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J-6-B

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Slow and quick release fertilizers

Quickly-available sources: These are water-soluble and not dependent on temperature to release their nitrogen.

Some, such as potassium nitrate, contain N in the form of nitrate (NO₃). Others, such as urea, ammonium sulfate, mono- and diammonium phosphate, have nitrogen in the form of ammonium (NH₄).

Ammonium nitrate contains both forms of nitrogen. Urea is an important N source, since it forms the basis for nearly all of the slowly-available nitrogen fertilizers, with the exception of the natural organic fertilizers.

The quickly-available nitrogen sources are ideal for "spoon feeding" and for use under cold conditions, when many many slowly-available sources do not perform adequately. They are relatively inexpensive, but may result in higher labor costs if they are applied frequently. The potential for "burn" is also greater with the quickly-available sources, mainly due to their higher salt indexes.

Slowly-available sources: It is more difficult to keep up with the types of fertilizers in this category, since changing technologies continue to result in new fertilizers. Within this category are *slow-release (or controlled release) fertilizers* that encapsulate a quickly-available fertilizer (usually urea) with a sulfur or plastic coating that degrades over time, slowly releasing the enclosed nitrogen source. Examples include the sulfur-coated and resin-coated fertilizers. These types of fertilizers generally contain enough free urea, or other soluble N source, to provide adequate short-term response, while providing the benefits of long-term, slow-release fertilization. Sulfur-coated urea has a history of performing well in lawn care and many golf course applications.

A new product from Grace-Sierra, with the trade name Once, can be applied once during the year to provide season-long feeding. In two years of testing at Colorado State University this resin-coated product has performed very well. These coated products require

adequate soil moisture to aid in breakdown of the coating, as well as to allow for solubilization of the enclosed N source and its subsequent movement into the root-zone. They will not perform well under dry conditions. On heavily-trafficked turf (especially if compacted and with little thatch), the coated products are subject to mechanical breakage, thus negating the slow-release characteristics of the fertilizer. On very close-cut turfs, such as tees or putting greens, the particles may be damaged (or picked up) during mowing.

Slowly-soluble: This category would include such fertilizers as IBDU and ureaformaldehyde. The N in these fertilizers is released via the action of hydrolysis (water) and/or microbial activity. Both types are quite moisture dependent. The UF fertilizers are also temperature-dependent, since the level of microbial activity is governed by soil temperature, in addition to the presence of adequate moisture. Thus, IBDU should work effectively under cool, moist conditions, while long-chain UF types will not perform nearly as well. Fertilizers containing UF are better-suited to summer use.

Natural organics popular

Natural organic fertilizers have become quite popular in recent years. Derived from plant or animal by-products, they include products like activated sewage sludge (Milorganite), dehydrated poultry waste (Richlawn products, Sustane), and dried blood, bone and seed meals (the Ringer products). These fertilizers depend on microbial activity to release much of the nitrogen contained in them. Interestingly, the Ringer and Richlawn products have performed very well under cool conditions in Colorado testing, probably because blood meal will release N quite quickly. These products require good levels of soil moisture to work well, and may not perform up to expectations under dry conditions (even if temperatures are warm).

—Dr. Koski □

Characteristics of Nitrogen Fertilizers

Fertilizer Source	N Percentage	N Source	Moisture Dependence	Temperature Dependence	Residual Activity	Burn Potential
QUICKLY-AVAILABLE N						
Ammonium nitrate	33	ammonium nitrate	low	low	short	high
Ammonium phosphates	11-21	mono/di-ammon. phos.	low	low	short	high
Ammonium sulfate	21	ammonium sulfate	low	low	short	high
Urea	46	urea	low	low	short	high
SLOWLY-AVAILABLE N						
Slow-Release Sources						
Sulfur-coated	14-38	urea, ammoniacal N	moderate	moderate	long	low
Resin-coated (ONCE™)	24-35	ammoniacal N, urea, nitrate	moderate	moderate	long	low
Slowly-Soluble Sources						
IBDU	31	IBDU	high	low	long	low
Ureaform Products						
Nitroform	38	ureaformaldehyde	high	high	long	low
FLUF	18	ureaformaldehyde/urea	moderate	moderate	medium	low
Nutralene	40	methylene urea polymers	moderate	low	medium-long	low
Scotts methylene urea	39	methylene urea polymers	moderate	moderate	medium-long	low
CoRoN	28	methylene urea/urea	low	low	medium	low
Formolene Plus	30	methylene urea/urea	low	low	medium	low
N-Sure	28	triazone/urea	low	low	medium	low
Natural Organic Products						
Ringer fertilizers	6-10	blood, bone, seed meals	high	high	long	low
Sustane	6	composted turkey waste	high	high	long	low
Richlawn fertilizers	6-14	DPW, blood & bone meal	high	high	long	low
Milorganite	6	activated sewage sludge	high	high	long	low

Source: The author

more, depending on the source) later in the spring when it becomes warmer. Alternatively, use a mixture of slowly- and quickly- available N when you cannot make frequent spring applications (see sidebar).

