds at the Equip Expo

**1 Frosty 5k** Scott Covelli of Epic Creative and *LM*'s Publisher, Bill Roddy, and Editor, Christina Herrick, braved an early morning wake-up call and cold temperatures for Equip Expo's first Mulligan's 5K Fun Run & Walk.

**2 Team effort** The *LM* Team including Jake Goodman, western sales rep; Seth Jones, editor-in-chief; Herrick; Joey Ciccolini, digital media specialist; Craig MacGregor, associate publisher; Chloe Scoular, account manager; Dan Hannan, eastern sales rep and Roddy in front of the giant Equip sign at the show.

**3 Wax on** During Equip Expo's kickoff event, attendees, like Herrick, got the chance to hand dip their own Equip Expo mini bottles of Evan Williams bourbon.

**4 Trace encounter** Jones grabbed a selfie with Equip Expo's 4th Street Live! concert series headliner Trace Adkins on the Equip Expo show floor, momentarily breaking his own policy of avoiding photographs with someone taller than him.

**5 Take me out to the ballpark** Karen Williams, senior vice president of partnerships for Equip Expo, spotted Jones and Roddy at a buzzing welcome reception held at Louisville Slugger Field.

**6 Quick out of the gate!** Corey Fisher, director of vehicle engineering for Greenworks, gave media day attendees the inside scoop on the latest innovations from the company at an event held prior to the start of Equip Expo at Churchill Downs.

1



2



3



4



5



6



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## 2022 a record year for attendees at Equip Expo

**E**quip Exposition, formerly known as GIE+EXPO, set a new attendee record, welcoming more than 25,000 attendees and exhibitors, organizers said. This year's show debuted a new brand and new experiences for participants. The show announced earlier in the summer that it sold out of all indoor and outdoor exhibit space available for both Equip Exposition and Hardscape North America, which co-locates with Equip.

"This year's numbers show the industry is strong and optimistic about 2023," said Kris Kiser, president and CEO of Equip Exposition and the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), which owns the trade show. "The industry continues to innovate and bring new technologies to markets, evidenced by the major product announcements, education and networking that went on."

Expo attendees hailed from all 50 states and 49 countries, with the furthest traveling attendees journeying from Guam, New Zealand and Australia.

"The trade show remains the industry's family reunion," said Kiser. "This year, we shook up the programming a bit and introduced lots of new ideas from an opening welcome reception and new, interactive educational sessions to Mulligan's 5K Fun Run & Walk, a coffee bar and an expanded outdoor demo yard."

Other new opportunities at the show include educational sessions organized by *Landscape Management*, as well as new partnerships with the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance and the Association of Outdoor Lighting Professionals.

More than 4,000 people turned out to the show's first welcome reception at Louisville Slugger Field. Nearly 250 runners braved the cold temperatures at the inaugural Mulligan's 5K Fun



Run & Walk over the Big Four Pedestrian Bridge. The benefit run and walk, sponsored by Ariens, raised funds for the Kentucky Humane Society.

**LM Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones checks out a ride-on mower from Greenworks at the company's event at Churchill Downs.**

Next year's show, which returns to the Kentucky Exposition Center, will be held Oct. 18-20, 2023. [LM](#)

### **LM Exclusive: Greenzie, Bobcat partner on autonomous mower**

Greenzie, an autonomous software company for commercial mowers and outdoor power equipment, closed an \$8 million corporate strategic round, led by Atlanta Ventures. This round included an investment by Bobcat Co.

Greenzie and Bobcat partnered on an autonomous option for a gas-powered zero-turn mower. Charles Brian Quinn, Greenzie CEO and co-founder, said landscapers told him it would be helpful to have an autonomous option on a standard mower. Quinn said this

Bobcat gas-powered zero-turn mower utilizes Greenzie's software with autonomous technology Bobcat designed. This is Bobcat's first foray into mower automation.

"Our customers have many job openings that they cannot fill, so having trusted equipment that is rugged, reliable, and now can be automated is a win for all of our mutual customers," Quinn said.

Joel Honeyman, vice president of global innovation with Doosan Bobcat, told *LM* this mower is a standard zero-turn mower with autonomous capabilities. A user can mow with the mower or deploy the automation technology as needed.

"It's not that everybody does everything autonomously," Honeyman said. "Someone can jump on this mower, and they can get their jobs done. But when they don't have labor or choose not to be on the machine, they can put it in autonomous mode and work that way as well."

Designed to operate with software developed by Greenzie, the Bobcat autonomous mower has a ride-and-repeat feature, where operators can plot a course and mark areas for the mower to avoid during autonomous operations. According to Bobcat, the mower can detect objects as



# LM EXCLUSIVE: Kubota looks to the future at its Kubota Connect event

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

When Kubota dealers entered the show floor at the Gaylord Texan Resort in Grapevine, Texas, for the Kubota Connect event, the company's vision of the future greeted them.

The company displayed a concept tractor in addition to a multi-step plan moving toward battery-powered equipment.

"We have to balance the past with what is to come in the future, and the future is coming at us really fast," said Todd Stucke, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Kubota North America.


Kubota's electric prototype Z2E ride-on zero-turn mower is part of what Kubota calls Phase 2 of its plan to create completely electric machines.

Now in what Kubota calls Phase 1, the company plans to develop a "drop-in" electric engine to introduce drive-by-wire and a completely electric machine with automation in the future.

Alongside a look to the future, the company offered dealers a look at the present as it showcased its newest offerings coming in 2023.

Kubota also announced new additions to its ZD zero-turn mower line with the ZD1611. The company says the machine will have a new common-rail engine, monitor and tie-downs and will be available at dealerships in January.

Kubota also improved the mower's LCD screen with the addition of more features, according to Michael Gryp, product marketing director for turf and RTVs at Kubota.

"The key is operator experience and operator comfort," Gryp said. "You've got this monitor with the gauges and the key information so the customer can see that whether it's fuel, whether it's the regeneration process or particulate matter, the operator knows what's going on with that machine by looking at that monitor." 



Kubota showcased its concept tractor alongside other prototype products in its Digital Solutions Hub. The company said it's moving towards all-electric solutions in the future.

the zero-turn mower travels its prescribed path while the operator can take on other tasks and maximize job site efficiency. A simple smartphone app manages these functions.

## DHS to release additional 65K H-2B visas in fiscal year 2023

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will release an additional 64,716 H-2B visas for seasonal non-agricultural workers for the upcoming year, bringing the 2023 total to 130,716.

According to DHS, 44,716 supplemental visas are available to returning H-2B workers who

received a visa in the past three years. The remaining 20,000 visas, which are exempt from the returning worker requirements, are reserved for countries, including employees from Haiti, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.

The National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) expects DHS to publish the official rule before the end of the year. The rule will address both the first and second halves of the fiscal year, which the NALP expects will expedite the process for the second half of the year, which starts on April 1.

Andrew Bray, NALP senior vice president of government relations and membership, stressed the importance of the timing of the decision, telling *Landscape Management* the October announcement will allow landscape professionals to apply for and receive their H-2B visas in time for when they are needed in April.

Bray and NALP expect the demand for visas in 2023 to exceed 160,000. So, while DHS's supplemental visas will not cover the entire need, it will raise the chances of green industry applicants having their visa requests approved.

# Making \$ense

**Irrigation pros  
share how water  
management plans  
benefit their businesses  
and their clients**

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Pacific Landscape Management works with its clients to develop a water management plan to save money and prevent waste.

**W**ater rates in the Pacific Northwest have more than doubled in the last five years, says David Grover. He says it seems almost contradictory for a region with a rainy season surrounded by inlets, lakes and rivers.

"We've even got one water district here in the last five years that's increased over 300 percent," says the branch manager with Pacific Landscape Management in the company's Sherwood, Ore., branch.

Grover attributes much of this increase in water rates to a growing population and infrastructure projects to meet that demand. What's happening in the Pacific Northwest mirrors what many landscape contractors experience throughout North America, which in turn, creates a heightened focus on irrigation management.

"The biggest problem in irrigation is most people, if you ask them how much water is used in irrigation, they have no clue," says Darren Kovacs, COO of ExactET Systems, an irrigation water management company in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. "They can say, 'We water three days a week.' But if you start asking them to quantify how much water is used, they don't know."

Like the Pacific Northwest, Alberta seems like an unlikely area to face water woes. However, Kovacs says his province took proactive measures to slow down the depletion of the glaciers that feed the waterways in Alberta.

"(Calgary) actually demanded that all irrigation systems beyond residential — multifamily, commercial and institutional — all have to have dedicated irrigation meters," he says. "What that has done is woken people up to the fact that how much water gets used in irrigation."

Danny Smith, director of water management for Park West Landscape Management in Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif., is at the heart of the state's water crisis. Water districts in Southern California deploy a tiered pricing structure. These tiered rates provide a monthly water allocation, Smith says.

"Each water meter would be essentially provided a variable monthly allocation," he says. "There are tiered rates based on percentages of that allocations. These tiered rate structures are essentially meant to reward those who are employing good water conservation practices and stay within the provided allocation. It's also meant to penalize those that are not following good water management."



Danny Smith

### Where water restrictions intersect with innovation

Grover says the Environmental Protection Agency estimates inefficient irrigation systems waste about 50 percent of irrigation water. He sees effective water management as a three-legged stool: efficient irrigation system design and

management, weather-based irrigation programming and an effective system to apply the weather-based data.

For the weather-based irrigation portion, Pacific Landscape Management offers its commercial irrigation, landscape maintenance and construction clients a subscription model for weather-based irrigation management with a Weathermatic system. Instead of upfront investment costs, Grover says clients pay a smaller monthly cost.

"We've seen it really take off in the last couple of years since we have offered the subscription model," he says. "We have somewhere around 550 weather-based controllers out there in our portfolio of work."

