

LO  
OVERHEAD

- OPERATES OUT OF HOME
- GOOD EMPLOYEE TRAINING
- WORD-OF-MOUTH HIRING PRACTICES
- DEGREEED OWNERSHIP



HI  
QUALITY

- LOTS OF EXPERIENCE
- EXTRA SERVICES LIKE GARBAGE CURBING, DEAD LEAF REMOVAL
- FLEXIBILITY
- QUICK RESPONSE TIME

# High-end services at low-end prices

**Because of the way NatureScape is run, it can adjust to the needs of its clients.**

by James E. Guyette

■ Proper advance planning with low overhead, attention to details, and better rates than the competition are the marketing ploys of NatureScape, a full-service landscaping company in South Euclid, Ohio.

NatureScape clients all know that "you don't always have to pay a high price to get high quality work," owner Jil Morgan explains.

She won't discuss prices—citing competitive reasons—but Morgan does reveal that she strives to shave 20 to 30 percent off the going rates within the area.

Savings are garnered through a number of methods, such as running the operation from a garage and her home rather than renting expensive office space. Morgan's high level of experience also contributes to more efficiency, she says. She has a degree in landscape construction/contracting, with studies in urban forestry, from Ohio State University; plus, she's worked in the industry for 10 years.

Another money-saver is a strong word-of-mouth network which helps her locate the two to five extra employees used each spring and summer. "We can't afford to hire someone with several years of experience," Morgan explains, "but if it sounds like they know what they're doing, we'll give them a shot."

A sound training system helps too, says Morgan: "We like to show them the way I

was taught."

**No mow and go**—Morgan stresses that high quality work at a fair price usually just means going beyond the typical "mow-and-go" attitude sometimes found in the industry. "We give more for the money," she notes. "If it only takes a minute to help the customer out, we go the extra step."

That attitude is instilled throughout every task NatureScape undertakes. While on a property, "we'll walk around with a bucket and pull dead leaves out of plants."

The extra steps so often overlooked by competitors may include something as simple as carrying customers' full garbage cans out to the curb. "We know that every Wednesday, the trash goes out."

NatureScape's marketing niche is offering specialized full-service care to smaller properties—especially those belonging to older residents. "Senior citizens can't get out there and mow lawns and cut up sticks," Morgan explains, adding that NatureScape has always included such factors in its business plan.

"We usually are prepared for anything that happens, and we're flexible," says Morgan. "Because of the way the business is run, we can adjust to the needs of our clients."

Such services tend to be greatly appreciated, and they were especially welcome after the area was ravaged by a massive summer storm.

**Riding it out**—The Cleveland area's "Great Storm of '93" last August lasted less than 10 intense minutes. The driving rain and howling wind gusts exceeding 100 mph created the most massive power outage in the history of the local utilities. Huge trees were left toppled atop houses, and residents were literally left in the dark.

Proper advance planning meant that NatureScape crews could provide quick response time, which pleased current clients and helped pick up some new ones.

"There were branches and sticks all over. It was a real mess," Morgan remembers. "When we went out on our jobs we took the chain saw, pruners and other equipment with us."

Discounts of 10 to 20 percent were automatically granted to long-term customers or to those who had offered referrals. "We tried to help out," she says.

Not a single stick was left by NatureScape clean-up crews. "Being female, we like to look at the little things," says Morgan of the company, which is owned and operated by women.

Not surprisingly, clients' neighbors noticed this treatment and approached NatureScape for even more work, including future design and installation jobs.

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

## Slowing down money leaks

by Dan Sautner  
Padgett Business Services

■ As a business owner, only you can control how the business operates. Part of this control relates to corporate finances.

Any company is like an old row boat, with a large number of small leaks. Each leak in itself is not important or dangerous to the well-being of the craft, but the sum of many leaks leads to disaster. As a business owner, you have to have a way to watch for the leaks, and a way to stop them.

**Cash**—The best type of cash is the cash coming into your business. Part of your business must include some kind of system to record sales and account for cash receipts. Beware of cash-over and cash-short situations. At the very least, these are indicators of poor customer service; at the worst, they are signs of an organized attempt by dishonest people to remove your cash.

**Inventory and supplies**—The next area of control is in the supplies and inventory that you have on hand. A steady gross profit margin is usually the easiest control to have, and this is achieved through regular inventories and a monthly profit-and-loss statement.

