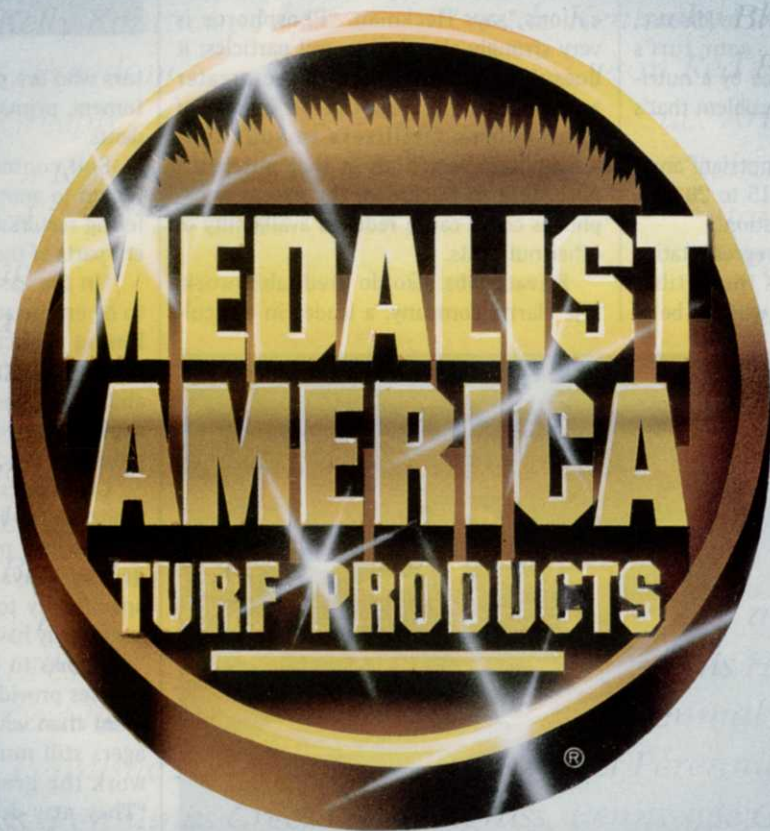


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Circle No. 127 on Reader Inquiry Card

Soil test could solve 'lazy turf' problem

A proper soil analysis will reveal if a nutrient deficiency is the cause of turf lethargy.

■ Has your turf lost its "zing"? Does it have that lackluster, "not-as-bright-as-it-used-to-be" shade of green?

If you know it's not caused by disease, drought or insect damage, your turf's lethargic look could be caused by a nutrient deficiency in the soil, a problem that's easily remedied.

But first, you need a soil nutrient analysis, which starts by taking 15 to 20 core samples from the area in question.

"If you don't have a truly representative sample, one that represents the fertility level of the turf, the analysis will not be of

sample exchanges.

Heckman says not much has changed in the way soils are tested, but there have been interesting findings over the last few years. One of the most important is the high phosphorus content found in approximately 75 percent of all samples obtained from landscapers and homeowners in New Jersey and other states.

"This is due to repeated fertilizer applications," says Heckman. "Phosphorus is very strongly absorbed to soil particles; it doesn't leach. We'd like to see greater awareness, and a reduction in use of phosphorus fertilizers in soils that already test very high in that nutrient." According to Heckman, the excess phosphorus could cause reduced availability of other nutrients.

Private labs also do creditable work. The Harris company, a leader in agricul-



Jeff Frack:
Golf course soils offer a challenge.

tors who are providing the service to customers, primarily golf course superintendents.

Soil content varies greatly from one region to another, so you'll likely find differing results from sample taken in different parts of the country.

"In the eastern U.S., the soil will tend to be on the acid side," explains Frack, "so liming applications may be required. In the West, you're dealing with alkaline soils and higher sodium or salt content, where applications of gypsum or elemental sulphur may need to be made to lower a pH."

Golf courses represent unique challenges in any locale. "So much of (the golf course) is a man-made, particularly golf greens," says Frack. "They're building specifically to grow grass, so you don't necessarily have a 'natural' soil medium."

Thanks to USGA standards, many golf courses provide a better growing environment than what existed before, but managers still must fertilize accordingly and work the greens, due to sand content. "They may drain very well," says Frack, "but be a little low on the nutrient side."

If you send the same sample to two different labs, and get two different readings, be sure both data are being reported in the same measurements, either parts per million or pounds per acre.

