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# LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

## Bio Green believes in quality service; making the sale, too

**Northern Virginia firm growing in spite of being on high end of prices.**

■ Until a customer signs the check, you really don't have a customer.

That's true even in lawn care—especially in lawn care—believes David Schrader who's keenly aware of the cosmic connection between getting paid and staying in business.

"You have to look at lawn care from two ends at once—quality service and sales. You need both," says Schrader.

Some other Schrader tenets include:

● **Charging enough to make a profit.** "There probably are only one or two companies in our market more expensive than us," he says.

● **Giving customers exactly what they want.** "We offer organic programs, pesticide-free programs and traditional programs, but 99 percent of our customers still want nice, green lawns," he says.

● **Having the same technician treat the same lawns whenever possible.** "How else is a technician going to know that that same south-facing, sunny slope in a client's lawn is going to have that grub problem," he says.

Schrader and Mark Stoeckel operate Bio Green Lawn Care which, this season, will treat more than 2,000 home lawns in addition to providing tree/shrub care and sprinkler services to several hundred other northern Virginia property owners.

Of the two, Stoeckel has more lawn care experience. He worked with several other firms prior to helping start Bio Green Lawn Care six years ago. Schrader, a 1984 University of Maryland graduate (agronomy specializing in soil conservation) likes sales. It shows. He thinks \$1 million in sales is realistic for Bio Green this season. It served about 2500 lawn and shrub customers in 1992.

"We try to drill the concept of quality, quality, quality into our company. Certainly, we want our customers to recognize the quality of our service, but we've still got to sell and sell," says Schrader.

That means no estimates dangling from door hangers. No vague price quotes over the telephone.

The best way to sell a quality, higher-priced service, says Schrader, is face to face. "If a prospect isn't going to sit down for 15 minutes and talk with us, they're not going to hire us," he says.

In other words, if Schrader walks a lawn with a potential client and gives them



David Schrader, left, likes sales, while Mark Stoeckel oversees production.

all the reasons why they should hire Bio Green, then he's most definitely going to ask for the check.

Similarly, Bio Green technicians develop friendly, workable, face-to-face relationships with customers, to the extent that time and schedules allow anyway.

"People hire lawn care companies because they don't know what to do," says Schrader. "That's why our technicians always try to do three things with each customer. We tell them what we did. We check off what they should do, and we tell them what's supposed to happen.

"That's always a lot better than leaving behind a computer printout of your visit."

Schrader's optimism is genuine and growing. His older brother, Steve, until recently a restaurateur, is joining Bio Green. "He's going to be pushing a spreader. We want him to get to know what we do," says Schrader with a wicked grin.

Also, the company, with offices in Manassas and Ashburn, eyes an expansion south into Fredericksburg, Va., in 1994.

