

With All The Abuse Your Turf Takes, Who Needs Root Pruning?



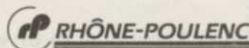
You know the story. The guys who swing an iron the way a lumberjack wields an ax are the same guys who yell the loudest when weeds give them a bad lie. So, with all the abuse your turf takes, the last thing you need is root-pruning from your herbicide. That's why you need CHIPCO® RONSTAR® brand G herbicide. University root pull studies show that CHIPCO® RONSTAR® G works without pruning turf roots. That means healthier roots and stronger, more durable turf. Best of all, just one pre-emergence application provides season-long control of 25 tough broadleaf and grassy

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Circle No. 145 on Reader Inquiry Card

'LEAST MANAGEMENT TIPS'

CONSIDERATION	NORMAL MANAGEMENT	'LEAST MANAGEMENT'
Scarification	2 to 3 times per year	as needed
Mowing	twice a week	once a week
Edging	once a month	twice a year
Irrigation	supplemental	supplemental
Fertilization	spring, summer, fall	spring, fall
Overseeding	late fall	none (heavy fall fertilization)
Weed Control	pre-/post-emergence herbicides	pre-emergence herbicides
Insect/Disease Control	as needed	none
Aeration	2 to 3 times per year	as needed for compaction

Source: the author

Diamond-Dry, which can be raked into the infield mix to bring a too-wet field into playable condition.

Mowing frequency is determined by budget. Though most turf managers can't devote time to creating a striping pattern in the grass, all alter directions with each mowing to maintain a cleaner cut.

Where funds are available, the infield and skinned areas receive some type of supplemental irrigation. Even the money-strapped facilities have found that it's more costly to rebuild a turf field than to keep it alive by watering.

Soil testing once a year for pH and fertility levels is a wise budgetary move. The test results help tailor fertilization programs to specific needs, possibly cutting

Even the money-strapped facilities have found that it's more costly to rebuild a turf field than to keep it alive by watering.

fertility needs.

The optimum time to verticut and dethatch bermudagrass is during the playing season, which is advantageous for the turf but not good for the playing schedule. A compromise is often made, tackling these procedures only as neces-

sary, and timing them as late in the season as possible, but early enough so the grass is still actively growing. Fertilizer is a big variable in maintenance programs. Turf managers with smaller budgets use the slow-release fertilizer products to stretch fertilization benefits over a longer period.

—Leif Dickinson is assistant turf course superintendent for the Los Angeles Turf Club and Santa Anita Park. He is a graduate of the University of Maine, completing the program in horticulture and sports turf management at Mount San Antonio College, and a member of the Sports Turf Managers Association. He extends special thanks to Merton Johnson and Jeff Barnes for their assistance.

Use customer complaints to secure company loyalty

■ If one of your customers—whether he be a landscape client, a member of the golf course, a citizen using one of your athletic fields—has a complaint, you have a tremendous opportunity to build customer loyalty, but it depends on how you choose to satisfy that complaint.

A survey by the U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs shows that whenever customer complaints are successfully resolved, 73 percent of the complainers would return to buy that product or ser-

vice again.

Conversely, when customers had minor problems but did not complain, nearly 67 percent would not buy the same product or service again. The three reasons mentioned most often for not complaining were:

- Customers felt complaining wasn't worth their time and effort
- They believed complaining wouldn't do any good;
- They didn't know how to or where

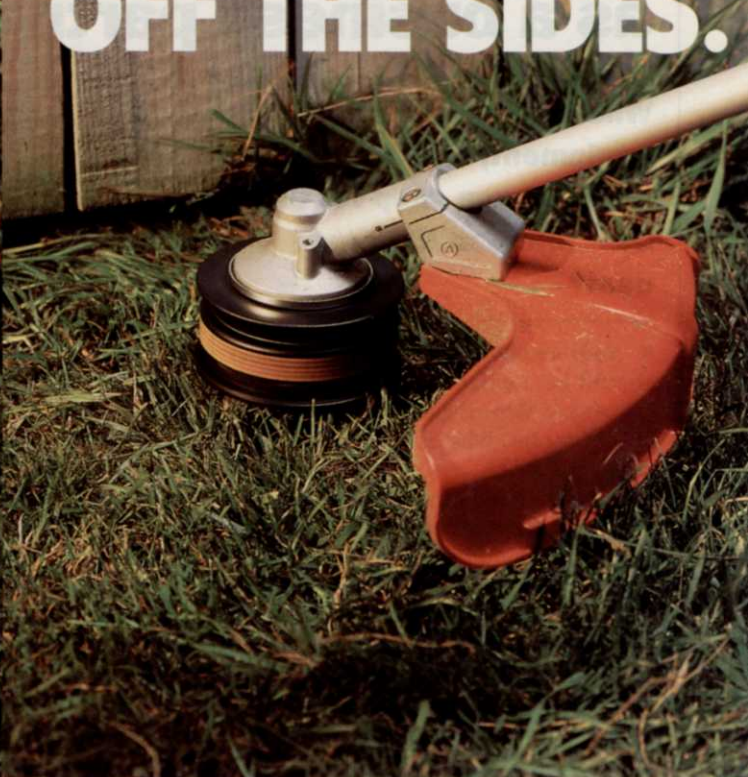
to address complaints.