Pacific Landscape Management also focuses on improving coverage and maximizing water use for existing irrigation systems with tools like Hunter MP Rotators and drip irrigation, Grover says.

"Anywhere we can get water down at the root zone to reduce the amount of evaporation and overspray is a great solution," he says. "(We're) just trying to find those areas where drip (irrigation) will help distribute that water more evenly and more effectively."

Similarly, Kovacs uses Smart Rain's automated climate-controlled irrigation system to help clients better manage water use and save water. The Smart Rain system matches the soil's moisture intake with the precipitation rate of the irrigation system. It also uses accurate evapotranspiration, weather data and rainfall information to determine the best time to water.

Kovacs says he also incorporates hydrometers and flow sensors with a master valve that offers automated leak detection. He favors climate-controlled water management coupled with hydrometers over irrigation timers with no leak detection.

"It's way more important to only water when you need to than water on a timer when you don't need to," he says.

Smith says all the technology in the world doesn't make up for an inefficient system and a lack of technician training.

"You can't put a smart controller on a dumb system," he says. "It's not just about putting the technologies in, but are we installing them correctly? Are we managing them correctly?"

### Helping clients better manage water use

"We at Park West don't just install the smart controller and think it's going to solve the world's water crisis and move on," Smith says. "We put together an entire program that takes us from spray head to smart controller and everything in between to make sure that we're capitalizing on not just the smart control benefits, but every other benefit that goes with that irrigation system."

*Continued on page 14*



Darren Kovacs

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*Continued from page 13*

Smith says he asks to see a new client's water bills to understand what type of tiered structure the property falls in. He says that task is a struggle for his clients as accounting departments for commercial properties often handle the bills, and HOA boards and property managers, in some cases, only look for anomalies.

"They might come to realize that, on average, this water bill is running 60 percent of the allocation," he says. "But then I find out they've had a mainline break or a leak on that meter for the last four years, and the actual true baseline that they should be at is 40 percent. That's what really separates the good water managers from the rest."

Smith says as he looks over the bill, he ensures the water board assesses the property fairly and eyes areas to improve water use. Park West also performs a full inspection when bringing on a new client.

"We're able to make those repairs, stop the bleeding and provide some relief during this evaluation, and then

*Continued on page 16*



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Continued from page 14 put together a long-term strategy with budget, return on investment, rebate potentials — all of that as part of the entire package,” he says.

Pacific Landscape Management offers a water management plan as an additional service. The operation promotes the service through the company’s newsletter and starts a conversation about the service when a client calls an account manager about a high water bill.

Grover says irrigation system evaluations typically begin in the summer, which helps Pacific Landscape Management identify inefficient areas on the property. Following the evaluation, a property manager puts together a plan with a



priority list — much like Park West’s — that breaks out easy upgrades and what might be bigger projects.

Grover says the plan also includes an estimate of water savings from third-party sources and general savings information about the products used in the upgrades. Although Grover acknowledges it’s a challenge to provide clients with solid data on savings as weather changes irrigation needs seasonally and yearly.

“We’ve done some case studies with our weather-based irrigation systems, and we’ve determined, based on four examples, that we did between 2019 and 2020, on average we saved about 34 percent water on those four sites.”

Pacific Landscape Management’s water savings plan also includes areas to reduce or eliminate turf in parking strips or areas with large trees that compete for water and nutrients.

“We can improve the look of the property while reducing or eliminating water needs in certain areas,” he says.

Grover says clients see the plan as a road map for their properties.

“It’s not chasing one particular issue on one particular zone,” he says. “It’s looking at the property as a whole and saying, ‘Where are all my opportunities to conserve water?’”

And this is a win-win for Pacific Landscape Management and the client.

“For our business and our industry, if we have a strong focus on water management, we can save our clients’ money without reducing our revenue streams,” he says.

**IN THE KNOW**  
Experts say training is a critical part of responsible water management.



David Grover

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PHOTO: PARK WEST LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

“Water’s a finite resource. We have a responsibility to manage it and use it wisely.”

### Future of irrigation

Smith says a major part of the future of irrigation management is increasing the industry’s professionalism. He says irrigation companies need to make water management a priority and educate the entire staff, including account and branch managers, salespeople and irrigation technicians.

“I think the next frontier for landscape companies, whether it’s through the water management standard department standard or not, is certifications,” he says.

He cites Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor (CLIA), Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL) training, recycled water site supervisor training (RWSS) and many others

*Continued on page 18*

### TECH TALKS

Irrigation professionals use the latest technology to track water savings data on sites with upgrades.



PHOTO: JOHN VALLS



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*Continued from page 17*

offered by irrigation system manufacturers to raise the bar for responsible water use.

“That’s where the landscape companies can really own and be responsible for their part of water management,” he says.

Grover says he hopes future technology will unlock ways to instantaneously get data and reports on flow meters and systems for existing irrigation installations. He says that’s a big challenge for irrigation systems. Pacific Landscape Management oversees some that are 20 or 30 years old.

“One of the things that we don’t have a lot of visibility into is the raw data of the irrigation use,” he says. “A lot of times, the meter is the same meter servicing the building, and the meter reader goes, they check the meter, get their data and they put it together in a water bill that comes

## DIGGING INTO WATER MANAGEMENT

Luke Hawthorne, owner of Emerald Lawns in Round Rock, Texas, says 2022 was a year of severe drought for the Austin area. This, coupled with increased demand due to a population boom, led the city of Austin to enact water restrictions that limited outdoor watering to once a week.

Hawthorne says when the area went through a drought about four or five years ago, he decided to deploy Hydretain, a mixture of hygroscopic and humectant components that helps the soil attract moisture. He says Hydretain helped his clients better manage the turfgrass stress that comes with once-a-week watering. He discovered Hydretain after calling a friend of his who is a golf course superintendent.

“He told me they used soil surfactants and products like Hydretain to make the watering more efficient,” Hawthorne says.

An application of Hydretain is an upsell for Emerald Lawns, which sends out informational emails to its 90 percent residential, 10 percent commercial lawn and tree care clientele about the service. Emerald Lawns charges a base price of \$72.50 and says it can help lawns absorb 30 to 50 percent more water. Emerald Lawns also amends the soil with a ½-inch layer of compost over the turf and a separate application of 1 to 1 ½ inch of topsoil.

“We’re actually adding depth, and then more soil means it can retain more water and the grass is able to have a more robust root system,” Hawthorne says.



**Luke Hawthorne**



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two months later. This information lags quite a bit.”

Kovacs says the future of irrigation comes down to changing behavior. Things as simple as adding more topsoil or topdressing — like what Emerald Lawns does (see sidebar) — can make a big difference.

“The deeper soil you have, it retains more moisture, which means every time you do water, you have a much greater opportunity to get to the next rain event without having to irrigate at all,” he says.

Kovacs says Oakes, a small town outside of Calgary in Alberta, mandated 8 inches of soil below all turf plantings — which Kovacs said city managers measure — along with two-day-a-week outdoor watering.

“Even at twice a week, those landscapes look fantastic because they have enough soil to retain moisture,” he says. “It’s more or less a do-or-die situation in the long term. If the industry wants to survive, we need to get better at what we do. Water management and a healthy green industry go hand in hand.”



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# Drought-stress turf or chinch bugs?

Industry professionals offer scouting tips to get a handle on this pest

BY JESSE KHALIL | CONTRIBUTOR

**C**hinch bugs can be a difficult pest for lawn care operators to identify and control. Closely mimicking drought damage, these pests cause turf to turn yellow and thin, transforming into dry patches if left untreated.

Chinch bugs pierce the turfgrass blades and suck fluid from the plant. As they feed, they also secrete toxins inside the turfgrass that disrupt the water and nutrient movement within the plant. This condition causes the turf to yellow and wilt, which is why chinch bug damage is often misidentified as drought stress.

Lawn care professionals share the best ways to tackle chinch bugs and treat the damage they cause to turfgrass.

## CHINCH BUG 411

“Both cool- and warm-season turf can be affected by chinch bugs,” says Bret Corbett, director of technical services with Prime Source. “In the Southeast, the Southern chinch bug can affect almost all warm-season varieties, but St. Augustine is the most common turf type to be associated with extensive damage.”

For cool-season turf, hairy chinch bug is most common. It’s found in Kentucky bluegrass, fescues and ryegrasses, according to Corbett.

Brian Mount, FMC technical service manager for insecticides, says drought or otherwise stressed turfgrasses will be more susceptible to chinch bug attacks.

“A healthy lawn is a great defense against attack from insects and diseases,” says Mount. “It is also worth noting that chinch bugs can attack totally healthy turfgrass as it would represent a good source of food.”

## SIGNS OF DAMAGE

The most telling sign of chinch bug damage is irregular yellow patches of turf, says Mount.

“These patchy areas can turn reddish brown and eventually die while the chinch bugs move outward into healthy turf,” he says. “A yellow halo around the damaged area is typical of a chinch bug infestation.”

Todd Lowe, technical services manager at Envu Green Solutions, notes that chinch bugs appear more active each



spring and continue throughout the hot summer months. Areas experiencing drought will have greater chinch bug damage at the time, he adds.

“Hopefully, homeowner irrigation systems can keep the turf from dying off completely before effective programs can be implemented,” Lowe says.

**WITHOUT BIAS**  
Chinch bugs are equal-opportunity turfgrass attackers, targeting both cool- and warm-season grasses.

## LOCATING AND ERADICATING

Early detection is key because early life stages of the chinch bug are easier to control than later stages, according to Mount.

Lowe says LCOs should use the tin can test to scout for pests. This method involves lawn care operators taking a coffee can or similar device, and cutting both ends and inserting it into the upper soil of the lawn. Professionals then saturate the soil with a hose until insects and clipping debris float upward.

Corbett offers another way for professionals to identify the pest.

“Pulling back the turf adjunct to yellow areas is a great way to scout for these pests,” he says. “Chinch bugs can usually be seen easily if they are present.”

