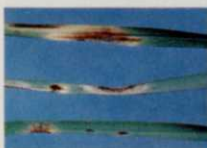


# HOW TO SELL LAWN DISEASE CONTROL, AND DELIVER IT.



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## Environmental Industries Inc. Grows as Fast as Its People Can

Large west coast company avoids publicity and concentrates on building a company around its employees

by Bruce F. Shank, executive editor

The management of Environmental Industries, Calabasas, CA, doesn't seek publicity. Success is something they don't like to flaunt. In fact, many people still think 'the big landscape company in California' is Valley Crest Landscape, it's old name.

"Although we have grown rapidly, we are not motivated by taking over the nursery, construction, or maintenance business," says Bruce Wilson, president of Environmental Care Inc., the maintenance subsidiary. "Our growth is based more on our peo-

ple and our customers than it is on sales objectives. We try to grow at a rate that provides opportunity for our people without the wheels falling off. Good employees want growth and opportunity. So, we grow at the rate our staff can take on more work." Environmental Industries has grown from \$28 million to \$60 million in sales in five years.

"As a rule, we enter new cities, like Houston and Denver, when one of our California clients asks us to handle facilities there," Wilson states. "We started the

Houston branch when Shell Development Co., a Los Angeles customer, asked us to take over maintenance at its West Hollow Research Center. We took the job and built the Houston branch around the Shell job."

"You can't go into a city and start a branch as if you are MacDonalds," Wilson pointed out. "It takes years to get your name to the right people and to be accepted as not being an 'out-of-towner'."

Behind this seemingly loose style is a finely-tuned machine driven by Burton Sperber, presi-

dent and chairman. "His philosophy," Wilson states, "is to let the branches worry about business and corporate to handle details such as banking, insurance and benefits."

From this service core, branch out four subsidiaries. Environmental Care Inc. is the maintenance branch. There are two landscape construction companies, Valley Crest Landscape Inc. and Western Landscape Construction. Valley Crest is the 35-year-old company Sperber built into Environmental Industries. The fourth subsidiary is Valley Crest Tree Co., a nursery operation. The subsidiaries have offices in California, Colorado, Texas, and Arizona with roughly 1,500 employees.

### Starting at the bottom

Wilson grew up in Rye, NY, was graduated from Cornell University in 1969, and worked for Starner Tree Service in Harrison, NY, for almost two years. In 1970, he and his wife decided there was no better time to try the "California life" and moved to Los Angeles.

Sperber had just purchased Green Valley Landscape maintenance company from Joe Marsh and formed Environmental Care with Marsh as president. Marsh hired Wilson, started him trimming hedges and mowing turf. Wilson, after working his way up to branch manager, became president of the subsidiary upon Marsh's retirement in 1979.

This 'start at the bottom' policy is still in effect. "It is a disadvantage in recruiting college gradu-

ates since they often believe college permits them to skip field work," Wilson muses. "But, they are much more effective later on if they have experienced the type of work they manage."

### Keys to growth

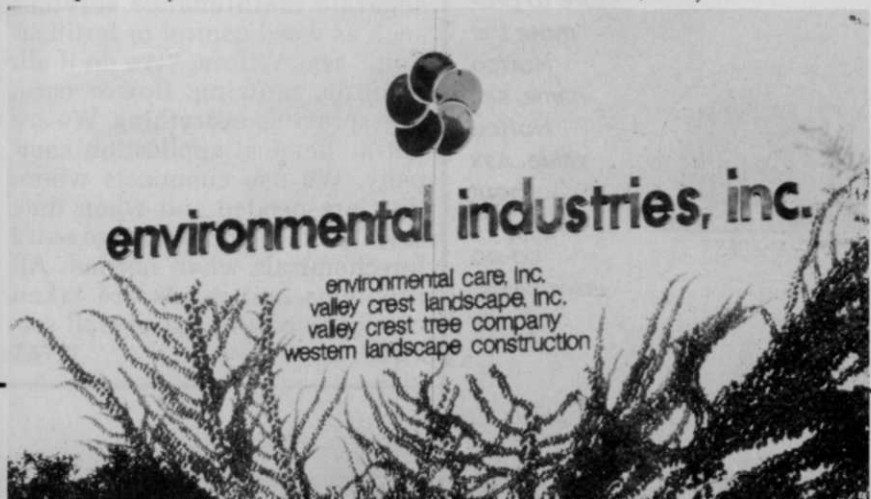
Green Valley specialized in municipal and industrial landscape maintenance. Environmental Care has continued that specialization with more emphasis on industrial and multi-family residential. "We are being moved out of municipal work by low bidders," Wilson said. "Public work is very volatile, going out to bid every two to three years. Industrial/commercial work is based more on quality and reliability than low price."