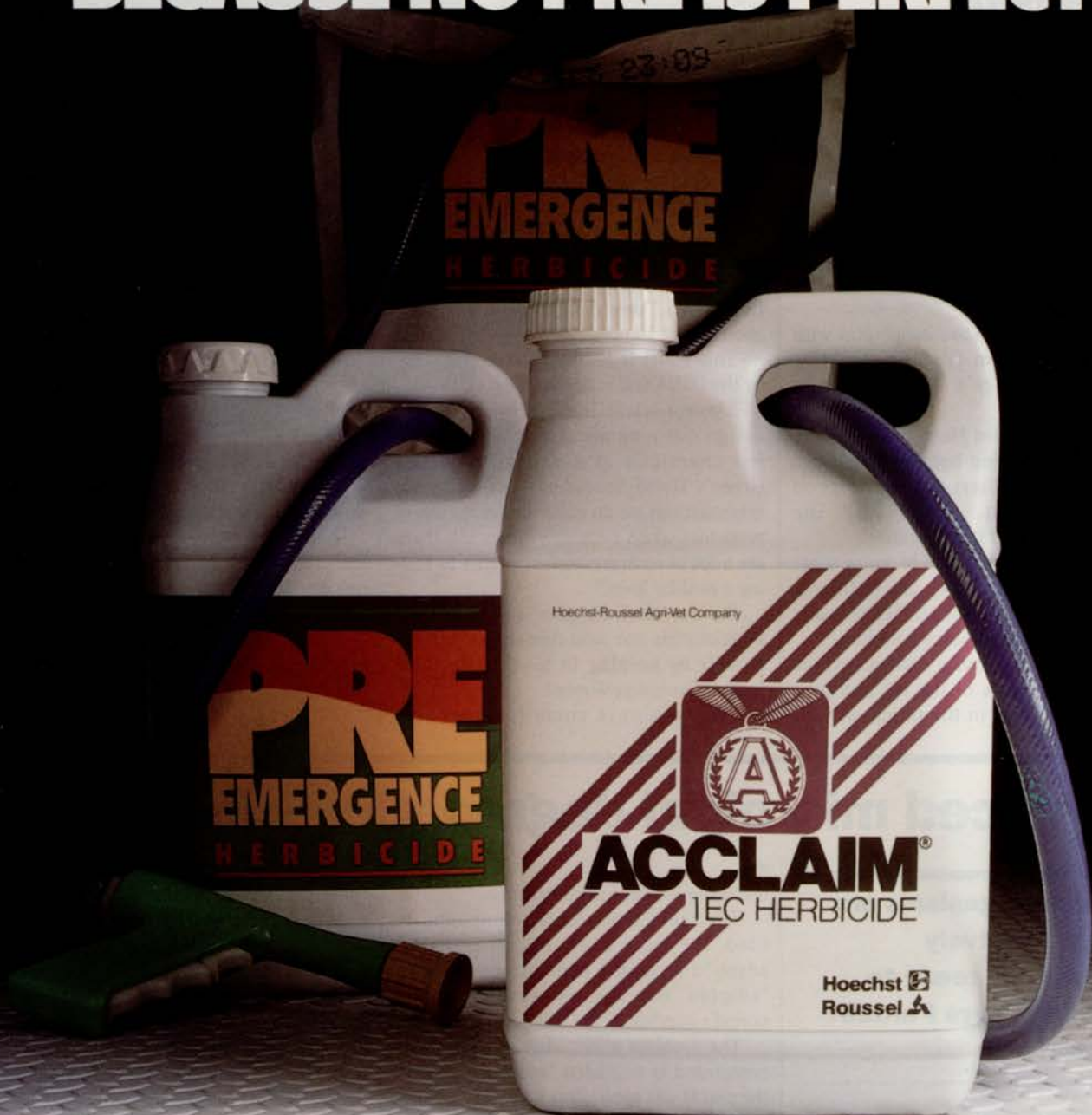
—Ron Hall



BioGreen Lawn Care staff must be able to give clients a 'menu' of programs.



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Circle No. 117 on Reader Inquiry Card



## Extension service program to educate homeowners about proper lawn care is a winner in Va.

■ Bio Green Lawn Care cooperates with the Prince William (Va.) Cooperative Extension Service's Water Quality Program.

Program specialist Marc Aveni says the program is educating homeowners about the impact of fertilizers and pesticides on the environment, specifically the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

"We want homeowners to know what they're doing before they use fertilizers and pesticides," says Aveni. "We're really looking at non-point source pollution."

The extension service conducts three two-hour field days in the fall and four two-hour field days in the spring on vari-

ous lawn/landscape care topics.

It's also enlisted 60 volunteer lawns. The homeowners have agreed to follow all program recommendations. Information on the amount and type of materials they use is being recorded, along with their results.

After a season, some of these homeowners will allow their lawns to be used as "demonstration lawns." Aveni says there are about 10 now.

This effort is jointly funded by the USDA and extension.

"As our name implies, we design our programs using as few chemicals as possible," says Bio Green's David Schrader. "But we're not extremists so we do make judicious use of pesticides when necessary. After all, there are a lot of environmental benefits to having a healthy lawn."

Partner Mark Stoeckel says lawn care professionals can help themselves immeasurably by keeping in touch with their local extension personnel.

"We've always come to them as a



source of information whenever we run into problems. They've helped us tremendously in our business," says Stoeckel.

Aveni, for his part, thinks the professional lawn care industry—and he singled out Bio Green—has been supportive of the Water Quality Program.

"They know that what's good for the environment is also good for business," says Aveni.