Research from North Carolina State University lists the threshold as 20 to 25 chinch bugs per square foot.

Once LCOs determine insecticide treatments are necessary, experts say they can — and should — deploy several active ingredients to control the pest.

“Products that are used for control of chinch bugs include products that contain the active ingredients acephate, chlorantraniliprole or clothianidin along with many different pyrethroids,” he says. “The bioinsecticide Crescendo also provides great knockdown.”

Mount adds, “In the South, where treatments occur year-round, it is important to rotate active ingredients as chinch bugs can quickly develop insecticide resistance.”

Khalil is currently an intern with *Landscape Management's* parent company, North Coast Media, and will graduate from Kent State University in December 2022.



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# Start spring off right with fall fertilization

As the calendar turns and dormancy nears, warm- and cool-season turf nutrition needs change **BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR**

**A**s the season shifts to late fall, experts say the nutrition needs of both cool- and warm-season turf change. Experts share what lawn care operators (LCOs) need to keep in mind this fall and how to get turf off on the right foot for next spring.

Ben Pease, Ph.D., turfgrass agronomist for The Andersons Plant Nutrient Group, says as cool- and warm-season goes into dormancy in late fall, LCOs need to be mindful of the fertility applied.

“You don’t want to overstimulate turf that’s about to go into dormancy,” he says. “Use a controlled-release fertilizer to put down small amounts of nitrogen that will go out slower than a fast-release version.”

John Perry, president of Greene County Fertilizer Co., says LCOs should see late fall fertilization as giving the turf a leg up for next year.

“The best way to think about fertility in the fall is that you’re actually applying your first spring fertilizer — it is just taking place in the year prior,” he says.

Perry suggests LCOs use soil temperature as a gauge to apply controlled-release fertilizers.

“Once the soil temperatures drop below 50 degrees, it would be better to switch over to a controlled-release fertilizer,” he says. “Even though it might have more of a delayed response in the

springtime, it would still be a more stable choice.”

Bill Abetz, director of turf and ornamentals for Pursell Agri-Tech, suggests that LCOs look for a 10-0-30 NPK (10 percent nitrogen, 30 percent potassium and 0 percent phosphorous) ratio to help the turf better overwinter.

“The reason you’re doing that is to enhance or improve plant health through dormancy,” he says. “Potassium makes plants stronger. It helps them overwinter better. It helps them in and out of dormancy.”

## USE LATE FALL TO ADDRESS SOIL NEEDS

Pease says LCOs also should use late fall to apply soil amendments, such as gypsum, lime or humic acid.

“You could still fit another application of any of those soil amendment-type products along with your fall fertility application,” he says. “Some fertilizers do have those as a component.”

Fall aeration is another opportunity for an application of fertilizer as the turf will take up the fertility quickly, Pease says.

“If you’re doing a later aeration, there’s still some recovery happening in the spring,” he says. “It’s good to partner a late fall aeration with some late fall fertility so that you can promote recovery. If they’re

overseeding with that fall aeration, that’s another good time to put down a small dose of fertility to help those new seedlings get started.”

Perry says LCOs with cool-season turf should not

overlook a fall round of fertility as the turf went through a second phase of growth and depleted some nutrition reserves.

“You basically have a growth phase and then immediate dormancy, and then it has to wake up and have something to latch on to early in the season,” he says.

## WHAT TO AVOID

Avoid overstimulating the turf going into the winter and then again in early spring, Pease says. It could deplete the soil’s reserves and make the turf more susceptible to stress in the summer.

“The mistake of possibly over-fertilizing with too much faster-release (fertilizer) and getting a big growth spurt (next spring) could be a detrimental mistake,” he says.

Abetz says not fertilizing in the fall would be a mistake. If that’s the case, he says LCOs need to think about fertility levels in the soil as turf comes out of dormancy and then apply nutrition as needed.

“In the spring, do soil testing on some properties to see where your soils are so that you can figure out exactly where you need to be from a rate perspective,” he says. “Because if they’ve depleted their soil reserves, they might not have as much fertilizer as they’re used to having in the spring.”



Ben Pease



John Perry



Bill Abetz

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# How one LCO uses Spraye to maximize route density

## Jim Beveridge of Yards Done Right shares the benefits of this software

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

**J**im Beveridge, owner of Yards Done Right in Westlake, Ohio, started using Spraye software to schedule his routes as a beta tester. A fellow lawn care operator (LCO) developed the software.

Beveridge runs a two-person crew with his wife, Judy. Yards Done Right is a primarily residential company that does lawn fertilization, weed control, organic topdressing and tree and shrub services.

Beveridge shares with *LM* how he uses Spraye, and the advantages route density offers his business.

“For a small- to medium-sized business, Spraye has an amazing array of features it offers at an affordable price,” he says. The base subscription costs \$90 a month.

Route density is a critical part of Beveridge’s operation because it equates to saving time and fuel.

“It means a lot to us because I can fly through a dense route versus driving

20 minutes between houses. So, route density basically is everything to us,” he says. “That’s what we try to aim for when we do marketing.”

Beveridge says most LCOs’ spray rigs can hold only so much liquid, and using Spraye helps him maximize the amount of square feet he treats in a day without going over that threshold.

“When I pick the route out, (Spraye) automatically shows me how many square feet I picked for that day,” he says. “And if I have a few too many (square feet), I can put a couple (jobs) back in the cart and not do those till another day.”

### MAXIMIZING BY CITY

Beveridge lives in one of greater Cleveland’s western suburbs. He organizes his routes by suburb to maximize the time spent in one area.

“We can pick a group in Avon that has 23 houses that are basically a mile apart, but it’s a 20-minute drive to get out to the houses, but once you’re out there, you go bing, bang, boom and you’re done.”

Beveridge says he also likes that Spraye emails customers twice: once when he schedules the visit — about a week out — and then again 24 hours in advance so the client can clear the yard.

### ADDING AND SKIPPING ROUTES

Spraye offers several options if a client needs to reschedule a service.

“If you pull up and Mrs. Smith



“It means a lot to us because I can fly through a dense route versus driving 20 minutes between houses. So, route density basically is everything to us.”

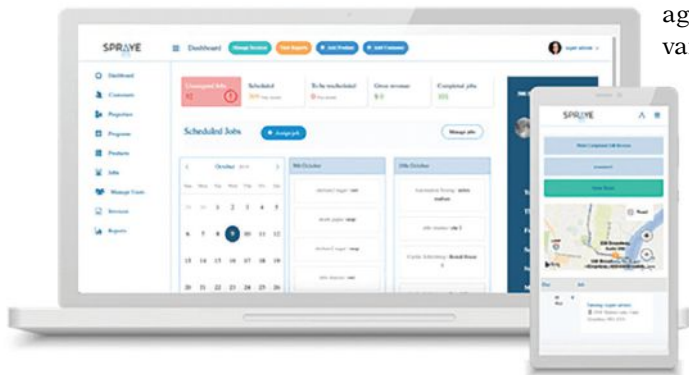
—JIM BEVERIDGE

said, ‘I’m having a party in 20 minutes with 40 kids coming over, you can’t do my lawn today’ ... you could skip it, you could move it to a different day automatically or you can just put it back in the unassigned services queue,” Beveridge says.

“And then the software will then recalibrate and figure out the next day that it’s in the vicinity and would make sense route-wise.”

Adding clients is easy, he says. Once he adds a client with a specific spray program — six applications or so — the client goes into the Spraye system as an unassigned service organized by city.

“We tag all the cities where all our customers are, so we can say our next day is going to be in Rocky River (for example),” Beveridge says. “We look up all the customers in Rocky River we’re going to do and, ‘Oh, there’s Mrs. Smith. We had to cancel her yard last week; let’s do her yard this week.’”



Rob Elder, owner of Omaha (Neb.) Organics sells corn gluten, made of pressed corn, as a natural preemergent herbicide.

## DID YOU KNOW

# Identifying the benefits of taking a natural approach to lawn care

## Business owners share the ins and outs of using biological and organic products in their lawn care operations **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**

**A**fter having kids, Rob Elder, owner of Omaha Organics in Omaha, Neb., says he wanted a way to have a safe, sustainable and beautiful lawn that his family and pets could enjoy — leading him to organic products. Elder is not alone. Many lawn care operators (LCOs) turn to biologicals and organics to improve the soil structure and become more environmentally conscious.



**Rob Elder**

Omaha Organics provides organic lawn care, maintenance and fall/spring cleanup for clients that are 75 percent residential, 20 percent commercial and 5 percent municipalities.

The business also manufactures and sells its own organic fertilizer products.

Elder says a standard recommended annual organic service program consists of a soil test, four applications of organic fertilizer and a fall aeration with seeding. Depending on the needs of the lawn, technicians may use additional soil amendments like gypsum, phosphorus, lime or top dressing.

The raw materials in the fertilizer applications contain one or more organic ingredients, including corn gluten, alfalfa, soy meal, kelp, molasses and sulfate of potash. Omaha Organics also offers other types of soil amendments and pest control products containing natural applications like gypsum, lime, humic acid, fish emulsion and neem oil.

The biggest challenge is customers who have concerns about the cost.

Organic products typically are more expensive, he says.

“Organic fertilizers also are applied at a much higher rate per square foot than synthetic fertilizers, so one bag of organic fertilizer does not go nearly as far as a synthetic bag, which adds to the overall cost,” Elder says.

Another concern Elder says he encounters is the time needed for the program to establish and show results.

“An organic lawn is not a quick fix. We spend a lot of time educating our clients and resetting their expectations if they are accustomed to the fast-acting results of a synthetic fertilizer program,” he says.

### LOCALLY SOURCED

Chris Burisek, owner of Pure Prairie Organics in Joliet, Ill., uses kelp, Milorganite or other biomatter products and products made from grains leftover from the food and beverage industry.

