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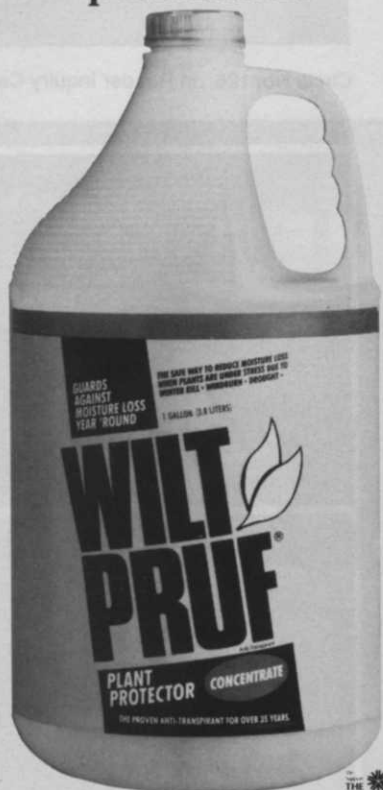
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Racusin is proud of the fact that his employees tend to stay with his company for years- a phenomena not easily accomplished in the Southwest's competitive landscape market. Why do they stay? In terms of pay levels, Racusin says that, even though his company offers as much or more than anyone else in the industry, "I don't think compensation in terms of pay is the highest priority to an employee. I think," he continues, "the feeling, the environment that you create in your company among your personnel is the most important element to gaining the tenure you're seeking from these people."

Racusin does several things to create a comfortable work environment. There's the profit-sharing and pension trust plan, which grows annually as company profits are poured in. The program has allowed employees to sock away a very handsome nest egg since being hired.

In the hallway outside Racusin's office, just past the conference room with the 21 Texas Association of Landscape Contractors' and eight national awards on the wall, is the "Achievement Bell." Any of the office personnel can sound it off after doing something they're particularly proud of.

There's also the Foundation of Excellence Award, presented for the first time to two employees last year at an annual company-wide dinner. A granite tablet holding the winner's signature, handprints and the date is laid to rest outside the entrance to the company's Houston field office, where it will remain forever. Last year's winners were the subject of a 10-minute video that showed them at work and at home with the family. The soundtrack? Carly Simon's *Nobody Does It Better*, of course.

"Employees need to feel that they're appreciated and cared about just as much as your clients do," says Racusin, who strives to maintain a family atmosphere in his organization of 150 employees working in Houston and Austin. He does so by gathering the company employees together at family functions such as picnics, Christmas parties and awards banquets. "I think you'll find that if you do these things your employees will develop a sense of well-being and cohesiveness as a group."

#### In no hurry

Another point of pride with Racusin is the company's slow, yet steady growth pace. Most of Environmental's present customers have been with the company for years, and about 90 percent have come through referral. "We've never really tried to sell quan-

tity," says Racusin. "What we've always done is try to maintain a consistency in our quality of work. We grow gradually and monitor the amount of productivity people are capable of putting out. That ensures the fact that we can deliver what we say we're going to deliver. If you do that, then you will grow."

What is delivered to the people of Houston and Austin is exquisitely-managed properties. They see dependability, trust and a team of professionals willing to go the extra mile for them.

Perhaps this is demonstrated best when the area is battered by the numerous tropical storms and hurricanes that have called Houston home over the years. Take Alicia, 1983, modestly referred to by Racusin as a "significant storm," which tore the more significant roof off his Houston operations office.

"We still had to get to our clients," remembers Racusin, who dispatched a task force with extra chain saws, tree guides and staking materials. "We made it a point to get to these properties within a day or two after the roads were passable." His company's efforts paid off: crews saved hundreds of trees.

Since that time, all threatening storms are tracked by weatherband radio, says Racusin. Environmental customers have the home phone and beeper numbers of key personnel and are told that someone will be on their property as soon as roads are passable.

After the storm, an immediate inventory by Environmental's personnel is underway to determine where the company's services are needed most. They then attend to those properties in order of importance. No, the attention doesn't cost the customer more than their annual management fee.

Charlie Racusin is a businessman who has matured in step with the high-budget commercial landscaping market, which is why his marketing analysis, simple as it may be, is so intriguing:

"People know when you're doing good work. It's a commodity, it's there, people can see it. They can see how you and your personnel project themselves. We've grown gradually because we've never forced our growth. It's key in our opinion to be known for what we're all about: a company performing the highest quality work. To do that you have to have a fix on your quality. It only takes one black mark and you could be in trouble."

Obviously, black is not one of Charlie's stronger colors either. **LM**

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# RESEARCH UPDATE

## Avoid crown rot by using mulch properly

by George Scott, pres., symbiosis

Landscapers using chipped landscape bark should realize that mismanagement of organic mulch can cause crown rot.

This condition causes the crown region of a plant to decay and eventually kills many ornamental trees and shrubs. The astute landscape manager however, can prevent it from developing.

A rot is defined as any organism that causes the disintegration of living cells of plants in large numbers. "Crown rot" is a term commonly used to describe the decay of cambium tissue in the crown of a tree or shrub.

