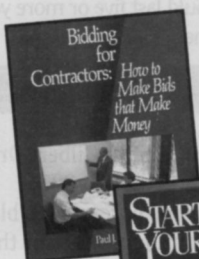


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Just enough mulch to cover landscape fabric presents finished look.

Photos courtesy Dr. Bonnie Appleton, Virginia Tech University

regularly, they believe. They also advise against using geotextiles around annuals unless you plan to plant year after year into the same holes you initially cut in the fabrics. Cutting new holes each year will increase weed growth. And don't use fabrics in beds planted with bulbs, clumping or rhizomatous perennials, or vines or groundcovers that spread by stolons or stems that root into the ground.

Installing geotextiles isn't complicated but it involves some thought and care, starting with providing a weed-free environment over which to put them.

If you plant first, carefully seam and pin strips of fabric around the plants to cover the soil. Even so, the researchers discovered that some weeds still found the weak points and were able to grow.

If you cover the soil with the fabric first, you must then cut holes through which to dig your planting holes. Remember, the bigger the hole you dig, the more fabric must be cut. Don't leave any of the hole's soil atop the fabric, or you'll have another place for weeds to grow.

**Cost effective**—Landscape fabrics are one of several options available for weed control. Base your decision upon weed spectrum, mulch type requested or desired, permanence of plantings, aesthetics and alternative weed-control options.

Also, consider cost. Though initially expensive to install, a landscape fabric may be a worthwhile investment if it is functional for several years. In the trials, fabric degradation was seen only where fabrics were not evenly covered with mulch, allowing photodegrada-

tion. Most fabrics should last five or more years if properly covered, the researchers found.

## LANDSCAPE FABRICS

**Dalen Products, Inc.**, 11110 Gilbert Drive, Knoxville, TN 37932. (615) 966-3256.

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**DeWitt Company**, Highway 61 South, RR 3, Box 31, Sikeston, MO 63801. (800) 888-9669.

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**Reemay**, 70 Old Hickory Blvd., P.O. Box 511, Old Hickory, TN 37138-3651. (800) 321-6271.

Tyrap Landscape Fabric, spunbonded polypropylene, resists tearing, punctures, rotting, etc., can be used for soil retention for timber retaining walls, around blind drains, etc., in rolls 3'-12.5' wide by 300' long.

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**Contech Construction Products, Inc.**, 1001 Grove St., Middletown, OH 45044; (513) 425-5896.

TerraBond products for landscape/mulch separation, slope erosion control, pathway construction, brick patio construction, retaining wall filtration, pathway construction, etc. (shown on cover).

**Circle No. 314 on Reader Inquiry Card**

## Tips from Appleton, Derr

- ✓ Use geotextiles with a high percentage of closed space.
- ✓ If you use organic mulches, use coarse mulch material or thin layers of fine material.
- ✓ Keep geotextiles evenly covered at all times.
- ✓ Remove or kill any mulch-layer weeds while small.
- ✓ Consider applying a pre-emergence herbicide.
- ✓ Avoid unnecessarily pulling up geotextiles around trees and shrubs.

# Aquatic gardens popular additions to home yards

**Making a client's landscape stand out from the neighbors' is often as easy as installing a little water feature.**

■ Aquatic gardens, enjoyed and used by ancient Egyptian, Indian and Oriental civilizations, are enjoying renewed popularity among today's homeowners, according to a report from the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service.

Aquatic gardens can be an interesting and rewarding addition to any home landscape, no matter what the size of the yard, says horticultural extension agent Ray Bosmans.

"In addition to the interesting plant life they contain, aquatic gardens attract a variety of fascinating animals, including birds, frogs, turtles and more," Bosmans says. "A small garden pool can provide hours of education and entertainment, especially for children."

The development and increased availability of pre-formed pools, flexible liners and other containers have helped foster the current interest.

"These new materials are a great improvement over the old tedious process of building ponds out of concrete," says Bosmans.

**Many choices**—The style and size of an aquatic garden can range from a simple, above-ground tub garden suitable for a patio, deck or balcony, to a large pond constructed with a flexible liner.

"Many people begin with a very small aquatic garden and enjoy it so much that they later move up to as large a pond as space and budget will allow," Bosmans continues.

No matter what size the homeowner chooses, the first step in designing the aquatic

garden is to think about where it will actually be enjoyed the most by the client and family. Some good locations:

- near a patio;
- near a porch;
- within view of a window.