If you have a consistent and stable gross profit margin, then you are likely in

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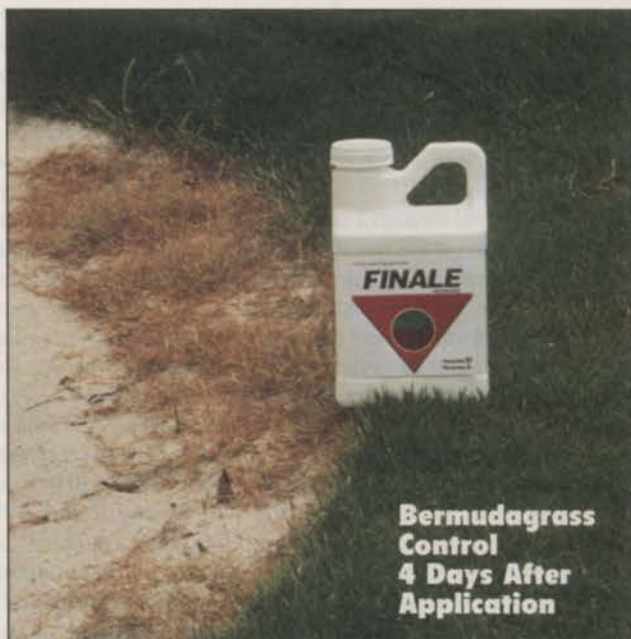
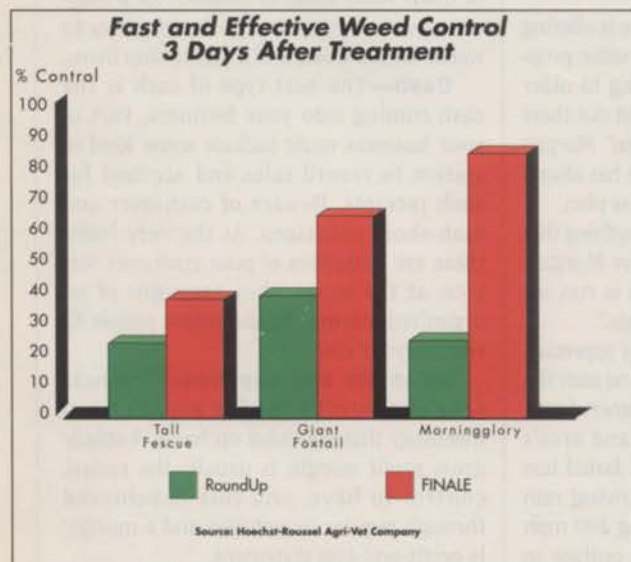
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## LEAKS from page 41

control of your inventory. Keep your storeroom neat, organized and secure, with limited and controlled access. Keep track of the supplies that you use so that abnormal usage can be spotted. Make sure that your employees understand that shrinkage will not be tolerated.

**Purchases**—Pay only for goods and services actually received. Inform your vendors that orders can only be placed by authorized personnel, and thoroughly

check every shipment of goods you receive. Ensure that you are receiving what you ordered and it is in acceptable condition before you sign the receipt.

When studying your invoices, double-check the mathematics. These computer print-out bills can look very formal and correct, but check the addition and cross-multiplication. Computers may not make a mistake in adding, but programmers sometimes make mistakes on the instructions that they give.

Pay attention to goods purchased. These may or may not be subject to sales tax, so careful attention can save money.

**Pay bills on time.** While this may not be the time on the invoice, set a policy that your cash flow can live with. Always match the received date to the invoice date and take the later of the two. Set aside a specified time to do this task. Try not to hastily pay a bill because someone is trying to exert pressure. Paying bills results in money leaving your business, and this is the worst kind of money.

**Sales**—Because so little of the total sale actually ends up in net income, little mistakes can hurt you. Make sure that all services are billed. It is often easy to overlook that small item, especially if several employees were involved in providing the service to the customer.

Have a system that records each service rendered, and make sure this reaches the final billing. At the billing stage, make sure that the bill is calculated properly. Few customers look for under-billings.

Periodically review your billings to check the math and services billed. If you have a number of people billing, make sure that you can track mistakes back to the right person.

**Summary**—The above hints can be classified into issues of completeness, accuracy and the authorization of every transaction your company makes. We appreciate that you cannot be there every moment for every transaction. You can, however, set up simple procedures for yourself and your staff. Ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) Are my sales complete and accurate? How do I achieve this within my system? Am I sure that every product and service delivered is at the price specified?
- 2) When I pay a bill, am I getting the services and products I ordered, for the price I agreed to, and have I fully received the billed items?
- 3) Am I keeping control of my assets? Am I getting full value for the resources I give away to improve my net income?