"Some even report in parts per two million," says Frack. "All the numbers could be exactly right, but if people aren't familiar with the methods or reporting units of the labs, you may actually think you've got different results."

A soil analysis is very inexpensive, especially when you consider the headaches it might solve for you.

Frack says Harris will conduct a basic N/P/K analysis for under \$20. A more complete analysis, with micronutrient content and sand/silt/clay percentage breakdown costs between \$30 and \$40.

—Terry McIver



Soil testing at state-of-the-art facilities is offered at reasonable prices. Shown here is one of the Harris labs, in Lincoln, Neb.

much value," says Dr. Joseph Heckman, a Rutgers University soils and crops specialist. "If you have another section of turf you know to be of a different composition, a separate sample is required."

Take your soil samples to a university-based laboratory or a good private lab. University labs have established good reputations over the years, and the accuracy of soil analyses from one to another is nearly exact, as proven by frequent university soil

tural soil testing for more than 60 years, also performs a good amount of testing for the landscape and golf course industries. "We get an idea of what the fertility levels are in the soil, whether it's golf greens, fairways or turf around large corporations," says Jeff Frack, Harris's vice president of agronomic services.

Frack says most of the company's non-ag soil testing is done for local fertilizer suppliers and other turf industry distribu-



Roger Albrecht, president of Nitro-Green Corporation, says that weed control is the most important single item in customer

satisfaction. "Excellence in weed control can be summed up in one word," says Albrecht... "Trimec!"

Weed Control in the Environmental Age

A leading lawn care franchisor who has set a goal of eliminating all broadcast spraying of herbicides freely discusses how TRIMEC® fits his basic strategy to accomplish this end.

Everett Mealman, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer PBI/Gordon Corporation



Roger Albrecht is president of Nitro-Green Corporation, which has 38 franchisees scattered over 15 different states. In addition to liaison with the franchisees, he manages two locations in California, primarily to keep abreast via hands-on experience.

"All business is local," says Albrecht, "so there is no royal road to success that will universally apply to all of our locations. But there are three basic fundamental realities that do apply."

Albrecht sums them up this way:

- People who pay money to have their lawns taken care of realize that perfection may not always be possible, but they appreciate our efforts to strive for it.
- Efficiency is the key to growth, so every dollar for chemicals, labor, and equipment in a landscape maintenance budget must be justified.
- Environmental stewardship is good business.

"These realities have caused us to set a goal on every property of totally eliminating all broadcast spraying of herbicide and replacing it with spot-treatment of the appropriate Trimec Complex as needed," says Albrecht.

"We want to be pro-active on environmental issues," continues Albrecht. "We want to be able to tell our customers that we are not spraying any herbicides to chase phantom weeds."

"Obviously, such a program has to be built over a period of time," says Albrecht. "We like to start out a new customer with an

early broadcast of Trimec... either Super or Classic, depending on the weather. We want the ultimate degree of weed control that's possible so we can start a program to thicken up the grass so weeds can't get back in.

"When the program matures, we want to be able to rely entirely on Trimec spot treatment to eliminate broadleaf and grassy weeds. Crabgrass is usually our biggest problem, but we have absolute confidence in Trimec Plus to handle any crabgrass or nutsedge that shows up. And what a plus, since it knocks out broadleaves, too."

There is nothing like Trimec

Albrecht says that because of his desire to rely on hands-on experience, he has tried every herbicide that has come along. "Perhaps you can imagine," says Albrecht, "how many times I hear salespeople say 'hey, this is just like Trimec, and I can save you a few dollars.'"

"I could write a book about the folly of trying to save money on Trimec substitutes," laughs Albrecht, "but I'll simply remind you of our position that every expenditure in an operating budget must be justified, and there is no expense that equals the cost of a call-back."

Why Trimec is superior

Trimec herbicides are Complexes, not formulator tank-mixes of ag-grade chemicals. To make Trimec, three acids are reacted together to form a unified salt. This salt is then formulated with wetting agents and disperants, and is analytically monitored continuously during formulation.

This unique process makes every droplet of every Trimec formulation an exact mirror image of the total, and thus precisely optimizes the intended synergistic activity.

The differences between a tank-mix and a Complex become major when the goal is weed control in the environmental age.



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BROADLEAF HERBICIDE

755-192

Circle No. 135 on Reader Inquiry Card

Buffalograss roams beyond the plains

Continued development of buffalograss varieties is making the species at home in more regions.