To handle complaints successfully, and better insure customer loyalty, you should:

- 1) Listen to the customer's entire complaint. Don't interrupt; let them say all that's on their minds;
- 2) Sympathize with them, and be sure to communicate sincerity;
- 3) Avoid justifying or making excuses; the customer doesn't want to hear any excuses;
- 4) Ask questions;
- 5) Agree on a course of action;
- 6) Inform and involve others who need to know;
- 7) Monitor the progress in resolving the complaint.

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Picking the right dealer as a business partner

When you need new equipment, chemicals or seed, do you shop for the best price, or the best deal?

■ Your equipment/seed/chemical dealer should be a partner in your business, experts say. What is good for your business is good for his. What is bad for your business is bad for his.

Nowhere else in the country is a landscaper more of a "partner" to his dealer than at KEI Enterprises in Cudahy, Wis. Rich Wilbert is KEI's landscape division supervisor and Rick Rollo is director of KEI's commercial equipment dealership. They talked, together, about their relationship during the Associated Landscape Contractors of America annual conference last November.

Here are the points, in descending order of importance, most landscapers admit they *sell* their services:

- 1) on quality that the customer establishes;
- 2) on performance;
- 3) on reliability;
- 4) on availability; and
- 5) on price.

Here are the points, in descending

order, most landscapers *buy* their equipment, according to Rollo:

- 1) on price;
- 2) on availability;
- 3) on reliability;
- 4) on performance; and
- 5) on quality.

Note anything unusual with the two above lists? "Eighty to ninety percent of all the people I deal with buy exactly the *opposite* of the way they sell," observes Rollo. "This needs to be reversed. You need to buy the way you sell."

For instance, "you should demand your partner train your people," Rollo continues. "Make him aware of that right away—that's part of the partnership. We, as a distributor, feel that if we get a fair price for a machine, we have a responsibility to the customer."

Rollo and Wilbert cite eight keys to picking the proper dealer:

● **Who and what is available?** This includes the types of equipment and the people you want to deal with. Go talk to a few to see if you can build a relationship.

● **Are replacement parts and service a part of the deal?** "Ask your salesman at your time of purchase for one of its parts. If they don't have it, you may be out of luck when your equipment breaks down," Wilbert suggests.

● **What programs are available?** What



Rollo: You can find some imaginative manufacturers.



Wilbert: Out of luck when equipment breaks down?

kind of financing, tax-free or tax-supported rebates, leases, national and regional programs? "There are some imaginative manufacturers out there," notes Rollo.

● **Is back-up equipment available?** What will the dealer do for you? What warranties will be in effect, both pre- and post-breakdown?

● **What about demonstrations?** "Can you take it to your site and operate it where you will be using it?" Rollo asks. "At that time, you can easily involve your operators. If an operator doesn't buy into the program, he'll do anything he can to destroy the equipment."

● **Does the dealer have references?** "Dealers will tell you their machines can do a lot of things," Wilbert observes. "You need someone who can tell you if the equipment can be used in a situation similar to yours."

● **What's the warranty?** Length and type are good indications of how much confidence a manufacturer has in a piece of equipment. "If this person's your partner, he'll go to bat for you on warranties," says Rollo.

● **Does the salesperson inspire trust, knowledge and understanding?** "He must understand your business and your applications," Wilbert says.

Manufacturers are just beginning to offer their dealer/distributors more assistance in customer relations, the pair notes. For instance, Rollo will ship or air-freight a part that he doesn't keep in stock as an added service to his valued customers.

Finally, remember that your dealer is in the business of making a profit. And if he or she can make a fair profit on the equipment or chemicals or seed being sold to you, he can afford to offer the service that goes with it.

—Jerry Roche

Maintenance prolongs mower life

■ If you want your lawn mowers to last, treat their engines with the same respect you show your car's engine, says a Penn State University machinery specialist.

Read the owner's manuals and follow the directions for maintenance, says James Garthe, instructor in agricultural and biological engineering. Pay strict attention to the viscosity and quality of oil used in the engine.

"The wrong oil shortens your engine's life by causing overheating and excessive wear on valve guides, seals and main bearings," he says. "Use high quality engine oils containing additives that buffer corrosive acids generated during fuel combustion."

Keeping the air filter clean also extends your mower's life.

"If the air filter is dirty, minute particles of silicon can eventually get into the internal moving parts," Garthe says. "A dirty air filter also keeps air from getting to the engine and affects the air/fuel ratio that governs combustion. The engine has to work harder, wasting energy and fouling the spark plug with deposits."

Other hints:

● Check spark plugs regularly. Carefully scrape deposits from the plug with a pocket knife or wire brush.

● Change oil while it's still warm to drain suspended contaminants.

● If you keep your mowers in a damp location, consider coating them with a silicon spray to keep moisture out and discourage rust. Covering with a plastic tarp also keeps moisture—and rodents—out.