Take a moment to see if you can plug a few of those business "leaks." Do not fall for the temptation of thinking that if you have never had a problem, no problem will ever occur. Do not depend solely on people to catch mistakes, or to not make them in the first place. After all, making mistakes is what humans are all about.

—Dan Sautner is chairman of Padgett Business Services. This is the third of a series of articles on accounting Sautner is writing for LM.

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## "A SEVEN-DAY PREVENTIVE SCHEDULE OF DACONIL 2787® COVERS ALL THE BASES."



*Thom Martinek,  
Superintendent,  
Shaker Heights  
Country Club  
Cleveland, Ohio*

From the Great Lakes to southern regions, for bentgrass turf, a little Daconil 2787® Fungicide from ISK Biotech Corporation goes a long way.

That's certainly true for Thom Martinek, course superintendent at the 80-year-old Shaker Heights Country Club located in that prestigious neighborhood near Cleveland, OH. He's used a seven- to ten-day

schedule of Daconil 2787 Flowable Fungicide at low label rates for more than a decade. And the result? Throughout the season, Leaf spot, Dollar spot, Brown patch and even algal scum are kept well under control.

### Seven-day schedule

"We've been successful with this program for years," Thom says. "Daconil 2787 is a good contact fungicide, but with daily mowing, frequent irrigation and that sort of thing, you're bound to lose some of it. So, from a preventive standpoint, I like to use a seven-day schedule at the very lightest end of the recommended rates." In warm, wet weather, though, when

disease pressure is highest, Thom uses Daconil 2787 at higher label rates, or tank mixes with systemics.

While the course at Shaker Heights Country Club is short — just 6300 yards — it has a reputation for tough, tight holes and fast, subtle, undulating greens. With bentgrass turf throughout, Thom knows he can't take shortcuts on maintenance.

### Cornerstone for disease control

Ask him, and Thom will tell you he doesn't see much disease. This he attributes to using Daconil 2787 as the cornerstone of his preventive disease control program. He doesn't have to worry about resistance, either. That suits his conservative nature just fine.

Drop us a line to tell us your Daconil 2787 success story. If we use your story in an ad, we'll donate \$100 to your favorite charity. Write Jackie Tengler, ISK Biotech Success Stories, 5885 Landerbrook Drive, Suite 215, Cleveland, OH 44124.

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**The cornerstone of your  
turf management program.**



# POINT AND CLICK:

■ You own a landscaping business and need to send a personalized advertising letter to customers describing a new maintenance service. What's the cheapest and simplest alternative?

It's income tax time and you must know the exact amount of your profits, losses and outstanding debts in order to file an honest return. How can you do this easily and quickly?

Your business badly needs a new truck and other expensive landscaping equipment. How can you easily figure all costs and correctly estimate the probable return on investment?

The answer to all such problems—and more—can be summed up in three words: *use a computer.*

And today, it's not hard to learn from scratch how to use computers. With the advent of recent user-friendly programs using Windows and Macintosh technology, mastering computers is not nearly as difficult as it was 10 years ago. Today, instead of having to enter long strings of command characters to get your computer to perform a function, in many instances all you have to do is click a mouse on an icon and voilà!

But if you, like many other people in the green industry, are still reluctant to conduct a foray into the computer world, these answers to some questions can help.

## 1) What can a computer really do to improve my business?

In addition to finding solutions to problems such as the above, it can control your inventory; keep accounts receivable and payable in order; help hire employees and check their work; analyze, promote, and design your ads; and check your profits.

Also, if you purchase a modem and subscribe to an on-line information service like Prodigy, you can be on-line with other computer users and share a variety of information that can be valuable in your day-to-day operations.

## 2) How can I learn more about computers?

● First, check out a book from the library. Master "computerese" so you can understand descriptions concerning what a computer can and cannot do, and how.

● Take some lessons on how to use a computer. Some are offered by computer dealers, others can be scheduled through your local junior or community college or adult education classes.

● Study computer magazines such as *Byte* and *Info World*. There are also periodicals for owners of specific computers such as

*PC World* for the IBM PC and *MacWorld* for the Apple Macintosh. They're available at many libraries.

● Join a computer-oriented club whose members already own computers. These people will usually be glad to answer any questions you might have.

## 3) Where should I shop for a suitable computer?

Check local retail computer stores. Discuss your business and its needs with a knowledgeable salesperson. Take

careful notes, making sure you cross-reference the computer name with additional components you might need, tasks it can handle, price and other data. Shop around!

## 4) What questions are important to ask before selecting specific computer software?

● Is it easy to understand and follow what appears on the screen?

● If offered a computer package, does it include a double-entry system?

● Can all transactions be tracked easily so that mistakes can be found and corrected quickly?

