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Readers speak up on choosing tree species



Nancy Stairs

NANCY STAIRS
Technical Editor

I recently received some responses to my February column, an embarrassment of riches but greatly appreciated. Each person had something to add to my points, an example of the wide range of knowledge and experience that exists in the green industry.

Thomas Smith, of Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum, Cincinnati, OH, called and, as an educator, expressed his eagerness to get out information on the use of native trees. He even offered the use of his extensive slide materials. It was a generous and appreciated offer that I hope

to be able to use in the future.

Jim Wollney, of Church Landscape, Wadsworth, IL, sent a fax that told me that I wasn't the only one who looked at trees. Jim's point was that tree form is also a valuable landscape consideration:

"I also think that there are different forms of trees to use besides the lollipop we typically plant. I enjoy seeing low branches and clump forms of ash and linden in the wild areas."

The visual variety that exists in nature can be an attractive addition to a landscape. Multi-stemmed trees, properly chosen and situated, are another way of adding to the character of a location. When they have an interesting bark texture or color, the effect is further enhanced. Crimson King maples are nice in their place, but there is room for so much more variety. We need to educate ourselves AND our clients.

Regulating biodiversity?

Tom Knowles, an urban forestry consultant in Columbia, SC, e-mailed me with a thought on taking diversity too far: "One community in our area is currently considering changing their existing tree and landscape ordinance to reflect an increase in biodiversity concepts.... Anyway, this community is considering a species make-up requirement of no

more than 10% of a single species on any commercial property. This means that on new landscapes being developed within the town limits, the landscape contractor would be required to plant no more than 10% of material in any one species. Now typically, a commercial site may have 4 to 6 street trees on the site. Can you imagine...1 oak, 1 maple, 1 ash, 1 birch, etc?..."

"My point is, we have to be careful how we promote species diversity and be REAL about it. This community is getting ready to adopt something that may be a nightmare to look at in 10 to 20 years. Species diversity needs to be studied on a regional or community-wide basis."

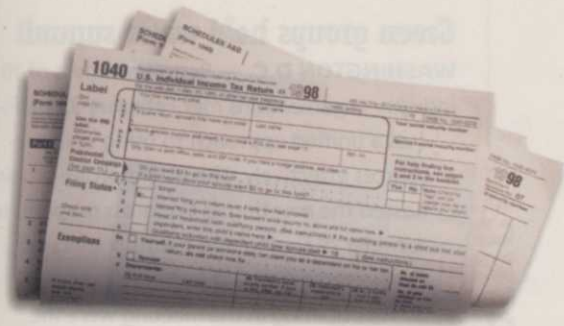
Tom's point shows us how a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. A well-meaning group of people, no doubt, but the need for professional, balanced input is essential. There are a number of ways to address tree species choices in the community. This could include:

- * a list of approved species for the community, regularly updated
- * a rebate through a local nursery for people who purchase approved species
- * knowledgeable decisions on tree species choices made for community property
- * planning, by not planting a single species in a neighborhood, but using a variety.

The situation brings us around, once again, to my comment in February that short-sightedness and a lack of familiarity with trees can lead to some poor decisions. This could be said about many local issues. The involvement of knowledgeable professionals in the community is an essential contribution.

I want to thank the people who commented on my last column. And to those of you who have sent your comments on previous columns, I may not get a column out of them, but I do keep them on file, as a reminder of what I am doing right and wrong.

Agree/Disagree? Comments/Questions? Column Suggestions? Let Nancy Stairs know at 440/891-2623. Fax: 440/891-2675. E-Mail: nstairs@advanstar.com



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Ruppert goes from boardroom to farm

Craig Ruppert is working his farm and he likes it.

Ruppert, who built a landscape company with revenues of \$45 million a year and, for several months, was the head of the landscape division of TruGreen-ChemLawn (TG-CL), now manages his 300-acre nursery and farm in rural Maryland. Helping him is Chris Davitt, former Ruppert Landscape Senior Vice President of Operations.

"Ruppert Nurseries, which has always been a separate company, was not included in the acquisition," says Ruppert. "We're now rolling up our sleeves in that business and plan to grow it."

Late last summer TG-CL purchased Ruppert's Maryland-based landscape company, at the time, the third largest landscape company in the country. Prior to their departure, Ruppert led TG-CL's landscape division from his Ashton, MD, location in addition to managing the company he had built; Davitt managed the East Division.

"Despite being a strategically sound move, the changes that accompanied ServiceMaster's acquisition of LandCare—including moving certain corporate functions from Ashton to Memphis—gave us reason to be concerned about our ability to influence and control the future in the way that we had hoped,"

explains Ruppert. TG-CL and LandCare had been competing to acquire landscape companies throughout 1998. SM's (parent company of TG-CL) stock-for-stock fold-in of LandCare, based in Houston, should be completed by the end of March.

