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**PRE-M®**



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# LANDSCAPE *management*

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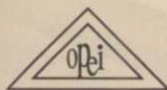
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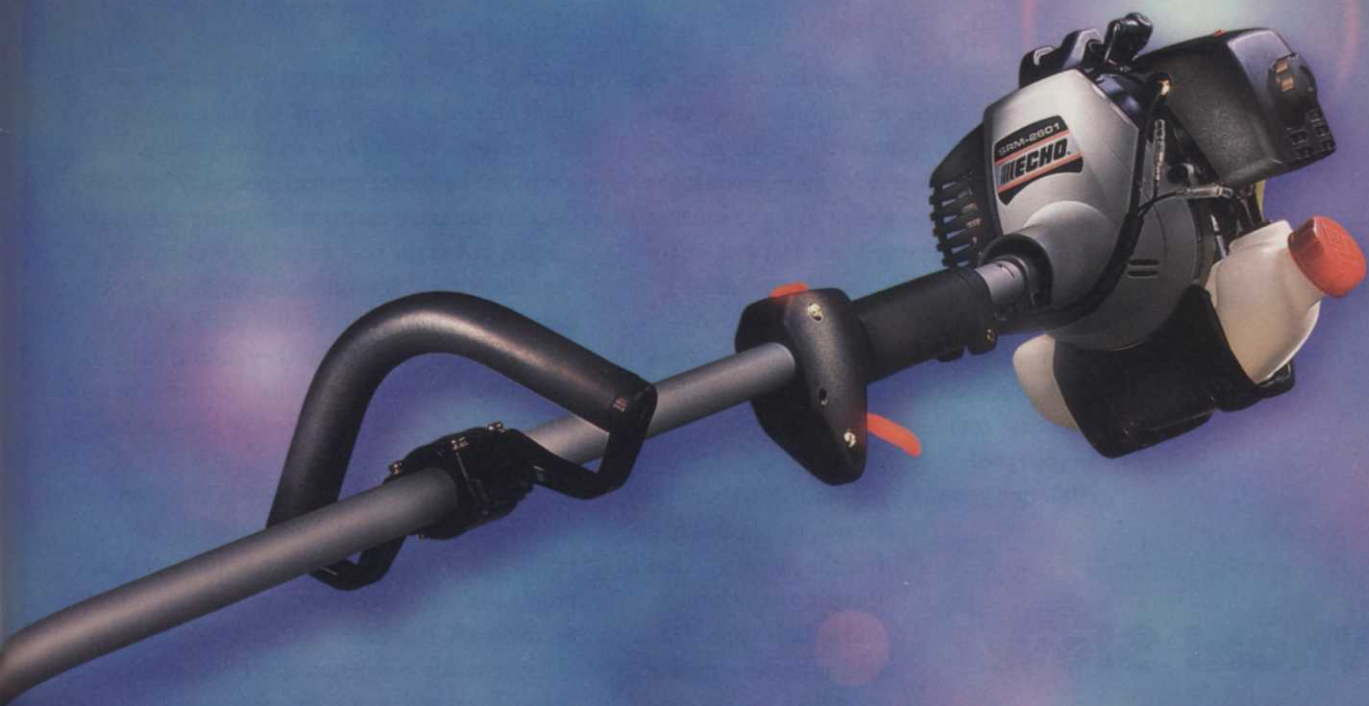
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**W**e haven't heard much from you lately, probably because you're too busy to talk as the growing season gets into full swing. We know you're trying to squeeze 10 hours of work into every work day, and we understand you don't have much extra time.

That's OK. We have a busy season too — those weeks between Halloween and the New Year when several industry events, special issues and holidays collide.

**Keep your cool**

Although you may have anticipated this busy season, you probably still feel the pressure. After all, there is so much to do and so little time. But now is just exactly the right time to slow down and make sure your operation works right and is not getting out of kilter. Two things can easily get out of whack when everything hits the fan: customer service and your own work-life balance. Here's an example:

I got a call the other day from a well-known green industry consultant who had just been jerked around by his lawn care company. Seems they provide continuous service year to year, and to maximize the season for themselves, made the first application up here in the north in February (way before it would be useful in this climate), which also happened to be before they mailed the annual renewal notice to customers.