● Is there a built-in safeguard that will save information when mistakes are made?

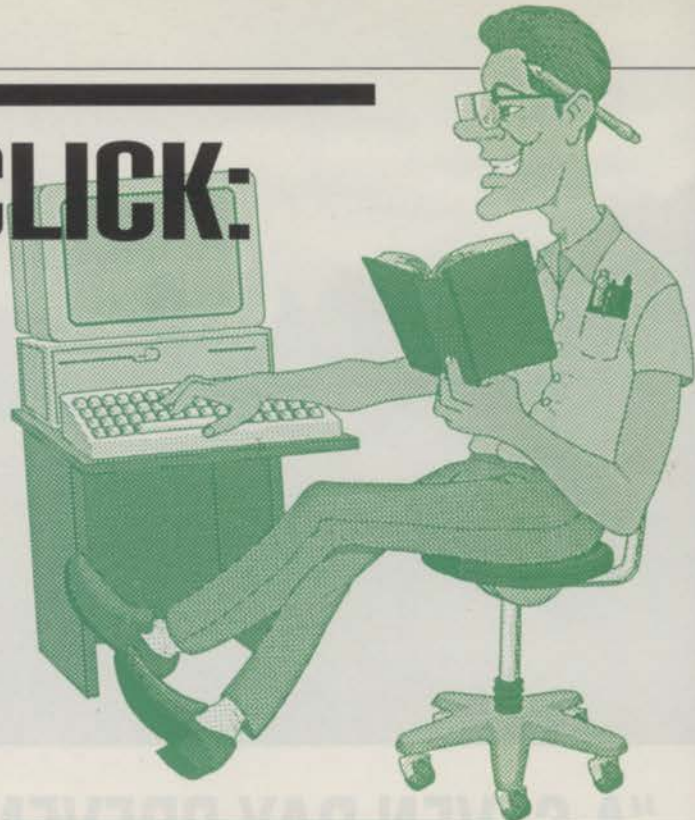
● Can you purchase one program and add to it as your expertise develops?

● Will the manufacturer continue to improve its software and offer it as part of its computer service?

● Does the company support its software with trained personnel, seminars, user manuals and a hotline number?

● Is the manual easy to read? Does it contain diagrams, charts and a troubleshooting guide?

● Does the company offer a guarantee which fully covers the product if you're not



## powering your business with the new computers

completely satisfied?

## 5) What important questions should be asked before selecting specific computer hardware?

● Will it operate the software you've selected?

● Does it have at least 64K of memory, expandable to at least 125K?

● Does the disk system have the storage to make the whole system run rapidly while allowing for future growth?

● Does the screen have 80 characters, which allows it to show all the information you need to see?

● Is the keyboard typewriter style?

● Is there a number pad to make accounting entries easier?


● Is the computer able to accept the type of printer that will yield the kind of finished work you need?

## 6) About how much should I pay?

Since prices are now at an all-time low, many business people feel that computerizing their businesses as an experiment can be worth a possible loss, which can be written off later. (However, such losses are rare.)

—Bess Ritter May

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a lot less and still get excellent results.

Here's an example. Mixing insecticide with insecticidal soap can reduce the amount of insecticide you need on your ornamentals by about 50 percent. Soap controls

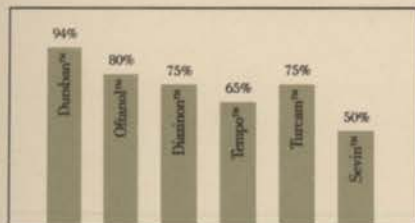
most soft-bodied insects and mites. By adding insecticide, you'll also take care of tougher insects, like scales and worms. University studies suggest you may get better control than you get with insecticide alone.



# A few ways to balance with your love for the env







Studies show that Dursban delivers better chinch bug control at lower rates than other insecticides.

Knowing exactly when to apply insecticide helps, too. One way to monitor mole crickets, chinch bugs, webworms and cutworms is by mixing 1½ oz. of dish soap in two gallons of water and sprinkling it

even controls fire ants.

And Dursban also gives you plenty of application flexibility. It's available as a liquid, dry flowable, wettable powder in water soluble packets, granule, fertilizer or bait.

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on a four-square-foot area of turf. If eggs have hatched, this soapy mixture will flush insects to the surface, and you can apply insecticide accordingly.

Your insecticide itself can also make a difference. After all, different insecticides work at different rates. Which is why Dursban<sup>®</sup> insecticide could be your best choice.