“With us, it’s about using products that are already available and not ones that are necessarily made in a factory, which causes pollution,” Burisek says.

His company provides organic lawn care, organic-based blended lawn care (about 85 percent organic), tree/shrub care and pest/insect control services. Pure Prairie Organics’ customers are 95 percent residential and 5 percent commercial.

The main pushback Burisek receives about using organic products comes from prospective homeowner associations (HOA), who mainly compare companies’ prices. He says HOAs aren’t his target audience.

“Most homeowners find us because that is what they are into and how they live their lives,” Burisek says. “They eat organic and natural food, use natural and organic products in their home and want it outside their home too.”

### BUILD HEALTHIER LAWN

With more than four decades of experience, Don Zerby — owner of Ecolawn in Eastlake, Ohio — uses a variety of organic matter and materials depending on local availability. That includes orange peel, corn gluten and yucca extract. Ecolawn’s hybrid program also includes applications of control products as needed.



**Don Zerby**

His company services mainly residential customers and provides lawn care, tree/shrub care and pest control. He says when technicians apply organic matter to the soil, more nutrients are available for the root system to grow deeper.

“That’s important because soil moisture is retained lower in the soil profile,” he says. “In extreme circumstances like heat, drought or high-traffic areas, the lawn is going to be healthier because of the availability of those nutrients.”

Zerby says educating customers about Ecolawn’s use of organics and its benefits is an important part.

“Organics were designed to be included as a part of my program to build healthier lawns,” Zerby says. “Healthier lawns require a lot less use of control products to stay healthy.”



**Chris Burisek**

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

## THE BIG ONE

### A green vision

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

**LOCATION** Research Triangle, N.C.

**COMPANY** GreenView Partners

**DETAILS** GreenView Partners has maintained this 124-acre property for seven years. Sustainability is a big focus for the client. GreenView Partners services the property several days a week, and the company's design and enhancements team work on projects throughout the year to continue that focus.

Tyner Tew, partner and director of sales and marketing for GreenView Partners, says tall fescue at the main entrance suffered from drainage issues, and crews constantly battled fungus. So, they converted the tall fescue to drought-tolerant TifTuf Bermudagrass and addressed grading and drainage issues over a weekend to avoid disrupting employees.

Tew says other enhancements include an irrigation system upgrade to stainless steel components and a RainBird LXMEF IQ system with a flow master and master valve to reduce water use and manage the system wirelessly.

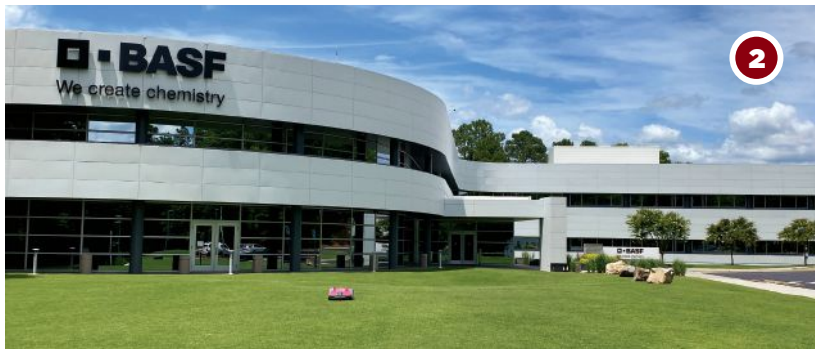
GreenView Partners also trialed a Husqvarna Automower and ultimately implemented 11 robotic mowers to maintain various parts of the property.

One of the property's priorities is to make enhancements to reduce labor, Tew says. Whether in the section of plant material or installation designs, he says this mentality helps GreenView Partners be more effective with crews.

"We're just able to help drive our maintenance labor focus in the areas that need more detailed attention," he says.

GreenView Partners won a Gold Award from the 2021 National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program for this project. 

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



**Captions** | **1.** This 124-acre property is a Class A office, industrial and research space. GreenView Partners services the property several days a week, and the company's design and enhancement teams work on projects throughout the year. **2.** GreenView Partners converted this area to TifTurf Bermudagrass to add autonomous mowing. Eleven autonomous mowers serve the campus. **3.** Small and large outdoor meeting areas line the company's outdoor space. Each of these areas blends manicured maintenance with naturalized landscape elements. Boulders, grasses and slate stone connect this space with a wooded area. **4.** GreenView Partners enhanced the exterior landscape of this corporate pavilion, which is used for events and training.



## REV YOUR ENGINES

# Mower manufacturers make their mark

At Equip Expo, mower manufacturers' new introductions stand out from the crowd

BY JOEY CICCOLINI | LM DIGITAL MEDIA SPECIALIST

**W**hile roaming the extensive indoor and outdoor exhibit space at the 2022 Equip Expo, it became clear that new mowing innovations to the green industry have arrived.

Take relative industry newcomer Kress, for example, which came to the show with new battery-powered equipment proclaiming “the death of gas.” The company’s KR233 commercial robotic mower navigates lawns up to 4½ acres large while operating with an average runtime of 80 minutes. Todd Zimmerman, vice president of product development for Kress, says landscape professionals can still expect the same performance they receive with gas-powered products with the new technology from Kress.

“We designed the product to be a gas-powered product, just powered by (Kress’s) Cyberpack battery and Cyber-system platform,” he explains.

It wasn’t just new companies that came armed with innovations to display; some of the industry’s heaviest hitters joined in as well.

Many pros are familiar with Exmark’s Lazer Z zero-turn mower. Considered the manufacturer’s flagship mower, the machine gets a new twist in 2023. Late next year, the company will release the electric Lazer Z. The electric zero-turn option is an area Exmark is excited to enter as the industry continues to change.

“We’re seeing a lot of pull from certain parts of the country and legislation

driving us towards battery,” says Chris Lammie, product marketing director for Exmark. “In 2024, we want to have a complete lineup for California that includes walk-behind power mowers, stand-on mowers and the electric Lazer seated rider.”

John Deere was also on hand at Equip Expo to showcase some electric prototypes. With a goal to have an electric option for all turf and compact tractor categories by 2026, the company shared some new concepts, including an electric ZTrak and stand-on QuikTrak mower.

While gas-powered options will still be available for customers, Monica Grimsley, marketing operations manager for John Deere, says the electric market is an area people are excited for the company to enter. She explains that John Deere’s goal is to offer the same power and experience in its electric equipment that it provides with gas.

“Zero compromises are a big thing; we’re not going to take any shortcuts when it comes to performance,” says Grimsley.

## NOT DEAD, BUT DIFFERENT

In some cases, it’s not the “death of gas” the industry sees, but new technologies infused into gas-powered mowers.

Greenzie, an autonomous software company, and Bobcat partnered on a new zero-turn with autonomous capabilities.

“It can be a normal mower, and it can be automated; it’s really about augmenting the job that needs to be done,” says Lincoln Voss, innovation manager at Bobcat. “Sometimes you may need to




hop on and mow, but other times you can mow it autonomously, which allows you to be able to do other jobs on the site.”

Husqvarna also introduced a new semi-autonomous robotic mower, which allows users to operate the machine as a traditional stand-on and as an unmanned robotic mower guided by satellite data.

Carlos Haddad, vice president and general manager for the North America professional business unit at Husqvarna Group, acknowledges that as manufacturers begin the journey into robotic mowing, it’s one of the innovations his company wanted to expand into as well.

“(Husqvarna) has already had this technology and knowledge for over 25 years, and it allowed us to accelerate this project,” Haddad says. “We were able to develop this mower from beginning to having prototypes in less than six months.”

Whether it’s new electric models, upgrades to gas models or unmanned robotic mowing, many innovations are on their way to the green industry, offering customers a variety of options to get the job done. 

## UPDATED HARDWARE

Exmark debuted its electric Lazer Z zero-turn mower to landscape pros at the 2022 Equip Expo.

## MAINTENANCE SHOP

# Robotic mower winterization do's and don'ts

How to ensure your robotic mower fleet is ready for hibernation **BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

**R**obotic mowers offer professionals a different way to maintain a property. But just like any other kind of “traditional” mower, robotic mowers must undergo a winterization process to ensure they're ready to go in the spring.

Joe Langton, president of Langton Group in Woodstock, Ill., — which offers maintenance, construction, irrigation and snow removal services to a 35 percent commercial, 60 percent residential and 5 percent municipal clientele — shares with *LM* what professionals need to do to have robotic mowers in peak condition.

### DO

**Pre-plan your routes.** Langton says his company — which uses Husqvarna's Automowers — picks up all its mowers in one swoop after ensuring they're all parked using Husqvarna's Automower Connect App. He recommends preplanning pickup routes.

“The last thing you want to do is make a bunch of wasted trips back and forth,” he says. “Then it might cost a lot of money to winterize. But if you preplan the routes so that you're picking them all up in a trailer at once, it will save time and money.”

**Leave the charging station.** The mowers Langton Group utilizes all have a “home base” on a client's property where they charge. Langton says his team leaves those on-site and places a bucket over the top of the stations to protect them from the elements and pests.

Husqvarna recommends storing the station inside or covering it for protection.

**Clean the machines.** Langton says professionals should keep it simple when they clean their robotic mowers.

After his team collects all the mowers on their route, they're brought back to the shop and cleaned in a controlled and clean environment. Langton says his team first brushes any dirt and debris off the mower and then uses a water and dish soap solution to clean it. The mowers are then hand-dried and placed on a shelf.

**Check for wear.** Just like you would do when winterizing a ride-on, stand-on or walk-behind mower, you'll want to check robotic mowers for items worn down after the season. Wheel motors, casters and blades are some of the items that Langton recommends professionals check when mowers get back to the shop.

“We always put fresh blades on when we bring them back,” he says. “So that in spring, everything is ready to roll out. This is some preventive maintenance you can do in the winter, so the mower is ready for the busy season.”