There are several other things to consider when selecting a pond site. First, a pond should be located where it will get at least five hours of full sun a day if you want to include flowering aquatic plants in the design. This is the minimum sunlight needed to produce blossoms on most flowering aquatic plants, though a few tropical water lily species will bloom in semi-shaded sites.

Avoid installing the pond directly under trees because leaves and debris will fall into it. And don't locate the pond in the lowest spot in the yard because surface run-off may wash mud and other contaminants into it.

An aquatic garden that is well balanced with plant and animal life does not need filtration. To achieve a balanced pond, build it as large as possible. Bosmans recommends a minimum size of 40 to 50 square feet by 18 inches deep.

"A very small pond is subject to rapid and frequent temperature changes, which stimulate excessive algae growth," he explains. "It also limits your choice of plants."

A pond can either be formal or informal in shape. Informally-shaped ponds are the most popular, according to Bosmans, because they allow the designer to use imagination and the soft irregularity found in nature to create a small haven for relaxation.

**Adding plants**—To help reduce algal growth, make sure the pond contains

enough plants to cover about 60 percent of the water's surface, with one bunch of submerged plants, such as anacharis and parrots' feather, for each one to two square feet of surface area. The submerged plants will provide additional oxygen in the water for fish, an important element of any aquatic garden.

"Fish are essential because they eat insects, including mosquito larvae, which develop in standing water," Bosmans says. "Ordinary goldfish are a good choice because they're quite hardy."

Aquatic plants are numerous and



**An aquatic garden need not be as grandiose as this one, but it should be at least 40 square feet by 18 inches deep, according to extension agent Ray Bosmans of Maryland.**

among the easiest plants to grow. They actually prefer being grown in heavy soil and have very few insect or disease problems. Pests that do appear can be controlled by simply removing the affected leaves.

Some plants you might want to choose from include:

- the many hardy water lilies;
- lotus;
- marginal plants such as cattails, arrowhead and pickerel weed; and
- floating plants such as water hyacinth, water lettuce and water fern.

For a special attraction, you can add one of the exquisite types of tropical lilies whose vivid colors of red, blue, yellow, white and magenta are unsurpassed for their size, beauty and fragrance. These lilies benefit greatly from fertilization using special fertilizer tablets that are inserted into the pots once a month (or less if extended-release tablets are used).

No matter the size, shape or scope of the aquatic garden, it's an excellent addition to a customer's fine landscape.



**Aquatic gardens can be designed in a variety of shapes, from figure-eight (left) to kidney-bean (center) to irregular (right).**

# This efficiency checklist helps grade employees

**Figuring out how efficient and effective your employees are is not an easy task. Have a checklist that can help facilitate the review process.**

■ When you've got to devise an efficient, thorough way to grade your employees on their job performances—perhaps in preparation for a merit raise—how do you start?

The best way, experts say, is to make sure you've got a complete checklist of the qualities you're looking for in a "perfect" employee. (The list at right will give you a head start).

Each employee, before being called in for a performance review—whether it coincides with a salary review—should be graded on the various components of his or her job by the immediate superior.

In its simplest form, the performance review issues a simple "yes/no" for each category. For instance, is the employee punctual? Yes or no? Does the employee put his or her ideas to action? Yes or no?

In a more complete review, the employee is graded on his or her performance in each of the categories. If you want to handle the grade like your high school teacher (A/excellent through F/failing), many employees can relate to that system.

However, you might want to make the grading process even more specific by using the grading scale listed at the bottom of the chart at the right. Simply make a matrix and check off whether the employee has been superior to unsatisfactory in each of the categories you're grading.

Another option is to use a numerical grading system. Normally, the employee is ranked from 0.0 to 4.0, or 0.0 to 10.0 (4 and 10 being the highest scores). In this manner, you can easily compare the performances of more than one person in each particular department or division. However, heed this warning: do not compare numerical scores compiled by two or more different supervisors, as these grades are highly subjective and the supervisors may be using different styles.

Finally, the most difficult but perhaps the most effective system of rating employee performance is a weighted system. Each of the categories you're issuing a numerical rating for, is issued a weight factor. Numbers are cross-multiplied before adding up a total score.