—Ron Hall

## Enhanced microbial degradation—it's real!

**Soil micro-organisms are 'hungry, relatively immobile and ready to reproduce,' says Purdue educator.**

■ Soil microbes are hidden, but they're real. You should know about them.

Indeed, there may be as many as 500 million micro-organisms (7,000 to 10,000 different species) in one gram of soil, typically clustered in small clumps or micro-colonies on/near food sources, says Purdue University microbiologist Dr. Ron Turco.

Turco describes them as "the powerhouse in the soil, the driving force controlling what really goes on in the soil system."

No wonder then that the chemical industry has a term for what they do to pesticides: enhanced biodegradation.

Soil micro-organisms, through their amazing reproductive abilities, can develop populations capable of rapidly breaking

down some chemical compounds.

The more a particular compound is used, the more likely microbes are to adapt to it. As the populations of these "adapted" microbes increase, the compound's survival in the soil decreases.

The problem arises when the chemical compound is degraded before it controls the pest it was applied for.

"When you apply some pesticide to the soil, bacteria view that pesticide as a free lunch," says Turco. "They're very happy to see the arrival of the chemicals. It's a much more readily available material than what they're normally living on which is the slow decomposition of organic matter in the soil."

Turco says to reduce incidences of enhanced biodegradation:

- rotate different chemicals in different classes, and
- limit the use of soil-active prophylactic chemicals.

In other words, when

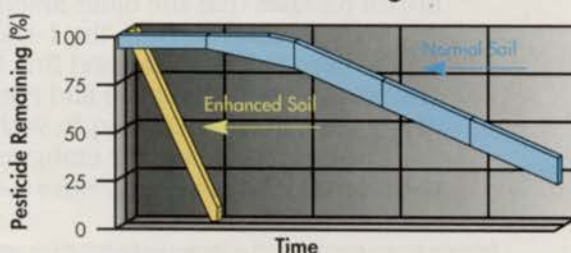
chemicals are used to treat problems as they occur, rather than making blanket preventive applications, they stand a much smaller chance of accelerating the biodegradation process.

Turco presented much of the above information at the Golf Course Superintendents Association America Conference in Anaheim, Calif., this past January.

In answer to a question from the floor, he said the potential for enhanced biodegradation is just as significant in thatch as it is in soil.

—Ron Hall

Enhanced vs normal degradation





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**REEMAY**



## 'Moments of truth' separate the good, the bad, the ugly in service

**Doing only what the customer expects, even if you do it well, will get you only a 'C' from a client.**

■ Why are some lawn care companies able to charge more for their services and still build market share while competitors struggle?

Service. They make it easy for customers to do business with them. That's what Ron Zemke, a nationally known business consultant, says.

He also says that businesses that place a premium on service:

- 1) charge, on average, 10 percent more for their basic products and services.
- 2) grow market share at 6 percent compared to 1 to 2 percent for those who don't.
- 3) have a return on sales of about 12 percent compared to 3 to 4 percent for those who don't.

Zemke this past February led about 250 green industry professionals through the building of "service-centered" organizations at the Associated Landscape Contractors Association (ALCA) Executive Forum in Tucson, Ariz.

Crucial to service success, says Zemke, is how well an organization manages the "moments of truth." He describes a "moment" as *any* time a customer comes in contact with some aspect of your business and has an opportunity to judge your company's service quality.

### *First in a series on Zemke and quality service*

If your organization does everything a customer expects, that client gives you only a "C" on their report card. If the client has an experience with your company that annoys them, then your company gets a "D" or "F" grade, he says.

Your organization must develop and put "enhancers" into its service to develop a loyal and satisfied client. Give clients more than they expect to get an "A."

"The only way you learn about these moments of truth is by setting down and asking the right questions of your customers," says Zemke.

- ✓ What is it you expect from us?
- ✓ What is it you've experienced from our organization?
- ✓ What has made you unhappy with our service?
- ✓ What has been an exceptional experience you've had in dealing with us or someone like us?
- ✓ And, what did we do to make that a memorable experience?

For information about Ron Zemke: Performance Research Associates, 821 Marquette Ave., Suite 1820, Minneapolis, MN 55402; (612) 338-8523.