**Have enough storage space.** “As you're converting (to robotic mowers) and adding mowers to your fleet, you'll need a place to store them all,” Langton says. “If you buy 100 robotic lawn mowers, figure out your shelving situation so you can store 100 mowers.”

### DON'T

**Forget to turn off the mowers.** Langton, who also sells robotic mowers through his Automated Outdoor Solutions business, says the No. 1 mistake professionals make is forgetting to turn off the mower itself after pickup for winterization.



### KEEP IT CLEAN

Cleaning off debris like grass and leaves is crucial to ensure mowers run smoothly.

This is an issue, Langton says because when the machine is on, it constantly communicates with the app and the station because of the GPS device onboard.

“That slowly brings the battery down to zero, and then you have to wake up the lithium battery in spring, and it massively decreases, in my opinion, your longevity and charging cycle on the battery,” he adds.

**Use pressurized water.** Pressurized water is a mortal enemy of a robotic mower. Langton strongly advises against using water from a hose or a power washer.

“(Professionals may think) ‘I'm not using a pressure washer; I'm just using a hose.’ But that's not needed with (robotic mowers),” he says. “If you hose it off and then put it up on a shelf or hanging somewhere where it's already cold, and it's got water sitting on it, that's a recipe for disaster.”

**Unplug the power station.** Langton adds that it's important for pros to not unplug the charging stations. He says when a station is left plugged in, it operates better when uncovered in the spring. 🗣️



Joe Langton

## PRODUCTS THAT WORK

### Winter apparel



#### X1 BOOT

COMPANY: Kujo Yardwear

URL: [kujo.com](http://kujo.com)

The Kujo X1 Boot features an aggressive rubber outsole and is layered with a cushioned EVA midsole — similar to an athletic shoe — to keep the wearer's feet comfortable all day. A waterproof SPU composes the upper to keep it dry from wet conditions and a water-resistant mesh that prevents overheating. Tall ankle support keeps snow and debris out, and the OSHA-certified composite toe protects without freezing.

#### M12 HEATED TOUGHSHELL JACKET



COMPANY: Milwaukee Tool

URL: [MilwaukeeTool.com](http://MilwaukeeTool.com)

The M12 Heated Toughshell jacket delivers heat with 80 percent more stretch and five times longer life than previous generations. The reengineered materials offer better mobility and flexibility while maintaining durability. With faster heat, enhanced garment constructions and interior liners, the heated Toughshell program adds comfort, mobility and protection. Powered by M12 Redlithium battery technology, these products now feature a pocket design that allows for front or back battery placement.



*Continued on page 30*



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## PRODUCTS THAT WORK

Continued from page 29

### RAMS HORN LACE-TO-TOE BOOT

**COMPANY:** Rocky Boots

**URL:** RockyBoots.com

The Rams Horn from Rocky Boots meets the American Society for Testing and Materials F2413 protective toe classification and electrical hazard standards and provides an oil and slip-resisting rubber outsole for stability in any working condition. The boot features Rocky Rebound Comfort technology for energy return, a flexible direct attached PU midsole and an EnergyBed LX Footbed with memory foam. Styles are available in 6- and 8-inch boots and come in brown and black.



### CAMBIUM FLEX JACKET

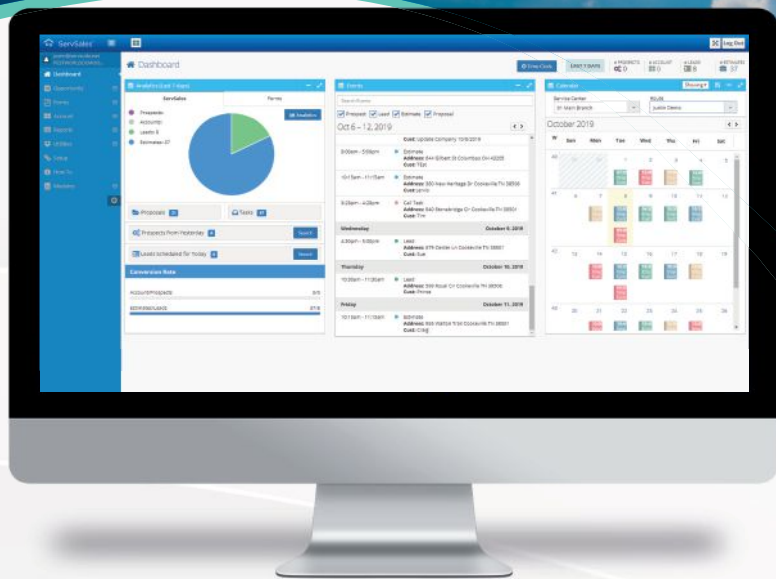
**COMPANY:** Arborwear

**URL:** Arborwear.com

Cambium Flex jackets feature thermoregulating honeycomb fleece lining for comfortable and warm wear. The jacket's stretch nylon shell allows for movement, and the hook and loop adjustable cuff closures keep precipitation out and the wearer's arms dry. The jackets also have abrasion resistance in high-wear areas for extra durability. There are multiple spaces for storage in the jacket with a YKK-zippered interior pocket and hidden-zip hand warmer pockets.

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## MAINTAIN YOUR EDGE

# Sharpen your saw

New technologies and better efficiencies were the theme for chainsaws at Equip Expo

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The wood chips were flying at Equip Expo 2022. Chainsaws were sawing logs both indoors, as companies gave demos, and outdoors, as companies allowed end users to test the latest and greatest themselves.

Here's a recap of what we saw and talked about at Equip Expo in the chainsaw category.

### OUT WITH THE OLD

At the outdoor Echo booth, Jerry Morgan, chainsaw product manager, demonstrated the company's latest offerings, including the CS-4511T, the CS-25511P, the CS-4010 and the CS-4910.

The gas-powered CS-4010 replaces the long-standing CS-400 that was the company's mainstay since 2007. A 41.6 cc two-stroke engine brings the 4010 a 15-percent increase in hp. The chainsaw is also almost a pound lighter than its predecessor.

"(Equip attendees) thought the chainsaw was outstanding. A lot of people who used the CS-400 on a regular basis noticed the power increase in the new CS-4010," Morgan said. "The new 4910 also has a purge bulb. The previous one did not. We weren't allowed to have people start the chainsaws from a cold start, but they were happy to hear about this improvement."

Morgan added that another exciting improvement was the addition of Oregon Tools' SpeedCut Nano chainsaw chain to the CS-4511T and the CS-25511P. The chains are ideal, he said, for light-weight chainsaws.

"It's a great system, and it works perfectly for these saws," Morgan said.

"If they had it available at the time, we would have launched the 4511T and 2511P a couple years ago with this specifically. We felt the performance was too great not to go ahead and launch the second version of these chainsaws right now because the performance and the lack of vibration are there."

### PROPER MAINTENANCE IS KEY

At the Oregon Tool booth, John Dilworth, technical sales specialist, demonstrated the efficiency of the company's chains. He also advised how to make sure the chains and chainsaw systems stay as efficient as possible. Without proper maintenance, even the most advanced chain technology loses efficiency, he said.

"Properly maintain the sharpness of the chain, so you have good quality chips coming out, which also speeds up the cut and doesn't slow down the process," Dilworth said. "Once a chain gets damaged, it will affect the bar. If one part is failing, the entire system will fail."

Dilworth added that the bar should be properly maintained and cleaned; the oil hole should always be unobstructed to give proper lubrication; be aware of the angles when sharpening the cutters; and flip the bar every time you remove the chain, similar to how you rotate the tires on your truck.


"If I'm felling a tree, I'm laying the chainsaw sideways. We'll notice if you hit something, the teeth will

have damage on one side," he said. "It'll affect a couple of them or the entire side. At that point, I have to file the chain and file it back to good chrome. Once I've done that to one side, I have to make sure the cutter length is the same length as this cutter (on the other side)."

### BETTER BATTERY

At the Stihl booth, the company showcased its new MSA 300 C-O battery-powered chainsaw. The company said this is their most powerful battery-powered chainsaw, and the tool is certified by the American Green Zone Alliance.

The MSA 300 C-O features rubberized soft-touch handles, anti-vibration technology and a lightweight design to help reduce fatigue. The Stihl electric motor offers reduced maintenance and offers low noise levels, according to the company.

"Not only does the MSA 300 C-O give pros the benefits of battery in a chainsaw that delivers professional-grade performance, but it's also the first of its kind to utilize the power laminate cell technology in the AP 500 S," said Paul Beblowski, product manager. "Which increases the life of the battery compared to the previous battery model, thus maximizing product performance." 



**BATTERY POWER**  
Stihl showcased its new MSA 300 C-O battery-powered chainsaw at Equip Expo 2022.

## HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

### More than a hobby

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**LOCATION** Longmont, Colo.

**COMPANY** Alpine Gardens

**DETAILS** Jack Fetig, president of Alpine Gardens in Fort Collins, Colo., says this project brought together the two visions from the husband-and-wife team who own the property.

The wife, an avid gardener, sought new vibrant plant life and a greenhouse. The husband, a miniature railroad aficionado, requested that a railroad circle the property.

“We learned a lot about model trains because it wasn’t our forte,” he says. “We created the bed for the track, which had to be relatively level. It couldn’t have a lot of elevation changes. But you wanted to create some interest, so it wasn’t like something on a board in a house.”

Alpine Gardens used compacted rock to create the level track for the rail. The client was on hand for the installation, offering guidance; he also installed the track after Alpine Gardens finished the base.

Fetig says his team worked around the already existing landscape, which featured a variety of trees and shrubs. Alpine Gardens installed shade-loving plants like Rocky Mountain columbine.

Alpine Gardens installed locally-sourced flagstone to meet the client’s request for a new pathway that reflected the high prairie environment.