Other nutrients

Most often, other nutrients are applied with (or in addition to) regular nitrogen applications. Potassium (K) applications, even when soil tests say

levels are adequate, have been touted in recent years as providing an added degree of drought resistance and/or heat tolerance.

Many turf managers believe that they see this effect in the field, although

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In cases of mite damaged turf, recovery can sometimes occur with adequate spring fertilization and watering.

research on the subject has not proven conclusively that supplemental K provides such benefits.

Less has been said about phospho-

rus (P) in this regard, but many turf managers provide regular supplements of potassium in their programs. It is unlikely that these higher levels

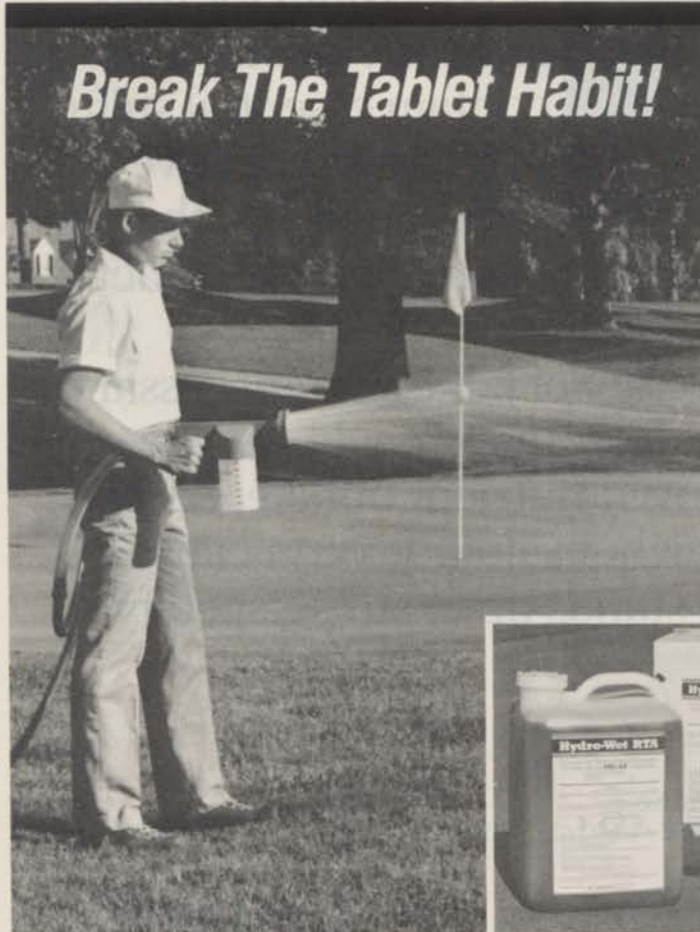
of K or P can cause any harm, but one should consider whether any benefit is gained by using high levels of either, especially when one considers the extra cost involved. Routine use of both is encouraged, however, on those sites where grass clippings are regularly removed.

Iron applications can enhance turf color without stimulating excess shoot production. Iron in the spring can be advantageous if it allows you to reduce the amount of N applied. Research by Wehner and Haley at the University of Illinois found that iron can be substituted for a portion of some N fertilizers (urea and Formolene), while still attaining a response equivalent than that obtained from a full rate of nitrogen.

In certain parts of the country where iron chlorosis is prevalent (high pH soils), it may be necessary to apply iron at least once per year. Nitrogen applications to a chlorotic (yellow), iron-deficient turf will worsen the chlorotic condition.

Iron is most effective when applied as a foliar spray. **LM**

Dr. Koski is an assistant professor and extension turfgrass specialist at Colorado State University.



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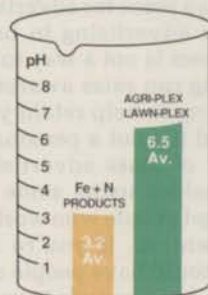
Turf management professionals around the world are finding that AGRI-PLEX and LAWN-PLEX are the liquid micronutrients formulated to truly *buffer* your tank mix to pH 6.0-7.0.

Don't be misled by other claims about pH. Most liquid micronutrients, especially those containing nitrogen, are formulated at a pH of 2.0-3.0 and, at suggested use rates will lower your tank mix to around 3.0-3.5, even when pesticides are added to the tank. Regardless of the water source, these numbers hold true because, practically speaking, water as well as pesticides do not have the ability to resist change in pH. A rare exception is water that is high in bicarbonates.

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SURVIVING IN A TROUBLED ECONOMY II

by Rudd McGary, Ph.D., AGMA, Inc.

Perhaps the most important key to being a strong company in the coming years is marketing: standard practices of past years aren't going to take a company through the '90s. Much of what used to be standard will become old-fashioned and—worse—ineffective. Here are some ideas about the ways in which you need to market to survive in the '90s.