—Ron Hall



**Zemke: do more than is expected**

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# HOT TOPICS



Ken Gerlack



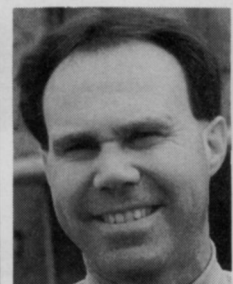
Twyla Hansen



Tim Hiers



Bill Prest



Mark Schlossberg



Brian Storm

## Reader panel will advise on green industry

### Six LM readers selected for special committee on editorial quality.

■ Ken Gerlack, Twyla Hansen, Tim Hiers, Bill Prest, Mark Schlossberg and Brian Storm have been named to LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT's first "Reader Advisory Panel," to serve 14-month terms.

In their roles, the six will be responsible for grading recent issues of LM as to editorial content and usefulness. They will also be called upon to suggest topics for future articles and will occasionally appear as contributing authors.

"We are excited about our new affiliation with these six key readers, who have impressed us as having their fingers on the pulse of the green industry," notes LM editor-in-chief Jerry Roche. "This is another way the magazine has devised to serve its readership more efficiently. We are looking forward to working with all of them."

● **Gerlack** founded Contra Costa Landscaping in Martinez, Calif. in 1970. He is active in the Associated Landscape Contractors of America and the California Landscape Contractors Association, in

which he was awarded a Life Member award earlier this year.

Gerlack holds a degree in ornamental horticulture from Cal Poly/San Luis Obispo.

● **Hansen** is grounds manager at Nebraska Wesleyan University and curator of Alice Abel Arboretum in Lincoln, Neb. She has held those positions since 1982. She is a former officer and board member for the Sports Turf Managers Association, the Nebraska Turfgrass Foundation and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum. She is also chair of the Lincoln Community Forestry Advisory Board.

Hansen received her bachelor's degree in horticulture from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

● **Hiers** has just been named to the staff of Collier's Reserve in Naples, Fla., after serving eight years as golf course manager at John's Island Club, Vero Beach, Fla. At John's Island, Hiers supervised 54 golf holes. He had previously been superintendent at Quail Ridge in Boynton Beach, Fla. and at Sun Tree in Melbourne, Fla.

Hiers, a Certified Golf Course Superintendent, is past president of the Florida GCSA and was Distinguished Service Award winner in 1986.

● **Prest** started working at Springvale

Country Club in North Olmsted, Ohio, at the age of 14. He has been superintendent there for 25 years, and is now superintendent and assistant general manager. Prest is a member of the national GCSAA and the Northern Ohio Chapter of the GCSAA, where he is a member of the Employment Relations Committee.

● **Schlossberg**, who has a degree in agronomy from the University of Maryland, is president of Pro-Lawn Plus in Baltimore, Md.

He is a member of the Maryland Alliance for the Responsible Regulation of Pesticides and on the board of directors of the Maryland Turfgrass Council.

● **Storm**, owner of Terrascaping Inc. in Birch Run, Mich., is immediate past president of the National Landscape Association. He has a degree in landscape and nursery management from Michigan State University.

Besides being president of the Michigan Nursery & Landscape Association in 1986, Storm is also active on the American Association of Nurserymen's public relations committee.

Six new panel members, to serve 18 months, will be named in June, 1994 at the end of the current panel's terms.

### ELSEWHERE

**Scientists waver  
on 2,4-D hazard,  
page 59**

**LCO takes his  
stand in court,  
page 59**

**Forestry comes to  
urban horticulture,  
page 62**



# Panel: 2,4-D, cancer link 'weak'

**Report from scientific panel this summer to say relationship of herbicide, cancer is 'weakly possible,' and 'weakly suggestive.'**

**WASHINGTON**—A panel of scientists is expected to tell the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that evidence suggesting 2,4-D is a carcinogen is limited.

The EPA's 10-member Special Joint Committee on the Weight of Evidence of Carcinogenicity of 2,4-D convened, in a two-day meeting here in early April, to assess several published connections between exposure to 2,4-D and cancers in dogs and farm workers.

It zeroed in on the results of National Cancer Institute studies on farm workers in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa; a key dog study; and a continuing investigation of

the health of chemical manufacturing plant workers provided by Dow Chemical Co. (now DowElanco).

The panel will issue a report by late June. After the report is presented to EPA Administrator Carol Browner, the agency will make a decision whether to put the herbicide in special review or take other measures to restrict its use.

