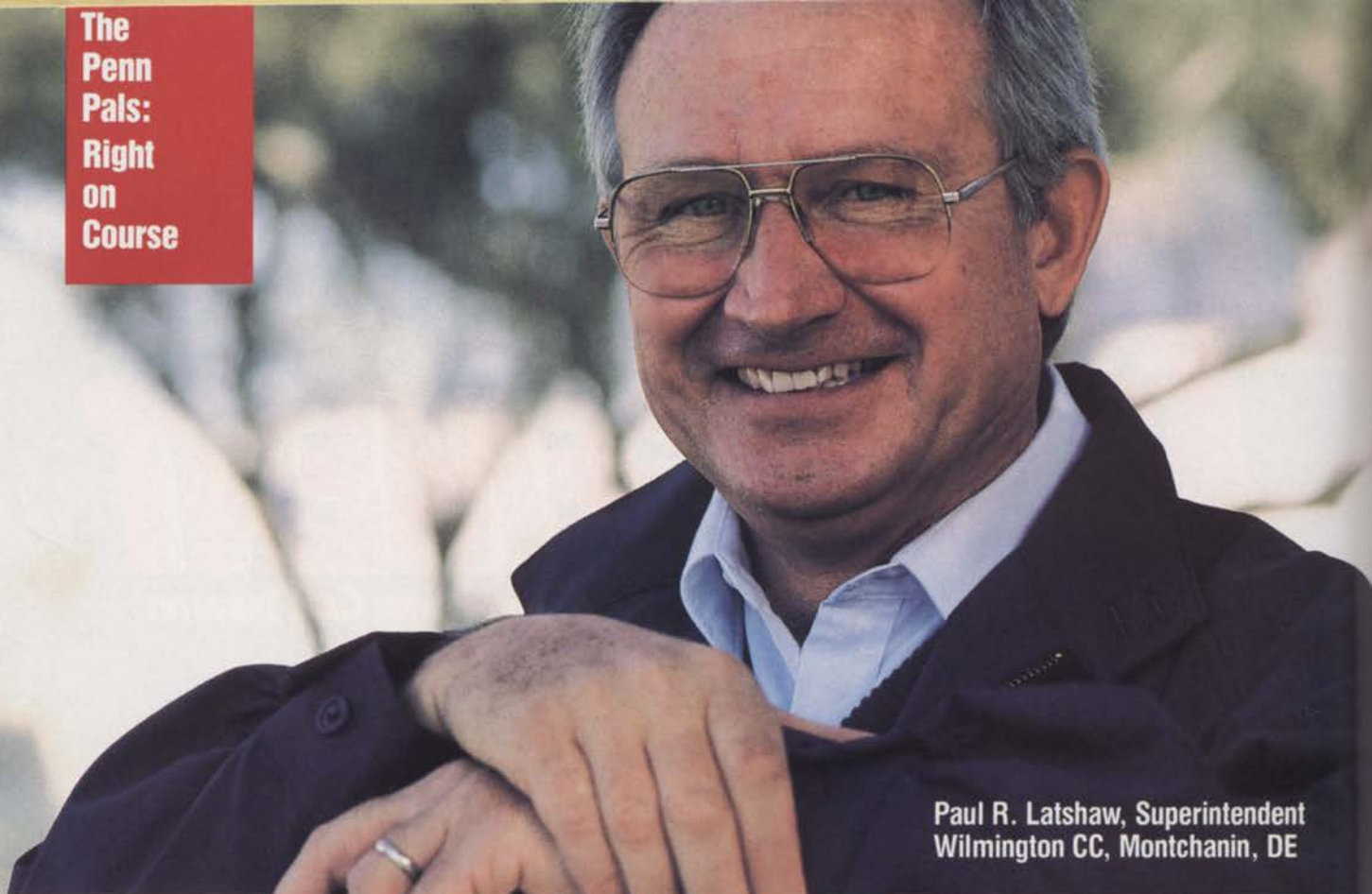


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AS WE SEE IT

JERRY ROCHE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



'B+' from customers: room for improvement

Are your clients happy with your performance as a lawn or landscaping service? Are the members of your golf club, or the golfers who visit your course regularly, happy with its condition? Are the people who play on your athletic fields, their coaches, their spectators and their administrators happy?

Judging by a small survey we commissioned here in Cleveland, it seems that the general public is fairly happy with its lawn and landscape services. (See page 8.)

Which means that at least one segment of the green industry, in at least one part of the world, is performing its tasks admirably. (It's too bad we didn't have enough time to also survey golfers or city softball and soccer leagues. But those could be other stories, for other months.)