For instance, if you put a greater weight on an employee having an acceptable appearance than that employee responding to criticism, you might issue a weight factor of 2.0 or 3.0 to appearance while the "response to criticism" line would have a weight factor of 1.0.

Employee evaluations should all be done in writing by the supervisor. Besides whatever grading system you choose to use, evaluation sheets should also contain the following vital information:

- Employee name
- Department
- Job title
- Supervisor
- Date hired
- Current wage
- Date of review
- Recommendation of salary increase (if a salary review is included with the performance review)
- Overall employee grade, score or evaluation.
- Space for comments by the supervisor conducting the evaluation
- Space for comments on the evaluation by the employee being reviewed
- Appropriate approval signatures, up to and including owner/president, if necessary

After the written evaluation is completed, sit down and discuss it privately with the employee. You, as manager, should maintain an attitude of support and constructive effort. If you criticize them harshly, they will get defensive. So make sure you emphasize mutual problem-solving in problem areas. Invite the employee's participation, and establish specific goals, objectives and strategies during the interview.

Employee evaluations, if they are honestly done, can also be key elements in the process to dismiss ineffective employees (legally a delicate matter). Before committing to a particular system, consult your company attorney to avoid any legal employee rights infringements.

—Jerry Roche

## Efficiency categories

### JOB HABITS

- ✓ punctuality
- ✓ self-starting abilities
- ✓ willingness to learn
- ✓ team spirit
- ✓ quickness/productivity
- ✓ quality of work/thoroughness
- ✓ willingness to work overtime
- ✓ knowledge of equipment
- ✓ care of equipment
- ✓ following safety precautions
- ✓ honesty
- ✓ attendance

### DECISION-MAKING

- ✓ creating options
- ✓ new concepts
- ✓ weighing ramifications
- ✓ solution-finding
- ✓ follow-through
- ✓ putting ideas to action

### PLANNING/ORGANIZING

- ✓ planning
- ✓ setting priorities
- ✓ structuring time
- ✓ organizing equipment
- ✓ organizing jobs
- ✓ meeting deadlines
- ✓ assignment follow-up

### COMMUNICATION

- ✓ face-to-face articulation
- ✓ keeping staff informed
- ✓ report-back habits

### LEADERSHIP

- ✓ enthusiasm
- ✓ initiative habits
- ✓ positive attitude
- ✓ problem-solving
- ✓ staff interfacing
- ✓ appearance
- ✓ image
- ✓ authority
- ✓ respect of others
- ✓ flexibility
- ✓ motivator skills
- ✓ response to criticism
- ✓ career orientation

### GRADING SCALE

- SUPERIOR = outstanding performance consistently demonstrated
- HIGHLY COMPETENT = sustained, high performance
- COMPETENT = sustained good performance
- AVERAGE = few noteworthy accomplishments, either bad or good
- IMPROVEMENT NEEDED = performance short of desired objectives
- UNSATISFACTORY = inability to perform job; corrective action needed

# How to sell cabling

## Cabling and bracing can support both trees and your bottom line—but know what you're doing.

by James E. Guyette

■ Tree care companies that provide cabling and bracing services can support at-risk trees, along with the company's bottom line.

"It can be a real profit-making operation," says Dr. Kenneth C. Miller, a tree pathologist with Miller and Associates, Ravenna, Ohio. "An \$80 to \$90 cabling job is not uncommon, and it will preserve the aesthetic value of the tree, too."

This type of service "moves" best in upscale neighborhoods but homeowners need to be informed of the increased value involved. "That's something the company owner has to train the sales person in," says Miller. "It's something you're not going to sell in a blue collar area, but it works in a yuppie area quite well."

**The benefit**—"Trees are usually a long-

term investment," points out Paul McFarland of McFarland Landscape Services, Philadelphia, Pa. "If clients want the beauty of the tree, they would invest in cabling to preserve the tree's structure."

In many communities, few tree care companies tackle cabling work. "Cabling and bracing is dragging its feet because people are afraid to get into it," says Dr. Alex Shigo, Shigo and Trees, Associates, Durham, N.H. "I think cabling and bracing is an extremely good practice, but many people run from it because they don't know how to do it."

Not only must the people attempting cabling and bracing be experts at tree biology, but mechanical engineering skills are also required.

**Be careful**—Even a seemingly easy cabling job can bring trouble, too.

"They have to match all the coordinates together to get a good hold, (or else) they could really create a lot of damage," observes McFarland. He knows of one cabling job that went awry when the cable broke and went through a greenhouse.