Although Sheila Zahn, the principle author of one of the NCI studies, defended the study's quality, the scientists decided the evidence didn't appear to be as definitive.

Five of the scientists felt the evidence was "weakly suggestive" of a herbicide-cancer link, three opted in favor of the term "weakly possible" and one voted for a "possible" link.

Dr. Genevieve Matanoski, Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, said she felt the human epidemiologic data "in and of itself is very weakly suggestive."

She also pointed out that the dog study linking non-Hodkins lymphoma to 2,4-D exposure stands alone and hasn't been confirmed by other studies. The panel agreed that 2,4-D was "an improbable animal carcinogen" based on the toxicological data.

Several of the scientists said they felt the epidemiological studies didn't explain 2,4-D's mechanism of action.

The scientists agreed that more data will probably be needed regarding multiple chemical exposures to farm workers.

Daniel Wartenberg, Environmental Health Division of the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute, said while the evidence against 2,4-D isn't compelling, it should still be considered.

2,4-D is believed to be the third most used pesticide in the United States. About 70 million pounds are used each year in agriculture, turfgrass, rights-of-ways, etc., says the EPA.

—Ron Hall

## Oklahoma LCO and TruGreen square off over 'non-compete'

**OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla.**—When Donn Smith bought his ServiceMaster Lawn Care (SMLC) franchise in Oklahoma City, Okla. in 1989, he figured he had a winner. He was right.

Central Oklahoma's economy was looking up, and lawn care was one of its bright spots. Contractors were building homes and the homes were selling. Curb appeal had returned to the oil patch.

In fact, Smith says his operation was one of the top SMLC franchises in the country. Early in 1991, he also bought the TruGreen operation in his market area. (By this time TruGreen, and all its branches, had become a part of ServiceMaster Consumer Services.)

In making the deal, Smith had signed another SMLC franchise agreement, one containing a non-competition clause. The clause was one of the conditions of the sale, he says.

Now this clause is the focus of a legal battle between Smith and TruGreen.

That's because on May 23, 1992, TruGreen bought ChemLawn, including a ChemLawn operation that competed against Smith's SMLC franchise. Within weeks of the TruGreen/ChemLawn merger, TruGreen approached Smith with an

offer, but Smith says he didn't like the terms of the offer.

"All I wanted was a reasonable settlement," he maintains.

"After that, things just went sour," says Smith, who says he just wants to run his business as usual.

In July, 1992, Smith says his attorney called TruGreen and asked them to either settle the matter of a SMLC franchise (Smith's company) competing against a parent company operation (ChemLawn) or face the possibility of a lawsuit.

But TruGreen, Smith says, beat him to the punch and sued him in the Chancery Court of Tennessee, Memphis. TruGreen's complaint charges Smith with breaking his franchise agreement and asks for a judgement for franchise royalties plus costs and attorney fees. The complaint maintains that TruGreen is not a wholly-owned subsidiary of ServiceMaster Consumer Services, and that the franchise agreement that Smith signed "is for a non-exclusive franchise."

Smith's counter-claim, requesting a jury trial, seeks a total of \$4 million in compensatory and punitive damages from TruGreen Limited Partnership, The ServiceMaster Company Limited Partner-

ship and ServiceMaster Consumer Services L.P.

The counter claim maintains that the "company-owned" ChemLawn in Oklahoma City competes against his franchise in violation of the non-competition clause he signed when he purchased the local TruGreen branch.

—Ron Hall

## GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS

### MAY

**April 23-Oct. 17: IGA Stuttgart Expo '93** (int'l. garden show), Germany. Contact: Walter Gehring, (0711) 25709-0.

**18: Florida Chapter, Sports Turf Managers Association meeting and tour**, Palm Beach, Fla. Polo Grounds. Contact: John Mascaro, (305) 938-7477; or Ed Birch, (305) 938-0217.

**20: Pre-Season Football Turf Maintenance Clinic**, Notre Dame University, Notre Dame, Ind. Contact: Sports Turf Managers Association/Midwest Chapter, (708) 439-4727.