We are also experiencing an influx of landscape construction companies competing for maintenance work to cover overhead while construction is off. This is cyclical, fortunately, and we'll get our share back when construction picks up again."

"We are not adverse to bidding," Wilson adds. "We make our own subsidiaries bid for work we do. Our biggest problem with bidding in maintenance is most clients don't have specifications, so they are not comparing apples to apples."

Much of Environmental Industries' success today is based on establishing good relationships with developers and corporate level property managers. "A majority of construction and maintenance is in the hands of a

Headquarters for Environmental Industries in Calabasas, California.



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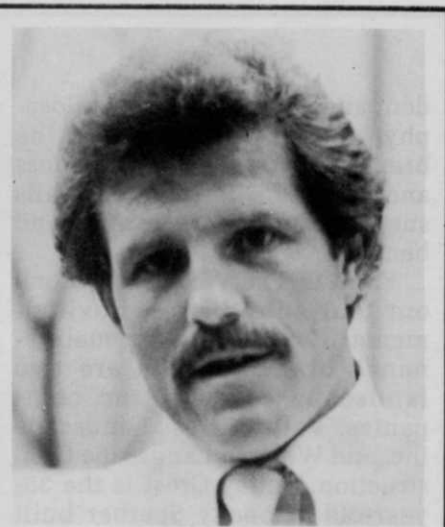
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64 WEEDS TREES & TURF/FEBRUARY 1984



**Bruce Wilson, president of  
Environmental Care.**

few individuals," Wilson points out. "Impress them with performance, fairness, and quality, and you become part of their team. Undoubtedly, there is danger in relying too greatly on a few accounts, so we try to balance each branch with a variety of accounts."

Attracting a variety of accounts requires flexibility. Large construction work is primarily union, so Valley Crest Landscape, run by Burton Sperber, is union. For smaller, more competitive construction work, Western Landscape Construction, run by Stan Colton, is non-union. To supply plant material to its own construction companies, as well as other landscapers, Environmental Industries has Valley Crest Tree Company, run by Burt's brother Stuart.

After the landscape is in and the unions leave the job site, Environmental Care's non-union crews can take over with maintenance. "We don't generally offer separate maintenance services such as weed control or fertilization," says Wilson. "We do it all, pruning, mowing, flower care, tree spraying, everything. We are not a chemical application company. We use chemicals where they are needed and when they save labor. We don't charge extra for chemicals when needed. All problems and needs are taken care of as part of our overall service."

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EXCELLENCE IN IRRIGATION



# PROBLEM SOLVERS

by Balakrishna Rao, Ph.D., and Thomas P. Mog, Ph.D.

## Poison ivy, an occupational pain

**Problem:** I work on a landscaping crew and every year I catch poison ivy. How is poison ivy spread and is there anything I can do to prevent getting it again? (Mississippi)

**Solution:** Contrary to popular opinion, poison ivy is not spread by the watery liquid within the skin blisters. A resin from the plant causes the itchy rash reaction. Washing the skin immediately after coming in contact with poison ivy may reduce the symptoms. The poison ivy resin sets up in the skin 5-15 minutes after exposure, after which washing will not remove it.

Since you know that you are susceptible to poison ivy, learn to recognize it and where it grows. Your landscaping job probably makes avoidance difficult so wear gloves, coveralls, long-sleeve shirts, etc., to protect your skin. Clothing helps but doesn't guarantee that you will never get it again. Poison ivy can be caught by touching clothing, even animals that have brushed against the plants. Some people are so sensitive that the smoke from burning poison ivy plants causes a serious allergic reaction.

The skin rash itself, although uncomfortable, normally does not cause serious problems. It is the scratching which can lead to infection or damage sensitive tissues. Cold water compresses applied to the rash help dry up the blisters and reduce itching. Salves containing steroids, hydrocortisone and/or antibiotics may be prescribed by a physician. When large areas of the body or delicate areas (eg. the eyes) are involved get prompt, professional medical care.