Miller is even more explicit. "Landscapers should stick with dogwoods" or other easy-to-



Shigo: cable with caution.

handle trees, he says. Using pole saws and ladders, a company can probably prune branches up to 20 feet high without harming the tree. However, cabling and bracing is a different story.

"I don't know if a landscaper wants to get involved with cabling," Miller notes. Even guy wire installation can be costly if attempted by someone without the proper training. "He or she is going to wind up girdling the tree."

"A mark of a professional is that he or she is able to make a decision," notes Shigo. "You have to be brave enough to talk to the client and say, 'I'm going to assign risks. Here is a tree I will cable and brace—and here is a tree I will not cable and brace.' If the client wants something else, get it in writing."

—The author is a freelance writer specializing in the green industry. He is based in South Euclid, Ohio.

## Accounting: an introduction

### It's a 'language of numbers,' not 'revenge of the math club,' says this accountant.

by Dan Sautner,  
Padgett Business Services

■ Financial statements are the products of accounting. They are primarily developed to help you run the business. Expressed in a common format—dollars—they show the results of every decision you've made. The purposes of financial statements are to:

- help you make better decisions for the future;
- allow you to file an accurate income tax return;
- help seek additional funding with your lender; and
- help attract buyers or investors.

Financial statements usually include three component statements: the profit-and-

loss, the balance sheet, and cash flow.

**P&L**—This ledger is a summary of the results of operation for a given time. It shows sales, costs of sales, and net income or loss (sales minus costs).

**Direct costs** include wages, equipment and advertising; **indirect costs** (those which will occur whether you have sales or not) include rent, interest expense and utilities.

**Net income** or loss will tell you how well you've used your resources. It also represents how likely it is that you will remain in business.

(Personally, I always look at the trend in net income. In business, it is not where you have *been*, but rather where you are *going*.)

**Balance sheet**—This ledger is a snapshot of the company's financial position at one point in time. It allows you to see what you have in the company, what you owe to outsiders, and what you own yourself. It will show you the original value of the assets on hand like office furniture and pick-up trucks.

These **assets** are offset ("balanced") by

**liabilities**—the company's obligations to outsiders—like bank debts, payroll and sales taxes.

The final section of the balance sheet is the **equity** section, which shows your original investment and the sum of undistributed income earned in previous periods. This is used to examine how well a company increases its assets, and what resources are available.


**Cash flow**—This ledger tells how the company took in cash and how it spent it.

**Adjusted net income**, for example, is your net cash position from the operation of your business. Paying debts or financial withdrawals by the owner would be shown as a use of funds. Reducing your inventory or financial contributions by the owner are shown as sources of funds.

The cash flow statement effectively ties together the income statement and balance sheet, and expresses it in terms of the change in your cash position.

—The author is chairman of Padgett Business Services, Inc., of Athens, Ga. This is the first in a series of basic accounting articles he is writing for *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT*.

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# Going 'natural' cuts costs

**Improvements at NWU are a great example of synergy—the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.**

■ Like most campus landscape managers today, Twyla Hansen has to deal with more restrictive budget constraints. Despite that, she has continued to upgrade the landscape at Nebraska Wesleyan University, a private liberal arts college in Lincoln. And she's doing it while reducing maintenance costs.

Within five years of her 1982 arrival, Hansen had a landscape maintenance program in place and working.

"The improvements are a great example of synergy—the theory that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," Hansen says. "As the appearance of the campus improved, building maintenance improved too. In the end, both contribute to student and faculty recruitment efforts."

**Going native**—For the past three years, Hansen has been converting annual plantings on the 55-acre campus to perennials, mostly with native plants. Not only does this reduce costs by cutting down on the cost of annuals, but it has added interest to the campus, too.

"A lot of people have never seen some

of the prairie grasses and flowers that are native to this area, so they find these new plantings intriguing. Botany and biology classes study them frequently, and campus visitors like to inspect them," says Hansen.

The entire western half of the campus is one of the 50 sites that make up the Nebraska Arboretum, which was established to maintain native plants for education and study. Hansen has developed a donor program for the campus, to replace trees that die and to add new trees and shrubs.