■ Turf scientists continue to improve the appearance and low maintenance characteristics of buffalograss.

Jeff Klingenberg, Ph.D. of the University of Nebraska, says up to 10 new buffalograss varieties may be available over the next decade. Different varieties may be adaptable to the Northeast as far as New Jersey, and westward to California (see map).

Buffalograss—named apparently because it was the main food source for American bison—is a warm-season, fine-leaved, perennial, sod-forming grass. It grows to a height of six inches, and spreads by stolons and runners.

Klingenberg says three commercial seeded types are available: Sharps, Texoka and Bison. The 11 vegetative types include two commercial brands (609 Oasis and Prairie) and nine experimental varieties.

Bamert Seed Co. of Muleshoe, Texas, now markets what it says are the first proprietary turf-type buffalograss seed varieties, Plains and Topgun.

Adaptation—Buffalograss is naturally adapted throughout the Midwest and Southwest in areas of 12 to 35 inches of annual rainfall, sandy clay loam or heavier soils, pH 6.0 to 8.5, and up to 6,000 feet

elevation. Buffalograss is not shade tolerant, and is recommended for use in high-light areas.

Buffalograss gets high marks as a low-maintenance alternative to other turf varieties.

It's drought tolerant, has a deep root system and establishes quickly. It avoids drought and high heat stress by entering dormancy, but shows rapid recovery when water is again available.

According to Bamert Seed, studies have shown that buffalograss requires only 30



Potential for buffalograss expansion across the US.

to 60 percent of the water needed by improved bermudagrasses.

Klingenberg says that university research shows that it's possible to have "short winter" dormant species adapted to the southern regions. "Long winter" dormant types—those that come from the lower adapted areas of the U.S.—have a longer growing season compared to those



Klingenberg: seeding rate most critical success factor.

that adapted to the northern regions.

Seeding alternatives—Non-treated buffalograss seed will take two to three years to reach 80 to 90 percent germination. Treated seed—or seed that has been "fooled" into thinking it has gone through winter—achieves 75 to 80 percent germination in 10 to 14 days.

A third, time-consuming establishment method involves removing the seed from its nylon-like "burr" shell, says Klingenberg.

Non-treated burrs are less expensive, and have a longer shelf-life, but are slow to establish, and may require more irrigation and weed control. Treated burrs, which are most available and cost less than the naked caryopsis, have a 3- to 4-day germination if planting is well timed.

Three important considerations when attempting to seed buffalograss are:

● **Timing:** Late spring, when soil temperatures are no lower than 50° F. The best planting window is between May 15 and June 15. Don't plant any later than June 30. You may get good establishment, but you won't get good stolon performance you need in June to withstand a late October freeze.

● **Seed placement:** Klingenberg prefers drill planting, which results in the best soil/seed contact. Plant 1/2 inch apart, with 1- to 2-inch row spacing.

Broadcast planting requires a mechanical method of covering and good soil/seed contact. Rolling will aid establishment.

● **Rate:** This is where most mistakes occur. Consider the viability of the seed you're buying. "It's a different ball game compared to most of the other warm and cool season varieties," says Klingenberg. He also notes that pure live seed in the burr is going to be only 62 percent, so you should plant at least 1-1/2 lb. per 1000 sq. ft.

Also, avoid seeded buffalograss that's been in the bag more than 6 months.

—Terry McIver

Buffalograss checklist

ADVANTAGES

- ✓ reduced mowing, irrigation, fertilization
- ✓ available in seeded and vegetative types
- ✓ grows in dry, compacted soils
- ✓ tolerates temp extremes
- ✓ establishes quickly
- ✓ drought tolerant
- ✓ winter hardy

DISADVANTAGES

- ✓ does not grow in moderate shade
- ✓ sensitive to some herbicides
- ✓ male plants have seedheads
- ✓ possible disease problems
- ✓ turns brown after freeze
- ✓ not suited to sandy soils
- ✓ no dark green color
- ✓ seed is expensive
- ✓ winter dormancy

Source: Gayle Jacklin, Jacklin Seed Co.; Kevin Morris, USDA.



Signs That The New Cushman[®] Turf Master Has Arrived.



Electric controller is standard instead of hand valves.

Tank design leaves less than 1/2 gallon of unuseable material.

All pressurized chemical hoses are isolated for greater operator protection.