Though our survey's sample was small and not geographically diverse, it pretty much affirmed what we've been hearing from our lawn/landscape readers: that they're doing their best to keep customers happy by providing the needed services in a professional and timely manner.

Given the "grade" they've earned (B+), we'd give our lawn and landscape readers a "summa cum laura" degree from the School of Hard Knocks, if we could.

Not that everyone's perfect, mind you.

The other day, on my way home from work, I happened upon a familiar scene.

The sun was shining (for one of the few times this spring in this part of the world). The birds were chirping. The truck with the requisite flat-bed trailer was parked at the curb in front of a pretty suburban home. A guy was zipping back and forth with a mid-size walk-behind mower. All was right with the world.

On my way to work this morning, I went through the same neighborhood, past the same house.

I was appalled at the sight my wondering eyes beheld: this same professionally-mowed lawn was littered with long, dark,

ugly clumps of grass. What could have been the prettiest lawn in the neighborhood looked like one of the trashiest.

Don't get me wrong here: I'm not saying the lawn professional was necessarily guilty of any negligence. I'm just using this case to illustrate a point.

There certainly may have been extenuating circumstances. Maybe the guy was coming back to collect the clippings. Maybe the customer requested that he leave them. Maybe.

Or maybe, since it was a wet spring here, the guy was running behind on his route. Maybe the grass had grown unexpectedly long between mowings and he hadn't made the necessary adjustments to his schedule. Maybe he was more interested in getting on to the next lawn.

But I know this: if I were his customer and went to bed knowing that my lawn was a mess, I'd be looking around for another service the next day.

That said, I issue all our conscientious readers a well-deserved congratulations. Overall, you're doing a great job—B+ as a matter of fact.

But, in all honesty, I remind you: a B+ is not perfect. There is *always* room for improvement.

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

incorporating Lawn Care Industry

JUNE 1993 VOL. 32, NO. 6

COVER FEATURE

8 Making the grade

Our mini-survey of lawn and landscape customers shows that our industry appears to grade out well in terms of knowledge, customer satisfaction and value.

Jerry Roche, Terry McIver

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James E. Guyette

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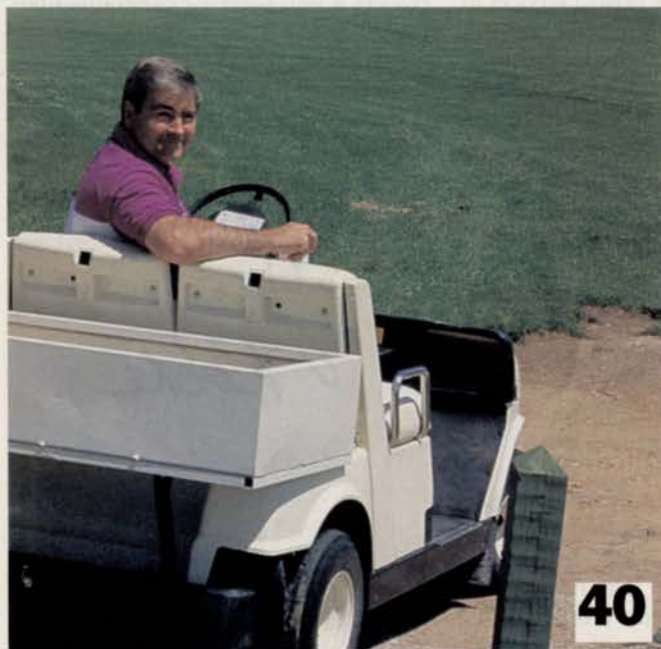
Summer heat compounds all the things that can go wrong during a day. Here's how to keep productivity high and workers happy.

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Preventive maintenance helps keep the equipment productive, and employees and bystanders safer, says Brad Yochheim.