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## Spring fertilization

by J.B. Sartain, Ph.D.  
University of Florida

■ Early spring is a time to review your turfgrass fertilization program. Did your turfgrass flourish last season, or was growth poor with noticeable thinning? Was growth non-responsive to fertilization?

Poor turfgrass growth is often related to too much shade, cutting too low, or soil chemical properties. Knowledgeably selecting a turfgrass species for shade tolerance and proper mowing height can eliminate some common problems. Soil nutritional deficiencies, however—the topic of this month's cover story—can only be assessed through soil tests.

Turfgrass fertilization should be based on a recent soil analysis, but if an analysis does not exist, the nutritional requirements of the turfgrass can generally be met by applying 1, 1/4 and 1/2 lb. of N, P and K, respectively, per 1000 sq. ft. as an initial application.

These nutrients can be supplied by applying 6 lbs. of a 16-4-8 analysis fertilizer. It is recommended that this mixture be composed of approximately 70% slow-release and 30% soluble N sources. If the soil is prone to leaching losses, a K source with reduced K loss potential should be used.

**Nitrogen**—Turfgrasses need more nitrogen (N) than either of the other primary nutrients, potassium or phosphorus. Most soil testing laboratories do not test for N because this nutrient is highly mobile and is typically deficient in the

turfgrass rooting zone.

Some turfgrass species, such as bermudagrass grown on sandy soils, require relatively high rates of N application on an annual basis; other species such as bluegrass grown on clayey soils, require much less annual N. However, the early spring fertilization of turfgrasses on all soil types is generally similar, with initial application of approximately 1 lb. N/1000 sq. ft. being typical.

Using slow-release N sources permits increased rates of N application without the threat of turfgrass "burn," and can reduce application frequency from 30 days

grass cultivation over an extended time exhibit phosphorus (P) deficiencies. A Mehlich 1-extractable P level of less than 15 ppm is considered low, and indicates a probable response to applied P.

Shallow rooting, low turfgrass root mass in early spring, and cool soil conditions often influence P fertilization response more than actual soil-test P level.

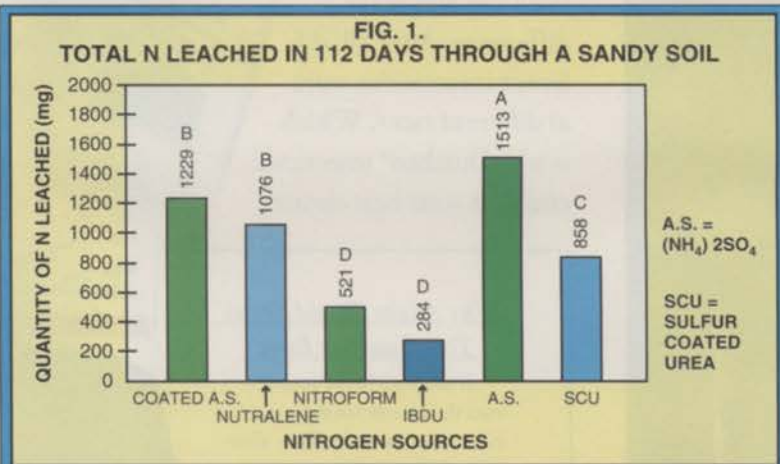
In long-term research, ryegrass positively responded to P fertilization, even though bermudagrass grown on the same phosphatic soil was negatively influenced by P fertilization. This suggests that cool-season turfgrasses can respond to P fertilization, even on soils testing high in P.

If overseeding is used in the turf management program, best response to P may be obtained during the cool-season turfgrass growth period. Early spring turfgrass growth may respond to P fertilization if the root mass of the warm-season turfgrass is restricted and the soil is cool.

Adequate fertilization can be achieved by applying 1/4 to 1/2 lb. P/1000 sq. ft., using any of the commercially-available P fertilizer sources. No differences in growth response to P fertilizer sources have been observed.

**Potassium**—Considerable confusion exists regarding potassium (K) fertilization. Turfgrasses accumulate approximately one-half as much K as N. In some turfgrass cultures, this represents a considerable quantity of K over an entire season, especially if the clippings are removed.

In sandy soils, K leaches readily and is rarely found at high levels. Turfgrasses



to as much as 90 days. A combination of slow-release and soluble N sources (70% slow-release, 30% soluble N) promotes optimum warm-season turfgrass growth.

Slow-release N sources are also less susceptible to N losses through leaching (Fig. 1). Soluble N sources tend to leach more in sandy soils than slow-release N sources. They should be used with care when large applications of N are made on an annual basis, particularly if groundwater pollution potential exists.

**Phosphorus**—Few soils used for turf-

### ELSEWHERE

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