(Excerpted from an article, "Poison Ivy Cures Founded on Myth," by Sharon McDonald, Resident in Dermatology, Columbus, OH)

## Impractical potash fertilizer

**Problem:** I live in New Jersey and have been told that local deposits of greensand can be used as potash fertilizers. Is this true and can I use it on lawns?

**Solution:** Greensand is essentially a hydrated silicate of iron and potash. However, the potassium is insoluble in water and only slightly available as a fertilizer unless refined, which is too expensive to be practical.

## Regulator reduces suckering

**Problem:** We cannot stop suckering on our flowering crabs and apple trees. Is there anything, other than the pruning we have done repeatedly, which works?

**Solution:** Suckering of ornamental trees, especially flowering crabapple trees, is nearly impossible to prevent via pruning. Various sprout inhibiting chemicals and herbicides have been tried but have not been particularly effective. I should caution that the use of herbicides for sprout control is not recommended. The systemic herbicides, i.e., those which move throughout the plant, when misused can cause

considerable injury, even death of the treated tree.

Ohio State University has tested a growth regulator called Tree-Hold Sprout Inhibitor A112, manufactured by Union Carbide. This material is registered for use on crabapples, pear, olive and bearing and nonbearing apple trees. Sprout regrowth from the trunk, from limbs after a branch was removed, and suckering from the base of the tree was stopped when the product was used according to the instructions on the label.

The A112 sprout inhibitor can be applied with a brush or sprayed on. To test for control of basal sprouts and root suckers, the existing shoots were pruned out and the sprout inhibitor applied during the tree's dormant period. The material was also tested by applying it to live suckers, 6-12 inches long. Both procedures successfully prevented sprout regrowth.

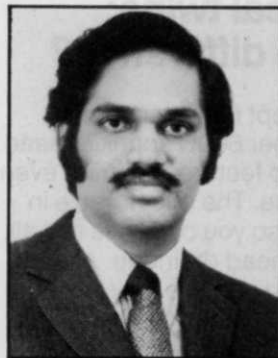
More information about product availability, cost and application rates should be available from Union Carbide or their distributors. We have not tested Tree-Hold Sprout Inhibitor A112, but the OSU results warrant its mention as a possible solution to your suckering problem.

## Yellow nutsedge control

**Problem:** We sprayed nutsedge with Basagran last year and thought we got control but it's back this year worse than ever. Is there a better herbicide on the market that can be used on lawns? (Virginia)

**Solution:** Assuming you are referring to yellow nutsedge, Basagran should give you good control. As a sedge, nutsedge spreads through underground tubers which can be controlled with Basagran if they are connected to actively growing shoots. Proper coverage of the plants is essential since Basagran is absorbed through the foliage and does not translo-

*continued on page 89*



Balakrishna Rao is plant pathologist and Thomas Mog is pest management specialist for Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, OH.

Questions should be mailed to Problem Solver, Weeds Trees & Turf, 7500 Old Oak Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44130. Please allow 2-3 months for an answer to appear in the magazine.



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- **Low maintenance.** You're in the business of cutting grass, not debugging "new" products for old line manufacturers catching up with the times, or new companies