### JUNE

**3: Rutgers Turfgrass Research Field Day**, Freehold, N.J. Contact: Edmund Milewski, (201) 285-8300.

*continued on page 62*



# LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

INCORPORATING LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

## RESOURCES FOR LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS

# GOLF & TURF

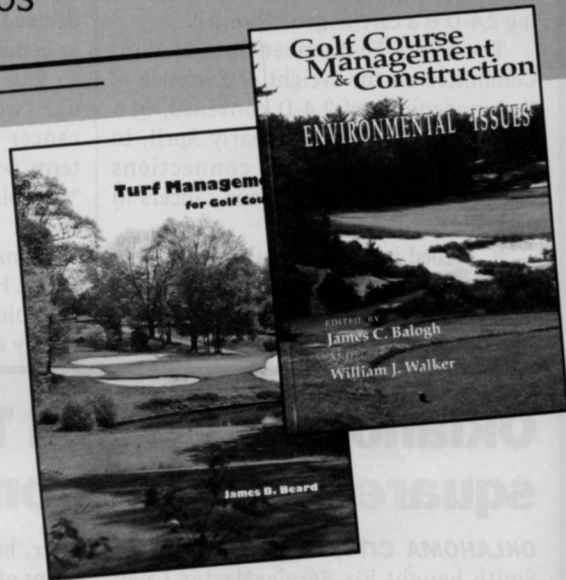
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**Turf Management for Golf Courses** by James Beard  
Written by the eminent turfgrass researcher, this USGA sponsored text is an ideal reference and "how to" guide for your bookshelf. This comprehensive guide details all phases of golf course operations including course design and construction, turf management, course administration, irrigation, equipment, and disease and pest control. 642pp. BK-615-\$74.00



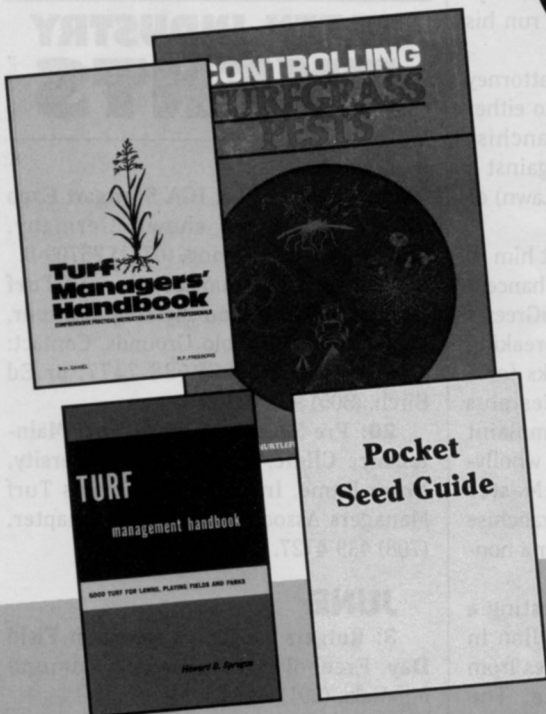
### Turf

**Turf Managers' Handbook** by Daniel and Freeborg  
2nd. ed. Totally revised and updated, this valuable and practical guide targets the turf practitioner. Chapters on grasses, growth regulators and diseases have had extensive modifications. Innovations resulting from research and practice have been added to reflect the current techniques available for turf manager. 437pp. BK-110-\$39.95

**Controlling Turfgrass Pests** by Shurtleff, Fermanian, Randell  
New comprehensive guide provides the most up-to-the-minute information available on the identification, biology, control and management of every type of turfgrass pest. 449pp. BK-220-\$56.95

**Turf Management Handbook** by Howard Sprague  
This is a practical guide to turf care under both healthy and poor turf conditions. Chapters cover turf in cooler and warmer regions, fertilizer use, regular turf care, weed and disease control, and special turf problems. Useful seasonal schedules for management of turf areas. 255pp. BK-620-\$26.60

**Landscape Management's Pocket Seed Guide**  
You'll refer to this handy guide again and again. It provides sections on why seed?, overseeding, Florida study, adaptability and disease susceptibility. Section 2 covers the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program results about perennial rye grass, Kentucky blue, Bentgrass, and Fineleaf fescues. Quick supplier listing included. 36pp. BK-655-\$10.00



#### **Pocket Seed Guide**