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PRO *LAWN PLUS

THE LAWN CARE PEOPLE



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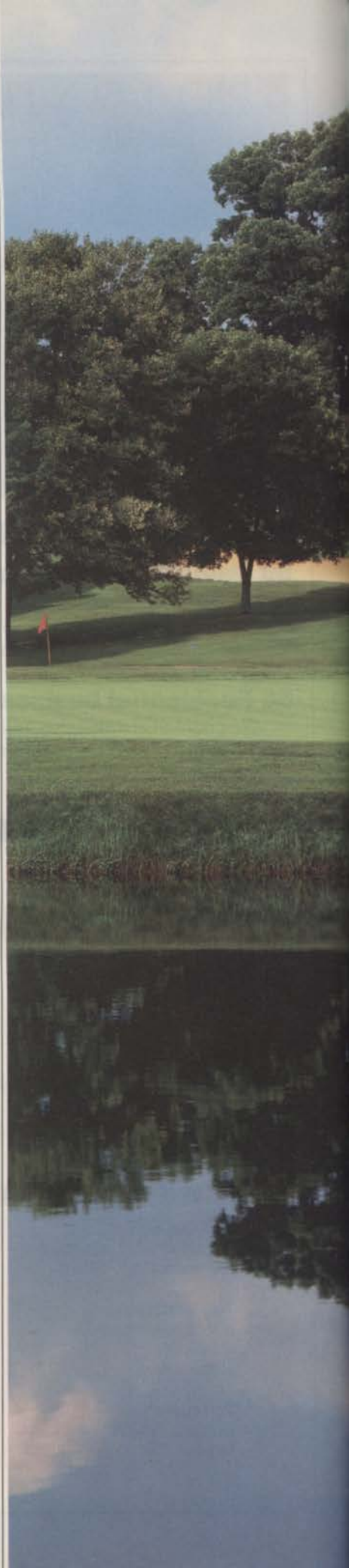
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Circle No. 126 on Reader Inquiry Card

ASK THE EXPERT

DR. BALAKRISHNA RAO

Diagnosing fungal disease

Problem: A number of spruce plants in our area are showing extensive needle drop and branch dieback. A majority of the plants have this problem, mostly on lower branches. We thought it might be due to fungal disease caused by *Cytospora*, but there are no typical symptoms of bluish-white pitching. Most plants were treated for mite and spruce gall aphid problem. This needle problem is gradually increasing. (New York)

Solution: Based on your description of the symptoms, the problem appears to be related to fungal disease. Since you were unable to observe bluish-white pitching, the problem is probably not related to canker disease caused by *Cytospora* sp.

Another disease, rhizosphaera needlecast, produces almost identical symptoms as cytospora canker. Most likely you are dealing with the needlecast disease caused by *Rhizosphaera kalkhoffii*.

This fungus also spreads from lower branches upward. As the disease establishes and spreads upward, affected needles will turn yellow and then turn purple and finally defoliate. Infected two-year-old needles drop extensively in the second summer. Current-year needles may become infected in May or June, but disease doesn't become apparent until fall or the following spring. During this period the fungus produces small black fruiting bodies on the needle surface. They appear in a row along the needle length near the stomata. These can be examined using a hand lens.

Your local extension service may be able to help. Apply fungicides such as Daconil or Bordeaux mixtures when new growth starts and repeat again in late June to help manage this disease. Severely affected branches may not re-leaf, therefore consider providing selective pruning. Provide proper fertilizing, watering, mulching and pest management as needed to help improve plant health. Read and follow label specifications for better results.

Will dormant oils work on mites?

Problem: How good is dormant oil for controlling mites? If the problem is severe, can we apply low applications to clean them up? If so, what kinds of intervals? (Michigan)

Solution: The dormant oil is now preferably called horticultural oil, and is used during the growing season as well as dormant periods. Most dormant treatments will be done in mid-November through mid-March.

Among the mites, the two-spotted spider mite overwinters as a female in litter or mulch or other protected areas and is not normally found on the plant. Treating the target plants during this period is of no value.

Spruce spider mite overwinters on evergreen hosts like arbutus, juniper, hemlock and pine in the egg stage. This makes the pest very vulnerable to oil treatments. Remember that oil treatment will remove the blue color of blue spruce temporarily.

The honey locust spider mite overwinters as mature females in bark and bud crevices. Here again, a horticultural oil application should work well.

Another mite species vulnerable to "dormant" season sprays is the southern red mite. With proper coverage, this pest can be managed with oil treatments. If the infestation is severe, a second application may be beneficial. Because conditions for evaporation are poor during winter, the potential for phytotoxicity increases. Therefore, monitor pest activity in spring and reapply 2 percent oil as needed.

Remember that brands of oils from different vendors may not be the same. The quality of the oil dictates the effectiveness and/or potential phytotoxicity problems.

Pine dieback caused by disease, insects

Problem: Some of our clients' pines are showing dieback of six to eight feet terminal growth. Some of these have tunnels and frass when broken and examined and others have no dieback. We find a lot of resin droplets on twigs and at the base of needles. (Virginia)

Solution: This problem appears to be related to an insect as well as a disease. The twigs showing small tunnelling and frass are most likely caused by pine tip moth infestation. Affected terminals may show slight bending with discolored needles. This often mimics phenoxy herbicide injury and/or a disease called diplopedia tip blight caused by *Diplodia* sp.