"TG-CL has a big job integrating these companies into one strong company, but I think they'll build a successful national landscape com-

pany," Ruppert adds. "Paul Anderegg (TG-CL) is an excellent manager, and I enjoyed working with him, as well as with Dave Slott (TG-CL)."

As for the landscape company he built and is now no longer a part of, Ruppert says it remains in capable hands with Don Jarratt, Ken Hochkeppel and a host of talented managers.

"While the decision to leave was difficult and I miss the challenges of directing a large company, I'm very happy to have cut down on my traveling and to have so much more time to spend with my family and my community activities," says Ruppert. "I'm also very happy to continue working so closely with Chris Davitt and with my brother, who has managed the nursery since 1990."



[CLIPPINGS]

Green groups hold water summit

WASHINGTON D.C. — Representatives of 10 industry organizations met February 22 to discuss a unified approach to using water resources effectively. The Irrigation Association hosted the meeting as Congress prepares to consider changing and reauthorizing the Clean Water Act.

Participating in the meeting were the American Society of Irrigation Consultants, the American Water Resources Association, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, the National Association of Conservation Districts, the National Association of Water Companies, the National Ground Water Association, the United States Golf Association, the U.S. Committee on Irrigation and Drainage and the Water Environment Federation.

Yazoo/Kees set to acquire Dig-It tractor, Huskie vehicles

JACKSON, MS— Yazoo/Kees is acquiring HCC's Dig-It tractor and towable backhoe products, the Huskie utility vehicle product line and the Power King garden and estate tractor line. The manufacturing of the three product lines will be moved to the 166,000 sq. ft. Yazoo/Kees manufacturing facility and corporate office in Jackson, MS. This transition is expected to be completed in four to six months.

PHC to market four new microbial-based products

PITTSBURGH, PA — A venture between Plant Health Care, Inc. (PHC) and Ecogen, Inc. allows PHC to sell four new biopesticide products into the U.S. commercial turfgrass, landscape and garden markets under its own label. The EPA-registered products will be packaged by PHC at its production facility in Pittsburgh. Like other PHC products, the new biopesticide products contain microbial-based active ingredients. AQ10™ is a selective fungal hyperparasite used to control powdery mildew. Cruiser® contains beneficial insecticidal nematodes that control Japanese beetles and other white grubs, billbugs and sod webworms. Crymax® and Lepinox™ are advanced *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) bioinsecticides that protect ornamental, fruit and nut trees, bedding plants and turfgrass from caterpillar/worm pests, says PHC.