With several woody ornamental shrubs, the symptoms of crown rot appear as chlorosis, low vigor, wilting and death of individual limbs, or death of the complete plant. These symptoms are likely to appear after excessive mulch, organic debris or soil collects around the plant crown. Investigation may reveal swelling, splitting and the decay of plant tissue in the crown area.

The conditions that favor crown rot

can exist for several months before an affected shrub will show any symptoms of distress. Crown rot symptoms can appear year-round, but will generally show up in middle to late summer when the demand for water to the leaves is highest. Even though water may be abundant in the soil, water movement from roots to leaves is restricted because the rotting of plant tissue (phloem and cambium, specifically) restricts water flow and prevents the translocation of sugars to the roots.

### Restricted water flow

During hot weather the demand for water in the leaves may exceed what is able to move up through the declining roots and crown. As a result, wilting and death occur. Once a stem has been girdled by crown rot, that particular limb will die.

High humidity and temperature around the plant's crown also make an ideal environment for crown rot's development. In addition, adding

landscape bark and other organic mulches to the landscape tend to add to the build-up of mulch within the plant crown, causing it to rot.

Mulching alone will not create the problem. Often it is the indiscriminate and careless placement of mulch that is to blame. Shrubs located on slopes are easily piled deep in mulch. Rain, overhead sprinkling and foot traffic tend to push mulch down a slope where it piles behind a shrub, slowly burying its crown.

Sometimes a shrub will bury its own crown in fallen leaves or needles, aiding its own death. Heather, azalea and juniper often do this. Also, falling leaves of a nearby tree or shrub may collect around smaller shrubs, creating conditions ideal for crown rot.

Care should also be taken to avoid water pools around plant crowns during irrigation.

### Soil levels

Shrubs should be inspected regularly to free them of these conditions. Ideally, the same soil level maintained in the greenhouse or nursery should be maintained on the landscape. Shrubs should not be planted or mulched deeper than their original soil level. When putting down new landscape bark or mulch around shrubs, avoid placing it under or inside the plant canopy.

The effects of improper planting and deep mulch is the primary cause of death to ornamental shrubs on residential landscapes.

Clean out and brush away organic debris after it collects within a shrub canopy. For most shrubs this is an easy task. Lower limbs can be gently pushed aside and the mulch pulled away from the crown. In older, well-established shrub beds (junipers, for example) this isn't as easy as it sounds.

If crown rot conditions exist on a landscape it may or may not be too late to save some shrubs. Pull excess mulch and leaf mold away from plant crowns and prune out dead limbs and twigs. This will improve air circulation inside the plant canopy and help dry rotted tissue.

Some shrubs appear to be more susceptible to crown rot than others. These include azalea, euonymus, heather, juniper and rhododendron. Crown rot in ornamental shrubs is both caused and prevented by a simple cultural practice: mulching. By making periodic checks of the area and properly placing mulch, you will maintain healthy, long-lived shrubs. **LM**

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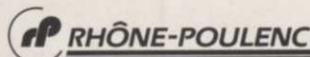
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## Polymers make life easier for turf managers

by Bill Stinson, Aglukon, Inc.

The early-morning sight of a beautifully-kept golf course can be breathtaking. The contrasting green colors of its fairways, greens and tees and its carefully chosen trees and shrubs do not, however, tell the whole story. The golf course superintendent must painstakingly plan, coordinate and take care of endless details every day to make sure that his turf and course will meet high expectations.

The superintendent deserves a lot of credit for maintaining such good looking grounds, which in turn keeps club members happy and management successful. He knows though, that beautiful turf and grounds don't just happen. He makes it happen by choosing the right people for his team, the right equipment, the correct seed and chemicals and the best irrigation program.

### Meeting the challenge

The ability to foresee possible problems and keep turf in useable

condition is a challenge. That's why the turf manager of today is using more sophisticated tools, more scientific chemicals, better seed varieties and more modern irrigation systems. These advances in the green industry represent a concerted effort to help



Polymers allow superintendents to reduce irrigation frequency and water stress to turf.

the landscape manager enjoy a better return on his efforts.

Such an addition to his arsenal can be Viterra Gelscape or other water-absorbent polymers.

Over the years, these products have become a trusted friend of the turf manager who is seeking consistent, more uniform germination and faster turf establishment with less maintenance and better durability and appearance. The ability of these polymers to absorb hundreds of times their weight in water—to be released as needed later—has given the turf manager the opportunity to reduce irrigation frequency and eliminate turf water stress on high or exposed greens. They also help the plant better use ground-applied fertilizer and chemicals.

Easy-to-use polymers like Viterra, applied as a blend with seed during aerification or verticutting, encourage strong, healthy root and blade development on hard-to-maintain areas. This takes at least some of the pressure off the turf manager, who strives to maintain beautiful, playable grounds at all times.