Exclusive ground speed governor control.

Unique boom design delivers more consistent nozzle pressure.

Unmatched three-wheel maneuverability.

Large tires for minimum ground pressure.

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Compare feature after standard feature, and you'll arrive at one conclusion: the Cushman Turf Master is easier to calibrate, easier to operate, and the most accurate.

Compare the Vehicle.

No competitor provides the absolute ground speed control that's critical for precise spraying. You get

it — and a lot more — only from the Cushman Turf-Truckster™ vehicle.

Compare the Sprayer.

The latest from SDI features a new generation Hypro polypropylene pump, mechanical and bypass agitation, 15' or 20' booms, three pressure gauges — only a few of the many features the competition doesn't offer.

Compare the Facts for Yourself.

Call toll free 1-800-228-4444 for a free comparison brochure, or contact your Cushman dealer for a demonstration. You'll see that the Cushman Turf Master is far and away your best buy.

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Built to Last

RANSOMES

CUSHMAN

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

Aeration still undersold to public

When lawn care professionals educate their customers to the benefits of aeration, a third or more will pay for it.



Ficco: Aerate in circular patterns, save time of stopping and turning



Van Noord: Leave-behind information 'stops some of the phone calls.'

■ Many home lawns would be healthier, more attractive and more valuable to their owners if they received periodic aerations.

But many home owners and property managers—those people who ultimately sign the checks to pay for professional turf care—still don't know what core aeration is, or what it's supposed to accomplish. This is particularly true of non-golfers. Most golfers have seen either an aerator in action, or the turf just after it's been opened up with tines.

Some lawn care company owners claim aeration hasn't been sold to potential clients, not really *sold* to them. But to sell you have to educate first.

"I think you have to be a little more intimate with your customer for them to appreciate core aeration," says Richard Ficco, Jr., president of Partners Quality Lawn Service, Boston.

When a company finally commits to educating and selling aeration to its customers, as many as 25 percent accept it.

Ficco says about 27 percent of his customers in 1991 accepted aeration as part of their programs. (Generally, almost 30 percent of Partners' new customers include it in their programs.)

"But I don't think you can come in with the hype that this is the best thing

ever," says Ficco. Recognize aeration service for what it is, he says, "a fine add-on service that can supplement the income of an existing business."

In the Boston-area market, \$24 to \$25 per 1,000 sq.ft. is what most residential customers expect to pay for aeration. Professionals elsewhere would love to get that. Some charge as low as \$10 per 1,000 sq.ft.

counts, coupons, mailings, etc. Aeration is also prominently mentioned in Partners' Yellow Pages' advertising.

But it really *sells* aeration through person-to-person contact, says Ficco.

"We explain the problem, write it down on the invoice and follow up. If the people don't call us back within 72 hours, we're back on the lawn in person, or sometimes we make a phone call, to follow up on what we've already suggested," he says.

Steve Van Noord, Weed & Feed Lawn Care of Byron Center, Mich., offers aeration as part of W&F's regular program—four applications and an aeration. "If we really believe it benefits lawns, why are we marketing it as an option?" he asks.

Van Noord says W&F aerates about 60 percent of its customers from year to year.

"This (aeration) is the type of service you have to continue selling," says Van Noord. "When we do an aeration, we leave behind lots of information, information that answers questions like, 'will I see long-term or instant results?' and 'do I pick up the cores, or mow right after an aeration?'"

Whereas Ficco's company does most of its aerations in the fall, usually in conjunction with applications of lime, fertilizer

SAMPLE RESIDENTIAL PLAN

	Existing customers	New customers	Total
Customer base	500	125	625
Cancels	50	10	60
Net customers	450	115	565
Buying aeration	15%	20%	
Price (1,000 sq. ft.)	\$18	\$18	
Avg. lawn (sq. ft.)	7000	7000	
Revenues	\$8820	\$3150	\$11,970

Under-charging is risky. Aerator maintenance, with its down-time and related costs, can be high. "Aerators, as part of their repair instructions, use terms like crowbar and sledge hammer," jokes Ficco.

The Easton, Mass., businessman offers aeration as one of several turf-building, extra-charge services in addition to fertilizer and weed control. The company sells it through a combination of seasonal dis-

ELSEWHERE

DC firm offers service 'menu', p. 80

Dr. Beard predicts turf's future, p. 82

High/low volume: the pros and cons, p. 82

The fight against yellow nutsedge begins here.