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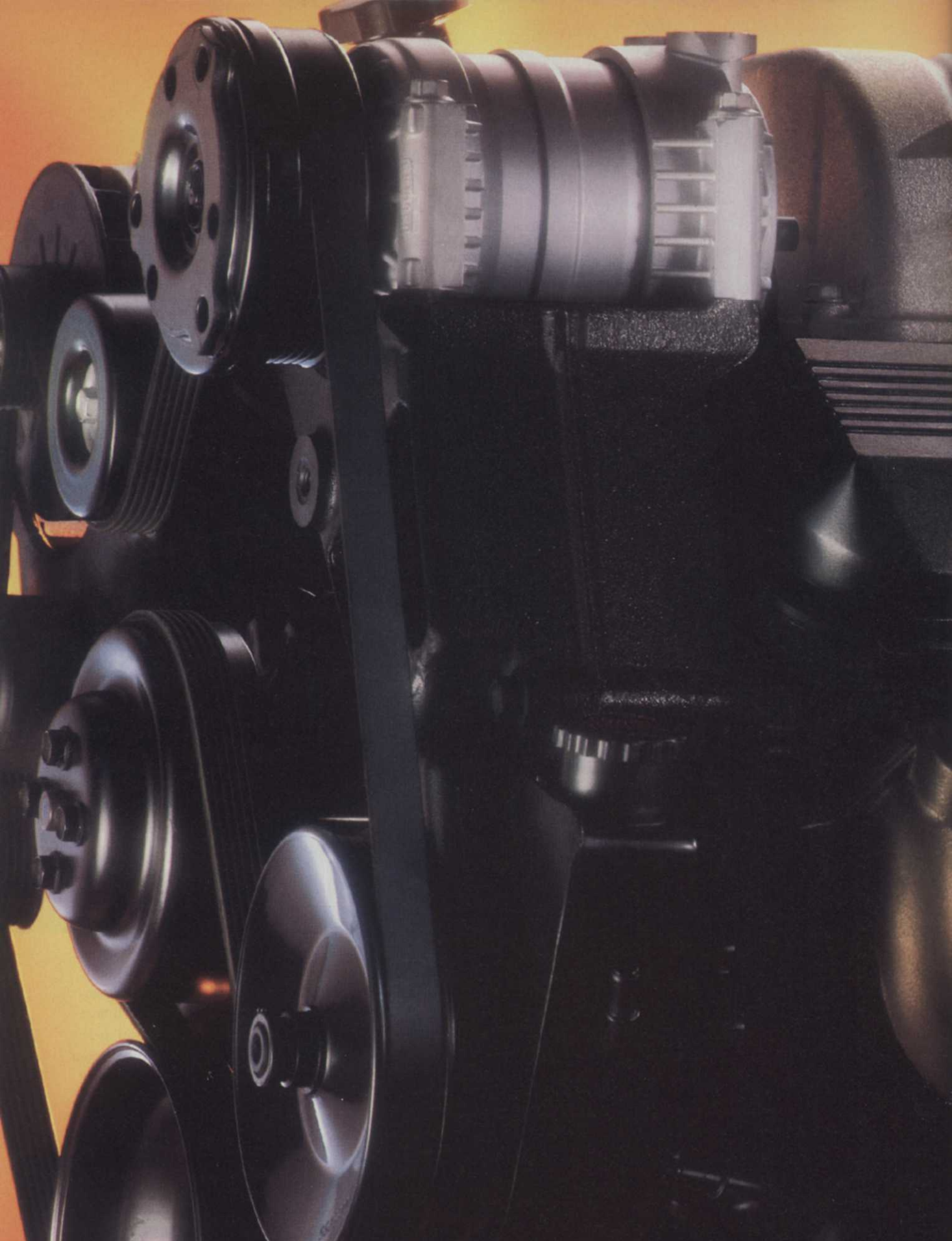
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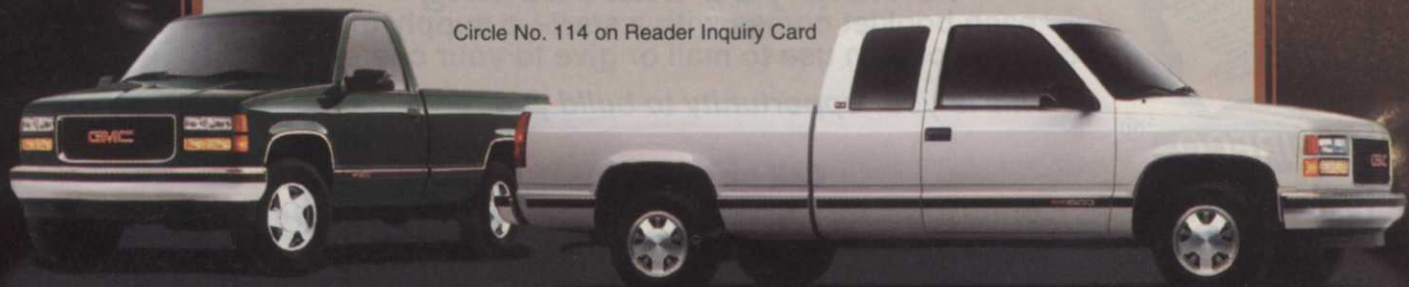
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Ariens and Kanga forge agreement

BRILLION, WI — The Ariens Company has announced a manufacturing and distributing agreement for the Mini Skid Steer Loader and attachments with Kanga Loaders USA of Bixby, OK. Ariens and Gravely dealers will begin selling the Kanga products in the next few months and Ariens will begin manufacturing them in the near future.

[CLIPPINGS]

Giant home builder Centex gets a start in lawn care market

DALLAS— Centex, based here, is the largest home builder in the United States. It's now in the lawn care business too with its HomeTeam Services. Other services offered by this Centex subsidiary include pest control and home security systems.

Mitch Smith is putting together the lawn care segment of HomeTeam Services. He started in the lawn care business with a Year-Round Lawn Care before spending eight years as a regional manager for Orkin LC. He left Orkin LC when it was acquired by TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1997.

"We're really just getting it started," Smith said of Centex HomeTeam LC.

"We've put lawn care into 11 of our pest control offices. We're treating it more like an incremental business in the pest control offices." HomeCare offers lawn care from locations in Florida, Texas, North Carolina and Georgia.

"The vision at Centex is to provide quality services that homeowners want, and security is a natural fit, pest control is a natural fit and lawn care is a natural fit," Smith adds.

Parent company Centex operates in 20 states and recorded revenues of \$3.9 billion in 1998.



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