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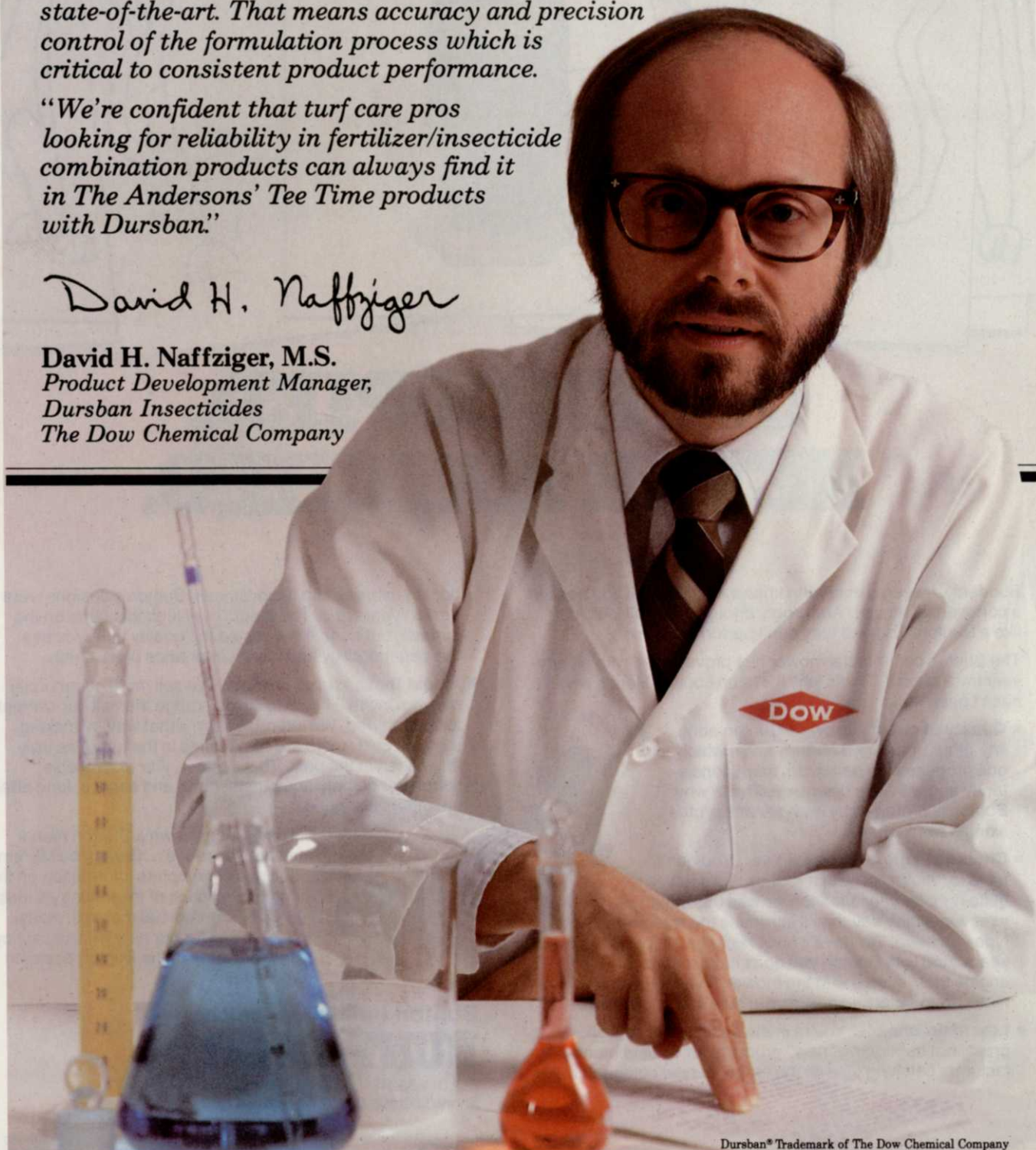
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# JOB TALK

by Richard Williston, director, safety and education,  
National Arborist Association, Inc.

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## Pruning: A practical approach



While arborists are well aware of the advantages of pruning deciduous trees at certain times of the year, they must also remember how the needs of clients and certain locations affect their pruning schedules.

Many times the arborist is the last in line when it comes to deciding when to prune. The customer comes first. You'll prune on Mondays if that's the only day of the week that a golf course is closed. Six months of rainy Mondays will put you further behind schedule, and if an insect problem pops up, expect to sit back and wait until that crisis is resolved.

Commercial arborists don't have the luxury of choosing pruning times based solely on what's best for the tree. While the researchers and horticulturists who publish pruning guides can restrict their attention to the tree's needs, you have to consider your clients' desire to have the job done on time as well.

The vigor of the tree to be pruned and the type of pruning to be performed may more critical in your timing decision than just the season.

Removing only dead limbs from a vigorous tree means you can prune at almost any time, while drastic work on an ancient and well-placed specimen will require more planning.

Don't neglect to consider the impact of pruning frequency when looking at your schedule, either. If a tree is pruned often, it probably doesn't make too much difference when the job is performed. Since only small cuts are made and little canopy removed at any one time, different pruning times would have no long-term effects on overall tree health. But timing becomes critical when you're removing several limbs from a previously-unpruned specimen.

Finally, remember that quality of workmanship is more important to the tree's health than picking the proper time. Pruning at an advantageous moment makes little difference if your cuts contribute to long-term tree damage.

Since the real world demands that you prune year-round, the old saying, "the time to prune when the saw is sharp" makes more sense than ever.