"We're integrating the native ornamentals in with the trees and shrubs, not only to add diversity to the campus, but to demonstrate the types of plants that can be grown in this area," Hansen says. "Plus, the beds have a secondary purpose of separating turf areas from woody plants, to cut down on the amount of trim mowing we have to do."

Initially, most of the perennials were seeded, with seed purchased from a couple of specialty seed farms in the area. "Now, we're getting to the point where we can divide the perennials and do our own transplanting to new beds," Hansen says. "We've also started some from seed in our own greenhouse."

**Enter, buffalograss**—Hansen is moving the campus to more natural plantings in other areas, too. "We've been planting some low-maintenance areas to buffalograss," she says. "There are small turf areas in some of the outlying parking lots, and we've been putting buffalograss in many of those spots, both with seed and plugs. We've done it long enough that we now have our own little buffalograss nursery near the stadium.

"We have to mow them pretty regularly

the first year or two to keep the weeds down until the buffalograss fills in. Sometimes, we spray the area with Roundup while the buffalograss is still dormant but the weeds are already growing. Once the buffalograss is established, the areas take very minimal maintenance."

Besides the campus turf and plantings, Hansen's crew is responsible for the athletic fields.

"We have added both men's and women's varsity soccer to the athletic program, so we have those practice fields to maintain, along with the stadium turf, baseball field and a football practice field. And the rainy weather this summer packed out soil pretty well, so we're going to have to aerate the whole campus this fall. This is the first year we've had to put down a fungicide, too...another consequence of the rainy weather early this summer."

Most of the turf areas are seeded to turf-type tall fescue, again to lower maintenance costs. Most lawn areas get a spring and fall fertilization, but some areas are fertilized only in the fall.

"We're using more groundcover, too—species like wild ginger and hosta for shady areas, and some of the sedums for sunny spots.

"Going to more natural plantings requires a little different way of thinking. You can't expect to have that neat, clipped look. Sometimes, you don't know how tall the native plants are going to get, so you wind up with a more 'casual' look to your plantings," says Hansen. "But going 'native' is cutting down on our maintenance costs, and students and faculty seem to like the unique appearance of the prairie plants."

—Gary Burchfield

## Twyla's secrets to low maintenance

- 1) Use perennials for annual plantings—native plants like prairie grasses and flowers, where possible—rather than annuals.
- 2) Establish beds to separate turf areas from woody plants, thus cutting down on the amount of trim mowing.
- 3) Divide the perennials and do your own transplanting to new beds.
- 4) Plant low-maintenance areas to buffalograss.
- 5) Use turf-type tall fescue for reduced maintenance.
- 6) Use more groundcover like wild ginger, hosta, the sedums.





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## EXCEL INDUSTRIES, INC.

Excel introduces the new Model 2500 Compact which features Excel's famous Trim-Steering™ for the most maneuverable, the most productive and easiest to operate compact mower on the market. The 2500 can be fitted with any of three rotary mowing decks - 52", 60", or 72" for an immaculate finish.

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## GMC TRUCK

For the 1994 model year, GMC Truck offers an array of vehicles to meet diverse customer needs including an all-new, totally redesigned Sonoma compact pickup; a Sierra Natural Gas Vehicle (NGV) and Sierras alternatively fueled with a dedicated or bi-fuel system in a 1/2, 3/4 or one-ton pickup.

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## GMC TRUCK, PONTIAC, MICH.

With an unparalleled heritage that spans 90 years in the truck business, GMC Truck is the leader in marketing GMC light duty trucks and vans and General Motors medium duty conventional and low cab forward trucks, such as the GMC Truck TopKick and Chevrolet Kodiak medium duty conventional trucks with an 18,000 lb. GVW.

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## JOHN DEERE INC.

Two new utility vehicles from John Deere are dubbed "GATORS" for their endurance, aggressive traction, stability and light footedness. The 10-hp GATOR 4X2 rolls on four wheels with 2-wheel drive, powered by a single-cylinder air-cooled engine. The 18-hp GATOR 6X4 rolls on six wheels with 4-wheel drive, powered by a twin cylinder liquid-cooled engine.

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## JOHN DEERE INC.

New John Deere 400 series heavy-duty lawn and garden tractors provide state-of-the-art features. The 425, 445 and 455 models include: 2-pedal foot control hydrostatic transmission with differential lock, internal wet disk brakes, hydraulic PTO clutch; shaft-driven implements and power steering with tilt steering wheel.

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