



# Defend your lawns with Cavalcade™.

**One application combats both  
grassy and broadleaf weeds.**

Make Cavalcade your weed control weapon of choice this spring. It's the double-duty preemergence herbicide that prevents grassy weeds like crabgrass, *Poa annua* and goosegrass, as well as broadleaves like prostrate spurge, common purslane and knotweed. With the proven active ingredient prodiamine, Cavalcade battles 30 weeds in all. Available as a granular combined with fertilizer or as a sprayable. Either way staining is not an issue. And because Cavalcade is priced right, you also protect your profit.



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## Take-homes from our experiences

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would be fired if they were not as fast as the best crews. One driver believed we were trying to get more than a fair day's work and that we were just trying to speed up production.

### Bad feelings arise

Also, we learned that the competition between the crews was leading to bad feelings. This became clear when a crew had an equipment breakdown and a nearest crew didn't want to help because they were finished and wanted to go home. The workers were bound by piecework pay, and saw no reason to help.

Back in the office, the paperwork necessary to pay on a piecework basis was overwhelming. Getting payroll completed was consuming two full days each week.

Some of the gains in productivity we experienced came from workers doing more work, and some of the gain was the result of the management necessary to make such a plan work.

In the end, we kept the management and tossed the piecework plan. Perhaps you can learn from our mistakes to make piecework pay work for you. Here is what went wrong for us, along with a solution suggestion to make it work for you.

**1 We didn't set goals.** We had hoped to become more efficient and profitable by getting the crews to work faster, but we really didn't set specific goals.

**Solution:** Set your goals. If you just want to get rid of the laggards, it's a lot easier to dismiss them now than go through the trouble of a new payroll system. If you want efficiencies, set a specific goal that can be measured.

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So which is better, piecework or hourly? It depends on your business, including back office skills, the type of work you do, quality issues, safety issues and morale issues. But whatever you do, keep it simple — these systems can consume a lot of your time.

If you decide to make incentive pay work, it will, in one form or another. For

us, we decided to stick with GPS tracking reports, visiting sites for quality control and praising work well done. In this way, we have achieved better results than we did with a piecework pay system. **LM**

— *The author is a certified landscape professional and manages an East Coast landscape operation. Contact him at [cs@charlessimon.com](mailto:cs@charlessimon.com).*

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# COOL POWER

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**2** **Morale suffered.** Sadly, we didn't know how strongly our workers felt about the change until after we ended the program. They claimed we had favorites and gave the best and fastest equipment to them. They also believed some of the routes were much more profitable than others and that we had favorites there, too.

► **Solution:** Experiment with the piecework system without telling the workers. Run both payrolls, one hourly, the other a mock piecework payroll for at least three months. Be sure to get the piecework pay time even and fair for all types of properties and all seasons. Carefully balance the workloads among the crews. Your goal is to give each crew an equal chance to do well.

**3** **Quality suffered.** A customer called and asked why our crew was mowing at high speeds in the pouring rain. Our crews made bad decisions. They were so motivated to finish their routes each week that they mowed even during heavy rainstorms.

► **Solution:** Do not rely on customer complaints for quality control. In the first few months after starting a piecework pay program, check the work at each and every property each week. It's necessary to achieve 100% quality control.

**4** **Safety suffered.** One worker drove the mower so quickly onto the trailer that he broke his leg when he pinned it against equipment stored by the hitch.

► **Solution:** Establish a safety committee before starting a piecework program. Consider installing a passive GPS system in your trucks to control speeding and harsh braking.

**5** **Shop work was left undone.** Workers did not want to do shop work because they viewed it as an unpaid or poorly paid job.

► **Solution:** Decide who will do the shop work up-front. Let the crews know exactly what is expected of them regarding shop work, including pay rates.

**6** **T&M projects suffered.** We are often asked to remove dead shrubs, pick up storm debris, make small landscape repairs and do other projects. These are normally assigned to the crew that services the property. The crews did not want this time & materials work because it took extra time.