### Hydroseeding turf

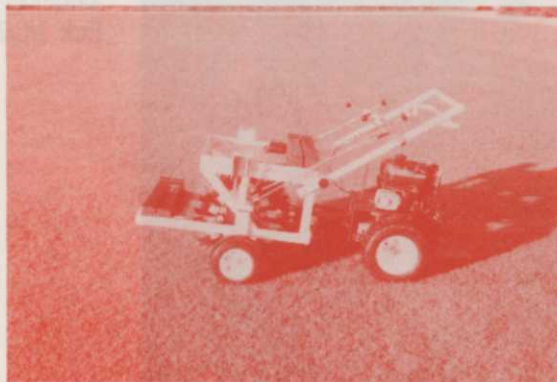
The very special characteristics of polymers that provide proper and consistent moisture to seeds and their ability to absorb, retain and re-release fluids many times over, was discovered by hydroseeders. Hydroseeding contractors now recognize how essential these products are for their operation; they have been able to reduce or eliminate costly call-backs caused in the past by a lack of germination.

Turf managers have seen their downtime due to clogged equipment reduced and, because turf establishes faster, less time is spent waiting for payment.

Contractors know how and when to lay sod. They also know that poor soils and a lack of proper irrigation will result in costly call backs for the replacement of "browned" areas. Polymers, applied at the time of soil preparation, give the landscaper an edge for quicker, better survival of their sod, faster knitting and decreased call-backs. Consequently, they can finish their jobs successfully by ensuring that the expensive trees and shrubs they plant will survive and withstand the harsh summer and winter temperatures.

LM

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But with OFTANOL® insecticide, you have the strength to knock out those grubs closest to the surface now, and the staying power to deal with grubs, rising up from the depths, in the future.

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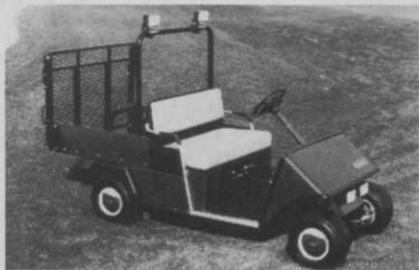
Specialty Products Group  
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## E-Z-GO Utility vehicle carries 1000 lbs

The new GXT-800 Turf Utility Vehicle from E-Z-Go Textron is a gas powered four wheeler with a 1000-lbs. payload capacity and an 8 cubic foot load bed. Dimensions of the bed are 44IM £M 40IM £M 8IM.

The GXT-800 features a new high output helical axle powertrain with a 244-cc, 2-cycle air-cooled engine and fully automatic, continuously vari-



able transmission. A tilting load bed provides easy access for service. Auto-adjusting service brakes and "the industry's only self-compensating hill brake" reduce maintenance.

E-Z-Go offers a complete line of gasoline and electric powered turf utility vehicles with payload capacities of up to 1,500 pounds, including the new GXT-1500.

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## Three- and four-wheelers from Melex

The Melex utility vehicles are available as four-passenger personnel carriers, or as cargo carriers with wood or steel sides or steel platform.



All are equipped with three or four wheels, are electric, quiet and very maneuverable.

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## Dual rear disc brakes one of many features

The model B 2-70 from Taylor-Dunn features the industry's first standard dual rear wheel hydraulic disc brakes. The personnel/burden carrier has an all-welded 16-gauge diamond plate steel body unitized to a



dual C-channel frame.

An automotive differential direct-drive axle is responsive and dependable. The unit has a short turning radius, in-dash controls and automotive steering for maneuverability. The modular design of the B 2-70 aids in converting the carrier with bolt-on toolbox doors, extra seats, or hitches. The model B 2-70 carrier will transport passengers, equipment or heavy loads safely and reliably.

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## M-B Company pulls up in the GSV-1

The GSV-1 is a new bi-directional utility vehicle for numerous road



maintenance and land development applications. According to M-B Company's Ground Service Vehicle Division, the "swing seat" enables the operator to turn the entire seat and control console, thereby always facing the work being done. The console is attached to the seat's arm rest, allowing for one-hand operation of transmission, attachments and accessories.

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## Club Car's vehicle line is versatile

A full array of vehicles in the Club Car utility vehicle line suits most terrain and maintenance challenges.

The Carryall II is a gasoline model powered by an exclusive four cycle/341cc engine, with large durable double-walled aluminum pickup bed.

The Carryall I is available in both gas and electric models, and features an all aluminum frame, chassis and pickup bed, a thermoset polymer front cowl, integrated front bumper and side rub rails. Inner fenders are flange-sealed to protect the battery and four cycle/341cc engine from dirt. Battery rating for the Club Car Carryall I is 105 minutes.



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## Hahn Maxi Pro 435 with hydrostatic drive

The hydrostatic drive on the new Hahn utility vehicle is powered by a 35-hp Wisconsin engine. A low center of gravity and sharp turning radius allow this unit to be used in numerous applications. The Maxi Pro is capable of carrying 300 gallons of spray material. Several other attachments will be available soon.



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## Mighty Mits Line breaks into market

Mitsubishi Motor Sales of America has entered the multi-purpose utility vehicle market with its Mighty Mits line of industrial vehicles.

Designed to suit a wide variety of