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Halting soil erosion on your landscape sites



This roadside planting was done with conservation in mind.

The old adage about an ounce of prevention will help you avoid erosion-related environmental problems.

by Fred Kelly



A thick turf cover protects underlying soil on slopes.

■ Soil erosion is a landscape manager's nightmare. Not only can it cause unsightly gullies and sediment bars around your site, but it can also result in off-site damage to adjoining properties and pollution of surface waters.

The problem can be worsened when a site has been fertilized or treated with pesticides. The nutrients and agrichemicals may adsorb to the soil and leave the site with the sediment.

Many thousands of dollars are spent annually to correct the effects of soil erosion. Believe it or not, sediment is the number one pollutant of surface waters in this country. It makes a lot more sense to prevent soil erosion in the first place.

The rate of erosion from a particular site can be predicted with a reasonable degree of accuracy. The Universal Soil-Loss Equation (USLE) and Wind Erosion Equation (WEQ) combine critical erosion factors to yield an average soil loss, expressed in tons per acre per year.

Naturally, the soil type at a given site is the starting point in beginning the erosion estimation process. Different soils have different tolerance for development and disturbance. The Soil Survey for your county can provide a wealth of informa-

tion on the characteristics of local soils. The County Soil Survey and information on both the USLE and WEQ can be obtained from your local USDA Soil Conservation Service or Soil Conservation District office.

Each site, however is unique in regard to erosion potential. The landscape professional can become proficient at recognizing potential high-risk areas just by using a little common sense.

1) Generally, sandier soils will erode more easily than finer-textured soils.

2) Slopes that are steeper and longer will erode more severely than flatter, shorter slopes.

3) Where vegetation is spotty and not providing a contiguous cover, soil will erode. But with a vigorous turf cover, the underlying soil is protected.

4) When rainfall-induced runoff flows across the site in a concentrated fashion, such as in a natural depression or draw, it will often speed up and erode much more than where the water is flowing in a widely-dispersed sheet at a slower speed. Concentrated flows cause gullies.

5) Lastly, parts of the country that have more annual rainfall will generally pose a greater risk than low rainfall areas.

This is an over-simplification of the science of erosion prediction. But it's worth some consideration because landscape managers can help themselves, their clients and the environment by thinking about prevention before correction is necessary.

Plan ahead—Any project you undertake should have a logical sequence of construction. This sequence should not only consider contractor or material availability, but also getting any erosion-control structures such as diversions, basins,

drains or swales in place and seeded before the structure will handle runoff.

● Planned pipe outlets should be stabilized with rock rip-rap or other suitable materials before concentrated runoff will come through.

● Rough grading should be planned to prevent diverting runoff into possible trouble spots.

● Don't clear portions of a wooded or well-vegetated site until absolutely necessary.

Keep it under cover—Nothing prevents soil erosion better than vegetation. The denser and more sod-like, the better. Good seeding, liming and fertilizing practices make the process go a whole lot quicker.

● Placing mulch over a seeding is mandatory. Make it clean straw or salt hay, at a rate of at least three bales per 1000 sq. ft.

● If a site needs to be protected only temporarily, use a quick-establishing annual grass like annual ryegrass. In some cases, a heavy application of mulch held in place with an environmentally-friendly tacking agent can also suffice.

● Low-maintenance slopes on a site should be protected with more permanent, wood mulches along with spreading perennial groundcovers. The Soil Conservation Service has developed some superior cultivars like 'Chemung' crownvetch and 'Lathco' flatpea.

Watch your back—Any erosion problems on your site may be causing havoc off



Stabilize pipe outlets with rock rip-rap or other suitable materials.



FACTORS AFFECTING EROSION

FACTORS IN WEED

FACTORS IN USE

FACTORS IN WEED	FACTORS IN USE
Soil composition or water infiltration	Soil type
Vegetation density or cover	Length and frequency of slopes
Erosion control methods	Soil erosion in the watershed
Soil moisture	Topography of the watershed



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FACTORS AFFECTING EROSION

FACTORS IN USLE:

rainfall
soil type

length and steepness of slopes
crop cover or groundcover
agricultural factors, like contouring

FACTORS IN WEQ:

soil susceptibility to wind movement
unsheltered distance along prevailing winds
soil moisture
windspeed
vegetative cover
ridge roughness



Soil erosion ruined this tennis court.

your site. This results in an environmental problem, and often a public relations nightmare.

Be aware of what your practices are doing to the lands and waters beyond the site. Consider waters coming into your site from outside. Be prepared to handle the storm flows you may be getting from upstream or uphill. Consider your neighbors and take care of the site the way

you'd like to see it if you were outside the fence.

Soil Conservation Service and local Soil Conservation District personnel can help you. Publications are also available.

The Soil Conservation Service is in the phone book listed under "U.S. Government, Department of Agriculture." Your Soil Conservation District is listed under "County Government."

For more information, contact your local office or the National Association of Conservation Districts, P.O. Box 855, League City, TX 77574-0855.

—The author is Assistant State Resource Conservationist for the Soil Conservation Service in New Jersey.

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