The project earned Alpine Gardens a Silver Award from the 2021 National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence program. 🏆

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



**Captions** | **1.** Many of the plantings installed by Alpine Gardens supplement the already existing landscape, which featured many trees and bushes. **2.** Alpine Gardens installed a base for a miniature railroad that travels throughout the property. **3.** New walkways were a request of the clients, who wanted flagstone to match the environment. Alpine Gardens utilized some of the previous stone in the walkway.



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## INSTALLATION IRON

# To rent or not to rent? That is the question

**With abundant supply chain issues and inflation, renting compact equipment emerges as a cost-effective option for landscape professionals**

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

One of the more significant expenses a landscape contractor faces today is the price of equipment; that's why it's essential to consider every option available.

Renting is one of those options.

Experts from Home Depot Rental, Cleveland Brothers in Murrysville, Pa., and American Rental in Peoria, Ill., share with *LM* the ins and outs of renting compact equipment.

### DECISIONS, DECISIONS

There are several reasons a landscape professional might need or want to rent a piece of compact equipment, according to Pete Quinn, operations manager with Cleveland Brothers.

"The vast majority of our rentals are unplanned where a customer had a machine break

down, or they ran into something unexpected on their job," he says. "Renting also gives you the flexibility to select the right machine for the job without the upfront cost of ownership. You get to try before you buy and don't need to worry about repair costs or storage."

Robert LeVar, outside sales manager at American Rental, says renting equipment makes sense for professionals who need equipment for a certain job they're only doing once or twice a year.

"They might only need to use an excavator six times a year; does that justify owning



Pete Quinn

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<sup>1</sup> See 2022 FDD for specific details.

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one? Probably not," he says. "It helps them expand into a market before without the upfront overhead costs."

So, when should you consider a rental over a purchase? Quinn says that as a general rule of thumb if a pro utilizes a machine 60 to 70 percent year-round, it makes sense to purchase it instead of renting.

A frequent specialized need for a machine or an attachment would also be a reason to own, as opposed to renting.

### THE PRICE OF BUSINESS

Quinn says a rental can save pros money up front, especially when product availability in the supply chain can hold up the buying process.

"With the current supply chain issues, new equipment is not as readily available as it has been in the past," he says. "You may need to wait months for a new machine to arrive. Rental can fill that gap when you need a machine right away."

According to Tony English, senior director of merchandising for Home Depot Rental, rental rates have risen around 10 percent in the last two years. He also points out that the cost of purchasing an item has increased significantly.

"While our renter rates have increased a bit, it's nothing compared to the out-of-pocket dollars that products have increased over the last three years," English says. "The rental value proposition is even more attractive now, even if rental rates are a fraction higher; proportionately, they can be better than the cost of buying."



Tony English


### CONSIDER THIS

Landscape pros should consider several things in their search for the right rental partner. First, the age of the equipment, LeVar says.

"We try to keep our equipment rotated in and out every three to five years, depending on utilization," he says. "Look for an updated fleet. Look for dealers that have good availability and offer service. We have techs that will get out and fix a machine if it's not running properly."

A newer piece of equipment may come with a steeper rental rate, according to LeVar, but it also offers professionals the confidence that the machine will work properly.

Convenience is something else to consider, English says. For example, equipment delivery and pickup, plus the ability to reserve machines online or through an app, are newer options that make the process easier for those looking to rent.

He says, "If you want to pick (the equipment) up at the store, you can; or for a fee, you could have it delivered directly to the home or job site that you're working on and have it picked up afterward, for that matter." 

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## RECOMMENDER

# What's the No. 1 thing pros overlook when servicing ponds and pond aerators?



Professionals should always be looking for ways to improve the filtration of ponds, according to experts.



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The No. 1 thing pros overlook when servicing ponds are opportunities for filtration improvement. Not all ponds are created equal, and most can be upgraded to run smoother and cleaner. Most ponds we encounter do not have enough filtration. Without proper filtration, pond water can become murky from lack of water movement; pumps will not last as long because they work harder than they need to. By cleaning filters regularly, performing water changes and adding additional filtration, you can improve the pond's overall health. As for pond aerators, it's replacing the inner workings of the aerator. Most aerators contain parts that are serviceable or replaceable. These parts include diffusers, diaphragms and air filters. By replacing the serviceable parts of an aerator, you can increase the lifespan of the aerator and improve its overall efficiency and performance.



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Regular maintenance in general. Most times, pros are conscious enough to provide adequate aeration for a pond feature or earth pond. However, maintaining the aerator itself is of utmost importance. It is recommended to perform regular maintenance on your aerator once every year or bi-yearly, at the least. The top recommendation is to perform a diaphragm replacement or install a rebuild kit on your piston-driven units within this time frame. These diaphragm kits and/or rebuild kits are often a fraction of the cost of a new aeration system, which will allow the systems to operate at peak performance for years to come.

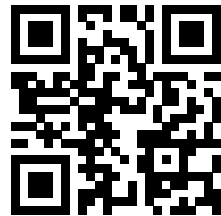


**SANDRA BURTON**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
LINNE INDUSTRIES,  
MANUFACTURER OF PONDHAWK

The No. 1 thing pros overlook is power: manpower, electrical power and access to power. Many pros forget that each "power" has an associated cost, and each aerator type affects these costs differently. Surface aerators like fountains are burdened with all three power costs. Fountains require power delivery costs to get electricity near the pond, electrical costs to keep the fountain operating and manpower to annually remove, service and replace fountain components in the pond. Electric-powered subsurface aerators have lower manpower costs but are still burdened with power delivery and ongoing kilowatt-hour costs. The PondHawk Solar Powered Aerator offers pros all the benefits of subsurface aeration without the cost of power access, electricity and manpower common to other aerator options.

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## IRRIGATION TECH

### What happens in Vegas?

The Irrigation Association brings its 2022 Irrigation Show to Las Vegas. Find out what to expect from the show. BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR



The Irrigation Association’s (IA) Irrigation Show and Education Week returns to Las Vegas Dec. 5-9.

Stephanie Clark, IA’s vice president of strategic partnerships and business development, gave *LM* the inside scoop on what to expect when the Irrigation Show takes on Vegas.

#### BIGGER AND BETTER

After a year hiatus due to COVID-19, the Irrigation Show returned in 2021 with what Clark called a “back to basics” conference.

This year, she says the IA looks to offer attendees more than just a return to normal.

“This year, we wanted to increase the number of networking opportunities at the show,” she says. “We’re back with the opening reception, a Women in Irrigation breakfast and a Young Professionals Networking Social. We’re also doing a brand-new IA membership appreciation breakfast.”

Also back this year is the general session, where the IA will announce the winners of its new product contest and pitch competition.

Unless noted as invitation-only, the registration fee includes access to networking events, which Clark says the IA kept low this year. Registration before the event is \$99 for members and \$139 for non-members. That price nearly doubles for on-site registration.

#### FOCUSED ON INNOVATION

The IA’s New Product Contest returns for its 20th year. The 2022 iteration of the contest features 30 new products in irrigation and lighting.

Product judging took place online in October, and contestants submitted a video presentation detailing the technical aspects and economic and environmental impacts. After the presentations, IA judges deliberated to pick a gold, silver and bronze winner in each category.

Attendees can then get a firsthand look at the products on the Irrigation Show website and on the trade show floor.

In addition to the new product contest, attendees can stroll down Innovation Row, which features irrigation startup companies.


“We want to promote new irrigation technologies and offer startups

an opportunity to gain industry exposure,” Clark says. “Innovation Row was very busy on the floor last year, so I’m hoping our 2022 attendees will also stop by to learn about these new products and join us for the fast-paced pitch competition.”

#### EDUCATION CONNECTION

Education remains a focal point of the Irrigation Show in 2022. The IA will host its IA University Dec. 5-7, offering a variety of classes in landscape irrigation, landscape business basics and more.

The IA also expanded its “Industry Insights,” a series of panel discussions led by industry experts. The discussions will range from 30 minutes to one hour and provide attendees with information on the latest research, innovations, career development, sustainability and more.

The discussions are open to all show attendees. Clark also notes that IA University registration includes admission to the show floor, the Viva Las Vegas reception and other networking events. 



Stephanie Clark

#### LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The Irrigation Association (IA) plans to take full advantage of the location of its 2022 Irrigation Show. Here are some of the things the IA has planned for attendees in Vegas:

- One of the first events the IA has planned is its Viva Las Vegas welcome reception on Dec. 6. Stephanie Clark, IA strategic partnerships and business development vice president, says the event, held at Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino, will have plenty of Vegas-inspired decors, food and music. Those who attend will also receive a free drink and appetizers, courtesy of the IA and Smart Rain. Clark tells *LM* the IA scheduled the event for the early evening (5-6:30 p.m.) so partygoers can still have their own Vegas experience outside the IA show.
- Heritage Landscape Supply Group is hosting a live concert at the House of Blues featuring the Turnpike Troubadours and The Band of Heathens, open to all show registrants. The event also includes food and drinks. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 7.
- On the show’s final day, Dec. 8, the IA, in partnership with Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply, will host its Craft Brewfest. The event allows showgoers to grab a craft beer and some appetizers while walking the show floor.



PHOTOS: IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION; JOECHO-16/ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS/GETTY IMAGES

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# A look at the advantages of rain and freeze sensors

Learn the benefits these sensors provide customers and irrigation companies alike

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

Most people have seen an irrigation system running while it's raining and thought about how wasteful it is. Or worse, they've witnessed a system running when temps are near freezing and could cause plant damage or injury.

Rain/freeze sensors not only help professionals avoid calls complaining about the above scenarios, but

these devices also can position irrigation professionals as experts who care about helping customers use less water, according to Joe Porrazzo, marketing group manager of controllers and wireless products with Rain Bird.

"I believe rain/freeze sensors can be utilized to ensure trust between professional landscapers and their customers," he says. "These products are fairly inexpensive and easy to install, so they're

a low-cost investment that provides valuable peace of mind."