► **Solution:** Let the crews know up-front that T&M work is expected. Everyone must know that you will not add extra time to T&M work. It is just that, time and materials, and it is part of the job.

**7** **Loss of control.** Team leaders wanted to decide who was on their team, what properties were on their route, what

equipment they would use and when they wanted to work. It almost felt like we had a union.

► **Solution:** Be up front, explaining that you are still very much in control. You will assign crews, equipment and routes. Let them know they will have to train new workers as well.

**8** **Department of Labor Audit:** We made a mistake on a form and ended up with a DOL audit. Fortunately, we kept the time clock and had time cards for everyone. However, when workers get variable pay each week, their overtime rate also varies. This was OK when workers had less than 40 hours for a week and their pay exceeded a formula calculated by DOL. But when they went over 40 hours in one week, their overtime rate is based on that week's pay.

► **Solution:** Keep the time cards. Whenever there is overtime, calculate the correct rate for the week to avoid DOL fines. You must make sure their piecework pay exceeds their total pay if they earned hourly and overtime pay. Our payroll company refused to change the overtime rate each week, so be sure to check with your payroll team before starting piecework pay.

—CS

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## Noticeably beautiful lawns.

They're what referrals are made of. Keep the weeds out and customers happy with Barricade®, the longest-lasting pre-emergence herbicide for crabgrass and more than 30 other weeds. It lets you work on your own schedule. Apply it in the fall, early or mid spring and select the desired rate to give you the length of protection needed. You also get a choice of quality formulations, from wettable granule, flowable, or on-fertilizer in a variety of sizes to fit your needs.

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**PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS**, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, arrive at your office for an initial meeting. They walk up a beautifully landscaped path and are greeted at the door. They are escorted down a hallway displaying numerous landscape awards.

In your conference room, they see beautiful photographs of your past work on the walls. Mrs. Jones is thinking she made the right choice by contacting your company. Mr. Jones is thinking about how much a new landscape is going to cost. He speaks first.

"We just want a patio," he says. "Nothing too fancy."

This is a common scenario for landscape design-build companies. It could lead to Mr. and Mrs. Jones having a modest patio designed and installed by your company that summer. Or, it could lead to a long relationship between the Joneses and your company. If the sales rep and designer are listening to the clients and

asking the right questions, it often becomes apparent that the clients don't think they can afford what they really want. A master design, installed in stages, could be the perfect fit.

#### **Client benefits**

"A master plan can get the focus off the budget, assuming you're forthright with the client and get them looking at things they might want to add later," says Rick Doesburg, president of Thornton Landscape, Maineville, OH. "Ideally, it can save the client money and time over the long haul by looking at the big picture."

Those savings come from planning. A master plan makes it easy to avoid in-

A **master plan** leads to long-term **relationships** with clients and ongoing **revenue** for your operation.