Pine tip moths generally have one to two generations in the Midwest and four to six in the South and Western U.S. In your area, you may find this pest on Scotch, mugho, Monterey, loblolly and most other two- and three-needle pines. Apply Orthene or Cygon in middle to late April and again in mid-June when moths are active.

The twigs showing terminal dieback without the tunneling may be affected by the diplopedia tip blight disease caused by *Diplodia* sp. With a 10x hand lens, look for small black fruiting bodies, primarily at the base of the needles. Fruiting bodies may also be found on scales of two-year-old cones. This fungus mimics pine tip moth symptoms from a distance. Selectively prune affected plant parts and cones where feasible. Preferably prune when dry, and disinfect pruning tools between cuts in Lysol, diluted Clorox or rubbing alcohol to prevent further fungus spread. Apply fungicides such as Bordeaux mixture or Cleary's 3336 to help minimize disease incidence. Fungicide treatment should be made as new growth starts and before needles emerge from the sheath. Provide two to three more applications at 7- to 10-day intervals, depending upon any rainy periods.

Dr. Balakrishna Rao is Manager of Research and Technical Development for the Davey Tree Co., Kent, Ohio.

Mail questions to "Ask the Expert," LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT, 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44130. Please allow two to three months for an answer to appear in the magazine.

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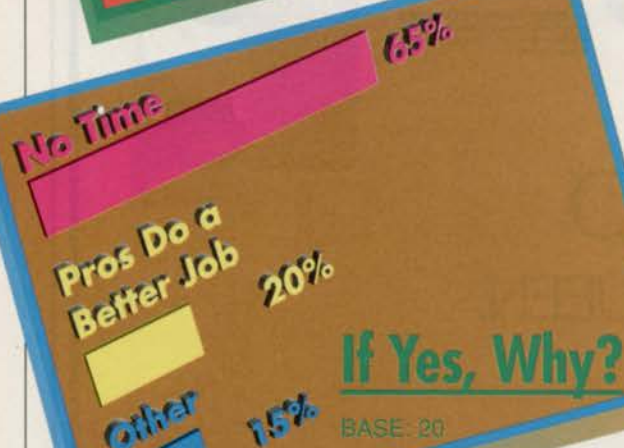


AMDRO® KILLS THE QUEEN.

19 of 20 Cleveland, Ohio, homeowners rate their lawn or landscape service as

'good' or 'excellent.'

B+



■ The nation's lawn care and landscape services are generally pleasing their customers, according to a mini-survey commissioned by LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT magazine.

Our telephone survey questioned 62 homeowners in selected areas of Cleveland, Ohio. Neighborhoods with higher per capita earnings were chosen for the survey, on the perception that people living in those neighborhoods are more likely to contract a lawn or landscape service.

Twenty of the respondents who subscribe to either a lawn care or landscape service were the basis for most of the in-depth questions. And, though the survey base was small and not geographically diverse, overall trends become immediately apparent.

Nine of the 20 subscribers gave their services a grade of "A" for excellent. An additional 10 gave grades of "B," or good, for overall service.

Finding a service—Referrals have always been (and probably always will be) an important source of business for lawn/landscape service companies. Fifty-five percent of those getting services said the company they used was recommended by their neighbor.

Direct mail also had an effect on our respondents: 35 percent contracted a service after receiving a brochure or coupon in the mail. Only one respondent made the call

after spotting a company's truck on the street.

About two-thirds of the homeowners who subscribe to a lawn/landscape service said that it is because they do not have enough time to do it themselves. About one-fifth of the respondents said they realized that professionals can do a better job than what they could do.

Grading out—The perception among lawn care and landscape businesses is that customers are very demanding of timely service, especially with the first signs of spring. This creates a spring rush that usually entails long hours on the job. Yet, among the qualities surveyed, timeliness is the most admired by customers. A full 60 percent of those surveyed gave a grade of "A" for excellent in the "timely" category. An additional 35 percent gave a "B."

Professional lawn/landscape companies also rated fairly high in:

- expertise,
- communication with customers,
- problem-solving and
- creating a lawn that is better than before the customer started the service.

Overall, lawn/landscape companies did well in every category, although 10 percent of the respondents gave them Ds in "personnel" and "value."

Why, why not?—Six of the 20 respondents said they started the service because the yard was too difficult to take care of