Attract and retain

Most green industry companies have emphasized attracting customers. This is apparent by strong efforts in direct mail and—with larger companies—in television and radio advertising. The idea was to keep on finding new customers year after year, with the supposition that there was a never-ending supply of them.

Unfortunately for companies which thought this way, the supply is just about used up. By that I mean that there aren't likely to be many potential customers in major metro markets who are just now finding out about companies for lawn and landscape care, as well as construction and design. Particularly lawn care, since advertising for this service has been done for at least a decade. This customer base knows that the services are available and generally has an idea about their costs.

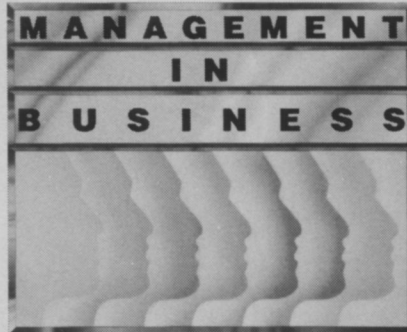
What does this mean for survival? Simply that you had better look at retaining your customers and making sure that your growth is predicated on a strong customer base rather than by trying to replace your customers (or at least a large part of them) each year.

Retention vs. attraction

Retention is a good marketing strategy, not only for survival, but for any company looking for strong growth.

One reason is that it costs less than attraction. Depending on your budget for advertising, and on how much you budget for retention efforts, attracting a new customer generally will cost three to six times as much as retaining one. Reason enough here to focus on retention.

But the true survival part of this strategy is linked to the fact that if a satisfied customer tells a potential



customer about your services, you're likely to get the business. If you're focusing on retention—making sure that the customer is satisfied—then you're likely to have a strong base of referrals, and growth is likely. Trying the opposite, to attract and not retain, is a sure way to perish.

The personal touch

A second major part of survival strategy deals with how you treat the customer. If you're interested in keeping customers, you need to make sure that you work on keeping in personal touch. That means several things from a marketing standpoint:

Advertising can be useful, but if you focus on retention and the personal touch, you should shift your emphasis to more personal sales. (This doesn't mean you should go more toward telephone sales. That's not a personal sale, it's a phone call.) You should go more toward a trained sales staff that knows how to explain your services to a consumer in a way that will help that consumer make a decision to buy your company's offerings.

There is a place for advertising, but relying on advertising to bring you new business is not a way to survive. Advertising can raise awareness, but it's not going to help retain your customers and it's not a personal touch.

Instead of mass advertising, you might consider using some of your budget to get people who work on customer retention. If you're in lawn care, you could have people call after the first and last rounds to make sure that the customer is satisfied, with both the results of the service and the way in which he or she was treated. If

you're in landscaping, you should call after your jobs to make sure that the client was serviced in such a way that he or she is likely to refer you to a new customer.

In addition, you might take some money out of your advertising budget and spend it on the office staff. They're the people who will make the first impression on the public, and also the ones who will deal with problems first as incoming calls occur. By finding ways to compensate the office staff for helping to retain your customers, you can help the entire company focus on retention.

At the same time, making sure that you look for a personal touch rather than mass advertising is likely to give you a group of customers who will help you grow through referral and word of mouth—the two most important ways to grow any type of green industry company.

In short, to survive:

1) Stop thinking about attracting new customers. Simply going after new customers each year isn't a good strategy, particularly in times when the word "survival" is being used. By worrying about how you're going to keep customers (and this includes work quality), consumers become the focus of everything the company does.

In a survival mode, the retaining customers becomes more and more important.

2) Use less mass media and more personal touch. The days of mailing out large amounts of direct mail pieces and getting a decent return are becoming history. You need to have a good sales force and a good retention force, people that can work with the consumers, in order to survive.

For most companies, taking care of the customer was the way to start and grow. In a survival mode, you should look at what the customer wants and make sure to deliver the service so that customers will want to come back or at the very least, give us a good recommendation. People can choose a lot of different companies for their green services. Those companies that give the personal touch are the ones that will survive and prosper. **LM**

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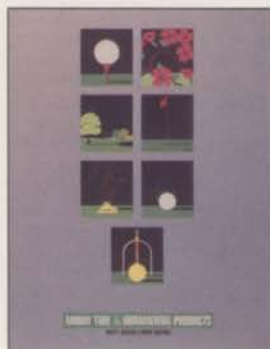
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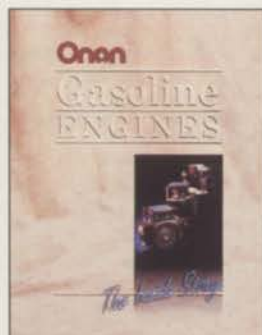
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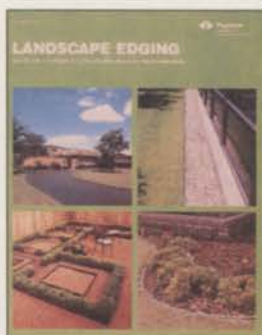
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Hesston Corporation
Woods Division
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