BY JAMIE J. GOOCH

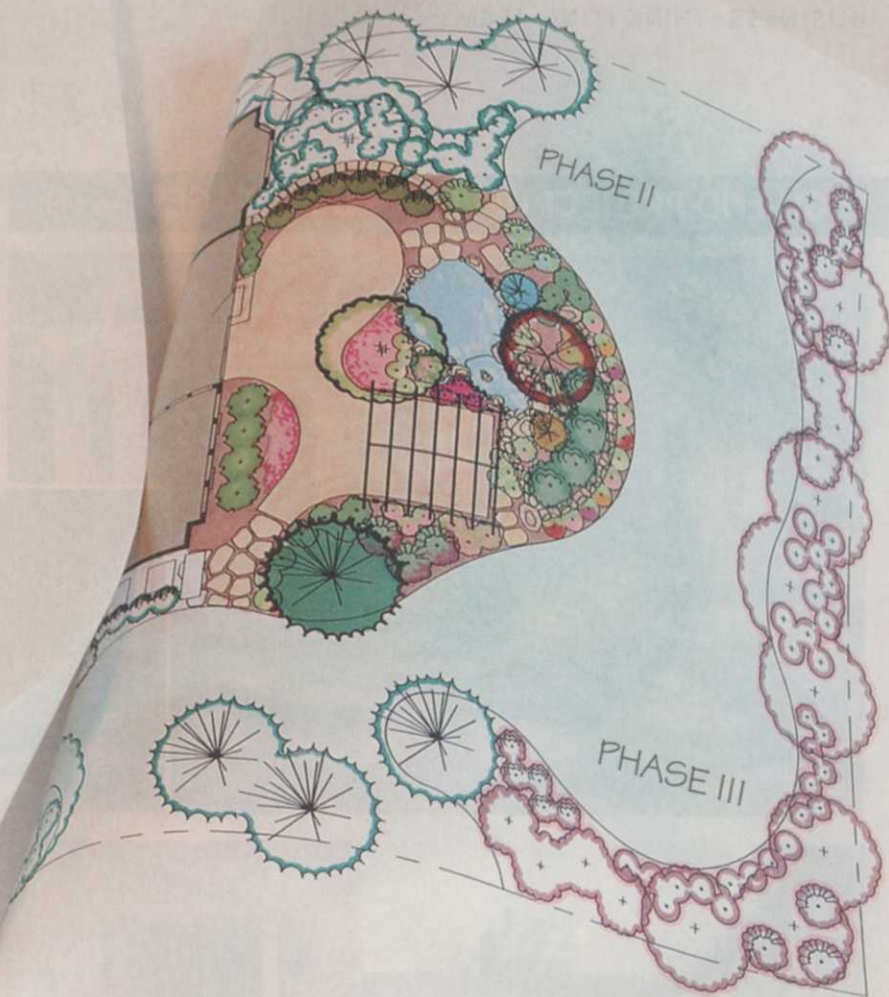
# STEP



stalling something the client will need torn out to accommodate a future project. It also helps the various phases of the project to work together.

"Maybe the client wants a circle driveway someday, and we're designing the walks and drive," Doesburg offers as an example. "We can design the way the main drive approaches the garage so it can easily accept a circle driveway in the future. That's harder to do and costs more if it's not planned."

Miles Kuperus, president of Farmside Landscape & Design in Wantage, NJ, agrees that planning yields efficiencies. Kuperus, director of the Design/Build/Installation Specialty Group for the Professional Land-care Network, says a master plan can address infrastructure requirements that make future builds on the site go more smoothly.



# BY STEP

## HIGH-END PROJECT DEVELOPED IN STAGES



Because Farmside Landscape & Design developed a well-thought-out master plan to provide the clients with a “bigger picture” of what their landscape could be, it was able to give them exactly what they desired. The project unfolded a stage at a time, allowing the homeowners to budget and enjoy each feature as it was completed. The plan also took into consideration factors such as noise and other homeowner inconvenience during construction.

“If you have a master plan that includes infrastructure, such as drainage, irrigation and lighting, you can build that infrastructure for the future,” he says. “For instance, you can install the drainage needed to allow for future projects to tie into that. With irrigation, you can install a control box that is able to receive additional zones that will be needed later. The same thing can be done with lighting.”

A master plan also allows a design-

build company to install footings for future structures when other earth moving work on the site is being done, Kuperus says. This shortens the time the client is inconvenienced by the noise and mess that excavating machinery can cause.

Zoning is another potential mess that can be lessened with a master plan. A plan can shine a spotlight on problems with what clients may ultimately want to accomplish in their landscapes. Kupe-

rus cites one of his state’s zoning laws as an example.

“In New Jersey, we have 15% to 25% non-pervious coverage thresholds,” Kuperus says. “What that means is that the house, driveway and any kind of pavement cannot exceed 25% of the property. The rest has to be able to receive groundwater so it can percolate back into the system. A master plan could

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