Learn more about how professionals can use rain/freeze sensors to have a leg up on the competition.

### PART OF THE SALE

Rain/freeze sensors provide the purest form of on-site accuracy for rainfall detection, Porrazzo says. With the increasing adoption of Wi-Fi-enabled products that also use localized weather, on-site sensors are ideal for customers who prioritize accuracy and response time.

In his experience, the most successful contractors provide a rain sensor—

*Continued on page 40*



PHOTO: RAIN BIRD



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## BUSINESS BOOSTERS

### CONSERVATION STATION

Experts say rain sensors are key in a water-efficient irrigation system.



*Continued from page 39*

either wired or wireless — as an assumed sale on each installation they quote.

“Providing customers with a good/better/best option where a rain sensor is included as the ‘best’ option has also been successful,” Porrazzo says.

Wired rain sensors can be affordable and often don’t impact the overall cost of an irrigation system installation, he adds. Prices range from \$30 for a rain sensor to \$105 for a rain/freeze sensor.

### SITE-SPECIFIC APPROACH

These sensors help prevent overwatering and avoid damage when the temperature approaches freezing levels, says Rick Hall, market development director for K-Rain.

“Irrigation systems are programmed to deliver exactly the amount of water

needed based on the landscape its watering needs,” Hall says. “When rainfall is plentiful, the sensor prevents system operation. A knowledgeable professional will program a system correctly knowing that all rainfall is productive.”

In addition to sharing how the sensors conserve, professionals should incorporate site-specific components in proposals to fully convey the benefits. That includes soil infiltration rates, grade changes and full-sun exposure.

### SAVINGS BENEFIT

It’s important to note that many municipalities require rain sensors, says James Bick, associate product manager for Hunter Industries.

“This saves water and prevents additional runoff or soaking that might

occur during simultaneous rain and irrigation,” he says.

Freeze sensors work the same way, but only when the air temperature is very near freezing. The additional benefit is that freeze sensors can prevent irrigated areas from becoming icy. Professionals should position rain/freeze sensors to be fully exposed to the sky — not under an overhang, gutter or tree canopy.

Talking with clients about how they feel when they see an irrigation system running while it’s raining is a good starting point for selling these devices, experts say. 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

PHOTO: RAIN BIRD



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# FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## Mark Phillips

**HORTICULTURE / FERTILIZATION SPECIALIST**  
MCINTOSH GROUNDS MAINTENANCE  
MILAN, MICH.

### 1 What can you tell me about McIntosh Grounds Maintenance?

We've been in business approximately 35 years. The owner started it part-time when he was in high school and worked his way up. He put himself through college cutting grass. He took his business expertise and built it into what it is today. We do the basic landscape industry services. We do pretty much everything except hardscapes.

### 2 How did you get your start with the company, and how long have you been in the industry?

I'm halfway through my 14th season. My son-in-law worked here part-time, and in the winter of 2008, my painting and remodeling business started to slow down. They needed some help removing snow on sidewalks. Since my son-in-law worked there, I went in and worked with him and cleared snow. They found out I like to cut grass because it relaxes me. Within a month, I had a job.

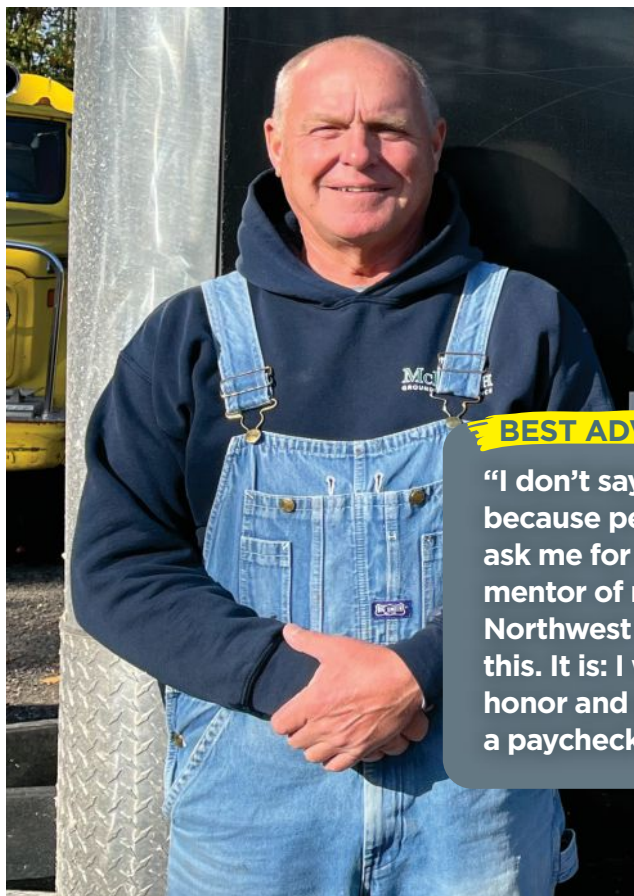


PHOTO: MADISON MCINTOSH

#### BEST ADVICE

"I don't say this very often, because people don't often ask me for advice. A friend and mentor of mine was a pilot from Northwest Airlines who gave me this. It is: I work for God, and to honor and glorify him. I just get a paycheck from McIntosh."

### 3 From 14 years ago to today, do you think customers have become more likely to change companies based on price, or maybe even just on a whim?

No. Our customer retainment is probably 95 percent. When we get a customer, they stick with us for the long haul. Those who leave us move away or die. Sometimes they'll find a better price. When that happens, within a season or two, they'll call us back and try to fix things with us.

### 4 It was great meeting you at the show in Louisville. How was Equip Expo for you and your team?

It was great. We brought down to the show — with office personnel — 11. We had two people stay back. Last year we took all the new guys down to the show in Kentucky. This year we took three new guys. We did a debrief when we got back. One of the questions was, "so, what did you think?" Their eyes lit up. They knew it was quite a place to go, but they didn't realize how big the industry really is. The reason we do that is because when we hire someone in, we want to keep them. We want them to know how much they can grow in an industry like this.

### 5 You're a self-described 'old guy' in the industry. Why do you say that, and why do you keep at it each day?

I'm 68. I see myself working another couple years and retiring when I turn 70. We'll see what happens. I've already been offered — from McIntosh — to come in a couple days a week doing quality control, training or consulting. I'll quit full-time, but I'll be doing something. I don't see a lot of older gentlemen out doing what I do, even at other (lawn care) companies. I think they get to a point that they get worn out, and enough is enough. I like what I do. I enjoy the job. You have to love what you do. If you can't get up and enjoy coming to work, get another job. I enjoy the company,

which really helps. The culture that we've established in our company with our employees is fantastic. The old saying, 'if you find a job you enjoy, you never work a day in your life.' I feel that way quite a bit ... until the end of the week when my back starts to feel tired. But that's what weekends are for, right? 🍷



# Finding the right fit for your culture

**Industry experts offered insights into the continuing process of building a successful company culture at Equip Expo 2022**

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

If it's possible to judge the importance of an industry topic based on how many people are willing to attend a panel on the subject, then count culture in the workplace at the top of the importance list. Because at Equip Expo 2022, the "Your Company, Your Culture" panel welcomed a packed room to listen to the panel discussions.

Panelists included Larry Ryan, founder and president of Ryan Lawn & Tree; Ken Thomas, COO of The Greenery and principal at Envisor Consulting; Donna Vignocchi, president of ILT Vignocchi Landscape and Brian Brueggemann, operations consultant with Bruce Wilson & Co.

Thomas told the room that on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being of the utmost importance, culture should rate at a 10 at everyone's company.

"People want to work at a company they believe in, they trust and they feel like has the same beliefs that they

have," Thomas said. "Culture is driven by the values of the owner or the leadership team. We work very hard to reestablish the next-gen values based on what people really believe, especially the younger people coming up."

## Take the high road

Vignocchi Landscape has been in business in Northwest Chicago for 53 years. Vignocchi said her company's culture came from her father, who founded the company.

"One of his favorite things to tell you when you start is, 'we always take the high road because there's less traffic,'" she said. "We always treat people with respect. We always try to develop our people. It's important to know everybody. If you're senior management, it's important to know everybody's name. It's important to shake someone's hand and look them in the eye."

Brueggemann advised the room that there is no "silver bullet" to establishing a great culture.

"It's not one thing that you do. There's a quote I read, it said, 'anything of value in your life is built on trust,'" Brueggemann said. "Your culture is built on trust because it's valuable. Connect to your staff because that is what builds a great culture where someone down the street might offer 25 cents more (per hour), but they don't want to leave this place because these guys are like family."

Ryan told the room that he believes many people look down on the hard-working people in the field in the

industry. It is his mission, he said, to elevate those people to feel like they're heroes.

"My commitment for the rest of my life is to see that blue-collar worker elevated, to see our industry really treat people like they're special," he said. "I think we're just starting to see that in our industry. Where we miss it in the industry is we don't focus on growing people."

## What to look out for

More than half of the hour-long panel was dedicated to questions from the room. The first question to get the conversation going was, "is there an indicator to look for in the interview process that someone might not be a good fit for our positive culture?"

Ryan took that microphone and offered advice that got many in the room to nod in agreement.

"You can't change somebody. If you need a smiler, then you have to hire a smiler," Ryan said. "We'll have (potential new hires) come and just ride along with us for a few hours and see if they would like us. There are a lot of questions you can't ask, like 'how old are you?' and 'what do you do for child-care?' It's amazing; when they ride along with you, they'll tell you things you didn't even ask. 'Oh, you're on your fourth wife? Wow!' You have to cast a wide net, but you have to filter out the people that don't fit your culture." 🙌

**Equip Expo attendees packed the house for the "Your Company, Your Culture" panel, moderated by LM Editor-in-Chief, Seth Jones.**



## HELP US CREATE MORE CLASSES FOR EQUIP 2023!

Landscape Management returns in 2023 as the official magazine partner of Equip Expo. With that, we will again offer attendees a full slate of classes. Do you have a great idea for a class you wish you could attend if only someone would offer it? Now is your chance — send your ideas for consideration for future Equip Expo educational seminars to LM Editor Christina Herrick at [cherrick@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:cherrick@northcoastmedia.net).