Only Basagran® T/O ends it here.

Unlike other herbicides which only burn back yellow nutsedge above the surface, Basagran T/O herbicide travels down to control the roots, rhizomes and tuber network underground. It's the only way to be sure those same weeds won't come back.

An over-the-top application is all it takes to win the fight against yellow nutsedge and broadleaf weeds. (A second



application is recommended when re-growth occurs.) And while it's tough on weeds, it's easy on virtually all varieties of established turf.

Basagran T/O is also labeled for directed sprays in ornamental varieties.

For more information on how to control yellow nutsedge and broadleaf weeds with Basagran T/O, call **Toll Free 1-800-878-8060.**

Always read and follow label directions.
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BASF

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Marino: wants to build home owner awareness in southwest Missouri.

and seed, Van Noord's W&F tries to slip in as many aerations as it can during the dog days of summer, on those days when wind

or other conditions don't favor fertilizer or chemical applications.

"We follow basically the same routes as we do for the other rounds," says Van Noord.

George Marino of Greenlawn Fertilizer of Springfield, Springfield, Mo., says this season he'll add an optional two rounds of aeration to his basic five-application program.

Says Marino, "I think the message I want to get across is for them to realize,

yes, this needs to be part of the program and it (aeration) will help the other things that we're doing benefit them more."

In spite of the turfgrass industry's familiarity with aeration and its benefits, Marino doesn't think home owners have gotten the message yet.

"I think a lot of our market is still uneducated when it comes to aeration," he says.

—Ron Hall

Adaptable DC-area firm offers virtual 'menu' of lawn services to customers

Partners Dan Henneberg and Bern Bonifant say it would be nice to be 'all natural,' but you've got to make a living, too.

■ Good lawn care programs, good name, good new location: these are some of the reasons Dan Henneberg and Bern Bonifant feel good about 1992.

Henneberg is president and Bonifant vice president of Natural Lawns, Inc., Fairfax, Va. They've been together since founding Natural Lawns in 1986. Last year, recession or not, was the company's best ever.

What they, through NL Inc., do—and do well—is offer clients a choice of programs. Then they deliver the type of service the customer wants.

They feel that, as a small company, they have to be flexible to compete in the Northern Virginia residential market. Or be squashed. The competition includes most of the industry's national heavyweights, and several top-flight regional companies, too.

Henneberg and Bonifant aren't intimidated though. They're too busy.

When potential clients get a Natural Lawns' brochure, they almost get a lawn care menu. The partners know their suburban D.C. customers, for the most part, are educated professional people. But these same people also probably don't know the subtleties of keeping green, healthy lawns during the area's hot, humid summer. That's one reason all NL programs are listed and explained in easy-to-understand language.



Bern Bonifant, left, and Dan Henneberg are proving that the Northern Virginia lawn care market is still strong.

Prospects can choose from an "All Natural Program," a "Modified-Organic Program," a "Lawnplus-IPM" offering, or, perhaps, a "Zoysia Program."

Says Henneberg, "we'll even make adjustments *within* a program."

Adds Bonifant, "some customers don't like the cookie cutter approach. They may want one aspect of a program customized to address some particular concern they have."

In spite of the company name, no more than 10 percent of the company's clients choose an all natural lawn care program.

"The more research we did, the more we realized that—sure—it would be nice to offer strictly all-natural lawn care," says Henneberg, "but we have to make a living too."

He says most NL customers choose a modified organic program, consisting of a soil pH test, the use of high-quality, slow-release fertilizer, application of a pre-emergence crabgrass control, and spot weed and insect controls, if needed. A winter application of lime (a common feature

of all NL programs) provides the sixth round for this program.

The company also offers a shrub care program, core aeration and seeding (mostly done together in the fall), overseeding, and a small amount of mowing.

Henneberg and Bonifant are digging deeper into the Fairfax-area market. In fact, they started 1992 by moving their headquarters from Falls Church to Fairfax County, about a 25-minute MetroRail southwest from downtown Washington, D.C.

"This puts us absolutely in the center of the Northern Virginia market," says Bern. "We think this is going to help us keep our routes tight. I know it's not always an easy thing to do, but we intend to concentrate on small areas and still expand our customer base."

Adds Henneberg, "many households have both parents working and they just don't have much time for lawn work, but they still want a nice lawn."

—Ron Hall