**What's going on here?**

This might suit them fine, but if you're a customer who does not want to renew, you're already stuck for the cost of the first treatment. In this case, our consultant was billed, then quickly received a rapid-fire, nasty collection letter from a California firm. After several contentious calls to the lawn care firm, plus calls to the collection firm (at his expense), he is clearly fed up. The at-

titude that 'we'll deliver service whenever we want and make life difficult for the customer' really set him off. And I haven't even told you about the customer service "specialist's" attitude.

This company may provide a decent enough service, but in the rush to get the work done, get the bills out and get collections in, they forgot the customer. They forgot to offer quick and thorough explanations of what they do and why. They forgot to make it easy for customers to respond. And they forgot to be nice because they're in a hurry.

This time of year can make you crazy with all the work that has to be done and all the new business you'd like to add. Just remember if you promise to see a potential client, do it. If you take on the work, make sure you do it right. If you claim to satisfy customers, don't disappoint them because you and your team are frazzled.

**Don't forget the family**

It's a delicate balance — maximizing work and your company's sanity. Which brings me to my last point. Don't forget about your own balance. It's easy to devote 90% of your waking hours to your operations this time of year. It's easy to promise you'll make up the time later. But too often, you miss those opportunities and suddenly, it's next spring's cycle again.

Slow down a little! Too much work isn't bad for you if you happily embrace it, but be sure to balance it with alternatives that relax or energize you. Make them "quality" breaks and you won't need a six-month vacation next year to feel rested. Then you can get back into work with more energy for the next 10-hour day. **LM**

## Whoa! Slow down a little



*Sue Gibson*

**SUE GIBSON**  
Executive Editor

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**P**lanting trees is time-consuming work when properly done, and can also be costly if the trees die while under guarantee. Enhancing tree survival is a priority, so the actual planting method, as well as how the plant is handled, is important to do properly.

Retaining roots and promoting root growth is essential in establishing a tree. Root loss is a stressful situation for any plant and it is compounded by poor handling practices.

▶ A bare-root tree does not have many of the nonwoody or absorbing roots needed in good number to help establish the plant. The root hairs and associated mycorrhiza fungi access water and soil elements. Bare-root plants are susceptible to their roots drying out and dying due to improper handling.

▶ A balled-and-burlapped tree also loses many roots when dug up from nursery soil, which can put the plant at a disadvantage in a landscape where post-planting care is limited. Rough handling tears and breaks roots. Excessive drying of

the soil ball results in dead and dying roots. Lifting and dropping the tree for positioning in the planting hole, or using the stem to leverage a tree, can break and damage more roots.

▶ A container tree has an advantage in that the entire root system is transplanted. One concern, however, is the likelihood that circling roots growing in the container will cause long-term problems.

Always check the condition of the roots of any tree you buy or plant. Keep the roots of bare-rooted plants moist and covered. Ensure B&B root ball burlap is at least damp, all roots are covered with soil and the root ball doesn't have large cracks. Container plants should be free from potential girdling roots, so check the outside and the top of the root ball. Look for evidence that transplanting

to larger size pots was delayed and a series of circling roots exists.

Another transplanting option is trees grown in fabric containers. Root control bags are placed in the ground so that tree roots will grow in native soil, which is usually heavier and more likely to be compatible with the customer's site than potted material. The bags act like a container in that root growth is restricted to within the bag. The bags are made of a heavy cloth-like material which does not degrade and must be removed at transplanting.

Unlike a container, the roots do not merely circle the container but grow through the fabric where their growth is constricted. This method has two results: one, the initiation of more fine roots inside the fabric container; and two, energy is stored at the swollen nodes, where constriction occurs, ready to initiate new roots upon transplanting.

This type of root pruning is quite effective, both for controlling root extension and for limiting the impact and loss of roots when the tree is removed from the nursery. At transplant, about 95% of the tree's roots go into the ground with the tree, as opposed to low percentages of B&B stock. For species difficult to transplant, root control bags may be a reasonable choice to increase survival rates.

There is debate over whether the use of root control bags results in more and faster top growth. This seems to vary among species and there may be a need for higher, short-term irrigation for some species.

The type of planting stock you choose should take into account how you will be handling it, what level of post-planting care can be expected and the handling and care of the trees at the nursery. Select your nursery and planting stock supplier with care, not just based on price or convenience, but also on quality and commitment. **LM**

## What do you know about your roots?



*Nancy Stairs*

**NANCY STAIRS**  
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