**BY GREG HERRING**

The author is the CEO of The Herring Group, financial leaders serving landscape companies. He can be reached at [greg.herring@herring-group.com](mailto:greg.herring@herring-group.com).

# Are your incentive plans like a lottery ticket?

**D**uring this time of year, we work with many of our landscape clients to create incentive plans for key employees for next year.

Not all landscape companies are ready for incentive plans.

To be ready, a landscape company must have:

- Accurate, timely and accessible data;
- Employees who have the capability to win;
- Employees who have the authority to act in ways that will enable them to win; and
- Great understanding of what actions will cause the company to have financial performance and achieve its other goals.

That's why the Herring Group's first rule of incentive plans is that the plan cannot be like a lottery ticket.

We don't want employees thinking, "I hope I win." We want employees to know that if they take certain actions, they will win. Having a plan that rewards good company performance without incentivizing specific behaviors is usually a waste of money.

## INCENTIVE VS. OUTCOME

"Show me the incentive, and I will show you the outcome," Charlie Munger once said. This quote from the vice chairman of Berkshire Hathaway and longtime partner of Warren Buffet implies the need

for great alignment between the company's and employees' interests when creating the incentive plan.

One technique for evaluating alignment is to consider what could happen in extreme situations and then ask how to prevent that outcome.

For example, if a company incentivizes salespeople just on new revenue, the company may get a lot of unprofitable revenue — jobs bid too cheaply either through low markups or low hours and materials costs estimates. If a company incentivizes account managers or production managers solely on hours, then the easiest way to win is to do very little work. Obviously, customers will have an issue with that approach, and the company's contract retention rate will decline.

Here are some more examples of misalignment:

- Incentivizing people on revenue without reference to actual gross margin (a percentage calculated by subtracting job costs from revenue and then dividing by revenue);
- Incentivizing production managers on labor hours without reference to quality, customer retention or customer satisfaction;
- Incentivizing people on maintenance contract retention without reference to gross margin (this provision incentivizes people to propose low renewal price increases — a big problem in an inflationary environment); and
- Failure to increase gross margin benchmarks for significant inflation in indirect (e.g., fuel) and overhead expenses.

## REWARDING RESULTS

The Herring Group's second rule of incentive plans is that the

plan should provide above-average compensation to people who produce above-average results. In other words, get more; pay more. Some incentive plans are too generous, and others are too cheap. Incentive plans are a great way to create loyalty and help ensure the continued employment of your high-performing employees.

The Herring Group's third rule of incentive plans is to keep them as simple as possible but as complicated as necessary to incentivize the desired actions and outcomes. To be clear, designing plans that balance simplicity with thoroughness is difficult.

The company needs a simple plan because an employee who does not understand how to calculate the incentive may treat the plan like a lottery ticket. However, if the plan is too simple, the company may not get the outcome it wants.

To increase understanding, we recommend clear communication of the plan and the specific actions required to win. We also recommend creating sample reports and sample incentive calculations to show employees how they can use the reports to monitor their performance and determine the incentive amount paid.

Comprehensive business management software systems like Aspire make reporting and performance monitoring much faster and more efficient.

Does incentive plan design sound complicated? Unfortunately, it is. The good news is that a well-designed plan will increase the probability of the company reaching its goals with great financial results for many years to come. 🍀

PHOTO: PAGADESIGN/E+/GETTY IMAGES





BY BEN GANDY

The author is principal of Envisor Consulting. Reach him at [bengandy@envisorco.com](mailto:bengandy@envisorco.com).

# The formula for company culture

**W**hen we look under the hood of market-leading companies in competitive industries, we look for the differentiator that propelled them to that position. Overwhelmingly, we find that culture is the key.

A strong, unique and compelling culture that drives a good client experience and creates a positive experience for employees is the formula for success in environments where price and product quality are not hugely distinct from one provider to the next.

This isn't new. Anyone who eats at Chick-fil-A, flies Southwest Airlines or goes to Starbucks is doing business with an organization based more on the quality of the experience than the price or quality of the product. Not that their products are subpar, they're just not overwhelmingly superior for the price. These companies aren't perfect at propagating uniqueness, but they do it well enough that culture represents a competitive advantage and strong differentiator.



## WHAT MAKES A STRONG CULTURE?

What are the characteristics of a differentiating culture, and how do companies develop it? Strong cultures seem to have a split personality where there's simultaneously a very strong employee commitment and a strong customer focus. It's often not as simple as "take care of your people, and they'll take care of your customers."

“Once an organization commits to standards in writing, behaviors and expectations become clear. Enforcing the rules is a means to express good leadership.”

Customer care in these organizations is mandated, not hoped for. The employee experience tends to be disciplined and rigorous, built around processes, procedures and policies intentionally designed to ensure a good customer experience. This is part of the secret. Documenting processes and procedures and enforcing them is where many organizations fall short, but not the ones with differentiating cultures. Once an organization commits to standards in writing, behaviors and expectations become clear. Enforcing the rules is a means to express good leadership.

Strong cultures tend to value employees in tangible ways; however, compliance with policy and responsible character is the expectation.

In organizations with strong cultures, the operation doesn't tolerate


bad behavior. The operation calls out bad employee behavior and poor customer behavior. Strong organizations walk away from abusive customers in keeping with respect for their employees.

Not every organization with a superior culture has an articulated statement of values. However, it's there more often than not. This statement provides an anchor point on which to base the characteristics of the business and embed these values into the core messaging in the hiring, onboarding, training and development, discipline, celebrations and planning practices.

## SUPPORTING CULTURE

Documented systems and a noble statement of values aid, support and propagate strong culture. However, these will not "stamp" an organization with a differentiating experience. There is an organic component that can only come through leadership.

Leadership is never perfect, but the character, courage and vision of leaders will either validate great culture or nullify it. The inexhaustible commentary on leadership is a testimony to its importance. There's no need to try and define great leadership here other than to say it's a necessary element in the culture equation.

An operation can develop a strong, unique and compelling culture through a commitment to values, documented processes and procedures, and leadership that emulates the characteristics that define the better parts of the organization. Perfection doesn't exist, but differentiation does, and market leadership follows. 

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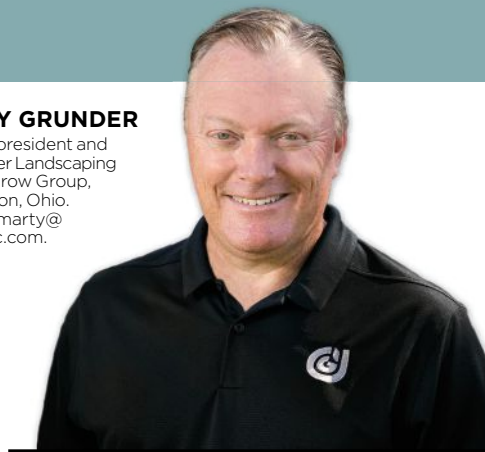
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# GROW WITH GRUNDER

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).



## The right time to make your next hire

**“H**ey Marty, how much revenue should we be at before we hire another salesperson?”

This has, quite possibly, been the most-asked question this year, its only competition being “What are you doing to keep your crews staffed?” As companies around the country have grown rapidly, many owners and leaders have found themselves in uncharted territory.

Often, this question then becomes an issue of the chicken or the egg: Do you hire someone and then expect them to help you grow to the next level, or do you wait until you have the revenue to support that position and then hire someone to take pressure off your existing team members?

### FIND THE RIGHT PERSON

In my opinion, for sales positions especially, it's most important to find the right person for the role and then hire them, whether that is before or after you see growth. With added firepower, if they're the right hire, they'll help you grow and quickly make the investment worth it for the whole team. If you've



**“ Set up your salespeople for success by properly onboarding and having realistic expectations. ”**

already grown, they'll immediately add value by taking some work off your existing team's plate.

Either way, set your new salespeople up for success by properly onboarding and having realistic expectations. Even an experienced salesperson will need some time and training to understand the processes and expectations at your company.

This year at Grunder Landscaping, we added salespeople to our team months before we were forecasted to need them, then we found the work for them. This allowed the salesperson to get up to speed on our company culture, the work we do and to shadow other salespeople before we needed them to be out meeting with clients and building their own book of clients.

### OUTSOURCE WHEN NECESSARY

Outside of sales, if you're looking to add overhead positions and wondering if it's time yet, the situation is a little different. For these business functions, there are options to outsource the work and rely on subcontractors that can help you get the work done without adding a full-time employee. At Grunder Landscaping, we will do about \$9 million in revenue this year. This is what our in-house office team looks like:

- A talent acquisition manager who primarily focuses on

recruiting, job functions and HR compliance.

- An accounting manager who manages daily and monthly financial transactions.
- An administrative assistant who answers the phone, manages the office and assists with keeping our efforts organized internally and externally.

Aside from our in-house team, we also rely on our other company, The Grow Group, to fill needs. Vince Torchia, vice president, plays a role in overseeing the financial performance and coaching our leadership team, while Emily Lindley does our marketing. Just like we do on the production side of our business, we rely on subcontractors to help us get everything done.

At GROW! 2023 in San Antonio, Texas, from Feb. 28 to March 2, we'll have a breakout session where we'll talk in-depth about what a company's org chart should look like and the next hire you should make. Have you signed up to join us yet? I would love to see you in Texas. Learn more about what we have planned and register at:

[GrowGroupInc.com/Grow-2023](https://www.growgroupinc.com/grow-2023).

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